Promoting social and economic regeneration in Belfast's interface areas

Belfast Interface Project

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BIP to launch city wide thematic discussions programme

By Paul Donnelly

Under the auspices of our Communications and Membership Support Project, BIP aims to organise a series of four thematic discussions on a city wide basis between May 2005 and March 2006. As a membership organisation we are keen that the topics for the discussions should come from amongst our membership. This is your opportunity to put forward your ideas to set the agenda for the discussions.

The first discussion will be held on Thursday 26th May from 10.00 am-12.30 in the Northern Visions studio at 23 Donegall Street.

Continued overleaf

SUMMER YOUTH AND INTERFACE PROGRAMMES TO GO AHEAD?

By Paul Donnelly

Youth and community workers across Belfast are expressing their concern at the financial difficulties of our Education and Library Boards and asking, ‘Will the BELB be funding this year’s summer intervention programmes? ’ Nowhere is this concern more strongly felt than in Belfast’s interface communities where the additional monies for summer and diversionary activities, available since 2002, could be in jeopardy.

Interface has spoken to Sean McMahon, Development Worker with Lenadon Community Forum and volunteer Youth Leader at Horn Drive Community Centre, and Arder Carson, Youth Co-ordinator with the Glen Parent Youth Group in West Belfast. Both expressed deep frustration at the administration of the summer intervention and interface programmes. Particularly highlighted were ongoing problems in the relationships with the Department of Education, the BELB Youth Service and workers like themselves who try to plan and co-ordinate summer programmes from early in the year. Specifically, criticism was made about the timescale for the release of information on funding from the Department to the Board to the groups. The late release of that funding - sometimes in early July - when money, or at least the promise of it, is needed in advance for effective planning of activities - was cited as a major concern. Interestingly, an independent evaluation commissioned by the Board into their summer programmes recommended in 2004 that ‘The Board should be informed in March of the expected allocation and funding should be received no later than May.’

Many youth workers would argue for an even earlier timetable to ensure the best delivery of services for young people, particularly in terms of planning and spending the additional interface monies.

There is recognition, shared by Arder and Sean, that the programmes are extremely important and that the interface funds have been welcomed by community groups and youth workers. This is despite the introduction by the Board in 2003 of guidelines regarding issues such as transport costs that, some youth workers feel, have created difficulties in delivering actual programmes ‘on the ground’.

Interface has contacted a number of Board personnel and emailed questions asking if the summer funding programmes will go ahead this year. As we go to print we have just had an indication from the Board that an administrative procedure is being prepared for ‘summer interface and social inclusion programmes’ which, if implemented, should make more money available in July and August.

One thing that is clear, however, is that youth and community workers in interface areas of Belfast need, ideally, to be reassured that the summer funding programmes will go ahead.

The position for the BELB is clearly difficult, but there is a more constructive way in which communications and systems could be improved, not least for the workers and volunteers who plan and deliver the summer programmes.

INTERESTED IN JOINING?

Belfast Interface Project has three categories of membership:
• Community group
• Associate
• Individual

If you support our mission statement (see our website for details) and wish to join BIP, please get in touch. We will send you an information pack or our Development Worker, Paul Donnelly, can come out to meet you.

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GOODBYE AND HELLO!

Belfast Interface Project is an organisation in transition. Our Support Worker Marnie Kennedy is expecting her first baby in April and goes on maternity leave in mid-March. Those of you who have encountered Marnie will have been impressed by her efficiency and her friendly nature. The consensus at BIP is that she is a hard act to follow. We have been extremely fortunate, however, in finding a very able replacement in Genevieve Lennon who has been working with Marnie this month. Genevieve previously worked with Community Dialogue so the new voice on the phone might already be familiar to many of you.

All Marnie’s friends at BIP would like to wish her and her partner Simon the very best in the coming weeks and months. We are also delighted to welcome Genevieve to BIP and look forward to working with her between now and September.

BIP, please get in touch. We will send you the Community Relations Council, the European Programme for Peace and Reconciliation Measure 2.1 and the International Fund for Ireland Community Bridges Programme.

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Possible discussion topics might include:

- The use of CCTV cameras at interfaces
- Policy issues for interface communities in the post general election period
- Exchanging good practice in peacebuilding

It’s important to us that the sessions are useful and relevant to you. So if you have a suggestion regarding a discussion theme that you think would interest others, or if you’d like to comment on the above suggestions, please do not hesitate to contact Paul or Genevieve at info@belfastinterfaceproject.org or 09024 2828.

Finally, Northern Visions Television (NvTV), a community-based television service, has expressed an interest in interviewing participants at the discussion. So you may have the opportunity, should you wish, to get your views over to a wider audience on the issue of the day.

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RACE AND ETHNICITY

PEOPLE’S COLLEGE

In our first two issues Interface reported on initiatives in West and South Belfast which have been intended to support ethnic minority communities and to combat racist attitudes and attacks. For this issue Barbara McCabe, a Lecturer in Adult, Community Education at the Ulster Peoples College (UPC), outlines details of a new UPC course examining concepts of race and gives an insight into the broader thinking informing the course.

Barbara McCabe writes:

“The Ulster People’s College has developed a course entitled ‘Race and Ethnicity’ examining these concepts. The course includes 10-12 hours of teaching, is accredited to OCR Level 2 and is currently offered free to community groups and individuals. It has already been delivered to a number of groups such as the Rural College Network, Incore and the Chinese Welfare Association. Feedback has been very positive as these statements from the evaluation by participants from Incore illustrate:

1. “The course gave me a much better understanding of what race and ethnicity is, people’s views and the amount of movement throughout the world. I was very surprised by how little I actually knew”

2. “I have a better understanding of refugees and asylum seekers and the issues they might have to face.”

The course is not about legislation, statutory duties or ticking the right boxes. It is about giving people the opportunity to consider what these concepts mean to them, about why the issue has risen to the forefront of the media agenda and how the issue of immigration has quickly claimed centre stage in the forthcoming General Election campaign. For the next few months these issues will get a lot of coverage - but what will we actually learn? The course - a mixture of discussion of attitudes, facts and figures as well as ways of accommodating difference, aims to be a positive contribution to the debate and to bring the issue home to Northern Ireland. It will adapt in order to encourage people to examine the issues that are most relevant to them and their area.

History is dominated by movement – settlers arriving, and emigrants leaving. How many of us have branches of our families in other parts of the world, beyond Northern Ireland? These migrants have not just been economic opportunists - some have fled poverty, oppression and in more recent times the dangers and frustrations of the ‘Troubles’. They have been absorbed, tolerated, persecuted or ignored by the societies into which they have arrived. Of course, nothing in human history should lead us to assume that just because this is our history we should tolerate others repeating it.

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NEW BORDER GENERATION-Building Relationships Across the Island

By Paul Donnelly

BIP met with Michelle McCarrick of the County Louth based group, New Border Generation (NBG), in June 2004 to discuss areas of mutual interest in our work. We were particularly interested to learn from Michelle about NBG’s work in facilitating contact and relationship building between groups in Southern Ireland and groups from within unionist communities in Belfast. Following this initial contact, we thought it would be useful to produce a short article outlining the aims and objectives of NBG, in order to make them known to a wider audience.

Michelle McCarrick and Ciocadh McKevitt founded the organisation in 1998 with the objective of building bridges of communication and co-operation between communities in Northern and Southern Ireland. The promotion of mutual respect and understanding is sought through the sharing of past experiences and via sharing new experiences as part of the project. Michelle points out that the formation of the group was very much informed by the political landscape at the time, from ceasefire to Canary Wharf and back, and the general sense of change that had accompanied the political Talks process. It was her view that it was a very important time for new relationships to be forged and developed. The initial partnership formed under the project was between the Coolyoe Peace Initiative and East Belfast Community Focus. This partnership was based upon community development principles, with a view to establishing a cross border community network as agreed by NBG and groups from Northern Ireland. In 2002 a cross border conference was held, at which agreement was formally endorsed a funded network. This was realised in April 2004, with the establishment of the ‘Island Network of Community Hands’ (INCH).

NBG currently aims to support the development of the network over the next three years. NBG activities since 1998 have included the following:

- The production of a video with young people from the Cooley Peninsula and young people from Belfast’s Donegall Road, discussing their relationships with each other over a three year period from age sixteen to nineteen.

- The hosting, in Carlingford, of over a thousand young people from within Belfast unionist communities, for discussion programmes related to peace building themes.

- The provision of outdoor pursuits and activities such as surfing, rock climbing and quad biking for youth groups. All projects have included trips to both sides of the border. Groups have also worked closely with their counterparts in communities for periods of time.

- Whilst the above indicate much emphasis on work with young people, NBG are keen to stress that they work with all age groups.

Similarly, NBG do not work exclusively with unionist communities and have also worked closely with people from the Short Strand area of Belfast, for example. NBG aim to continue this work, assisting in the development of new relationships with groups from Northern Ireland, regardless of political or community background.

For more information, Michelle can be contacted at m.carrick@newbordergeneration.org

Finally, NBG’s website will go live in a couple of weeks at www.newbordergeneration.org
On the 30th November 2001 a meeting was held between Tom O’Dowd, a former colleague of the late Terry Enright, and Seamus Calligan, one of the young people Terry inspired. The meeting began with a discussion about the possibility of setting up a foundation. Following a number of years of development, the Terry Enright Foundation has been firmly established and the following areas of work have been cultivated.

**Aims**

To make a contribution to peace building across sectarian divisions by drawing together young people between the ages of 17 and 25 from all community backgrounds to participate in the Foundation’s activities and programmes. The Foundation will continue in its role of nurturing young leadership in this age group.

**Key Areas of Work**

a) **Bursary Scheme**

The Bursary Scheme offers grants to support young people and youth projects from the areas of greatest disadvantage and need in Belfast. It helps in the region of 75 young people annually. The scheme aims:

- To support personal development;
- To be accessible to all young people;
- To promote opportunities for intercommunity contact through activity and shared experiences;
- To support programmes which reflect the spirit and ethos of the Terry Enright Foundation.

b) **Leadership Programme**

The mission of the Terry Enright Leadership Award is to invest in Young people’s potential for leadership.

The Leadership Award is a new initiative which will identify, develop and recognise young emerging leaders in disadvantaged communities in Belfast. The leadership programme will seek to work with 20 young leaders per year between the ages of 17 and 25.

It will be modelled on the values and qualities that Terry Enright stood for:

- The importance of peace building;
- The value of role models which young people can identify with;
- The potential of young people from disadvantaged communities.

c) **Challenge**

The Terry Enright Challenge is a cross community, team-based outdoor challenge for young people from areas of social need in Belfast.

It aims to develop the young participant’s capacity:

- To follow through on a commitment;
- To work as a member of a team;
- To lead others in challenging circumstances;
- To value diversity;

I became involved in the Terry Enright Foundation when I agreed to take part in their Leadership Award. When I started this award I did not realise the opportunities or prospects this would open up for me. The opportunities that opened up for me were challenging but enjoyable. They helped me to grow as a person, to learn to think for myself and to work on my own initiative. I met many new people and gained many friends, people from all over Belfast who I would never have met otherwise. These people gave me both knowledge and insight into other communities from throughout Belfast.

The people involved in the Terry Enright Foundation, both staff and young people, were all very friendly and down to earth. There was never any difference made between the young people or the leaders. Everyone was treated as equals. The way the leaders worked seemed to me to be a very person centred approach. Young people were made the priority. Everyone had a voice and the decision of what they were involved in was entirely up to them. When I was involved in anything with the Terry Enright Foundation I always came away happier, more confident and generally feeling better about myself. The Foundation has had a real, positive influence on my life so far and I hope it carries on having an influence on my life in the future.

The Terry Enright Foundation can be contacted through www.terryenrightfoundation.org or via Seamus Calligan on 0903 2831.
DIVIDED WE STAND

By Dr. Pete Shirlow

The reproduction of segregation through housing, education, employment and mobility remains an important facet of life and living within Belfast. Around two thirds of people, living within highly segregated communities, identify places that they would not enter if those places are dominated by the ‘other’ community. Similarly, over 80% would not enter such places at night. Around a half have also concluded that relationships between interfaced communities have worsened since 1994, a possible reflection of the impact of events such as Drumcree and Holy Cross. In a sense, and despite obvious political change, we remain locked within a form of spatial apartheid within which communities tend to share different lives, cultural norms, employment experiences and form political values.

No one would have seriously predicted that historically high levels of segregation would have simply fallen away due to political change, but it may have been expected that politicians and policymakers would have identified the centrality of segregation to the perpetuation of low level conflict and social and cultural separation. In political terms there remains a stubborn refusal to plan and co-ordinate services and housing within neutral zones so as to alter the nature of social practice and avoidance. The recent Belfast City Metropolitan Plan lays down the significance of segregation as an institutionalised form from which to remove radical policy intervention. The Noble Index, which measured access to services, completely failed to recognise that access to services could be undermined by fear. Mobility, it was assumed, was merely based upon how far you could travel from a service, despite a whole body of work showing that access was clearly related to patterns of segregation.

According to the 2001 census the population of the Belfast Area Urban Area stood at 277,393. There was, as shown in Table 1, a near equal split Catholics and Protestants with regard to Community Background. Religion has always been measured within the Northern Ireland Census. However, due to a growth in the non-religious population bands of those who state their religion, the Community Background variable was introduced. This was to determine that they come from a particular religious background.

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73% of those with a Protestant community background live in places that are at least 81% Protestant. This indicates an overwhelming share of those living within what are essentially highly segregated places. A mere 12% live in places that are predominantly Catholic (50-90% Protestant). 7% live in the most mixed band within which Protestants constitute 41 and 66% of the population. Persons from a Catholic community background tend to live within slightly less segregated environments. 67.3% of those with a Catholic background live in places that are at least 91% Catholic. Slightly fewer Catholics (58.5%) than their Protestant counterparts, live in predominantly Protestant places (90-99% Catholic). More Catholics than Protestants live within the most mixed 41-66% group, 10% compared to 7%.

There is no doubting that the perpetuation of parallel lives creates dismal spaces between communities that are filled with low level violence and forms of ethnic identification that undermine more shared senses of progress and social and cultural development. The central aims of future interface based work must be to:

• facilitate a proper appreciation of the issues faced by interfaced communities;
• understand how violence and fear impact upon mobility and the use of facilities;
• indicate to government and policymakers that the removal of fear and prejudice requires an analysis of special needs and policy change;
• understand the complex nature of avoidance strategies between communities;
• understand how fear and violence dilutes the potential for economic development and normalised patterns of living. In particular to understand how fear may reduce the mobility needed when searching for work;
• provide data and information which sets out to the community the nature of the negative impact of segregation upon ‘both’ communities;
• fully comprehend what living in and at an interface actually means;
• provide a policy initiative which provides the possibility of linking into all agencies, groups and individuals with a direct interest in the problem of interfaced areas;
• understand the link between fear/violence and the perpetuation of economic and social deprivation.

Dr. Peter Shirlow is a lecturer and researcher at the School of Environmental Sciences in the University of Ulster. He can be contacted at p.shirlow@ulster.ac.uk.