Welcome to the first issue of “Interface” - the news-sheet of Belfast Interface Project

Belfast Interface Project (BIP) was formed in 1995 with a remit to seek to identify and assist in addressing issues of concern to nationalist and unionist interface communities in Belfast. BIP became a democratically accountable membership organisation in 2000 and we currently have a membership of about 70 community groups operating on nationalist and unionist interface communities of Belfast, as well as a smaller membership of associate agencies and individuals.

We aim to promote creative approaches towards the regeneration of Belfast’s interface areas and our overall vision is of a Belfast in which interface communities:

- Are free of intercommunity tension, intimidation and violence;
- Have come to terms with the legacies of the past;
- Are socially and economically vibrant, within an attractive physical environment;
- Enjoy freedom of movement in accessing facilities and services.

Given the levels of disadvantage across Belfast’s interface-communities, we know that this vision will not be realised overnight. With this in mind and at the suggestion of one of our members (thanks, Ann), we have launched this news-sheet in the hope that this will provide a platform for our members and others to promote information-sharing about the good practice that already exists across the interface community sector in Belfast.

Award-winning project escapes closure

by Paul Donnelly

Suffolk Community Forum (SCF), based in outer West Belfast, has undergone 18 months of notable success as part of a ground-breaking and award-winning regeneration project. At the same time, the Forum has been under imminent threat of redundancy and closure in a set of circumstances that clearly highlight the many funding difficulties facing groups across the city as they strive to regenerate communities and build positive futures.

After many years of polarisation, SCF and Lanadoon Community Forum took the courageous step of engaging in dialogue. One of the positive outcomes of this was the development of an economic regeneration project based around derelict and vandalised maisonettes and shop premises on...

continued p3
Since June 2002, Groundwork NI has employed two workers, Patsy Laverty and Sean Montgomery on their Youth and Environment Project based in Inner East Belfast. The project has sought to work in three key thematic areas and has established itself as an important and innovative piece of work, seeking to improve the quality of life for those living and working at the interface in the East. Focusing on young people, the project seeks to connect them with issues around mental health and the environment they live in. It also seeks to support them to develop skills and knowledge that they can use for themselves, for their broader community or that they can transfer to their peers.

**SKILLING OUR YOUNG PEOPLE**

It is the view of those involved that a previously-neglected area of work has been the legacy of the conflict and its impact upon young people.

This is particularly relevant given that young people are often cited as the starting point for trouble. This project has taken another angle and looked at the mental health impacts of kids witnessing conflict, with discussion groups addressing issues around stigmas attached to the topic and examining the legacy of sustained inter-communal rioting.

**IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENT**

The interfaces in East Belfast received a lot of publicity following the sustained disturbances that occurred in 2002 at various flashpoints. Since then much relationship building has been undertaken and complementing this has been proposals through the Groundwork team to develop an environmental improvement scheme on either side of the interface. This has again involved young people in a joint arts project producing GAA and Loyal Order murals on boards within a neutral environment. The proposal is for the appropriate boards to be placed in their respective communities. Whilst some might question this outcome, Patsy and Sean have emphasised that the production was integrated and supported by facilitated discussion seminars and education classes regarding the organisations depicted. Furthermore, young gaelic and soccer players from both communities have taken part in mutual understanding programmes based on the issues arising from these activities.

Beyond this there are other environmental improvement proposals which are at an advanced planning stage and await planning permission in the next two months. Included in these proposals are: a small welcome archway at Cluan Place possibly dressing inspiration from the “Samson and Goliath” cranes in the shipyard. Also the far end of Cluan may have a communal garden constructed either with murals or with wooden grids with climbing plants as an alternative to murals. Complementing this are plans to improve the entry from Mountpottinger into Clondeboge with the likelihood that Gerry Doyle (founder of the Doyle Youth Club) and Sean Martin (who founded the local GAA club in Short Strand) will be remembered for their input to youth provision in the district. On the main Short Strand and Lower Newtownards Road there are plans to redefine existing fences with new painting or decoration and have new fencing redeveloped in more attractive styles. This would further enhance the area and build upon existing improvement efforts such as the Madrid Street paintings depicting views of the street on the interface gate there.

As a result of these talks and after meeting Health and Social Services workers, those involved produced youth-friendly leaflets aimed at their peers. A training pack has been designed for peer education amongst young people. This work has been headed up by a steering group of five young people from each community. There are now plans to run a 12 session roll on/roll off personal development programme addressing areas including mental health, conflict transformation and social awareness for as many as 24 young people from the interface areas who have been identified as potential peer leaders.

**awarded with four directors from each community forum and four independents, totalling twelve is structured in such a way that the dissolution of any component bloc leads to the demise of the whole company, as agreed by all within it. Thus there was a very real possibility that the award-winning SRRP could cease to function! So serious was the situation that last Brown, community worker for SCF, had been placed on notice redundancy as of September 26th 2003. On the threatened day of closure the forum at last received word from the Department that they would be funded until March 2004.**

Commenting on the situation and the issues, Jean Brown said:

“It was a crazy situation to Lenadoon and brought our own community with us and it all was under threat because of confusion and uncertainty with our own funding. We were all under a lot of stress... a profit-making organisation in an era when funders talk about the need for sustainability! Here we were about to lose a sustainable project due to a funding issue.”

**We hope you like the news-sheet and find it useful and informative. We see the news-sheet as a work in progress and we are open to making changes to the format and content to be most useful for our readers. So, if you have any suggestions about how to improve it, or if you have information about a particular project operating in your area that is contributing toward the vision above, then please let us know about it for us to aim to produce three issues per year.**

On a different subject entirely, it’s coming up to that time of year again and already we’re starting to hear murmurings about the possibility of a difficult summer ahead. It’s almost as if we can’t believe that we could be beginning to reverse the spiral of violence that has been inflicted upon our interface communities over so many summers here. For what it’s worth, our experience here at BIP is that local community and youth activists in a range of interface areas, together with others, worked extremely hard to make last summer relatively violence-free. These have been described as our ordinary heroes and we owe them a huge debt. All we have spoken with so far have said that they hope to achieve the same again this year. At the same time, we hear the common refrain: ‘We’re not going to start it, but we’re worried that they are’. We have a long way to go before we can trust each other, but if we can put our own houses in order this will help to build confidence for the future. Regardless of how the summer goes, we’ll all still be here to pick up the pieces afterwards. ‘Better to light a candle than curse the darkness’, as someone once said. Best wishes for a quiet summer.

Chris O’Halloran
Director, Belfast Interface Project

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**ENVIROMENTAL PLANS AND YOUTH PROJECTS FOR EAST BELFAST INTERFACES**

By Paul Donnelly

Since June 2002, Groundwork NI has employed two workers, Patsy Laverty and Sean Montgomery on their Youth and Environment Project based in Inner East Belfast. The project has sought to work in three key thematic areas and has established itself as an important and innovative piece of work, seeking to improve the quality of life for those living and working at the interface in the East. Focusing on young people, the project seeks to connect them with issues around mental health and the environment they live in. It also seeks to support them to develop skills and knowledge that they can use for themselves, for their broader community or that they can transfer to their peers.

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This is particularly relevant given that young people are often cited as the starting point for trouble. This project has taken another angle and looked at the mental health impacts of kids witnessing conflict, with discussion groups addressing issues around stigmas attached to the topic and examining the legacy of sustained inter-communal rioting.

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Beyond this there are other environmental improvement proposals which are at an advanced planning stage and await planning permission in the next two months. Included in these proposals are: a small welcome archway at Cluan Place possibly dressing inspiration from the “Samson and Goliath” cranes in the shipyard. Also the far end of Cluan may have a communal garden constructed either with murals or with wooden grids with climbing plants as an alternative to murals. Complementing this are plans to improve the entry from Mountpottinger into Clondeboge with the likelihood that Gerry Doyle (founder of the Doyle Youth Club) and Sean Martin (who founded the local GAA club in Short Strand) will be remembered for their input to youth provision in the district. On the main Short Strand and Lower Newtownards Road there are plans to redefine existing fences with new painting or decoration and have new fencing redeveloped in more attractive styles. This would further enhance the area and build upon existing improvement efforts such as the Madrid Street paintings depicting views of the street on the interface gate there.

As a result of these talks and after meeting Health and Social Services workers, those involved produced youth-friendly leaflets aimed at their peers. A training pack has been designed for peer education amongst young people. This work has been headed up by a steering group of five young people from each community. There are now plans to run a 12 session roll on/roll off personal development programme addressing areas including mental health, conflict transformation and social awareness for as many as 24 young people from the interface areas who have been identified as potential peer leaders.

The project has established itself as an important and innovative piece of work.

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**Award-winning project**

Stewartstown Road interface between unionist Suffolk and nationalist Lenadon. Physically and economically blighted, the area had often been the setting for sectarian conflict. After a challenge by the Housing Executive to community representatives to develop an innovative scheme to change the area, the Stewartstown Road Regeneration Project Company Limited (SRRP) was formed in late 1999.

With a mandate from both communities achieved through public meetings, SRRP successfully secured funding from the International Fund for Ireland, Belfast European Partnership Board and Belfast Regeneration Office to demolish the existing properties and develop new structures. Open since February 2002 with access for both communities, the site is refurbished and attractive with office accommodation, a post office, various retailers and a chemist serving the areas. In 2003 the project was nominated by the Housing Executive for a British Urban Regeneration Award (BURA) which was accepted and awarded to the Project in London in December 2003.

Herein lies an absurd situation. While representatives from Suffolk and Lenadon travelled to London to receive the BURA award, SCF was facing closure as its funding from BRO had run out in March 2003. The composition of the Project’s company board with four directors from each community forum and four independents, totalling twelve is structured in such a way that the dissolution of any component bloc leads to the demise of the whole company, as agreed by all within it. Thus there was a very real possibility that the award-winning SRRP could cease to function! So serious was the situation that last Brown, community worker for SCF, had been placed on notice redundancy as of September 26th 2003. On the threatened day of closure the forum at last received word from the Department that they would be funded until March 2004.**

Commenting on the situation and the issues, Jean Brown said:

“It was a crazy situation to Lenadoon and brought our own community with us and it all was under threat because of confusion and uncertainty with our own funding. We were all under a lot of stress... a profit-making organisation in an era when funders talk about the need for sustainability! Here we were about to lose a sustainable project due to a funding issue.”

Jean does, however, acknowledge the difficulties facing BRO: “over the same period they were undergoing major upheaval with the Neighbourhood Renewal process and dealing with the funding legacies of other projects in the area. This slowed progress in addressing SCF’s needs. On a positive note, Suffolk Community Forum need both funding and reassurances from government about their future security.

As Jean concludes: “We feel more confident about the future now but we have to be very clear about this: we don’t want and can’t go through all that we went through, all over again in March 2005.”

Suffolk Community Forum can be contacted at suffolkcommunityforum@yaho.co.uk or 09030 8198
Situated above the Ormeau Bridge and partially bordered by the River Lagan, Ballynafeigh runs southward as you leave the city towards Rosetta. Historically a mixed community in political and religious terms, the area has experienced violence in the last thirty five years, gentrification of its housing stock and the associated challenges that brings to any community. Despite this, Ballynafeigh has remained a diverse community with all aspects of identity in our society being represented in its composition. Philip Whyte and Gerry McCaffrey, two local youth workers from Ballynafeigh Community Development Association (BCDA), suggested that two young people from the area write an article for Interface describing their feelings about where they live. We are grateful to Grace and Sinead from Ballynafeigh for taking the time to write this article. If having read their contributions you would like young people from your area or group to undertake a similar piece of work, please let us know at BIP.

My name is Grace Jones and I am a 14 year old Protestant living in the Ballynafeigh area of Belfast. I have lived in the area all my life. The things I like about living in this area are the people in it. They make it a good place to live because they are happy, cheerful and friendly. The other thing I like is the youth clubs. There are a number of youth clubs and projects which both sides of the community can attend.

The things I don’t like about living in Ballynafeigh are that some young people are not like me or my friends. We get along no matter what our religion or background is but some young people can’t, which can end up in sectarian violence. I don’t agree with violence or not liking someone because of their religion. The other thing I don’t like is that the youth clubs or projects are not on every night. When they are closed we have to find our own entertainment on the street corners or the main Ormeau Road. We don’t like this because some young people usually end up fighting or vandalising the area. There is not much for kids and young people to do round here.

Living in a mixed community is great to me. I enjoy living in an area where both communities can talk and get along with each other. I met my best friend, Sinead Napier here, by being able to run about with both religions.

My point of view as a Protestant is Ballynafeigh is not an area that people would call a ‘dream’ place to live but living here to me is a pleasure as I enjoy the company I have. I don’t agree with violence between religions as at the end of the day we are all people and I don’t see any difference.

Grace

Sinead and Grace from the Ormeau Road.

Two houses in Glenbryn 2003. Frankie Quinn

The increased focus of community and police attention in trying to maintain order and reduce violence at problematic interfaces may also have led to trouble shifting to other nearby sites, which are perhaps less readily monitored and controlled. As a result theothenically neutral spaces may become sites of conflict for rival groups of, in particular, young people. When trouble broke out around the Donegall Road/West Link area over the summer of 2003, this was not in an area that had been recognised as a problematic interface of the traditional model. In this case the trouble seems to have been linked to the presence of young people from rival communities, identified by their football strips, in and around the Park Centre area.

This example indicates both the role of young people in helping to sustain tensions and generate disorder in interface areas and that the tensions and violence can all too easily spread to what may be otherwise perceived as neutral spaces such as shopping centres. The redevelopment of brownfield sites also has a potential to impact upon interface violence. In some areas the strategy of redevelopment has been used, arguably, to keep people further apart, while at the same time providing common resources. But this is not inevitably the case. The opening of the new Dunnes Stores complex on the Crumlin Road was perceived by some as creating a new potential interface on a site that was already perceived as problematic. Similarly, concerns have been expressed about the impact of the housing development on the Dunmore stadium site in North Belfast on the still fragile community tensions in the area.

Neil Jarman is Acting Director of the Institute for Conflict Research
Contact ICR on 9074 2682 or www.conflictresearch.org.uk

Sinéad and Grace from the Ormeau Road.

Sinead and Grace from the Ormeau Road.

Ballynafeigh Community Development Association can be contacted at www.bcdla.net/contact.htm or 9049 1161

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Grace
Rodden Street Community Challenges Racism

At a time when racist attacks are on the increase in Belfast it was heartening to meet Tina Black, Centre Manager at the Grosvenor Community Centre in West Belfast, to learn about the relationships developing between Rodden Street Community Development Group (RSCDG) and Belfast’s Filipino community. I also learned about inter and intra community relations training for young people in the Rodden Street Estate and the growing network confronting racism in our communities.

On Saturdays over the last 18 months the Grosvenor site has become a focal point for the Filipino community living in the Falls Road area and for those who come from as far afield as Dundonald in East Belfast, and Craigavon. With the emphasis on socialising and sports, a group of around 60 to 70 attend the centre each week from 9.30 am to 4.00 pm. Grosvenor Chairperson, Belle Black, provides housing and education advice. The centre also provides free childcare to support the group and mention must be made of Patricia Mills, the Creche Coordinator, who is the main provider of this care. As relationships have grown, Filipino children have joined the Rodden Street playgroup and it is hoped that older Filipino children will be involved in the summer scheme.

In addition to these developments RSCDG supports young people aged 15 to 18 through the ‘Moving On’ initiative that combines employment skills training with cross community and cultural awareness training. This initiative is funded by Prince’s Trust and has included three residents to Ballietts and visits to Derry and Dublin. A particular emphasis is placed on human rights and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission has liaised with the group to implement the programme.

As awareness develops about the levels of racism experienced, Filipino children have joined the Rodden Street playgroup and it is hoped that older Filipino children will be involved in the summer scheme.

The truth recovery process is coming to fruition. The Peace Building Programme has been established for the purpose of bringing together participants from North, South and West Belfast.

The aim is to bring member groups and others together to meet and discuss the most important issues affecting Belfast’s interface communities. How have the needs of interface communities changed? Has your area stood still? Are things better or Worse? How have other interface communities changed? How has your work been supported? How have statutory agencies changed their policies to address the needs of interface communities? What more needs to be done?

BIP will present the findings of a survey of its membership currently being carried out by our Development Workers. There will also be a presentation of the results from a new methodology survey of key issues for statutory agencies who promote social and economic regeneration within interface areas. These findings will be compared with similar work carried out in 1996.

The conference will be held in the Holiday Inn on Omeath Avenue in the city centre and will be followed by our Annual General Meeting. Further details will be sent out shortly. Please put this date in your diary!

For more information contact Marnie Kennedy on 9024 2828 or at info@belfastinterfaceproject.org

Intercomm’s Peace Building Programme

By Pauline Kersten

‘That was a down to earth presentation on the workings of the Assembly, we need more of that’, ‘I absolutely don’t agree with what was presented, but it was a great discussion’, ‘I had heard about the Bloody Sunday Tribunal, but it was something else to be there at the proceedings’. These are some of the comments expressed by community workers and activists that have been participating in workshops, seminars and field trips organised by Intercomm under its Peace Building Programme.

Intercomm - the intercommunity development project - was founded in 1995 as a direct response to grassroots community concerns about interface violence and social and economic deprivation in North Belfast. It delivers a number of services to the local community, from a women’s business project and money management course, to ‘work track’ and a conflict intervention programme which is active at the interfaces and works with the local community. Intercomm’s Peace Building Programme is relatively new and funded by the CRF and the Voluntary and Community Unit. The Peace Building programme is a rolling programme of workshops with a vision to build capacity within the community for conflicts to be managed and resolved with justice and without violence in accordance with universally agreed standards and practices.

The Peace Building Programme, as a means of community empowerment, is a pioneering programme which intends to enhance peace building skills of community workers through informed discussion and debate, assessment of good practice and international experience of conflict resolution.

The programme hopes to give participants the tools and skills to understand and influence policy development on an all-Ireland basis and to engage in processes of peace and nation building. It aims to tie participants into the debates on the ‘bigger picture’, on policing, equality legislation, human rights legislation, structures of devolved governance, international experiences of conflict resolution, processes of accommodation and resolution. It also wants to explore practical ways of using this learning in community work, learning from international experiences and dealing with and making use of structures of government on an all-Ireland basis.

The current series of events organised under the peace building programme are focused on dealing with the legacy of the conflict.

On Saturday, 27 March we had organised a panel discussion on the issue with excellent speakers. The following is a short overview of some of the key points.

Prof. Bill Bolston from the University of Ulster spoke about the Eolas document on Truth and Justice. This document has been put together by a number of community organisations and discusses models of truth recovery.

The truth recovery process envisaged by the Eolas document looks at the setting up of a panel with local and international members which would call for submissions from the public regarding questions they wish answered and issues they wish to be investigated in relation to the conflict. It also wants to explore practical ways of using this learning in community work, learning from international experiences and dealing with and making use of structures of government on an all-Ireland basis.

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