

Building Houses and Hope in North Belfast



Families from Ligoniel join their friends in Ballysillan to celebrate the dedication of another Habitat home.
Photo: Habitat for Humanity Northern Ireland

By Claire Moss

Habitat for Humanity is a Christian cross-community movement for regeneration and reconciliation within and between communities in Northern Ireland and around the world. Community based self-build housing programmes focus on volunteerism, skills development and leadership training in conflict and post conflict settings

Habitat for Humanity Northern Ireland has been working in the interface communities of Ballysillan and Ligoniel since 2002. By building in Ligoniel and Ballysillan simultaneously volunteers and families have had the opportunity to cross over and work on both projects at the same time. While the communities may not be far apart in geographic terms, the psychological distance that existed was vast. Partnering with Habitat offered a real chance to bridge that gap.

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Gasworks Community Network - from 'fire fighting' to peace building

By Gary Mc Clean

The Gasworks Community Network was set up 19 months ago as a response to serious intercommunity violence. The areas affected by these problems include the Markets, Donegall Pass and Lower Ormeau Road areas. Representatives from these areas came together out of recognition of the severity of the problem and the need to address it on a joint community basis.

In discussions between local representatives about the ongoing situation, there was agreement from all present that neither community benefited from such incidents. People wanted more effective communication in order to develop relationships and keep the

interfaces in the area quiet. It was decided that a mobile phone network be organised, and with the support of Belfast Interface Project, a number of phones were distributed within the affected areas. Regular meetings between local representatives were arranged in order to build effective relationships.

The community network has proved very effective in reducing tensions, developing relationships across the interfaces and creating opportunities for intervention at times when tensions are heightened or when violent incidents occur in the areas in question.

Those actively involved in the network have agreed to take this initiative a step further. This comes from recognition that, although good

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Here Comes the Summer...



By Frances McClelland

The Community Relations and Cultural Diversity grant scheme was developed by the Community Relations Council (CRC) to support timely and strategic interventions to community relations work on a project funding basis. The scheme complements other grant programmes within the CRC but is available to those not funded through larger EU and Core Funding avenues and adopts a flexible approach to encourage applications from groups previously not involved in any type of CR work. Through this grant scheme, the CRC has an opportunity to play a role in supporting interface communities during periods of possible unrest and disorder.

We expect similar interest in the grant scheme this summer to previous years and would encourage interested groups or organisations to demonstrate a clear community relations focus in project work i.e. activity must make a positive contribution to improving relations within and between communities. Where possible, the scheme particularly welcomes applicant groups who have a sustained approach to community relations work and have projects operating throughout the year. The scheme may also support development work building on cultural identity projects undertaken during summer 2005, or indeed new activity which meets the scheme criteria.

Funded activity can be on a single or cross-community contact basis, and the scheme seeks to develop opportunities for an exploration of cultures, beliefs and traditions. Some examples of summer initiatives which have been supported in previous years have included:

Running costs for inter-community mobile phone networks and the meetings between community representatives operating them.

Programmes which offer practical cultural learning tools such as visits to interactive learning centres.

Promoting inter-community dialogue and offering space for project participants to become more culturally aware through facilitated workshops.

The grant application form itself is relatively straightforward and all applicants will have the opportunity to meet with programme staff to discuss issues in relation to the application or the potential for other community relations programmes. The Council would request that any application which you may wish to make is submitted as early as possible for processing. Whilst we recognise that the nature of interface work necessitates a need to be reactive to arising situations, processing times normally take 8 - 12 weeks. We will endeavour to make the scheme as flexible as possible but would ask that you assist this process by submitting applications for any work you may be planning as soon as possible.

Please do not hesitate to contact a member of CRC's Funding and Development team for any additional information you may require, or if we can assist in any way with the planning of your summer diversionary activity for 2006. Application forms for the Community Relations and Cultural Diversity Grant Scheme can be downloaded from the Community Relations Council website at http://www.community-relations.org.uk/services/funding/small_grants_criteria/ alternatively you can contact our office on (028) 9022 7500 to request a form. Frances McClelland is Project Officer with CRC's Funding and Development Programme.

Habitat homeowners Jennifer Crockard (left), from Ballysillan and Michelle Hamilton, from Ligoniel enjoy a chat. Photo: Habitat for Humanity Northern Ireland

homeowners from Ballysillan and Ligoniel shared in the experience by handing over keys to each other. This was a very practical demonstration of how trust and friendships have grown between these two communities and symbolises their hope for a shared future.

Executive Director Peter Farquharson comments, "We have so much to celebrate! Here in North Belfast we are seeing a community transformed through the relationships that have developed between families and volunteers."

The Ballysillan project is now complete with eight local families in the new homes they built with their neighbours and friends in Ligoniel. The final two homes at the Ligoniel project site will be completed in June 2006. While the projects may be completed, the houses finished, the relationships that have formed as a result of Habitat's work in North Belfast will be the real lasting legacy in these communities.

Jennifer Crockard and Michelle Hamilton are two ordinary women that never would have met but for the fact that they were both selected as Habitat homeowners. The women have overcome their fears and suspicions to develop a friendship. Jennifer comments, "At the outset it was strange sitting alongside people from Ligoniel. While it's only up the road it may as well have been another world. The more Michelle and I chatted during the training sessions and while doing our sweat equity, the more we realised how much we had in common. I am delighted that through partnering with Habitat I can now say I have a real friend in Ligoniel."

Claire Moss is Communications Manager for Habitat For Humanity Northern Ireland. For further information phone (028) 9024 3686. www.habitatni.co.uk



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The real impact of the Habitat Northern Ireland Programme is on the families and volunteers who partner with the organisation. Homeowners from both communities undertake their training and 'sweat equity' together, establishing respect and trust and forging friendships. Particular highlights have been the house dedications in North Belfast:

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work has been done with a certain degree of success, the present arrangement is more of a "fire fighting" approach and it is now necessary to develop a more forward looking strategic approach.

The network reached agreement on a new phase of their work and planned a number of initiatives including a series of meetings which aim to involve the wider community, discussion and planning with local youth and community workers and further discussion with local statutory agencies with responsibility for the areas including N.I. Housing Executive, Youth Services, Social Services, Belfast City Council and Translink.

The series of planned meetings will create the opportunity to:

- Inform the wider community about the work of the network to date and the future strategy of the network.
- Consult the wider community on their views and concerns about the issues in their areas and possible ways forward.
- Consult the local community/youth workers as to how they can move forward together in a joined up approach to tackle the issues faced by the youth from the area.
- Consult with local statutory agencies to help them to work more closely with the communities in question to assist them to tackle local issues.

The first of these meetings took place on the 18th January 2006 and was attended by residents from Donegall Pass, Lower Ormeau Road and the Markets area. This meeting was aimed at community inclusion, informing those present about the existence and work of the Network to date. In addition, there was an opportunity for questions and answers and for residents to voice their hopes and fears around the issue of interface tensions and violence. There was overwhelming support for the efforts of the Network and a strong desire for this work to continue. Those present recognised that the issues that they were dealing with were shared issues and that any solutions would have to involve a shared effort on the part of all those with concern for the area. "What we do in future we do together..." was a commonly shared view of those at the meeting.

One of the many problems experienced by interface workers has been the issue of being identifiable to their own community members, the other community representatives and other agencies. Interface workers often have to contend with verbal abuse from members of both communities, have in the past been struck by missiles and always face the danger of being arrested themselves while attempting to intervene to resolve the problem at times of violent exchanges.

With this in mind, one issue currently being addressed is the possibility of providing clothing which clearly identifies Network members. By

providing those on the ground at the interface with identifiable clothing the Network can assist, as far as possible:

- In supporting safer working conditions during violent exchanges.
- In ensuring that those operating at the interface feel more secure in their efforts to resolve, reduce and prevent violent exchanges.

A member of the Network, Terry Watson from Donegall Pass, commented that "the Gasworks Community Network is currently engaging in a process that will address community relations in all three communities. This process will incorporate, possibly for the first time in many years, all members of the community in dialogue and workshops to assist the holistic development of each community. It is now very evident that this original 'fire fighting' team are becoming more and more recognised as community activists with peace building at its core."

For more information contact:
Deirdre Hargey - Markets Development Association (028) 9024 8338
Terry Watson - Donegal Pass Community Forum 07721 645 113
Mark Sykes - Gasworks Community Network 07818 832 435

'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe'

From the homeland of C.S. Lewis - East Belfast

Mention a parade, drums and fireworks on an interface and most people would run a mile

By Sean Montgomery

A night that outclassed any of C.S. Lewis' fictional blockbusters. A huge success story of how hard work and strong will, based on respectful understanding, overcame the real life difficulties in organizing a truly large scale cross-community event in East Belfast.

Mention a parade, drums and fireworks on an interface and most people would run a mile, board up the windows, lock away the children and prepare for the battle ahead. Maybe, and given people's past experience this is a very understandable view.

This year's theme for the East Belfast Lantern Parade was the Chronicles of Narnia; the dress theme was the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe; the overall theme was C.S. Lewis and a celebration of an East Belfast lad who did well.

The 10th December 2005 Lantern parade was to prove not only a perfect model of how interface communities can work together, but a wonderful, fun-filled and colourful event in an area that could be described as contested space. The lantern parade in years gone past was held in the heart of East Belfast; because of this people from Short Strand felt a real sense of exclusion through fear. It was decided through discussion, honest debate and mature accommodation by the organising committee to move the end event to Bridge End/Sirocco (for those who don't know the geography, this area links predominantly catholic Short Strand with predominantly protestant Newtownards Road).

The committee was made up of a number of key youth and community groups from Short Strand and Inner East Belfast, in partnership with the

Beat Initiative (Belfast's leading carnival group). At all times the committee consulted with as many people as possible to ensure full cross-community and political support. Through this approach an atmosphere of co-operation was enhanced. This event became a test of how relationships which had been fostered behind the scenes had created real change; participation was the buzz word.

As people in schools, church halls, youth clubs and community centres worked tirelessly with hundreds of young people, preparations on the route continued with an agreed dual starting point, one at the top of Newtownards Road and the other at the top of Mountpottinger Road. The parade merged at the junction of Newtownards Road and Strand Walk in a sea of colour, lights, music and bright floats. Local people from both communities stewarded and co-operated to ensure safety for all. The finale of the night was a fantastic performance by English, Scots, Welsh and Irish carnival entertainers, topped off by a fun and enjoyable firework display.

This event proved that co-operation and working together, mindful of our differences, can lead the way in peace building between our communities. Praise must go to all the groups who took part, and to those who drove and supported this carnival partnership.

Sean Montgomery is Community Relations Officer for the Short Strand Community Forum and can be contacted on (028) 9050 1705. Contact the Beat Initiative at www.belfastcarnival.org



Whowhatwherewhenwhy

By Gary Mc Clean

A number of Belfast Interface Project member groups have recently embarked on a journey of discovery, fun, adventure and learning supported by BIP. The groups have begun a process with W5 @

*a journey of discovery,
fun, adventure and
learning*

Odyssey which will allow them to have a major input into and benefit from a series of projects in the W5 complex. The programme will cater for a wide range of young people covering three main groups: toddlers and their parents, 7-11 year olds, 12-16 year olds.

We spoke to Judith Harvey, Business Development Manager with W5 for some details on the proposed projects. Judith told us that "initial consultations have been conducted with members of BIP who identified some of the problems in their areas. On agreeing that W5 had the resources to potentially help, a number of member groups consulted with the young people within their communities about the type of programmes that they would engage with and felt would benefit them." Judith went on to tell us about the type of projects that would be developed.

The parent and toddler project will aim to

*activities that are
enjoyable and give a
sense of achievement*

- Develop improved confidence and skills amongst parents in interacting with their children
- Help parents to become more imaginative and inventive in approaching situations, both social and behavioural with their children
- Develop understanding of the child's development and how the parent can support early education through talking and playing with their child

- Provide rich experiences for the child to engage in, maximising their own development
- Develop a more positive attitude to education and the fun a child and parent can have together

The 7-11 year old's project will engage this age group in rich experiential activities that are enjoyable and give a sense of achievement with the aim being to

- Improve skills in listening to, understanding and acting on information
- Enhance skills in articulating needs and ideas
- Increase confidence in sharing their point of view and understanding others' points of view
- Encourage imaginative and inventive approaches to various situations

Through a multi-media based project, the 12-16 years old group will develop

- the ability to use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a tool for accessing and communicating ideas, including a range of media (e.g. animation, sound, film etc.)
- an improved understanding of group roles and how they can work together to achieve success or otherwise within the group
- an ability to identify their own learning needs and how they can develop future learning opportunities
- flexibility and self confidence, through learning about participation, teamwork and communication skills
- an increased willingness to explore education/training opportunities
- improved skills in literacy, numeracy and language skills
- improved skills in identifying options and making decisions

Another element of the project, catering for the 12-16 years old group, will provide the opportunity to work with older people from the community, which will allow the young people to

- develop a commitment to working for the benefit of others and a sense of responsibility for others
- understand local community issues or needs and develop a motivation to impact positively in their local community
- engage effectively with different members of their community
- identify traditions in their community and their historical context
- participate in discussions about shared traditions and culture
- participate in outings, visits and talks to explore and develop greater understanding of their heritage, culture and traditions, exploring positive and negative aspects of traditions
- demonstrate pride in their community
- participate in activities which include people from all parts and sections of their community



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After some initial meetings, a sampler session was held at W5 for young people from the ages of 7 to 11. The rationale behind the taster session was to give a better idea of what is available at W5 and find out what they would like to do as part of any future programme. The session was recorded on video in order to capture their reactions and also to have a short film which could be viewed by other BIP members.

The finalised programme will allow more BIP members to benefit from the resources at W5

Over the next few months similar sampler sessions will be carried out involving young people in the multi-media based activities such as film and animation. In addition, there will be a sampler session of an inter-generational project to explore their communities 'yesterday, today and tomorrow' and interact with older people to look at how they and their communities have developed and will develop in the future. As part of the parent and toddler sampler session, parents will get the opportunity to view the Under 8's gallery, giving them an idea of how they can participate with their toddlers in activities at W5.

This programme is a work-in-progress and further information will be made available in the coming months. The finalised programme will allow more BIP members to benefit from the resources at W5. BIP are supporting W5 in developing a grant application to fund this programme. If your group is a member of BIP and would be interested in participating in the full programme, please contact gary@belfastinterfaceproject.org or call (028) 9024 2828.



Ballynaveigh Community House.
Photo: Ballynaveigh Community Development Association (BCDA)

By Katie Hanlon

Belfast as a city is synonymous with segregation and it is this concept which has dominated political, economic, academic and planning matters over the years. But Ballynaveigh, the area in which I live and work, is 'mixed' and as such unusual in Northern Ireland terms.

Ballynaveigh is situated at the Ormeau Bridge in South Belfast and is a district where Protestants and Catholics have continued to live alongside one another throughout all the years of the Troubles. It is also diverse in terms of social class, life-style, social capital patterns, ethnicity, religious affiliation and housing tenure and includes among its residents possibly the highest level of mixed relationships in Northern Ireland.

Yet, Ballynaveigh is not a homogenous blob where internal conflict is absent nor do I wish to present it simplistically, as it has often been by the media, as some kind of urban utopia within a seething sea of division, because the area is composed of complex, diverse and often competing webs of relationships. The term 'mixed' should therefore not be misinterpreted as meaning 'integrated'. Residents value their distinctiveness, so relationships can sometimes be strained as people engage in the ongoing struggle to maintain their identity and equitably share physical space and everyday lives. Nevertheless, Ballynaveigh stands out from the usual 'us and them' of Northern Ireland, pointing the way to a more pluralist future.

It is crucial to remember that the mixed character is historical and has endured over considerable time. Indeed, Professor Fred Boal identified the area as mixed from as early as 1911. It is therefore not a product of a peace dividend or of the reduction in hostilities, nor was it planned or socially engineered.

This is something with which I believe Northern Irish society has a bit of a problem. The concept of segregation is so ingrained in our psyche

Ballynaveigh. Today Mixed - Tomorrow?

that a 'mixed' district is usually viewed as having a somewhat temporary existence and is actually on its way to being something else i.e. that Ballynaveigh is on its way to becoming segregated. I do not wish to infer that living in a mixed area is somehow better than living in a segregated one, but surely in such a polarised society the fact that a mixed area exists at all, and that people increasingly want to live in it, is something worth preserving as a good in itself.

Planners, researchers and other observers describe Ballynaveigh as becoming gentrified and it is true that more people want to move into the area. However, as an older established neighbourhood, land is in short supply, so available property is in high demand and house prices are increasing. Indeed, they are rising at such an alarming rate that it is almost impossible for lower income households and people who were brought up in the area, to afford to buy a home. In my opinion this represents the biggest threat to Ballynaveigh's future survival and to its level of 'mixedness'.

It is important to remember that the process of gentrification did not produce the 'mixedness'. That was already here and represents a major attraction for people to move into the area. What gentrification is in danger of doing is disturbing the social balance of the district, putting living in Ballynaveigh beyond the means of socially disadvantaged and lower income groups; in effect making living in a mixed neighbourhood a luxury commodity available only to those who can afford to buy into it. Surely the opportunity to live in a mixed neighbourhood like

Ballynaveigh should be available to all who wish to do so irrespective of their class or financial standing, which brings me to the second concept which Northern Ireland holds dear - the supremacy of market forces.

It has been pointed out to me many times that 'you can't buck the market'. For me to accept this however, requires me to also accept that the socially mixed nature of Ballynaveigh will disappear in a relatively short space of time as more affluent people price lower income groups out of the market. Affordable housing is therefore one of the most pressing issues facing the district. The demographic balance is further being eroded by the rapidly rising number of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) due to developers dividing up houses and building apartment complexes to maximise capital gain, thereby reducing the amount of accommodation suitable for families.

The potential already exists in NI planning regulations to introduce measures to prevent the destruction of Ballynaveigh in the form of Article 42 Agreements (1991 Planning Order) and by paying attention to PPS12, (housing and settlements), although I have seen no evidence of their application. Consultation has also just ended in relation to limiting the amount of HMOs in areas at risk of being overwhelmed by such developments. However, will planners introduce caps in time to prevent permanent damage to the housing stock and demographics of the district? The ability of the local Housing Association to provide social housing is also hampered by the restrictive Total Cost Indicator

(TCI) rule which disadvantages them in competing financially with private developers to purchase property for development.

Government has recently made a commitment to promoting shared/mixed neighbourhoods in the Shared Future Policy document, published by the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister in 2005 and adopted as the primary policy on community relations in Northern Ireland. But is this policy going to be provided with the 'teeth' to deliver on its promises, or is it destined to languish on a shelf like so many others before it? A Community Cohesion Unit has also been set up within the NI Housing Executive, the strategy body responsible for the provision of social housing in Northern Ireland, which aims to establish some new mixed areas. But what about those which already exist?

If Ballynaveigh is left to the mercy of market forces there is a real and present danger that the social diversity which local residents and Ballynaveigh Community Development Association (BCDA) have fought so hard to protect over the past 32 troubled years will be irrevocably damaged. The daunting challenge for BCDA therefore, is to demand that government, planners and developers make interventions which benefit all the diverse residents of this remarkable district, especially those who are vulnerable or socially excluded.

Katie Hanlon is the Director of Ballynaveigh Community Development Association. For further information contact (028) 9049 1161. www.bcda.net

The North Belfast Conflict Transformation Forum

“of practitioners, for practitioners, by practitioners”

By Gary Mc Clean

there is agreement that Forum members will work to prevent a return to the ways of the past.

It is all too easy sometimes to feel disillusioned, frustrated and helpless when following current affairs here. People sometimes say, “But, sure it’s getting worse instead of better” or “Are we never going to have a normal society in this part of the world?” These feelings and sentiments are perfectly understandable and at times wholly justifiable. It is often difficult for the ordinary observer to see any great positivity, given the major focus on negativity coming from the newspapers and television news programmes.

There is, however, an immense amount of hard work going on and maturity being shown by those at the front line in interface community work in Belfast. Things are changing and there are a lot of people ‘at the grassroots’ who are working tirelessly to bring about those changes.

One particularly impressive initiative is the North Belfast Conflict Transformation Forum (NBCTF). What is it? What does it do? Who is involved? How does this work? These are some of the questions that I put to Rab McCallum of the North Belfast Interface Network, Michael Atcheson from LINC

(Local Initiatives for Needy Communities) and John Loughran from Intercomm, all of whom, among others, are heavily involved in the Forum.

“Collective cogs” is how Rab McCallum describes NBCTF. “While there isn’t any collective agreement on what the future might hold, there is agreement that Forum members will work to prevent a return to the ways of the past. The Forum is simply trying to bring together people of a like mind.... to look at an achievable way of putting together a practical programme that looks at managing change... The idea behind it is to broaden the impact that these programmes make, instead of people individually doing their own piece of work somewhere.... This is ‘collective cogs’.”

Michael Atcheson explained that “North Belfast is well known for its problems and differences. We have more interface areas than anywhere else in Northern Ireland and 30% of troubles-related deaths in Northern Ireland have occurred in North Belfast.” Michael points out that “basically, NBCTF was born out of necessity”.

According to John Loughran, “The idea for a strategic forum had been circulating for some time. In its current form it emerged from the Intercomm/LINC learning group and through work with the North Belfast Interface Network. The basis was to join up ‘grassroots’ peace building work and to create a focus on creating and sustaining a more proactive and strategic direction, particularly at a time when the instability in North Belfast did not appear to be on the radar of statutory and government bodies.”

So surely there are major difficulties and obstacles standing in the way of the formation of such a forum, given the strained relationships that have existed in Northern Ireland and North Belfast in particular? “Not so,” says John. “Working relationships and strategic alliances had previously been formed between all partners. The challenge has been to sustain and develop the Forum.”

NBCTF is made up of a diverse range of individuals and organisations actively working in North Belfast on an inter-community basis. Those involved have reached agreement on working within an agreed Charter. The Forum plans to officially launch this Charter in the very near future. Following this launch there will be a distribution of information packs containing, amongst other information, details of those involved and contact details. Michael commented that “it is exciting as a model of practice, exciting in that the people sitting around that table, who wouldn’t normally, are actually working together and it’s exciting that it is a new idea.... and eighteen months later we are still going”. Michael also highlighted the fact that the Forum model is currently being replicated in the East Antrim area.

The idea is to broaden the impact that these programmes make

The Charter

- North Belfast Conflict Transformation Forum is the coming together of organisations whose aim is to promote co-operation and collaboration and improve relationships between organisations, within and between communities and with all like minded individuals or agencies actively working within North Belfast.

- The aim of this initiative is to strategically address issues of sectarianism and the negative aspects of parochialism and competitiveness that exist within the different areas and organisations.
- The Forum believes that working in this way will enable us to maximise the potential of personnel and resources in our efforts to develop strategic conflict transformation practices and policies.
- The Forum is committed to developing relationships that promote dialogue as the principle means of resolving conflict.
- The Forum agrees to co-operate and where necessary initiate contact with all groups, individuals or agencies who express similar aims regardless of their ethnicity, religious denomination, political affiliations, sexual orientation, cultural expression, age or gender.
- We support the individual rights of all irrespective of ethnicity, religious denomination, ability/disability, sexual orientation, age or gender.
- We also hold that with individual rights come responsibilities and we resolve to exercise these rights and responsibilities so as to ensure that we do not create or enhance any condition, relationship or situation which may prevent others from exercising their rights or upholding their responsibilities.

Asked about the benefits of the NBCTF for North Belfast communities, John replied, “The Forum has broken down barriers, misconceptions and stereotypes. It has also given positive leadership on contentious issues. The content of the discussions also inform other strategic discussions on matters of peace building, parades, confidence building and the provision of political analysis. The foundations have been laid.”

Personal Profile



Michael Briggs - East Belfast Community Development Agency

Post:

Director of East Belfast Community Development Agency. I am directly responsible to our Chair and Board of Directors. My role is to manage and develop the agency keeping our mission at the forefront of my mind and ensuring the work we do is in line with our strategy for 2006-2010.

Your Community:

East Belfast has a population of approx 110,000 people. It is predominantly protestant (97%) with small catholic communities within it, Short Strand being the biggest with approx 3000 people.

Your Typical Day:

I am not sure I have a typical day. I think I start every day being conscious of the need to manage my time and then constantly manage it. I may be at meetings either in our building or in someone else’s building. I know that I usually am dealing with 3-10 things every day and this can be frustrating. When I know I have to write things like reports or letters then I usually don’t allow any interruptions or I’ll never get it done. Although, in my role as Director my plans for the day can go out the window very quickly because of staff issues, or last minute funding issues (which have haunted us, like others, for the past year).

Low Points:

I suppose the low points for me, my agency and area is the violence we have experienced over the past four years and the length of time it takes for people and communities to recover from this. Another low point is the length of time it takes government to move on something. Whilst I think ‘Positive Steps’ and ‘Neighbourhood Renewal’ are excellent documents we need to get them from the pages to communities in a practical and sensible way, but government seems to be dragging their feet on making this happen.

High Points:

High points are always the successes we have as an agency in our work or successes we are involved with alongside other organisations. The fact that some recovery has been made from the violence has been because of design and the commitment of people in East Belfast, not by accident.

Examples of Good Practice:

We as an agency are always keen for people and groups to find ways of working together and sharing resources and so we have a number of forums which we support and are active within in East Belfast which support and develop this concept. They are East Belfast Community Workers Forum, East Belfast Youth Workers Forum, East Belfast Social Economy Stakeholders Forum, Inner East Forum, Inner East Neighbourhood Partnership, East Belfast Partnership and developing a positive working relationship with Short Strand Community Forum.

Hobbies:

Trying to play golf, walking, listening to music (all genres), playing and collecting acoustic guitars, collecting music memorabilia, going to concerts.



Photo: Parades Commission
Parades Commission site visit to Derry/LondonDerry.
(From left) Vilma Patterson (Vice-Chair, Parades Commission),
Roger Poole (Chairman, Parades Commission)
Garvin O'Doherty (local businessman)

New Parades Commission Heralds New Approach

By Vilma Patterson

When first asked to provide an article for this news-sheet, it was with a certain degree of trepidation that I accepted. The trepidation comes from the fact that few, if any people know better than those living on Belfast's interfaces how important the issue of parading is in the city. They know better than I that the issue is one of the single biggest factors dictating the direction and success of community relations and community development each year.

The reason I agreed, is because these same people also know how important it is that

greater levels of understanding, engagement and agreement on parading are developed. It is the same reason that I agreed to join the new Parades Commission and in turn agreed to become its first Vice-Chair.

In the absence of agreement on parading, the role of the Parades Commission continues to be crucial – facilitating dialogue, encouraging agreement and only issuing determinations as a last resort. Upon taking up his position as Chairman of the new Commission, my colleague Roger Poole was asked what was his long term objective in the role. He answered that he hoped to be the last Chairman of a Northern

Ireland Parades Commission – that when this new Commission comes to the end of its tenure, the level of mutual understanding and mutual trust in Northern Ireland will have developed to the point where it is no longer necessary.

Some observers may think that this approach is overly optimistic. But not I, and not my fellow new commissioners. We share this optimism because in the time since we have been appointed, we have met a broad range of individuals and groups associated with parading. While they all come from different backgrounds, have different perspectives on our shared history and have different views on the merits of parading and protesting, the overwhelming message coming from them all is the same: this issue needs to be sorted.

People here have come to expect more from life than a never ending cycle of parading crises and tension filled summers. The new Parades Commission believes this cycle can be broken and we are determined that through facilitating dialogue, building trust and encouraging people to agree arrangements that threaten no one, we can help everyone involved in parading to enter a new context.

The Parades Commission conducts its business in a framework discussed and agreed by

Parliament. This includes the procedures it must follow, what it is allowed to consider and the code of conduct that parades must follow. The new commission is acutely aware that these elements have been in place for many years and are a source of frustration for people on all sides of the community.

Our aim is to make engagement and progress possible, so one of the first actions of the new commission was to initiate and announce a comprehensive review of all our procedures. This decision was taken with the very clear aim of improving public confidence in the role and work of the Commission, and it will be thorough.

Given the importance of the Belfast Interface Project and the expertise of its members, I

would encourage all those involved in the project who have a view on our work or our procedures to contribute to this review. We will make every effort to meet with interested parties and it is our intention to hold a series of public events, but I would also encourage groups and individuals who would like to make an input to write, fax or email their views to the addresses included at the end of this article before Friday 19th May 2006.

The motto of the Belfast Interface Project is 'Building Towards Peaceful Co-Existence in Interface Areas'. While our remit within the new Parades Commission extends beyond interface areas, the aim of building towards peaceful co-existence is one we share. We believe that with the public's input into our review of procedures

and wide participation in our work, it can be achieved sooner than many people think.

Vilma Patterson is Vice-Chair of the new Parades Commission.

Submissions to the Parades Commission's review of procedures should be addressed to:

The Parades Commission
Review of Procedures
Windsor House

9 – 15 Bedford Street
Belfast

Email: review@paradescommissionni.org

Telephone: (028) 9089 5900

Fax: (028) 9032 2988

Suffolk and Lenadoon Interface Group - new staff strengthen the team

By Gary Mc Clean

Our first issue of Interface in May 2004 contained an article on the Stewartstown Road Regeneration Project (SRRP). Formed in 1999, this project is currently thought of by many as a model of good practice, co-operation and innovation in peacebuilding work and the regeneration of interface communities. SRRP came about through dialogue between Suffolk Community Forum and Lenadoon Community Forum, under the auspices of the Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group (SLIG). SLIG, until very recently, was an informal group made up of people from the neighbouring communities of Suffolk and Lenadoon in west Belfast, but has now become a constituted group. SLIG member Jean Brown believes that this development in itself is a tangible sign of the progress the group has made, both in terms of its own organisation and confidence.

Jean went on to explain that the objectives of the group are to benefit the local area, to promote community harmony and to promote good citizenship. Long term, the group's aim is to ensure that both communities can live alongside each other as good neighbours. Given the fractured history of the area, it must be accepted that this is a long and difficult process, with deep hurts to be healed on either side and mistrust to be addressed. Jean pointed out that there are five principle themes which underpin this latest phase of the work of SLIG. These themes are:

- Bringing People Together
- Addressing the legacy of conflict and sectarianism

- Improving the quality of life for people living on the interface
- Community Safety on the interface
- Group Development

The latest development to come from SLIG is the recruitment of three new interface workers, two part-time and one full-time. The two part-time interface workers will focus their energies mainly in the Lenadoon community, while the full-time interface worker will be working mainly in the Suffolk community.

Interface met up with the new interface workers to find out what their plans were and what sort of things they have been doing in the first month in their new roles. Maria Perkins, who operates in the Lenadoon area, commented that it has been a busy time so far. She has been spending time with her two colleagues, "gelling as a team". "We have taken tours of Suffolk and Lenadoon and discussed the issues affecting the people in each of the areas. I have held several meetings with various groups to introduce myself and discuss future work with them. We have been looking at developing a programme with young people from both the Suffolk and Lenadoon communities to look at what is active citizenship and how can young people be involved". Maria's co-worker in Lenadoon, Cathal Toland, talked about some of the more fun and activity based ideas that they will be working on, which would include:

- a fishing club
- Golf lessons
- Team building and group work sessions
- A fun and learning experience project with W5 (Odyssey)

Darren McKinley, the full-time interface worker with primary responsibility for the Suffolk community, has spent a lot of time sorting out a base for himself and his two colleagues and familiarising himself with the various groups that meet within Suffolk. Darren commented on some early progress with the unemployed club, having introduced local unemployed residents to the Job Assist Programme. This, hopefully, will enable them to access jobs within their area before they are advertised in the Job Market.

We hope to include updates of the progress of SLIG in future issues of Interface. For further information about SLIG, contact:

Jean Brown or Sean McMahon
Suffolk and Lenadoon Interface Group
Tel: (028) 9030 8198



New interface workers, (from left) Darren Mc Kinley, Maria Perkins and Cathal Toland. Photo: Gary McClean



Weekly team meeting. Photo: Gary McClean

BIP launch new Conflict Transformation Support Project

By Erik Cownie

On Monday March 6th I joined the team at Belfast Interface Project as Development Worker on the new Conflict Transformation Support Project (CTSP). BIP have designed this new project around the needs of our member groups, as identified in the extensive Members Survey (2004).

Funding has been secured from the Community Relations Council and International Fund for Ireland for the provision of the new post and associated programme and running costs.

The main objectives of the Conflict Transformation Support Project are:

- To maximise levels of uptake regarding the range of support and training programmes available to our members in the areas of 'addressing the legacies of the past' and 'developing conflict transformation skills'.
- To design and deliver training programmes addressing identified unmet need, in conjunction with current providers and with our membership.
- To provide a facilitation and signposting/support service where practicable.

Target groups:

These include our membership of (35+) community groups operating in nationalist or unionist interface areas of Belfast, plus associate and individual members. Part of the role of our Communications and Membership Support Development Worker is to develop our membership further so we expect these numbers to continue to grow throughout the lifetime of the project.

Proposed benefits:

Increased awareness amongst our membership and key stakeholders of existing available training and support provision.

Increased uptake of existing available training and support provision amongst our membership and key stakeholders.

Increased awareness of unmet need amongst current training and support programme providers.

Uptake of new training and support programmes, addressing unmet need, amongst our membership and key stakeholders.

Increased provision of facilitation and signposting/support services to our membership and key stakeholders.

Over time, increased levels of inter-community contact and activity.

Increased levels of confidence and capacity in coping with the legacies of the past.

At present my time is being taken up sourcing and collating information from training providers and funders, but I am very mindful that at this project's core are the needs of our members. Within the next few weeks I aim to begin to make contact with and meet with members to update them on the progress of the project and to seek their participation.

I very much consider myself to be at the service of BIP's members and I hope and trust that they will view me as such and that together we can continue to strive to improve living and social conditions within all of Belfast's interface communities. For my part I am delighted to be part of this new and challenging project and look forward to the work ahead.

For more information on the new Conflict Transformation Support Project, contact: Erik Cownie on (028) 9024 2863/9024 2828 or email erik@belfastinterfaceproject.org

Promoting social and economic regeneration in Belfast's interface areas

IS THERE A PARTICULAR ISSUE THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE HIGHLIGHTED IN *INTERFACE*?

Send us an article about an issue that you feel needs to be highlighted, or about the work you're doing. Alternatively, BIP can write an article in consultation with you. Or maybe you have some photos of a project you're working on that you'd like published. While *Interface* particularly welcomes input from within our membership, we are happy to consider articles and submissions from others involved in good practice in addressing interface community issues – community workers, women's groups, youth, elderly, ethnic groups, statutory bodies, local businesses and everyone else!

Contact Gary McClean at gary@belfastinterfaceproject.org or 9024 3579/9024 2828.

INTERESTED IN JOINING?

Belfast Interface Project has three categories of membership:

- Community group
- Associate
- Individual

If you support our mission statement, meet our criteria (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, Gary McClean, can come out to meet with you.

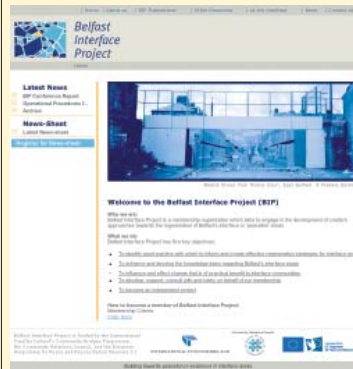
COMMENTS SECTION ON *INTERFACE*

As part of our ongoing evaluation of *Interface*, we invite readers to submit comments on each issue. Comments can be about the previous issue in full or about the particular merits or weaknesses of specific articles. We may publish comments, with author's permission, and internally record them for our monitoring and evaluation purposes. Comments must be attributable to a named individual or organisation with accompanying contact details. We reserve the right to edit comments received.

WEBSITE UPDATE!

- BIP's Second Annual Conference report is now available for download on our website.

Check it out at:
www.belfastinterfaceproject.org



STAFF CHANGES AT BIP

BIP said farewell to Development Worker Paul Donnelly in September last year, as Paul left to take up a new post with Ulster Peoples' College.

Gary Mc Clean took up the reins as Communications and Membership Support Project Development Worker at the start of November.

Erik Cownie joined BIP last month as Development Worker with our new Conflict Transformation Support Project. (See related article in this issue).

It's great to have Gary and Erik as part of the team.

Finally, we're glad to welcome back Marnie Kennedy as part-time Support Worker following her maternity leave, and as we go to press another part-time Support Worker is being recruited.



Erik Cownie



Gary Mc Clean

Interface is the news-sheet of Belfast Interface Project and reflects the views and diversity of our membership groups. *Interface* seeks to promote good practice around interface community issues and increased communication between groups across the city. The editor reserves the right to amend articles where appropriate with the consent of the author. The views expressed in *Interface* do not necessarily represent those of the management committee.



**Belfast
Interface
Project**

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Belfast Interface Project is funded by the Community Relations Council, the European Programme for Peace and Reconciliation Measure 2.1, the International Fund for Ireland Community Bridges Programme and Belfast City Council Good Relations Unit.



INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR IRELAND