



## A Bill of Rights for All – A Bill of Rights for Youth



Participants at January workshop looking at the issues of bullying and free association. Photo: Conor Hamilton

By Gary Mc Clean

Margaret Valente from the Star Neighbourhood Centre (SNC) contacted *Interface* recently to discuss an exciting piece of work that the SNC is currently engaged in. The project aims to “educate young people around the concept of a Bill of Rights, which will of course impact on their lives, both now and in the future. In addition, those participant young people will then set out to inform their peers and others in their community about the Bill of Rights.”

*The project aims to “educate young people around the concept of a Bill of Rights...”*

I asked Margaret about how a Bill of Rights will affect her community, to which she replied “the New Lodge area is a marginalised community

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## A better future? Interfaces and the Good Relations Panel

By Duncan Morrow

At the end of the day, an interface is where two groups of people meet, face to face - but never as friends. The message of interfaces is a stark one of ‘us’ and ‘them’, where people make hard choices not so much because of their personal attitudes or anything in their own past, but because of wider connections and what that means.

Interfaces are the hard evidence that conflict is not really over yet. In fact most of what we call interfaces are the direct result of political battles and the violence that arose from them.

*Interfaces are the hard evidence that conflict is not really over yet*

The logic of interfaces is that ‘we’ hold out against ‘them’. Any change in the map is a victory for one side or the other. The best we can hope for is to manage the fear, put up better and bigger barriers and hope that people turn their backs on one another rather than face each other in a

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Project participants working on the Bill of Rights learning aid video. Photo: Conor Hamilton

suffering many forms of social and economic deprivation. A Bill of Rights, by protecting and promoting people's human right to housing, health care, leisure, education etc., can be a powerful tool for our community." Margaret highlighted that those living in the New Lodge area are "not aware of the ongoing debate around a Bill of Rights, never mind the possibility that they could influence this debate for the betterment of their community. We hope that residents, and in particular young people, in the New Lodge area will become informed about what is at stake with the Bill of Rights and the impact it can have by ensuring that public/government policy is developed with a view to respecting human rights."

Margaret explained that "the Bill of Rights Project involves the SNC working in collaboration with the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) and the Participation and Practice of Rights Project (PPR).

"We have accessed funding from the Community Foundation Northern Ireland (CFNI) in order to engage 15 young people aged between 12 and 16 years old from the SNC."

The aims of the project are to:

- Raise awareness of the significance of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland for young people.

The Commission has been asked to advise on rights which reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland and that are additional to the European Convention on Human Rights. It has argued that special rights may have to be devised in the following areas: equality; education; language; cultural expression and identity; victims' rights; social and economic rights; criminal justice and implementation. It is also concerned about guarantees which may be required for certain groups of people, such as women, children and young people.

The Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement 1998 states that the Bill should reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, drawing as appropriate on international instruments and experience.

The Commission is also to consider whether and how to formulate:

- (1) a general obligation on Government and public bodies fully to respect, on the basis of equality of treatment, the identity and ethos of both communities in Northern Ireland, and
- (2) rights not to be discriminated against and to equality of opportunity in both the public and private sectors.

The rights it contains are to reflect the principles of mutual respect for the identity and ethos of both communities and parity of esteem.

In order to give the best advice, the Commission has been engaged in a comprehensive consultation process. It has received over 400 submissions from individuals and agencies and organised a large number of public meetings, seminars and training events throughout Northern Ireland to ensure that as many views as possible are heard.

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*A Bill of Rights, by protecting and promoting people's human right to housing, health care, leisure, education etc., can be a powerful tool for our community.*

A Bill of Rights is a list of basic rights that everyone in the state is entitled to enjoy. These rights normally only bind public institutions, although, in some countries, such as South Africa, private bodies are covered. Usually individuals can seek remedies in their local courts for alleged infringements of these rights and in some instances organisations can take cases if they feel a breach has occurred. In most cases a Bill of Rights is included in the country's constitution, for example, India, USA, Canada and the Republic of Ireland.

In many countries a Bill of Rights is the "supreme law" which ensures that local parliaments cannot pass laws that infringe people's rights under it. Some countries also entrench a Bill of Rights which means that the Bill is established firmly in the law of the land. This doesn't mean that a Bill of Rights can never be changed once enacted but that it is more difficult to change than ordinary law. For example, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission could advise the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that a special majority or a referendum should be required if changes are to be made to the Bill of Rights once it is enacted. A Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland was promised to the people of Northern Ireland by the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, 1998. Following this agreement, the Northern Ireland Act of 1998 established the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and gave it specific duties in relation to a Bill of Rights. The Commission is directed by section 69(7) to "advise" the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what should be in a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

The Human Rights Commission is required by statute to advise the Secretary of State on the scope for defining, in a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland to be enacted by Westminster legislation, rights supplementary to those in the European Convention on Human Rights.



Duncan Morrow addresses 2007 BIP conference. Photo: Christopher Heaney

riot. Not that this ever really deals with the underlying problem. Interfaces become the venue for any inter-community tensions. People who have choices tend to avoid them like the plague, so the chances of poverty are always greater. And inevitably, one side of the divide will grow more quickly than the other, increasing pressure for housing and resources on one side and increasing fears on the other. Small things like shops, how people go to work or school, libraries, who collects the bins and whether the kids can go to the swimmers are defined by these battles - for as long as everything belongs either to them or to us and never to all of us. So these battles for territory matter more than any once-a-year parade or any planner's stroke of a pen.

The idea of a shared future is the real radical departure in the north of Ireland. It reverses the centuries old 'normality' - that survival depends on keeping them out. To suggest a shared future on an interface may be to invite ridicule, and certainly to be reminded that it can only happen in the long term. In reality that means it is put on the long finger. While fear is the main issue, no matter how deeply hidden, anyone talking about making gestures or being generous is accused of putting the community at risk. When politicians talk of a shared future they are actually assumed to be hiding an unequal grab for power - so it is crucial that it is made clear that the only shared future worth having is built on the equal value of every person and a generosity towards others which has never been easy to come by.

- Ensure that the issues which affect the rights of young people are considered by the Bill of Rights Forum - [www.billofrightsforum.org](http://www.billofrightsforum.org)
- Ensure the participation of young people in articulating and highlighting their rights during the Bill of Rights consultation process.

"The project itself has a number of different elements. Initially, we carried out a number of workshops, whereby the young people looked at what a Bill of Rights will mean for them, helping them to gain a better understanding of the topic.

"Our next element involved a weekend residential facilitated by tutors, youth-workers and community artists. The purpose of the residential was to discuss issues that are of importance to young people and that could be included in a Bill of Rights. The young people then chose one of those issues and worked along with their drama coach to produce a dramatisation around that particular topic. They worked with the artists to design costumes, stage sets and to create a plan to record the drama piece on video. It was agreed at the residential that we would have 12 workshops to follow up on this work."

*The video will be ready at the end of January and will be used as a learning aid in future workshops*

The video will be ready for distribution at the end of January and will be used as a learning aid in future workshops on the Bill of Rights. Copies will be sent to all groups who are working towards a Bill of Rights for the North of Ireland.

Margaret concluded, "All of our work, from start to finish, will be recorded on video and used to convey the views of our young people in relation to a future Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland."

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Interfaces are where fears turn into bricks and mortar. The day interfaces disappear is the day when fear is replaced by something else. And for that to happen, change has to take place both on the interfaces and far more broadly across society. The reason why *A Shared Future* was a breakthrough was that it finally recognised that the problem is far deeper than interfaces - it is everywhere. Above all, government acknowledged that the decisions government takes are critical if we are to move on. Changes are needed in policing, in education, in regeneration policy, in housing, in community development, in cultural policy, in transport policy and even in investment. For interfaces to disappear, all vestiges of discrimination or unequal treatment based on cultural tradition or political allegiance have to go. And both the need for community defence outside the law and the means to use guns to achieve it has to stop.

To try to steer all this at government level, a Good Relations Panel has been set up, chaired by the head of the civil service. All government Departments attend, as do representatives of the PSNI, District Councils, Housing Executive, the Equality Commission and CRC. In theory at least, the task is to ensure that good relations is taken seriously across government. In practice, success will depend on the political leadership provided by the Executive. If there is real political will, this panel could change lives over the next years. If action for a shared and better future is not the priority of government, the panel will quickly degenerate into a talking shop.

Interface communities have a real stake in the outcome of these debates. Change on the interfaces is the single biggest indicator of change across society. It is vital that interface communities and their representatives demand support for change from government. The alternative is probably a worsening two speed society, where part of society abandons any interest in or responsibility for the interface, while others live with it every day. If the Good Relations Panel is to lead to real change, then they need to hear directly from the interface. Change is possible, but only if the effort is shared.

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# The Wider Circle

By Martina Mullin-O'Hare

Many of us are close to someone who has experienced a traumatic event in their lives. Or perhaps we have been traumatised ourselves. Traumatic experiences can range from a serious car accident to abuse and, of course, as a result of the conflict in Northern Ireland. A traumatic event can be anything where someone suffers a severe shock.

*The Wider Circle provides a supportive and safe environment where people can deal with frightening emotions and experiences*

Through its structured self-help trauma programmes, The Wider Circle seeks to restore a sense of hope in the lives of people who have suffered a trauma.

Many traumatised people experience disturbed memories, feelings of isolation, and helplessness. The Wider Circle is not a counselling organisation and cannot offer counselling to individuals. However, through its Trauma Programmes, The Wider Circle provides a supportive and safe environment where people can deal with frightening emotions and experiences. They can share their stories and their problems and know that they are not alone in their suffering. They are encouraged to accept their trauma as something that happened in the past, rather than something they have to live with all the time.

The Wider Circle Trauma Programmes are free of charge and take place across Northern Ireland. They are available both to those who have suffered a trauma and to those who care for traumatised individuals.

Sessions focus on sharing traumatic experiences through a process of story telling in a supportive and confidential small group atmosphere. A range of visual materials and reflection are also used. The trauma is put in the context of being a part of a person's life, rather than becoming their whole life. New participants are welcomed into a friendly and warm atmosphere. This is a group support situation. It is where people can come together to

support and develop rather than going it alone as an individual.

Over the past eight years, The Wider Circle has helped over 100 people through its trauma programmes. Many thousands more have been helped through its trauma publications.

Many of those who have benefited from the Trauma Programmes have been encouraged to become programme facilitators themselves. Through their unique understanding and support, they help other traumatised individuals to move forward with their lives and make a positive contribution in society.

In conjunction with its trauma programmes, The Wider Circle has also produced a publication that explains in very simple terms what trauma is and how to cope with it.

*The Sky before the Storm* publication sets out in simple language the devastating physical and psychological effects of trauma and how to move forward from a traumatic experience. The book is also of benefit to professional bodies. It provides information on how to work with trauma survivors to reduce symptoms and to increase their confidence and esteem, so they can learn to cope again.

*The Sky before the Storm* has been sent to all GP surgeries in Northern Ireland. You may have seen a copy in your own local doctor's surgery. This has helped The Wider Circle to spread awareness about psychological trauma to a wider circle of people, particularly those who have been seriously affected by 30 years of violence in Northern Ireland.

It is generally accepted that the events of the Troubles have left a large number of people with undiagnosed psychological trauma. *The Sky before the Storm* publication can help these people come to terms with what they've experienced.

The Wider Circle is planning to run another structured Self-help Trauma Programme beginning February 2008, which is free to those wishing to participate. The course will be held one evening per week lasting two hours and will run for 15 weeks.

Martina Mullin-O'Hare is the Development Officer for The Wider Circle Programme.

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Presentation at joint football competition organised by Ligoniel, Ballysillan and Upper North and Upper Ardoyne CEPs. Photo: Joe Morgan

# Flags and Emblems Program

By Anthony Stuart



Ligoniel/Ballysillan neighbours on a day out. Photo: Anthony Stuart

Over the past year the Greater Ballysillan Community Forum and the Ligoniel Improvement Association, based in the Wolfhill Centre, have been working in partnership with great success. The wide array of programs facilitated and the lasting links forged between the communities were a major contributing factor in the two organisations winning the prestigious Aisling Award recently. Although this is the case the two community groups will not rest there, they aim to push forward and break down psychological barriers that have been erected over years of conflict.

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The next step in the long term plan for the community youth workers is the Flags and Emblems Program. This project is an adventurous one, funded by the Community Empowerment Partnership (CEP) and facilitated by Northern Ireland Children's Holiday Scheme (NICHHS). It will involve a group from Ballysillan and a group from Ligoniel working together over the next few months and also achieving an accredited OCN level qualification in cultural awareness. We believe that a lot of young people today do not understand their own culture or the background

of their areas and therefore jump on the bandwagon of sectarianism. The aim of this program is for the young people to learn about their own culture first and foremost and then about each other's culture.

We aim to build capacity in the young people by profiling them and their areas, highlighting both the positives and the negatives of their communities. The groups will then meet after a month or two and work together to dig beneath the surface to explore their perceptions and cultures. It should be a stimulating experience for the group and they will not only find out more about themselves but also about their community, neighbouring communities and about how they are not all that different.

*The aim of this program is for the young people to learn about their own culture first and foremost and then about each other's culture*

The program will also include various social events and eventually a residential. We sincerely hope that the groups can make lasting friendships and this being the case, we will aim to build on that in the future. If we want the relationship to improve between the polarised communities of Ballysillan and Ligoniel then future work of this nature is paramount.

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# The Participation and the Practice of Rights Project

By Stephanie Green

The Participation and the Practice of Rights Project (PPR Project) is a coalition of groups and organisations working on social justice issues in Ireland, north and south. We aim to give individuals, groups and communities the tools and support they need to actively assert and campaign for their social and economic rights. Social and economic rights include the right to the highest attainable standard of health both physical and mental, the right to adequate housing, the right to education and so on.

*rights around health, education and housing, amongst others, are hugely important issues for interface communities*

Clearly, rights around health, education and housing, amongst others, are hugely important issues for interface communities. This article will hopefully enable interface community activists to think about the relevance of human rights to local issues with special reference to a particularly relevant issue at the moment - given the stark increase in suicide over the last year - mental health. It is worth remembering that according to government statistics the rate of suicide in deprived areas is twice that of less deprived areas.

*The PPR Project is committed to strengthening the direct accountability of the state to communities*

The PPR Project is committed to:

- Promoting rights-based democratic practice on the basis of participation by marginalised groups in decisions which affect their lives
- Strengthening the direct accountability of the state to communities through the understanding and implementation of international human rights standards

The Project meets its objectives through:

- Introductory information sessions on human rights
- Intensive training and continued support for communities and groups asserting their social and economic rights
- Training for community activists in the use of human rights tools (eg budget analysis, using human rights legislation)
- Publications including profiles of human rights denials in specific communities
- Seminars and conferences linking the work of local residents and community activists with national and international human rights advocates

The United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, as a response to the atrocities witnessed by the world during the Second World War. This was the first document to talk about social and economic rights as human rights. Both Ireland and the United Kingdom signed up to the Universal Declaration. In the following years, both Ireland and the UK have signed up to other human rights treaties which have included economic and social rights, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the European Social Charter.

The UK has made commitments to respect, protect and fulfill economic and social rights. People in the UK cannot have their economic and social rights directly enforced by their own courts. (The European Convention on Human Rights, which has been incorporated into UK law and allows citizens to claim human rights in their local courts, does not contain economic and social rights). But the UK has promised to make sure that its laws and policies protect economic and social rights. The United Nations and the Council of Europe keep watch on whether or not they do.

There is no set definition of a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA). The rights based approach can best be understood by its characteristics, some of which are explained below:

## 1. The HRBA turns 'needs' into 'rights'

Using the HRBA means that what was previously a request for improved service, is strengthened by the fact that the government has voluntarily committed itself in an international human rights treaty to provide a certain standard of, for example, housing and health services. The request becomes a call for the government to live up to this obligation.

PPR, for example, has been working with a group of people from PIPS (Public Initiative for the Prevention of Suicide) based in Duncairn Gardens and RAYS (Reaching Across to reduce Your Risk of Suicide) located on the Woodvale Road. This group now calls itself PIPS/RAYS Rights Group and has linked a number of issues they have identified as an affected group into human rights standards. For instance, the group were concerned that mental health service users were not getting follow up appointments when discharged from hospital within appropriate timescales. They then were assisted through the PPR Development Programme to link this issue to the appropriate international human right standard, which in this case was - under human rights law - health 'facilities have to be accessible to everyone without discrimination ... especially the most vulnerable or marginalised sections of the population.' *The right to health 'includes the provision of equal and timely access to ... appropriate mental treatment and care.'*

## 2. The HRBA promotes accountability

Because governments have signed up to human rights treaties they are obliged to respect, protect and fulfil these rights and submit regular reports to bodies which assess their performance in meeting this obligation.

The HRBA turns government and therefore public authorities/service providers into duty-bearers; they are obligated to demonstrate how they are working towards realising people's rights. The Rights based approach enables people in the community to remind government and service providers of the rights they have promised to fulfil, protect and respect.

A recent example of how this has been done with the PIPS/RAYS Rights Group is that the group itself researched, through surveys and focus groups, the extent to which the problem of, for example, getting

follow up appointments affected other mental health service users. The research provided a picture of what the reality of mental health services was like on the ground and especially for those in deprived communities. The group then called for change or improvement in this particular service by setting what is termed human rights indicators - these are basically what the group wants to see improvement on over a period of time. With regard to follow up appointments - their indicator for change based on international standards was highlighted in a speech by a member of the group, Roberta Coates, at a recent PPR Mental Health Forum:

*'Over the next year we want to measure what progress the Department of Health is making to meet this right. We will measure the number of patients discharged from hospital after mental health treatment who receive their follow up appointment within a week. This is a small issue, but one that would make a huge difference to people in crisis if it was addressed. As a result, the group is keen to see it addressed quickly. In six months, the group wants an increase to 45% of people receiving a follow up within a week. Within a year, the group would like to see a system in place ensuring that 90% receive their follow up within a week. The group thinks the issue of follow up appointments should be addressed as a matter of priority, in order to show progress on working towards the fulfilment of the right to health.'*

The group is presently awaiting a meeting with the Minister of Health on this and other issues which they have identified.

The other characteristics of the HRBA approach which have already been discussed to a certain extent are:

- The HRBA empowers people
- Participation is central to a HRBA
- The HRBA focuses on the inclusion and involvement of particularly vulnerable groups

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## Public Initiative for the Prevention of Suicide and Self Harm By Sharon Quinn

Public Initiative for the Prevention of Suicide & Self harm (PIPS) was established in North Belfast, due to high levels of suicide and the fact that there was very little support. We aim to:

- Save lives, offer advice and support those affected by suicide and self harm.
- Increase the community's awareness around issues about suicide and self harm with a view to reducing the stigma of suicide and encouraging people to seek help.
- Inform people about places that offer help in their area.
- Provide information and training.

*PIPS House will provide advice and therapeutic support for loved ones bereaved through suicide and those living with a loved one suffering through self harm*

PIPS House, based at 187 Duncairn Gardens, was the culmination of months of hard work put in by a raft of community, voluntary and statutory agencies with a common goal to create a safe and warm haven for those suffering mental anguish or the intense loss of losing someone close through suicide.

The house in Duncairn Gardens was leased by the Housing Executive to the PIPS Project, which has spearheaded suicide intervention work across the North of Ireland. It is located on one of North Belfast's many 'peacelines' in order that it may be accessible to both communities and a place where everyone, regardless of religion, culture or ethnicity, may feel safe.

PIPS House will provide advice and therapeutic support for loved ones bereaved through suicide and those living with a loved one suffering through self harm. The house will also be a base for the setting up of a number of neighbourhood response teams in North Belfast.

Philip McTaggart, who lost his son Pip to suicide in April 2003, is a founder member and Chairperson of the PIPS Project. He said the facility will allow and encourage organisations working in partnership to help support those bereaved through suicide.

'We want to offer a joined up approach in the new centre in tackling the issues surrounding suicide. It will be of great benefit to the people of Belfast and is a resource that has not been available in the past. We hope to create awareness and break down barriers to the issue of suicide and self harm and hopefully save lives in the process.'

Jo Murphy of the PIPS Project, who is also a founder member, said she was delighted with the new facility. 'Dozens of people have given up their time to help us get here,' she said. 'Three years on, our vision has become a reality. True partnership working really does pay off, as the opening of PIPS House proves.'

The work of PIPS involves:

- Working with bereaved families, who have lost a loved one through suicide, in helping to support them in coming to terms with their loss and their grief.
- Crisis intervention for those who are attempting to and/or have previously attempted to take their own lives.
- Provision of counselling and/or complementary therapies for all service users of PIPS (i.e. bereaved families, self-harmers, carers of self-harmers, those feeling suicidal, depressed or dealing with mental health issues).
- Lobbying and campaigning for a suicide strategy and the implementation of policies around the issues of suicide and self-harm.
- Assisting communities in establishing their own local support networks and groups. We have assisted in establishing such groups in Downpatrick, Newcastle, Cookstown, Newry and Ballynahinch, amongst others.
- Going into communities and schools to provide awareness and training around the issues.
- Working to remove the social stigma currently attached to suicide, self-harm, depression and other mental health issues.
- Establishing Neighbourhood Response Teams.

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**Bill Shaw – 174 Trust**

**Post:** Director of the 174 Trust for almost ten years, since May 1998. My responsibilities as director include answering to management and the trustees and ensuring the oversight of the complex which caters for several hundred people a week, most of who are involved in autonomous groups.

Fundraising is a big part of my job description as well as serving on a number of boards and committees, including the Belfast Interface Project.

**Your community:** The immediate community is the New Lodge, stretching from Clifton Street/ Carlisle Circus through to Duncairn Gardens, with a population approaching 7,000. The user groups that look to the complex as 'home' range from Ligoniel down to the Shore Road and beyond. So the catchment area is even broader than the Greater New Lodge.

The community is strong in the sense of their culture, their identity, who they are and where they were going. Even at the start of my time, there was a very strong community infrastructure which has strengthened in the last ten years.

In the last couple of years we have seen a growing ethnic minority community, where we now have Filipino and Indian families moving into the area.

**Typical day:** It's a long day!! There really isn't a typical day other than that every day I'm at my desk between 8:00 and 8:15 in the morning. Regardless of what's happening the rest of the day, I try and get in first thing to collect my thoughts and prepare myself because I really don't know how the day will go. Regardless of what's in my diary, any number of things can happen. But my typical day is a mixture of fundraising, keeping in touch with donors, sitting on committees, chairing meetings, and networking outside of the complex.

**Low points:** There have definitely only been one or two that I would say were low points where I have really questioned if we're making any difference. Those low points were two particular sectarian murders in North Belfast, which I think rocked me personally. One of those killed was a young Protestant boy and the other a young Catholic boy, but their backgrounds are not important, they were sectarian murders. Those were times where I found myself sitting at my desk wondering was there any point. At the time of the first of these murders we had a couple of American visitors with us that day, and they said to me, "Surely you must feel like you're wasting your time when something like that happens?" By mid afternoon on those occasions, I think I'd come to the conclusion that if we and others who are doing similar work don't do what we're doing it's going to be worse.

**High points:** There have been numerous high points. For me personally two things stand out.

St Patrick's Day 2005 at the White House, meeting the president, George Bush. On the invitation I was with about a dozen others who quote "were making a difference" unquote, and that for me was a high point. Getting recognition at such a high level for the work we were doing, especially from the point of view of the American donors that we have, was a very positive thing.

The other highlight was when we welcomed President Mary McAleese in February 2006 to the launch of our community relations strategy that we'd worked on the previous year.

**Examples of good practice:** I think these are numerous given the varied nature of the programmes that we run and the partnerships that exist here. Some examples include the partnerships themselves, for me having come from regular church work, where the church runs things, and the change in strategy to the community development approach, whereby we work with people to develop programmes and activities that cater for their specific needs, lets them do that without us interfering, but supporting them. The community development clichés about empowering them and enabling them, all that stuff, that's something that I would use as an example of good practice and one that I try and share with other church groups in particular, thereby offering them a model to engage in the community, particularly in the inner city.

I don't know if it's an example of good practice or an outcome, but throughout my ten years and before, we've operated an open house, which created a shared space before it became a technical term that everyone tries to include in their funding applications.

**Hobbies:** I'm a Man United Fan, so I enjoy watching football and playing football with the lads here who are generally 16 to 23 years old. I have tried at times going back to learning the guitar, to try and pick up where I left off, but I don't have the dedication. Listening to music is a big thing for me, both on CD and going to gigs - I just went to Bruce Springsteen on Saturday night. I really enjoy reading when I get the chance. When I get to travel I get to read. I love books.

**By Gary Mc Clean**

*Interface* recently met with Teena Patrick from the Interface Residents Group which operates at the interface between the Ainsworth area and the Springfield Road. Teena contacted us to share the news on a recent cross community youth project that she had helped organise in association with Forthspring Inter Community Group and Shankill Alternatives.

Teena explained how she had accidentally come across a book of photographs and poems produced by her daughter and some friends as part of a project carried out back in 2001. "From a young person's perspective, this book conveyed for the first time the true reflections and a feeling of what it was really like to live in an interface. In this area it was either the shadow of the peace-wall (as it is called) or the shadow of the police station on the Springfield Road, which is now gone. The project had been coordinated by the Forthspring Inter Community Group based on the Springfield Road."

Teena spoke to a number of young people about how they would feel taking part in a similar project and to her delight she received a very excited response. With this feedback, Teena approached Deirdre McMahon, youth worker at Forthspring Intercommunity Group, about the possibility of running a similar project again, six years after the original.

"From there the project just took off. I spoke to Kelli Crawford from Greater Shankill Alternatives and they were delighted to work jointly on the project with me and our partner group, Forthspring. A joint application was then put forward to the Community Cohesion Unit of the N.I. Housing Executive and the Community Relations Council and this funding financed the cost of the project.

"Once the funding was in place, we brought the young people together and gave them the opportunity to explore the positives and the negatives of living in the shadow of a west Belfast interface and to express their reflections through the medium of photography. The final pieces of photographic work were then placed on

# Interface Reflections: young people's photography exhibition

public exhibition for two weeks at Farset International on the Springfield Road. From the pieces that the young people produced, there are now 800 photographs available on archive for public viewing at the Belfast Exposed gallery on Donegall Street.

"The exhibition was such a success and the young people achieved so much from it. The young people felt it would be a great idea to produce a new booklet on the photographic project, updating the 2001 Forthspring publication 'The Hurt, the Peace, the Love and the War', with the photography from 2007. At present we are currently waiting for news from CRC in the hope that our application to complete this project has been successful.

"The young people have since been working together on a collage for both communities, along with postcards from the photographs they have already taken. The collage of their work is to be erected in both communities. Should any group wish to display the exhibition this can be arranged by contacting one of the groups by email."

Teena added, "I believe that by bringing together young people from adjoining communities of the interface, we can help to reduce negative perceptions and work to build positive relationships. I am certain that friendships will continue to grow and develop based on acceptance of difference, trust and respect; through sharing and reflecting on their similarities

and diversity, each can be respected rather than feared."

Following the meeting with Teena, *Interface* spoke briefly to Deirdre McMahon and Kelli Crawford, who both reinforced what Teena had said.

Deirdre, in her capacity as co-partner and youth worker involved in the project at Forthspring Inter Community Group, who helped co-ordinate the project activities, echoed those sentiments and added, "The young people were very positive in their participation and their confidence was boosted as they learned new skills and took up opportunities for new experiences ... The launch of this exhibition will emphasise that it is really important that young people are valued and portrayed in a positive light."

Kelli, from Greater Shankill Alternatives and partner co-ordinator of the project, said, "As others have highlighted, the project raised young people's awareness regarding interface issues, peer similarities and diversity. It also taught the young people new skills and allowed their creativity to excel. Equally as important, I feel the project enhanced the young people's social development through group work and activities. It advanced their cognitive development through encouraging them to think beyond the literal meaning of images, into the representational. It furthered their practical development through teaching photography skills. Most importantly, it provided the young people with a sense of pride and ownership of this, their project."

For information on the exhibition, contact:

- Teena Patrick  
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- Deirdre McMahon  
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- Kelli Crawford  
Greater Shankill Alternatives  
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*there are now  
800 photographs  
available for public  
viewing at the  
Belfast Exposed  
gallery on Donegall  
Street.*



From left, Lisa McCormack, Paul James McGarigan and Rhys McFarland, participants in the photographic project. Photo: Hugh Russell



Right centre: 'Why are facilities closed to us?' Photo: collective  
Right bottom: 'Workman Avenue access gate'. Photo: collective

# The Programme for Government: an opportunity to rethink peace building or another missed opportunity?

By John Loughran

With power sharing taking root and a devolved administration in delivery mode there is now an even greater imperative to rethink how trust and confidence building must become the new currency that constructs new sets of interdependent relationships. The rebuilding of these relationships within communities, between traditional communities and new communities, and between the community and the state, must be the defining dynamic that creates an agreed vision for the future. There is no doubt that the peace process has removed political conflict out of the equation. Yet an end to political conflict will not in itself create the dynamic to rebuild relationships. We need a roadmap that will outline direction towards a new future.

There has not yet been any clear evidence of a peace dividend in areas that have been largely affected by the forty year conflict. This is particularly evident in interface areas across Belfast where life has not changed for the better.

Yet that is not to assert that communities sought trade off between conflict ending and peace dividends. It is to assert, however, that communities want better public services, better jobs, an improved education and health system

and a safer future. As health inequalities remain and deprivation levels increase there is still no prospect of decent employment on the radar for the majority. In this context it is difficult if not impossible to build agreement on what constitutes an agreed vision for the future.

Building strong and vibrant communities must be the investment that empowers communities to take ownership of the challenges of making peace. There have always been barriers to action. Communities however must be resolute

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*Building strong and vibrant communities must be the investment that empowers communities to take ownership of the challenges of making peace*

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in their determination to improve their own quality of life. The reality now is that we are the one community with different needs, different identities and different aspirations. The Paisley/McGuinness symbolism is proof that we can overcome division and work together for the common good. The Programme for Government must match this symbolism with a new Peace Plan and a sufficient resource commitment.

The challenge now for political and community leaders is to draw on the Paisley/McGuinness model as a legitimising influence to build confidence and trust in communities. There is no manoeuvre left for duplicitous signals or double speak messages from government or public bodies. Actions and programmes that target segregation, shared public space and poor quality of life in interface communities are needed now. The Programme for Government must meaningfully address these real issues.

In addition communities deserve and desire a language of hope and generosity. Collectively we must appreciate that this new society is the product of compromise. Our political architecture has created a new context in which to shape a new future. This in itself has created

a new political language of co-operation and negotiation. This language must inform a rethink of peace building and community relations practice. There is an ever pressing need to develop new strategies, new working practices and a shared vision that we can all collectively shape and create. Compromise must be the bedrock of everyday living.

The Draft Programme for Government does not creatively grasp the challenge of building a better future. Government needs to plan ahead with the vision of creating a society at peace. The alternative is that communities will not overcome the patterns of fear and mistrust. The same patterns of communal segregation will remain and sectarianism in all its manifestations will remain unless our Executive quickly demonstrates that they have the capacity and will to build a society based on equality and respect.

In light of the restoration of devolution, not to radically rethink how community relations practice is delivered and sustained to manage the transition forward will be to miss yet another opportunity to create an agreed vision for the future. There is a clear onus on government to

set the context for a creating a shared future: communities must be empowered to be constant and equal partners in a way that makes this new political dispensation real and meaningful. Politicians can create a context for co-operation but only a bottom-up approach will deliver stable and cohesive communities.

We all need to think outside of the box. The Programme for Government must set the stall out for a ten year community peace plan. Unless specific actions are detailed around the need of interface communities then another opportunity to regenerate and rebuild communities will have been lost and, worse still, by our own elected politicians.

The Programme for Government must move beyond broad brush strokes. It must be capable of overcoming the division of the past while facilitating communities to benefit from the promised economic prosperity of the future. It has to detail how it will engage disadvantaged communities, become economically active and it must grow local enterprise. Otherwise the peace process will have done nothing for interface and disadvantaged communities but to cement economic inequalities.

The responsibility is now firmly on the new Stormont Executive, to demonstrate political leadership in a way that builds community confidence and signals progress towards an agreed vision for the future. The draft Programme for Government has some way to go if it is to convince communities that an agreed vision for the future, where the most disadvantaged can prosper, is on the radar!

## Editor's comment:

*It is hoped that this article and the issues raised within will stimulate further debate. If you would like to respond to any of the comments offered in this article or simply continue this discussion, please contact us at Belfast Interface Project. We will consider all responses for publication in future editions of Interface.*

John Loughran is Programme Director for the North Belfast Developing Leadership CEP.

He has written this article in a personal capacity.

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# The Stadium Youth and Community Project

By Pastor Jack McKee

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*A 'neutral' space straddling both Shankill and Falls communities can leave an enduring legacy... and a message that the time for dialogue, contact and tolerance has arrived*

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Who would have thought that 25 years after Belfast was blitzed by bombers from Berlin that both cities would become aligned in association because of a wall? However, the Berlin wall has been consigned to history while the Belfast wall continues to stand as a physical reminder of the historical political and religious divisions across the city.

The Belfast wall may well have helped to save lives, but it has also assisted in the further polarisation of communities. Unlike Berlin, where West Germany flourished at the expense of the East, people on both sides of the Belfast wall suffered the same levels of social deprivation from under investment, higher levels of paramilitary activity and criminality, higher levels of unemployment and lower levels of educational attainment, in relation to other parts of Belfast and Northern Ireland.

The segregation of Nationalist and Unionist populations served to limit any potential for reconciliation and dialogue between the communities in question. Few were prepared to challenge this mindset and to break the ice by forging meaningful cross community relationships. However, since 1989, Stadium Youth and Community Projects - with its Higher Force Challenge personal development programme and

other youth and cross community programmes - has been willing to step up and to become one of the few.

Stadium Projects has been acclaimed for its interventionist work, evidenced by its invitation to present at an International Conference on crime prevention in Jerusalem, having been selected as one of three submissions from a total of 1200. Allied to this the Stadium Projects has helped to spread the message of its work undertaken, at an AIB Better Ireland Awards event in 1997, with Stadium Youth and Community Projects being the only project from Northern Ireland to be shortlisted; the Taoiseach Bertie Ahern TD was the special VIP guest at this event.

Now, almost 20 years on in serving both communities, Stadium Projects wish to build on its successes by relocating its activities to the former James E Ball building in Northumberland Street, a 22,000 sq ft warehouse that straddles the existing peace-line. This is not a step that has been taken lightly and indeed the team at Stadium Projects has engaged with several people across both communities. While there are obvious concerns, the response has been overwhelmingly supportive of the project.

A 'neutral' space straddling both Shankill and Falls communities can leave an enduring legacy for the people of Belfast and Northern Ireland and a message that the time for dialogue, contact and tolerance has arrived. This is what the Stadium Project's team hope to achieve when they move to their new facility, soon to be called 'City Life Centre'.

Among other things, the project proposes to establish a new conflict transformation forum or network throughout the city and use City Life Centre as a supporting resource for meetings and conferences, hosting annual conflict transformation conferences in a bid to raise the profile of a project, and of communities, moving forward with the 'peace process'.

City Life Centre will offer advice, support and access to community relations programmes as part of the Stadium's conflict transformation forum. Groups will be invited to attend the facility in a bid to provide current and up to date advice and guidance on Community Relations and the need for peace. Staff members will seek to help organisations develop relationships with one another, in addition to encouraging links to similar organisations throughout Ireland.

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*"...the project proposes to establish a new conflict transformation forum or network throughout the city..."*

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The new facility will also support research groups, political delegations from throughout the world, and tourist groups in a bid to raise the profile of the city, helping to send a strong message to the rest of the world that this country is beginning to move forward not just among politicians in Stormont, but among the people on the ground within the communities where it matters most.

Groups will be invited from schools, community organisations, church groups, youth clubs, sports teams, students, etc. The Centre will also provide individuals from across the city with a neutral, accessible space that will help them deal with the changing demographic and dynamic within Northern Ireland. Staff will be available to support

individuals who require support in a number of areas such as health, drug abuse, addiction, employment, training and more importantly sectarianism. Stadium Projects will be there to support individuals from both sides of the community with the advice and guidance which will assist them to become more 'culturally aware and tolerant' - a key foundation that will bring about sustained peace.

City Life Centre will provide help and hope to all those who attend its programmes and events whatever their background.

'People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care.' John Maxwell

Pastor Jack McKee is Director of Stadium Youth and Community Project.

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## Promoting social and economic regeneration in Belfast's interface areas

### MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

In 2004, BIP carried out an extensive survey of its members' needs. Its aim was to gather perceptions as to how conditions had changed in interface communities over the previous decade and for our members to outline how BIP might better support them in their work. The findings of the survey have shaped and informed the work of Belfast Interface Project to date.

Almost four years on from the completion of that survey and given the dramatic changes in the wider political environment, we feel that it would be very useful to carry out another. The 2008 survey will focus on the effectiveness of the services that we currently provide and how best to improve on them.

Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI) has been commissioned to produce this work. CENI will carry out the survey through a mixture of face to face interviews, postal questionnaires and a telephone survey.

We hope that BIP members will participate fully in order to ensure that the services we provide will support the needs of our membership in the future.

### 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 Mc Clean, can come out to meet with you.

### NEW MEMBERS

Benmore Community Development Association  
Denmark Street Community Centre  
North Belfast Women's Initiative and Support Project

### WEBSITE UPDATE!

Available for download:

*Parades and Protests: an annotated bibliography (2007)*

*Working at the Interface: Good Practice in Reducing Tension and Violence (2006)*

*Scoping Public Sector Perceptions of Interface Issues (2004)*

*Survey of Membership Needs: Executive Summary (2004)*

*Inner East Outer West: Addressing conflict in two interface areas (1999)*

### PARADES AND PROTESTS: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

This annotated bibliography aims to provide a resource to people wishing to trace and understand the dynamics of current parades-related disputes and the various initiatives that have been taken in relation to these.

It summarises all of the main writings on the current cycle of parades and protests. These include academic studies and documents written by advocates of parading and by their opponents, and also a large number of policy documents that have been generated by the disputes over the past decade.

The document includes a number of studies that provide a historical background to parading in Northern Ireland, and also works that focus more on the Loyal Orders that are responsible for organising the parades.

As with our earlier 'Interface Issues' bibliography BIP has brought together a library of hard copies of the source materials. This library is housed in our offices and is available for consultation. Please give us a ring if you'd like to know more.

*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.



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Community Relations Council



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