



Girdwood Barracks and Crumlin Road Gaol - Community Development Opportunities for North Belfast

By Manus Maguire

THE regeneration of Girdwood Barracks and Crumlin Road Gaol in North Belfast offers a once-in-a-lifetime-opportunity for local residents and young people to begin to tackle multiple deprivation and decades of sectarian division.

The communities that surround Girdwood and the Gaol have suffered greatly from thirty years of political and sectarian conflict. The wounds inflicted during this conflict have not begun to heal. The existence of interfaces is a testament to the open sores that exist.

Residents of these interfaces have been bypassed by recent economic developments. There is no peace dividend here. But the regeneration of these sites offers great hope.

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Showcasing, Networking, Generating Ideas...



Small groups debate recommendations for the Shared Future Triennial Action Plan. Photo: Christopher Heaney

By Chris O'Halloran

Belfast Interface Project held its third annual conference, this time jointly with the N.I. Community Relations Council (CRC), on November 8th 2006 in the Spires Conference Centre, Belfast. The theme of the conference was 'Belfast Interface Communities: Building a Shared Future'. The conference was opened by Jean Brown (BIP chairperson), Nigel Hamilton (Head of N.I. Civil Service) and Duncan Morrow (CRC CEO) and featured presentations from speakers from within the interface community sector.

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Jean Brown, BIP chairperson, welcomes conference participants. Photos: Christopher Heaney



Nigel Hamilton, Head of N.I. Civil Service, addresses the conference.



John Loughran, speaking on behalf of Intercomm.

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The aim was that the conference would be:

- a showcase for existing good practice across a range of kinds of work
- stimulating opportunity for networking and information exchange
- an opportunity to influence future government policy in these areas of work

Speakers representing interface community organisations from across much of the city each gave a short presentation on a particular aspect of their work, ranging from conflict management through to conflict

transformation and social and economic regeneration projects in interface areas.

Each was followed by small group discussions which explored the issues facing interface communities. The groups generated recommendations to be submitted to the Shared Future Triennial Action Plan which would help to support interface work more effectively in the future.

Conference presentations were delivered by the following: Seán Montgomery (Short Strand Community Forum); Erik Cownie

(Belfast Interface Project); Stiofán Long (Finaghy Crossroads Group); Sid Trotter (LINC); John Loughran (Intercomm); Jean Brown (Suffolk Community Forum); Manus Maguire (Crumlin Road Gaol and Girdwood Advisory Panel), and Dianne Menaul and Malachy Mulgrew (Glandore / Mid Skegoneil Interface Project).

The conference was well attended and feedback from participants has been extremely positive. A conference report is currently in the final stages of preparation. Northern Visions TV (NVTV) has also

produced a DVD of interviews with speakers and participants filmed at the conference. We aim to forward the conference report executive summary, including the recommendations generated for the Shared Future Triennial Action Plan and also the DVD to all BIP members and conference attendees, with the main report made available for download from our website.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our speakers for their inputs and also to thank all of those who attended on the day and fed in to the very lively group discussions. Finally, a big thank you is due also to CRC for their support and assistance in planning and delivering the event – we couldn't have managed it on our own.

Chris O'Halloran is the Director of Belfast Interface Project.



Summer diversionary programme: youth group camping trip to the Mourne mountains. Photo: Ronan Mc Kenna

Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group Youth Project

By Gerard Rice

Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group (LORAG) Youth Project was established in 1995 and was staffed on a voluntary basis throughout that year. At that time the project received programme and transport support from the Probation Service, support which consisted of a small grant towards equipment and the provision of a Probation Service mini bus.

The main aim of the project is to provide young people who are not currently availing of other youth provision, with a safe place to go, to meet and plan their own activities as well as run them.

In 1996, successful applications to various funding agencies resulted in the appointment of two full time workers along with programme, training and administration costs. Since then the project has been supported by Youth Net, Belfast European Partnership Board and Neighbourhood Renewal (phase 2).

Lack of resources, particularly space for young people to call their own, has and does lead to under age drinking, substance abuse and a general attitude of engaging in risk taking behaviour which results in

youth and community alienation. In the past this has led to significant difficulties both within the community and for neighbouring communities.

The main aim of the project is to provide young people who are not currently availing of other youth provision, with a safe place to go, to meet and plan their own activities as well as run them. It also aims to provide a support based centre to build confidence, encourage achievement and provide new and positive experiences for the young people.

The project targets young people aged between 12 and 25. At this moment in time the project is engaging with over 60 young people. The project operates seven days per week, with opening periods ranging from afternoon sessions on three of those days and evening sessions everyday.

The following activities and services are provided through the project:

- Life Skills
- Active Citizenship Skills
- Peer Education
- Health and Well Being
- Outdoor Education and Team Building
- CV Writing Skills and Job Club
- Crime Diversion and Intervention Programmes
- Mentoring Programme
- Drop-in Facilities
- Cooking Facilities
- Sport
- Drama and Arts

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At this stage there is little evidence to show that the redevelopment of these sites will result in social and economic benefits for local communities.

The real options for Girdwood and the Gaol are:

A deal between the two communities to split the sites between them. This may offer some short term benefits, but it will not address the long term divisions which exist.

The sites could be developed Laganside-style. Large private sector companies could create jobs which would go to people living outside North Belfast. Local people would be the cleaners and security guards.

The two communities could decide to work together for mutual benefit and embark on the journey of addressing the core problems of a deeply divided society and address the genuine fears and concerns that people have.

A fourth option is to do nothing and let Girdwood and the Gaol remain derelict.

To date, consultations on Girdwood and the Gaol have taken place involving local communities. These consultations have been purely on a single identity basis. There has been no real discussion or dialogue

around the contentious issues that divide our two communities.

Discussion and dialogue across the community divide can use an adversarial or a problem-solving approach. An adversarial approach, with the aim of maximising each community's benefits against the other, will solve none of the problems facing our communities and any benefits will be short term. A problem-solving approach does not mean being conciliatory or weak. It should look at the big picture. It needs to be creative and create much larger opportunities and benefits for both communities. It would need to address the real fears that exist and provide clear and tangible benefits for residents and young people from both communities – especially those suffering from multiple disadvantage.

This is a risky path for everyone involved. For some the Laganside model would be the easy option. To encourage the two communities to work together for mutual benefit will not be easy. However, the prize will be potentially much greater and it offers the only real hope of beginning to tackle the many deep rooted problems which exist in North Belfast. It offers an opportunity to begin to address the divisions which exist within our communities and it should begin to address the lack of jobs, the high levels of economic

A problem-solving approach does not mean being conciliatory or weak. It needs to be creative and create much larger opportunities and benefits for both communities.

inactivity, low educational attainment, poor health and the lack of a future for our young people. The alternative is to allow North Belfast to sink deeper into

poverty, disadvantage and division, with the only growth area being in more sectarian interfaces.

The government has developed its policy around a Shared Future. Surely the regeneration of Girdwood and Crumlin Road Gaol will be a test for that policy. Will the policy remain on a shelf in an ivory tower or can it make a practical impact that benefits the lives of people living in these communities? Do senior government officials have the skills and training to implement this policy and facilitate deeply divided and wounded communities to plan for the future? Or are they only interested in maintaining harmony until they leave North Belfast at 5.00 p.m.?

Somebody or some agency needs to take the initiative to begin this process or today's opportunities will be lost.

Manus Maguire is a member of the Girdwood and Crumlin Road Gaol Advisory Panel. He is writing this article in his capacity as a community worker with Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum.

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Shankill & Glenbawn Youth discover that Irish history isn't just 'balderdash' after all!
Photo: Frank Higgins

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The project offers an extensive range of activities; these include arts and crafts facilitated by professional artists. One of the more popular activities, particularly for the young men surprisingly, is cookery. The centre offers a wide variety of youth friendly equipment and the most popular with the young people is the computer suite, complete with 24/7 internet access. Also on offer are TV game consoles, pool/snooker tables, board games and darts, all set within a youth friendly setting.

The equipment and layout have all been dictated by the young people. Not only do they like to have their say and be heard, they also work hard at supporting the leaders in the completion of the many funding applications that are required to maintain such a busy youth drop-in facility.

When it comes to fundraising, the youth are not to be found wanting. In 2005, 13 young people completed an OCN in Peer Education, and as part of their project they successfully set themselves the task of raising the funds for a 12 day camping trip in Tuscany, Italy.

The project has a number of very successful and active young men and women's groups that meet each Wednesday to take part in courses covering relationships, drugs, health and wellbeing.

The project also seeks to engage the young people during the 'non traditional times' such as Christmas, Easter, Halloween and Summer Holidays, which are the periods when most other youth service facilities close down. The project has for many years organised a number of diversionary programmes designed to appeal to those young people that are not regularly engaging with the local youth provision. These programmes, supported by the Community Relations Council, have proved to be incredibly successful particularly at defusing intercommunity tensions.

One very exciting aspect of the project is the Midnight soccer which is aimed at keeping 14 – 17 year olds off the streets and engaged in competitive sports each Saturday night between 8 p.m. and midnight. This has proved so popular with the young men that the project has set up a satellite soccer site at the Shaftesbury Community and Recreation Centre each Friday 7 - 11.00 p.m.

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TIMEWARP Project Takes Off

By Frank Higgins

Forward Learning is a company established to create community-based training for all communities. The Board of Directors is drawn from education, community/voluntary, and business sectors and have given the staff the challenge of ensuring that the training and support work carried out is based on the company's mission statement of "inclusion, connection and advancement".

The charity currently runs a number of successful projects including the Life Skills, Community, Citizenship and ICT course for asylum seekers, and the high end IT technical training IMPROVE project which is funded by Proteus under Peace II.

The team at Forward Learning have recently embarked on a ground-breaking good relations project which has won major funding for a three year project based in the Greater Belfast Area. The project, TIMEWARP, is funded through the International Fund for Ireland in association with Belfast City Council and Transition Training and is aimed at bringing young people together through specialised training on the history of conflict in Ireland.

TIMEWARP will aim to engage eight community youth groups across Belfast training 80 young people per year over three years. All the participants will gain a unique and recognised qualification individualised for each study group. Location is the key to the programme and all the training and accreditation is free for young people aged 11 – 18 in Belfast. Groups already undertaking the project are:

- Upper Andersonstown Community Forum**
- Glenbawn Youth Project**
- North Down Impact**
- Beechmount Community Project**

"I can't wait for the next group to start!"

The course funds the groups to visit places of historical interest such as Kilmainham Gaol, the Boyne battlefield and Derry/Londonderry. Study groups will also be a focus of the project and the cross community learning will study such diverse subjects as the History of the Connaught Rangers, Clifton Street Graveyard, the Orange Order, the Somme, Michael Collins and the Hunger Strikes.

"When I told my daddy we were being taught that the 'rebels' of 1916 were considered to be heroes too, I thought he was going to have a fit! But when I explained to him the story of the rebellion he wanted to do the course himself!" (Youth participant)

The training and accreditation from entry level to level three has been pioneered in a number of community groups over the past two years and it's the success of the pilots that has led to such major source funding from the International Fund for Ireland (Community Bridges Programme).

Angela Mervyn, Youth Education Manager at Upper Andersonstown Community Forum (UACF), one of the participating groups, commented, "UACF was one of the lucky groups who piloted the TIMEWARP project and the participants still talk about what they learnt and how it changed their opinion of each other's community. I can't wait for the next group to start!"

The training programme pairs each youth group with a group from a different political, religious or ethnic background. The groups will undertake the programme both at their respective group locations and at Forward Learning's neutral training suites at Belfast Cathedral Centre.

The project will also have a base in the community through the Digital Communities Programme based in four Belfast City Council premises across the city.

In addition to the young people's awards, group leaders will undertake training and accreditation in Community Volunteering. They will manage the programme across the community divide and will also manage the many outreach visits to places of historical interest in Ireland.

For details on how to apply as a group or individual, contact the number below to find out if places are available in your local area. The project hopes to recruit young people from the Shankill and Short Strand areas in particular, however places are very limited.

Frank Higgins is the Co-director of Transition Training.

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Glenbawn and Shankill groups at Derry/Londonderry.
Photo: Frank Higgins

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A Legacy of the Past 'Gift or Hindrance'

By Alan Wardle

I am sure and assume that anyone reading this article would be well aware of the legacy we have been gifted by past generations within our communities. You only have to look around in areas most involved and affected by the conflict here and in some cases still involved in a conflict of one type or another.

Vast stretches of underdeveloped working class communities in areas such as the Shankill, the Falls and Derry/Londonderry etc have a sense of detachment from the rest of society - a sense of isolation. Through no fault of their own, people within these areas can become very sceptical and somewhat paranoid about 'other people' that either don't belong to their community or come in from the outside; you could say that it creates 'communities within communities'.

This situation has some positive as well as the obviously negative aspects to it. It can create an incredible sense of belonging, if only in an isolated way. These smaller communities become self governing in a sense and develop extremely strong support structures and identity, actually demonstrating some of the aspirations of us all to get back to the 'good old days' when people could leave their front doors open and pop next door for a chat or a cup of tea and you knew who your neighbours were.

Some of the negative aspects to this situation would be the fragmentation of the greater community or societal structure, as well as limiting the mobility of people within those smaller communities, especially young people. The sense of belonging and safety within those smaller areas is a very strong connection for the young adults living there and they find it extremely difficult to move outside their safety zone either for social or other interaction with others. They are cocooned, with little inspiration or input from the rest of society and their values and outlook on life and their role within it can become slightly tainted by this. Frustration, anger and anxiety become everyday emotions for many members of these communities. They see the world around them moving forward and leaving them behind, and they become resentful and look for someone to blame. I emphasise again that this is not necessarily their fault, if you look at the bigger picture and what they have been left as an example of what community should be.

I have worked extensively within interface areas, both in a mediative and in a therapeutically supportive role with both adults and young adults. I must say that it saddens me, particularly within interface areas, when you hear what young people believe their role is within their communities. Where inter-community violence has been a factor in their lives, they believe they are protectors, whichever 'side' they are on, stopping a perceived invasion of their community that would lead to a stripping of their cultural identity. Whether they like it or not or even realise it, this attitude leaves them open to negative manipulation by others. This thought process can only be attributed to previous teaching and learning from others; whether you start looking at family, community, religious or political aspects of this statement, I will leave to you.

So what of solutions of which there are many? Some are idealistic, some are practical, some address long term personal need, and some address a wider societal shift in attitude and behaviour.

I am a strong believer that the majority of people have a number of basic priorities and that if these priorities are examined or met, a better foundation for the future can be laid. Providing for your family, housing, health care, employment opportunities, feeling safe and a sense of identity being only a very few.

In my work in areas across this region, I have found that the basis to identify those needs is communication and dialogue, providing an opportunity to set aside perceptions of others or what we've been told and identifying a shared need. When we have identified those needs we can then begin to move toward a shared course of action. Very soon, previously perceived boundaries are set aside; not totally, but just enough to alleviate those anxieties that exist. In this process there is obviously a massive role for those who can provide answers and new policy, and an even more important role for those who engage in this type of work, whether they be people from within those communities or workers who can broker dialogue. All people who work and live in such areas and engage in a direction of positive change should be commended for their work and efforts. It can be a long process but one that I have seen working and must continue to be encouraged.

Shankill Stress and Trauma Group is an exclusively inclusive support and training organisation and has been in existence for 20 years. Its core delivery is of professionally accredited therapeutic counselling and community training programmes.

Although situated in unionist north Belfast, the organisation provides and shares resources right across both communities as well as within a multicultural setting, with a number of delivery partners.

The organisation would be primarily classed as a 'victims' organisation but realises that if progress and tolerance are to be achieved, then a multi faceted approach to the whole situation here has to be delivered. To this end, the organisation strives to establish trust and relations with a wide variety of partners and agencies as well as individuals to ensure that its goals and the needs of all are met as much as possible.

Alan Wardle has worked over the last five years with organisations such as Mediation NI in specific interface areas and has also delivered training in diversity and conflict management both here and abroad in other conflict regions.

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This is the first in a series of articles on the subject of 'addressing the legacies of the past'. If your organisation is involved in this work then we would be very pleased to hear from you with a view to publishing an article in a future issue of *Interface*.

Lagan Village Home Safety Project

By Brian Dawson

The Lagan Village Home Safety Project was set up in December 2003 by the Bridge Community Association in partnership with relevant statutory agencies.

The service is offered to all persons in the "area of benefit" regardless of nationality, religion, and political beliefs.

The project provides a free telephone care service for vulnerable groups and older people living in the Woodstock and The Mount wards but Ballymacarrett and Island will also be considered - priority will be given to those living in the Woodstock and The Mount wards. A Telephone Carer will make a daily call, up to five mornings a week (Monday to Friday) to check on members' well being and take the time for a social chat.

The project acts as an alert service when a member fails to answer their telephone. When repeated calls go unanswered, the Telephone Carer will, where appropriate, liaise with local service providers, e.g. a food delivery scheme or the Home Help, to try to locate our member and verify his/her safety. If this is unsuccessful, the Telephone Carer will let his/her nominated contacts know that there may be a potential problem. Finally, if the nominated contacts cannot be reached, the operator will call the Emergency Services.

The project is involved with the social aspect of health. By offering a 'friend on the phone' we aim to reduce the isolation sometimes felt by excluded groups. Telephone Carers take the time to get to know members and build up a relationship with them.

Importantly, Telephone Carers are able to monitor the well being of members and, when appropriate and in consultation with members and/or family, make referrals to statutory service providers such as Care Services, Social Services and local health care professionals. When necessary, the Telephone Carer will signpost members to professional agencies for help and advice.

Additionally, the project acts as a community directory and promotes local events, e.g. a Luncheon Club, healthy eating and demonstrations at community centres. By referring members to other local projects and services, we link people into the community network and help them to get the most out of their community.

The service is offered to all persons... regardless of nationality, religion, and political beliefs.

At present, 114 clients have received a daily telephone call, information on local events, signposting to other services and offers of security locks and personal attack alarms. Responses from clients indicate that they feel safer in their homes and that feelings of isolation, exclusion and fear have been reduced; responses also indicate improvement in health and well being and in peace of mind to family, neighbours and friends; clients also report that involvement with the project has improved self esteem and self-confidence.

The Lagan Village Home Safety Project is funded by South & East Belfast Health & Social Services Trust and Belfast Community Safety Partnership

For further information or if you would like a free telephone call in the morning, contact:
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The Voice Reconciliation Project – developing capacity and building relationships

By Gary Mc Clean

“...there was a need to provide support to people in the area who had been affected by the ‘Troubles’.”

Interface met recently with Jim Bailey, who is the new Project Manager with the Voice Reconciliation Project (Voice). The project has been operating now since 2003; the first two years on a voluntary basis. Voice is based in Highfield, west Belfast, although the area of benefit also includes the Springmartin and Glencairn areas. These areas, not unlike most working class areas of Belfast, are suffering from high levels of antisocial behaviour, vandalism, low levels of educational achievement and social and economic deprivation. One of the big problems being witnessed in recent times has been the increase in incidents of suicide, especially among young people.

Jim explained that “the group initially came about from discussion between a number of individuals, who were concerned that there was a need to provide support to people

in the area who had been affected by the ‘Troubles’.” Jim explained that “during these discussions, there was a commonly held view that everyone in the area has been affected in some way. Although there were groups in the greater Belfast area dealing with the issues in question, there were none working specifically for these three areas. This is why the group was set up. This group is primarily dealing with issues associated with the legacies of the past.”

Jim was pleased to report that Voice had recently secured funding which will allow the group to continue its work until June 2008. This funding will go towards salary costs for the project manager and a part-time administrator. “It will allow us to focus on projects which will seek to build capacity within the areas in question, assist people

from the areas to find employment, and to develop their skills base. We will operate as a signposting agency in situations where we are not able to offer assistance directly. Given that we are facing high levels of suicide in these areas, we hope to begin running some training courses which will look at suicide prevention. From the start of this year we have begun to open as a drop-in centre, which means that we can begin to offer other services such as welfare rights.”

Jim talked at length about the involvement of Voice in the Springfield Interface Forum (SIF). “Through the hard work of those people along the interface on both sides, we have managed to keep a lid on incidents occurring at the interface. We are involved in a mobile phone network which allows for lines of communication between ourselves and our counterparts on the Springfield Road. We meet twice monthly with those people working on

the Springfield end of the interface. This allows us to discuss things such as recent incidents and how well they were dealt with and what could be done differently. There are approximately 16-18 members involved [with SIF] from different areas. We find this to be a very good way of countering any trouble that could potentially occur and for resolving incidents that arise at the interface.”

On the question of other plans for 2007 and new projects, Jim talked about building and consolidating relationships with other areas. “With three representatives from each area meeting at least four times a year and based around community dialogue, this will allow space to engage individuals from both communities in discussion around current issues and ways of supporting each other to achieve peaceful resolution to shared problems.

“We also hope to run a cross-community football project engaging young people from both sides of the interface. So during the summer when the kids are off school, we will hopefully be in a position to offer them a few weeks of entertainment. We are currently looking at potential funding sources to allow this to take place.”

Jim’s vision for the next ten years? “I would like to see the group developed to its full potential and delivering the best possible service to the community. I would like to see the psychological barriers that exist between the two communities being a thing of the past.”

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Community Dialogue Residential Debates Sectarianism

By Brian Lennon

Community Dialogue’s residential, last November, funded by Belfast City Council, was on the issue of sectarianism. This was a bit unusual for us as up to now the subject-matter of most of our residential has been open-ended and decided by participants. However, sectarianism surfaced often as a topic.

We had a good mix at the residential of people from different backgrounds, some new to the process, some old hands. Continuing the ongoing relationship between Community Dialogue and Belfast Interface Project, many of the participants were from BIP member groups.

Of course, sectarianism is something others have, not us! Well, it’s not that simple, as we soon found out.

Who is sectarian? That question caused some dialogue! Some said Protestants were more sectarian: “Look at the Orange Order, parading through other people’s areas.” Others said this was nonsense: “Look at the GAA, banning the security forces from

their games for so long, or look at the Hibernians.”

*Who is sectarian?
That question
caused some
dialogue!*

Others countered that the Orange Order simply held strong beliefs and part of these beliefs involved expressing their faith through parading. They felt that Nationalists did not understand how important parading is for Protestants.

Still others said that it was nonsense to say that the Hibernians were as central to the Nationalist community as the Orange

Order are to Protestants; also that the GAA were not sectarian, they were a sporting organisation: Ireland was occupied when the rule excluding security force personnel was introduced.

One person said that sectarianism was “learning to disrespect each other”.

A strong point made was that we tend to compare the best in our own group with the worst in the others. So some often say, “They’re a crowd of drunken yahoos”, while forgetting that occasionally people in their own group get drunk!

We were reminded that there are ‘others’ in Northern Ireland who are neither Republican nor Unionist and we were helped in this by the presence of some Muslims.

We found it hard at times to distinguish between strongly held beliefs - which people are entitled to hold - and sectarianism. One approach was to ask: “Does what we do or say widen the gap

between us and the other group? If so, then it is sectarianism.”

*One person said
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other”.*

But this does not necessarily help. We may hold strong moral views about an issue and want to express them, and if we do, that may widen the gap. But we are surely entitled to do this. The answer to this might be: “Yes, but do we do enough to find out what the others believe and why they believe it? Do we also do enough to tell people why we believe what we do?” If we fail to do all this then we are widening gaps unnecessarily, and doing so with no real understanding of what others believe and why.

We discussed the role of religion a good bit. Is it always present in sectarianism, or can you have sectarianism without any religious element? Most probably favoured the second option.

Many stressed the class issues: it is working-class people who suffer most from sectarianism.

As usual, while the dialogue during sessions was important, what went on in between sessions was even more important. There people began to relax and tell some of their real stories. That opened up minds. Comments at the end were mostly positive, for example: “I liked the great debate and broad scope of opinion”, and “Hand on heart it was one of, if not THE, best dialogue I have ever taken part in.”

So what else is going on in Community Dialogue?

One is staff changes. In recent months we have been sorry to lose Sam Askin (now with BIP. Their gain is our loss!), Kay Nellis (unfortunately Kay’s post ran out of funding) and David Holloway, all after many years with us, but we are also glad to welcome Mabel Doole into David’s

place. We also now have a new Senior Administrator in Caroline Davidson, who has taken over from Sam.

In our programme work we are now offering courses on themes such as identity, conflict, the 1998 Agreement, dealing with the past, policing, marches, flags and emblems, agreeing the future, gender, racism, sectarianism, conflict management, dialogue, and peace processes in other countries.

The length and level of the courses can be adjusted to suit the needs of different groups and courses can be accredited by OCN. As well as this we can offer help with strategic and operational planning and other organisational issues.

If you are interested in any of these, get in touch!

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Participants attending Community Dialogue's 'Conflict and Diversity' course in Suffolk. Photo: Brian Lennon

Suffolk and Lenadon Interface Group

By Gary Mc Clean

Our readers will remember that we first reported back in April 2006, that the Suffolk and Lenadon Interface Group (SLIG) had changed from an informal group to a formally constituted organisation, with big plans for both communities.

Interface recently met again with Darren Mc Kinley, the full-time interface worker, and Cathal Toland, the part-time interface worker with the group, for an update. In the past ten months Darren and his co-workers have been very busy.

Darren reported that training, on both a single identity and cross community basis, has been a major focus within the two areas: "A number of participants completed training in Principled Negotiation Skills and Child Protection. This involved members from both Suffolk and Lenadon. Within Suffolk itself, people took part in a course of training delivered by Community Dialogue, entitled 'Conflict & Diversity – What does this mean for protestants, unionists & loyalists?' Following this, they carried out a course of study looking at 'Children and Political Violence in Northern Ireland'."

Another big focus for SLIG for the past twelve months has revolved around work with the youth of the Suffolk area, with some ground-breaking progress being made. Darren gave some examples of this work by highlighting the recently formed Youth Forum in Suffolk. "The idea of the Youth Forum is to give young people a voice in their community. In July 2006, three young girls from the Suffolk area took part in an international exchange programme with young people from Spain. In addition to this, we have worked on various single identity projects including developing environmental schemes, a summer scheme, a community festival and creating a community garden.

"As a special treat for both young and old, the elderly from both communities enjoyed a carol service with performances by children from Suffolk Primary School and Oliver Plunkett Primary School. To add a cultural theme, Suffolk

Highland Dancers showed their talents for the pensioners."

The results of the hard work of the Suffolk and Lenadon Interface Group have also been reflected within the Lenadon community in that, since the group was set up, the numbers of young people using the Horn Drive Community Centre have doubled.

Under the stewardship of Cathal Toland and Maria Perkins, the two part-time interface workers based in Lenadon, a number of projects have produced some positive results for the young people of the area. These have included: an art project where a group of 13-16 year olds brightened up the community centre by painting cartoon characters on the interior walls; a late night soccer scheme for 16-18 year olds, which runs from 9 pm – midnight, and First Aid Training with three participants from Suffolk and nine from Lenadon. Cathal was also excited about their up and coming Duke of Edinburgh Awards scheme, which will see a number of young people involved in a combination of outdoor pursuits and community work training.

Darren also stressed that there has been a lot of work carried out on the ground which has produced good results in tackling the problems associated with reoccurring tensions at the interface: "I feel that most progress was made in reducing tensions on the interface, with further expansion of the mobile phone network. This work was actively supported by Belfast Interface Project (BIP) through their Conflict Transformation Support Project. By the end of the summer we had measures in place to deal with most incidents arising at the interface. Although incidents did occur, the quick response of community representatives stopped them from escalating."

For further information about SLIG, contact: Darren Mc Kinley, Cathal Toland or Maria Perkins
Suffolk and Lenadon Interface Group
Tel: (028) 9030 8198

Skegoneil and Glandore Project

By Dianne Menaul

Skegoneil Avenue is a residential street linking the Shore Road to the Antrim Road in North Belfast. It is a predominately protestant working class area with a few catholic families and mixed households. There is an interface area around the junction with Glandore Avenue, a predominately catholic working class area.

In the 1990s, residents from both sides of the interface became increasingly concerned about the decline of their area. However, community initiatives in both Glandore and Skegoneil remained segregated.

Key lessons learned from previous community activities have been that any cross community initiative would have to have the support of residents, political representatives, and all other relevant stakeholders in order for any progress to be made. Skegoneil and Glandore residents are equally appreciative of the fact that in order to maintain an environment that is conducive and beneficial to all in the area, good relations and working together are key. Unfortunately, the capacity within the protestant community in Skegoneil is low.

We in Skegoneil hope to harness support from all quarters to address this imbalance and enable the community to forge and develop a strategy to move forward.

The Stewartstown Road Regeneration project is a good example of the basic ingredients to improve upon and there are many other examples to emulate. This community is determined to not just duplicate examples of best practice but to set them.

Whilst there has been what can be perceived to be a slow start - one residential, a number of cross community meetings and a few cross community projects in the summer of 2006 - this has been very deliberate in order to build up trust and the relationships needed across the community which not only encompasses the indigenous population but an increasing multi-cultural community in the area.

When people feel confident enough to make harder and more definitive decisions it is hoped that, with the current support and encouragement from statutory agencies like CRC, BCC Good Relations and NIHE, the community will feel more confident to make progress.

2006 saw a number of successful cross community activities take place, including

an arts project which involved young people designing and producing murals based on their own ideas. The 11th July bonfire passed off in a more relaxed atmosphere due to the improved communications and relationships on the ground. A cross community go-karting trip saw young people sharing just good fun, and the interface mobile phone network, working with residents, addressed and intervened where potential trouble might have occurred.

Our achievement in 2006 was strong relationship building that led to a quieter and less violent interface and the will to make sure 2007 is even better!

Dianne Menaul is a volunteer member of Skegoneil Residents Association and director of a successful social enterprise company that researches and develops how ICT's can impact upon learning, enterprise and social exclusion.

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Junction between Glandore & Skegoneil Avenue. These homes have been redeveloped several times but have constantly been vandalised to the extent they are now a health and safety risk. Photo: Malachy Mulgrew



The main interface: the junction of Queen Victoria Gardens and Skegoneil Avenue, a major flash point during the events around Drumcree. Photo: Malachy Mulgrew



interface profile



Glenda Davies - Sandy Row Community Forum

Post: Area Development Manager with Sandy Row Community Forum for five years now. I am responsible for overseeing the implementation of the work associated with the Sandy Row neighbourhood development strategy. This covers issues such as housing, education, environment, physical and economic regeneration, children and young people, and people with special needs. So my job covers a very wide range of issues.

Your Community: Our area of benefit if you like, takes in the area between the Boyne Bridge to the Lisburn Road end of Sandy Row, and from the Shaftsbury Square end

of Donegall Road right up to Serious Street. The population in this area at one time would have been somewhere in the region of 15,000, but with redevelopment over the years it has shrunk to approximately 2,500 – 3,000. We still have a lot of redevelopment going on so the area continues to change. We work hard here to integrate the 'new build' residents with the 'local' community. As is common in most areas, we have a high level of unemployment so we work closely with local employers etc. to encourage them to employ people from the area. Some of the facilities that we have within the community include the primary school, the community centre, and a new youth club.

Your Typical Day: When I first come into the office in the morning I would go up and speak with the girls – the finance officer and the administrator - have a cup of tea, discuss any problems in terms of finance, grants etc. I would then meet with some of the Forum member groups and generally take a walk around the area to keep up to date with certain projects, identifying any problems. My typical day would always have some form of meeting. I would go up to the McMichael Centre and carry out some development work with them in terms of future projects around IT and training. I would spend a lot of time devising projects and then chasing funding to carry them out.

Low Points: The insecurity of keeping our staff on short notice from time to time, as a result of the short-term funding system.

Media attention on the negative things in the area – the media does not seem to want to highlight the positive work and progress that happens in the area.

High Points: Funding from the Big Lottery – a 'Transforming Your Space' grant – has allowed us to create community spaces in the area and these are absolutely gorgeous.

Visit by John Speller – government minister – to launch the Sandy Row/Greater Village Area Project Team.

Launch of the KITE project, which is 'Kids into Training and Education' – aimed at encouraging our children to 'reach for the sky' in their approach to life.

When David Hanson came here in February 2006 to announce that we would receive funding for local projects under Neighbourhood Renewal (£657,000). I almost burst into tears!!!!

Examples of good practice: We have a number of initiatives that we are currently involved in that would be worthy of mention, but too many for this article.

One of the things that we find here among our young people is that they are reluctant to travel outside of their own area to find work. We are working with them to build their confidence and to let them experience the benefits of working, so that in the future they will be confident enough to work outside of their area.

We have a training scheme running at the minute in association with Graham Construction, who are building a new apartment complex in the area. This company has agreed to take on four young people from the area as apprentices to train them up in the construction industry.

We built a good working relationship with Days Hotel during their recruitment process to fill their vacancies from within the local area, with a total of 27 jobs secured at the time.

The KITE project mentioned earlier.

Hobbies: What? When am I not doing all of the above? Ha!! My husband and my dad laugh at me and ask, "Why do you put yourself through all this, why don't you get yourself a proper job?" No, I love spending most of my spare time with my five year old son and, I suppose, just going out and chilling out with a glass of wine. I like going out with the staff on occasion.

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

INTERFACE COMMENTS

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.

BELFAST INTERFACE PROJECT IS MOVING!

It's been on our wish list for some time, and we're delighted to announce the securing of new offices in the Cathedral Quarter Managed Workspace, opposite Central Library.

From April 2nd our new address will be the one that appears at the bottom of this page.

Note that our phone numbers remain the same.

UPCOMING EVENTS

The 4th in BIP's thematic discussions series will be on March 16th, 9.30 – 12.45 in NVTV studios, 3rd floor, 23 Donegall Street. This is an opportunity to hear and put questions to a panel of MLAs on their vision for interfaces.

For more information contact the office or visit our website.

Plans are also underway for a seminar that will look at models of mobile phone network operation and discussion on examples of good practice.

WEBSITE UPDATE!

The much-anticipated map of NIO-identified interfaces is now live.

The map features links to location photos by Frankie Quinn and explanatory notes by the Institute for Conflict Research.

Go to www.belfastinterfaceproject.org and click on 'At the Interface'.



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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