

## 1

### **Life on the Interface**

*Belfast 'peaceline' community groups confront common issues*

*(March 1993)*

In October 1992 some 80 people, representing community groups from the Shankill, Falls and Springfield Roads in Belfast, came together for a conference entitled 'Life on the Interface'. The conference was the result of patient work undertaken by individuals and groups along this part of the Belfast 'peace-line'. It took place against a backdrop of continuing violence and escalating tensions, and at a time when the two communities seemed more polarised than ever. However, the organisers of the conference felt that despite the political divisions, the two communities were experiencing similar social problems which urgently needed to be addressed. They believed that it was possible for the two communities to put aside their political and religious differences in order to present a joint strategy for tackling the socio-economic ills besetting their areas. The purpose, then, was not 'reconciliation', but 'community development'.

This conference, the first stage in what will inevitably be a long process, limited itself to one primary objective – to allow those who were engaged in community development work along the 'interface' to describe the problems they faced, and to share their fears and feelings openly and honestly with one another. As the report reveals, this opportunity was certainly taken, and much thought-provoking dialogue resulted. The organisers are confident that the process will continue, and this report is seen as an integral part of it.

## 2

### **Sacrifice on the Somme**

*Ulster's shared sacrifice in the First World War*

*(April 1993)*

The Battle of the Somme has long been celebrated by Ulster Protestants as an essential part of their community's heritage. Yet the sacrifice made in young lives on the bloody battlefields of France during the First World War was, in reality, a uniquely 'cross-community' one, with Protestants and Catholics, Northerners and Southerners, fighting and dying side by side. In the Battle of the Somme the gallantry shown on 1 July 1916 by the 36th (Ulster) Division was to be repeated a few months later by men from the 16th (Irish) Division who were likewise to prove their 'ancient valour' on the battlefield. This pamphlet describes the battle and the subsequent engagements in the course of which Irishmen of all persuasions earned each other's mutual respect, a respect which – as the testimony of the veterans shows – has diminished little with the passing of the years.

## 3

### **Ulster's Scottish Connection**

*Exploring the many links between Ulster and Scotland*

*(June 1993)*

Ulster's connection with Scotland dates right back to the Stone Age and has been a constant factor in our history ever since. Indeed, it was emigrants from Ulster who, in the words of Dutch geographer Heslinga, "gave Scotland her name, her first kings, her Gaelic language and her faith." Those aspects of this 'connection' which are explored in this pamphlet clearly reveal that the historical and cultural heritage of the peoples on either side of the North Channel is very much a *shared* one.

The pamphlet also hopes to show that, as a direct consequence of this unique relationship, the tragically-divided people of Ulster have much more in common with each other than they might presently realise.

## 4

### **Idle Hours**

*Belfast working-class poetry by Robert Atkinson and Robert Atkinson jnr.*

*(October 1993)*

5

## **Expecting the Future**

*A community play*

*(October 1993)*

Five women meet while in the prenatal ward of a maternity hospital. Their common predicament allows a genuine camaraderie to develop between them. But this is Belfast, and behind the light-hearted banter another reality exists, one which soon threatens to rise to the surface.

6

## **Ulster's Shared Heritage**

*Exploring the cultural inheritance of the Ulster people*

*(November 1993)*

Despite the tragic conflict which continues to beset them, the two communities in Northern Ireland possess a rich, unique and *shared* historical and cultural heritage. This pamphlet explores many aspects of that shared inheritance, in the hope that an increased awareness of what they hold in common will bring closer the day when the people of Ulster overcome all that presently divides them.

7

## **The Cruthin Controversy**

*(March 1994)*

This pamphlet is a double exploration. The first part, *The Cruthin*, gives a brief description of these first-named people of Ireland, and reveals how their story is an important facet of the shared historical heritage of the people of Ulster. The second part, *The Controversy*, explores the way reviewers, academics, the media and others have reacted to the efforts of those who have sought to reveal to our divided community a new vision of their ancient past.

8

## **Ulster's European Heritage**

*(June 1994)*

This pamphlet describes some of those facets of Ulster's historical heritage which reveal that, notwithstanding our position at the very edge of the European continent, we have rarely been isolated from developments there, and indeed, have at times been able to make our own vibrant contribution to European history and culture.

9

## **Ulster's Protestant Working Class**

*A Community Exploration*

*(November 1994)*

The Protestant working class of Northern Ireland are a people much maligned and often ignored, whose heritage is frequently afforded scant legitimacy, and whose entire community is regularly labelled, and demonised, as irredeemably sectarian. But how do the Protestant working class see *themselves*? To provide an answer to this, a series of discussions was held on Belfast's Shankill Road in the middle of 1994, and community activists, Loyalist ex-prisoners, local councillors and others accepted the challenge of trying to define the Protestant working-class experience.

The diversity of opinion contained within the Protestant working class might surprise outside commentators, and, as this document clearly reveals, it is evident that many current perceptions of this community are based on outdated stereotypes and badly in need of revision.

A *Postscript* on the IRA ceasefire has been included, which explores how the new circumstances, and the new possibilities, are viewed by members of the Protestant working class.

10

## **The Battle of Moira**

*An adaptation of Sir Samuel Ferguson's Congal*

*(January 1995)*

In 637AD at Moira in County Down, occurred what Sir Samuel Ferguson considered to be “the greatest battle, whether we regard the numbers engaged, the duration of combat, or the stake at issue, ever fought within the bounds of Ireland.” Inspired by Irish bardic romances depicting the engagement, Ferguson penned his own epic poem, *Congal*, which has been described as “unquestionably one of the finest products of Irish genius”, and named after the battle's chief protagonist, the Cruthin over-king of Ulster.

This adaptation of Ferguson's 150-page poem will hopefully help to bring this forgotten facet of Ulster's historical and literary heritage to the attention of a wider audience.

11

## **Beyond the Fife and Drum**

*Report of a conference held on Belfast's Shankill Road, October 1994*

*(February 1995)*

On 1 October 1994 a highly significant conference – entitled *Beyond the Fife and Drum* – took place on Belfast's Shankill Road. Well-known speakers and a capacity audience energetically explored the identity of Ulster's Protestant community in all its many facets – religious, secular, social, literary, cultural and political.

Just as importantly, the conference addressed the question of how both communities in Northern Ireland could move purposefully into a new future together, and the role the Protestant community could play in that process.

The conference took place at a time of unprecedented debate and possibility within Northern Ireland – having occurred one month after an IRA ceasefire, and being followed two weeks later by a Loyalist ceasefire. Without doubt the opinions expressed at the conference will prove to have been a vital contribution to this long-overdue debate.

12

## **Belfast Community Economic Conference**

*(August 1995)*

Since the 1994 ceasefires, the regeneration of the Northern Ireland economy has been the main focus of promised European, American and British government aid packages. Much of this funding will supposedly be targeted at those communities which have suffered most from 25 years of violence. However, many working at grassroots level feel there are vital issues which need to be addressed. Will the community have a say in *how* and *where* the funding is allocated? Will inward investment provide genuine employment opportunities for disadvantaged areas? Will the aid be used to confront poverty and social exclusion? Will the community be assisted to regenerate *itself*, rather than remain dependent on a ‘drip-down’ economy?

Representatives of community organisations, training schemes, and trade unions came together at the Belfast Community Economic Conference to explore these issues. What emerged was an insistence that economic regeneration should not be fixated with *business* needs, but concerned with broader *community* needs, and with strengthening the social infrastructure of disadvantaged areas.

13

## **A New Beginning**

*Shankill Think Tank*

*(November 1995)*

Over a year into the IRA and Loyalist ceasefires the fears and uncertainties of the recent past show little sign of abating. The Shankill Think Tank – created in 1993 for the purpose of stimulating debate within the Protestant working class – believes that much of this uncertainty is due to the inability of our politicians to initiate purposeful dialogue, and the fact that the ordinary people of Northern Ireland – the ones who have most to gain by a genuine peace – have been given no real say in the ‘peace process’.

This document is a call to both working-class communities to assert their right to be heard. It seeks to explore the issues that lie at the heart of our communal divisions, and challenges people of both traditions to redefine their aspirations more inclusively. Finally, the Shankill Think Tank reiterates its belief that only through debate and dialogue within and between our two communities can we ever hope to set this society on the path to a new beginning.

14

## **Reinforcing Powerlessness**

*The hidden dimension to the Northern Ireland 'Troubles'*

*(January 1996)*

With some of Northern Ireland's political leaders claiming that the current 'peace process' is entering a period of 'crisis', or is even 'non-existent', it is tragic that the very people who most fervently desire peace – the ordinary citizens of Northern Ireland – are the ones with no real say over this 'peace process'. This is not a new phenomenon. During Northern Ireland's twenty-five years of turmoil and grief, the voices of ordinary people have been repeatedly sidelined, manipulated or ignored by those with control over social, economic and political decision-making.

In this pamphlet the author, drawing upon his own experiences and those of other community activists, attempts to describe the subtle (and not so subtle) mechanisms whereby ordinary people have been prevented from asserting control over their everyday lives.

15

## **Ourselves Alone?**

*Voices from the Nationalist working class*

*(May 1996)*

Numerous political and church leaders, in both Northern Ireland and the Republic, frequently purport to have a concern for – and even to speak for – the Catholic/Nationalist working class of Northern Ireland. But what do people *within* the Nationalist working class have to say about their own community and the faltering 'peace process'?

The Falls Think Tank set out to give a section of this community a voice, and during a series of meetings community activists, ex-prisoners, young people and others spoke freely about their hopes, fears and aspirations. The picture that emerged was of a community deeply sceptical about current political developments, but one which was nevertheless articulate, strongly self-reliant and displayed a resilience politicians and policy-makers would be ill-advised to ignore.

### **NOTE:**

This list does not include **pamphlet 16**, *Hidden Frontiers*, which detailed a community development/conflict resolution initiative linking Northern Ireland and Moldova. A much extended account was published in the book *From Conflict Containment to Resolution* (2002). Discussion of the initiative is found in pamphlets 19 and 61.

17

## **The Death of the 'Peace Process'?**

*A survey of community perceptions*

*(February 1997)*

The Northern Ireland 'peace process' appears to be in total disarray. A growing despair has been felt by those ordinary people in both our communities who had most to gain from peace, but yet who were given least say over the development of the process. This pamphlet is an attempt to provide a platform for the often ignored views held by those working at the grassroots, about a 'peace process' which initially seemed to offer a way out of our long nightmare. It is also an attempt to let those at the grassroots hear each other, for with violence and confrontation again dominating the headlines both communities have begun to retreat into a dangerous insularity.

What the 'voices' in this document clearly reveal, however, is that many people in both our communities are equally distressed at the failure of the 'peace process', and are anxious that whatever hope it offered is not extinguished.

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## **At the Crossroads?**

*Shankill Think Tank*

*(August 1998)*

On 10 April 1998 what became known as the ‘Good Friday Agreement’ was signed at the multi-party talks at Stormont. In the subsequent Referendum the Agreement gained the support of 72% of the people of Northern Ireland. Analysis of the Referendum vote, however, revealed that the Protestant, Unionist community was split right down the middle. Soon afterwards, elections to the new Northern Ireland Assembly confirmed the stark divisions which existed within Unionism. In the rival campaigns leading up to the Referendum and the Assembly elections, some of the issues which came to the fore – decommissioning, the early release of prisoners, policing, etc. – only served to mask the deeper, unresolved fears and anxieties which had always lain just below the surface within the Protestant community. This pamphlet, compiled from discussions held by the Shankill Think Tank in the months preceding the Agreement, reveals the extent of the debate which is currently taking place within Belfast’s Protestant working class – a debate within which hopes and fears, aspirations and suspicions, cultural insularity and cultural openness are often juxtaposed in quite surprising ways.

19

## **Conflict Resolution**

*The missing element in the Northern Ireland peace process*

*(June 1999)*

As the summer of 1999 approaches there is much anxiety and despondency throughout Northern Ireland: implementation of the Good Friday Agreement is at an impasse over the question of arms decommissioning, while tensions over the still-unresolved ‘stand-off’ at Drumcree are dangerously high. It seems that the parties to the Northern Ireland conflict are as yet unable to find the means to work collaboratively on issues of common concern.

And yet, over the past few years, leading members from all these same parties have lent their support to a common purpose – assisting others experiencing similar difficulties at the edge of the Balkans move towards a resolution of their deep-rooted, violent conflict.

This pamphlet reveals the extent to which community workers, local councillors, political leaders and others throughout Northern Ireland have provided assistance to a unique experiment in conflict resolution, embracing both Northern Ireland and Moldova. It also highlights the potential such an experiment holds for engendering movement towards a resolution of our own centuries-old conflict.

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## **Young People Speak Out**

*Newhill Youth Development Team*

*(June 1999)*

In the first half of 1999, some members of the Newhill Youth Development Team undertook a series of explorations on the realities of everyday life as faced by Nationalist working-class youth in Belfast. This pamphlet reveals their thoughts and opinions on a wide range of issues – their relationship with the adult world and with their own community, their alienation from the education process, the long-term impact of living with the ‘normality’ of ‘The Troubles’, their experience of the security forces, the effectiveness of cross-community projects, their disenchantment with local politics, the pressures which often lead to drugs and even suicide, and, not least, their hopes and fears for the future.

21

## **Puppets No More**

*Ballymacarrett Think Tank*

*(June 1999)*

In the first half of 1999 a group of individuals from Protestant East Belfast, calling themselves the Ballymacarrett

Think Tank – and representing various community groups, residents’ groups, women’s groups, cultural projects and political parties – undertook a series of discussions in which they explored numerous issues currently confronting the Protestant working class of East Belfast. Two pamphlets resulted from these deliberations – this one deals with matters such as health, education, unemployment, the impact of funding and political loyalties.

22

## **Beyond King Billy?**

*Ballymacarrett Think Tank*

*(June 1999)*

In the first half of 1999 a group of individuals from Protestant East Belfast, calling themselves the Ballymacarrett Think Tank – and representing various community groups, residents’ groups, women’s groups, cultural projects and political parties – undertook a series of discussions in which they explored numerous issues currently confronting the Protestant working class of East Belfast. Two pamphlets resulted from these discussions – this one deals with questions of identity, cultural expression and cross-community relationships.

23

## **Are we not part of this city too?**

*Waterside Think Tank*

*(June 1999)*

In the first half of 1999 a group of individuals representing various shades of grassroots Protestant opinion in Londonderry – from youth and community groups to the Apprentice Boys Association – came together to discuss the numerous issues, both socio-economic and cultural, which confront the increasingly marginalised and disadvantaged Protestant working class in the city.

It was felt that an exploration of the alienation currently felt by the Protestant community was a necessary starting point for these discussions, and this pamphlet examines this sense of alienation in all its aspects. Hopefully, the perceptions aired within the pamphlet will assist in stimulating serious reflection and debate within – and ultimately between – both communities in the city, as to how a more inclusive civic consciousness can be created for the future.

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## **‘Orangeism and the Twelfth: what it means to me’**

*An account of a cultural evening organised by*

*Ballymacarrett Arts & Cultural Society*

*(July 1999)*

In May 1999, at the Harland & Wolff Welders Club in East Belfast, *Ballymacarrett Arts & Cultural Society* brought together a number of prominent Unionists to address the theme: ‘Orangeism and the Twelfth: what it means to me’. The invited speakers addressed the theme from a range of perspectives: some detailed the historical context within which Orangeism had developed, some gave personal accounts of their first childhood encounters with the colour and pageantry of the ‘Twelfth’, while others spoke about the cultural significance of Orangeism for Northern Ireland’s Protestant and Unionist community.

These contributions engendered a lively and at times impassioned debate, especially when some of the speakers were critical of current stances being adopted by the Orange Order leadership. The audience too were equally divided in their views and a lively exchange of opinions ensued. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that public debates such as this are not only healthy but vitally necessary – for all sections of the community in Northern Ireland – if self-confidence and understanding at grassroots level is to be built up and a more tolerant and pluralist society is to be created.



## **Broadening Horizons**

*The impact of international travel on attitudes and perceptions*

*(November 1999)*

‘Travel broadens the mind’ – or so the old adage claims. But can it also assist in changing deeply-ingrained attitudes and perceptions, especially those which an individual holds towards other people, other communities? If so, it would certainly be a valuable asset to those striving to create a new, pluralist society in Northern Ireland, a society in which our diversity is valued for its richness rather than always being seen as something which is threatening.

Springboard is a Belfast-based organisation which works with young people from Protestant and Catholic West Belfast and from Tallaght, Dublin, sending them abroad on training programmes aimed at building their self-confidence and enhancing their employment prospects. In April 1999 a group of former graduates’ of Springboard training programmes were brought together to explore what lessons their experience of working together outside these shores holds for future cross-community and cross-border relationships. This pamphlet is an account of that exploration.

## **Before the ‘Troubles’**

*Shankill Senior Citizens*

*(December 1999)*

During 1999 a small group of senior citizens from Belfast’s Shankill Road were brought together to reminisce about life ‘before the Troubles’. Not that ‘trouble’ was absent from their recollections, for the riots of the 1930s, the short-lived working-class unity forged during the Outdoor Relief agitation, and the carnage inflicted upon Belfast during the Blitz, were all recalled with undiminished clarity.

The constant struggle to rear a family, and the hardships experienced working in the mills and factories, were also touched upon. But acknowledged too was the vibrant sense of ‘community’ which permeated everyday life in working-class areas – when friends and neighbours were always there to share the bad times as much as the good times.

This society’s current preoccupation with the needs of the present has tended to obscure or undervalue the contributions made by those who are now its senior citizens. This pamphlet is one small attempt to redress that imbalance, for there is no doubt that this society owes much to those same senior citizens for providing the backbone which helped sustain our communities throughout all the trauma and tragedy of the past thirty years.

## **Seeds of Hope**

*An exploration by the ‘Seeds of Hope’ ex-prisoners’ Think Tank*

*(March 2000)*

Thirty years of conflict in Northern Ireland have impacted profoundly, often tragically, upon countless lives. Whether as innocent bystanders or active participants, all those directly affected by the conflict were, in different ways, victims of the extra-ordinary historical circumstances which ultimately engulfed this society. All those who suffered during the past three decades have personal stories to tell, and over the coming years the telling of those stories will be vital if a genuine healing process is to occur.

The ‘Seeds of Hope’ project is composed of ex-prisoners, Republican and Loyalist, who came together to create and sustain self-employment opportunities. They believe that those individuals, like themselves, who became directly involved in the conflict have their own personal stories which need to be told, and in this pamphlet they have made a start at recounting some of them. They have done so with an honesty and an openness which serves to remind us that within all sections of this society lie ‘seeds of hope’ which, if allowed to germinate, can help bring us to a better and more compassionate future.

## **Towards a Community Charter**

*Falls Think Tank*

*(June 2000)*

The erratic progress of the Northern Ireland ‘peace process’ – culminating in the Good Friday Agreement – was depicted in the media as being solely concerned with matters of political allegiance and cultural identity. However, at a grassroots level there was a strong belief that any genuine ‘peace process’ also needed to concern itself with matters of equality and justice, particularly those pertaining to the socio-economic needs of working-class communities.

It was in an attempt to give voice to these grassroots concerns that the Falls Think Tank was reactivated in early 2000. Community activists from various parts of nationalist West Belfast engaged in a series of discussions which explored the fundamental changes they wished to see implemented at the grassroots of society – *irrespective* of the outcome of the political process. That ‘political process’ itself was inherently unstable, with the new Assembly being established, suspended and then resurrected during the period of the Think Tank discussions.

The Think Tank participants, as the major focus of their deliberations, undertook the drawing up of a ‘Community Charter’, in which they made explicit the manner in which they believed all political and public business should be conducted from henceforth.

## **Restoring Relationships**

*A community exploration of anti-social behaviour, punishment beatings and restorative justice*

*(September 2000)*

Over the past few years a number of projects based around the concept of Restorative Justice have been initiated within both Unionist and Nationalist working-class communities. These initiatives originate from a grassroots desire to develop not only a more effective community response to the scourge of anti-social behaviour, but a humane alternative to the punishment beatings and shootings which have been so often meted out to those participating in such behaviour.

Under the auspices of *Alternatives*, a restorative justice project located in Belfast’s Greater Shankill area, a small group of people, representing different aspects of community life, were brought together to explore perceptions surrounding anti-social behaviour, punishment beatings and restorative justice. This pamphlet is an account of those deliberations.

## **Separated by Partition**

*An encounter between Protestants from East Donegal and East Belfast*

*(October 2000)*

In June 2000 a group of Protestants from East Donegal sat down with a group of Protestants from East Belfast to explore areas of mutual interest: culture, national identity, Orangeism, the role of the Protestant churches, community development, as well as hopes and fears for the future. The encounter provided a fascinating insight into how these two communities had evolved since Partition had placed them under two separate jurisdictions.

## **Left in Limbo**

*The experience of Republican prisoners’ children*

*(November 2000)*

Shortly before the last Republican and Loyalist prisoners were due to be released under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, a group of young people – the children of Republican prisoners and ex-prisoners – sat down to explore how their parents’ imprisonment had impacted upon their lives.

Their motivation was to describe some of the problems they had encountered, so that other young people, who might be experiencing similar problems, would know that they were not alone. They also wanted to share their thoughts with the adult population, especially their returning parents, for, above all else, they had a genuine desire to see the re-establishment of proper family relationships, which had been placed under such strain as a direct consequence of the conflict.



## **A question of ‘community relations’**

*An exploration by the Gae Lairn Centre, East Belfast*

*(December 2000)*

The advent of ‘community relations’ funding met with a mixed response from Northern Ireland’s Protestant community. Some community groups readily embraced it, but others kept their distance, for a variety of reasons. Between May and July 2000, workers at the Gae Lairn Centre, a Loyalist ex-prisoners’ support group in East Belfast, sat down to explore these reasons and the perceptions upon which they were based. During the course of this exploration there was a ready acknowledgment that many of the perceptions could be based on misunderstanding and misinformation. To rectify this situation, representatives of Northern Ireland’s largest community relations funding body, the Community Relations Council, were brought into the debate, and the latter part of this pamphlet relays the constructive and informative exchange which ensued.

## **Beyond Friendship**

*An exploration of the value of cross-border exchanges*

*(May 2001)*

Over the past few years an increasing number of cross-border contacts have been established between communities in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Some contacts long predate the advent of the Northern Ireland ‘peace process’, many others received their impetus from the funding which followed in its wake. Yet, while ‘peace’ and ‘friendship’ are certainly desired goals for the participating groups, most of these groups also confront, on a daily basis, a myriad of socio-economic problems which are just as important to the communities they represent as any of the religious and political divisions which were the product of Ireland’s turbulent history.

In February 2001, two organisations currently engaged in cross-border endeavours – Drogheda Partnership and Greater Shankill Community Council – convened a conference to address the value of the exchanges in which they were engaged. They specifically wanted to explore whether there was a grassroots desire to take such exchanges ‘beyond friendship’ into joint efforts at tackling the numerous issues which impacted upon their respective communities. This pamphlet is an edited account of the debate which ensued.

## **Catalysts for Change**

*(May 2001)*

In December 2000 a group of community leaders – mostly former gang members – from Los Angeles visited Belfast. They had come at the invite of community activists representing projects located in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Moldova and the Republic of Ireland. All the participants in the exchange were engaged in grassroots efforts to counter the devastating effects of violence, deprivation and disadvantage upon their respective societies.

The purpose of the visit was to share and explore their experiences, in the hope that such a sharing would be mutually beneficial. What emerged confirmed that it was often change at a deeply personal level within the lives of individuals which motivated them to act as ‘catalysts for change’ within their communities.

## **Dunmurry Reflections**

*(July 2001)*

Members of the Men 55 and Over, Ageing Well Group in Dunmurry and women from the local Senior Citizens Club sat down to share their memories and reflections on the changes which their ‘village’ had witnessed over the years. Their reminiscences, while full of humorous anecdotes, also touch upon the tragedy of the Troubles and the regret felt at the passing of that ‘sense of community’ which had been so much a part of their life experiences.

## **Community Relations: an elusive concept**

*An exploration by community activists from North Belfast*

*(October 2001)*

The working-class communities of North Belfast have endured much during the course of the ‘Troubles’. Community workers involved in tackling the high levels of deprivation are often encouraged to engage in community relations work in order to counter the other threat to the community’s wellbeing – sectarianism. But how easily do the processes of community development and community relations sit alongside one another, particularly in North Belfast? It was to address such questions that a group of community activists was brought together by the Community Bridges Team. Hardly had their series of discussions ended when North Belfast witnessed yet more communal strife, highlighting the consequences which follow when our estranged communities hold back from a meaningful and genuine engagement with one another.

## **Living in a mixed community**

*The experience of Ballynafeigh*

*(October 2001)*

Located in South Belfast, Ballynafeigh is a ‘mixed community’, where Protestants and Catholics coexist within close proximity to each other, and without the gaunt peacelines which scar so many other parts of the city. In 2001 the Mixed Links initiative, launched by Ballynafeigh Community Development Association, brought together residents, community workers and others to recount what it was like to live in a mixed community, and explore how they coped with the communal tensions so prevalent within Northern Ireland society.

What emerged was a very honest exploration, which engendered many practical suggestions as to how the mixed nature of a community could be maintained and enhanced – thereby offering important guidelines for the wider society in Northern Ireland as it endeavours to move into a more pluralist future.

## **Cross-border reflections on 1916**

*Drogheda-Shankill Partnership, Dublin Conference*

*(October 2001)*

At a conference convened in early 2001 by the Drogheda-Shankill Partnership, exploring the value of cross-border exchanges, the participants expressed a strong desire to take such exchanges beyond mere friendship into joint efforts at tackling the various socio-economic problems impacting upon their respective communities.

However, it was acknowledged that by focusing solely on such problems it was relatively easy to put to one side differences of identity, nationality and religion – the primary factors underpinning conflict in Ireland. Hence it was decided to host a further series of conferences which would address more contentious issues – starting with the different interpretations held regarding important periods of Irish history.

The first of these conferences, which was held in Dublin in April 2001, took as its theme ‘1916’, and quest speakers presented a diverse range of reflections regarding the events of that period. As this pamphlet reveals, the conference proved to be a highly successful and informative exchange.

## **The forgotten victims**

*H.U.R.T. victims support group*

*(October 2001)*

In the course of the past three decades of ‘Troubles’ over 3600 people lost their lives and their family members left to grieve. With few exceptions most of these families believe that their loved ones, and they too, have become the ‘forgotten’ victims of Northern Ireland’s conflict. In the past few years a number of self-help victim support groups have emerged to try and compensate for the years of neglect. One such group is HURT, made up largely of the families of people murdered in the Upper Bann area. In the hope that others might gain an insight into the reality they face every day, members of HURT held a series of meetings during which they shared their personal stories. This pamphlet is an account of those meetings.

## **The unequal victims**

*Loughgall Truth and Justice Campaign*

*(October 2001)*

On 8 May 1987 eight members of the IRA were shot dead by undercover member of the Special Air Service (SAS) in Loughgall, County Armagh. The incident, in which a passing civilian was also killed and his brother seriously injured, has been shrouded in controversy ever since. When the holding of an inquest was repeatedly delayed for eight years, relatives of the dead men came together, as the Loughgall Truth and Justice Campaign, to press for the facts of what happened on that day to be fully disclosed.

Over 3600 families have been left bereaved during Northern Ireland's thirty years of conflict, and the Loughgall families would be the first to acknowledge that all families suffer the loss of their loved ones equally. Their experience, however, has been that because of who their loved ones were, and because of the circumstances in which they died, all attempts to reach an adequate sense of closure have been repeatedly denied them. In early 2001 some of the family members met to discuss and share their experiences; this pamphlet is an account of those discussions.

## **Citizenship in a modern society**

*Report of a public debate*

*(February 2002)*

The last few years have seen increasing use of the term 'active citizenship' within the community sector. But what does 'active citizenship' mean; indeed, what does 'citizenship' mean? In the course of various community explorations undertaken by Springfield Inter-Community Development Project and Farset Community Think Tanks Project it became evident that although a great diversity of opinion exists on the question of citizenship there was also much common ground at a grassroots level.

Prompted by community requests, SICDP decided to organise a public debate on the theme: 'Citizenship in a modern society.' A number of panel presentations confirmed that the concept of citizenship could be addressed from a rich diversity of perspectives, while the input from the audience revealed that any debate about 'citizenship' could not be divorced from day-to-day grassroots realities. That the debate took place shortly before serious inter-communal rioting erupted in North Belfast only served to underline the belief that a constructive debate on the question of 'shared citizenship' is now imperative if our communities are to move into a better future together.

## **Whatever happened to the peace process?**

*Report of a public debate organised by Springfield Inter-Community Development Project*

*(February 2002)*

In November 2001 Springfield Inter-Community Development Project (SICDP) organised a public debate on the theme: 'Whatever happened to the peace process?'

It was a time of crisis for the 'peace process'. David Trimble's Ulster Unionist Party had collapsed the power-sharing Executive because of lack of progress on weapons decommissioning. When the IRA made an 'historic gesture' by putting a quantity of weapons 'beyond use' Trimble felt sufficiently encouraged to recommend that his party retake their seats. However, he now had to seek reelection, and dissident members of his party were preparing to vote against him. The SICDP debate took place on the evening before the crucial vote.

On the streets a summer of intense rioting in North Belfast had been followed by a bitter inter-communal stand-off at Holy Cross Primary School where Catholic schoolgirls and their parents faced a daily protest from Protestant residents, who were attempting to draw attention to numerous grievances held by their own community. Such destabilising events only served to confirm that the 'peace process' was fragile, and that the very least that must happen was for debate and dialogue between Northern Ireland's two main communities to be pursued with a new urgency.

## **Turf Lodge Reminiscences**

*Voices Women's Group, Turf Lodge*

*(April 2002)*

Voices Women's Group is based in the Turf Lodge area of West Belfast. Towards the end of 2001 a number of their members held a series of informal discussions during which they shared their personal experiences of life in Turf Lodge. Whether recalling school-days, times of hardship and personal loss, moments of danger, or simply lamenting the increasing erosion of a once vibrant community spirit, these reminiscences provide ample evidence of the humour, resilience and communal solidarity which was – and still struggles to remain – such a feature of life in working-class areas of Belfast.

The series of discussions was supported by the New Voices programme, the aim of which is to assist individuals – particularly those who have been deeply affected by 'The Troubles' – to share their personal stories in a safe, nonjudgemental environment.

## **In search of a Haven**

*HAVEN victims' support group, South Belfast*

*(April 2002)*

HAVEN victims' support group – based in the Donegall Road/Sandy Row area of Belfast – is a self-help group providing advice and support to those who had become victims of the Northern Ireland 'Troubles'.

Towards the end of 2001 members of the group undertook a series of discussions during which they related their personal stories and explained just how important it had been in the healing process to get together with others and share one another's pain.

The series of discussions was supported by the New Voices programme, the aim of which is to assist individuals – particularly those who have been deeply affected by 'The Troubles' – to share their experiences in a safe, non-judgemental environment.

## **An uncertain future**

*An exploration by Protestant community activists*

*(May 2002)*

At a time when politicians have been lauding progress made in the Northern Ireland peace process, many working-class communities are feeling increasingly uncertain about their future. These uncertainties have been most prominently voiced within the Protestant community. While there are fears regarding the renewed inter-communal confrontations in North Belfast, and the perception that the Protestant community is 'losing' from the peace process, the primary concern is with the internal disarray now being experienced within Protestant working-class areas. Unemployment is rife; the level of educational attainment among youth is abysmal; and there is an absence of any long-term strategy for regeneration and renewal.

Renewal requires adequate resourcing, and the fear expressed by many community activists in Protestant areas is that those Protestant communities with the weakest infrastructure have the least prospect of benefiting from whatever funding is available. It was to assess the current situation that a series of discussions was undertaken by community workers from different parts of Belfast. That assessment, along with the hopes and fears which were articulated, forms the basis of this pamphlet.

## **An education for the future**

*Views from North Belfast*

*(June 2002)*

The current public debate engendered by 'The Burns Report' on post-primary education in Northern Ireland has largely focused on the question of whether the '11-plus' should be abolished, obscuring the need for a much broader debate. In April 2002 a series of discussions was held in North Belfast bringing together school principals with those who work with young people and parents in the community. While the '11-plus' issue was certainly explored, so

too were other important realities: the fact that many children in working-class areas of North Belfast are *already* educationally disadvantaged before they even reach post-primary education; and that behind Northern Ireland's highly visible religious divide lies a much more insidious social divide, one which our education system has not only failed to address but, in the opinion of many, actually reinforces. Above all, the rich and varied contributions ensured a thought-provoking exploration of the role education could play in creating a more just and equitable Northern Ireland.

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## **Towards a shared community charter**

*Falls/Ballymacarrett Joint Think Tank*

*(June 2002)*

Community activists from both sides of Northern Ireland's so-called sectarian divide have always been able to establish common ground on one issue: that the working-class communities which they represent – irrespective of whatever may divide them in political or religious terms – share identical concerns with regard to socio-economic realities. Ironically, the current rapprochement taking place between some of the main political parties in the new Northern Ireland Assembly, rather than providing the reassurance that grassroots needs will now be adequately addressed, has left communities feeling more isolated than ever from the structures and processes of decision-making.

To reflect the sense of increasing powerlessness and isolation being experienced by many working-class communities, members of the Falls and Ballymacarrett Think Tanks sat down together, not only to explore current grassroots needs and anxieties, but to agree ideas which they felt should be incorporated into a 'community charter' which would be applicable to all working-class communities in Northern Ireland.

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## **Reuniting the Shankill**

*A report on the Greater Shankill Community Convention, May 2002*

*(August 2002)*

In August 2000, a bitter inter-Loyalist feud ripped apart the working-class communities of Belfast's Shankill Road, leaving seven people dead and uprooting over 200 families from their homes. Community leaders, seeking to respond to this traumatic experience, realised that if the legacy of bitterness and distrust was not confronted then the decline already evident within the Greater Shankill area would be accelerated.

In 2001 a Church of Ireland initiative saw the formation of the Loyalist Commission, embracing representatives of local churches, political parties, community groups and paramilitary organisations. The Commission in turn called upon the Greater Shankill Community Council, Partnership Board and Community Forum to convene a Community Convention to address local needs and move the healing process forward.

The Convention – along with a Community Exhibition – took place in May 2002. The objective was to rekindle hope, to enable groups and individuals to share with one another, to create more possibilities for working together, and to build a new agenda for the future.

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## **Shared Memories**

*Reminiscences by Springfield 50-plus inter-community group*

*(March 2003)*

One of the saddest consequences of the Troubles was the break-up of mixed working-class neighbourhoods, when people of one religion or the other were either forced, or felt it necessary, to move to 'safer' areas. The ongoing violence ensured that rigid demarcation lines were gradually imposed between communities.

However, in recent years many community groups have been re-establishing contact across the communal 'divide'. For example, when the members of Highfield Women's 50-Plus Group encountered the women of Springfield Senior Citizens Group they found they had much in common. They had all grown up within the same area of Belfast, they had all been in their late teens or early twenties at the beginning of the Troubles, and they had socialised and shopped in each other's areas when such interaction was commonplace.

Because of this bond, the two groups decided to merge into one: the 50-Plus Springfield Inter-Community Group. In late 2002 they sat down in to record the reminiscences which form the basis of this pamphlet, in the hope that these shared memories would have an important message for the wider society in Northern Ireland.



## **Community development: Socialism in practice?**

*Report of a public debate organised by Springfield Inter-Community Development Project*

*(March 2003)*

To a large degree, community development has a deep concern with the wellbeing of those at the 'bottom' of society: the disadvantaged, the marginalised, the unemployed, the alienated. And in seeking to change the prevailing social realities which permit and sustain such disadvantage and marginalisation, community development workers often have a political vision of the society they wish to work towards, with that vision often containing a strong socialist content. But is community development practice compatible with the pursuit of a socialist society; or, given that community development is largely dependent on government assistance, it is really only another form of social control? It was to explore such questions that Springfield Inter-Community Development Project organised a public debate on the theme, held in the Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre in November 2002. This pamphlet is an edited account of that debate.

## **'It's good to talk'**

*Springfield mobile phone network*

*(March 2003)*

In early 2000, Springfield Inter-Community Development Project, in an effort to confront the problem of youth-led violence on the Springfield Road interface, convened a meeting of residents and community activists from both sides of the 'divide'. From this developed the Springfield Inter-Community Forum. One of its activities has been to facilitate a 'mobile phone network', whereby community activists assist one another in reducing incidents of violence at the interface. During the summer of 2002 a series of discussions took place involving some of the phone-holders. This pamphlet has been drawn from those discussions, and is being publishing in the hope that lessons learned from the West Belfast experience might prove useful to those working in other interface areas.

Hopefully too, the productive relationships which have been developed along the Springfield interface will highlight the potential which exists for our two communities to begin to move towards a more peaceful future together, one in which distrust and suspicion is gradually replaced by honest communication and mutual respect.

## **A lifetime's legacy**

*A personal exploration by members of WAVE Trauma Centre*

*(March 2003)*

During three decades of unrelenting violence, over 3600 of Northern Ireland's citizens met violent deaths and countless others were left scarred, both physically and psychologically. For most of those three decades the bereaved have been largely left to 'suffer in silence'. However, with the assistance of the different self-help support groups which have emerged in recent years – such as WAVE Trauma Centre – the bereaved are slowly getting their voices heard. In late 2002 some members of WAVE met to discuss the traumatic impact the murder of a parent or sibling had made upon their lives. Although the deaths ranged from right at the beginning of the Troubles to the post-Ceasefire period, the common bond linking the participants was that they had each experienced their loss while they were young. Their hope is not just to have their voices – and their many unanswered questions – heard by government and politicians, but by the wider society. Their grief is the visible proof that this society has inflicted terrible damage upon itself, something which must be fully acknowledged by all sides if we are to move into a more tolerant, non-violent future together.

## **A journey towards healing**

*Reflections on a University of Minnesota programme of restorative justice and humanistic mediation*

*(July 2003)*

In recent years a number of restorative justice schemes have been set up across Northern Ireland. Some seek to find alternatives to the punishment beatings meted out to young people engaged in anti-social behaviour, others have a broader remit, tackling disputes between individuals, families, neighbourhoods.



That an even wider range of possibilities exist became evident when a group of community activists from Northern Ireland, brought together by the Seeds of Hope Project, took part in a training programme presented by the Centre for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking, University of Minnesota. The programme, based on the work of Dr Mark Umbreit, was entitled ‘Victims of severe violence meet the offender: a journey toward healing and strength.’ Impressed by the programme, the community activists believed that it held great potential for their own society. But how could this training be best utilised in their work? What were the similarities and the differences? It was to explore such questions, and to reflect on what the experience had meant to each of them, that the community activists undertook the series of discussions described in this pamphlet.

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### **The East Belfast Interface (1)**

*Lower Newtownards Road youth speak out*

*(July 2003)*

In recent years, the relationship between the Catholic enclave of Short Strand and neighbouring Protestant areas of East Belfast, while not overly close, had been free of the interface tensions which blighted other working-class areas of Belfast. That situation abruptly changed in May 2002 when inter-communal violence erupted and lingered on to December. This pamphlet does not set out to investigate the facts behind the violence, it merely seeks to give a voice to some of those who formed the largest contingent among the participants of the disturbances – young people from both communities. To achieve this, two youth workers from the Groundwork project – Patsy Laverty, who works on the ‘Protestant’ side of the interface, and Sean Montgomery, who works on the ‘Catholic’ side – brought together (separately) a group of young people willing to articulate their feelings about life in inner East Belfast. Two complementary Think Tank pamphlets have been produced.

This particular pamphlet summarises two separate series of discussions which took place at ‘The Base’ community project: one involving a small group of youth and community workers, who explored the issues facing young people; the other involving a group of ‘Protestant’ young people aged 12–16.

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### **The East Belfast Interface (2)**

*Short Strand youth speak out*

*(July 2003)*

The second of the two East Belfast pamphlets – see synopsis for No. 54 above – this particular pamphlet summarises two separate series of discussions which took place at Short Strand Community Centre: one involving a small group of youth and community workers, who explored the issues facing young people; the other involving a group of ‘Catholic’ young people aged 14–16.

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### **Beginning a debate**

*An exploration by Ardoyne community activists*

*(July 2003)*

In North Belfast a patchwork quilt of Protestant and Catholic communities live cheek by jowl with one another, a fact which contributes to the heightened levels of tension frequently found in that part of Belfast. Despite this, North Belfast is composed of ordinary communities whose energies are largely concerned with the needs of everyday living. Only at certain times of the year, or in response to specific incidents, do the two communities come into conflict at any of the various interface points. One major incident occurred in June 2002 when relationships between the two communities in the Ardoyne area rapidly deteriorated and a protest blockade by Protestant residents of Glenbryn estate attempted to prevent Catholic parents taking their children to Holy Cross Primary School. The open displays of sectarian feeling marked a new low in inter-community relations.

In the midst of the events, a number of people in Ardoyne were tasked with engaging in negotiations with the Protestant community. Although all negotiations have ceased, this group continues to explore ways of moving forward. It was with this motivation that members of the group engaged in the discussions which form the basis of this pamphlet. Those discussions, by touching upon relationships within their own community as much as with the Protestant community, were described as ‘challenging’ and ‘difficult’ but ultimately worthwhile. The group see these discussions as a necessary first step to beginning a much wider community debate.

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## **Reflections on Violence**

*A cross-cultural exploration of the Northern Ireland conflict and 'peace process'*

*(December 2003)*

In September 2003 a group of young Israelis and Palestinians – reflecting the entire spectrum of political opinion within their two societies – came to Ireland for a five-day programme of workshops and seminars. The purpose of the programme was to foster partnerships which might help address the conflict in the Middle East, and to draw lessons from a comparative study of the Israeli–Palestinian and Northern Irish conflicts.

Two pamphlets were produced on aspects of the programme; this one focuses on the shared analysis which was undertaken of the Northern Irish conflict and subsequent peace process.

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## **Making road maps to Peace**

*Report of an Israeli–Palestinian conflict resolution workshop held in Belfast*

*(December 2003)*

In September 2003 a group of young Israelis and Palestinians came to Ireland for a five-day programme of workshops and seminars. The purpose of the programme was to foster partnerships which might help address the conflict in the Middle East, and to draw lessons from a comparative study of the Israeli–Palestinian and Northern Irish conflicts.

Two pamphlets resulted from the programme; this one describes the analysis which was undertaken on the Middle East conflict. It focuses on a conflict resolution workshop, conducted by Dr. Joe Camplisson, which aimed to provide the participants not only with an opportunity to express their hopes and fears, but to expose them to the experience of assisted analysis and what it might offer in their search for satisfaction of their own and each other's identity needs.

59

## **Home and Away**

*Some reminiscences on community-based children's holiday schemes*

*(March 2004)*

Since the early 1970s many community projects in Northern Ireland, as well as a number of international organisations, have organised countless holiday schemes for children living in those communities which bore the brunt of the Troubles.

This pamphlet contains reminiscences from three people who have been involved in such schemes: Michael Hall, former co-ordinator of Kinder Community House in Killough, County Down; Frans Kuiper, from the Dutch organisation Pax Christi Kinderhulp; and Louis West, Shankill Road community worker.

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## **A Safe Place**

*An exploration of the work of the Koram Centre, Strabane*

*(March 2004)*

The growth in recent years of the sector concerned with victim support, or with healing, can be largely attributed to self-help initiatives. One such has been the Koram Centre, Strabane, which arose in response to a widespread feeling that the support needs of the people of the area – including, but not limited to, those arising from the trauma of the Troubles – were not being adequately met. This pamphlet explores the work of the Centre in the hope that it offers encouragement to all those who feel frustrated by the lack of support provision in their own community and have a desire to do something constructive about it.

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## **The search for conflict resolution**

*Lessons drawn from a community development strategy*

*(March 2004)*

Since 1996, Island Publications has published a number of documents describing the community development/conflict resolution process introduced into the former Soviet Republic of Moldova by a Belfast-based project, MICOM.

Interest in this process is gathering momentum internationally among scholars, conflict resolution practitioners and those living and working at the interface of violent conflict. In order to provide something of practical assistance to all those endeavouring to address the effects and causes of deep-rooted conflict, the essential elements of the process are presented here, supplement by recommended guidelines drawn from practice.

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### **‘Crossing the Line’**

*Report of a community conference*

*(March 2004)*

In September 2003, Springfield Inter-Community Development Project Cross-Border Team organised a conference which brought together community groups from both sides of the West Belfast interface as well as community groups from counties Donegal and Louth. This pamphlet is an edited account of the women’s workshop which formed a core component of this conference.

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### **At a new crossroads?**

*An overview of community anxieties*

*(May 2004)*

Although the relative peace of recent years has been welcomed across Northern Ireland, a sense of anxiety and uncertainty still prevails at grassroots level. Any euphoria which surrounded the setting up of the new Assembly has been largely dispelled: there is an acceptance that political horse-trading will stretch out for years, while the socio-economic problems confronting working-class communities do not seem to be on anyone’s agenda other than those community activists who are endeavouring, with dwindling resources, to ameliorate their worse effects. The ‘peace process’, sidelined by the political process, appears to have been shunted into the sidings.

This pamphlet, compiled from a series of discussions which took place in different community projects in Belfast, offers a glimpse into current anxieties at grassroots level.

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### **Exploring the marching issue**

*Views from Nationalist North Belfast*

*(July 2004)*

Few issues reveal the deep-seated divisions between the Unionist and Nationalist communities of Northern Ireland as starkly as ‘the marching issue’, especially the small number of marches and parades categorised as ‘contentious’, where the potential for inter-communal conflict is ever-present. Some community activists in North Belfast in particular feel concerned that little is being done to move the situation there to any form of resolution. They also believe that the impasse is compounded by the lack of any real debate on the core problems.

With a view to initiating such a debate a group of community workers, representing Nationalist areas of North Belfast, were brought together to explore attitudes towards the marching issue. A wide diversity of views emerged – some conciliatory, others hardline – but all those involved felt that an honest articulation of these deeply-held perceptions was important if such a divisive issue was ever to be overcome.

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### **Reflections on the ‘peace dividend’**

*The views of women from Nationalist North Belfast*

*(August 2004)*

Ten years after the ceasefires, many community activists had hoped that by now Northern Ireland society would have begun to confront the numerous problems besetting many working-class communities – from interface sectarianism to the lack of job opportunities for young people. However, not only has the political process continued to lurch from one impasse to another, but these everyday issues are as far down the agenda as ever.

Disillusionment with the shortcomings of the ‘peace dividend’ is felt most acutely in interface areas, where it is women who often bear the greatest burden. This pamphlet relays the concerns voiced during a series of discussions undertaken by a group of women involved in community work in Nationalist areas of North Belfast. To some it might

make depressing reading, for it reveals that the legacy of sectarianism is as potent as ever, and that the socio-economic outlook for working-class young people remains bleak. However, this is the reality these women experience, and government, politicians and funders would be ill-advised not to pay attention to the fears and apprehensions which are voiced in this document.

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### **‘A tale of two sister cities’**

*Report of a workshop organised by Shankill Women’s Centre, Belfast,  
and The Shanty Educational Project, Dublin*

*(September 2004)*

Throughout most of ‘The Troubles’, Protestants in Northern Ireland tended to view Southern Irish Catholics with indifference, suspicion or even hostility. For their part, watching with incomprehension as the violence unfolded, many citizens of the Republic were content to keep themselves at a safe distance from the warring factions in the North. In recent years, however, an increasingly productive contact between communities on both sides of the border has been taking place, facilitated by some of the funding which is attempting to consolidate the peace process. Protestant working-class communities, albeit with some initial wariness, have proven to be willing participants in this exchange. This is nowhere better exemplified than through the two-year programme which brought together the Shankill Women’s Centre, Belfast, and the Shanty Educational Project, Dublin. This pamphlet, an account of an evaluation undertaken by women from both groups, clearly reveals that there are real lessons to be learned from such an exchange – about how stereotypes and negative attitudes can be broken down and relationships forged which would have been unthinkable only a few years before.

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### **‘Look at me, not at my disability’**

*An exploration by the Disability Think Tank*

*(December 2004)*

As well as having to cope with the trauma of the ‘Troubles’, one group of people in Northern Ireland – those with disabilities – have had to confront a wide range of everyday problems. In June 2004 a Disability Think Tank was convened, partly to allow the participants to share their experiences, and partly to let a wider audience hear about – and hopefully learn from – these experiences. Those who have disabilities are not seeking any form of patronising sympathy; they are simply demanding equality of access and opportunity, along with the right to be treated with proper respect as fellow human beings.

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### **The Good Friday Agreement: where to now?**

*Report of a conference organised by Drogheda Cross-Border Focus*

*(December 2004)*

The Good Friday (or Belfast) Agreement of 1998 is still encountering obstacles to its full implementation. In September 2004, Drogheda Cross-Border Focus organised a conference to reflect on the Agreement and its future. The speakers included members of the Women’s Coalition, the UUP, DUP, SDLP and Sinn Féin, as well as Irish senators, a cross-border peace activist, a Protestant clergyman who works with Loyalists, and the chief executive of one of the major peace and reconciliation organisations. This pamphlet is an account of that conference.

69

### **Finding common ground**

*An exploration by young people from both sides of the East Belfast interface*

*(January 2005)*

In the aftermath of the sectarian rioting which engulfed inner East Belfast in 2002, community workers there have striven to build bridges between the communities on both sides of the conflict interface. As the bulk of riot participants were young people a priority was to bring together youth from the Catholic Short Strand and Protestant Lower Newtownards Road/Albertbridge Road areas. This pamphlet describes the discussions which took place between members of one cross-community group of young people, touching upon issues which the young people themselves felt were important – from concerns about their personal safety to the forging of cross-community friendships.

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### **Grassroots leadership (1)**

Recollections by **May Blood** and **Joe Camplisson**

*(June 2005)*

Throughout the Troubles, Northern Ireland's embattled working-class communities were forced to rely on their own strengths and capabilities to hold 'normal' life together and confront the legacy of the ongoing conflict. Although largely a collective effort, the work done by certain individuals can reveal the radical manner in which socio-economic, political and inter-communal needs were being addressed. This vibrant and creative aspect of the Troubles has remained largely hidden, partly because those involved generally shunned media attention and partly because the mass media itself was preoccupied with the imagery of violence. Over a number of pamphlets some of those individual stories will be told. This pamphlet contains recollections by May Blood and Joe Camplisson.

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### **Grassroots leadership (2)**

Recollections by **Fr. Des Wilson** and **Tommy Gorman** [see pamphlet no. 70]

*(June 2005)*

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### **Grassroots leadership (3)**

Recollections by **Jim McCorry** and **Jackie Hewitt** [see pamphlet no. 70]

*(June 2005)*

73

### **Self-harming and Suicide: searching for answers**

*An exploration by the SPEAK Project, Short Strand*

*(August 2005)*

The worrying increase in incidents of self-harming and suicide, especially among young people, has engendered community-wide demands for adequate resources to tackle this tragic problem. However, while government and statutory bodies have a vital role to play, there is no greater resource than the personal experiences of those who have themselves been closely affected. And it is with real courage that a number of young people and their parents – associated with the SPEAK Project based in Short Strand, East Belfast – proved willing to describe their personal experiences and voice their opinions, in the hope that what they have to say might be of help to others facing similar circumstances.

74

### **Still in Limbo?**

*An exploration by young people from Tar Anall Youth Project*

*(October 2005)*

In 2000, Tar Anall – a support group for the families of Republican prisoners – brought together a group of prisoners' children to describe their personal experiences and explore their feelings. The views they expressed – presented in Pamphlet No. 31, *Left in Limbo* – enlightened, saddened, and even shocked readers, for this was the first time that the voices of prisoners' children had been heard with such openness and honesty.

Five years on, and with all prisoners now released as part of the Good Friday Agreement, a new group of young people, from the Tar Anall Youth Project, was given a similar freedom to express themselves, to see in what way things might have changed for today's young people. Their discussions reveal that problems faced by ex-prisoners' families are still very much alive, and that for many young people one set of problems has just been replaced by another.

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### **Grassroots leadership (4)**

Recollections by **Jackie Redpath** and **Eilish Reilly** [see pamphlet No. 70]

*(October 2005)*

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### ***Grassroots leadership (5)***

Recollections by **Louis West** and **Anne Gallagher** [*see pamphlet No. 70*]  
(December 2005)

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### ***Grassroots leadership (6)***

Recollections by **June Campion** and **Billy Hutchinson** [*see pamphlet No. 70*]  
(December 2005)

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### ***Grassroots leadership (7)***

Recollections by **Michael Hall** [*see pamphlet No. 70*]  
(March 2006)

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### ***Loyalism in Transition (1) A new reality?***

*Exploring changes within working-class Loyalism*  
(October 2006)

In mid-2005 representatives of the Ulster Defence Association, Northern Ireland's largest Loyalist paramilitary organisation, declared the need to develop a conflict transformation initiative which would: seek to address the causes of the Northern Ireland conflict; create an environment which could bring an end to all paramilitary activity; and set in place a community development strategy aimed at addressing the disadvantage and alienation experienced by Protestant working-class communities. Farset Community Think Tanks Project was asked to complement this initiative by engaging representatives of Loyalism in a series of explorations around important themes.

This first pamphlet in the series is in the form of a 'preamble'; it presents an outline of what such an initiative might contain and describes the outcome of a consultation process which had involved the UDA's rank and file membership.

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### ***Loyalism in Transition (2) Learning from others in conflict***

*Report on an international workshop*  
(February 2007)

To launch the UDA's 'Conflict Transformation Initiative' [*see Pamphlet No. 79*], a workshop brought together UDA members with community activists from Moldova/Transnistria and Israel/Palestine, to share lessons from their respective conflicts.

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### ***Building bridges at the grassroots***

*The experience of Suffolk-Lenadoon Interface Group*  
(March 2007)

When the 'Troubles' began, the institutions of state often proved inadequate to meet everyday survival needs at the grassroots, and it was left to ordinary people to try and hold their communities together through the most dangerous of times. The personal stories behind these efforts have gone largely unrecorded and unacknowledged. One such story of determination and courage is described here. It concerns working-class Protestants from Suffolk housing estate in West Belfast and working-class Catholics from the adjoining Lenadoon estate. Although both sides experienced severe trauma when they were engulfed in the inter-communal violence, something drove individuals to set their personal experiences aside and to strive to build a new relationship. Their story reveals just what can be achieved through perseverance and working constructively together.



## **Reconciliation: a false goal?**

*Farset/Inishowen & border counties initiative*

*(April 2007)*

A number of descriptive labels have been attached to grassroots community work, implying that those involved are working towards ‘peace’, ‘reconciliation’, ‘conflict resolution’, etc. But are these labels accurate? And do they help that work, or hinder it? Is ‘reconciliation’ a false goal, imposed upon community work by outsiders, people with a different understanding of grassroots realities? What does ‘peace’ really mean? Whose agenda is being followed, and does that agenda bear any resemblance to what motivated many community activists to first get involved in grassroots issues more than three decades ago? A group of community activists was convened to explore such questions. Although they reached no consensus, they nevertheless hope that they have opened up a long-overdue debate on the issues involved, one which will prove of interest, and benefit, to community workers and funders alike.

## **Loyalism in Transition (3) Is there a shared Ulster heritage?**

*Looking towards an inclusive identity*

*(June 2007)*

As part of the UDA’s Conflict Transformation Initiative, which seeks to address the causes of the Northern Ireland conflict and create an environment which could bring an end to all paramilitary activity, the UPRG (Ulster Political Research Group) intends to run a number of grassroots discussions during which members of the UDA will debate themes pertinent to Loyalism and the wider Protestant community.

One series of discussions, to be held under the auspices of the Farset Community Think Tanks Project, will focus on cultural identity. Given that the Project’s Co-ordinator, Michael Hall, has long promoted the shared heritage of Northern Ireland’s two main communities, the UPRG asked him to prepare a pamphlet on that theme, to stimulate discussion not only among those preparing to take part in the proposed Think Tank\*, but within both communities.

(\* This series of Think Tanks had to be abandoned when the SDLP Minister for Social and Economic Development in the new Northern Ireland Executive withdrew government funding previously awarded to the Conflict Transformation Initiative. The matter was taken to court, and after a long legal process the minister’s ruling was successfully overturned. However, by this time it proved too late to resurrect the planned Think Tanks.)

## **A shared sacrifice for peace**

*Farset/Inishowen & Border Counties Initiative*

*(July 2007)*

Within the last twenty years a remarkable transformation has taken place in the way the people of Ireland – North and South – commemorate those of their citizens who gave their lives in the Great War. This transformation had been largely grassroots-led and has had a positive impact on reconciliation efforts taking place between different communities, whether in Northern Ireland or on a cross-border basis.

This pamphlet, beginning with an overview of Ireland’s military role in the First World War, presents an account of discussions undertaken by community activists from both sides of the border, who came together to reflect on the work they have been engaged in and the impact it is having on the wider society.

## **‘A future for cooperation’**

*An account of a cross-border conference (Farset/Inishowen & Border Counties Initiative)*

*(February 2008)*

For some years, the Ballymacarrett Arts & Cultural Society (East Belfast), has, in collaboration with the Drogheda Focus Group, promoted a cross-border dialogue on political, historical, cultural and identity-related issues. One of the programmes which developed from this linkage, PATCH (Political Awareness Through Citizenship and History), delivers a range of training workshops on such issues. Given the remarkable turn of events in May 2007, when the political parties in Northern Ireland finally agreed to share power, it was decided, as part of the PATCH programme, that many of those with whom they had engaged over the years would be invited to participate in a conference to which politicians from all parties, North and South, were invited to share their thoughts on the theme ‘A Future for Cooperation’. This document is an edited account of that event.

## **Building cross-border relationships**

*Farset/Inishowen & Border Counties Initiative*

*(March 2008)*

In recent years a remarkable transformation has taken place in relationships between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Old suspicions have been laid to rest, stereotypes have been successfully challenged, and a genuine working partnership has been established between the political institutions in both jurisdictions.

More remarkably, a host of new friendships now link individuals and community groups across the border. Indeed, many would argue that it was the patient forging of these grassroots relationships which laid the bedrock for all the positive changes which have taken place.

This pamphlet recounts an exploration of the actual process of building cross-border relationships, undertaken by some of those who were to the forefront in taking the first tentative, and often anxious, steps forward in their desire to transcend old animosities and forge new friendships.

## **Divided by History?**

*Farset/Inishowen & Border Counties Initiative*

*(April 2008)*

The new Northern Ireland power-sharing Executive has been running surprisingly well for the past eleven months, without the ‘battle a day’ predicted by some of its main players. Have old enmities been laid to rest then, old divisions finally set aside? Closer inspection, however, reveals that what the parties have done is to concentrate on ‘bread and butter’ issues around which a consensus is achievable. Potentially divisive matters, involving history, culture or identity, have been largely put on ‘hold’. And yet, sensitive historical and cultural issues have been addressed at a grassroots level, going back many years. This pamphlet recounts a cross-border exploration on the subject, by some of those who have been to the forefront in trying to engender a better understanding between our differing interpretations of history.

## **A grassroots achievement**

*Farset/Inishowen & Border Counties Initiative*

*(May 2008)*

The establishment of power-sharing between the DUP and Sinn Féin took many media commentators by surprise. They wondered how formerly antagonistic political stances could have been so radically transformed. However, community activists would contend that the transformation which we are now witnessing in the political arena came about as a product of all the grassroots community work which had been ongoing for decades. This extensive inter-community and cross-border effort had helped to create the environment within which erstwhile enemies could finally sit down together and seek accommodation.

This pamphlet contains reflections on this theme by community activists. The contributors also note, with some irony, that despite all that people at the grassroots have achieved, the new political realignment now threatens to relegate community activism to a subservient role.

## **Young People and the ‘peace process’**

*Farset/Inishowen & Border Counties Initiative*

*(October 2008)*

It is widely believed that the re-establishment of power-sharing institutions in Northern Ireland will herald a bright future for the island of Ireland. But how is this future viewed by Ireland’s young people, north or south of the border? Indeed, are they thinking about it at all, or are their minds focused on more everyday concerns? What does the experience of peace mean to them? Are the sectarian divisions which blighted their parents’ lives now a thing of the past? In an effort to answer such questions a number of discussion groups – involving young people from Buncrana and Glengad in County Donegal, and from Ballymurphy in West Belfast and Tullycarnet in East Belfast – were convened to canvas some of the views and opinions of today’s younger generation, along with their hopes and fears.

90

## **Self-help at the grassroots**

*Farset/Inishowen & Border Counties Initiative*

*(October 2008)*

Peter Robinson, Northern Ireland First Minister, recently admitted that if individuals and groups in the community had not persevered in the often difficult task of building bridges between people – in order to break down fears and counter misperceptions – then the politicians would never have been able to move forward. It was a welcome, if somewhat belated, acknowledgement of this remarkable grassroots achievement.

Many people outside working-class communities are largely unaware of the extent of the creative work which was undertaken at the grassroots, as communities responded to the trauma of the Troubles. This pamphlet endeavours to provide some insight into this ‘hidden history’ by looking at a small number of innovative community-driven projects, although there are countless others which must await inclusion in a fuller account.

91

## **Suffolk-Lenadoon Reminiscences**

*Senior citizens reflect on the past and the future*

*(November 2008)*

Following on from the achievements made by community workers in the Suffolk and Lenadoon areas of West Belfast (as described in pamphlet 81, *Building bridges at the grassroots*), some senior citizens from both areas were brought together to reminisce about the past and the future.

92

## **Preventing a return to conflict**

*A discussion by ex-combatants*

*(August 2009)*

In recent years, Loyalist and Republican ex-prisoners have heard many young people in working-class areas express attitudes which could, if left unchallenged, lead some of these young people to drift back to violence. Part of the problem lies in the fact that many young people have no real understanding of the brutal realities of the conflict. Accordingly, a group of Republican Socialists and Loyalist ex-combatants sat down to explore how the Troubles – and imprisonment – impacted upon their lives. Their aim was to highlight the reality of armed conflict, and to de-romanticise the prison experience.

This pamphlet, which has been drawn from those discussions, is to be used by the ex-prisoner group as part of an ongoing programme of engagement with young people from both sides of the community.

93

## **Lenadoon Community Forum**

*Responding to community needs*

*(November 2009)*

This pamphlet describes how the Troubles impacted upon the large working-class Catholic estate of Lenadoon in West Belfast, and how local activists sought to meet the needs of their area, but in a way which would empower the community in the process. The story of Lenadoon Community Forum shows the thinking behind this important example of grassroots community development, as well as highlighting many of the obstacles which were faced, and indeed, are still being faced.

94

## **Death by postcode**

*Report on a Health Inequalities conference*

*(February 2010)*

Statistics relating to health inequalities in Northern Ireland provide startling reading. Children from the poorest families are four times more likely to die before the age of twenty, fifteen times more likely to die in a house fire, and five times more likely to die in accidents. Women living in Northern Ireland’s most deprived communities succumb to ill-health at least fourteen years sooner than those who are well off. Not simply health but life expectancy is literally determined by a person’s postcode. It was in response to this unacceptable situation that a conference was

convened in October 2009, bringing together representatives of the statutory agencies with those from the community and voluntary sectors. The conference's primary purpose was not only to create greater understanding and awareness of the reality of health inequalities but to provide an opportunity to share ideas and expertise with a view to remedy. This pamphlet is an edited account of the conference proceedings.

95

### **'Time stands still'**

*The forgotten story of prisoners' families*

*(May 2010)*

In 2009 Republican and Loyalist ex-combatants engaged in a series of discussions about their experiences of imprisonment during the course of the Northern Ireland 'Troubles'. (Island Pamphlet No. 92, Preventing a return to conflict.) In response to a comment made by the wife of one ex-prisoner that 'the story of the families is still to be told' – it was decided to engage a number of female family members in a separate series of discussions, focusing on the numerous difficulties they faced when a son, husband or brother was imprisoned as a result of the conflict. This pamphlet provides an edited account of those discussions.

96

### ***Republicanism in transition (1) The need for a debate***

*An exploration of disaffection at the republican grassroots*

*(February 2011)*

The decision by Sinn Féin to enter a power-sharing administration at Stormont seemed to underwrite the popular hope that the 'war' was over and a new future lay ahead. However, disquiet among different republican groupings has been steadily growing. Although a few have resorted to what they describe as 'armed struggle', most disaffected republicans express no desire to see a return to conflict, yet still hold deep concerns about the way Irish Republicanism is evolving. Furthermore, many of them believe that the absence of a genuine debate within republicanism lies at the core of the current situation. In order to help facilitate such a debate, this pamphlet – the first in a series – presents a number of different organisational positions, and provides an insight into current feelings at the republican grassroots.

97

### ***Republicanism in transition (2) Beginning a debate***

*(June 2011)*

This pamphlet – the second in this 'mini-series' – summarises a number of face-to-face discussions which took place between those republicans who had presented 'position papers' for Pamphlet No. 96.

98

### ***Republicanism in transition (3) The need for a debate***

*(November 2011)*

The focus of the discussions for this third pamphlet was: what does Irish Republicanism actually mean in 2011?

99

### ***Republicanism in transition (4) The question of armed struggle***

*(April 2012)*

The discussions for this fourth pamphlet focused on an exploration of the use, and non-use, of armed struggle in the pursuit of Irish Republican goals.

100

### ***Republicanism in transition (5) An engagement with Loyalists***

*(August 2012)*

This is the fifth pamphlet seeking to facilitate a debate within republicanism. In the discussions held to date most participants have stressed the need to engage with the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist working-class community. The purpose behind this particular pamphlet was to provide a platform whereby people from that community could enter into an exchange of views with the participants on their differing perceptions of Irish Republicanism.

101

### ***Towards a shared future (1) The difficult questions***

*(December 2012)*

The upsurge in street violence during the summer of 2012 sent shock waves throughout Northern Ireland, highlighting the need for some fundamental questions to be addressed with a new urgency. Where are we going as a society? What do we want for our future? How do we envisage getting there? How do we confront the legacy of the past? How do we move towards a more inclusive future?

In an effort to assist the process of debate and dialogue, some forty individuals working at the grassroots in Belfast – community workers, loyalists, republicans and others – were each asked the following question: *What do you believe to be the difficult questions our two communities must address if we are to move to a shared future?*

This pamphlet, part of a series, is an edited summary of the wide range of viewpoints expressed.

102

### ***Towards a shared future (2) Confronting sectarianism***

*(December 2012)*

As part of the same series as No. 101, this time the interviewees were asked the question: *How do you believe we can best confront the legacy of sectarianism?*

103

### ***Towards a shared future (3) Irreconcilable Identities?***

*(March 2013)*

This is the third in a series of pamphlets on the theme *Towards a shared future*. The first two pamphlets had revealed a growing disquiet among community activists. Within the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community much of this disquiet related to perceived threats to their ‘British identity’. Within the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community much of the anxiety was focused on the lack of any real socio-economic ‘peace dividend’.

Soon after the two pamphlets were published what became known as the ‘flag protests’ erupted, in the wake of Belfast City Council’s decision to limit the flying of the Union flag to 18 designated days. Discussions for this third pamphlet – on the theme *Irreconcilable Identities?* – were dominated by the ‘flag issue’. At the very least, it has served to highlight the need for politicians, policy-makers, community workers and others to address the question of our conflicting identities as a matter of urgency.

104

### ***Towards a shared future (4) Explorations of Identity***

*(March 2013)*

The preceding pamphlet in this series had sought to address the issue of Northern Ireland’s conflicting, and seemingly irreconcilable, identities. The discussions upon which the pamphlet was based, however, were dominated by the ‘flag protests’ (see no. 103 above). The result was that many of those interviewed were more concerned with perceived threats to their identity than with a thorough exploration of its multifaceted elements.

In an effort, therefore, to contribute to a fuller discussion around this important topic, this particular pamphlet presents a number of separate but related articles on the themes of identity, culture and history.

105

### ***Towards a shared future (5) Ulster’s marching bands***

*(January 2014)*

Marching bands are an integral part of Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities, and provide a primary focus for the expression and celebration of Protestant identity and culture. However, in the past few years the media has often portrayed bands in a negative light. At the request of a leading member of the Confederation of Ulster Bands, a series of discussions was undertaken, involving a group of bandsmen and bandswomen, for the purpose of letting them tell their side of the story, and to assist them to articulate the deep unease which they – and many others within Protestant working-class communities – are currently experiencing. In any process hoping to move Northern Ireland society towards a shared and inclusive future *all* sections of society must feel that they are being equally engaged in that process – and that includes the Protestant marching band sector and its 30,000 members.



## ***Towards a shared future (6) In search of a process***

*(July 2014)*

In light of the failure of the ‘Haass Talks’ to reach agreement, the Community Think Tanks Project engaged a number of loyalist and republican community workers in discussion around two interconnected themes: (1) Why did they think those talks failed? Did they think the process was flawed? And, if so, in what way? (2) What did they think a more effective process would look like? What might it contain which could give it more chance of success? The responses given to these questions were largely negative, reflecting a widespread disillusionment that, sixteen years after the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland was still no further along the path to genuine and lasting conflict resolution. The final section of this pamphlet describes an alternative process, one which might contain the vital ingredients missing from all those efforts attempted to date.

## ***A process of analysis (1) The Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community***

*(February 2015)*

Sixteen years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement identity-related issues in Northern Ireland still remain unresolved. Farset Community Think Tanks Project was asked whether it could help to engender movement towards resolution. It was decided to convene two separate discussion groups: one representing the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community, the other the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community. The participants in each group, after analysing the root causes of the Northern Ireland conflict, would be asked whether they felt they could view the conflict as a ‘shared problem’. If so, representatives from both groupings would then undertake a joint engagement, to explore possible ways of moving towards a ‘win/win’ outcome. This pamphlet is a summary of the first phase: the discussions and interviews which engaged representatives of the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community.

## ***A process of analysis (2) The Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community***

*(April 2015)*

[SEE 107] This pamphlet is a summary of the second phase: the discussions and interviews which engaged representatives of the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community.

## ***A process of analysis (3) Searching for a road map***

*(July 2015)*

[SEE 107] This pamphlet provides an edited summary of the discussions, both separate and joint, which formed the third and final stage of this initiative. It also includes a list of ideas, directly emerging from the discussions, which it was felt might be important when setting down what one participant described as a ‘road map to the future’.

## ***Parades and Protests***

*Some unheard voices*

*(March 2016)*

In Belfast, parading and protesting has long been an integral part of cultural, religious and political expression. Mostly such expression remains peaceful, even colourful. At times, however, it has been a cause of conflict between the city’s two main traditions. Belfast City Council decided to undertake a series of discussions with people who are not directly involved in decision-making around parades and protests, but whose views might help to inform the debate around such matters. Belfast City Council and Island Pamphlets held discussions with women, older people, young people and new communities. We hope these voices, largely unheard, might provide decision-makers with information to help deliberations on such complex issues.



***United for Change***

*Young people's experiences of a 'United Youth' pilot programme*

*(March 2016)*

The *Northern Ireland Youth Forum: United for Change* project engages two dozen young people in a multifaceted programme, focusing on Personal & Social Development, Good Relations, Citizenship and Employability. The young people undertake a wide range of activities, including group discussions on pertinent issues, studying at the University of Ulster at Jordanstown, visits to Germany and Poland, residentials, and work placements. In this pamphlet some of the young people talk of their experiences and assess what they have gained from the programme.