

Community Visits in Belfast, Northern Ireland

COMMUNITY VISITS – OPTION 1

What: Visit To Cross-community Projects

Where: The Inter Community Development Project, Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium, Mount Vernon Community Development Forum

When: Friday 5 February 1000 – 1300

THE INTER COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

The Inter Community Development Project, Intercomm, was established in 1995 as the result of growing community concerns about the lack of formal structures to deal with political and sectarian unrest in the absence of meaningful intercommunity contact in the North Belfast area.

Intercomm is driven by a fundamental ethos of co-operation and partnership. Founded in 1995 by community activists Liam Maskey and Billy Mitchell, the project's core aim is to forge fruitful links between Catholic/ Nationalist and Protestant/ Unionist community groups through long term strategic development work, community inspired peace building initiatives, youth programmes and job creation programmes.

The cornerstone of Intercomm's peace building strategy is most importantly the people of North Belfast. Those who have intimately experienced the effects of conflict are the key resource in the project's aim to transcend community division through dialogue.

The Peace Building Programme, as a means of community empowerment, is a pioneering programme which intends to enhance the peacebuilding skills of community workers through informed discussion and debate, assessment of good practice and international experience of conflict resolution. It is an innovative venture combining workshops, seminars, skills training and field trips, with a vision to build capacity within the community for conflicts to be managed and resolved without violence in accordance with universally agreed standards and practices.

Intercomm's Director, Liam Maskey has been a part of many delegations to Brussels, meeting EU politicians and civil servants stressing the importance of civil society organisations developing an income generation strategy to underpin their community development work. He has also developed innovative and empirical models and approaches that advance the process of peace-building in Northern Ireland and throughout the world, and was instrumental in forging a new partnership with a leading American based Centre for Conflict and Negotiation, as well as locally with Queens and Ulster Universities in Belfast.

COMMUNITY VISITS – OPTION 1 *CONTINUED*

BELFAST CONFLICT RESOLUTION CONSORTIUM

The Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium (BCRC) project is an innovative city-wide cross community partnership approach to conflict transformation at interfaces.

Set up in April 2007, the BCRC is made up of loyalist, republican, and community activists who, for many years, have been working at the interfaces where they live, to manage and prevent violent outbreaks and potentially violent situations.

Throughout the project, BCRC has cultivated tentative contacts between activists to create effective working relationships and develop a cross-community steering group, response network, and staff.

The aims of the BCRC project are twofold:

- To provide an integrated response to tensions at interfaces and prevent outbreaks of violence through fostering and expanding cross-community strategic alliances;
- To enhance within interface communities the conflict resolution skills, local leadership capacity, democratic involvement, and reconciliation efforts and share future work on the legacy of the conflict and social problems faced by these working class communities.

MOUNT VERNON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FORUM

Mount Vernon, a working class loyalist area in North Belfast which is often perceived by outsiders and the media as a stronghold of paramilitary and criminal activity.

The people of Mount Vernon want to change this image and so members of the Mount Vernon Community Development Forum have embarked on a project to create a strategy and vision for the area. This involves encouraging local people to have greater ownership and responsibility for their area by setting out priorities for development for the next five years, and also engaging service providers, the voluntary sector and funders in high quality delivery.

Billy Hutchinson is the leading community worker in the area helping to develop the strategy and is also a key driver in building trust and pragmatic relationships between communities in North Belfast. Billy is a member of the Progressive Unionist Party and a former member of the Legislative Assembly and Councilor at Belfast City Hall.

COMMUNITY VISITS – OPTION 2

What: Visit To Integrated School

Where: Hazelwood Integrated College

When: Friday 5 February 1000 – 1300

HAZELWOOD COLLEGE

Hazelwood College was the second post-primary integrated school to be established in Northern Ireland. It was founded in 1985, against a background of sectarian violence, by a group of Protestant and Catholic parents from North Belfast and funded originally by the major charities and the fundraising efforts of parents. Despite receiving no government funding for the first three years, its numbers grew from an initial enrolment of 17 students in 1985 to 858 in 2009.

Hazelwood College was founded as an all ability inclusive integrated school that promotes reconciliation and mutual understanding through educational excellence. It accepts students with a wide range of talents and ability, and promotes personal achievement and the realisation of each child's potential irrespective of religion, gender, race or social background.

All areas of school life both inside and outside the classroom are constructed to realize integration. Good relationships are promoted between members of the school community, parents, staff and students. Each subject area reflects, both through content and process, the ethos of integration.

A programme of school events celebrates the integrated ethos of the College. School assemblies provide an opportunity to reflect on the College mission and an annual Peace Assembly takes place to celebrate, with parents and friends, the success of the Hazelwood integrated community. A structured programme of workshops allows students to explore contentious issues. In addition, student involvement in innovative projects and in global links communicates the work of the College to a broader audience.

The work of Hazelwood has achieved international recognition. In 1999 the College received the Team Harmony Award in a video linked conference with President Clinton in the White House, and in 2002 the College received both the NICIE Cross Community Award and the NICCI Award for cross community relations.

COMMUNITY VISITS – OPTION 3

What: Visit To Integrated School

Where: Lagan College

When: Friday 5 February 1000 – 1300

LAGAN COLLEGE

Lagan College was founded in 1981 as a religious response to the challenge of community conflict and a religiously divided school system in Northern Ireland. Since 1974 the All Children Together Movement (ACT) had been lobbying the Churches and the Government to take the initiative in educating Protestant and Catholic children together.

In 1981 a small group of parents with children at the age of transfer from primary to secondary school decided to take the initiative. With the support of ACT they called a public meeting in February 1981 and founded Lagan College. The college opened with 28 pupils.

For the first three years, the College, which aimed to serve the whole community – rich and poor alike – received no Government funding. Parents of pupils contributed what they could afford towards the costs.

Following new legislation in 1989 concerned with the development of integrated education, the College became a Grant-Maintained Integrated School in 1991. This means that 100% of the costs, recurrent and capital, are now funded directly by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland. By September 2008 the number of pupils at the college had grown to 1200, with more than 80 teachers.

The founders of Lagan College aimed to create an integrated, all-ability Christian school which would ‘educate to the highest standards Catholics, Protestants and others of goodwill together under the same roof’. This aim remains as important, if not more so, in 2010 as it was in 1981.