Working at the Interface

Good Practice in Reducing Tension and Violence

Neil Jarman

*i*CR
INSTITUTE *for* **CONFLICT RESEARCH**

Working at the Interface
Good Practice in Reducing Tension and Violence

Neil Jarman

Institute for Conflict Research

Contents

Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

Violence and disorder have been recurrent problems in many interface areas of Belfast for many years, but these problems have also led to the development of a range of responses by people living and working near interfaces. This brief document highlights some of the current best practice and key learnings of interface workers about how they can respond to violence and reduce future disorder.

The report highlights the importance of a small number of events (such as parades, football matches, Halloween), activities (drinking alcohol, flying flags) and categories of person (young people, outsiders) as key triggers that raise tensions and spark violence in interface areas. It also outlines the growing awareness of links between disorder in interface areas and anti-social behaviour more generally.

Many interface workers identified the importance of 'fire-fighting activities', forms of intervention that are designed to stop or reduce interface violence. The report highlights a variety of other types of activities that have been developed by interface workers, these include:
- preparatory activities, such as sharing information;
- diversionary work, with young people;
- preventative work, including environmental and regeneration activities;
- relationship building activities among neighbouring communities; and
- strategic planning work among local networks to develop longer term responses to reduce tensions.

In particular much of this work has been based on a growing number of cross-community networks in many areas of Belfast.

Interface work involves a variety of street level activities, such as monitoring potential flashpoints, recording incidents, reducing tensions and maintaining contact with neighbouring communities through the many mobile phone networks. Although the focus on interface tensions often occurs during the summer months, problems can arise throughout the year.

Increasingly, however, interface work involves working in a variety of single identity and cross community networks, which enable interface workers to build and develop relationships with similar workers from other communities. Many people highlighted the importance of such

relationships in helping to develop trust and confidence among workers, in building an understanding of each other's issues, enabling people to share information and to develop local strategic plans.

It was also noted that interface work can often be dangerous, unrewarding, time consuming and stressful. People acknowledged the importance of maintaining support and understanding within their own communities as a necessary factor in successful interface intervention. They also noted that sometimes the levels of tension and pressures meant that cross community contacts had to be scaled down at least in the short term.

Interface workers noted the importance of building connections and relationships with other sectors and highlighted the important role of the statutory sector and the private business sector. They also noted the problems that can be exacerbated at times by some politicians and by the media and the ongoing problems of securing funding to develop and expand interface work.

The final section looks at some of the new areas of activity being developed, at the role of interface workers in developing local strategic plans, at the potential for engaging young people as a positive force in interface work and the opportunities for engaging in environmental activities and regeneration work to try to improve the quality of the physical aspect of interface areas.

The report thus provides a brief overview of the scale and variety of activities developed in response to interface violence in Belfast in recent years, confirming the value and importance of such work in reducing tensions, preventing conflict and improving inter-communal relationships.

Introduction

Violence and disorder have been persistent and recurrent problems in many interface areas of Belfast for several years. Many interface communities routinely experience periods of tension and violence each year, and over recent years a number of areas have become more segregated and divisions between communities have both increased and become more visible. Since the paramilitary ceasefires were declared in 1994 nine new interface barriers have been built in Belfast and eleven existing barriers have been strengthened or extended in some way.

The persistence of tensions and violence in interface areas has generated a range of responses by people living in those local communities near the different interfaces. Some of these activities, such as the mobile phone networks and the street level 'fire-fighting' activities, have become well documented. Interface workers, however, have developed an extensive array of experiences and practices over the past years, and their work has developed beyond fire-fighting into a diverse range of networks, preventative activities and longer term projects.

This brief document, commissioned by Belfast Interface Project, aims to highlight some of the key learnings of interface workers about how to respond most effectively to the tensions and disorder at interfaces and what they can do to reduce the possibilities of disorder in the future. The report draws largely on the experiences of a wide variety of volunteers, activists and community workers who are involved in the various projects and networks across the city. The aim is less to highlight the work of any one specific project, than to identify some of the core principles and practices that underpin the work of interface workers in many, if not all, of the different interface areas.

This document is aimed at informing those involved in conflict resolution work and policy development of the scale and variety of activities that have been initiated in responding to interface violence in Belfast in recent years. It is hoped that this report will help to progress debate and understanding in this area. Finally, it is also hoped that the report will provide those working in interface areas with some confirmation of the value and importance of the work they are doing and the approaches that they have developed in often trying circumstances.

Neil Jarman   **Chris O'Halloran**
Institute for Conflict Research   *Belfast Interface Project*

1. Interface Tensions and Violence

Although the interface is usually considered to be the main defining element of such areas, it is possible to categorise interface areas by the type of problem they experience. Tensions and violence at interface areas are usually linked with a particular type of *event*, with a limited range of *activities* or with a certain *category of person*. Some interfaces are affected more often by particular events and at certain times of the year, while others are troubled on a more systematic and regular basis.

The main *events* that regularly provoke tension and disorder are:
- **Parades:** the most contentious parades in Belfast have been linked with the loyal orders. These include both parades that pass through or nearby to an interface and a limited number of key parades that raise tensions on a wider scale.

- **Football:** in recent years football matches between Celtic and Rangers have generated disorder in interface areas of Belfast.

- **Bonfires:** a number of Eleventh night bonfires can draw people to interfaces and they can also attract attention of people who are opposed to the bonfires.

- **Halloween:** a number of people have reported that Halloween has become an increasingly tense time of year in some interfaces due to the widespread use of fireworks.

- **Gaelic matches:** displays of flags associated with the success of various local and regional GAA teams have raised tensions in a limited number of interface areas in recent years.

Interface workers are well aware of local events that have the potential to raise tensions and there is also greater recognition of the need to monitor events further afield that might do likewise. There is also a general acknowledgement of the benefits of ensuring that key contacts in neighbouring communities are informed of forthcoming events that might create tension, and in sharing information about planned local activities.

Many interface workers are only too aware that events, over which they have no influence or control, can all too easily disrupt relationships, dialogues and processes. In response they emphasise the need to try to ensure that communication and relationships are maintained, that dialogue continues and that any disruption is kept to a minimum. The ability to sustain

contacts through periods of tension is often dependent on the quality of **relationships** that have been built up over previous weeks and months.

Some types of incidents and *activity*, which are unrelated to any specific event, also occur in interface areas and may require regular and persistent attention from interface workers.

- **Alcohol:** some interface areas are particularly troubled by people who have been drinking due to the location of off-licenses or bars, and who may shout abuse or throw bottles with little thought for the wider consequences of their actions.

- **Night-time Economy:** a small number of areas have a large number of fast food outlets or off-sales premises which attract people from both communities and which can also lead to exchanges of abuse and worse.

- **Flags:** the flying of flags in or near to interfaces has been a persistent problem over recent years. The issue has recently begun to be addressed seriously and with some considerable success in many areas.

- **Fireworks:** a number of people have cited the problem of the throwing of fireworks across interfaces in the weeks running up to Halloween as a growing problem in some areas.

Attempting to deal with problems of alcohol abuse, flags and the night-time economy can demand a slightly different approach from dealing with the tensions associated with well known events. They usually require recurrent activity on the streets but they also usually involve fewer people working on the ground. They can also involve working with local businesses to try to reduce the potential for incidents.

In the past much of the trouble at interfaces has been associated with political differences or with sectarianism but increasingly interface workers are arguing that much of the disorder is little more than either anti-social behaviour or forms of 'recreational rioting' carried out to relieve boredom and frustration.

Those mainly involved in these types of behaviour are:
- **Young people:** who are attracted to interface areas because of the lack of adult control and authority and who use the spaces as a place to hang out with friends.

- **Anti-social elements:** these are usually individuals who have little involvement in the wider community or engagement with community-based organisations, and who cause trouble at the interface out of bigotry and hostility to the 'other side'.

- **People from outside the immediate area:** in some areas the trouble is caused by people who do not live nearby but rather who come to the interface for the craic or excitement.

In many areas people have highlighted the fact that much of the low-level trouble at interfaces is often the responsibility of a small number of individuals, who have no political agenda and are often hostile to those who try to reduce such tensions.

Dealing with such individuals can be extremely difficult and it is important to assure members of neighbouring communities that activities such as sectarian verbal abuse and stone throwing are not sanctioned or desired, and that the interface workers are doing their best to prevent it.

Anti-Social Behaviour

Historically the violence at interfaces has been linked to the wider political conflict, but there is increasing recognition that much of the contemporary violence is little more than a form of anti-social behaviour and has no political motivation or impetus.

Violence associated with parades and protests against parades is one of the few persistent interface problems that can be linked to political and cultural issues. Most disorder is related to problems caused by relatively small numbers of people, and much is associated with the behaviour of unruly young people and people under the influence of alcohol.

Interface workers have recognised that there is a similarity in the disorderly behaviour that occurs at interfaces and anti-social behaviour within communities, the main difference is that disorderly behaviour at interfaces can have a significant impact on relations between communities, whereas anti-social behaviour tends to impact on relations within single identity communities.

This has also affected how some interface workers work. In some areas people have begun to focus more on problems of anti-social activities and behaviour within their community and thereby try to prevent it

occurring at an interface. This has led to more of a focus on making people aware of the impact their behaviour can have on their own community and on relations with neighbouring communities, rather than tolerating poor behaviour at the margins.

- In some nationalist areas this has led to interface workers linking up with **Community Watch** projects, which focus on trying to reduce anti-social behaviour and alcohol related disorder.

- In some areas interface workers have engaged with the **Northern Ireland Housing Executive** to ensure there is appropriate sensitivity in housing people in and near interfaces, rather than using social housing in interface areas as a 'dumping ground'.

- A number of interface workers have noted with concern the number of **hostels** being located in or near interface areas and the potential impact this can have on creating problems at interfaces.

- In some areas this has also led to interface workers engaging with a much broader range of issues than they have traditionally engaged in. These include work on mental health issues, working with the Probation Board and local landlords, providing safe play spaces and other environmental issues.

2. Developing Good Practice

Current approaches to reducing violence at interface areas have been developed in response to recurrent outbreaks of violence. In most interface areas ground level activity has benefited from a period of sustained work and learning by groups and individuals. This range of work has drawn heavily both on personal experiences and from experiences and developments in other areas.

Much of the basic work has focused on **fire-fighting** or **responsive** activities; these are activities that respond to rising tensions or outbreaks of local disorder and which are designed to prevent the trouble escalating or spreading. This work usually involves interface workers maintaining a presence on the ground at key times and sustaining lines of communication with neighbouring areas via mobile phone networks.

However, increasingly groups are turning their attentions to other activities, these include:

- **Preparatory work:** this predominantly involves dialogue, information sharing and awareness raising. These activities are designed to reduce the possibilities of violence and disorder starting in the first place.

- **Diversionary work:** this usually involves work with children and young people and is designed to divert them away from the interfaces and from participating in activities that might lead to the raising of tensions and outbreaks of disorder.

- **Preventative work:** this includes projects that focus on environmental issues, regeneration work and building links with local businesses in order to try to reduce the potential for disorder.

- **Relationship building:** with groups and organisations based in neighbouring interface communities. Such activities can involve working on joint projects, such as health or regeneration issues, which have little directly to do with the reduction of tension and violence but can help build trust, respect and understanding.

- **Strategic planning:** increasingly as relations grow, groups are working together to develop longer-term strategies for their areas and approaches that will link together community relations work, community development and regeneration.

The key feature of all these activities is that they are initiated at the grass roots and are therefore primarily bottom up rather than top down initiatives. In principle this allows the groups themselves to determine the pace, scale and nature of the work they undertake and of their relations with neighbouring communities and statutory agencies.

In practice, all groups noted that they had to respond to external pressures, which might be linked to public events or the political context. Work can also be restricted by lack of funding. Each and all of these can reduce their scope for activities, limit their contacts with neighbouring communities and restrict the effectiveness of work to reduce tension and violence at the interface.

Models

To date only a limited number of examples of community-led approaches to addressing tension and violence in interface areas have been written up and published. Clearly a wealth of experience has been gathered and a range of forms of good practice have been developed over recent years; it would be of benefit for local activists and others working on conflict intervention for this to be recorded and documented. Recent documents include the following examples of good practice.

Template for Interface Intervention: This was produced by a number of experienced interface workers as a Sinn Féin discussion document in June 2004. The template is described as providing a 'practical mechanism to deal with the various types of violence that might occur' and has been used as a framework for responding to interface interventions and for training volunteers working in interface areas. The short document sets out a range of short, medium and long term objectives and identifies three 'modes for intervention': a prevention mode, a response mode and a maintenance mode. The template document has been widely circulated among interface workers in both nationalist and unionist communities.

A Model of Good Practice: This was produced by Springfield Intercommunity Forum in September 2005. The document highlights the work of SIF and identifies the core areas of work as: transforming relationships and resolving differences; reducing conflict and violence; exploring diversity and increasing community capacity. The document also has sections on the different strands of work of SIF including the mobile phone network, environmental issues and cross cultural exchanges and finally includes sections on 'what works' and 'what doesn't work'.

Community Charter: Published by Ardoyne Focus Group in March 2005, this is described as a 'cohesive attempt through which all residents can have an input into strategies that will impact on their quality of life'. The charter emphasises the importance of taking responsibility in relation to issues such as the behaviour of young people, drugs and alcohol, the local environment and social relations in Ardoyne. The hope is that residents will sign up to the charter and adopt its basic principles.

Anti-Sectarianism Charter: This document was produced by Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum in March 2005, and is designed to be a response to sectarianism. It encourages people to make a commitment to anti-sectarianism by challenging attitudes and behaviour that exclude; promoting attitudes and behaviour that include; promoting toleration and equality; respecting diversity; removing visible evidence of sectarianism; promoting dialogue over cultural conflict and working against institutionalised sectarianism.

North Belfast Conflict Transformation Forum Charter: The North Belfast Conflict Transformation Forum is made up of a diverse range of individuals and organisations actively working in North Belfast on an inter-community basis. Those involved have reached agreement on working within the guidelines laid down within an agreed Charter. The Charter was publicly launched in April 2006.

Networks

Groups in all interface areas have emphasised the value in developing a range of networks to support and facilitate their work. The most important or valuable networks have been identified as:
- local (single identity) networks involving a variety of groups which are based within the local community;
- wider single identity networks with other neighbouring communities of the same background; and
- cross-community networks involving groups from both main communities.

Most interface groups are involved in all three of these types of networks as interlinked parts of their work and the different types of networks help to provide support to each other and ways of distributing and receiving information.

The local networks tend to be more informal groupings, which tend to draw upon personal contacts and ongoing working relations, whereas

the cross-community networks are generally more structured, usually with a name, defined members and regular meetings.

The wider single identity networks almost always draw on a variety of groups that are involved in a diverse range of activities. They are not limited to groups working on interface issues, but rather include organisations involved in different forms of community development and community relations work. The following table lists examples of some of the cross community networks active in the Belfast area.

Cross Community Networks	Areas Involved
Finaghy Crossroads Group	Finaghy Crossroads, Benmore, Ladybrook
Gasworks Initiative	Donegall Pass, Lower Ormeau, Markets
North Belfast Conflict Transformation Forum	Groups from all parts of North Belfast and South East Antrim
North Belfast Interface Network	Community relations workers and groups in North Belfast
Springfield Intercommunity Forum	Groups from both sides of Springfield – Falls - Shankill interface
Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group	Suffolk and Lenadoon

Although most groups have highlighted the benefits of networks that are based on a relatively clearly defined geographical area, some groups have also identified the value of wider networks which bring together groups from across the city and which may also include statutory organisations.

There are a number of Belfast wide networks which are involved in dealing with interface issues and are acknowledged as playing a valuable role in networking and providing support to local groups.

There has been some reticence expressed about the role of umbrella groups, with some people expressing concern that they can at times function as a buffer between local groups and the statutory sector, that they are sometimes believed to take credit for the work of local groups and that they receive funding that would be better directed at groups working on the ground.

Similarly many groups remain wary of initiatives that have been led or initiated by statutory organisations, and believe that networks are most effective when the agenda is set by groups that are most closely based in and responsive to local communities.

As more groups have become increasingly more confident in their own abilities and capacities so they have been more willing to take greater responsibility for initiating and sustaining locally based networks to address interface issues.

Groups have emphasised that the most effective and successful networks are those that are most inclusive and involve those people who have most significant influence at a local level in dealing with public disorder. A number of people noted that networks needed to ensure that they had the right sort of contacts and include 'appropriate' people, those with influence and authority in their communities. Many people highlighted the need to include ex-prisoners and people with connections to the paramilitary networks if the networks are to be really effective.

3. Responding to Tension and Violence

One of the most basic approaches to the reduction of violence at interfaces is to have people present at particular flashpoints to act as a deterrent to members of their own community in either initiating aggression to the other side, or in responding to acts of violence and aggression.

This often involves having people on the streets:
- Through the evening and early hours of the morning through much of the summer marching season;
- During and immediately after key events such as parades and Rangers-Celtic matches;
- During and after sustained periods of local tension.

Maintaining a street presence usually involves separate but parallel activity, whereby each community simultaneously monitors its side of the interface and only engages with members of its own community. Co-ordinating responses with people from the other side is usually done by mobile phone (see below).

In some areas interface workers are working to maintain a semblance of shared space, that is areas where members of both communities have equal access to facilities and resources. Even in such situations the principle of 'parallel but separate' work is usually maintained, this means that interface workers only deal with people from their own community.

When people are working together but in parallel, it was felt to be important to ensure that people on each side worked to an agreed process and set of principles. There was also a need for people on each side to be honest with each other about the nature of local incidents, to accept responsibility for actions from one's own community and not to exaggerate the scale of the situation.

Above all it was important to accept what one's counterpart on the other side told you about their experiences, what they were trying to do and the limitations on their activities. This was one way of learning to see things from the other's perspective and thereby begin to understand and respect each other.

Working together to defuse a situation, even at a distance, was important in building effective relationships of trust. Knowing that one's counterpart

on the other side can deliver was acknowledged as a key element in building confidence in local capacity to deal with conflict and violence.

In some situations local groups have worked with umbrella organisations or independent third party groups, which are not based in the immediate local area but which can provide a degree of support to local activists. Such third party groups have been used as independent monitors of the situation on the ground, to help provide communication between locally based groups, facilitate local discussions and help create space for dialogue between communities.

Among the key principles that have underpinned the involvement of non-local groups are:
• Only work with the agreement of both local communities;
• Observe and communicate with local people but do not intervene;
• Do not work where you are not invited or not wanted;
• Have a clear framework, timetable and set of objectives for the work;
• Have an exit strategy for the support or involvement.

The evidence from groups working in interface areas across Belfast over a number of years is that sustained work by locally based interface workers can reduce the number of incidents at interfaces and reduce the levels of tension and fear within interface communities.

Aggressive and Defensive Violence

A number of interface workers differentiated between aggressive and defensive violence. They noted that they would not try to stop people trying to defend their homes or their area from attack from outside, but they would argue against and try to stop any aggressive violence towards another community from within their own community.

It is also worth noting that groups and communities often consider that violence from 'their side' of an interface is defensive or a justified response to aggression from the 'other side', while violence from the other side tends to be seen more readily as aggressive or hostile. There is a growing acceptance of the need to acknowledge the reality of aggressive violence from within one's own community.

It was also acknowledged that interface workers had to recognise the very real fears that people living in interface areas often had about threats of attack from outside and that this could impact on how people responded to rising tensions and attacks on neighbouring areas.

Logging Incidents

In a number of areas interface workers attempt to record as many incidents as possible in a systematic manner. In other areas the interface workers agreed that ideally they would like to be able to log all incidents but they also felt that this could place an extra and unrealistic demand on already stretched local volunteers.

Logged incidents are also discussed in most of the formal network meetings as part of a wider debriefing session on the state of the local context and to help interface workers to plan future strategies.

Those who logged incidents usually entered the data onto a computer to be able to compile both monthly and annual records of the number, type and location of incidents. These might be used as internal documents to assess the impact that their work was having and to enable them to monitor trends in their local area.

Mobile Phone Networks

Mobile telephones have become widely established as one of the basic tools for interface workers. Since they were first introduced in 1997 most areas with interface communities have linked people into networks to provide a means of maintaining lines of communication during times of tension. Mobile phones have enabled activists to monitor the situation on the street and retain contact with colleagues and people on the other side of the interface.

Most networks provide links between neighbouring communities on both a single identity and a cross community basis, as well as with key statutory agencies and other supporting organisations.

The key element of the mobile phone networks is that they are networks of community groups and activists who use the phones as tools to maintain contact during times of tension. Although in some areas there is a single person who acts as the key contact, the preferred option is to have a small group of people who can share responsibilities for responding to calls and liaising with the neighbouring communities.

The basic principles for most of the current phone networks are simple and are based on the approach developed by the first such network co-ordinated through the Community Development Centre North Belfast in 1997:

- Each community involved in the network has one or more mobile phone.
- Each of the phone holders has the contact number of other members of the network as well as those of a number of other phone holders.
- Each of the groups agrees to monitor the phone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week during the agreed period of time.
- Each phone holder agrees to respond to calls to their phone and expects the same response to calls they make to other phone holders.
- Phone holders agree to try to respond to requests for information or to requests for help in addressing tension, violence or aggression involving members of their own community.

Beyond these basic principles interface workers have highlighted the following aspects of good practice:
- Networks should be formally re-established each year to ensure groups from both communities are fully organised, that the networks on each side are both established and the basic procedures are understood.
- Ideally each area should have more than one contact phone number, this provides for an alternative should one phone be unanswered for any reason.
- Phones should be shared among members of a community group, to ensure that the load does not always fall on one individual to respond to calls.
- People should inform members of the network if they are not going to be accessible at any time or if they have been accessible and are going home or to bed.
- There should be a means of debriefing among members of the networks following periods of tension, after serious incidents and at the end of the summer to further develop shared understandings of practice and problems that might occur.
- Mobile phone networks are at best only one component within a broader strategy that needs to include a relationship-building element

The first networks involved umbrella community based groups renting a number of phones, which were then distributed to local groups or activists for the summer months, but after the summer the networks were usually suspended until the following year.

However, as mobile phones have become more common so the networks have become more permanent year round projects. And while some networks are still centralised, in a few areas more informal networks have

been adopted, which use the participant's own phones rather than provide a separate and dedicated network phone.

In the centralised networks all phone costs are paid by the co-ordinating organisation, but under the more informal networks participants may receive a financial contribution towards the running of their own phone.

The proliferation of phone networks has also highlighted a number of practical problems emerging from their success:

- The phone networks can be abused, a small number of people can come to be considered as the only ones with responsibility for responding to problems and tensions at the interface.
- The police can demand too much of community workers and can expect them to respond at all times of the day and night.
- Members of the networks can feel under increasing stress due to expectations that they will respond to calls at any time.

Furthermore although the phone networks have been generally regarded as a positive initiative there is often uncertainty about whether funding will be available. All groups rely on some form of grant funding to finance the ongoing phone networks, and although a number of people have suggested that mobile phone companies should be encouraged to sponsor the networks, to date none have been willing to do so.

Mobile phones are now a basic tool used to assist in conflict intervention work, but they are simply a tool. As such equipment has become a common item they have also been used by young people to organise meetings with young people from neighbouring areas at an interface so that they can participate in forms of recreational violence.

4. Working on the Interface

There was a general agreement that interface workers need to have a good knowledge of their local community and area and a degree of respect and authority within their community if they are to be able to work effectively. Others added that interface workers also need individual credibility with people on the other side if they are to be effective.

It was also stated that community workers needed to take a lead in engaging in cross community work and addressing interface issues because too often elected politicians did not do so. But people also argued that it was important that interface workers should also be accountable to their own community and accept that they were at best a spokesperson for their community.

At the same time there were differences of opinion about some of the other requirements for successful interface work.

Some people highlighted the beneficial role that ex-prisoners can play while others emphasised the advantages of good contacts with key people in paramilitary organisations. Others in contrast emphasised the positive role that women can play in such contexts and felt that too often situations suffered from male posturing and a macho attitude.

There were also differences of opinion on the benefits of having paid workers to address interface issues as opposed to drawing on a strong volunteer base. Some people emphasised the benefits of being able to draw upon a strong volunteer base, as this reduced the need to rely on outside funding, while others stressed the need for more full time workers as relying on volunteers for such stressful work can be unrealistic as they get burnt out too quickly.

Most felt that there was a need to be able to draw upon as large a number of people as possible and this would include paid interface workers, local activists, community workers, volunteers and local residents.

It was also recognised that there is a need to balance the demands that are placed on volunteers, to limit burn out and also to reduce the potential of tensions developing between paid staff and volunteers. In some areas paid workers had established rotas for volunteers that they worked with to try to clearly define and limit the demands that were being placed upon people and thereby prevent people from spending too much time at the interface.

People in all areas recognised that they could always use more volunteers to monitor the situation at the interface and also that they would always lose some volunteers to other interests and therefore would need to involve new volunteers simply to maintain numbers.

In many areas interface workers felt it was important to devolve responsibility for monitoring and responding to the situation at the interface to the lowest or most local level, that is to people living on or near to the interface. It was felt that local residents would be most attentive to developments and most keen to try to reduce scope for violence and disorder.

Most interface areas involved paid staff working alongside volunteers and in many areas interface workers provided forms of mentoring and support to local residents or community volunteers as they built up their skills, capacity and confidence in taking more responsibility for monitoring the interface.

All interface workers acknowledged the need to accept their limitations in what they could do. They noted that while they are trying to improve relationships with neighbouring communities, they also had to retain the support, trust and confidence of their own communities. There is always a limit to what can be achieved and there will always be situations that cannot be controlled. Everyone had experienced times when the situation on the ground had got out of control or become too violent and the interface workers had to walk away or stand to one side and limit themselves to monitoring developments rather than continue to try to intervene. People stated that sometimes the only thing they could do was to phone a counterpart from the other community and acknowledge that they could not do anything to stop acts of violence.

Inclusivity

Interface workers acknowledged the need to be able to draw upon as wide a range of people as possible if they were to maintain peaceful interfaces. A number of people emphasised the need for interface workers to work with people with 'power on the ground' and with what one person described as the 'darker side of community activism' if the interfaces were to be kept calm and quiet. Others phrased it as the need to work with 'people with authority'.

Many people cited their experience that ex-prisoners were consistently among the most committed and most effective at dealing with disorder

on the ground. A number also referred to the arrest of Sean Kelly in the summer of 2005 and the subsequent questioning of the role of ex-prisoners in managing disorder as a major factor that impacted on the willingness of some people to continue to try to calm tense situations.

Most people said that interface workers should decide who were the most appropriate and effective people to assist in reducing or preventing trouble at interfaces, based on their local knowledge. But all also stated that interface workers needed to be able to draw upon all effective lines of contact and support including people from diverse paramilitary, community and political backgrounds.

Valuing the Work of Interface Workers

Many interface workers felt that there was not enough recognition of the work that was done on the ground to ensure that the interfaces remained reasonably quiet. It was noted that even relatively minor incidents could take a considerable time to deal with and many workers felt that they were on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week through the summer months and they might have to respond to a call at very short notice.

Some also mentioned that they felt that more consideration needed to be given to issues of safety when they were on the streets in sometimes violent contexts. In some areas there have been discussions about the benefits of having a visible means of identification, such as a highly coloured jacket, which would help to make the interface workers visible to their counterparts on the other side and would also help to identify interface workers to the PSNI. This idea is currently under consideration by some groups.

Another person raised the issue of insurance cover for people working on interfaces and wondered what the consequences would be if they were injured while trying to prevent disorder.

The North Belfast Interface Network highlighted the primacy of personal safety of people working on the interface and had produced a simple set of guidelines to govern their work. These are printed on the back of a folder which is given to all those involved in the network, they state:

> *The role of the network is to prevent and reduce violent confrontations and tensions at interface areas through communication, dialogue, intervention and vigilance.*

This network is a voluntary partnership and is governed by the following guidelines which we believe will protect people and ensure that everyone involved is:
- *Treated with respect;*
- *Personal safety is paramount;*
- *Contact relevant people / agencies;*
- *Be calm, measured and respectful in your approach; consult – be assertive not aggressive;*
- *Ask for assistance, do not make demands;*
- *Be aware of your and other's limitations.*

It was also suggested that the more established organisations involved in interface work should consider ways in which they could thank people who had been involved in such activities on a voluntary basis. One way that this had been done in the past was to hold a small function with a dinner for volunteers after the main summer period has passed.

5. Developing Diverse Contacts

Interface workers emphasised the need to build wide-ranging working relationships involving a diverse range of groups and individuals and to consolidate these into more formal networks if they are to sustain effective work. But they also noted the difficulties that can be involved in building effective or appropriate cross community contacts, particularly:
• in areas where there had been a history of inter-communal tensions or hostilities; and
• in situations where previous contacts had been broken off by one party.

A number of people highlighted the benefits of initially building on a relatively small number of established personal contacts in setting up the network and then to expand membership and bring in a wider range of people, if and when this was appropriate.

All the cross community networks met in mutually accessible venues for their meetings. Some drew support from third party organisations to help facilitate meetings, while in other areas the groups sustained the networks without any outside assistance. Good administrative support was regarded as an important aspect of ensuring that meetings were held regularly, minutes were produced and agendas were set.

Groups noted that it was important to make best use of the autumn and winter months for dialogue, discussions and planning, while the spring was used more for planning for forthcoming events and beginning the focus of monitoring activities on the ground. The quieter winter months can also be used for more discrete dialogue and for developing longer-term strategic thinking.

Interface workers also felt it was important to always maintain cross community dialogue on a broad range of issues, rather than limiting them to interface issues. In this way if tensions on the ground restricted discussion about managing the interfaces, cross community dialogue could always continue on less contentious issues.

Interface workers highlighted a number of important activities that can be assisted through the involvement in cross community networks

• **Debriefing:** all networks used their meetings to debrief about any incidents that had taken place recently and to discuss how the various

members had responded. This included looking at issues that had been successfully dealt with and those where greater difficulties had been experienced.

- **Dialogue:** network meetings provide space and time for open and frank dialogue and discussion of key issues. Some networks met on a weekly basis, others on a monthly basis, but agreeing to hold regular meetings can also mean that discussions do not need to be hurried and can be picked up in subsequent meetings if issues are not resolved or if groups need to consult with other members of their community.

- **Learning:** it was emphasised that talking and listening to others were important elements of the process that helped to create a greater understanding of the other's view, and provided opportunities for sharing of new information that could change perceptions of events and processes as well as help to build stronger relationships.

- **Taking Risks:** building stronger and deeper relationships means that groups are often more willing to provide support for each other on cross community initiatives and to take calculated risks in response to local tensions that they otherwise would not have.

- **Planning:** network meetings are used to share information about forthcoming events and activities and to advise each other of other local projects and initiatives.

- **Better Networks:** working together on interface issues can also provide a basis for neighbouring communities to work together more effectively on other less contentious projects.

- **Realistic Expectations:** regular meetings and working together can help different groups recognise the difficulties and limitations that groups in the other community may be experiencing and can thus help to establish more realistic expectations of what each may be able to achieve or deliver.

- **Own Limitations:** similarly groups need to be open and honest about their own limitations. It is important to be realistic about what you can do and not to promise what cannot be delivered.

- **Stresses and Strains:** regular meetings can help enable cross community networks to deal effectively with the stresses and strains

that can be caused by external or unexpected events. Interface workers emphasised the importance of meeting regularly and maintaining inter-communal dialogue despite the pressures generated by external events and tensions.

- **Make the Other Human:** regular contact helps build strong relationships and can help people recognise the humanity of the people from the 'other side'.

- **Diversity:** everyone acknowledged the need for a broad and varied range of cross community contacts, just as one needed diverse contacts within one's own community for different issues, and at times some people would be unavailable or uncontactable. Working within networks can be useful in confirming who is the most appropriate contact in different situations.

Building Relationships

All interface workers emphasised the importance of good relations as a key factor in being able to prevent outbreaks of disorder and to respond to low-level violence. Relationships can be developed and strengthened by meeting together on a regular basis in different networks, but they can also be established through working together on the ground on a variety of different types of activities and projects. Such relationships can then be drawn upon at times of tension.

People acknowledged that developing strong effective relationships takes time and many of the relationships that interface workers draw upon have been built up over a period of years. However, working together will help to build trust, respect and confidence between people of different backgrounds and can help to develop shared understandings of each other's perspectives.

In general people accepted that they should not have a veto on who the other community chooses as their representatives, but some people also spoke of the need to break down established perceptions about specific individuals from the other side that might have been built up during years of tension and conflict. This would best be done through meetings, discussions and finding ways of working together that would establish a degree of trust and credibility.

However, it was also noted that at times it could be difficult to accept the presence of some individuals as community representatives. Activists and

community workers noted that on occasion attending cross community meetings could create problems and undermine support among one's own community. In building wider relationships it was always important to sustain the approval and trust of one's own community.

People also noted that strong relationships help them to develop a deeper understanding of the difficulties people from the other side experienced in their work and the limitations that might be imposed on their actions.

At the same time sharing perspectives about the limitations and difficulties that each community were having could help people be more realistic of what they might expect and could also help build confidence in the good faith of the other community.

Building strong relationships with people from neighbouring communities also encouraged people to share ideas and good practices as well as making sure that they kept the other side informed of any potential events or activities that might impact on each other.

A key element of relationship building is learning to listen to other perspectives and hearing other people's concerns and fears. Many people said that this made them realise how similar these were to their own.

Having a good relationship with people from another community provided a strong base for working on other issues. Some groups highlighted the fact that they worked on a wide range of issues that were unrelated to the interface, others emphasised that their relationships had enabled them to move on from simply discussing fire-fighting activities to starting to develop longer-term strategic planning for the interface.

Good relationships meant that people also felt they were able to discuss problems and things that had gone wrong with greater confidence and that they were able to deal with ill feelings rather than letting them fester.

Breaking Contacts

People also acknowledged that they were working in an unpredictable environment and at times relationships came under stress and sometimes even broke down. It was noted that at times formal communication was suspended because people came under pressure from within their own community rather than because of any personal desire to break contacts.

Some people noted that at times when contacts had formally been suspended or broken, the strength of personal relations usually enabled some degree of communication and contacts to be maintained, although this might have to be done discreetly. Sustaining lines of communication was important in that this helped to ensure that dialogue and discussion were able to be picked up and continued at a later date.

People also noted that while dialogue over interface issues or community relations might be suspended, many people also tried to maintain contacts in relation to other non-contentious projects.

However, sometimes communication and contacts were completely broken and if this happened they could be very difficult to re-establish. A complete breakdown in contacts could readily undermine the underlying relationships and any sense of trust and confidence in the good faith of the other that had been built up.

It was suggested that at times of extreme tension people needed to consider whether they were simply breaking contact with the other side as a temporary or tactical measure or whether they were breaking off relations entirely. A temporary suspension of direct communication was acknowledged as a fact of life, while breaking off relations entirely was considered as a more serious matter.

It was also noted that at times when direct communication was not possible, people usually tried to ensure that some form of indirect communication, using third parties or an extended chain of contacts, was available.

6. Working with Others

Interagency groupings

Following the serious disorder in parts of Belfast in 1996, a wide ranging working group of statutory bodies and community representatives, including staff from the Community Development Centre North Belfast and Belfast Interface Project, met to review the quality of the response by statutory bodies to wide scale public disorder. This group became the Interagency Working Group on Displaced Families. In 1997 the working group published revised statutory procedures for responding to disorder – 'Operational Procedures for Displaced Families'. This document has been revised annually and produced and distributed by NIHE since then.

In 2000, the violence associated with the Shankill Feud forced further examination of the capacity of statutory bodies to deal with serious and unexpected disorder, while the working group remained as a useful conduit between community and statutory sectors.

In 2003, following a review of its operation, the Interagency Working Group was re-structured as the Interagency Oversight Group, with a remit to oversee the effectiveness of other agencies in addressing issues relating to the needs of those displaced, distressed or dispersed through civil disturbance.

In late 2005, this group itself was disbanded following the formation of a new interagency structure, the Belfast Resilience Forum, which aims to provide a structured approach to comprehensively deal with issues related to emergency situations.

Private Businesses

In a number of areas the local interface workers have engaged with members of the local business community to seek their support in attempting to reduce trouble at interfaces.

The most widespread engagement has been with local off licenses and alcohol retailers to try to reduce the sale of alcohol to young people. In some areas people have found alcohol sellers willing to work with them. One initiative involved each business using different coloured carrier bags so that it was easy to tell where the young people were buying their drink.

In other areas the local community workers have worked with staff and owners of fast food outlets to try to reduce levels of anti-social behaviour and sectarian exchanges. Elsewhere interface workers were in contact with landlords of privately rented properties to try to improve the quality of fencing to try to limit the access points being used by young people involved in interface disorder.

In each case the interface workers have tried to emphasise the social responsibility of private businesses as well as the financial benefits of reduced tensions for businesses. In general interface workers have found that locally based businesses were more open to engagement than multi-nationals.

Politicians

Many interface workers expressed caution about working with 'politicians'. However, the term 'politicians' appears to be largely reserved for the more senior local figures from the UUP, DUP, Alliance and SDLP and a number of interface workers were close to Sinn Féin, the PUP and the UPRG, with whom they often worked closely.

Few interface workers had anything positive to say about many of their local political representatives. Many gave examples of politicians making statements that made the work of interface workers more difficult or of political interventions that only served to create tension within local relationships. People generally felt that politicians worked to their own agenda and to boost their own profile rather than aiming to contribute to the improvement of an interface community.

Most interface workers suggested that politicians should be kept at arms length, and said that they would not willingly invite them to participate in local networks or on working groups, as too often experience suggested they worked to their own agenda. More people suggested that politicians would be more likely to do harm and make things worse rather than make a positive contribution to local dialogue.

The exceptions to this were largely limited to Sinn Féin and PUP representatives, and some independent politicians, who often worked closely with groups working in interface areas. However, a number of groups said they would welcome genuine and effective political interventions and a higher quality of political leadership than at present.

PSNI

The police were acknowledged as a key player in responding to issues of violence and disorder in interface areas. But while most groups working in unionist areas spoke of a variety of types of contacts that they had with the PSNI, no groups working in nationalist areas were currently working directly with the police.

Groups working in nationalist areas did note though that if they did need to communicate with the police there was apparently an established procedure whereby they contacted a local Sinn Féin representative who would then contact the Northern Ireland Office Civil Rep, who would then convey their concerns to the PSNI.

Groups working in unionist areas noted that most of their links with the police were at a local level, with neighbourhood officers and inspectors, rather than with more senior officers or strategic levels. Some people said they would welcome more strategic level contacts and there would be a benefit from better liaison and understanding with the PSNI over strategy and tactics. Others were happy with their current contacts and levels of engagement.

In general interface workers suggested that the police were often willing to allow them time and space to try to intervene before the police intervened themselves, but a number of people also felt that the police sometimes expected too much of interface workers. They felt that at times the police were too cautious about intervening and some people resented being woken up by a phone call from the police telling them about trouble on the interface.

They also felt some inconsistency from the police towards interface workers. A number noted that while at times the police welcomed their intervention at others they did not seem to recognise that the interface workers were trying to reduce tensions, but rather they were treated as just another person in the crowd. Some reported having been hit by a police baton while trying to calm a situation; others cited the case of Sean Kelly in creating concerns among ex-prisoners about maintaining a willingness to carry on working at the interface.

A number of people said that they were never sure how the police might respond when dealing with trouble at an interface. Sometimes interface workers felt that they responded too passively and seemed to wait to see what would unfold, while at others they engaged in what was considered a very aggressive manner.

Some people felt that the nature of the police response depended more on the attitude of the local commander to local interface workers than the context on the ground. They also felt that if they could build better relations with the PSNI this would lead to a greater degree of trust, more scope for effective action, and less suspicion and thus potential for confrontation.

A number of interface workers in unionist areas believed that there was a need to work with the police both to raise awareness among police officers about the work being done by interface workers, and also to raise awareness of the problems faced by the police among interface workers.

CCTV

Closed circuit television cameras have been erected in many of the interface areas of north and east Belfast in recent years. Initially there was considerable suspicion and hostility to the presence of the cameras and a number were attacked and damaged, but the cameras have now become an established feature of interface areas and appear to attract little attention.

However, while the CCTV cameras attract little hostility, there is little enthusiasm for them and few people were convinced that they contributed in any way to making interface areas more peaceful.

Interface workers in one area said that there had been some impact on local youths when a number of people had been successfully prosecuted on the basis of CCTV evidence. This had made the young people think about the potential consequences of causing trouble if they could be seen by the cameras.

However, a more common response was that young people soon adapted their behaviour in the presence of cameras and wore hoods, hats or scarves to hide their faces and thus avoid being identified. Others suggested that the flashpoints for violence merely shifted away from the gaze of the cameras and were displaced to other nearby areas. This had created a degree of fluidity in the location of potential flashpoints, which stretched the resources of interface workers.

A number of people in a variety of locations noted that the CCTV cameras appeared to be very selective in the incidents that were filmed. Virtually everyone could recount a story of an incident that had occurred

near to a CCTV camera but when they contacted the police about it they were told that the camera did not film the incident, or was not working, or was facing the wrong way. Perhaps for this reason, many people believed that the cameras were used solely for other policing purposes and not to increase any sense of community safety.

The Media

Many interface workers were very cautious about engaging with the media. None had a good word to say about their experiences with them and most felt that the media rarely contributed in any positive way to the situation in interface areas. People felt that too often stories were one sided and thus had a negative impact on local relations.

People felt that the media had a very simplistic approach to interface issues and that all forms of violence were treated in the same way whether they were caused by drink or related to disputes associated with parades. Some had noted stories in the press about attacks in their area that no one else appeared to be aware of and which raised concerns about the source of such stories and the impact they might have on local relations.

Although some groups deliberately tried to keep a low profile in relation to their work, most interface workers accepted that at times they had to engage with the media. People felt that a key principle in speaking to the media was to take responsibility for problems caused by one's own community, rather than attempt to blame others for them.

In general people felt they needed to be careful about making any statements, but this was more important if they were working on a cross community basis and then ideally they should only issue agreed joint statements. Some people expressed a sense of disappointment when stories appeared about their activities, which they felt could only have come from colleagues they worked with on a cross community basis and served to create unnecessary tensions.

As a bottom line interface workers favoured avoiding contacts with the media as much as possible.

Funders

Groups had an ambivalent relationship with funders. In some areas interface work was undertaken by dedicated and paid workers, while in

others the groups were dependent on volunteers providing their time. However, most interface areas relied to some extent on local people, community groups and activists acting in a voluntary capacity to prevent violence and disorder. Some people felt that statutory bodies and funders expected too much of volunteers and did not appreciate the scale of the work that they did, or the amount of money they saved in preventing acts of violence.

Most groups received funding for various elements of their work, and in particular to help cover the cost of mobile phones and to organise summer 'diversionary' activities for children and young people. Although the support given by some funders was welcomed, in other cases people stated that the application and accounting process was too bureaucratic for the amount of money that was available. Some groups said that they would not apply to some funders as a result of this.

Groups also highlighted difficulties in finding out what types of funding were available and felt that there was a need for more readily accessible information on sources of funding for interface work and activities.

Overall the groups felt there was a need for a more strategic and long term approach to funding interface work, which allowed groups to plan their activities in advance. At present it was felt that if the interfaces were kept quiet over a summer, it was too easy for funders to question the need for resources the following year.

7. Expanding the Remit

Increasingly interface problems have been recognised as one part of a broader web of activities and which means that interface workers are engaging with groups and individuals who are primarily concerned with such matters as community development work, youth issues and anti-social behaviour, environmental issues and regeneration.

Interface workers acknowledge that interface issues need to be more fully included as part of a wider local agenda, rather than being a distinct and separate area of activity.

This includes finding ways to engage both with other types of community-based groups and with the wider community. A number of people highlighted the need to improve and increase the provision of information within their local community and to try to involve members of the wider community in key decisions relating to interface issues. But they also emphasised the need for interface workers to recognise and be responsive to the diversity of voices in all communities as part of this process.

It was agreed that building better links with the local community was important both to increase the level of accountability of people working on interface issues and also to encourage more local people to become involved in helping to manage the interface.

It was felt that it was important to involve more local residents in helping to monitor and respond to tensions and disorder, as a way of increasing information and responsiveness to tensions, but also in helping to build more sustainable local networks to help deal more quickly and effectively with disorder.

Strategic Planning

A number of the networks of groups working in interface areas have identified the need to move from focusing on crisis intervention work and to begin to develop strategic planning in relation both to single identity work and to cross community activities.

In most cases the process of strategic planning is still work in progress, but a number of key elements have been identified:

• The development of a range of short, medium and long-term objectives that are designed to address deeper structural roots of the conflicts and divisions.

• The need to integrate interface work with community development activities.

• To link work that is focused on the local level with activities operating on a citywide level.

• The need to expand the working contacts with statutory agencies beyond short term and interventionist projects.

• The need to develop strategic thinking in conjunction with key statutory agencies working in the fields of housing, environment, regeneration, transport and planning.

• The need to improve levels of co-ordination among statutory agencies and between statutory agencies and community groups with regard to initiatives and activities.

• The necessity of establishing appropriate sources of long term funding to underpin and support long term strategic activities.

Some interface workers noted that at present there appears to be something of a gap between strategic thinking and practice on the ground and that this needs to be bridged if interface work is to move beyond various forms of crisis intervention work. At the same time some noted the difficulties in developing long term planning, as many interface groups were focused primarily on crisis management and if the interfaces were largely quiet there can be less desire to engage with neighbouring communities.

Nevertheless strategic planning is an area that has been widely recognised as an essential element in the future development of work in interface areas.

Young People

Young people have been consistently identified as one of the main instigators of disorder at interfaces. Young people have been involved in

various forms of interface violence for many years, but over recent years their activity has been increasingly identified as a form of anti-social behaviour rather than as political activity. Many young people have used interfaces as a place to hang out with friends but the use of alcohol has often been a factor that in turn led to incidents and trouble starting.

Interface workers identified the need to find ways to engage with young people and make them aware of the impact of their actions rather than simply shout at them or encourage them to move away. In some areas interface workers had encouraged a dialogue between the young people and residents living near the interface so that the young people could be made aware of the negative impact that their attempts to 'protect' or 'defend' the area could have on people who lived there year round.

In other areas the problem of poor parental control was identified as a key factor and the need to find ways of parents taking more responsibility for the actions of their children. In some cases people acknowledged that some parents were unwilling to respond positively but in some areas parents had been surprised at what their children had been doing and were willing to work with interface workers and residents to improve the situation.

A number said that people needed to remember that the young people were usually local residents too and their interests and concerns also needed to be taken into account. In several areas people were exploring how they might involve young people to help prevent interface trouble.

- In one area the interface workers used the phrase 'report not react' as a principle for young people. In the past the young people had been only too willing to respond to attacks or perceived attacks with violence of their own, but now the interface workers were encouraging them to report any incidents to them before any action was taken.

- In another area interface workers were acting as mentors to enable young people to act as interface workers in their own right. It was felt that the young people could be particularly effective in engaging in dialogue with their peers, and especially with young people from outside the area who caused trouble.

- A number of groups were running or developing educational or cultural programmes to engage with young people over a period of months or years to raise their awareness of issues around cultural

difference and thereby improve relations both within the community and between neighbouring communities. Although much of this work was being done on a single identity basis, some groups also envisaged cross–community activities being a part of such programmes.

• In more than one area the young people were encouraged to become involved in a local youth forum and thereby feed their ideas into the wider community.

All the interface workers identified the need to plan for long-term programmes of activity to engage with young people and through these to build relationships and trust between adults and young people. However, they also noted that because a new generation of young people emerged every four or five years such activity needed to be an ongoing part of interface work, rather than something that needed to be done only once.

Many people highlighted the need for better relations between interface workers and youth workers, and several people highlighted the current gap in understanding and engagement between the two areas of work. Interface workers felt that they were forced to undertake youth work because the youth workers were too often unwilling to engage with issues affecting young people outside of the formal youth work framework.

The need for a better dialogue and understanding between youth workers and interface workers was a persistent theme and was raised in many areas. Many people felt that youth work programmes and interface projects should be much more integrated, although to date little progress appears to have been made in achieving this.

Environment and Regeneration

Interface workers in many areas noted the potential benefit that environmental improvements and regeneration could have on improving both the look and the feel of a local interface. A number of groups have been involved with Groundwork Northern Ireland in developing small scale projects to improve their local environment, while some had been involved in much larger scale regeneration work.

Environmental projects have often been relatively small in scale, but even so they can have a significant impact on issues of community safety. The types of activities that groups had developed or advocated to date include:

- The erection of fencing or tree planting designed to reduce direct visual contact between neighbouring areas and thereby reduce taunting among young people.

- The erection of alley-gates to limit the number of local entries that can be used in launching attacks on neighbouring communities.

- The design and development of better and safer play spaces for young people to keep them away from the interface.

- Work with young people to clean up the area and paint murals on interface barriers.

- In 2005 Belfast City Council funded Groundwork to work with groups in a number of areas to try to improve the social and environmental impact of the Eleventh night bonfires.

The aim of much of this work is to improve the local environment and, at the same time, to reduce the scope for trouble and disorder at or near an interface, but the projects can also encourage groups to think more positively about the wider local environment and to consider the wider role of regeneration activities.

However it is also evident that redevelopment and regeneration can lead to the creation of new interface areas and some groups have begun to explore how they can play a role in creating shared spaces and resources that can be used by all local communities rather than accept that local tensions can only be resolved by further segregation.

One prominent example of community led regeneration is on the Stewartstown Road where the Stewartstown Road Regeneration Project has regenerated a substantial section of the interface over recent years. This project involved the demolition of an existing derelict block and its replacement by newly built premises containing a range of shops and offices. The development is designed to be accessible to people from both communities and is being actively maintained as a neutral and shared space. The new development is run as a commercial enterprise, with profits being equally divided between the management of the business and the two local communities. The regeneration project is thus also helping to provide financial support for local groups and activities.

The success of the Stewartstown Road interface regeneration project is in part at least due to the fact that the regeneration programme has been led

and driven by the two local community groups working together on a cross community basis, rather than simply being a part of a wider top down initiative. This work also involves ongoing work on a partnership basis in dealing with interface issues and the management of violence.

The project also highlights the benefits of groups working together to develop long-term local strategies. The Stewartstown Road project began as an idea in 1997 and the first phase of the redevelopment was completed in 2002. The success of the project has in turn meant that the local groups have been able to secure finances for a further regeneration programme of adjacent space on the interface.

Conclusions

A relatively small number of community workers and activists have had a significant impact in reducing levels of tension and violence in the many interface areas of Belfast over recent years. Although much of this work has been carried out in a diverse range of locations and contexts in an attempt to address very localised problems, a small number of common approaches have been developed.

Communication: it is important to maintain lines of communication within and between communities and with key statutory agencies, especially at times of tension and conflict.

Relationships: in many areas the success in initiating and sustaining conflict resolution work has been due in large part to the personal relationships that have been build with individuals from the 'other side'. These relationships have often helped sustain work through periods of extreme crisis.

Networks: in all interface areas groups have developed a range of networks to assist in intervention and prevention work. These include single-identity networks, cross-community forums and networks involving community groups and representatives of statutory agencies.

Inclusivity: most, if not all, groups have highlighted the importance of including all key local actors in the debate and discussions at some stage. They also note the importance of communities choosing their own representatives, without any veto from other parties.

Young People: many community activists noted the prominent role played by young people in sustaining tension at interfaces. They also highlighted the importance of encouraging young people to take more responsibility to become part of the solution rather than seeing them simply as a problem.

Trust: all the above factors and activities are important elements of building and sustaining trust, within and between members of the different groups. Trust is an important factor in helping to sustain communication, relationships and networks, but it was noted that the trust was built up between individuals rather than between the communities that they represent.

Connections: increasingly people are identifying the links between interface work and other forms of community activity. In particular people highlighted the needs to respond to issues of anti-social behaviour, drug and alcohol misuse and mental health problems. They also referred to the importance of integrating interface work with issues of social and environmental regeneration.

It is sobering to appreciate that, in many interface areas, varying levels of intercommunity tension remain the norm rather than the exception and that measures have needed to be developed to address this reality. In many areas interface communities have effectively delegated inter-community relationship building work to a small number of key local workers. Mutual trust has indeed developed between key workers and individuals across a significant number of interfaces, but workers are keenly aware that the task of developing programmes, strategies and more wide ranging relationships across a broader range of individuals and groups remains a major challenge within many interface communities. At the same time, this report provides positive evidence of commitment, dedication and the development of a range of imaginative approaches to this vitally important area of peacebuilding work, shown by interface community workers and groups from across the city.

Organisations Working in Interface Areas

A list of Community Relations Council (CRC) funded organisations that work in interface areas, supplied by CRC.

Ashton Community Trust, Ashton Centre, 5 Churchill Street, Belfast BT15 2BP.
Ardoyne Focus Group, Unit 5, Flax Shopping Centre, Ardoyne Avenue, Belfast BT14 7DA
Ballynafeigh Community Development Association, 283 Ormeau Road, Belfast BT7 3GG.
Beat Initiative, 9-11 Ballymacarrett Road, Belfast BT4 1BT.
Belfast Interface Project, 6 Murray Street, Belfast BT1 6DN.
Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum, 185 Cliftonpark Avenue, Belfast BT14 6DT.
Community Relations Forum, 6a Ballyclare Road, Glengormley, BT36 5EX.
Corrymeela Community, 8 Upper Crescent, Belfast BT7 1NN.
Forthspring Inter-Community Group, 373-375 Springfield Road, Belfast BT12 7DG.
Groundwork NI, 63-75 Duncairn Gardens, Belfast BT15 2GB.
Interaction Belfast, Farset Centre, 638 Springfield Road, Belfast BT12 7DY.
Intercomm, 290 Antrim Road, Belfast BT15 5AA.
Ligoniel Improvement Association, Wolfhill Centre, 148 Ligoniel Road, Belfast BT14 8DT.
LINC Resource Centre, 218 York Street, Belfast BT15 1GY.
Lower North Belfast Community Council, 30-42 York Road, Belfast BT15 3HE.
Mediation Northern Ireland, 83 University Street, Belfast BT7 1HP.
Partnership in Community Transformation, Fortwilliam Park Presbyterian Church, 577 Antrim Road, Belfast BT15 3JL.
Peace and Reconciliation Group, 18-20 Bishop Street, Derry Londonderry, BT48 6RQ.
St Columb's Park House, Limavady Road, Derry Londonderry, BT47 6JY.
Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group, 124 Stewartstown Road, Belfast BT11 9JQ.
174 Trust, Duncairn Complex, Duncairn Avenue, Belfast BT14 6BP.

ICR REPORTS

The following is a list of the most recent research reports that have been produced by ICR. Wherever possible reports are made available on our website, some however remain the property of the commissioning body and are retained as internal documents. A full list of reports, papers and articles can be found on our website.

- **Policing, Accountability and the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Community in Northern Ireland.** Katy Radford, Jennifer Betts and Malcolm Ostermeyer, (2006) Commissioned by Northern Ireland Policing Board and the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.
- **Policing, Accountability and the Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in Northern Ireland.** Katy Radford, Jennifer Betts and Malcolm Ostermeyer, (2006), Commissioned by Northern Ireland Policing Board and the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.
- **Troubled Youth? Young People, Violence and Disorder in Northern Ireland.** Ulf Hansson, (2005) Funded by the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation.
- **Interface Violence in East Belfast during 2002: The impact on residents of Short Strand and Inner East Belfast.** Jonny Byrne, (2005) Funded by EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation.
- **Interface Issues: An Annotated Bibliography.** Mary Conway and Jonny Byrne, (2005) Commissioned by Belfast Interface Project.
- **New Migrant Communities in East Tyrone.** Jennifer Betts and Jennifer Hamilton, (2005) Commissioned by East Tyrone College of Further and Higher Education.
- **No Longer a Problem? Sectarian Violence in Northern Ireland.** Neil Jarman, (2005) Commissioned by Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.
- **Ballysillan Residents' Attitudes towards Church Participation, Community Involvement and Neighbourhood Safety.** Mary Conway, (2005). Ballysillan Bridgebuilding Forum and ICR.
- **Young People's Attitudes and Experiences of Policing, Violence and Community Safety in North Belfast.** Jonny Byrne, Mary Conway and Malcolm Ostermeyer, (2005). Commissioned by the Northern Ireland Policing Board.
- **Young People in Community Conflict.** Jonny Byrne, Jennifer Hamilton and Ulf Hansson, (2005). Commissioned by Northern Health and Social Services Board.

- **Sectarian and Racist Chill Factors in Armagh College.** Jennifer Hamilton, (2005). Commissioned by Armagh College of Further and Higher Education.
- **Community Cohesion: Applying Learning from Groundwork in Northern Ireland.** Neil Jarman, Libby Keyes, Jenny Pearce and Derick Wilson, (2004) Commissioned by Groundwork UK.
- **Sectarianism in Armagh City and District Council Area.** Jennifer Hamilton, (2004) Commissioned by Community Relations Council.
- **Out of Sight: Young People and Paramilitary Exiling in Northern Ireland.** Jonny Byrne, (2004). Commissioned by Save the Children and NIACRO.
- **Report on the Consultation about proposals for a Chinese Community Centre on Donegall Pass, Belfast.** Neil Jarman, (2004). Commissioned by Belfast City Council.
- **Community Relations, Community Cohesion and Regeneration: A training and development strategy for Groundwork Northern Ireland.** Neil Jarman and Paul Hutchinson, (2004). Commissioned by Groundwork NI.
- **Young People in the Greater Shantallow Area.** Ulf Hansson, (2004). Off the Streets and ICR.
- **Sectarianism in the Limavady Borough Council Area.** Jonny Byrne, (2004). Commissioned by Community Relations Council.
- **Mediation Northern Ireland Policing Project: Interim Evaluation.** Neil Jarman, (2004). Commissioned by Mediation Northern Ireland.
- **Demography, Development and Disorder: Changing Patterns of Interface Areas.** Neil Jarman, (2004). Commissioned by Community Relations Council.
- **Crime–A Waste of Time. Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour in Sunningdale.** Fabrice Mourlon and Ulf Hansson, (2004). North Belfast Alternatives and ICR.
- **Evaluation Report of Diversity Challenges.** Ruth Moore, Brandon Hamber and Neil Jarman, (2004). Commissioned by Diversity Challenges.
- **Sectarianism in the Antrim Borough Council Area.** Jonny Byrne, (2004). Commissioned by Community Relations Council.
- **Sectarianism in the Larne District Council Area.** Jonny Byrne, (2004). Commissioned by Community Relations Council.
- **Legislative Provisions for Hate Crime across EU Member States.** Rebecca Thomas, (2004). ICR.
- **Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland.** Kathryn Bell, Neil Jarman and Thomas Lefebvre, (2004). Commissioned by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

Belfast Interface Project

Diversity ⇋ *Equity* ⇋ *Interdependence*

Community Relations Council

ISBN 0-9552259-1-4

£5

*i*CR

INSTITUTE *for* **CONFLICT RESEARCH**

Institute for Conflict Research
North City Business Centre
2 Duncairn Gardens,
Belfast BT15 2GG
Northern Ireland

Tel: +44 (0)28 9074 2682
Fax: +44 (0)28 9035 6654