

# Beginning a debate

An exploration by Ardoyne community activists

*compiled by*

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# Introduction

While the interface between Catholic and Protestant working-class areas of West Belfast is reasonably well defined, the situation in North Belfast is much more confused, with a patchwork quilt of communities living cheek by jowl with one another. This patchwork geography has undoubtedly contributed to the heightened levels of fear and tension frequently found in that part of Belfast; indeed, North Belfast has probably witnessed the highest concentration of sectarian violence and violent deaths arising from 30 years of ‘The Troubles’.

Despite this, North Belfast – on both sides of the religious divide – is composed of ordinary communities whose energies are largely concerned with the needs of everyday living. Only at certain times of the year, or in response to specific incidents, do the two communities come into conflict at any of the various interface points. In certain areas residents from one side of the community have been able to traverse an adjoining interface without hindrance. Such was the case with Holy Cross Girls Primary School, located on what is now the ‘Protestant end’ of Ardoyne Road, where for 30 years Catholic parents had been able to accompany their children to and from school without impediment.

That all changed abruptly in June 2002 when, for a variety of reasons, relationships between the two communities in the area rapidly deteriorated and Protestant residents from the Glenbryn estate attempted to block the passage of the Catholic parents. The latter had to be escorted to the school by a heavy police presence, and the depths to which sectarian attitudes had suddenly sunk were relayed by a sizeable media scrum to a horrified and bewildered world.

In the midst of these events, a public meeting in Ardoyne delegated a small group of people (separate from the ‘Right to Education’ group formed by Holy Cross parents) to engage in negotiations with the Protestant community. Although no communication currently exists with that community, the group continues to meet, to explore ways of moving things forward. It was with a view to furthering that exploration that some of the group engaged in the series of discussions which form the basis of this pamphlet. As the reader will see, those discussions went in an unanticipated direction –which some participants described as ‘challenging’ and ‘difficult’ –but which they felt not only helped to ‘clear the air’ around long-standing internal divisions which had existed for years within Ardoyne, but probably mirrored the path they will eventually have to take in reaching accommodation with their Protestant neighbours. The participants see these discussions, and the openness and honesty they each brought to them, as a necessary first step to beginning a much wider community debate.

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# Beginning a debate

## Stating the purpose

One of the organisers of the Think Tank first sought to remind the other participants as to its purpose.

We are all members of that group of people who were picked at a public meeting around the time of the school protest to engage in some kind of negotiations. Now, we're not here to revisit the course of those negotiations – they are non-existent at the moment, anyway. We're here because among ourselves, and within the wider community, many different questions have arisen: What has been the fall-out from the blockade of Holy Cross school? How do we address issues between the two communities? Are people ready to talk in 'cross-community' terms, or have events put it further away than ever? And, if there *is* any desire to go forward, how do we go about it? And do we need to begin by looking at relationships within our *own* community? It's issues like these we feel it would be useful to discuss here.

I think that the blockade of Holy Cross school is only a symptom of a bigger problem. We have had an interface as a permanent reality, irrespective of the Holy Cross dispute. We have had massive problems at that interface and it has affected different parts of the area. I recently counted thirteen 'For Sale' signs at the top end of Alliance [Avenue], so it shows the dramatic effect that's had on those people's lives.

On the one hand the interface has had this dramatic impact, yet on the other it's almost invisible. I was involved in a piece of work some years ago with different groups from [Nationalist areas of] North Belfast, trying to identify positive and negative stakeholders in the community. And *nobody* identified the Protestant community as being either a positive or a negative stakeholder – they just weren't noticed. We assumed that this was because there was no interface trouble going on at that time. Then Holy Cross came along and it was seen just how much the Protestant community could impact on our areas. And, yet, when we all went away on a residential only a couple of weeks after it had settled down, *once again* nobody mentioned the Protestant community as either a positive or a negative stakeholder, they had become invisible once more. Once the violence settled there didn't seem to be any desire or need by anybody to actually engage with people on the other side. Is that the reality?

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*Note: All indented paragraphs represent a quote, and spaces between quotes indicate when a new contributor is 'speaking'. In line with Think Tank procedure, no quote is attributed, a policy which experience has shown allows for more openness.*

I think we've lived with it for so long that we don't see it in front of our faces – it has just become part of everyday life. Also, we tend to look at the more fixable problems, because the issue at the interface is not a fixable problem for most people. Anyway, I believe that when we talk about interface issues, 'interface' is a nice word for an ugly problem which is sectarianism. And our parents grew through it, we've all grown up through it, we have it as an everyday fact of life – sectarianism is there, it breeds all the other evils that stem from it. But because it's an everyday fact of life, we focus on other issues: community development, health, education... all the basic stuff, and we put the great evil of sectarianism to one side, because it's one of those things which nobody seems to have a solution for.

That might be the reality, but I've always been of the opinion that we should still try to get the Protestant community on board, to build some type of relationship, because of the fact that we do have parades that impact on us – and problems at the interfaces and even with the school could easily erupt again. So I feel that building up a relationship is important to all of us.

That's true. We now have five to seven loyal marches a year: Easter Monday, June, the Twelfth, 12th of August and the December one. And they impact on us every time they occur, to a greater or lesser degree, the Twelfth being the nightmare, but the other ones all have the potential to turn just as ugly.

I think we should face the sectarian bigotry and show that we're prepared to try and break it down instead of finding ourselves in a situation of: 'Oh, holy shit, here's Easter Monday again, what are we going to do here?'

I agree with you that we need to face it, but the problem we have always had – and it was the same problem we encountered when trying to create dialogue for a resolution of the children's plight – was: who do you talk to? The Protestant or Unionist community has been bereft of proper leadership for years; in the last 30-plus years we've seen them fracture into all kinds of different guises and they don't have a cohesive leadership that we could actually engage with. Who is there, or what structure do we go to, to try and engage in dialogue with any hope of finding resolution?

I think people in our community know subconsciously that it's pointless talking to the ones in Glenbryn, because when it comes to the likes of the UDA in Glenbryn or the Shankill or wherever, it's really the government which lets them ones do what they do. We need to have a 'community relations' project between our community and the people who control the power, not the people who are just proxies to that power.

I think these are all some of the points we're hoping will be looked at during these discussions. There are also other issues we might need to look at as well. For a start, just how do we tackle sectarianism within our communities and where does it actually come from? Secondly, given that even this group has all very different opinions, how do you go and negotiate with somebody

when you haven't agreed what your own values are? Do we need to have a clear understanding of where *we're* coming from, collectively?

We're never going to get agreement on *everything*. We may have shared values on certain issues and that's the best we can hope for, but I don't think we're looking to come up with any unanimous viewpoint.

Even if some people here feel there is a need to begin to build bridges with the Protestant community, are people in this community ready for that? Furthermore, does there need to be an internal discussion first? Ardoyne has an image of itself as a tightknit community, but is there consensus within that community as to what it stands for, and what way it wants to go forward?

## Internal dissension

The question as to whether there existed a 'consensus' within Ardoyne opened up quite a lively discussion, touching upon many sensitive local issues.

I think there's a bigger job to be done within the Nationalist community before we can talk to anybody outside it. People seem to have very fixed ideas about who they will, and who they won't, speak to. I have experienced that directly. Some people have expressed a resentment over some of the things I would say, especially when I say that the Church has failed. I would be called a 'Provie priest' one day, a 'Castle Catholic' the next, and the 'SDLP at prayer' the following day – and each one a criticism. Some people claim I'm too closely aligned with 'those ones on the street', and because 'they don't speak for me, therefore *you* don't speak for me' – that's the kind of logic which is out there. However, what strikes me, as somebody coming new into the situation here, is that at the same time there's huge potential there in the richness of our diversity – if there's eight thousand people in this area then there's eight thousand opinions, and I would hate the day there would be one less.

In this area we have, as you say, eight thousand different opinions, but every now and then you hit on a subject that unifies the community, and the school was the prime example. I didn't know anybody who was saying, 'give it up, forget about it', except one voice –but that voice was a voice in the wilderness, I'm glad to say. Everybody else was saying: 'No, we've taken enough rubbish.' The rights of the children to go to school free from fear was what everybody took a common stance on.

Not a totally common stance. A lot of people were very suspicious of outside elements trying to infiltrate the school thing – all the political stuff, Sinn Féin... whatever. People just wanted to be strong together and keep away from any kind of political thing. I mean, there were many people in the

school unhappy with the way the ‘Right to Education’ group was set up, about who was involved in it, and who wasn’t involved... and I had my reservations as well. There’s still a lot of suspicion out there, a lot of political division, this community is still very much split. Now, I’m in community work thirty years and I’ve had a lot of suspicions about many things being more political than community. I believe that everybody should be working together for the community, but there’s still strong suspicions about community issues being used politically. When the Holy Cross blockade first began people were saying that they didn’t want our response to be taken over by different groups, it was to be kept solely with the parents. For some of the parents weren’t happy with the way things were going –who was calling meetings and where meetings were held... things like that... and a definite controversy arose. I think one of the reasons why people now want to come together is to finally stop all that, so that when something does happen to us we can respond as one community.

But you have to remember that the ‘Right to Education’ group was itself composed entirely of parents, who all had a right to be involved. And the group members were selected by other parents, not by anybody else.

I think this perception about Sinn Féin taking over everything is just paranoia. Anyway, my experience is that there have been other takeovers. For example, our community for long enough was represented at government level by the Flax\*, and that didn’t fully represent this community. We had seen Tory ministers and NIO people come in and out of the Flax, and the Flax was getting this and that for community development and economic regeneration... yet the community wasn’t consulted. So that caused hurts and there’s divisions there that aren’t healed yet, but that is what our community is: it’s a divided community with different opinions, and that’s a healthy thing.

I can’t accept your statement about the Flax; it isn’t how I saw it, ’cause I was involved in it. You’re saying there about Tory ministers coming and going or whatever, but –and I was there from the very inception – the purpose behind whatever the Flax did was to make use of whatever was available for the community. If you didn’t take up those schemes that were on offer, if you hadn’t got those training schemes, then our community wouldn’t have got anything and would have suffered even more. It was certainly difficult at times, because there was all this anti-British stuff going on in the background, but those individuals who set up the Flax Trust were brave enough to step forward and do it. I got criticised for it, and I’m still getting criticised, but I don’t care – I did it for my kids and my community. In my opinion, the Flax gave us a vision for the future. We were stuck in a black hole and had nowhere to go, and there was a war going on, and a vision of how we could move forward had been set in front of us – and I accepted that vision for my family, my future, for this community. And people worked

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\* The Flax Trust was set up in 1977 as a community regeneration programme.

their butts off for thirty years to do it all, and the exact same thing is happening now with your Focus group and everybody else – you are all trying to find a common vision. Only it's a wee bit more acceptable now, but we had exactly the same desire for a vision then. There was money available for community development and economic development and people wanted to make use of it.

Many people would have seen the likes of Flax as being collaborators with the system which was attacking our families. As well as that, it makes me angry that one organisation, with no accountability to my community, controlled the economic wellbeing of my community. I was born in Jamaica Street, and I have lived in this community all my life. Yet I have never been asked by the Flax Trust for my opinion. I have an opportunity at every election to vote for any political party I choose, and at least that gives me some sense of democracy, but I felt that here was an organisation that gave me no voice at all.

But that's wrong; I'm telling you, you're wrong. We carried out surveys round every door and everything that was done by the Trust was in response to the answers we got. Surveys about street lighting and a new health centre and whatever – done as consultation with the community for Flax.

There has always been a big issue around 'chucks and church'\* in Ardoyne. There was a perception through a big part of the Troubles that church groups were funded in order to undermine any movement that was coming through from the radical grassroots – Sinn Féin or whatever. The Church was seen as acceptable by government. And some people aligned themselves to a group that was perceived as a 'chuck group', some to a group that was perceived as a 'church group'; others didn't want to be involved in anything because of all this division. But our hope now is that it shouldn't matter which you are as long as your intention is to work towards improvement in the area.

People perceived the Flax Trust as a church-based group. But that's not true; it's an unfair comment.

Thirty years ago, whenever people in this area first got involved in community development, there was a war going on, the 'Troubles' were at their height, and people put their energies into different activities. Some went into community development, and anybody could get involved in it, there was always an open forum. Many people came on board, a lot of people didn't, but groups gradually emerged who could represent the area. Okay, the government did vet these groups, and they weren't giving funding to anybody they felt had any kind of [radical political] association. A lot of church groups got the ACE schemes because government felt that money wasn't going to be filtered down to the IRA. But that was all government policy, that wasn't decided upon by the people – we had to take advantage of what was available.

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\* A reference to the political differences which existed between members of the republican movement ['chuckies', after the Irish *tiocfaidh ár lá* ('our day will come')] and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church.

There's also the perception that there was a lot of internal vetting going on as well, that people internally within communities vetted themselves. Some people will turn around and say today: you know that the Ardoyne Association regulates itself, it picks its own members... that's the way some people see it.

But that's your *perception*, you don't know if it's a fact – you never came to us to find out.

I've tried to go to a few of the meetings but I haven't been allowed or it's being held at different times.

But who would stop you? You can come any time you want.

I'm just saying that these are the type of perceptions people hold.

Perceptions can be very negative things. We all paint a picture of somebody and say: 'Oh, they're in the Ardoyne Association so they must be such and such, and they will never change.' Just like some will say about me: 'Oh, he was in the IRA, and he will always be like that.' People react to different things in different ways and over time they can change their attitudes towards things. But people sometimes don't allow you to change. I think half the suspicions that arose around the school blockade was when some people at meetings talked about the need to see 'the bigger picture', and all of a sudden others became suspicious, because they thought: 'They're thinking politically instead of emotionally and reacting right away.' For loads of people in Ardoyne were going: 'Where's Sinn Féin, where's the RA, why don't people just go and get into them and get it over and done with!' And there was other people saying: 'No, you could do it this way.' It was that debate between reaction and pro-action which made everybody suspicious about agendas.

Can I just say that the government was at fault too. While we were engaged in the school issue the government was actually using us and trying to divide us – phoning different people telling different stories, or setting up meetings and asking certain ones to come here but asking others to go there.

I think that's an important point, and it shows how much things have actually changed, for people recognised what was happening and said: the only way that we can overcome this is to communicate more effectively with each other, so that we know what to do when anybody from the NIO phones any of us up asking what we think about something. Hopefully people will now say: 'I'll get back to you when I've talked to everybody else.' We have to develop an approach where we're not just forced into a situation where we have to give personal opinions, but hold back until we find out what other people think.

That's a positive thing which maybe happens within community groups, but the majority of people in the community wanted the people who were doing that to the children dealt with right away, that day; they didn't want to know that in five years' time they might be in front of a European court.

Despite this evidence of long-standing divisions within the community, there was a desire that everyone should now move forward more constructively.

I was only a nipper when all this stuff about ‘church or RA’ was going on. I have seen the benefits of the Flax Trust on this area. But the way I look at it is this: we’re now in the year 2003 and today’s young people don’t give two fiddlers about what happened in the past. People of your generation are carrying baggage forward that the people of my age and younger are either unaware of or don’t particularly care about.

## Perceptions and rights

However, before discussion could turn to more constructive matters, it was evident that even current issues were creating divisions.

Not only are different perceptions an important issue *within* Ardoyne, but outsiders have their own perception of us. During the school blockade, it seemed that people’s perception was that Ardoyne was all IRA-controlled, and that everybody in Ardoyne is an IRA-sympathiser. Yet we’re not. But how do you dispel that kind of myth? And, you know, there’s a lot of things that people still can’t say out loud, because they feel a bit afraid of speaking their minds. There’s different points of view held by people in Ardoyne – they aren’t all republican minded – but that isn’t always put across. The whole thing about Ardoyne is that you’re put in this box and you’re labelled a particular way. And even a lot of the people I’ve been speaking to through cross-community work would hold that perception. And some people use that against us. Even when we were walking the road [to the school] people in the Protestant community were saying we’re all IRA or whatever. And the excuse they were using for their protest was that we were bringing in republicans to protect us going up and down the road. They even claimed that that fella who was in the Shankill bombing was walking the road –but he wasn’t. I mean, they’re using all these excuses to justify what they were doing to our community, and they’re helped in that because Protestant communities have this perception about all those who live in Ardoyne. But the reality is completely different – there’s many different opinions here.

The way it was put across in the media was that republicans being on the road was a bad thing. But republicans have just as much right to be there as anyone else – and there’s republicans who have kids at the school.

Sure Wheatfield Primary has UDA and UVF parents in the school, so what gives them the right to talk?

In terms of the politics of Ardoyne, there were approximately 4000 people on the electoral register at the last election, and 2500 of them voted for Sinn Féin. So the perception that it is a Sinn Féin area is quite understandable with

those sort of figures. I accept that the fifteen hundred others who voted for other parties, or chose not to vote, deserve representation too and their opinion needs to be heard. There are many different viewpoints and we have to make space for them all.

But some viewpoints aren't listened to –even to do with the mural\* and the flags going up. All our kids suffered in the Holy Cross blockade. I live in Estoril Park, and nobody asked me whether I wanted a mural there – personally I was against it. And people who live facing it don't want it either, but nobody asked them about it, it was just put up. And one of the reasons I am against it is because people from Glenbryn are still coming down the Ardoyne Road to the shops. And when they come down I speak to them, I make sure they feel welcome. Now, if I had to go up their part of the road and somebody had put a mural up about the Shankill bombing – which I wasn't responsible for – I would see it as a slap in the face for everybody in my community. It sort of says to people: 'This is what you lot done to us'... it's another form of sticking it up their noses again. I think it's served its purpose, and should be removed. Another reason is that kids are seeing it every day. I spoke to people in the counselling service and they're saying that the kids are suffering as a result of it still being there, it brings back all the bad memories. But the main point I want to make is that no community committee was consulted when that went up.

I think the mural had a role to play during the crisis because it was a message that went out to the world – a simple picture which told a thousand words. Whether it serves that purpose now or not I don't know.

I also think it served a purpose, but I agree with you that, purely on the psychological impact on children, I would have my reservations now about it. I mean when I see that child's face... it breaks my heart. I mean, she was my daughter's best friend, and to see her on the wall...

But nobody was consulted about that mural going up. That's what I mean, there's big issues that take place which divide people. I know a lot of people now don't go to the Easter Tuesday memorial service because it was politicised and all this kind of stuff.

But it was always politicised, it was a republican memorial! It was never a non-political commemoration.

One of the years that I went your man with the beard – I can't remember his name – said something about the war and I never went back.

But there was people legitimately agreed with the war in Ardoyne and they believed –as I believed – that the best way to defend ourselves against the British government and the British Army was to fight them.

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\* A wall mural showing different aspects of the school blockade, including a particularly harrowing depiction of one of the school children screaming in terror just after Loyalists threw a pipe-bomb at the police.

But *I* didn't.

Well, the majority of people in Ardoyne disagreed with the British Army.

Okay, but not everybody wanted to go down the road to war.

The majority of people that I know, the majority of my family, disagreed with the British Army in our area. My experience of the British Army in the area legitimised my reaction to it. But I didn't go and invade England, I tried to stop them doing what they were doing on *my* street. As for the stuff about murals, I understand about you're saying about the mural, I suppose it probably doesn't serve a purpose now, but given the way the media misrepresent most things, the likes of the mural was the only way we could tell every single media outlet the exact same story – that's what the purpose of it was.

But who's 'we'? Who decided what?

The community. Okay, you say that you didn't want it and someone facing you didn't want it, but murals go up as a reaction to serious events, they're not the product of a door-to-door survey.

Ardoyne isn't different from any other community, whether it's on the Malone Road, Turf Lodge, Divis Flats, Derry, Tyrone... anywhere. You've people in it, and people have different opinions, there's no great 'this is what everybody believes', it just doesn't happen like that.

The people who do the murals are political artists who react to a situation, and the terrible tragedy of it. When young Cassidy from the Bone was killed with a plastic bullet on the New Lodge Road, within a day or two there was a mural up about plastic bullets, because it's a way of telling a story. And murals by and large serve that purpose; some of them are great, some of them are crap, that's like all art. But if we had to debate whether each mural went up, we would strangle ourselves on opinion consensus.

Say some people do want to put up something, is it now time to take the community on board in some form? We may not be able to go round every door and ask everybody, but can we create mechanisms which bring most people in with the greatest consensus?

I think that's what we're trying to do. I think at that particular time there was a consensus that people did support something like that, perhaps there wouldn't be the same consensus now. The Focus Group have gone around removing graffiti. But just as some people don't want the graffiti, there are other people have come at us with very strong arguments, saying: 'Hang on a second, that's a valid form of political expression. We're still not having proper access to the media, and yet you're taking it off the walls – why?' So there are people who think it's a valid form of political expression. We've been removing graffiti off walls and people have been approaching us and saying that what we're doing is political censorship.

Going back maybe about ten years ago, we had an ACE scheme, and we had about thirty or forty environmental workers, and we started painting out graffiti, political graffiti, such as 'Fuck the RUC' and things like that. And I got a phone call to come to a Sinn Féin incident centre, and I was pulled in for an hour and I was told not to do it again, and the fellas that worked on the scheme –who were all young teenagers –were all threatened and told not to do it.

But you should consult with someone about *why* you do it, or even if you *should*.

So should *others* consult us when they put flags and murals on my street – it's the same thing.

When we did it recently, we put it in the *Focus News* about removing graffiti, and we were asking people about what they wanted. And the majority of people said they didn't want the graffiti up.

Ten years ago I was probably getting a different experience, too, you know. It was: 'Stop your car and get out! And take everything out of it and put it on the ground!' Yet I never seen no-one coming along and saying: 'Here, it's wrong to be doing that to that fella. You have no right to be stopping people like that.'

But the people who worked on the scheme were actually threatened not to do it, and the young fellas were terrified.

Ten years ago there was loads of things that weren't acceptable, depending on your perception of how people were treating you. And you're probably right – people probably did mistreat you. But we have to remember that loads of people were being mistreated then by the state and graffiti was one way of fighting back.

I seen an incident on the Ardoyne Road after an RUC man was blown up, and a couple of kids had put graffiti up and a prominent member of the Republican movement actually got a paint brush and removed it himself –he was totally disgusted by it.

The flags are another issue. See during the time of the school protest, they put flags up on the Ardoyne Road, and we were going to a meeting in Belfast Castle that night with Glenbryn. I approached the fella who was putting the flags up, and asked him not to put them up. He was with a couple of kids, and those kids called me for all the 'effers'. I went to Sinn Féin, I went everywhere, I even went over to the offices of the IRSP on the Falls Road and I got dogs abuse for asking to take those flags down. But people were coming to our office and asking us to get them down. The guy who was putting them up said that everyone agreed to it, but they didn't, people living on the Ardoyne Road didn't want them up. Where were *our* rights, then? The people who didn't want those flags put up were being walked on. Who are the IRSP to

say: 'We're putting these up'? There's lots of things happen that we have no control over as a community. Certain people take on these things by themselves and just say: 'We're going to do this.'

With regard to the flags issue –and I detest the flags being just thrown up everywhere – I know that I could have created a bigger incident by physically trying to remove them within our community at that particular time.

I am a devout republican and I make no apologies to anyone for it – but I don't like seeing Tricolours on the top of lampposts...

I hate it myself.

It's disrespectful.

... it's not respecting our flag. Okay, Easter Sunday whack them up... then take them down. Have them outside places like the Centre, the Prisoners Office... places like that.

I personally feel that this thing about flags, even in our own area... it's just people being insecure about what they are about. You shouldn't even need to run about putting flags up, showing who or what you are. And I think that's what it is. And you can see that every time there's rising tension and people feel more and more insecure – all of a sudden they're going up everywhere.

## **The desire for a new openness**

Despite the somewhat confrontationist nature of some of the discussion the general mood was surprisingly optimistic.

I think this discussion has shown two things. Firstly, that while Protestants and Unionists might have this idea that the Catholic community is completely unified on where it's going, and knows exactly how they're going to do it, you only have to sit down with a group like this for half an hour to realise that they aren't! Secondly, and more importantly, I think this discussion proves that people are now not afraid to voice their opinions and their criticisms, whereas maybe they used to be hesitant to do so before.

Because of what happened at the school, it has given many people the drive to work together – for the benefit of all the eight thousand people who live in our district –and I think that's been an important outcome. I accept that it was slowly starting to happen prior to that, but I think it sort of spurred us on because then we were thrust into a situation where we were going to talk to ministers or we had to be talking to this one or that one, and we needed to be going collectively together. So I think that a bad situation often forces people into moving and working collectively together.

Don't forget, however, that the school issue was a structured situation, one that you wouldn't generally have. Once 3rd September came the school governors were able to act, and nobody could contradict us. I don't think there would be a comparable issue which would galvanise a community in the same way. There was an inner core to the issue – namely the school community with a belief in freedom of education. That was what galvanised the community, and it would be very hard to see any other issue having that cohesiveness unless there was a similar core structure behind it. Nevertheless, Holy Cross is not typical – it was focused on a single issue: the right of children to go to school without hindrance. If it ever became anything else not only would I have walked off the road but it would have lost its focus. And if it had been a case of the Catholic Church trying to evangelise through it, or a political organisation or anybody else pushing their agenda on the backs of the children, then we would have been as bad as the protesters. This was always my message and that's why it was so effective –not that I was particularly effective, but the issue was compelling. Now, while Holy Cross might not be a typical example, it shows that there is potential for this community to come together. Perhaps we're not ready to do that, perhaps it's not even appropriate right at this moment, but if we were able to do it there, then we're able to do again.

There was also an acknowledgement that all previous relationships within the community were changing for the better, and that the Church too was now part of that change.

There is a transformation taking place, and the Church is included in that transformation, and we're at a moment now in this community where we could develop further – either that or we'll begin to fracture again. And that's why I came along here today, to see if there is anything we could focus in on, that we could concentrate on, that could really bring on board the great potential that exists in this community. I think the practising Catholic community is looking for that, the alienated Catholic community is looking for it too, and I think those people who would declare themselves religiously neutral are also looking for it. I believe that if we could build something which was inclusive of the eight thousand opinions, then this community would be so confident we could talk to anybody. The problem now is that even when I talk to anybody I find I'm always looking over my shoulder a little bit.

I think it is important to deal with the stuff we were talking about the other week. It affected me terribly when I went home, I felt quite perturbed by it all. Nevertheless, I feel that the air should be cleared, people should know that all these perceptions must be dispelled or confirmed or whatever, and I feel that I understand the other side of the issue better than I did before. I definitely feel that when people are doing things for the community, everything should be out in the open.

We're not setting out to change everybody's ideas here, we just hope that we can all respect where each of us is coming from.

Perhaps this discussion has revealed old divisions, but I think the very fact that we can discuss it now like this is extremely healthy. And especially if we are thinking in terms of trying to work into the future, then this type of debate has to take place.

I think people have to accept that there has clearly been division within our community for years, but we now need to respect where each other was coming from at that time. People had taken different roads thirty years ago and they shouldn't be knocked down for that. There is a peace process now and I think we need to start moving forward now, instead of being hung up and constantly chipped on the shoulder about what happened down the line.

I agree with that, because that's where I was thirty years ago. When I joined the Family Centre in my twenties I'd five children at the time and I wanted to have a hope for the future. Somebody give me good advice, and somebody showed me a light at the end of the tunnel, somebody give me a positive option; I saw something for the future for my family and for the next generation in my area. I mean, that's why I got involved, that's why a lot of people got involved in community stuff then, to try and build a better future for our kids and our grandkids – and even though it was slow to happen you stayed with it and you gave your all for it. People want the best for their community and their families.

No matter how much we discuss things here we're never going to end up being in full agreement. But I feel that at least we can begin to accept where we're each coming from. And where we can find agreement is by focusing on what we all feel is better for the people, for the community.

For a start, how do you overcome the type of suspicion we talked about earlier –of people and their perceived motives? I can remember a lot of years back saying to different people: 'Hold on here a second, all this suspicion has to go.' Every time a group set out to do something to make things better for people in the area a typical reaction was: 'We need to be very careful here; what's the motive behind this?' How do we move away from this fear of 'motives' and 'agendas' and begin to see people as just working for their community?

Coming at this discussion, again, with an 'outside' mind, I can understand all points of view on this actually, to be perfectly honest – and my heart goes out to everybody. Because in one sense we've all been traumatised by our experiences, even if we have reacted in different ways. The only problem is that when you go to move on you have to be certain that you have the freedom to move on.

Although it has been a difficult discussion, I feel we have all learnt something from it by listening to, and taking on board, each other's frustrations.

I think you have to accept there's no single voice in Ardoyne, there's no monolith that can't be changed. We have a dynamic community but we're

being hampered in harnessing that dynamic because we have been denied the necessary resources. The schools show that where school resources have been provided our children aren't stupid. The children are very bright, they're capable of doing any sort of thing that's set in front of them; those that aren't are not the failure, the system is probably the failure, as well as the difficulties created by the underprivileged background from which the children come. We have different problems around health issues too, and we haven't got adequate resources for dealing with them either. If we get the tools to give our children a fair start, a lot of these problems for another generation will not be there. So it's about us being given the resources, and focusing on those things around which we share a common humanity. Ultimately, it's nothing to do with political labels, it's simply that we're all human beings and we want to see the best for our children and our community. And the tragedy is that our community lives cheek-by-jowl beside a community that hates and fears us, so we have to find some kind of mechanism to overcome that hate and fear. Because they face similar issues in Glenbryn, in lower Oldpark, Twaddell, Shankill... wherever. And, as human beings, we need to see their life improved along with ours. So there's where the challenge lies.

## **The Protestant community and 'community relations'**

Having aired the internal differences within their own community, the participants now turned their attention to the 'other' community.

Perhaps we need to find out whether we have a common perception of what the Loyalist/Unionist community really is, and then maybe through that determine if there is anything that we can do to build bridges. Or maybe we'll decide: no, we're only going to waste our time, they're not at that stage. And until they arrive at a stage where they feel free to engage, there's no point in us expending energy there. Because it's a one-way traffic, and it's no use being a one-way-traffic, we need an exchange.

I think we have to understand our own needs first, and that's why our previous discussion was important. And I think that whether we're addressing our own community or the Protestant community, it's becoming increasingly important to try and understand each other, rather than saying that my opinion is the only valid opinion here, therefore I'm not going to listen to anybody else. So the last discussion was a very important thing to go through. Indeed, I believe that it is something you *have* to go through, for I think you need to be open and challenging. And there are so many different challenges, especially when it comes to our relationship with the Protestant community. For example, a few of us were sitting talking about the impact of *Ardoyne: the Untold Story* – we were asking what it meant to people, and what people took out of it. And someone said: 'How do you think Protestants would react

to reading that book? They would hardly see it the way we do.’ And, by the same token, say someone gave us *The RUC: the Untold Story*, in which their kids and their families gave their personal stories, would we even look at it in the same way, or would we just completely discard it? So I think we have to try and understand some of the needs that exist in the other community, and ask how we might address those.

It’s maybe easier for women to work on cross-community initiatives than men. Throughout the Troubles women from both communities have been able to work together, and I’ve done an awful lot of cross-community work, I’ve done things throughout the Troubles that you maybe wouldn’t have wanted to be generally known. But you just do it because you’re a woman and you have things in common with other women. I think there’s more difficulty with men doing that kind of work.

But we all still avoid divisive issues, even women’s groups. I once went to a meeting with two women’s groups – one from Tigers Bay, the other from the New Lodge – in North Belfast Partnership Board’s offices. And right outside the window was where that wee lad had blew himself up. And *none* of the women addressed the issue at all; they avoided it and all got on with discussing different things. And that has happened in loads of different forums –we push the really difficult issues away.

Do you not think that 99% of cross-community work is bluff, there is no real cross-community building in it. It’s done because it’s part of the criteria for whatever funding package is supporting the project, which insists that some element of cross-community be included. Or sometimes the cross-community work is done between people who never had a problem in the first place, who maybe shared different values from working-class communities. I don’t think that in any way it is dealing with the core problem. We all know that there’s been a multi-pound industry built up over the years around so-called ‘community relations’, but with what result? Did it benefit the community in Ardoyne or in Glenbryn during the Hold Cross child blockade ? Does it benefit those people who live in the interfaces and have been forced to move? Because they are the people who need to see some evidence that cross-community work could be successful. I don’t think that cross-community, as we have grown to know it, is of any great benefit –in terms of the people who live on the sharp end of all this.

It has always been the case that when people from both communities gather together, there’s this ‘big elephant’ in the middle of the room which we all know is there, but which we all avoid and work around. And, as long as we avoid it, we can all get on well together. But sometimes you learn something about the other community when you do confront it. When I was involved in the mobile phone network I’d maybe have to go up to someone with a message from the other side and say: ‘Look, that rioting crowd is standing over here because of your crowd standing here; they’re afraid of what you’re planning to do.’ And the response would be: ‘No, the only reason we are here

is because we are afraid of that crowd over here; they're waiting to attack us. And you're just advocating for them ones.' Many people don't want to hear messages like that. But think over the years the number of things that are beginning to develop. When the Holy Cross blockade started there were a number of people in the Protestant community who did try to get the protest ended. There was a huge element there, of course, that was insistent that it be kept going, but there were a number of people in the background who were advising ones in Glenbryn: this has to stop, this isn't good for our community. So it isn't true that community relations work hasn't improved anything. I think some of that type of work *has* improved things partially over the years. Certainly, it will take a long time to solve things more fundamentally.

I think fear is a main player in this. There's 'us' and 'them', and there's fear in the middle of it all. I mean, you've got exponents of the UPRG\* coming saying we're not playing on a level playing field with you boys. They were specifically talking about the republican community, but really they're talking about anybody from this community they're going to run across on a community basis. Basically what they're saying is: 'Look, you are light years in front of us, you know what you are talking about, you are genned up on all these issues, you know what's happening inside your own community, let us catch up with you and then we'll talk to you.' It's that whole fear kind of thing, they're afraid they won't be able to validate the stances they take.

Many people have a fear of anything which might challenge everything they were brought up to believe. We were sitting in a group with a woman who had a relative in the RUC, and thought the RUC were incapable of doing anything wrong. But she listened to what a number of us were saying about *our* realities. And she accepted that our personal stories challenged her beliefs. Now, some people can find that a frightening thing. One of the things I always remember was being 29 and in jail and going: hold on a second... my ma's a Prod... I could have been born 20 yards across the road and had a completely different outlook in life in terms of politics. Am I just cloned into what I am and what makes me 'right' about what I believe in? Then you begin to deconstruct all your arguments: do I still believe that now, is that the way we perceived it? It's like most people going to Mass every Sunday, who don't ever think about Mass but just go to it. So it is about challenging your own belief system and seeing whether it still stands up to scrutiny. Can you sit down and say everything that was done was right? Have I actually challenged things in myself the way I've always challenged them in others?

There's fear and suspicion and there's hatred. You have got two gangs of rioters flinging bricks at one another. Community relations hasn't worked; it doesn't work. Even people who do cross-community work, it's all periodic. You maybe only do two bits of cross-community work during the year, and perhaps a very small number of people will have positive experiences of that

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\* Ulster Political Research Group, set up to provide political guidance to the UDA, the largest Loyalist paramilitary organisation.

and build upon it. But then something happens and the old suspicions and old hatreds come back. And it'll always happen in the present generations. Unless something happens with a brand new generation, nothing'll change. I would advocate integration in play. A 3-year-old girl in Glenbryn will swing round a lamppost just like a 3-year-old girl in Ardoyne, and older ones with their Play-Stations, etc. They should grow up to see differences as normal, without all the baggage we usually add on. If I support Man City I'll slag somebody who supports Man United, and people should be able to slag somebody who supports Rangers or Celtic without going: that means you're this, that and the other.

What do people expect from community relations? Is it about stopping all the interface trouble, or is it about beginning a process of understanding where we're coming from and where other people are coming from? And is it about dealing with our own prejudices? We could maybe even start that understanding by looking at the school issue. Assuming that the Holy Cross school protest didn't start for nothing, something made them people get out there and do what they did. But imagine somebody had gone up to the parents and said: 'Hold on a wee second, I know it's terrible but we have to understand the problems that are in Glenbryn.' The understandable reaction probably would have been: 'What! Catch yourself on, and get the fuck out of it! We need that protest smashed off the road!' But that protest did start for *some* reason, and maybe community relations is about asking questions and confronting issues that you know people are not going to be too comfortable with.

I disagree with you about this concept of advocating something we're not comfortable with. I am comfortable with my beliefs and the logic in them. At the same time, I have hopefully developed them through the years, and I am prepared to change my mind on things.

Yes, but on the Holy Cross issue, logically you could have sat down and asked: 'How do we help these ones resolve this?' But I never heard anyone say that. Why not? Would that notion have been too uncomfortable for people at that time?

To try and understand the reasons behind it would have been to justify what they done. There was no way I was prepared to sit and say: look, they've no ramps up there, etc, etc. If you were getting into that type of dialogue with them you were actually justifying what they done on them kids.

But it didn't start over ramps or bad housing or anything else, it started over a UDA power-struggle! See this idea that it was over the social conditions of Glenbryn, if anybody really believes that then they've got the wrong message.

What did the UDA exploit?

They exploited a fear of Catholics and Nationalists and Republicans.

But everybody who was on that road were not members of the UDA. So what

we want to try and understand is how some woman, who *isn't* in the UDA, can possibly be standing there? I'm just using that issue as an example. I'm not saying there is any excuse for it, but if you had tried to advocate that approach at that particular time it would ...

...have got you lynched!

I heard loads of people during the Glenbryn protest saying: 'I see such and such a person up there, and the UDA are up there, and the UDA have all this...' – basically that the UDA inspired everybody! But the UDA cannot even get a vote in elections, let alone inspire the whole of Glenbryn, so there must have been something bigger behind this than just a UDA plot.

In the beginning they didn't know what they wanted out of the protest; there were all different agendas. Then once a group of people came along –the UDA who *did* have an agenda –they were able to call the shots. But people had actually formed themselves into a group to oppose something *before* the UDA came along and took control of it.

A lot of it is to do with perceptions again. When that TV programme about Glenbryn was on, it started off by saying: 'On the other side of the Republican stronghold of Ardoyne we have Glenbryn', so the viewers were immediately presented with this description. Okay, this *is* a Republican stronghold, and you will find that the majority of people vote Republican. But this perception goes further, and assumes that *everyone* in Ardoyne supports the IRA, or is in the IRA, or is a Catholic. I have talked to Prods who are surprised that I come from Ardoyne but don't go to Mass, and don't support certain things, or that I don't think the Catholic Church should have all the power they have. There are so many perceptions there. The same way we have all these perceptions about Prod communities.

Would 'community relations' help Ardoyne? We don't depend on anybody from Glenbryn, except when it comes to our kids surviving going to school and then we deal with that. But see to live, and do all the rest of the things we need to do, we don't depend on them for anything. We now realise that they haven't the power to do anything.

But they do. Look at the impact of their protest.

But that's the only power they have. And they were given that power by the authorities. Anyway, even the authorities' power over Loyalist communities is disappearing, because people in Glenbryn don't even depend on the government to go to work any more, because there is no work for anybody any more.

I'm trying to see some place beyond here, some point down the road where we can say: it'll be better then. And I'm trying to think what could actually provide the incentive for honest dialogue which actually achieves something.

If there were things we had to depend on each other for, then cross-community involvement would be a natural thing. But it's like being on holiday and you don't know anyone in the hotel except a couple from the Shankill Road: you will go over and talk with them quite naturally. Until you come home again – and you all go your separate ways.

I think if this was in any other country in the world, the very fact that you do not walk 20 yards this way, that your kids have to choose carefully what they wear to go somewhere that way, would be a big issue. The fact is that we've lived with it as if it's natural – we're so used to it we don't see it sometimes. Unless there's conflict we don't see each other.

Our communities don't deal in community relations, it's a luxury for us, because we're dealing with so many other everyday issues. For example, the youth issue is a major problem in Ardoyne and recent events are just putting it under the microscope for the moment. But the problems faced by youth and the lack of provision for youth in Ardoyne is massive, and if we count round the number of dedicated youth workers, people who are there as a full-time job to try and manage it, it's pitiful. Now, that's only one part of it, we have all kinds of other social problems which take up people's energies. So, obviously, 'community relations' does get pushed back. Only when we have a crisis does it come up the agenda again and we say: listen, we need to get something sorted, we need to solve this. We're always going to put it on the back-burner because the other pressures we're under mean that the everyday stuff takes over.

But every one of those difficulties you mention has all been compounded by the fact that we live in this divided society. How often do people turn round and say –and they do it every day of their lives – 'I have to get a black taxi to go somewhere, I don't want to use the bus' or 'I don't walk up to those shops because...' All of those aspects of our everyday lives are impacted upon by the sectarian realities. So I see community relations as being about how this whole conflict impacts on our everyday lives. I appreciate that when someone goes out to work their main concern is to get their work done, their kids out to school etc, etc. But I just think we take for granted how much this all impacts on us.

But for ten months of the year it has become so normalised that you take it for granted. Maybe if your children are going over to the Newtownards Road you might be careful what clothes they were wearing. But you see the whole aspect of sectarianism... I think we should be looking now at how we can combat that as part of the solution *now*, rather than somewhere down the line, post-conflict.

## The need to confront sectarianism

How did the Think Tank participants believe sectarianism could be confronted?

I think there's lessons to be learned from other countries. Take the difference which was made in the US, in terms of people's attitudes towards African-Americans. For generations Black people were perceived as being lesser than Whites, of little value and with few rights. Prior to the Civil Rights movement racism was the poison in American society. Now, it didn't change overnight and it didn't change completely, and probably all kinds of subtle discrimination still exist. But there was a massive leap forward which brought Black people into society and let them play a fuller role than they had been allowed to play before. So I'm asking: is there something we can learn from that? In the US case they put in strong Civil Rights laws to make sure that people who committed racist acts were actually punishable by law. I think we need to explore what their experience was, what worked there, and whether it could be adapted to make it applicable here. For if we don't confront sectarianism we're into a generational thing. The child learns it on the mother's knee, it's not just when they go to school. There was a recent study which showed that children as young as four and five can already identify things in a sectarian sense; they can identify Rangers or Celtic, whatever. So we need to be putting something forward that fundamentally tackles sectarianism, for unless we do we won't give people the freedom to begin to think for themselves outside the box.

But the native Americans are not part at all of the system in America. I think the American system changed because it depended on the African-American population for its stability –that population was getting bigger and more articulate and more educated, and could have undermined the system if it hadn't been brought on board.

And if you go over to some of those places now and ask what did civil rights create they will probably say a Black middle class. The people who bore the brunt of what civil rights is all about are still bearing the brunt of it. How do we guarantee that if we are going to get some settlement here, then the people who are going to be better off are not just the middle-class Catholics and Prods?

Nothing is ever perfect, but I still think we have an opportunity to learn what worked there, what didn't work. And it did work... how many people in America would use the word 'nigger' now? It is now socially unacceptable. You would never hear it used on a television programme, never used in any social discourse. So the word 'Fenian', or the word 'Orange' –or all the different labels that are separating and dividing us here – is there some way

that we can tackle them? And we don't just look at America, but other countries, because we have similar problems right across the world. There are loads of things we can be learning and taking on board and trying to put into some kind of programme that tackles the evil of sectarianism here. But I still feel that unless you have strong legislation to outlaw sectarianism it will always exist.

But laws are made for breaking.

I know, and it won't solve everything. But unless you're ready to cut through swathes of it at the beginning and say: right, this is wrong, that is wrong... We actually may need to go further and put things into the curriculum, where we teach people to have respect for other as human beings, and identify that person as a human being and a Catholic, that person as a human being and a Protestant...

The main thing which is missing is 'respect'. There isn't a mutual respect. We talk about Protestants/Unionists putting us down, but we have our own smug superiority as well, because we 'know' we're right, we 'know' that the question that's on the table is the right one, we're asking all the right questions, we're demanding all the right things. But within it we fail to give sufficient respect to the problems and issues that *they* have. You're asking them to sign away everything that they believed in, everything that they thought was their God-given right.

But see even when we're talking about equality, the Unionist community expect us to perceive coming down the ladder to equality as a loss for them, and that in some way we have to recognise that this is a loss for them.

But the socio-economic realities are the same for them. There is a class inequality which goes right across this society.

Why, then, do they continue to vote for Unionism? Unionism is there to protect the status quo, the status quo that screwed the working-class Protestant as much as the working-class Catholic, and it continues to be supported by ordinary working-class Protestants. It was the 'big house' Unionism for years, then it became the DUP, then the UDP, but at all times it is about maintaining the status quo.

We had a group of Americans over and they said that every one of us is a 'change agent'. And we thought they were a bit over the top. But they were right: nothing changes unless you're the first one to change. You can't wait for legislation, that can take years, decades. The civil rights situation changed in America when people stood up and showed they were prepared to make that change themselves as individuals.

Anyway, you can't legislate against mindsets.

But you *can* change things. I go back to the word 'nigger'. People were

prepared to struggle for civil rights and demand that the constitution defend their rights. All I'm saying is that it's one of the building blocks against sectarianism. Coming from a community that has had the indignity of all this heaped upon us, I think we have a greater capacity for understanding the need to oppose sectarianism, because we have experienced how evil it is. It doesn't produce anything of good to this community. Legislation is not going to do all the business, but we need to open a debate as to how we change it. We could be using European laws as well.

But legislation has to be part of a bigger thing.

Yes, but we need to prove to people that there is support to back up anti-sectarian projects. And I would expect it to be strenuously applied right across the community. I would like to feel it was illegal to chant out 'Fenian scum' or 'Orange scum' or whatever... there's a whole lot of stuff like that. It is now the general talk among children, and to me it sends out a very negative message.

We should all be actively challenging it, in the home and elsewhere.

But say you do challenge it and you're still being put down. I mean, I have two girls who are afraid to wear their uniforms outside the area; their doctor is on the Ballygomartin, they can recognise every flag that flies on the lampposts, and they're able to tell me the different Loyalist flags. Yet they never grew up with that.

Loyalist paramilitary flags intimidate people. That sends out the wrong message.

That's why I think we need to define what sectarianism is. The flags issue is an example. I can see why people would be annoyed. They're often just put up as coat-trailing – on both sides.

There are other things even worse, like some graffiti... 'Kill all Huns' and things like that. I think the community should continue to stand up and say: take that off the wall. They shouldn't be allowed to put the likes of that up.

You would need something like a community charter asking families to sign up to things, including anti-sectarianism. I do think we have to be seriously challenging it... it's an evil we can't allow to remain and fester, because the more poison it spreads, the more young people are swallowed up by it. And when I hear it on the street from local kids it really sickens me that kids that young are repeating garbage and they will grow up all their lives with that kind of outlook on life – it becomes their reality.

It also becomes a pathetic substitute for their real cultural identity, and they lose sight of the richness of the identity they have actually got in this country.

It could be made a policy that you didn't get funding for your organisation – whether you were in the community sector or in the business sector – unless you adopted anti-sectarian practices in your work. But, I accept –it's not a panacea.

Any anti-sectarian policies should be made applicable to our politicians too.

Okay, but how do we put it into actual practice? Even if we have it in terms of jobs and somebody comes along from a Prod background, everyone's going to say: 'Jesus, how's he going to be accepted in Ardoyne?' That's always going to be a problem – how do we actually start integrating? We will have to accept that there will be setbacks along the way.

We're talking about breaking a generational cycle. Children are unfortunately growing up and thinking there's nothing wrong with it. We need to begin with them, even if we may not see any measurable impact for 10, 15 years. But if we delay it, we're only delaying something that's going to have to happen. So the sooner we can start to talk about it, debate it, the better. We should look at all the different ways anti-sectarian attitudes and practices can be introduced.

Can this debate take place with Glenbryn at the moment, or is it too soon? Does the debate have to take place in each community first?

I think there are still unresolved issues for them, even after the protest, in terms of this argument they had with the government, which was one of the things broke down any possibility of dialogue... promises were made to them and weren't upheld because we weren't in agreement. I think they have to resolve what they need to resolve themselves. I always felt there were different views there which weren't reconciled. And I think that's what each community needs to do, before we go and engage with somebody else. We need a common understanding as to what *our* community wants, and what we think the other community wants from us. That's not to say you wouldn't have contact. If someone said 'let's sit down and work out a common future' we should accept that challenge. But we also have to remember that neither of our communities have any real control over our future.

And some of the middle-class people who operate the system are sometimes more reactionary than in working-class districts. We need legislation as much so that we can apply it against the people who created the whole thing, as opposed to some disempowered person in Glenbryn. We can apply it to bodies like the Housing Executive, and say: we oppose you thinking in terms of 'Catholic land' and 'Protestant land', perpetuating the whole thing.

And some of the middle class living in Cultra or wherever can be sectarian too but those areas would never get labelled as sectarian. And, furthermore, in our areas sectarianism is partly the result of a community being bombed or attacked in different ways – there is some sort of rationale behind it. This

sectarianism hasn't arisen simply because we hate Prods, or Prods hate us, it's much more than that.

It has to be basic to begin with, an approach that allows everybody to play a part in. A community charter could ask people to make a conscious effort about the way they speak to their children –for example, not to refer to Protestants by any derogatory labels.

At the same time, a lot of people would say: catch yourself on! We have to understand the enormity of what we would be taking on. It's a generational thing. It's all about how we deal with each other. We do need to start with small things. Like listening to each other. One Protestant said to me that every time we talked about 'removing the British presence from Ireland' he felt we were talking about him. And I hadn't really understood it that way before.

We need to look and see whether there are things which are sectarian within our own community and decide how we manage to overcome them, because it is not a straightforward journey. There are some obvious things which most people will agree with, but as you move through the whole sectarian thing you're going to find more and more aspects that will challenge long-held attitudes or beliefs. But I think the sooner it starts the better.

I think sometimes the very way we talk is sectarian in itself. For instance, if we were to set up something then 'invite the other side' to come on board and call it 'cross-community', we're probably only perpetuating the very problem we're trying to solve –by the way we state it. We need a complete revolution in thought and language around this 'cross-community' concept. We should be initiating things which are *attractive* enough and *needed* enough that *anyone* would consider coming on board. I'm coming more and more to the conclusion that we should be talking to *everyone* – irrespective of where they're coming from – we should be talking about sharing space, places and opportunities. And let's just see who's of sufficient humanity –not who's of sufficient Loyalism or Nationalism or whatever – but who's of sufficient humanity to want to come into that space together.

I really believe that this is a debate which definitely needs to be taken forward –because at the end of the day it is about all our futures.