

Reflections on the 'peace dividend'

The views of women from
Nationalist North Belfast

compiled by

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ISLAND (65) PAMPHLETS

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Introduction

In the wake of the IRA and Loyalist ceasefires many community activists had hoped that along with an end to thirty years of conflict genuine moves would also be made on all the other problems besetting working-class communities – from interface sectarianism to the lack of job opportunities for young people. However, to their dismay, not only has the political process continued to lurch from one impasse to another, but those other everyday problems seem as far down the agenda as ever.

Any hopes for genuine moves towards an end to sectarian divisions were effectively thwarted when the ‘peace process’ became increasingly sidelined by the ‘political process’, and conflict management became the order of the day rather than conflict resolution. To compound matters, even though there has been a welcome end to the so-called ‘political’ violence (bar a few sporadic incidents), paramilitarism still remains as a significant reality in many communities.

All these problems – especially sectarianism and socio-economic deprivation – are felt most acutely in interface areas. And in many of these areas it is women involved in community work who often bear the greatest burden, for as they endeavour to ameliorate the worst effects of these problems they invariably experience added stress to their own family lives as a consequence.

During April and May 2004 the North Belfast Interface Consortium convened a series of discussions involving female community activists from Nationalist interface areas of North Belfast, the primary aim being to provide the women with an opportunity to share, and explore, their everyday experiences.

This pamphlet relays the main concerns voiced during those discussions, and to some it might make depressing reading, for it reveals that sectarianism remains as undiluted as ever, that contact between the two communities is at an all-time low (certainly in the areas these women represent) and that even suspicions about the ‘other side’ receiving preferential funding assistance (something which many struggling community groups on the ‘other side’ would undoubtedly refute) are as strong as ever. However, this is the reality as these women see it, and government, politicians and funders would be ill-advised not to pay attention to the fears and apprehensions which are voiced in this document.

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Reflections on the ‘peace dividend’

Community work at the interface

The women were in agreement that community work in interface areas of Belfast, while certainly offering challenges and rewards, could be extremely time-consuming, even stressful, and was invariably poorly funded.

Basically, you’re fighting every year to stay afloat and it’s all this short-term funding – like two years or whatever – and before you know it the two years is over and you’re starting all over again, trying to get money in. I mean, the facilities that community groups provide are often the only resources available for our areas, and if they were to disappear there’d be a big gap left in the community. I’d say that if community groups weren’t there interface communities would be struggling far worse than they already are.

All of us here are trying to improve the lives of ordinary people. She and I are part of the Fleadh up in Ardoyne, and half the time you don’t even see your own kids, you’re out trying to organise activities to keep all the local kids away from the interface. But nobody seems to want to give us money to help us do that.

I work for the Festival, which is always the first week in August, which is Internment week. Over the years the whole ritual used to be lighting bonfires and rioting in the streets, so the main reason for the Festival being set up was to offer the young people of the community an alternative. And it’s been proven from the Festival’s inception that the rioting and all has stopped. But we’re fighting an ongoing battle every year for funding, and even the word ‘Festival’ now is like a black word – funders don’t want to know you.

I think funders and government should be held accountable for this lack of resources.

I feel that an awful lot of that money is spent by the funding bodies actually administrating the funding rather than getting it down to street level.

Look at the Peace II applications, they were an absolute nightmare. And if, after you go through it all, you get turned down you don’t feel motivated to be putting another one in, because you’ve just wrecked your brains sitting doing that one. And for many community workers that’s where a lot of their time is spent – doing funding applications – and they’re not getting the chance or the time to go out there and develop the communities the way that they should be doing. I mean, the workers should be out there forming groups and getting things set in place, and they’re trying their best to do all

that –but on top of it they’re spending hour upon hour trying to get money into the community. And then sometimes too funding can be a very divisive thing, because each wee group finds itself battling for a share of the money.

That’s true. Everybody is forced to compete with each other over funding because there is only a small amount of money there to start with. I work in ‘The Bone’; it’s only a small area and sometimes we feel that if we don’t go and fight our corner, then, yes, Ardoyne could, would, try to walk all over us. Now, I don’t mean that in a nasty way, I just mean that you feel you are always having to compete for resources and things, you know. And in The Bone we feel there would be more resources going into Ardoyne than there would be into the Bone. I accept that there’s still not enough in Ardoyne, but sometimes we feel that when we’re going to these Forum meetings and such, that we’re in the minority. It doesn’t stop us from shouting our mouths off, like, and getting our points across! But our group itself can feel – and our community can feel – a wee bit isolated.

But it’s the same in Ardoyne... I mean, there’s not enough facilities in Ardoyne, for the size of it we would love a leisure centre. We have a leisure centre just five minutes walk away, but we can’t use it because it’s in a Protestant area. All we have is a football pitch with big high fencing –and that’s all our kids have. Our kids don’t feel they’re really part of a community, and I think that has contributed to the high rate of suicides and other problems. Our kids need so much, yet the only funding that we really get is the BELB money, for to take our kids away on trips and things.

Don’t get us wrong, there’s money going into Ardoyne for the interface, but we don’t get it, it often goes to other people, who might claim that they’re working with kids right on the interface but they’re not, so our kids do without while other kids get the money.

Aye; basically, we get the guts of £600, but that has to be spread over... well, how many do we have in our area? I think it’s about 480 kids?

Oh, more now. We done a survey not that long ago, and there about 700 kids all under twelve.

But we get £600 and that’s all we have to take these kids away. It just about pays for two buses.

You’re always hunting for somewhere affordable you can take the kids to.

That’s another thing too: if you didn’t have to pay for the buses to take the kids away we could organise other trips for them.

I think government and funders expect miracles but they’re not prepared to put the resources into our work on the ground.

The community empowerment partnership thing that started three years ago

was good simply because it's a partnership. We're with Ardoyne in it, we're working together with them and saying: 'Look, there's four youth workers needed, there's an advice worker needed' ... you know? But at the same time it can still have that aspect where people are basically out for their own wee group. So funding allocation *can* cause problems. And if different groups are looking to do the same thing it means that some groups will go under.

Some of the women harboured a suspicion that the 'other community' was receiving preferential funding treatment.

From what I've heard, Protestant groups just wrote in letters asking for money, whereas with us we had endless pages to fill in on the application forms. But they just wrote a simple letter, saying: 'We need money for this and that,' and they got it.

They say that it's because community development in Catholic areas is more advanced than in theirs and they need to be brought to the same level. But it's more advanced in our areas because of the way we've had to live and struggle over the past 35 years. And now Protestants are learning what we had to put up with all them years ago, that they're now having to fight for.

Lack of funding was only one side of the problem, lack of workers was another.

We have a wee community May festival, it's more or less to celebrate our community, to celebrate its endurance from all that has happened to it. It's a three-day thing over May and there is a reasonably good volunteer side to it and we do get a good crowd at it. But I must be honest, sometimes we find it hard getting people to participate in events.... That side of it can sometimes be a bit hard, and you're always trying to think up ways of getting more people involved or even more people to take on a wee bit of a community role, because usually they're leaving it to so few.

Yeah, it's always the same faces doing things. But I think you get that in all communities, no matter where you go.

You have the doers and the ones that don't want to get involved.

And the people see these few individuals doing all this work and when anything needs done they say: 'Sure such and such will do it.'

Sometimes you'd just love more younger ones to get involved in doing things. Sometimes I think we're getting too old, you know – I'd like younger women and men to come up.

Do you not think though that many younger ones sometimes don't really want to come into community work because they see the way that you can get roped into so many different things, even if you started off just working on one thing. It just sucks everything out of you and you've no energy left.

A couple of years ago me and her were very close to burn-out, because we were in that many groups. If we had more resources and funding –and more

people helping us – it would be a lot easier for workers to really make a difference to their communities.

Living at an interface had its own specific stresses.

Once there's a period of quiet people forget there are interfaces really. It's only the people who are living on them who are always living in fear of something happening.

There are people in Northern Ireland that the Troubles have never affected; they've lived a sort of 'normal' life –brought their kids to school normally and didn't be affected in any way. And I don't think they really understand what it's like to live at an interface. I would love some of those people to live on an interface for a lot of months to see how it would affect them.

Some community workers from West Belfast brought our kids –the Holy Cross kids and some of the ones who live on the Ardoyne Road – over to the Whiterock for a fun day out. I have to say the kids had a brilliant time. And as we were coming home these fellas on the bus turned round to us and said: 'Where is this Alliance interface?' And we're driving up Alliance Avenue, just turning down the Ardoyne Road to drop the kids off who live there, and as we got there we went: 'There it is there.' And one of them went: 'Jesus Christ, I didn't realise it was that close!' He couldn't believe that, you know: one foot and that's you into different territory. He was totally gob-smacked.

It's very frustrating for women especially, because the women that do be out on the interfaces also have another job as a parent and a mother. I mean, they're coming in maybe at four o'clock in the morning, getting a couple of hours sleep and then having to start into the everyday, practical things of running a home. And nobody seems to recognise that, or value it.

Sometimes we have to relieve one another. Say a riot breaks out at maybe three o'clock in the afternoon and she and I would be out on the streets for a couple of hours, trying to calm things down. And when she would have to go, I'd say to her: 'Look, you go home, feed your kids. As soon as you feed yours come back and let me go and feed mine.' And that's the way you basically do it. You're out at the interface looking after other people's kids, trying to ensure their safety, and trying to protect their homes, but all the time in the back of your mind you're thinking of your own home as well.

Confronting interface issues

Friction between the Protestant and Catholic communities along interfaces often escalates from incidents of youth violence. Attempts to counter such incidents – through cross-community contact –were often fruitless and brought their own levels of additional stress.

We're on the mobile phone network – our interface covers Alliance and

Glenbryn. And for four years we had different contacts with people on the other side. But then one of our women was actually trying to control an interface problem and got hit on the head with a brick. So we phoned and asked them if they would pull their kids back into their area and we would do the same with ours. And our contact just says: 'No, now youse know what we feel like!' And then after that they seemed to just pass their phone around whoever wanted it, and often you were getting abused and insulted.

We did try and get explanations about why the phones were being switched off, but they just denied that they were, or claimed that the battery was flat.

The mobile phone network over in West Belfast is more successful, partly because they meet each other regularly face-to-face, and when they come to meetings they have to explain why they didn't respond to a phone call. Whereas when you don't have to do that there's no accountability.

When they were running the phone network down on the Limestone, I mean, you got dogs abuse over the phone. One time I was asked: 'Would you get those ones off the Limestone, they're causing trouble', so I walked down the corner and there would have been two wee three-year-olds coming out of the shop. So I phoned them back and said: 'What are you talking about, there's nobody here?' And the response I got was: 'Away and fuck yerself!' –that sort of thing. Another time a young girl of about 15 years' old phoned me up and when I answered she said: 'Who's this?' So I went: 'Why, who's this?' And then I heard her saying to someone: 'Oh here, that there's a Fenian from the other side!' Now that phone should always have been on the contact person – it shouldn't have been left about for a kid to pick up.

When the parade – the 'Tour of the North' – was still coming through, we were in talks with them ones... involving representatives from community groups on this side and from theirs. And then all of a sudden it just stopped and they wouldn't answer our calls. And even though we had been round to their community centre and sat down with them and spoke to them, all of a sudden they just wouldn't answer phone calls, they just wouldn't talk to us at all. But I think it was because of the feuding within their area, do you know what I mean –they were being told they couldn't speak to us.

Aye; I think there's that many different problems within Protestant areas, and that many groupings within their communities, that they're all divided among themselves. And when we've asked for meetings it's impossible to get any of them to agree to go.

But you find too, when we actually had cross-community meetings – through mediation – that it was always the decent people who were coming, the people that didn't want any trouble in the first place. But they had no support in the community, because their hard-liners were saying: 'No, youse aren't talking to them again.' And the same thing happens on your own side, you know. You try and make that contact and then suddenly you're the bad person, you're the 'Orange lover'.

I would disagree with that. I've never had a problem with our side.

Nor me, we've never had pressure. But see on the other side they always seemed to have pressure on them –not to talk, not to do this or that.

Well, that actually happened to me, and then the other side are saying to you: 'Sure the Provies wouldn't even trust you.'

Purposeful contacts with their Protestant counterparts were either extremely transient or, more often, non-existent.

I used to be on the local Partnership Board, the community support group – that was about three to four years ago. It still operates, though I don't think there's too many women on it. It's meant to represent all the community groups in North Belfast, but at the time I just felt it wasn't getting anywhere. Okay, it maybe got you contacts from the other side of the community and some of those contacts you held right through – and you could maybe still rely on them to a certain extent – but no really useful, ongoing stuff.

The problem in them areas is one week you're talking to 'John', the next week you're talking to 'Geordie', and the week after that you don't know who you could be talking to.

The ones from the Protestant side, when they *are* talking till any of us, will tell us that one side of the street can be UDA and the other side UVF, and no-one knows when they'll next start feuding with each other. So these people are stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea, you know, just trying to keep the peace in their *own* communities, let alone with ours.

I think there's a lot of fear in Protestant areas.

I think in their areas, because they're so fragmented, ordinary people are afraid to say: 'I disagree with you.' I used to work in Gallaghers and I remember them saying, when it was coming up to the Twelfth: 'Oh, they'll be round looking their money' – for their flags or whatever. And they all had to give so much money coming up to the Twelfth for to put their flags up or do whatever they were doing. See if you went to somebody in our areas and said, 'I want a fiver for flags,' they'd tell you to take yourself off!

I'd tell them mine's going into my electric and youse can do whatever you like!

I think that is a big, big difference between Nationalist and Loyalist areas.

What we really need is for them ones to get their act together and keep people in place who we can work with in a consistent way.

Over in East Belfast the Lower Newtownards Road and Short Strand seem to have got their act together far better.

So do the ones over on the Springfield Road; their phone network is working

brilliant. I was over there and done a Farset workshop with them as well; it really was good. But that's what we need, somebody to be there, that we can talk to on a one-to-one basis, who's not going to abuse you, you know, and who's going to be reliable.

They would also need to have the backing of their paramilitaries too, to be able to go back to them. 'Cause if there was somebody talking to the other side and the paramilitaries didn't like it they'd soon be told to stop.

Sometimes when we can't work cross-community, both communities lose out. Last year there was a cross-community funding application put in by a group on the Limestone – working jointly with ones in the Protestant community – for a wee play park on our side, and one on their side. Everything was all going through sweet and then all of a sudden the funding was withdrawn, and when we asked why we were told it was because the Protestant ones had pulled out. Paramilitary pressure on their side had told them they weren't to work with us. So that was knocked on the head, and the funding money all had to be sent back again. We've since got the money through again, but now there's a couple from round our own way don't want it to go ahead!

Cross-community contact is there in parts. Say you're going to different meetings you'll see them there, or there's the North Belfast Employment Task thing and it's cross-community; and there's a few other things that are cross-community, but in my opinion there's nothing solid enough to sort out real problems. It's there maybe for funding, 'cause some groups will work cross-community to get funding. Although some of them don't even work together, but they say they are, just to get it –and that's understandable. But, at the same time, there's like other groups that are just left out on their own and don't have any sort of contact with anybody. While I think North Belfast community groups in general are getting their act together a bit more, I think the Protestant side needs to come on board with that too. They say that they're lagging behind in community development and I would agree with them to an extent, but I also disagree with the extra money getting pumped in to bring them up to the same level as the Catholic community. I mean, Nationalist areas of North Belfast are away behind those in West Belfast, in terms of community development, but there's still not enough getting pumped into *our* groups.

The advent of CCTV 'security cameras' was not judged to have been a success.

Those CCTV cameras only see what they want to see. There's been attacks on houses and people, but then when you're asking the cops for the CCTV footage they tell you that the cameras weren't switched on!

I was told down the Limestone that they're only put on during a riot situation.

Sure this girl was attacked on Alliance and got a terrible beating –stitches, broken arms, everything – but the way the cameras were situated they didn't see the ones from the Protestant side coming. Even though the Glenbryn ones

started it, the cameras didn't see the ones coming from Glenbryn. When they attacked, all the cameras seen was our ones coming on the defence, so of course it was our ones ended up getting charged. And the other ones got away with it. And that girl got bate to within an inch of her life.

The prominence of the Protestant-Catholic interface did not mean that either community was necessarily cohesive within itself.

North Belfast is very fragmented –on both sides. Even on the Nationalist side there are small areas competing with each other.

Yeah, it is. For example, there's a thing... a friction... between Ardoyne and The Bone. But community workers are trying to get our act together and there's a forum now set up between Ardoyne and the Bone. It is working quite well, but sometimes ordinary people within the community – not the community workers or the volunteers, but other people –will say to us: 'What do you mean we're joining with Ardoyne? We're not joining with Ardoyne, we're the Bone!' So you still get that attitude.

Yeah, even within your own community you get this thing about territories.

You definitely do.

But still, if the crunch came to the crunch and the rioting was bad down on the Limestone then we would help each other, you know.

Then fight with each other in between times!

And sure The Bone and Ardoyne then fight the New Lodge;they always did.

Interfaces will never die! Even within the same community.

The thing I find when there is trouble at the interfaces –and I think it's the way the media portray things as well –but, in all fairness, they never give Nationalists a fair crack of the whip.

Yeah, it's very frustrating.

It is, it does be very frustrating. Especially for people who are on the interface and know exactly what has happened and yet it's all portrayed totally different. And when things happen, and it's portrayed from the other side, it's blew out of all proportion for *their* sakes, not for ours.

Holy Cross and continuing sectarianism

Feelings regarding the events surrounding Holy Cross School still ran deep.

See at the time of the Holy Cross thing when it was getting bad, the Protestants were complaining that there was ones walking to the school who weren't

even from the area. But people wanted to help. My kids don't go to Holy Cross, and I was sitting in the house after having left them over to their school, and the next minute the news came on that a blast bomb had been thrown at Holy Cross. Now, I don't drive, but I got my mate up out of bed – she wasn't well, she was sick – and here was me: 'They're after throwing a blast bomb; we'll go up and see what we can do!' I'm a mother myself and there's no way that I can see any child going through that there. And how the Protestant parents from up there allowed it to happen, I just don't know.

You have just hit on it, because most of us in this room are mothers... and I wouldn't let you do that on a Protestant child... it was sick.

Catholics wouldn't have done that. People wouldn't have stood by and let it happen. I know myself, as a Catholic, that if it had've been a Protestant school I would have turned round and said I don't agree with this. And I would say that more than half our community would have followed suit.

At the time of the Holy Cross stuff, we got accused of doing the same thing on the Limestone Road to children from Curry Primary School. And it was me that actually give the interview to the reporters – I told them that we would never treat any child the way they were being treated up at Holy Cross, and that it must have been their own that done it. Then they interviewed this Protestant community worker who wasn't even there at the time. He didn't know what happened, but he'd been told what to say by the Loyalist paramilitaries. And when the news report came on later that evening they only took a wee clip of what I had been saying, but a whole load of things from what he said! Yet he wasn't even there.

How can a grown woman spit on a baby, even a child at six and seven-year-old, knowing that she has kids of her own?

They threw piss at them as well.

It actually landed in front of us! Water balloons filled with urine!

Some of those people are filled with hatred.

I suppose the only positive thing about the Holy Cross dispute was that it really brought our community closer together. Like, you'd have ones who didn't have kids at the school but who were standing there supporting you, encouraging you, saying: 'Go on, you can do it.' They were there when you were going up in the mornings and there when you were coming back down – at lunchtimes, then in the afternoon – and you had all these people supporting you, and they were our community, our neighbours. It was brilliant, wasn't it?

It is unfortunate that that's how it happens: tragedy or crisis usually brings the community together.

Sectarianism was clearly still a major ingredient of interface problems.

I would like to work cross-community, to be honest, because it would maybe teach kids not to be bitter, that they're not all bad on either side.

Well, at least we teach *our* kids not to be bitter. I knew a [Protestant] girl who used to work on a cross-community project – its purpose was supposedly to bring up the next generation to want peace and reconciliation. And one day I saw her going along the Limestone Road with her child, and she whispered down to the child to shout something over at our kids – for to try and get something started! And we're going to our young ones: 'Just ignore it, say nothing, let her walk on.' I couldn't believe it, she was actually putting up a front in front of these Catholic people that she's working with, and being all nice to them and all, and yet she was doing this? And I went to myself: God knows what our ones could be saying to her which she's carrying back to her crowd!

God forgive me, but from they're no height they're being fed this hatred. I mean, even looking at the Orange parades, you see babies in the pram, or toddlers dressed in all this Orange regalia that a child doesn't have a clue about... dancing up and down the road and some of them only learning to walk.... And the bitterness, you can see it seeping out of them. And that's the next generation, they're just pumping it into them.

And some of them are real vicious. If there was a riot or whatever that ended up coming fist to fist, you'd have seen our ones maybe giving one of them a dig in the head or whatever, and that would have been it. But when they [Protestants] used to grab our fellas they just wouldn't have stopped, and you knew that if they got their hands on you, you could be left for dead. At least our ones give you a kicking, maybe put you in hospital or whatever, but if they get their hands on you, that is it, you may say 'cheerio'.

I always believe we accept that there are limits, we know where to stop... like: 'I can't go that wee bit further.' Whereas Protestants have it in the back of their heads just to...

...kill us! They have this thing: 'Kill the Fenian bastards', and that last one boot could be it, going in to you. They just have this hatred.

I think Catholics are a lot more tolerant.

As I said before, I used to work in Gallaghers and there must have been 350 in the part where I worked. The room was divided up into packing and making, and there was about thirty of us Catholics. And on 1st June the Protestants started putting flags and bunting up, and our room used to look like the Shankill Road! And you got ones that spoke to you all year round, but see once 1st June came, they wouldn't look at you, wouldn't even speak to you, even in the canteen. That went right through to August – and that was the working environment that you worked in. And yet when you started in

Gallaghers you were given a rule book, and one of the rules was that there were to be no flags or emblems, and you weren't allowed to wear badges or anything. Yet they used to come in covered in badges! Some were worse than others... There was ones I worked alongside who came across as very bitter – yet a couple of them are now running in and out of our areas on cross-community projects! And I say to myself: cross-community my arse, because she wasn't like that when I worked with her in Gallaghers for thirteen years. And it sickens me, because I couldn't go over into Tigers Bay and work on a cross-community scheme there –they wouldn't allow you to.

Last year my youngest one was being taken by her school to the Grove Baths for swimming. And when they were getting out of the minibus an elderly man came along, with a walking stick, and he just turned and spat on them! I asked the teachers: 'Where were youse when this was happening?' And one of them says: 'We just tried to get the kids in out of the road.' I mean, these are wee ones of eight years of age; what harm were they doing...?

Well, I've always believed that the peace process – for Catholics, that is – has only give us *equality*, whereas the Protestants are seeing us as getting *everything*. It's not as if we've passed them ones, we're only coming up to their level now, but they just don't want that, in their eyes we should never even have been given the chance to come level with them.

We would love to take our kids to the swimmers at Ballysillan Leisure Centre, for it's only five minutes up the street, you could walk up from our house... but we can't go there.

The councillors round our areas have fought for over 20 years for a leisure centre here in North Belfast, that Catholics can avail of, because we can't go to Ballysillan, we can't go to the Groove, we can't go to the one down the Shore Road. I mean, we have no facilities like that over here.

Anything we go for, the Unionist councillors will always see fit to object to it, you know –and that's the kind of petty things that you're up against.

But do you not think they love keeping us down?

They do, they don't want to give you anything to see you bettering yourself in any way, and if they have the control to keep you down there and stop you doing something, they'll do it.

Relations with the police

Relationships with the police had seemingly hardly changed at all.

The Holy Cross situation said it all, when they allowed them to do what they done on those kids. The police were colluding in child abuse.

I seen the police in Carrick Hill putting up them big canvas shields when there's an Orange parade going down Clifton Street – I mean, really boxing people in in Unity Walk, so that they couldn't even see out. Why couldn't they have done that at Holy Cross, why did they allow those wee children – and some of them were only babies in the reception classes, you know – to be so abused? Because that's what it was, it was child abuse. Them kids were abused – by mouth, by physical abuse, by everything you could name – and yet withal the cops stood by and let that happen.

During the Holy Cross thing my brother-in-law, my sister and I all used to walk up together. But remember when we decided that enough was enough and that we weren't going to be corralled any more, we weren't going to let them herd us up in a big bunch? Well, they actually threatened us with arrest if we didn't wait for everybody else, and the same on the way down – they told us they would beat us back, they would arrest us. The police actually kept it going, because they were allowing it all to happen.

Even from it's been over, see as we walk up with the kids to school, if it was a nice day you might get about nine or ten Protestants and they would all stand in a crowd, maybe down in the opening of a street, but away from the footpath, you'd get nine or ten of them and they'd all be standing talking, but just slightly below us. The peelers would see them all standing there and do nothing, but see if me and her was walking up the street, and two people we knew was walking down from the school and we stopped in the middle of the footpath to have a conversation, the peelers would immediately drive the whole way down and move us on – as if we're loitering or trying to incite a riot. I swear there's not allowed to be any more than three or four parents stopped on the road at the same time having a talk because they think you're up to something, and they come and they move you on.

My wee niece goes to Holy Cross, and I collect her at three and then I go up to Ballysillan to collect my own wee girl, and two other kids as well. And I was coming down the other day and seen a bit of disturbance taking place on the Crumlin Road – it was to do with St Gabriel's. I seen a crowd of our young fellas so I stopped, got out of the car, walked across the street and asked them what was going on. Apparently there had been a run-in with the Girls Model. There was about ten out of the Girls Model shouting at our young fellas, and they were answering back. Next thing one of the Girls Model parents had tried to run our kids down in a car, right! Then a fella had come running over, a Protestant who works at a nearby shopping complex, and he said to our kids: 'I know you, coming in and out of ____ and next time I see you down there I'll kick your shit in!' The peelers was there, but they were just targeting our ones, telling them: 'You lot started this,' even though our fellas were saying 'We didn't!' I said to our young fellas: 'Come on, move down the street, don't give them nothing to start at.' Then this car pulled up with about four or five people in it, and the driver wound his window down and shouted at me: 'Away back down the street where you come from, you Fenian bastard!'

It's happening every day. I have actually heard the peelers, sitting in their vehicles, shouting out at our fellas: 'Your ma's a fat whore, a fat slut!' and things like that. And then our kids start mouthing back. Sometimes the peelers were sitting there giving them the fingers, just to get them started. So nothing changes. Last Monday a Protestant parent slapped this wee boy from the Bone, slapped him! For nothing –because he was walking down where Hesketh is. Being honest, with the good weather coming in you hate going up to get your kids from school, because if the ones from Glenbryn are up drinking at Hesketh or whatever, all you get is abuse –they call you and your kids for everything. I mean, that's what I'm saying, nothing changes –it's the same as it always was.

There was the other day, I walked up and all these ones were sitting outside, all these fellas; they had a suite took out of a house into the front garden. They were drinking and shouting abuse – and there wasn't a cop car in sight. They just came out and sat deliberately facing you – so that they could shout abuse at you as you walked past.

But you know what makes me so angry about that? See if that was the opposite way about and it was Catholics sitting out, the Protestants have just to lift the telephone and the police are doing you for either disorderly behaviour or drunken abuse –at the very least you'd be shifted out of the road. But see if *we* get onto the phone –I've seen it happen umpteen times down our way –to tell them: 'My car's been smashed', it's a case of: 'Right, we don't have enough officers to deal with the situation, we'll put you through to somewhere else.' They transfer you from Antrim Road to North Queen Street, but it's the same with them: 'Sorry, we haven't got enough manpower here.' We ended up being sent to somewhere over East Belfast. The incident happened at a quarter to three, and it was nearly an hour before a peeler jeep arrived and asked: 'Where are they?' We said: 'Excuse me?' 'Where are the ones that smashed up the car and done the window?' 'Well, if you had've came from Antrim Road right away... even if youse had walked it down you'd have caught them at it. Because when we were on the phone to you they were still throwing slates and everything over the wall.'

One time the kids were playing a game of rounders, were Parkend Street goes down were the factory is at Parkside Gardens. And one of the kids hit it a big whacker and it went over till the factory. See within the space of... I don't even think it was ten minutes... a police jeep arrived. 'What's going on here? There's been missiles thrown over the interface.' 'No, we don't thing so', we said. Because all the mothers were out keeping the kids entertained, and the kids were all sitting or playing rounders. 'No, no,' he says, 'golf balls and marbles are being thrown over there.' This fella finally turned round and said: 'I'm putting my hand up till it, and you know what it was? It was a tennis ball; we were playing with the kids, and it was one tennis ball went over.' But it's just amazing how the other side can get the police on the ball like that, for something so minor, but we'd be sitting here an hour waiting on them coming in response to real criminal damage.

Housing issues

Housing had also become a major source of inter-community tension.

In the New Lodge there's a really big housing shortage; there's over 700 people on the waiting list to be rehoused and there's absolutely nowhere in the New Lodge for that to happen.

Well, around Hallidays Road and Mountcollyer Street behind the factory, they were some cracker houses that anybody could have moved into right away. But even though we couldn't have moved into a Loyalist area, the Protestants themselves were going: 'These houses aren't up to our standard' and moving out, and getting new ones built for them elsewhere. So they just lay there vacant. The only thing that they ever used those houses for was to break into them and use the slates and bricks to throw over onto our streets.

There's some in Manor Street as well, like a buffer zone. There's a load of houses have been not lived in for years.

In 'The Bone' we're hemmed in: we have an interface on one side and one on the other; the population is expanding, but there's no houses to expand to. And yet the Protestant houses just behind the 'peace-walls' are all lying empty. Some of them are not even behind the peace-walls, and we've actually asked for this land. We've asked for Torrens, but we just can't get it, so we're hemmed in by these peace-walls. And there's actually peace-walls that don't need to be there – Torrens at the moment is mixed so that peace-wall is of no use any more. And they only built it a couple of years ago – it cost thousands. We're feeling now as a community that we can't expand, we're either pushed up the Oldpark or people have to move to other districts. So that's another problem with the interfaces: it turns communities into ghettos.

I know people who were prepared to move into empty houses at the Protestant end of Torrens. They went down to the Housing Executive and said, 'We will take those houses there because we're in such a desperate need.' But the Housing Executive said: 'Sorry, we can't let you.'

Not everybody would be willing to do that, though. Many don't want to move in once they find out the houses are right on the interface. I mean, we've a full street over there, Parkend Street, and there's two people living in it, with maybe thirty to forty empty houses. But people just won't move back into them any more, so they remain blocked up. They have been offered them, but once they see the area, they say: 'No.' Because it's right at the interface. And although it has been sort of quiet over this last year or two, they still won't move back in again, even though the houses are okay inside.

As I said, in the New Lodge there's a long list of people waiting for housing. There's families in them flats with maybe four kids, in a two-bedroom flat,

and in this day and age you're saying to yourself: this shouldn't be happening. And where we have our 'green area', we can't build beyond that.

You'd be creating more interfaces if you did go that way.

We'd asked in Manor Street, because so many of them houses are empty and because there's a big green space behind it, we'd meetings with the DOE and asked them to move the peace-wall back a bit...

That'll never happen! 'Cause the Protestant community wouldn't allow it, they don't want us to take any of their land.

My sister lives in Alliance Avenue, and the fence that used to separate her back garden from Glenbryn was only three strips of wood, it was just like an ordinary fence. And then for some reason... and this is before the Holy Cross dispute... people started talking about Ardoyne busting at the seams, and the ones in Glenbryn seemed to think that we wanted to move into their area and they started murder... and what's the fence like now? It's massive.

The housing situation in North Belfast has changed radically over recent years, and Protestants think we're trying to push them out.

I suppose they see it a threat to them.

Aye, 'ethnic cleansing', as they call it.

But do you not think they're being selfish? There's loads of houses in their areas which none of them want to live in, while there's us homeless and needing houses. So if there's streets sitting empty, which nobody is using, why can't we move in? Do you know what I mean?

They just don't want Catholics anywhere near them. Look at what's happening at the moment with those new flats at the top of Sandy Row. As for that Unionist councillor lambasting Catholics for living in the flats... How he got away with saying what he did on TV I don't know, 'cause he was being completely racist. When our kids grow up they won't be able to get houses within their own area 'cause there's not enough houses to go around, and they're gonna have to move out. And it's places like that where they'll have to move to –but if it's near Protestant areas they won't be wanted.

Young people

Without a doubt the most pressing problems facing interface areas – indeed, all working-class areas –related to young people: their sense of alienation, their lack of employment and opportunities, the alarming increase in suicide, and the attraction of drugs, anti-social behaviour and rioting.

Holiday times can be stressful. When schools close, youth clubs close, and

there's nowhere for the youth to go and the interfaces are like a magnet to young people – on both sides of the community. They just go there for what I would call 'recreational rioting'.

It's a question of offering them an alternative. What is the alternative for young people, because they actually enjoy the rioting?

What we've tried to do is bring the young people who come to our youth club together with some of the pensioners' group. Some of the pensioners actually help out in the youth club. At the same time they're seeing what the young ones have and don't have. Because I think an awful lot of older people think kids nowadays have everything handed to them, and we're letting them see that they don't have everything, these are the only resources we have to work with. And it's also about trying to teach the kids respect for elderly people.

In our area we try this thing called 'adopt a granny'. There was a lot of young people coming in who weren't originally from the community, and we were saying to them: there's people from different areas coming in here who don't have their grannies living here. And we're saying to the younger ones: 'Why don't you adopt a granny – any granny who is in your street –and look after that granny?' So these kids will hopefully then say to other kids: 'No, you're not allowed to play ball there –wee Mrs so-and-so lives there.' And it works. Well, with some kids it only works for a while; they get fed up after a bit and don't bother. But it's a way of trying to bridge that gap, because there is definitely a big gap between the older ones and the kids. And I think it is also because the kids have nowhere to play. I mean there are all these Housing Executive signs up, saying: 'No ball games; no this, no that.'

There's no proper play areas built in our estates.

If the Housing Executive build a back garden onto a house they say they've fulfilled their obligation to provide a play area; that's how they get out of it.

You'll get residents ...I mean, round in Manor Street we were looking for part of it to be a play area – for all the young ones in the area –but it was the residents themselves who didn't want it. All they could see would be the problems with teenagers gathering in it at night. They were like: 'We don't want it in our street.'

The Housing Executive were building fourteen houses on the Ardoyne Road, which is now the interface, and we had asked if we could have part of the area set aside for a play park for the kids. And we were advised to 'get a petition' –so we went round all Ardoyne and we got nearly 600 names and handed them in. But it was a waste of time: they built an extra two houses so they wouldn't have to give us the play area. I think it's totally ridiculous, they're building houses but they don't take into account the number of kids they're putting into each house, and nothing for them to do in the area.

The Executive try to put far too many houses into one wee area. We actually

said to them: ‘Do you not realise that’s too many. All you’re doing is crowding people in... people need to breathe to live.’

Some of the pensioners will say to the kids: ‘Could youse not go to a park somewhere to play, instead of hanging round here?’ But there is no green space for them to play in round our area.

We have a constant fight on our hands over lack of facilities for the kids. Where we live we have a high ratio of kids to adults, and there is no community house or anything like that up there for the young ones. The kids feel that they don’t really belong to the rest of the community and they would love somewhere to go. We have a park at the top of our street; if we could put a portacabin in there at least it would be somewhere they could go and maybe feel some sense of ownership about. It would also maybe give them something more constructive to do rather than getting into trouble or taking part in any rioting.

It’s the same in our area. We have a wee park but there’s nothing much in it for kids. If we had something like a portacabin there it would be really good.

We have Alexandra Park, and you’re sending your kids down for to play football or whatever, then you’re getting these teenage ones, especially at the weekends, coming down, and bringing carry-outs into it. Then they start chanting over the peace-wall at the Protestants, and if a riot starts your kids are stuck down there in the middle of it. There’s nothing down there for them whatsoever. We don’t have back gardens, so the only place our kids have to play in is the middle of the street, and with the cars and all flying up and down it’s too dangerous for them.

The Protestant young ones are just as badly off – and the paramilitary organisations put a lot of pressure on them. I used to work with a girl on a YTP scheme, and about two years ago I happened to run into her down the town, and I said to her: ‘Is your mummy okay; she’s looking very pale and thin?’ And she told me it was all because of a lot of hassle her brother had got into. He was sixteen then, and what happened was... you know how kids like experimenting with drugs and stuff? Well, he eventually tried marijuana. And one day he was sitting in a park with some others and this fella said: ‘What about youse getting a ten-deal between you. A couple of pound each, right?’ So they all done that. Then the following week this guy said: ‘I’ll tell you what, what if you each take five and sell them for such and such, that means you’ll be getting one free for yourself?’ This girl’s brother thought that seemed fair enough, so he done it. Now, when it started out it was £100 he was to bring to this guy –and he was getting his own ten pound worth free – but then within a couple of weeks this guy increased the quantity to £200 worth. Her brother only managed to sell £120 worth, but that didn’t matter to this guy, who not only told him that he *had* to get him the £80, but he gave him a new week’s supply on top of that! And the fella panicked and didn’t know what he was going to go. So his mummy and his two sisters says:

'We'll help you out this time but we're not helping you again.' They got the £80 together and gave it to him. So he got that cleared up, but he still had the new £200 worth of dope to get rid off. He didn't know who he could sell it to, for all his friends had been encouraged to become sellers as well. He and his mates were forced to go into town and wherever, trying to sell this stuff. It ended up he was sitting with near £1000 worth of debt, and the dealers came round and threatened him and threatened the family as well. The family had to get him over to a sister in Leeds or somewhere. She says to me: 'It was all down to the paramilitaries, all for to line their pockets. We just had to get him out of the road, because the next place for him was the graveyard.' That's how much pressure the Loyalist paramilitaries have on them.

Drugs are a big problem. Even nine- and ten-year-olds are smoking blow now, and it's the bigger ones get them started. They stand smoking away at their wee splifs, not only at the weekend, but during the week and all. And some of the bigger ones are getting big drums of glue and selling it at £2 a scoop or whatever. Kids were coming up with their bags and these two fellas were seen scooping the glue in. I mean, this was a big fella at 23 and the other one would have been 21, and they were selling it to the wee totes!

Unemployment has a lot of do with it. 'Cause they've so much spare time on their hands. As well as that it used to be that the dole threw you into training schemes or whatever, but a lot of them now are getting the by-ball, they don't have to go into schemes or anything. And they're thinking to themselves: I'd like some easy cash here, and what easier way than to pray on younger ones that are looking blow or whatever... 'cause I'm gonna make a few pound here to get me my habit.

But look at the ones who take it just for the buzz. A lot of the fellas around our way take Es at the weekend. And one of them, God forgive me, has the whole inside of his mouth chewed, near enough chewed away. The skin... oh, if you'd seen it, it was all like ulcers! He eats the inside of his mouth when he's on them... his lips and all... there's no skin, he has just eaten it all away. I think it's mad, but they do it. And if I say, 'But why do you do it when you're leaving yourself like that?' they say, 'It's the buzz.' And say one of them is on the buroo, he would sell whatever he had to buy drugs. One of them even sold the mobile phone his ma bought him for Christmas.

And joy-riding is a big problem round our areas. The ones that's doing the joy-riding on the likes of the New Lodge don't do it on the New Lodge, they do it on the Falls or wherever else.

And the ones from the Falls do it over here.

Ack, ours just do it in their own area.

I remember last year when we were having terrible trouble with joyriders on the Cliftonville Road and we'd phoned the police. But the cops are no use either. Even when they catch them, I've seen the cops taking kids out of cars

and then letting them go. We've witnessed that when we're out with the community watch, for you're out to all hours. It's amazing; they have them there in their hands, you know, with the stolen car there as evidence but they don't even arrest them. And you're saying to yourself: what's going on here?

I think it's a game for the peelers late at night –do you not think so? Because see in Ardoyne you've [back] entries that run right from the top of the area to the bottom. And late at night – I'm talking 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning – you hear the joyriders come tearing down these back entries with the peelers after them, their vehicles scrapping off the walls. Down one entry and up the next one, then down another one. And the cops don't really do anything: the kids get out, leave the car, the cops phone, get it lifted, and away they all go –I think it's just for a chase.

There's the other night, they were chasing a motorbike with three fellas on it; three of them hanging onto this motorbike going up and down the entries and the peelers swerving up and down the entries after them!

But if your tax is one day overdue they'll stop and fine you straight away, so it's amazing how they let them get away with it. I mean, surely breaking into cars is criminal damage? Cars from over our way are being found in the Falls and vice versa: what they're actually doing is stealing a car to drive themselves home... it's just unbelievable.

What were the reasons behind the high suicide rate among young males?

We think there are many contributing factors behind some children deciding to take their own lives, such as social and economic deprivation, limited opportunities and little prospect of real work in the future. Also for some it was the overpowering influences of certain paramilitary groups that put additional stress during an already vulnerable time in their lives; for as we all know, turning from a young person into an adult is a difficult time.

But see down in our area, there has been a couple of wee fellas have hung themselves down there, and it was nothing at all to do with paramilitaries as far as people there were concerned.

Some mothers were talking about it all one time and one of them had heard of American research which showed that five years after taking Es, depression can set in, and paranoia. And I think that could be part of the problem.

What concerns me is that people progress from one thing to the next, just to get their 'high'. 'The blow's not working so I'm gonna try Es', and then they start taking Es but that's not enough either, and the next minute they're onto cocaine –and that's one thing you don't want any child being on because that is when they're gone.

I was a glue-sniffer when I was a child; for over a year. I tried blow once and took a real bad reaction. I did uppers and downers. That was as a child; as a adult I don't touch anything and haven't any drugs like that.

Okay, you'll get a child that will turn round and say, 'I'll try it and see what it's like,' who *can* try it and see what it's like and never ever touch it again. Then you'll get another child that will turn round and say, 'Here, that wasn't bad, I'll try that again.' And then it gradually progresses from there so that they cannot do without it.

It's all about willpower. If you have the willpower to say 'no' and stick to it.

It's about teaching our kids about the choices that are out there, that's what's important: letting them see that they have the choice of doing, or not doing, certain things. Educating them about what drugs can and will do to them ...

Alcohol is a drug too. It's also a lot to do with peer pressure. Younger ones want to be accepted, and they're maybe hanging around with older ones who are sniffing, smoking blow and taking Es. And the big ones are saying to the wee ones: 'Try this, you can hang out with us, you can do this.' And the younger ones are doing it too, and they say they're doing it to be accepted in with the older ones, you know. It's just really hard for them to say 'no'.

I look out my back bedroom window on a Sunday morning and I see kids smoking 'lungs', isn't that what they're called? The plastic bottle...? And I see our kids doing that, and that's a Sunday morning at maybe half ten and these kids are anything from 11 to 14.

You said you tried glue when you were young. But you were either in someone's house or somewhere out of the road, you didn't actually walk up and down the street...

I used to go to the Deerpark, I would never have sniffed in Ardoyne.

But the kids now are actually walking up and down their own street doing it!

You see them going to school smoking it.

Yes. Blatantly, as if to say: 'Two fingers to you.'

When I was young and I was drinking underage, I hid the fact that I was doing it. I would have went somewhere and did it inside, I never stood at street corners and done it.

And that's another thing too... you're not allowed to chastise kids any more. If you try it, they'll turn to you and say: 'I'm phoning Childline!' I mean, see if I'd have turned round and said to my ma, 'I'm phoning Childline,' she would have beat me black and blue!

Every one of mine has been slapped at one stage or another.

But the teachers aren't allowed to slap them no more either. So the kids have this attitude now: 'I can do what I want.' They've definitely no respect for their elders any more.

But they've no respect for themselves either, because society has shown them that there's nothing there for them – there's no houses, they've no jobs, they've very little, what education they do have doesn't get them anywhere.

At the same time, they've a lot more now than we ever had when we were growing up.

I agree, definitely.

But they don't know what to do with it, that's the problem. They haven't got a clue what to do with what they've got. 'Cause we had that park built, it cost a quarter of a million, yet they set fire to the seats, they had it wrecked and everything. I swear to God, the kids today just don't know what to do with anything they have. They don't know how to use things properly, so they just wreck everything.

We did that child protection course. And you're not allowed to do this and that; you're not even allowed to have them in the car with you on your own. Now, child protection policy is great in a controlled environment, but not when you're working on the streets with kids of different ages. When they are actually standing in front of you and they're shouting, 'We're going to burn your car, we're going to do this or that!' it's a totally different thing.

A couple of them actually lifted their hands and hit us, until we told them: 'See if you lift your hand to us, we'll hit you back, and there's nothing that you can do about it.' See now if we're up the road none of them touches us.

But you *can* work with them. I'm over in my area about eight years, and the ones we worked with years ago actually helped us to move younger kids back a while ago when there was bad trouble on the Limestone. They actually asked us if we wanted them to help. In fact, if any of our young ones slabber to us now, the bigger ones say: 'Don't you dare talk to them'ens like that!'

But it's not easy. See whenever I first moved back down to Ardoyne, she'll tell you I hardly ever cursed, sure I didn't? And when we used to try and move the kids on... you would say to them, 'Come on, move on' or whatever, and the kids would just stand there and look at you, as if to say: 'Look at that eedjit there!' We'd be saying things like, 'Move on, or we'll tell your mummy,' and they'd just laugh at us. So then we had to start talking like them, you know: 'Move now, before I fucking...!' And that was it, away they'd go. But you had to talk like that to get anywhere with them.

You'd to bring yourself actually to their level. But the good thing is that some of them are helping us now if anything does happen.

Some of our young fellas actually *wanted* to stand talking to us; we'd sometimes know more about what's going on in their lives than what their parents would.

You *earn* respect, and a lot of people I think in our area *demand* respect at times – but you can't demand it.

If you treat young people with respect, they'll actually give you respect back, for you'll earn their respect.

I think there's a lack of discipline today; I think it's to do with the way you were brought up yourself. I mean, I bring my kids up the way my mummy and daddy brought me up. But there's kids there and they just don't have no respect for nobody, they haven't any respect for their own parents so they'll not have respect for anybody else.

I think values and all have changed a lot, most kids' values. You try to give kids a lot more than you had for yourself, and sometimes you can overdo it.

Respect used to be enforced more – well, not enforced, but taught – in school and you respected your teachers. Then I think they began to mollycoddle the kids too much, which has created a vicious circle.

I wouldn't have give anybody cheek when I was a kid. I had a dread of going home and being told: 'Such and such was at our door about you.' My daddy would have give me a good slap and he wouldn't have asked 'did you do it?'

There's one thing I wouldn't do. I have one son and two daughters. And to be honest, I probably got more people coming to my door because of A___, 'cause he was a real wee boy, and done stupid shite at times. And they'd have came to the door complaining: 'Your A___ has done blah, blah, blah, or whatever.' And I'd call him out, and you could tell by the look of him whether he'd done it or not. And I'd say to them, 'Right; leave this to me – I'll sort it out.' But one thing I would never have done would be to hit him in front of anybody. I remember going to somebody's door one time over something and they beat the shit out of this child in front of me, actually beat the child all round the garden, and I felt like crying. And I swore I would never ever hit my child in front of anybody. If anyone had've come to our door to complain I would have waited until they had gone and then went: 'Did you do it or not?' And if he did I'd have went crack! But that was between me and him, never in front of anybody. I think it's so disrespectful to hit your child in front of people.

It all really worries me, because if our young people don't see themselves as having a future –with proper jobs and a sense of self-worth – then what will that mean for our areas? I thought with the 'peace process' we would have begun to see an improvement in the situation, but we're still waiting.

Final thoughts

When they reflected on what had emerged from their discussions, the women were concerned that the overall impression given might be a negative one.

I would be worried that anyone reading this booklet might think we are all anti-this and anti-that, because that wouldn't be a true reflection. All of us here do genuinely want the situation facing our communities, Protestant and Catholic, to improve for the better, not only in terms of housing, jobs and facilities for our young people, but in the 'cross-community' sense as well.

I think when you get involved in discussions about the problems we face on a daily basis you do get carried away at times, even a bit emotional about the things you've had to confront or lived through. But although these things upset us, I don't think any of us sitting around this table are full of bitterness or hate.

If that was the case we wouldn't be working at interfaces.

I think a lot of people, including us, just feel so frustrated because the hopes raised by the 'peace process' and the Good Friday Agreement have not materialised. We are still very much a divided society, and all the old fears remain. And it affects our access to basic amenities, like leisure centres, libraries, doctors and places like that. When there is trouble, people can't even get to the likes of post offices safely. And when you take youth away on trips they're not allowed to wear football tops for safety reasons as well.

Even when there is no trouble taking place the interfaces are a barrier to normal life. We can't go to certain leisure centres because it means you're crossing over into Protestant territory.

I feel it most for our young people. You'd almost think that nothing has changed much over the past thirty years, because young people are still facing the same problems their parents faced. Particularly in North Belfast there is a serious lack of employment opportunities for young people. And there's so many places where our young people couldn't even go to, even if they could find work – it just wouldn't be safe for them. You even have that when they go to the likes of Yorkgate, which is meant to be neutral, for there's kids working there who are getting intimidated. And I don't just mean Catholic kids getting intimidated, it's coming from both sides.

Young people are hemmed into their districts – and they don't like going into other districts, with the result that they hang around in gangs within their own communities.

And that's when the anti-social behaviour kicks in – and that's a major problem for the entire community.

But aside from all the problems caused by social deprivation and disadvantage, our two communities haven't really moved any closer to one another. I think that while the community in The Bone, for example, has moved forward in some ways –like in community development – in other ways it hasn't really. And I think that's because not only has there been no real attempt to bring the two communities together, but the healing process that's needed for that hasn't even started. I was looking at how many people have been killed just in our small area by Protestants or policemen or whatever. And the people haven't healed; they haven't spoke about it openly, they're still caught in the past that way.

I believe that the Catholic community is more tolerant than the Protestant community. Okay, because of what still goes on – and especially after Holy Cross –for some there might still be a hatred there. But I think it's because when you try to do anything to reach out to the Protestant community it's blocked by them themselves.

I think that our community is working more towards peace than what the Protestant community would be. I'm not saying that Protestants are against peace, I don't mean it that way; I just don't think they're as active.

Maybe many of them don't want peace? I sometimes think they were happy enough to put up with the way things were ticking along here before the peace process actually kicked in. It was us voted more for the peace process because we wanted to see where it could take us, but they're just not happy with it, for they feel they're kind of losing out. And it's scaring them something silly – and you can understand that.

I think Protestant community workers need to talk more to people on the ground in our areas who are trying to do things, or trying to work with young people to bring about positive changes in their lives. I know that some of them *do* engage with our workers but there's not enough talking going on at community-activist level.

In our areas we've all grew up with hatred being directed at us, either by the Protestant or the Brits, and we've had all that to contend with. And although there are times it does make you feel bitter, it doesn't make me that bitter that I wouldn't want to speak to a Protestant person or interact with Protestants.

It scares me too in the sense that my children are going to grow up in the same old divided society. My son, who's turned 15, is talking to me in ways he never talked before –about 'Huns' and things like that. Now, he wasn't brought up that way, but he's seeing it on the streets, and around where he lives, and going to school –it's all around him. He knows that he can't go certain places, and he's hearing things –like somebody getting a hiding at the top of Brompton Park last week. His interpretation is: that's them ones attacking us again. And it's a real fear with me, 'cause I don't want my children to grow up like that. I tell him not to use words like 'Huns' in the

house. And my wee girl will say to him: there's good Protestant people, so there are. But he's not that convinced.

My kids were raised in Legoniel and were taught to call the police 'the police' –not the 'peelers' or anything like that. Now, even though I myself was born and raised in Ardoyne at the height of the Troubles and seen it all, I wanted my kids to form their own opinions. But when we moved down to Ardoyne their eyes were opened. They had never seen a full-scale riot, and the first riot they saw was actually started by the police, and my kids didn't know what was happening. And then the Holy Cross thing happened. Any sectarian views my kids have been given come from outside influences – it hasn't come from the home.

I think Drumcree and Holy Cross made things take a big nose-dive.

But the Unionist politicians are at fault too. They say they're not talking to such and such but behind the scenes they are. They should be actively doing things to take this process forward.

But does that not show you something too, that the Protestant community don't want their leaders to talk with Sinn Féin, otherwise they wouldn't have voted the DUP in. The Protestant community is going right back to 'no talk', 'no nothing'. If their politicians say they shouldn't be talking to our political representatives, that hardly encourages people on the ground to talk. With the DUP saying 'no talk', and wanting to get rid of the Agreement, it's like they're putting a big divide between our communities again. And ordinary people in the Nationalist community are saying: well, if the Protestant people voted the DUP in with all these votes, *they* mustn't want to talk to us either. Of course, maybe they're saying the same about the way we voted, but the difference is that Sinn Féin wants to talk while the DUP doesn't. I think Protestants have become more hard-line.

At the same time there *is* cross-community work going on –especially with the likes of schools and youth clubs. We take 40 kids down to Harmony House in Portaferry, but although it is a cross-community scheme we are going away with a group of Protestant kids from Westwinds. I would prefer it if we were doing it with a group of Protestant kids from down around the Oldpark, who our ones live right beside. Because we do have to work together, for all our sakes. We need to engage with each other far more than what we are doing at present.

But we can only engage when we can all express honest opinions, because only then can people begin to genuinely confront all the things which divide us and begin to move forward.