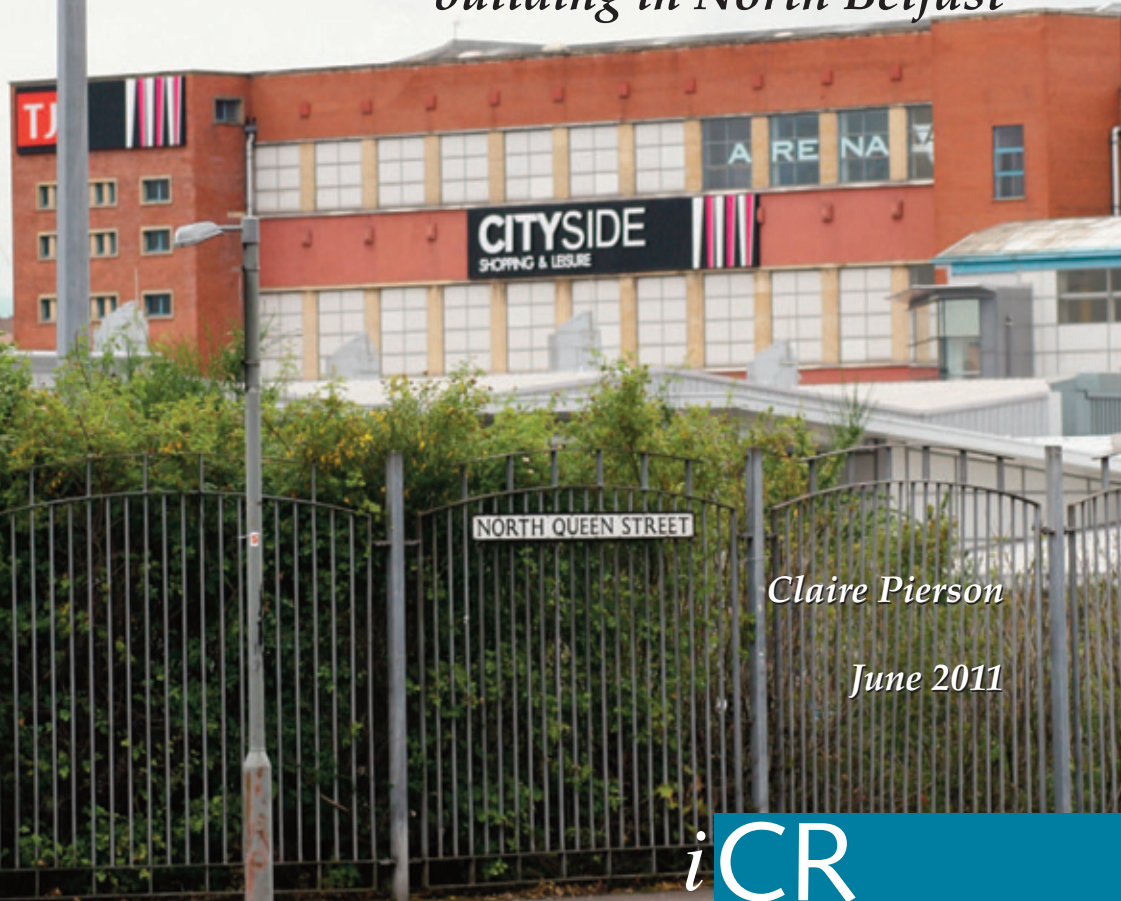


The CitySide Initiative – Community-based Peace- building in North Belfast



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June 2011

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INSTITUTE for

CONFLICT RESEARCH

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Acknowledgements

The author would like to express thanks to all those individuals who agreed to be interviewed as part of this research project. I hope that I have successfully represented the range of views that were expressed.

This publication has been funded by the OFMDFM North Belfast Strategic Good Relations Programme through the Intercomm systemic peace building strand.

Foreword

The disinvestment and the disconnection in North Belfast, as a place apart from regional and citywide priorities, cannot really be disputed. As a place that has suffered disproportionately as a consequence of political conflict it is also the place that is leading the way in building community relations and pursuing an economic development agenda. Local community organisations have worked independently and interdependently to create a new environment that is now focused on developing solutions to local issues of conflict and under-investment.

These solutions have not happened by chance but have come about as a result of years of firefighting, relationship building and in delivering for each other. The road to improved relationships and transformed spaces is one of consistency, incremental small steps and hard work. The progress made in getting to the stage wherein the CitySide interventions were possible is continuing. New opportunities to further develop good relations and shared space in North Belfast are currently underway as a result of the body of work that has been developed within and between the communities and constituencies involved in the CitySide project.

The primary reason for engaging the expertise of Claire Pierson from the Institute for Conflict Research was to capture this learning and to give hope to others that intractable difficulties of division and disinvestment can be overcome. Project promoters believe that the CitySide model is a good news story.

It is fair to say that the CitySide intervention came about as a result of growing confidence and positive engagement between loyalist and republican community representatives involved in interface work. In addition, transformation processes within Loyalism and the support of Sinn Féin for new policing arrangements created a new context and

confidence for co-operation and collaboration across sectors and communities.

The North Belfast Community Development and Transition Group, the North Belfast Interface Network and Intercomm have been instrumental in driving forward a radical model of engagement and delivery with major retailers in the CitySide complex supported by the PSNI and other key stakeholders. The significance about the CitySide development in North Belfast is that it is being driven from the bottom up and has grown sufficiently widely to involve local residents. These indigenous groups have shown tremendous leadership in addressing issues of division and contention and indeed it has been their efforts, supported by local traders, the PSNI, Groundwork NI and other stakeholders that have radically transformed the Duncairn Gardens/ North Queen Street interface.

Their efforts were a bespoke response to an upsurge in sustained sectarian confrontation which threatened the future viability of retailers, jobs and services at the CitySide complex. Intercommunity violence was a regular feature in the local area. This had now expanded into the Yorkgate complex. The consequence was twofold: (I) A reduction in footfall primarily from local communities, (II) A reduction in Yorkgate's ability to attract shoppers from beyond local communities.

The CitySide model demonstrates how best to develop indigenous resources to simultaneously build safer communities while securing key commercial services and employment. The process in CitySide was that local representatives took a key role in promoting anti sectarian strategies within their own respective communities. The PSNI acknowledged and changed their style and direction of policing to be more responsive to community needs. The retail outlets realised that close partnership and interaction with the other key stakeholders would lead to a win-win situation for all.

This report details two clear outcomes from the CitySide model:

Footfall has increased dramatically and CitySide is now seen as an attractive retail outlet complex. This is demonstrated by an increased number of retail outlets in the complex. For example, four new retail outlets are now due to open in the next twelve months. The irony now is that car parking space which was currently a venue for intercommunity confrontation rioting is now so safe that it is impossible at peak times to locate parking spaces.

A significant decrease in sectarian related anti-social behaviour is evidenced and indicated by a reduction from 66 nights of sustained violence over a three month period in 2007 to 6 nights of violence in 2008. This transformation has been maintained and has freed up police resources to address other issues being faced by local communities such as burglary, drug related issues and other crime.

A further outcome of this intervention has been an improvement in overall relationships between all of the key stakeholders. Two examples of this are: (a) Intercomm, North Belfast Interface Network and the North Belfast Community Development and Transition Group who are now delivering front line training to PSNI response officers in North Belfast and (b) The partnership not only compliments, but enhances ongoing efforts around policing, community safety and promotion of community relations in the local areas of Tigers Bay and the New Lodge.

The trust and generosity generated in this particular piece of work among partners is now being reflected across local communities by way of further investment in relationship building, dialogue and co-operation. The CitySide process has established new norms and protocols to deal collaboratively with issues on policing, community safety and managing the potential for interface conflict.

Foreword

This piece of research will be followed by another quantitative piece produced by Groundwork and Intercomm through their jointly promoted Democratising Governance in Transition PEACE III funded programme on the Social Return on Investment produced by the CitySide initiative.

The promoters would also like to acknowledge the support from the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister through the North Belfast Strategic Good Relations Programme towards the programme research and the publication of this report.

John Bunting, Kate Clarke, Gerard O'Reilly, John Howcroft, Sam Cochrane

May 2011

Introduction

The CitySide initiative is a unique and innovative project, established in early 2008 as a response to increased violence, disorder and anti-social behaviour at the Cityside complex which is located along the interface of Duncairn Gardens. This behaviour, including vandalism, graffiti, rioting and violence, had a negative impact on good relations and perceptions of safety in the area which affected the level of investment in the retail park, the number of customers visiting shops and the appearance of the Cityside complex.

The persistence of this violence and tension generated a response from representatives from the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities in North Belfast. Participants from the North Belfast Community Development & Transition Group, the North Belfast Interface Network, Intercomm, the PSNI, Cityside Management team, schools, churches and other voluntary and statutory agencies began to meet on a regular basis, developing lines of communication, sharing information and dialogue regarding the incidents in the area and creating partnerships in order to address the anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhood.

Although the actions of the group were initially of a short-term 'fire-fighting' nature, this has since provided opportunities for more long-term preventative measures which have dramatically reduced incidents of crime and violence. This co-ordinated approach of transformation to a safer environment has encouraged new investors to the area which has invigorated and brought a new-found confidence to the spot. This has enabled local residents to see the Cityside complex as neither a Protestant or Catholic area but a shared space which can be of benefit to the whole community.

This document, commissioned by the Cityside Initiative, aims to draw attention to some of the key insights of stakeholders in this venture on

how to respond most effectively to violence and disorder at interface areas and providing solutions to reduce the possibility of its reoccurrence in the future. The report provides an overview of the experiences of community workers and activists, local businesses, churches and police officers who have been involved in the various projects and initiatives. The ultimate aim is to provide a guide of key methods and good practice to those involved in responding to interface violence in Belfast; as key participants in this project have said:

'CitySide may have been seen as a stop-gap...a sticking plaster three or four years ago. It is now a tried and tested way of dealing with conflict and going a fair way to bringing it to a conclusion.' (Community worker, New Lodge)

'If it works in Duncairn Gardens then why can't it work in other areas?' (PSNI Officer)

This evaluation has been completed through a series of informal, semi-structured interviews with key community workers, local PSNI, residents of New Lodge and Tiger's Bay, local business representatives and representatives of the church who have been involved with the CitySide initiative. It is divided into chapters which outline the background and development of the programme, findings of key concepts and good practices for such community work and recommendations for future planning and strategy.

Location and Background to the CitySide Initiative

In order to fully understand the development and success of the CitySide programme it is crucial to provide a background to the location in which it took place. North Belfast is a patchwork of small communities divided by visible and perceived boundaries. It is the most mixed segment of the city in terms of religious composition. However, each segment of North Belfast is highly segregated into either majority Catholic or Protestant populations. Although containing only 5% of Northern Ireland's population, this area has suffered over 20% of all deaths associated with the 'Troubles'.¹

The CitySide complex (formerly Yorkgate) is located off North Queen Street and is neighboured by the New Lodge and Tiger's Bay communities which are to either side of the main thoroughway and buffering zone of Duncairn Gardens. Statistics show that more than 90% of the New Lodge population is from a Catholic background whilst over 90% of the Tiger's Bay community is from a Protestant background (Tiger's Bay is located within the wider Duncairn Ward).² According to the Multiple Deprivation Measure, both wards are considered to be within the top 10% of most deprived areas in Northern Ireland, the New Lodge being the 3rd and Duncairn being the 14th most deprived ward.³ The Multiple Deprivation Measure is based on levels of levels of employment, dependence on welfare, levels of crime, levels of educational attainment and training, health and care, housing and the environment and transport.

Duncairn Gardens serves as the interface between the New Lodge and Tiger's Bay. The road has been subject to extensive regeneration

¹ Hamilton, J., Hansson, U., Bell, J. and Toucas, S. (2008), *Segregated Lives: Social Division, Sectarianism and Everyday Life in Northern Ireland*, Institute for Conflict Research: Belfast.

² <http://www.ninis.nisra.gov.uk/>

³ Ibid.

through the development of a business centre and premises for voluntary and community organisations. This road and North Queen Street were subject to outbreaks of violence at various times of the year and triggered by certain events (parades, football matches, Gaelic matches, bonfires and Halloween) and sparked by a variety of factors (alcohol and drug use, flying of flags, political events, night-time economy, fireworks). Although this violence has a sectarian nature in the events and times when outbreaks occur, most interface workers point out that it is linked to anti-social behaviour more generally.

'We decided then it wouldn't be sectarian, it was just anti-social behaviour, young kids involved.' (Community Worker, Tiger's Bay)

Much of the vandalism, rioting and violence involves young people (some as young as seven years old) and has been orchestrated and fuelled in recent years by the use of social media.⁴ This demonstrates the changing nature of interface violence, in that violence is not being orchestrated by paramilitaries but by young people as a form of 'recreational rioting',⁵ which has been described as:

*Another form of anti-social behaviour, which is emerging as a persistent problem as Northern Ireland struggles to establish itself as a peaceful, democratic society. However, these forms of recreational rioting can all too easily feed into more inclusive forms of sectarian violence.*⁶

However, residents of the area are keen not to 'demonise' all young people and highlight that there is often a core group who take part in these activities. This core group are noted by interface workers to be young people who end up progressing to more serious criminal activity.

⁴ See for example, O'Dochartaigh, N. Conflict, Territory and New Technologies: Online Interaction at a Belfast Interface, *Political Geography*, Vol 26:4, 2007, 474-491.

⁵ Jarman, N. and O'Halloran, C. (2001), 'Recreational Rioting: Young People, interface areas and rioting', *Child Care in Practice*, 7 (1), 2-16.

⁶ Ibid.

The ones who we went to their parents in 2007, you know they're now involved in criminality, that's the start of it. (Community worker, New Lodge)

Often, young people involved in interface violence would claim that attacks had begun from the 'other side' and that they were 'defending their area', however community workers knew from communication with those on the other side of the interface that this was not the case. It seems that the idea of defending the area is passed down to younger generations of males in particular, and it is deemed acceptable to engage in violence and rioting to achieve this. It is important for interface workers (and the wider community) to stress that violence is not acceptable and in fact (if they have the information), that there is no threat from the other community.

It is also interesting to note that young women are also involved in this violence, as spectators and sometimes as active participants.⁷

Girls are the worst. In 2009, we had romances going on between both communities, which was brilliant to see, but the trouble that brought. It was good to see... but the kids that came along were jealous of the wee girl and boy and it ended up in trouble. (Community worker, New Lodge)

Previous research has demonstrated the high levels of segregation in these areas.⁸ This has documented, for example, the fact that many residents of one community may feel intimidated walking through what is perceived to be the 'other community's' area and would prefer to either take a longer journey, avoid the area, or travel by bus or car through an area.⁹

⁷ The role of young women in interface violence is very much underreported, for examples of research considering young women and their role in interface violence see: Jarman, N. (2005), Teenage Kicks: Young women and their involvement in violence and disorderly behaviour. *Child Care in Practice*, 11(3), 341-356 and Hansson, U. (2005), *Troubled Youth: Young people, violence and disorder in Northern Ireland*, Institute for Conflict Research: Belfast.

⁸ See for example, *Segregated Lives*, note 1.

⁹ Ibid.

I would only walk as far as the Doctor's surgery, just in case...you know someone recognised me. (Resident, New Lodge)

However, it has been noted that there are attempts to decrease visible signs of segregation, for example, through the re-imaging of murals.¹⁰ This may work towards creating a less intimidating environment and a sense that the area was becoming less segregated and thus encourage more cross-community activity. Regeneration, which has taken place on Duncairn Gardens, has created a more neutral space in which people can meet; this has included the creation of a business park and large community organisations, such as the Northern Ireland Community for Voluntary Action (NICVA) and Groundwork NI and the North Belfast Community Development and Transition Group's Cultural bonfire - beacon initiative, whereby a bonfire from the Tiger's Bay side of Duncairn Gardens was relocated to another location within the Tiger's Bay and Mountcollyer community.

¹⁰ There have been several murals in Tiger's Bay which have been re-imaged with funding provided by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland under its Re-Imaging Communities programme.

An Overview of the CitySide Initiative

This project was set up in the spring of 2008 in response to enquiries from the CitySide complex to local politicians and representatives of the North Belfast Community Development and Transition Group regarding the increased levels of violence especially during June/July/August. This had resulted in workers being targeted and having stones thrown at them, nightly riots in the car park and acts of vandalism and theft:

We were in a very difficult place with regard to interfaces, sustained rioting was occurring, properties were getting attacked, people were getting injured, police vehicles damaged, business properties suffering, communities suffering. (PSNI officer)

Management had noted a marked decrease in people using the centre and the possibility of some businesses closing. There were also almost ten times as many security guards than are there at present, working in pairs, because of the threat of violence. All of this contributed to a negative perception of the centre:

We promote a happy and safe environment for customers to come into. The last thing they want to see is graffiti everywhere, damaged buildings, violence. (Representative of the business community)

Members of the security team had contacted local politicians and interface workers for assistance, who in turn had contacted local community workers. Relationships between community workers from Tiger's Bay and the New Lodge had already been established through the North Belfast Interface Monitoring Group (NBIN), however this new programme was intended to target a specific area, ie. the CitySide complex and surrounding area of North Queen Street, Duncairn Gardens and Brougham Street.

Members of this group included community workers from:

Intercomm: A development organisation which aims to forge fruitful links between Catholic/Nationalist and Protestant/Unionist community groups through long term strategic development work, community inspired peace building initiatives, youth programmes and job creation programmes.

North Belfast Community Development & Transition Group: Originally known as the North Belfast Prisoners Aid, an organisation for loyalist ex-prisoners, which now works on a cross-community basis to develop, support and promote reconciliation whilst also building community capacity within PUL communities of North Belfast.

The North Belfast Interface Network: An organisation established in 2002 by community organisations to develop a strategic response to interface violence and develop community relations work in North Belfast.

Representatives from the local community, police, churches and uniquely, representatives from the local business community; from the CitySide complex and also from businesses located on Duncairn Gardens, for example, Teletech call centre, were involved in the initiative. This joined-up, multi-agency approach has been highlighted as being a necessary and highly effective part of the process.

We couldn't do it on our own, we needed the partnership.
(PSNI Officer)

Mobile phone networks had been set up through previous interface monitoring work and initially, in response to the contact from CitySide, a mobile phone network was set up for interface workers and certain people living on the interface in order to monitor, report and respond to incidences of violence. Although mobile phone networks have been



Examples of cross-community activities around the CitySide complex







successful in other situations, here it was judged (at least before face to face meetings) to be quite problematic. Phone holders reported being verbally abused by callers, phone holders not answering calls and rather than responding to incidents, there was a perception that some were playing a 'blame game':

Dialogue started with an exchange of phone numbers, but not everybody was genuine, they had their phones turned off or they just didn't answer their phone. (Interface worker, Tiger's Bay)

Face to face meetings have proved to be much more rewarding in this case. Although at first meetings were characterised by blaming one another and an unwillingness to take responsibility, quite quickly the meetings became much more functional and relationships and trust were built enabling members of the group to be sure that any promises made would be kept. Participants accepted a sense of responsibility and, as such, the process of dealing with problems became much more transparent with a sense of accountability.

It got to the stage, at some of the earlier meetings where they would have sat around the table and argued about who started it and things like that. So I think the first thing they done was, sat round a table and said it doesn't matter who started it, it was about resolving the issues. (Interface worker, Tiger's Bay)

Meetings were held quite intensively during the most concentrated periods of rioting and violence, up to two or three times weekly. These meetings involved members of the local business community, the PSNI and interface workers. During calmer times meetings are held on a monthly basis in order to maintain relationships, provide updates and plan for future projects. The relationships and friendships built at the meetings and the benefits which can be evidenced from successful work already completed has built confidence in continuing to develop this project in the communities involved.

I built up confidence knowing that they were genuine. (Interface worker, Tiger's Bay)

The importance of the diversity of groups that have been working on this programme and the uniqueness of having the business community involved has been noted by participants.

'To engage a business about working so closely with the community, about interface incidents, I've never heard of it happening before...It's still not happening to the extent we want it to.' (PSNI officer)

Working on a multi-agency basis has enabled this group to share issues and problems and also to come up with more diverse and innovative solutions. The opportunity to share experiences, knowledge and resources means that problems can be dealt with much more efficiently and quickly without multiple consultations. For example, the complex had a problem with trolleys disappearing, these had been taken by young people and were being vandalised and used to damage cars. Community workers were able to provide this information to businesses and also, on occasion, to return the trolleys to CitySide thus encouraging businesses to take measures which keep trolleys on-site and improving the appearance of the local area and decreasing incidents of vandalism.

'People can bring issues to us and discuss it openly and hold us to account, this way it's easier to get things done and we have a better opportunity to engage with people which we couldn't have met before.' (PSNI officer)

The group would like to have even more contact with the business community however, it has been noted that during periods of stability there is less interest in engaging with interface work by the wider business community.

This project was conceived as crisis intervention thus initial work was

mainly of a 'fire-fighting' nature. This involved interface workers being visible at areas where anti-social behaviour was taking place, in order to monitor such activity and engage with young people who were taking part in violence and trying to encourage them to move away from the area. If this didn't work, community workers could then approach parents to inform them of their children's behaviour. Having interface workers present at scenes of violence also provides a sense of accountability, as a record of incidents can be kept so that there is no chance to blame each other.

This fed into further work which involved community workers talking to young people in schools and youth groups and providing disincentives for engaging in anti-social behaviour, for example, explaining that they cannot travel to certain countries with a criminal record. There has also been a yearly summer poster campaign aiming to discourage young people from taking part in rioting. This is coupled with local youth groups offering diversionary activities, such as trips, outdoor activities, sports etc. However, these may not always be wholly successful in distracting young people from partaking in interface violence.

...the buzz they get from being on those interfaces, you could bottle that. (Interface worker, New Lodge)

Despite this, measures taken at the interface have had a significant impact. Incidences of rioting and violent behaviour have dramatically reduced, for example, December 2010 saw the lowest recorded incidents since 2008 (25 in total) and events, such as the Tour of the North, passed off peacefully in 2010.¹¹

¹¹ <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/hopes-for-calm-at-tour-of-the-north-march-14844875.html>

'We had the quietest Tour of the North here that we've ever had...I policed on the Nationalist side which I wouldn't have done before as it would have caused trouble...but being there this year I could see people I knew and they were helping.' (PSNI officer)

Although there were small disturbances on the 11th night on North Queen Street these were much less visible than in previous years and are greatly reduced by the presence of community activists. There is now a forum where discussion can take place and as such pre-empt and plan for potential problems associated with contentious events. One of the key successes has been in communicating with the PSNI, which enables interface workers, with local knowledge of the community, to identify offenders and provide key knowledge to police officers and perhaps intervene before more official action has to be taken. The police also acknowledge that the link with local community workers has been a learning curve for them and has improved their ability to do their job.

The community are very vibrant and forward thinking...we appreciate the courage shown by both communities to engage with us.' (PSNI officer)

This has also involved interface workers coming in to train police officers, providing explanation of an interface workers role, the work that they are undertaking and how they and the police can work together to respond to and reduce interface violence. Although this has had positive feedback from both interface workers and the police there is a perception that some younger police officers are unwilling to engage with interface workers because of their perceived background in being linked to paramilitary organisations.

With a reduction in violence and a period of stability, there is greater opportunity to engage in longer term measures to combat interface violence and improve inter-community cohesion. Community workers have developed ideas such as 'Events for All' which aims to bring local residents from both communities together for events such as fun days, pensioners dinners and Santa's' grottos at Christmas. These events are sponsored by local businesses and the PSNI and create opportunities to forge relationships between residents from both communities. The PSNI have also founded a cross-community football team, 'Limestone United', so that police officers can play football with local young people, who perhaps have been involved in violence at the interface in the past, with the aim of building trust and stronger relationships. This has developed to the extent that a trip to Dublin with young people and the police has been arranged to compete in a tournament.

I know more kids in Tiger's Bay now than I ever did.' (PSNI officer)

Although these types of events may be seen as 'extras' to the main work on the interface, it is important not to underestimate their importance and the valuable relationships which can be built during cross-community activities and which can work towards preventing the deterioration of relationships in the future.

The success of this venture can also be seen in the CitySide complex; currently the centre is close to full capacity and is suffering from a shortage of car parking spaces. Increased stability and also an improved appearance, due to less vandalism, creates a secure environment where people feel safe shopping. The improvement of business at the CitySide complex has positive implications for the local community, in the form of employment and the increase in bridging social capital¹² and cohesion this can bring.

¹² See Putnam, R. (2000). 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital'. *Journal of Democracy* 6 (1): 65–78. Bridging social describes more distant connections between people and is characterised by weaker, but more cross-cutting ties e.g. such as the ones between business associates, acquaintances, friends of friends. It is important in seeking and gaining employment.

It gives the local people a purpose and they work alongside people from the other side and it doesn't matter where you're from. (Resident, New Lodge)

Improved business conditions can also encourage businesses to invest in the local community, as is currently happening. For example, Tesco sponsors an annual Christmas dinner for pensioners from the New Lodge and Tiger's Bay and provided refreshments for the North Belfast Fun Run in the summer of 2010.

However, the hard work which has taken place in order to secure this situation should not be undervalued. Interface workers have had to, on occasion, work solidly day and night (at one time for 66 nights consecutively), responding to calls to intervene in incidences of rioting and violence. This involves a high level of dedication to their work and also a high risk of 'burnout' and, of course, risks to their personal safety.

I mean you were doing social services work, police work and parents work... you were there, especially in the summer months, you were there practically all day, from the early morning til late at night. (Interface worker, New Lodge)

Interface workers have also reported coming under attack from members of their own community for working with members of 'the other side'. This can be problematic for maintaining trust within the community, although strong relationships have been built up between community workers from both 'sides'; it takes much longer for this trust to filter out into the rest of the community.

Nevertheless, all community workers reported that the sense of achievement involved when seeing the results of work and the extent to which 'a sense of normality' has been restored to the area made the work worthwhile.

When you see a settled area, when you see an expanding business retail park, when you see children coming together for Christmas or creating the space for them to meet up, that's when you know you're advancing.'
(Interface worker, New Lodge)

Key Methods for Good Practice

The CitySide Initiative developed in response to recurrent outbreaks of violence and was initially conceived of as a crisis intervention programme with the sole purpose of dealing with and responding to these occurrences. This has since developed into a period of sustained work which has included diversionary and preventative work and furthered relationship building and planning for the future. This process has provided key learnings and a good practice model for working on an interface and in a particularly unique situation of working with businesses on an interface. The following chapter will provide an overview of several important themes which emerged from this evaluation.

Identifying Key Stakeholders

Each participant involved in the CitySide programme has emphasised the importance of the relationships forged throughout this process.

I think it has a lot to do with personality. You know if you build up a trust with somebody, you build a friendship up as well, there's a friendship with people on the other side. (Interface worker, New Lodge)

This developed a confidence and trust in the work that was being undertaken and the people undertaking the work which was key to the longevity and success of the overall project.

Working on an interface can involve workers being on call constantly, especially during high periods of sustained violence. This means that those involved must be committed to their community and have an excellent degree of local knowledge.

Sometimes I wasn't getting home til 12 o'clock. It was a tiresome time, a lot of months in 2007 never seemed to end. (Interface worker, New Lodge)

All key contacts in the business community and the PSNI were believed by those involved to be genuinely engaged in the initiative and dealt with all issues and queries honestly and directly and, even if they were not able to fulfil every request, they did not make idle promises.

If you start making promises that you can't keep, it becomes unreal and it becomes ineffective. (Local Business Representative)

All interviewees highlighted the fact that this was a personality driven process and the commitment of those involved and the relationships forged meant that progress was not driven off track during any crisis times.

One interviewee noted the fact that women were particularly good interface workers as trust was more easily built.

Its easier to build up trust with a woman than with a fella, as they (men) were part of the organisations that done harm, you bring a woman in, you have that wee bit more trust, cause you knew that they weren't involved in making the decisions in the past. It's easier to talk to a woman. (Interface worker, Tiger's Bay)

Thus, it is crucial to recognise and engage with people who have influence in the community and can provide insight into effective solutions to the problems there.

Attitudes

At the beginning of the process it was recognised that there had been a culture of blaming 'the other side' for any acts of violence and retaliation. However, it was when people began to admit that there was fault on both sides and mutual responsibility for the problems was taken that the positive work began. People cannot begin to move forward without being prepared to take a full role in creating change and for

this there must be acceptance that both sides have responsibility. This is much more likely to happen as relationships, mutual respect and trust are built within a group.

It was also highlighted that when sustained violence was recognised and categorised not simply as organised sectarian violence but as more akin to anti-social behaviour, this created a more neutral environment and it could be dealt with more effectively and did not raise so many emotions.

Communication

At the height of interface violence, meetings were taking place 2 or 3 times weekly and community activists were taking calls at all times of the day and night. With a reduction in violent incidents and anti-social behaviour, it was possible that participants would believe their job was done and move on, however, it is recognised that in order to address the root causes of the problems a more long-term, sustained approach is necessary. Currently, there is still one meeting per month in order to provide updates, raise issues and maintain relationships.

Interface workers noted that communication with the police was one of the most important measures for success in reducing interface violence.

When we started working with the police and they started attending our meetings that was the turnaround for us. We took small steps; we identified the wee groups from both sides... the ringleaders. (Interface worker, New Lodge)

Interface workers, with knowledge of the community, were able to work with police in order to identify offenders and were then able to talk to them and their parents in order to avoid arrests in all cases. Police officers also recognise that without communication with the local community they could not have achieved such success.

We would have been working in isolation down there...what's the point in me sitting talking about people from a particular area coming in and causing problems in the business park if I'm not talking to the very community where they're coming from? (PSNI Officer)

Long-Term Planning

As previously stated, the initial and sole aim of the initiative was to reduce the incidents of rioting, anti-social behaviour and vandalism in and around the CitySide complex. It has since been recognised by the participants to this programme that short-term planning only provides short-term solutions and that in order to tackle the root causes of these issues and to decrease the possibility of tensions arising in the future the group still needed to meet on a regular basis and plan more long-term cross community activities in order to improve relationships between the residents of Tiger's Bay and the New Lodge.

We have to keep this work continuing so the crisis doesn't return. (Interface worker, New Lodge)

Longer term initiatives have included diversionary and preventative measures in order to keep young people from returning to the interfaces, perhaps out of boredom, these are usually developed in conjunction with local youth groups.

There has also been several cross-community events organised to encourage residents to use the 'shared/safe space' on Duncairn Gardens and promote good relations between the communities of Tiger's Bay and the New Lodge. This has involved activities such as fun days, football tournaments and events related to shared holidays such as, Christmas, Easter and Halloween.

There is also ongoing interface monitoring, such as the 'Safer Streets' initiative and the Tiger's Bay and Mountcollyer Policing and Community

Partnership where local residents patrol their streets to spot potential areas where violence could erupt. This continuing cross-community and long-term work can build trust and create an environment where there is potential for dialogue on more contentious issues.

Engagement with young people

As young people are the main instigators of current forms of anti-social behaviour it is important to effectively intervene and engage with them. In this programme, interface workers would approach young people involved in rioting and talk to them about why they were there and what they hoped to achieve. Through this informal engagement they learned that some of the young people had difficult family backgrounds and may have been simply 'hanging around' with no-where else to go. With persistent offenders, when their identity was known, it was often useful to approach their parents and inform them of their children's behaviour. In many cases, parents had no idea where their children had been or what they had been involved in.

In terms of a longer term preventative strategy, interface workers routinely go into schools (mainly before the summer and Christmas holidays) to talk to young people about the results and repercussions of their actions in the hope that this will dissuade them from becoming involved in anti-social behaviour. Another prevention programme is the summer posters, which are designed by young people to help promote summer activities and discourage young people from participating in any violence on the interfaces, these are prominently displayed on buses and by local youth groups.

It is recognised that rather than reacting to incidents of violence, there must be a cohesive plan to prevent it from actually occurring. This involves adopting a joined up approach where interface workers cooperate with local youth or church groups, schools and parents in

order to coordinate diversionary activities for young people which are engaging and also arranged at times which will stop young people becoming involved in violence.

There is also a growing awareness of the additional problems and triggers that drugs and alcohol bring. Programmes in North Belfast are helping to address these issues. For example, the RAPID drug box, established by the Tiger's Bay and Mountcollyer Policing and Community Safety Partnership, located in a doctor's surgery on Duncairn Gardens where anyone can confidentially leave prescription or illegal drugs in the box for the police to pick up. Plastic bags with details of the service can be used to carry the drugs in and have been distributed to every house in North Belfast. It is important to recognise the impact that drug and alcohol use can have on young people, tackling this issue is crucial in reducing anti-social behaviour and interface violence.

Conclusion

The positive work which has taken place through the CitySide initiative, initially conceived of as a short-term crisis intervention measure, has generated medium and long term strategies in order to improve community relations, community cohesion and help towards tackling the deeper roots of inter-community conflict. The opportunity which has been taken in this instance can be built upon in the future in order to strengthen relationships.

Although in the immediate community there is knowledge of the work that is being done on the interface around the CitySide complex, it is necessary to feed this knowledge out into the wider community in order to increase understanding of and participation in cross community activities. It is also necessary to have further and deeper communication with the business community and statutory agencies to continue the work which has already taken place and also to further discussion into more contentious issues.

The multi-agency, joined-up approach adopted in this situation has helped to engage statutory agencies and enabled focused and effective problem-solving and an opportunity to impart knowledge and experience. It is the hope of those involved that this can be shared with other local communities experiencing similar problems and that there is an opportunity to share learning and practice and develop relations with other communities.



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