

**AGE CONCERN NORTHERN IRELAND'S RESPONSE TO THE
CONSULTATION PAPER 'A SHARED FUTURE'
IMPROVING RELATIONS IN NORTHERN IRELAND,
JANUARY 2003**

Introduction

Age Concern Northern Ireland is a major voluntary organisation committed through campaigning and service provision to promoting the rights of all older people as active, involved and equal citizens. We act as a Northern Ireland-wide campaigning body and support a network of Local Age Concern Groups operating throughout Northern Ireland.

Age Concern Northern Ireland considers this consultative document on the future of community relations in Northern Ireland. It is vitally important and that the views and opinions of older people and those who represent them be listened to.

Older people, particularly those living in interface areas and in places where the level of tolerance and understanding between communities remains low, have suffered greatly, either as a direct consequence of violence or, more often, because of the fear of violence and community strife. Divisions within our society and the reluctance, often, to move outside their own communities and the distrust which so often exists across communities, has had an inhibiting effect on the lives of large numbers of older people.

We are deeply concerned at the growing numbers of attacks on older people and the increasing fear of attack and violence. We feel, however, that it is important that we don't fall into the trap of simply seeing older people as victims.

The consultative document places particular emphasis on the need for leadership from community representatives in bringing about change and that Government must act in partnership with local communities to bring about change. Older people must not be excluded from this community involvement.

Age Concern Northern Ireland and the thirty-one Age Concern Local Groups across Northern Ireland are committed to supporting the development of policies and services which encourage social cohesion not only across communities but also across generations. We believe that an approach which focuses on bringing generations together as active and involved citizens will do much to improve community relations in Northern Ireland and must be supported.

We have sought views of the older people we represent through two consultative meetings held in Belfast and Omagh on 10th and 11th September 2003 respectively and through seeking views from Age Concern Local Groups who were unable to be represented at the meetings. The feedback from these meetings forms the basis of our response.

Age Concern Northern Ireland is grateful to the office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister for facilitating these meetings and to Brigid Loughran for the reports and trust they will be helpful in developing the strategy.

DAVID SAVAGE
Policy Officer
Age Concern Northern Ireland

September 2003