

**List of Residents Groups and Projects participating in Shared
Future Workshops at Ballynafeigh Community House
Monday the 22nd and Tuesday the 23rd of September**

- Central Ballynafeigh Residents Association (2 participants)
- Ava Crescent & Sunnyside Park Residents Group (2 participants)
- Annadale & Haywood Residents Association (1 participant)
- Upper Ballynafeigh Community Group (1 participant)
- Journeys Training and Development Project for Women (1 participant)
- Ballynafeigh Health Development Project (South Belfast Highway to Health) (1 participant)
- Mixed Links Project (2 participants)
- Ballynafeigh Crucial Arts Project (2 participants)
- Five Areas Advice Project (1 participant)
- Ballynafeigh Youth Diversionary Project (1 participant)
- Ballynafeigh Citizenship Project (1 participant)
- Ballynafeigh Community Facilitation Project (1 participant)

Report of Consultation on “ A SHARED FUTURE” document.

Monday 22nd September 2003

1. Background & Participants

The consultation was held at Ballynafeigh Community Centre on the evening of Monday 22nd September. There were 7 participants 6 of whom were representatives of local residents groups. Two were from Central Ballynafeigh Residents Association. Two from Ava Crescent & Sunnyside Park Residents Group and one each from Annadale/Haywood Residents Association and Upper Ballynafeigh Community Association. The 7th was a local resident and also a worker in the Community Centre.

Most of the discussion focused on community relations/good relations issues relating to the Ballynafeigh area because that was how participants had experienced them and that was the area in which they felt they had some influence, and could make a difference, personally and as representatives of residents groups.

Five of the participants had lived in the Ballynafeigh area for more than 20 years. One had lived there for more than 10 years and one for 6 years.

2. BALLYNAFEIGH - A MIXED AREA

All the residents were aware that Ballynafeigh is perceived, both by people outside the area and those who live here as a “mixed area” and this led to a discussion of what this term actually meant to them.

It was suggested that the term “mixed” in relation to Ballynafeigh went further than being a mix of Catholic/Protestant or Nationalist /Unionist to include other groups and significant numbers of individuals, such as students, ethnic minority people and people who did not subscribe to any religious denomination.

It was also noted that the area contained a mix of class/occupational residents and of homeowners, housing executive tenants and private rental tenants.

The “mix” was not however a completely homogenous one. Within the area described broadly as Ballynafeigh there were streets or groups of streets which were perceived as “sub areas” sometimes because they formed a geographical entity or because of perceived political or religious identity.

All these factors were felt to be important to and impact on “community relations” in the area.

Some of the participants felt strongly that the perception of Ballynafeigh as a mixed area had resulted in an assumption (by government agencies and funding bodies) that no great attention or support need be given to community relations work in the area. They believed that this was not the case and indeed that considerable work had been done (by the local community) and needed to continue, to support what could often be a fragile “peace” in the area.

3. CHANGES IN THE “MIX”

It was felt by all the participants that “change” was another very salient feature of the area.

Changes particularly noted over the past 10 years included;

More single people

Fewer older people

Fewer families (with children)

More students

More ethnic minorities (Chinese were mentioned)

Greater “variety” of people.

Increased trend towards home ownership

More apartments (built for single people)

Less Housing Executive accommodation (particularly Annadale flats)

New “sheltered” accommodation for elderly

Less affordable housing (for local families) due to big increase in house prices.

More people out at work all day (less “housewives”)

Less contact between neighbors.

Loss of amenities including 2 (Protestant) youth clubs

Closure of Curson cinema

Change of use of shops/ more cafes, hairdressers no home bakeries, hardware or shoe shops. Closure of many small “corner” shops.

Imminent closure of Ormeau Bakery complex.

While it was recognised that these factors reflected changes taking place in the wider society it was felt that they impacted on community relations in the area, by causing the “mix” to change all the time and by creating a degree of uncertainty about what the future might bring/look like.

4. WHAT BENEFITS DID PREVIOUS “COMMUNITY RELATIONS” POLICY DELIVER FOR THE AREA?

Some of the participants had, through links with women’s groups or youth groups, several years ago taken part in “exchange visits” with other communities. They were not particularly impressed with this aspect of “community relations” strategy as they felt it had little impact on their day to day lives and was of such a short term nature that no meaningful follow-up was involved.

Others thought that in situations of extreme segregation a visit to “the other side” might be of some benefit in breaking down extreme stereotypes.

Generally there was no clear picture about what the governments community relations strategy had been over the years but there was a feeling that more attention and economic resources had been targeted at areas perceived as being

most segregated and as already noted (para.2) that Ballynifeigh as a mixed area had been low on the list of beneficiaries of community relations resources. It was agreed that the results/benefits of “community relations” work were hard to measure and that bigger external political events often had more sway over peoples attitudes.

5. VISION

The participants did not dispute the “vision” proposed in the consultation document but struggled to translate it from an abstract set of aspirations into something which they could imagine happening in real life.

As representatives of Residents Associations their main focus was “social issues” Suggestions for positive changes which would improve and sustain “good relations” in the area included;

Integrated education

Affordable housing/ more social housing

Community policing (which hopefully would result in a reduction in crimes such as burglary and vandalism and assaults).

It was felt that the most important concepts in a “vision” for the future were **participation** and **choice** and that these principles underpinned **mutual understanding** and **respect**. It was when people felt excluded, marginalised or threatened that “good relations” broke down.

6. WHAT SHOULD GOVERNMENT DO TO DELIVER THIS?

There was a degree of skepticism about a vision of harmony and mutual understanding coming from a government who could themselves apparently not model such behaviour.

“They should stop fighting among themselves”

It was suggested that the government should be “realistic” about what could be done and recognise that there were “no quick fixes” for this problem.

The government needed to **both** manage the existing situation **and** promote longer term changes.

There should be funding, resources and recognition for “good practice” and not just for situations where there was most conflict.

7. WHAT CAN COMMUNITY GROUPS DO?

From their own experience as representatives of residents groups the participants felt that community organisations could offer local leadership and be a focus for the majority of people in the community who did want “a shared future”.

Some felt that it was the “silent majority” who were in fact marginalised by a more aggressive minority.

Their “vision” for the local area was that the residents/community groups should work to emphasise and publicise shared values such as zero tolerance for anti social behaviour, while still working to include and communicate with all sections of the community.

“Good relations” could be developed by working together on social issues.

Report of consultation on “A Shared Future”

Ballynafeigh Community Development Association

Tuesday 23rd September

1. Introduction and Overall Response

As a mixed organisation working in and with a mixed community Ballynafeigh Community Development Association welcomes this consultation. It is a positive document which acknowledges reality and looks to the future.

In particular the organisation places high priority on the Policy Aim “***to support the development of integrated or shared communities where people wish to learn, live, work and play together.***”

Community Relations / Community Development work in a mixed context is often by its nature very low profile. As any issue in a mixed context has the potential to be contentious and destructive to the social fabric in the area much of our work is done through the medium of community development and as such is not always easily recognised as community relations.

In the face of increasing segregation it is our opinion that Ballynafeigh as a mixed community and communities like it across Northern Ireland have an important contribution to make to the development of a shared society. **However, many of these communities are under immediate threat and will need significant resources and concerted support if they are to be sustained.**

2. Background and participants

This consultation was held on the afternoon of Tuesday 23rd September with 10 workers from Ballynafeigh Community Development Association.

The group included workers with a wide variety of job descriptions ranging from arts & crafts through youth work to community development work.

The majority of participants had read the “Shared Future” consultation document and believed that the issues were relevant to their future work with the community.

3. Previous experiences of “community relations”

The session began with a discussion about the history of “community relations” policy and how the participants saw it impacting on the Ballynafeigh area.

On the positive side it was felt that the broad, if somewhat vague, nature of community relations policy had allowed scope for a wide interpretation and application.

Community relations work had always been done in Ballynafeigh and had contributed positively to the area, although it was felt that this had not always been recognised by the government which assumed that community relations

work was not as important in this “mixed” area as it was in very segregated areas or in interface areas. Ballynafeigh, in the past, had to argue very hard to access resources for this work.

It was strongly felt that community relations work could not be / should not be separated out from community development work.

Negative perceptions of “community relations” included the views

- that it was often “*preaching to the converted*” and made little impact on hard-line sectarianism
- that it was an “*impossible mission*”
- that support for exchange visits or even single identity cultural activities which had no follow up and no real community development agenda was just tokenistic and a waste of time.

3. Vision

While there was general agreement with the “vision “ statement in the consultation document this section of the discussion focused more on implementation than on “vision” as such. As people working directly with the community the participants felt a need to stress the tangible aspects- rather than the principles, or to make the principles tangible.

It was suggested that a new “good relations” policy should above all be **realistic**, recognising the real problems/needs on the ground. This included recognising the interaction and often tensions between the many different social groups based on religious, political, ethnic and economic status.

4. What government should do to implement “good relations”

“*Be there*” was the first response. The current situation with the N.I. Assembly suspended tested the credibility of the principle of “good relations”
It was felt that the different political parties would need to be seen to be working more closely together/more co-operatively in order to “*show visible commitment to this vision*”

One participant stated that “*In Northern Ireland we are good at form and structure not at substance*”

From the previous discussion about the history of community relations it was seen as important to “*learn from what works*”

Because Ballynafeigh was a “mixed” community and did not fit neatly into the “cross community” model of work it had to invent its own ways of working on community relations issues and to put effort into seeking out other “mixed” communities to compare experiences with. This was seen as useful in forcing it to be flexible and innovative and it was felt that this approach of experimentation, innovation and taking risks should be reflected in the new “good relations “policy and practice.

5. How the new “good relations “ strategy should be delivered.

It was strongly felt that a separate “agency” should be responsible for implementing the new “good relations” strategy. This was for a number of reasons including

- civil servants not understanding the “community development” way of working.
- government departments being inaccessible for dialogue/communication with community groups and not flexible enough to cope with change/innovation
- government departments being too swayed by party politics.

The new “good relations” agency should be **well resourced** and be able to provide long term **core funding** to groups for “good relations” work.

There should be a **channel for direct communication** between community groups working on good relations and the agency (maybe in the form of a **forum** where plans/ideas/projects could be discussed)

The new agency should be flexible enough to change if things aren’t working or if new ideas come along.

It was reiterated that “community relations/good relations” work should be integrated with community development work which is essentially a means of including and empowering people at community level.