

**Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) Consultations**

**Inquiry into Building a United Community**



**Response from the Young People who use the services of The Bytes Project**

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## **Inquiry into Building a United Community**

### **1.0 Overview**

OFMDFM committee is currently carrying out an inquiry into building a united community. “The purpose of this inquiry is to inform the Executive’s approach in the actions it takes to tackle sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance; and to make recommendations in order to support and enhance policy in uniting communities and community integration, including how communities are involved in decision making. The Inquiry will also seek to make recommendations based on the evidence gathered”.

In order to feed into this inquiry The Bytes Project has consulted widely with the young people who avail of Bytes services. This consultation involved approximately 60 young people who are not in employment education or training (NEET). The consultation was carried out across a range of geographical locations during August and September 2014.

### **2.0 Consultation process**

The consultation process was carried out by three members of Bytes staff, (2 youth workers and a youth mentor). It was agreed that the consultation process would be informal thus allowing participants to engage openly and honestly with the process. In order to ensure that the voices of all participants were heard consultations were carried out using small focus groups. Within the focus group settings young people were presented with a number of exercises/activities aimed at opening discussions and debate and as a prompt to enable further exploration of the topic presented.

In order to understand how young people perceived the structures, power bases and decision makers within the communities in which they lived they were presented with flash cards. Each flash card contained one from the following list and young people were asked to rate the following (from highest to lowest) according to which held the most power:

- **Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs)**
- **Community Workers**
- **Shop Keepers**
- **Church**
- **Older people**

- **Young people**
- **Ethnic Minorities**
- **Paramilitaries**
- **PSNI**
- **Media**

They were they asked to discuss what they knew and how they viewed the history of the conflict, the peace process and the growing diversity within current society and finally were asked their opinion on the removal of interface barriers as outlined in Government's Together: Building a United Community strategy.

The consultation involved young people from the following Bytes centres and outreach locations;

- **Woodlands JJC**
- **Derry Bytes**
- **Enagh Youth Forum (Strathfoyle)**
- **Short Strand Bytes**
- **Flax Foyer in Ardoyne**
- **Tullycarnet Bytes**
- **Belfast Foyer**

In order to tailor this process to the needs of the groups involved the facilitators adapted their approach based on the following;

- **Size of the group**
- **Ability of group**
- **Age range of group**
- **Location of group**
- **Time with group**

### **3.0 Consultation results**

**3.1 Group:** Short Strand, Bytes Centre, Belfast.

**Date:** 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2014

There has been a Bytes centre in the Short Strand area for 15 years, its current location is within Short Strand Community centre and the young people who attend this centre come from the Short Strand area and fall within the NEET category. As core NEET they display many of the characteristics associated with deprivation i.e. risk taking behaviour, educational under achievement poor employment prospects and high levels of drug usage etc. Given that this centre is in close proximity to a number of interfaces the area is insular and the young people who live in this community have yet to benefit from the opportunities arising from peace.

#### **How young people from Short Strand rated power (highest to lowest) within their community**

- 1 Media
- 2 MLA's
- 3 Community workers
- 4 Shop Keepers – PSNI
- 6 Paramilitaries
- 7 Church – Older people
- 9 Young people
- 10 Ethnic Minorities

The young people in Short Strand felt that the media had the most power within their area and in particular when reporting about the 12<sup>th</sup> July and issues concerning young people. They felt that young people were always given a bad name in the press and any time the young people engaged in a positive programme/scheme etc the press showed little or no interest. They agreed that paramilitaries had little say today within Short Strand with MLA's and community workers to the fore when dealing with young people. The group agreed that young people as well as ethnic minorities had the least power although young people were listened to when standing together.

The young people showed a lack of interest in what had occurred over the years and seemed baffled when it was explained to them that individuals were searched when entering the city centre! They had little or no knowledge of their history or the history of Northern Ireland.

Regarding the peace walls, the young people said that at present there was no way the walls could be taken down as trouble would occur which would eventually lead to serious outbreaks of violence and death. Once again the 12<sup>th</sup> July and other flashpoint dates were mentioned in order to highlight the dangers if this happened.

### **3.2 Group: Derry Bytes Centre, Derry.**

**Date:** 3rd September 2014

Derry Bytes centre is located within Strand Foyer, a homeless support centre and caters primarily for the Foyer residents who are 16-25 years-old. These residents are NEET young people with many complex needs and issues.

#### **How young people from Derry Bytes rated power (highest to lowest) within their community:**

- 1 Media
- 2 Paramilitaries – PSNI – MLA’s
- 5 Community workers
- 6 Shop Keepers – Church – Older people
- 8 Young people
- 9 Homeless – Ethnic Minorities

The media were seen to be in a position of ‘manipulating’ the truth to suit themselves, to sell papers. The PSNI, paramilitaries and local MLA’s were regarded as having equal power with MLA’s being seen as one time members of paramilitary groups. Martin Mc Guinness was given as an example here. The young people said that the PSNI had power because they can put you in Gaol! Paramilitaries or dissidents have no respect but do have power in certain areas within Derry.

Community workers are well thought of as they are seen as trying to improve conditions for the young people and in particular trying to keep them out of trouble.

Shop keepers, Church and older people were seen as holding power but only with certain people, these people are of an older generation who look down on the young people but at the same time not really understanding them. The church is slowly losing its grip on power, on having a say and young people in this group have no interest in the church today.

Young people have a sense of worthlessness today; of 'lacking in confidence' one young person said that they are living with legacy of the troubles.

The homeless and ethnic minorities are regarded as having no power within the community. The young people we spoke with have no issues with minority groups as they themselves are seen as being part of a minority group as having 'no hope no voice'. Ethnic minorities were seen as having 'no voice' in the area and the young people acknowledge their hard work ethic. The group agreed on the ongoing problem with drug and alcohol misuse in their area, stating that it was at crisis point.

### **Can the peacewalls come down?**

Derry walls seen as tourist attraction as different to peace walls in Belfast and other areas. The Diamond in Derry was talked about as being fenced in within the greater Derry area. The young people did not believe the walls could come down as trouble would occur and lives put at risk. They did however put forward ideas to change the walls:

- Cut holes in walls
- Make features of walls
- Nice murals on walls
- Keep murals relevant to area

### **3.3 Group: Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre Bangor**

**Date:** September 2014

Woodlands JJC is situated on the Rathgael Road in Bangor and was built to house young offenders ranging in age from 10 to 18. Young people are held in houses there are a total of six houses each accommodating up to six young people.

**How young people from Woodlands House 6 rated power (highest to lowest) within their community:**

1. PSNI – Local MLA's

3 Paramilitaries

- 4 Older People, Church
- 6 Community Workers
- 7 Ethnic Minorities
- 8 Young People
- 9 Shop Keepers

The young people who engaged with Bytes in House 6 are from areas that include Shankill, Turf Lodge, Enniskillen and Newtownabbey. Whilst it was difficult to get a definite 'ladder' of who holds the power within their area a general consensus was reached on who was the strongest and weakest within 'their' communities. In both the Shankill and Turf Lodge community workers were regarded as paramilitaries or ex paramilitaries and were not trusted. Indeed the young people said that if they could they would 'do away' with MLA's, paramilitaries and community workers such was their dislike of them.

The most powerful part of the discussion centred on the young people and how they themselves felt they were seen by the community in which they lived. There was a sense of hopelessness of depression felt by these young people with one in particular talking about spending his days taking drugs and nothing else. There is a widely held view by the young people that they do not have a voice 'outside' that they are not listened to.

There is a feeling amongst this group of being labelled in their communities; one young person gave the example of not being allowed into local youth club by the youth leader. He went on to say that if he was allowed into the centre he would not get involved in anti social behaviour.

Shop keepers, older people and ethnic minorities were seen as having little or no power within the community. This group as with others within Woodlands give a unique perspective on behalf of young people today because they are existing 'on the edge', they are to a large extent looked down upon by the police, the community and in some cases their families.

### **Can the peacewalls come down?**

There was a general consensus that the walls could not come down as this would lead to trouble particularly around certain flashpoints, i.e. the twelfth and internment. Lanark Way was given as an example of where trouble could occur if the walls/gates were removed. One young person made the point that it should be up to those who live at the interfaces to decide if and when the walls should come down.

### **3.4 Group: Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre Bangor**

**Date:** September 2014

**How young people from Woodlands House 5 rated power (highest to lowest) within their community:**

1. PSNI – Local MLA's
- 3 Paramilitaries
- 4 Community Workers
- 5 Older People, Church
- 7 Young people
- 8 Ethnic Minorities
- 9 Shop Keepers

As with house 6 the young people in house 5 had a very negative view of paramilitaries/MLA's and the PSNI. Whilst one or two within the group talked more positively of community workers there was still a doubt as to their real motives, i.e. were they a front for Sinn Fein etc? When talking about MLA's the young people talked about certain MLA's 'keeping it going' in order to gain out of it. The keeping it going was the political process and gaining was in financial terms. Whilst not as vocal as house 6 the young people in house 5 were of the view that young people as well as ethnic minorities and shop keepers had the least 'say' regarding what went on in their communities. One young person stated that it was important to highlight what rights young people had and the discussion that followed concluded that a 'programme' highlighting the rights of young people should be run in Woodlands some time soon.

#### **Can the peace walls come down?**

The overall consensus was that it was up to those people living on the interfaces to decide when it was appropriate for the walls to come down. One young person mentioned that the peace walls did not matter to young people and that it was the media who kept bringing up the issue of peace walls in order to 'grab headlines'.



## **Houses 1,2 and 3 in Woodlands JJC**

The young people in each of these houses come from a wide range of locations and so a lot of comparative debate and discussion was generated during these sessions. Areas included; Shankill (Upper and Lower), Antrim Road, Enniskillen, Lisburn, Derry, Downpatrick, Newtownards, Ardoyne, Lurgan, Ballymena and Bangor.

One young person pointed out that the LGBT community was missing from the flashcards and this was added for that particular session. The young people felt that the Government, PSNI and Paramilitaries had the most power within communities and that they all worked together to some extent. Young people from areas within Belfast such as Shankill and Antrim road feel paramilitaries have huge control over the area “they have their own laws and can just walk about with guns.” “They hide behind their masks but we all know who they are” “young people can’t speak out against them or you’d get a bullet in the head” These young people also associated community workers with paramilitaries and don’t feel there is anyone within their community that they can trust. The young people from Enniskillen, Lisburn and Downpatrick feel that paramilitaries don’t have that level of power over their communities and that MLA’s and PSNI have most of the control. The overall feeling from the young people is that they themselves feel powerless within their communities, they don’t feel safe and they don’t think there is anyone (apart from certain youth workers) that they can talk to about either individual issues or issues affecting communities as a whole like drug addiction and mental health. The PSNI are despised by the young people, some of whom talked about experiences of getting beat and mistreated, constantly being harassed by police for things like wearing a hoodie and Nike Air Max. The young people believe that we do need a police service but that the PSNI should be abolished and a new service put in place. They feel that nobody listens to them and that nothing is ever changes. Some stated that they would like to learn more about their rights and others felt that they would like the opportunity to speak to MLA’s at Stormont regarding issues that were discussed.

## **Can the peace walls come down?**

Opinion was split on the issue of peacewalls with those from predominantly loyalist communities stating that they should not come down as the troubles would restart. Those from predominantly nationalist communities felt that they could and should come down and people should be more integrated and not divided as it is usually the older people in the community keeping the troubles going and trying to involve the young people.

In terms of ethnic minorities the majority felt that they are ‘ok’ and that they don’t mind if they live in the community but others felt that they “steal our jobs and houses”. Almost all

felt that they had little or no power within the community and were often victimised or discriminated against.

### **Ideas for building a United Community:**

- Give young people a voice
- Integrated education
- A new flag – get rid of all the other ones
- Northern Ireland to be its own country (not part of Ireland or Britain)
- A new police service
- Challenge the paramilitaries – remove them

### **3.5 Group: Strathfoyle (Enagh Youth Forum)**

**Date:** September 2014

The Enagh Youth Forum is a youth/community provision situated within the Strathfoyle estate in Derry. Approximately 40 – 50 young people use the centre on a regular basis and they range in age from 5 – 25. The Bytes Project has been providing project work in Enagh for the past 3 years and over 40 young people have successfully completed qualifications delivered by Bytes staff during that time.

### **How young people from Enagh Youth Forum rated power (highest to lowest) within their community:**

- 1 Media
- 2 MLA's - media
- 4 PSNI
- 5 Community workers
- 6 Church - Older people
- 8 Ethnic Minorities
- 9 Paramilitaries
- 10 Shop keepers



The young people in Strathfoyle talked about the issues concerning them and they are as follows;

- Cliques, if you are not related you are kept out
- Discrimination against young people
- Crime, break ins, sex offenders
- Housing lack of social housing in areas
- No good sports facilities in our areas
- Health, high incidents of cancer, mental health
- Drugs, speed, coke, meths and grass
- Integration, minority groups don't want to integrate, Romanians, Polish, Chinese, Travellers etc.
- Lack of jobs, opportunities

One young Polish person give an example of young people being nice/friendly to her in a group situation but when alone she is taunted because she is 'not from Strathfoyle'.

Regarding the issue with the peace walls the young people in Strathfoyle felt that the walls should come down when the people living closest to the walls feel it is time. This process maybe accelerated through integrated schooling, cross community projects etc.

### **3.6 Group: Tullycarnet Bytes Centre Tullycarnet Estate**

**Date:** September 2014

There has been a Bytes centre in Tullycarnet for a number of years now and it is currently based in the Tullycarnet Community Resource Centre. The young people who use the centre fall within the NEET category.

#### **How young people from Tullycarnet Bytes Centre rated power (highest to lowest) within their community:**

- 1 Paramilitaries
- 2 Media
- 3 PSNI - MLA's
- 5 Older people - Community workers
- 7 Shop Keepers
- 8 Church
- 9 Young people
- 10 Ethnic Minorities

The discussion in the Tullycarnet centre concentrated on the power the paramilitaries have in the area. The young people provided examples of how the paramilitaries 'run' the area in which he lives. The paramilitaries he feels have 'the final say' on what happens within the area. They have the power to put people out if they so decide. The media, PSNI as well as community workers had to a lesser extent power within that area and it was mentioned that some community workers had at one time been members of paramilitary organisations. The young people acknowledged that the media did have power because they can manipulate a story to suit themselves but usually to put a negative slant on what young people are doing. Not surprisingly young people and ethnic minorities were regarded as having the least amount of power within the community. The young person stated that ethnic minorities usually kept themselves to themselves, that there was no interaction with the community as a whole.

#### **What is good relations?**

The young people felt that good relations consisted of a community helping each other out and welcoming people into their own communities.

#### **What are the main issues concerning you in your community?**

The young people struggled to come up with any issues in their own area even when prompted. They felt that their area was quite good but if they could change anything they

would have more practical activity things alongside the 3G pitch like a BMX track. They felt that the youth club was a positive thing for the younger ones but older ones 16+ had nowhere to go when they were bored but they felt there was enough provided in their community and that is up to the person to choose whether to take part. They also would like to see more job opportunities in their area and places where they can do proper paid apprenticeships etc

### **What are your views on the peacewalls?**

The young people felt that they had to be there to stop other people fighting each other and it lowered rioting happening as much. They did not feel they were ready for them to come down as it was escalate troubles in their area.

### **What are your views on those from a different religion in your area?**

The young people consulted felt that both communities have no respect for each other. Although they felt that they had no issue with other religions there were certain people were they lived that hated the "other" side and that then gave the estate a bad name.

### **What are your views of ethnic minorities living together in your community?**

The young people consulted again felt that they had no issue with ethnic minorities but certain people in their area who were set in their ways did and that it would be hard to change. They talked about certain incidents in their area involving ethnic minorities that they didn't think was fair on the ethnic minority how they were being treated.

### **Have you any ideas on how we can work together to build a united community?**

The young people personally felt that the main issue was people judging others and that they didn't give people different from them a chance. They mentioned the same minority of people who are set in their ways and expressed frustration towards this as they wanted this changed but didn't know how to go about this.

### **3.7 Group: Belfast Foyer Bytes Centre**

**Date:** 20<sup>th</sup> August 2014

The Belfast Foyer Bytes Centre is situated on the Malone Road in Belfast. The Belfast Foyer is a supported housing unit for vulnerable young homeless people, residents within Belfast Foyer have multiple and complex needs including alcohol/drug dependency, mental health issues lack of support networks essential skills needs with the result that they tend to have poor health, education and employment outcomes.

#### **How young people from Belfast Foyer Bytes Centre rated power (highest to lowest) within their community:**

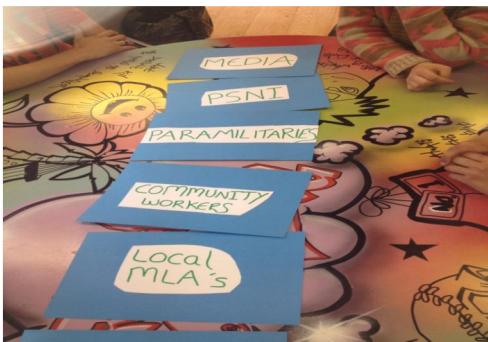
- 1 Media
- 2 PSNI
- 3 Paramilitaries
- 4 Community Workers
- 5 MLA's
- 6 Church
- 7 Shop Keepers
- 8 Young people
- 9 Ethnic Minorities
- 10 Older people

A number of issues came to the fore when consulting with the young people in Belfast Foyer, these include;

- Suicide
- Drugs
- (poor quality drugs)
- Lack of proper jobs
- Boredom
- Car crime
- Paramilitaries

The young people said that if they could they would 'make paramilitaries and PSNI go away'. They later admitted that there was a need for proper policing and that they needed to be there to keep paramilitary power under control. The young people when talking about friends who had lost their lives through misuse of drugs/alcohol said that they were not afraid of death that it was inevitable.

The young people did not really have an issue with ethnic minorities and two of the group said that they were nice people once you got to know them. One of the groups did state that they (ethnic minorities) should not be allowed to stand in the town selling Big issue. There was no issue with people from a different religion as the young people living in Belfast Foyer are a mix of all religions.



**3.8**  
Foyer Bytes  
**Date:**  
2014



**Group:** Flax  
Centre  
19<sup>th</sup> August

Flax Foyer is a supported housing unit for vulnerable young homeless people, residents within Flax Foyer have multiple and complex needs including alcohol/drug dependency, mental health issues lack of support networks essential skills needs with the result that they tend to have poor health, education and employment outcomes.

The Bytes Project have been engaging with Flax Foyer for approximately 5 years and despite the many issues these young people face once engaged they tend to be highly motivated. The age range of the young people who participated was 18 – 25 years of age.

## **How young people from Flax Foyer Centre rated power (highest to lowest) within their community:**

- 1 MI5
- 2 PSNI – Media -Paramilitaries
- 5 MLA's
- 6 Community workers - Shop Keepers
- 8 Church – Older people
- 10 Young people
- 11 Homeless – Ethnic Minorities

The group in Flax Foyer insisted on 'new' headings being introduced into the discussion, these included MI5 and homelessness. There is at present within Flax Foyer an awareness of the political situation within Northern Ireland at present. The group placed MI5/paramilitaries and PSNI at the top and put forward examples as to why they had done so. As it was a large group we decided to break them into three separate smaller groups in order to let the quieter ones have a say. The overall consensus was that MI5 controlled all that went on within the Ardoyne area. There was an acknowledgement that the media manipulated what went on in areas such as Ardoyne in order to sell papers with no concern for the impact this left within the communities themselves. The church and older people were seen as very much a diminishing power with young people having little or no regard for them, the church in particular.

### **1. What is 'good relations'?**

Two parties on good terms and who can make joint decisions for the better of the community.

### **2. What are the main issues concerning you in your community?**

A large Police presence. They follow you and pass you slowly up to 4 times in a short period of time. They stop and question you for no reason, taking your details. This can cause



problems in your area as other people in the community start asking why you were stopped and what have you been telling them.

Drugs, lack of housing, discrimination against Catholics, police intimidation.

### **3. What are your views on the peace walls? Do you think they could come down?**

We can walk round them anyway. There's no need for them. We don't take much notice of them because they've always been there. Young people don't care about them as our attitudes have changed from our parents' time. Catholics don't care about Protestants coming into our areas but they have issues with us coming into their areas.

If they are sound they are already. 'I used to think it was ok but I lived in a Protestant area and I had an awful experience'.

### **4. What are your views of those from a different religion/culture living in your area?**

It makes the community better with having different cultures, different faces and different people with different views.

### **5. What are your views of ethnic minorities living in your community?**

It can only be a good thing to have the community mixed.

'I don't like ethnic minorities and don't want them in my community'.

### **6. Have you any ideas on how we can work together to build a united community?**

Have more cross community events, exercises or residential. We all get on when were away from our communities together.

More cross community groups that would include a cross community party and cross community youth groups.

A new flag for Northern Ireland.

Other main points of concern;

- Surveillance camera's

- Dog dirt
- Lack of real jobs
- Political policing in community
- Lack of housing
- Weather (I'm trying to sort this!)