

'We don't feel as isolated as you might think...'

*Experiences of Catholic Minority Communities in Counties Antrim and Down*



Community Relations Council



Rural Community  
Network NI

**dc**  
DIVERSITY  
CHALLENGES

*'We don't feel as isolated as you might think...'*

### Diversity Challenges

Diversity Challenges was founded in 2001 with a grant obtained by the NI Community Relations Council from Atlantic Philanthropies American Foundation to facilitate change in a number of cultural groups in Ireland. Its vision is of a society in which people understand, and take responsibility for, the shared and distinctive traditions of all communities. Its work includes;

- Targeting key culturally specific groups within Ireland with greatest impact on community life.
- Identifying influential individuals within each organisation who are driving change (or wish to drive change) towards a fuller and more constructive role in a diverse society.
- Supporting the individuals through consultancy, coaching, training, networking and practical assistance to develop and implement change strategies within their organisations.
- Consultancy and training support on the use of the best practice models to agencies in other countries facing similar challenges.

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### Community Relations Council

The Community Relations Council was formed in January 1990 as an independent company and registered charity. It originated in 1986 as a proposal of a research report commissioned by the NI Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights. The Community Relations Council was set up to promote better community relations between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland and, equally, to promote recognition of cultural diversity.

Its strategic aim is to assist the people of Northern Ireland to recognise and counter the effects of communal division.

It aims to do this by:

- Providing support (finance, training, advice, information) for local groups and organisations.
- Developing opportunities for cross-community understanding.
- Increasing public awareness of community relations work.
- Encouraging constructive debate throughout Northern Ireland.

The Council's work falls into three main areas:

- Encouraging other organisations, both voluntary and statutory, to develop a community relations aspect to their policies and practices.
- Working with churches and groups which have a primary community relations focus.
- Encouraging greater acceptance of and respect for cultural diversity.

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### Rural Community Network

Rural Community Network (RCN) is a rural voluntary organisation established by local community organisations to articulate the voice of rural communities on issues relating to poverty, disadvantage and equality using a community development approach to its work.

Formed in 1991, RCN is a membership organisation. It is managed by a voluntary Board of Trustees, elected every two years. It is made up of community representatives from each county along with statutory, voluntary, farming, environmental and cross border representatives. RCN reflects a broad geographical, gender, religious and ethnic mix in its membership and its Board.

### Mission

RCN's mission is to provide an effective voice for and support to rural communities, particularly those who are most disadvantaged.

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## Foreword

Following the publication of Rural Community Network's report 'You feel you'd have no say' which discussed the position of minority Protestant communities living along the border, we recognised that there had been no equivalent work on the position of the Catholic community where it was a minority. This work would need to be comparable to the work on the Protestant community so that the broader perspective of how minorities fare could be examined.

Diversity Challenges approached the Community Relations Council and the Rural Community Network. A partnership of the three organisations was established to commission and oversee the research. It was recognised from the start that the work would be in two stages. Stage one would examine the population demography and records of incidents of intimidation and violence to identify potential communities for study. Stage two would be a participative study of communities on the same basis as that used in the research with Protestant community. Again it was important that the community groups gained from taking part in the action research process with support for community development. The partnership decided for comparison and continuity that the same researcher be used and were pleased that Marie Crawley agreed to undertake the project.

We hope that this piece of work will help contribute to the debate on how we as a society treat minority communities. It is critical that this takes place and the debate moves on to address the position of ethnic minorities. It is important to develop policies on minority - majority relationships, as this will form a key role in building good relations and an equitable society.

**Will Glendinning**  
Diversity Challenges

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## Introduction

In 2003, Rural Community Network NI published a report '*You feel you'd have no say*' which documented the views and opinions of members of minority Protestant communities living along the border area on their experiences as a minority community. The report was a summary document of an action research project which resulted in the formation of three new community groups and the production of a detailed research report.

In 2004, Diversity Challenges, the Community Relations Council and Rural Community Network NI initiated a parallel piece of research with Roman Catholic communities (hereinafter referred to as Catholic communities) in areas in which they are in a minority. The purpose of the project was broadly similar to that of the research project with the Protestant communities, that is, to find out about people's experiences as a minority community and if and how everyday lives are affected by the religious demographics in five selected areas. This report '*We don't feel as isolated as you might think*' is a summary report of the research findings. A copy of the full report is available on the following websites: [ruralcommunitynetwork.org](http://ruralcommunitynetwork.org); [www.diversitychallenges.ik.com](http://www.diversitychallenges.ik.com), [www.mariecrawley.com](http://www.mariecrawley.com).

The research project was managed by an advisory group comprising representatives of the Community Relations Council, Diversity Challenges and the Rural Community Network NI.

Five communities were selected to participate in the research, one from each of the following five council areas; Antrim, Ards, Ballymoney, Carrickfergus and Moyle. The communities were selected by the Advisory Group. Selection was based on statistical analysis of census information produced by the University of Ulster.

In recognition of the value of discussion and the richness of information which emerges when people are provided with a safe space to talk, focus group discussions was used as the method of gathering information. Two focus groups were held in four areas, one each with women and men. In the fifth area of the selected areas, it was not possible to convene focus group discussions. There was a high degree of reluctance on the part of Catholic families living in the area to get involved in discussions of this nature. Consequently; four 'one to one' interviews were held in September 2004 and information solicited in this way is included throughout the report. The workshops were held between March and May 2004.

To protect the identity of research participants, none of the areas will be named in the report and all references to towns, schools and organisations have been removed. For ease of reading, the areas will be identified as communities A, B, C, D and E. They are as follows:

- Community A    Town which serves a rural hinterland, the Catholic population is approximately 14%.
- Community B    Small rural town and hinterland. Catholic population just under 3%.
- Community C    Catholic population in the research area, 92% approximately, but the community is surrounded by areas and towns in which the Protestant population is in a majority. In the Council area, the Catholic population is just under 30%.
- Community D    Predominantly Protestant hinterland, the research focus was on a GAA club.
- Community E    Recent shift from Catholic minority to Catholic majority in the small research town. Overall Catholic population in the Council area just over 38%.

*'We don't feel as isolated as you might think...'*

As referred to above, a GAA club was selected to be the point of contact and all participants in that area were GAA members. The GAA was also particularly strong in a second research area.

Life for Catholics, as nationalists, was very different in all five areas. However, for the purpose of this report, the five research communities will broadly be divided into two groupings, one grouping of two which refers to communities A and B in which the minority status of Catholics causes significant problems. Information from these communities is presented in Section 1.

Section 2 presents information from the second grouping of communities; C, D and E. These are areas in which the Catholics who participated do not identify themselves as a minority community.

While there were differences in the experiences of all five communities, there were also similarities. The effects of the 12th July, experiences of sectarian incidents, attitudes of young people to community relations, mixed marriages, attitudes to the police and the selling of land were comparable in all five areas. Findings on these issues are presented in Section 3.

### Glossary of Terms

<b>Gaelscoil</b>	School in which all subjects are taught through Irish
<b>GAA</b>	Gaelic Athletic Association
<b>Naionra/naiscoil</b>	Irish language nursery school
<b>Orange Order</b>	The Loyal Orange Institution (more commonly known as The Orange Order) is a Protestant fraternity with members throughout the world.

## Summary

This research project sought to find out about Catholic experiences as a minority in five communities in Northern Ireland and in particular to find out whether and how everyday lives are affected by the religious demographic breakdown in these communities.

The most striking aspect of the research findings is the extent to which the five communities selected for the research differed in terms of profile and experience. Of particular interest is the extent to which participants did not define themselves as belonging to minority communities. In some cases while statistically the communities selected were a minority in terms of the wider geographical or council areas; the size of the community was sufficiently large or robust that people did not define themselves as a minority. In the two communities in which they did (and statistically Catholics are very much in the minority) the sense of isolation and powerlessness one might expect from being such a small minority was absent. Indeed, a consistent feature of all workshops was a sense of confidence and self sufficiency.

A number of issues were considered as part of the research including: involvement in community activity; expression of identity; relations with the Protestant community; incidents related to the Troubles; policing; mixed marriages; social patronage; and the future of Catholic communities in the research areas. Two key themes emerge, that of identity and the nature of relations with the Protestant community and more specifically how relations are affected by the 12th July.

The subject of 'identity' is a complex one encompassing issues such as how people see themselves, how others see them, similarities and differences with others and linkages to cultural structures and community.

In this report, the theme of identity is central. Identity as a member of the Catholic community is for the most part interpreted or understood to mean nationalist identity. Its expression is, in the main, associated with Irish culture and sport; for example,

the Irish language, GAA sports and merchandise and to some extent traditional Irish music. In all cases participants spoke of a tendency on the part of some Protestants to misconstrue interest in Irish cultural and sporting activities as political, and in particular, to imply that organisations concerned with their promotion are components of a Republican family. However, particularly in the case of GAA games it was felt that attitudes are changing and increasingly there is broader acceptance of the GAA as a sporting rather than political organisation. In the three communities in which expression of identity is not contentious and participants freely express their identity, the way in which it is expressed is also central to community activity in that area, be that through the GAA or Irish language initiatives.

In communities A and B, where people repress and sometimes deny their Irish identity because they fear being targeted and attacked, its suppression is hugely significant for people. Participants find themselves in a space where fundamental expressions of identity; such as the language they speak, the sports they play, the clothes they wear and the music they listen to, are not possible for them. Consequently, they either find expression behind closed doors or they are repressed or denied. In Community A, and to a lesser extent in Community B, Irish identity is suppressed because of a strong fear of attack to the person and the home, and for most people the greatest fear is of attack on other members of their families. The presence and perceived control of loyalist paramilitaries in these communities is the main contributory factor to this fear. Furthermore, any hope for change in the way in which Catholics as Nationalists can openly live their lives in the future is defined in terms of whether or not the paramilitaries are allowed to maintain their grip on these communities.

With the exception of Community A, relations with members of the Protestant

community were described in positive terms and people appear to peacefully co-exist with limited integration. It is important to note there was also a strong degree of ambivalence about relations with the Protestant community and an implication that the question did not hold any great significance. There was a strong and consistent message that the quality of neighbourly relations is not dependent on religious affiliation. The religion of neighbours was described as 'not an issue.'

In reality, however, it **was** an issue when it came to political discussions. Even in instances in which relations with Protestant neighbours were described in positive terms, discussions stayed outside the realm of politics. Participants spoke of a fear of causing offence. In some cases they also expressed concern about opinions being mis-interpreted. Similar to the issue which emerged in the expression of Irish identity there was a fear that nationalist political expression would be interpreted as pro-republican and by implication pro IRA.

Undoubtedly the most contentious issue which affects relations with the Protestant community was the 12th July and Orange Order parades. There was, in the main, a high level of acceptance of the right of the Protestant community to hold parades but abhorrence and fear of the intimidation and violence which many participants saw as inevitably accompanying them. Many participants were very uneasy with the presence of paramilitary bands and the erection of loyalist paramilitary flags in their communities. There was also a strong degree of frustration with the Orange Order's failure to directly engage in dialogue with Catholics living in these areas. These features of the 12th July, most people suggested, are a relatively recent phenomenon and many dated them back to the 'first Drumcree' of

1995. They are now considered to be the norm and their presence has undoubtedly reinforced, and in some areas created, an enormous gulf between Catholics and Protestants in the communities which participated in the research. The main response of the Catholic communities was to leave their areas around the 12th July. It would appear that in the four research areas where parades are, and have been, problematic, this is unlikely to change.



# 1 section

## COMMUNITIES A AND B

This section presents the findings from communities A and B in which the minority status of Catholics causes significant problems for the people living there. The order in which information is presented in this section and throughout the report is as it emerged in the course of discussions.

### Community Involvement

Participants were asked to comment on the extent to which they were involved in community activity. In community A, two clear points emerged from this discussion. Firstly, the small numbers of Catholic families in the area has an effect on the community's ability to organise any activity which would be more attractive to Catholic members of the community (such as set dancing or Irish language classes). There simply are insufficient numbers to sustain this type of endeavour. Secondly, activities which *do* take place in the area (for young people in particular) are not attractive to members of the Catholic community either because there is a religious component or more particularly because of concerns for the safety of the children/young people. The primary deterrent for involvement is the danger associated with the areas in which these clubs are located.

*'I would be afraid of her saying the wrong thing and I would say to her "don't be saying anything, there, you have to be careful"- it's okay as long as you don't say you're a Catholic.'*

### The GAA

While the GAA emerges as a focal point for community activity in Section 2 of this report, the strength of feeling at its absence was palpable in Community A. There was a strong sense of loss at the absence of a GAA club and associated teams and matches, particularly given that participants felt that the idea of establishing one in the future was inconceivable.

*'There was a GAA club about 35 years ago. It stopped when the Troubles started. There had been a few Protestants playing for us. There was an attempt to begin one. First we couldn't get land for a pitch. Then the posts were burned down. Almost all of us would be Gaelic supporters but can't say so or wear an Antrim shirt. We have our own code if we want to talk about Gaelic matches or results in the town. We have silent expressions if Celtic beat Rangers. The GAA is a fabulous organisation. We would like to be involved.'*

*'We don't feel as isolated as you might think...'*

*'We'd be burned out. The house would be burned out. You and your family would be attacked. The police wouldn't help you. You would be seen as IRA.'*

*'It would be bringing trouble back to our own door. It wouldn't be worth it.'*

*'You become visible when you put your head above the parapet.'*

### Expressing Identity

*'No degree of Irishness is accepted in this town.'*

The degree to which people felt safe about expressing their identity was striking in communities A and B. In community A in particular, the overriding sense was that the only way to survive was to live a life *'behind closed doors.'* In community B, for the most part, Catholics almost without exception, avoid having anything to do with the town. Expression of identity was generally associated with wearing sports colours, having conversations about GAA matches and speaking Irish. Participants spoke of fear of being targeted and the subsequent limits they place on what they do, where they go, and what conversations they can have in their local town.

*'Catholics are scared to be seen to be Catholics. For instance, the young ones can't wear Ireland shirts, Celtic shirts, it's asking for trouble. They'd be murdered.'*

*'I dry my son's Celtic jersey in the house – I wouldn't dry it outside.'*

*'15 odd years ago, Irish music was on the go. (One of the men in the group) had Irish music playing in the house. The rumour went around that they were a Republican family and they fly the tri-colour. Rumour plays a large part – you could be burned out on the strength of it.'*

*'I wouldn't speak (Irish) here unless I had full body armour and was in an armoured tank!'*

*'The town is not a safe place for any body that is associated with being Catholic.'*

*'I don't see any possibility for a community group with a Catholic or Nationalist identity (e.g. Irish language or sport) surviving in this area in the foreseeable future. It would be closed down by intimidation and ultimately, violence.'*

In both of these communities, participants highlighted the consequences for their families. Parents spoke of their children *'dreading'* being asked where they go to school and also having to attend schools outside their areas with the result that they do not have friends near where they live. From an early age, they begin to construct a life elsewhere. Young people themselves spoke of the tactics they adopted to hide their identity such as taking off school ties and blazers in the local town.

### Belonging

*'I have no sense of allegiance to the area. I don't feel there's anything about this place that would make me belong. There'll never be a place for me here.'*

Linked to the sense of freedom to express identity is the extent to which people experience a sense of belonging in their areas. This question had relevance in both of these communities. In community A, despite the fact that all participants could trace either their own or their spouse's families back for generations; *'You can trace his family back so far they become Protestant!'* this was not supported by a sense of belonging or affinity to the community. All except one participant said that they have no sense of belonging to their area and certainly no sense of loyalty or pride. Participants also referred to the fact that because the area is

majority Protestant, people from elsewhere assume they are Protestant. One man had worked in Harland and Wolfe. His colleagues had assumed he was a Protestant (he had been discreetly concealing his identity). When they found out he was Catholic, the response was; *'you're a fxxxxx Taig'* and relations changed instantly.

The young people interviewed in community B emphasised the need to 'fit in' in an area they felt they did not belong to, of a need to play along with being a Protestant and say the 'right thing' politically. Others spoke of donating to Orange Order and other collections to avoid setting themselves apart.

*'The messages are in the slogans on the walls. Protestant people rule here.'*

*'I feel as though I don't belong here.'*

*'If you read the local paper, it's severely biased. Catholics don't even register in the imagination here. Catholics come out worst all the time.'*

*'I'm embarrassed to say I'm from here.'*

*'You would not think a Catholic lived in this town.'*

### **Withdrawal from Community Activity**

*'It's a UDA town. Catholics keep a really low profile but the UDA still knows every Catholic house.'*

One of the consequences of people feeling they do not belong to the community (combined with a fear of making oneself visible and thus more open to sectarian attack) was that people limited what they do in the community and modified their behaviour within it. This included withdrawal from, or failure to get involved in, community activity. Essentially people felt that the only way to survive was to maintain a low profile, and under no circumstances, to draw attention to oneself.

*'Never again will I get involved in anything cross community. They were so nasty. A couple of Protestants told them, don't be so stupid, but they were threatened too.'*

*'Even a picture in the paper is enough.'*

*'If you tried to start anything (e.g. a GAA club) people would say 'it's IRA backed'.'*

### **Relations with the Protestant Community**

*'My road is called Vatican city; there's two Catholic families in it!'*

In Community A, while there were some positive comments about Protestant neighbours, they were on an individual basis and were not used to describe relations with the community as a whole, which were generally described as poor. Participants did however highlight occasional incidents where Protestant neighbours had sided with them and in so doing had risked their own safety. They also referred to incidents in which Protestant neighbours were clearly embarrassed by the activities of the majority within the community. There were other comments to the effect that while there is positive contact with Protestant neighbours, the relationship has never been tested.

*'Some Protestant families had to leave because they were friendly with us.'*

*'There is a token couple who are the exception.'*



# section 2

## Section 2 – Communities C, D and E

Section 2 presents information from the second grouping of communities; C, D and E. These are areas in which Catholics do not identify themselves as a minority community, despite in actual numerical terms being a minority within the wide Council area, and freely and openly express their identity.

### Community Involvement

*'We had great set dancing classes – they fell apart, there was a lack of support, a lack of people.'*

In these three areas, all research participants were involved in some form of community activity. In communities C and D, much of the activity centres around the GAA and in community D, exclusively so. In the remaining area, all the research participants were involved in Irish language initiatives. These were large scale projects and include running a Gaelscoil, Naionra and adult Irish language classes. With the exception of community C there was no involvement in mainstream community development. In the main, therefore the focus of community involvement was through sporting and cultural activity.

### The GAA

*'The GAA is the focal point in the community. It's where everybody socialises.'*

*'It's perceived quite well by the Protestant communities locally. It's viewed in a sporting context. Years ago, Protestants saw it as being anti-British, not now, it's recognised as a sport.'*

*'The television coverage has made a great difference - people see it for what it is. There's no trouble, you don't need hundreds of people to control the crowd and the crowd isn't segregated.'*

*'Protestants close by on the outskirts of this area would look favourably enough on it but further away they don't know and they don't want to know much about it. They can't relate to it, especially hurling, it's different.'*

*'To Protestants hurling is a Fenian game. They can identify with football. Protestants associate Gaelic football with rugby and soccer.'*

*'(People see it as) a thriving, well developed, very useful organisation. If we hadn't the GAA in this community, we'd have nothing. In a village like (this), it is very essential.'*

In communities C and D, the GAA is pivotal to community activity and in community D, participants in both the women and men's focus groups were all members of the local GAA club. It is the only community association in this area and all social events in the parish take place in the GAA club. Catholics travel from the mainly Protestant hinterland to be involved with the club. The focus in both areas is on hurling and camogie.

Given that throughout the Troubles GAA members in some areas of Northern Ireland were both the target of sectarian attacks and viewed with suspicion by the police and army, current perceptions of the GAA were examined. In one of the areas the club had been the subject of attack on a number of occasions.

There was broad (though not unanimous) agreement in both communities that the perception of the GAA is a positive one, that it is viewed as a strong well supported organisation and that GAA sports are becoming increasingly popular, including within the Protestant community. This belief is held by members of the club referred to above whose clubhouse was burned to the ground and which was the subject of a number of sectarian attacks. Everybody in that area agreed and shared a belief that these attacks were not initiated or supported by Protestants from within their own community. This was substantiated by their view that Protestants living close to GAA clubs have a more positive perception of the GAA than those who have no direct or immediate contact. The GAA's increase in popularity was attributed mainly to increased BBC coverage and to a lesser extent the change in the political climate brought about by and since the ceasefires. There was however a distinction made between hurling and football with general agreement that football was more 'acceptable' to the Protestant community because of perceived similarities with soccer and rugby. One participant commented that Michael Collins' association with hurling may have done it few favours in affecting Protestant perception!

In community D, participants related the positive perception of the GAA to attempts by themselves to make Protestant members of the community feel welcome within the club. Participants referred to the GAA club's attitude to, and stance on, issues with political connotations. They spoke of never knowing 'who' would be in the club. They would be unaware of people's religion and would therefore 'play it safe' in terms of being 'overtly nationalist.'

*'We wouldn't let anyone off with making sectarian comments.'*

*'We wouldn't offend them. We wouldn't play the anthem in case there were Protestants here. It wouldn't happen. I don't know if that's official policy, it's just the way it is.'*

In another area the positive perception of the Protestant community appeared tainted by a view that while Protestants may hold a positive view of GAA sports it is coupled with envy and is used to 'justify' Orangeism.

*'I think they are envious. But they also see it as being something against which they can justify loyalism or Orangeism. They are paralleled but this is wrong.'*

Some participants felt that the Protestant view of the GAA is not necessarily positive, that the organisation is equated with Republicanism and treated with suspicion. This affects members' willingness to talk about their involvement with the GAA in 'mixed' company. In the club which had been the target of sectarian attacks, alongside the over-arching positivism there was a background of attacks to the property and a belief that membership of the GAA is a label which can place one in a vulnerable position. In this area, reference was made to a number of other

*'We don't feel as isolated as you might think...'*

clubs who were worried about travelling to their area for matches over the Twelfth period *'for fear of being attacked'*. Participants added that people from outside the area travelling for matches there would change their route to avoid having to travel through certain towns. However, the targeting or potential targeting of people involved with the GAA had no effect on membership. In fact, attacks on the property strengthened the club.

*'(There's a perception that the GAA is) just for Catholics. They see it and the IRA in one line.'*

*'The Twelfth is a busy time. Anybody who tells you they weren't apprehensive travelling around the Twelfth with hurleys in the back of the car is lying. You would be afraid.'*

*'The club became stronger, it was the same with the other club.' (The club house was re-built using local voluntary labour).*

### Expressing Identity

*'I wouldn't speak Irish there. I wouldn't feel comfortable. I would be afraid I'd get my head kicked in.'*

In these three communities, there was a variety of perspectives on participants' degree of safety associated with expression of identity, such as wearing GAA or Celtic colours and/or speaking Irish, but in the main it was not an issue for participants. There were some notable named exceptions, but rather than being disclosed readily, these usually only emerged as a result of more detailed questioning or for example when the question was extended to include local towns which would be considered majority Protestant.

*'Some children do wear them (jerseys) today but I would still be wary of it.'*

### Acceptance of Gaelic

*'I brought a sponsor sheet into work and a girl from Newry took the sheet down from the wall. She said it was because there was Irish in it and she didn't want to offend people.'*

In community E, expression of identity was bound up in levels of acceptance of the Irish language within the community. All participants in the research were either learning Irish or were actively involved in the establishment of Irish language initiatives. Opinions on the degree of acceptance of the Irish language were clearly related to levels of activism in promoting the language; the more active the participants, the more likely they were to cite incidents of opposition or difficulty. Interestingly, one of the main sources of resistance towards the language was identified as being other members of the Catholic community. Responses reflected divisions within the Catholic community in the area, which on the face of it, appear more pronounced than divisions between the Catholic and Protestant communities. Participants' own analysis in relation to this is that the issue of acceptance of the Irish language is as much a class issue as a sectarian one. There was however some resistance from within the Protestant community. There was also a hope expressed that in the future Protestants might choose to become involved in the Irish language schools.

*'My daughter had a sponsor sheet and all the Protestants sponsored but none of the Catholics.'*

*'People assume you will get a reaction from the Protestant community and you don't.'*

Irish language speakers and activists suggested they are presented with two difficulties, one is that of promoting Irish language initiatives in the face of resistance from the community as a whole, and the second is the degree of discomfort experienced by speaking Irish in public.

*'If people don't understand, they dismiss it but maybe dismissal is their only way of addressing their own fears.'*

*'We have had so much thrown at us. We had a sign with the name of the naionra on it. When we put the sign up, we were told it was too big, it might offend people. The private business housed in the same building objected, saying 'it will be bad for my business' and after about 5 weeks the priest took the sign down.'*

There was a degree of frustration at the perceived politicisation of the language, both by those who hold the perception that to be interested in the Irish language implies Republicanism and also on the other side of the coin by Sinn Fein who some saw as politicising it. Participants commented on the implications of the resistance to and politicisation of the language. This mainly focused on a sense that those involved in Irish language initiatives were making themselves more visible within the community and as such could be potential targets of sectarian attacks. To date there does not appear to have been any consequences in terms of numbers enrolling for the Irish language schools. Another of the consequences identified is that it exacerbates an 'us and them' divide within the community.

*'The ward sister where I work would make wee comments about 'Your wee IRA school.'  
'Maybe Protestants feel it is something against them, maybe they feel insecure, maybe they see us as part of Sinn Fein.'*

*'It hurts me when people associate the Irish language with the IRA.'*

*'When you are associated with the Irish language school there is a fear that something could happen to you.'*

*'There is a perception that there are political overtones, anything cultural is perceived as antagonistic.'*

### **Relations with the Protestant Community**

*'You don't stop and think about Protestants.'*

In all of these communities, the initial response to a question on the quality of relations with the local Protestant community was that on the face of it, relations are good, but are not really tested as day to day contact is minimal. The Catholic community in all areas emerged as strong, autonomous and self-sufficient. Consequently, contact with the Protestant community is not really necessary. The question of relations with the Protestant community didn't appear to be a particularly important one for people. In a couple of workshops, when the question was posed, the discussion moved rapidly to the topic of the Twelfth suggesting perhaps that it is only at this time of the year that relations with the Protestant community feature strongly in people's thinking.

*'It's not an issue. The Protestant neighbours across the road would help quicker than the Catholics beside us.'*

*'Very few people make a difference between a Catholic or Protestant neighbour. It's well mixed.'*

Given that people generally responded positively to the initial question on community relations, they were then asked to comment on whether that extended to openly discussing local politics. In the main, with very few exceptions, politics remains a no-go area. There was, however, a

*'We don't feel as isolated as you might think...'*

distinction drawn between discussing politics in work and with neighbours. There was a greater degree of willingness to discuss politics with work colleagues.

*'Heavy politics is taboo. You would have conversations with close mates, but if there are other people about who would hear you, you would avoid heavy political topics.'*

*'If you knew they were Protestants, you wouldn't discuss politics.'*

In communities C and E, there was an acknowledgement of the effects of the population shift in the area on the Protestant community, that is, the increase in the number of Catholic families. In community C, this was accompanied by a sense of loss that when Protestants left, they are unlikely to return and the area lost out from the absence of these families. In this community, there was also an acknowledgement that these families moved out because they no longer felt safe and a degree of culpability was accepted. The reduction in the Protestant population happened 'quietly' and over a period of time.

*'The Protestant families; I would think they felt intimidated. We had a few young ones who did not behave very well. The Orange Hall was burned, the walls of the Hall were daubed with paint, the church windows were broken...it may not be locals.'*

*'It's a big loss that they're gone. They'll never be back. They're gone forever. They were good people.'*

*'Someone went to the graveyard and desecrated Protestant graves and broke windows in the Protestant Church Hall. We (the Catholic community in the area) had a collection. It would have replaced the windows twice. They didn't accept the money. They gave it to charity.'*

*'Protestants; when they leave, they will never return.'*

*'It was a big loss to the area; they were good people and the best of neighbours.'*

In summary, the main issues for communities A and B were a conscious and deliberate withdrawal from community involvement because of the fear associated with raising one's head above the parapet, an absence of the GAA or any form of Irish cultural activity, an inability to express identity arising from a fear for personal safety and practically no sense of belonging to the community.

In communities C, D and E, there was a high degree of community activity, a prominence of the GAA in people's expression of identity and as a focal point in the community, a shifting ground in terms of expression of identity in broader society and a satisfactory level of co-existence with Protestant neighbours.



# 3

section

## SECTION 3

### Section 3

Information on the same themes was presented separately in the sections 1 and 2 because there were markedly different experiences in the research communities. This section presents information on themes and issues of which there were similar experiences in all five areas.

#### Relations with the Protestant Community

While there were differences in response to a question on the quality of relations with the Protestant community as outlined in the earlier sections, there was consistency across the areas in the responses of young people. The young people interviewed in two separate areas were very positive about their relationships with Protestant friends. There was a low tolerance for politics.

*'The school is mixed; most of my mates are Protestant. You go out with them. Most of them live in the country. My Protestant mate comes and stays here. There's no friction. The school is well disciplined. Nothing ever happens.'*

*'No problem – I have quite a few friends from primary school and guides. There is no problem, we understand that we just go to separate churches and that's it. I have no friends who care about religion.'*

#### Social Patronage

*'The Protestants are more loyal (to Protestant shops) than Catholics are to Catholic ones.'*

Participants were asked to comment on where they carry out their day to day business, where they socialise and in particular to comment on whether the religious background of business owners influenced their choices.

The question of where people choose to shop did not appear to be an issue. In all areas, there was agreement that the decision is based on variety, options and price and is unconnected to the religion or perceived religion of either the shop owners or within the towns in general. In instances where participants indicated that there was no loyalty to particular shops or

*'We don't feel as isolated as you might think...'*

villages this was not linked to religion or politics, rather market options and prices. In many cases, people were surprised at being asked the question. It was suggested that shopping loyalty in religious terms is a Protestant concern but not a Catholic one.

Where participants choose to socialise was a different issue as this decision was linked to perceptions of safety. The religion of the owners and more specifically the clientele was a significant consideration of the choices people made. In particular, this was an important consideration for people in communities A and B, but also featured in decisions in the other three areas.

*'The places (we can socialise in) are selective. In some bars, there is paramilitary involvement, in one, UVF is written up on the door.'*

*'If I walked in, I wouldn't walk out – it's one way traffic (for Catholics).'*

*'I would have a meal there, but I wouldn't have a drink. The place is painted red, white and blue. You could go during the week but not at weekends.'*

*'(We wouldn't socialise there) it's somewhere you drive through.'*

*'There is an issue over which paramilitaries own which bars.'*

#### The Twelfth

*'I don't mind the marching. It's everything that comes with it – the trouble. Some do it because they are proud of their culture. Others do it out of hatred.'*

The issue of Twelfth of July parades was one which elicited a wide range of responses, both within and between workshops. It was a subject which usually emerged long before a question was asked in relation to it and frequently in response to discussions on relations with the Protestant community. It is the issue which brought community divisions into sharp focus. In two of the five areas, it has been particularly contentious. In community A, there is now a mass exodus of the Catholic community at that time of the year and in community C, for the past few years, the parade has been banned by the Parades Commission at the request of local residents.

While the perspectives were very varied both within and between communities some common themes emerge. Firstly, many people responded by saying that parades in themselves are perfectly acceptable, the basis of rejection and fear of them is the violence and intimidation with which they are invariably accompanied. The young people interviewed spoke of the drunkenness associated with the Twelfth and suggested that for Protestant young people in their area the event is simply an excuse to drink. Secondly, many attributed the problems to outsiders and clearly lay the blame for the emergence of violence in relation to the Twelfth on people from outside their own areas. Thirdly, participants recalled parades in the past before they became violent and controversial, in a positive way. Fourthly, the lack of consultation and dialogue with the Catholic community was a major bone of contention. Fifthly, while the actual parades in themselves may pass off without incident, they clearly act as a catalyst for sectarian incidents, and this was the main issue for many people. Finally, the majority of people felt that Protestants 'change' around the Twelfth and relations become more strained for that period, returning to 'normal' when the Twelfth period is over.

*'When the Orange Order were equating the right to march with the right to go to church quietly – I had a problem with that.'*

*'It's the bitterness I can't stand – it's the kick the pope bands.'*

*'They have a right to march...if they do it in areas where local people do not object. It's important that the Orange Order is not seen to be beyond the law.'*

*'It shouldn't be forced on people.'*

*'As long as the leaders have the right mindset... and the leaders in the local bands are okay.'*

*'I think everybody is entitled to their own celebrations, they can tear away. I don't like this in your face thing, if it is peaceful and disciplined, it's okay.'*

*'What the 12th stands for is really bigoted to me. I just don't agree with it.'*

*'The Twelfth is always a tense time for Catholics.'*

*'They own the place, they can do what they want and they send that message to us loud and clear – especially on the Twelfth.'*

### **Violence and Sectarianism Associated with the Twelfth**

*'It's not the Twelfth that's the problem. It's the 11th night.'*

Participants described a range of violent incidents which had taken place in their communities around the Twelfth July. These ranged from; broken windows, clashes with police and locals, petrol bombs, riots, and intimidation towards people going to mass. There were numerous references to the sectarianism which unfurls around the Twelfth.

Some people objected to their communities being covered in flags and emblems, particularly those of a paramilitary nature.

*'Whenever I hear it – I go back to when we were very young – you felt terrified – and you go back there every time you hear it. It was because they picked us out – they picked out our house, now I think – please, please don't let them stop outside our house.'*

*'The year of the first or second Drumcree was the scariest time for us. At midnight they marched with torches and lights. It was like the Klu Klux Klan. We had friends to stay – they were absolutely terrified. It was really sinister.'*

*'I remember UDA boys in masks at the front of our house, we were terrified and if you tried to get anywhere there were road blocks. You were terrified when your daddy or brothers were out of the house – in case they wouldn't come back.'*

*'We were burned out that night. It wasn't the first time it was burned but it was the worst fire we had. They have also thrown petrol bombs in twice and the windows have been broken twice since. The police said it was an electrical fault. The place stank of petrol... they didn't do a lot of research! It didn't help for insurance. Your insurance goes up and you have to take extra precautions.'*

*'My oldest memory at (6 or 7) is of an 11th night – a neighbour in the British Legion who had been in the bar came down and said they were meeting at our house! They were planning to burn the Catholics out. He told Daddy to take down the picture of the pope and that he had a spare union jack for the garden. Daddy refused to take the picture of the pope down. I remember my dad standing behind the door that night with an axe and mother went to bed with a bottle of domestos!'*

*'We don't feel as isolated as you might think...'*

*'For the Twelfth, every lamp-post is bedecked with paramilitary flags – it is totally intimidating.'*

*'The union jacks don't bother me – it's the other flags they put up – the UVF and other paramilitary flags... and it's the council bin lorries (which are used to put the flags up). The DOE lorries used to put them up.'*

People responded to events surrounding the Twelfth in a variety of ways, ranging from maintaining vigilance, to leaving the area for all of that period, to moving away from the area altogether. For some, the main worry is the 11th night. Some participants described staying up all night to keep vigil. They also spoke of a sense of being on their own.

*'One year we (were really scared) – we phoned the police – they said, we can't get in or out. You're on your own.'*

*'When trouble comes, you are on your own.'*

*'Because we're all scattered - you can't circle the wagons.'*

#### Sectarian Incidents Towards Protestants

*'Someone said it was a joke but maybe it was more bigoted.'*

While in the main, the sectarian incidents recounted from the 12th period were directed by Protestants towards Catholics, in community E, where the Catholic population is increasing (with a corresponding decrease in the Protestant population) participants spoke of Catholic antagonism towards Protestants on the Twelfth. While some felt there was no deliberate harm in the incidents which had taken place, that it was a combination of high spirits and alcohol which caused the problems, others offered a different perspective and acknowledged that these events combined with the population shift must have been difficult for the Protestant community.

*'If I was a Protestant I would feel pretty intimidated from the way it was.'*

*'They know there's ejits on both sides. They're young lads – 17-25 - and drink would be involved. There is an agreement in the area that the arch will be up for a certain length of time. When stuff happens it's the talk of the town and then it usually goes all quiet.'*

*'Only for the drunken-ness the sectarianism wouldn't come out. When they're drunk, it emerges. Everybody raised in this society is tainted with sectarianism.'*

*'There must be something going on, look at the way Protestant businesses are moving out (a number of Protestant businesses for sale were referred to). There is a gradual withdrawal. I wouldn't be happy if it happened to me.'*

#### Involvement of 'outsiders'

*'Prior to that there was no bother with Orange Marches. Catholics used to go along and watch the bands. The (local) Accordion Band was good but there's not one person from (the area) in it now. What got people's back up was that it was people from outside the area.'*

One of the main problem areas in relation to the 12th was the involvement of 'outsiders.' In the main, participants suggested that culpability for problems which emerge over the 12th lay with

people from outside their communities. Comments on the involvement of outsiders refer both to people arriving in the area for the day and also the composition of the bands.

*'There's a maximum of 10 people (from the area) in the Band and a maximum of 6 people behind them.'*

*'People from outside the area came in and set fires. They started a bonfire in the middle of the road. They set up road blocks and then we set up our own.'*

The refusal by the Orange Order to engage with local residents was identified as a major problem for many participants. It is seen as offensive, arrogant and a slight on the local community. In a couple of areas discussions have never taken place between the Orange Order and residents. Participants pointed out that the Order will not engage with local residents.

*'There never has been, and never will be, negotiation with Catholics.'*

*'There hasn't been a Parade in 6 years. (There used to be 8 times a year). They won't dialogue. Our criteria is face to face dialogue. The Orange Order won't talk and the ball is in their court.'*

Most, though not all, participants who spoke on this subject referred to a 'change' in Protestants around the Twelfth. Most people spoke of it matter-of-factly; some as an issue which caused confusion as a child. It was often a cause of bemusement.

*'Definitely – people who would normally say hello wouldn't speak to you.'*

*'Even when you were younger. If you were watching the band maybe they didn't want to be seen talking to you (by their own community).'*

### Incidents Related to the Troubles

*'The parish church was burned to the ground. There was a spate of burnings after the signing of the Belfast Agreement.'*

*'The (hall) was broken into, there was a tread of a rubber soled boot and we found a wheel brace which belonged to a land rover. We suspect it was the UDR. The trophies were burnt or broken, they were won by the young ones.'*

*'There was a lot of tension at that time (85/87). We had a hay shed burned down and so did our Catholic neighbours. Our Protestant neighbours weren't touched.'*

In all areas, participants recalled numerous violent and sometimes fatal incidents arising from the Troubles. One participant recounted a family member being killed by the security forces, while others spoke of young people being beaten up and in one instance killed, halls, churches and GAA property being burned down, haysheds being burned out, bars being bombed and houses being pipe bombed. No particular incidents will be recounted here in order to protect the identity of research participants.

With the exception of one community in which the threat of violent sectarian incidents is still current, and to a much lesser extent in a second community where there had been a murder within the last four years, the incidents were not particularly prominent in people's minds. There was a strong sense of communities having moved on and in all five areas a notable absence of bitterness.

*'We don't feel as isolated as you might think...'*

Participants also referred to sectarian attacks perpetrated against the Protestant community. In one community, participants commented that the attacks on Protestant property were probably carried out by locals and motivated by drunkenness. It was also suggested that attacks like these are not pre-meditated, that they are spontaneous and usually fuelled by alcohol. These attacks are, participants suggested, carried out due to a combination of drunkenness, devilment and sectarianism. Participants also suggested that there is little or no tolerance for incidents such as these in their communities.

*'The Protestant community was attacked, it (the community) was very small, and we got no stick from them.'*

*'You'd get the odd bit – graffiti and things like that – it's only kids stuff. It's cleaned off very quickly.'*

### Avoidance Tactics

*'Years ago, we would have picked routes to matches. We wouldn't stop in (names a 'Protestant' village) to get chips. It's just common sense. It would be seen as taking a risk you didn't have to take.'*

People spoke of the tactics they adopt in order to avoid sectarian incidents taking place (both historically and currently). Essentially, these can be divided into two categories.

The first is where people modify their behaviour and that of their children in order to avoid any situations which are perceived as threatening. The following are some examples given by participants of how participants modify their behaviour in order to avoid sectarian incidents;

- Changing school times to avoid conflict with other school children
- Being escorted to the public transport station (to go to school)
- Changing public transport stations
- Sending children to a particular school because of the colour/style of the uniform
- Changing routes to avoid certain areas (particularly when returning from GAA matches)

The second tactic was where some participants literally took the protection of their communities and community facilities into their own hands by keeping guard (sometimes armed with shotguns) outside properties which were considered to be at risk. In one area, there was an acknowledgement that with the benefit of hindsight, it was a *'stupid'* thing to do, as people were essentially sitting targets. However, at the time people felt a need to protect their property and themselves. They commented on the fact that Catholic families wouldn't have received a licence for guns, but Protestants did. Other measures were taken such as sitting on guard at the back of mass in case it was attacked during a service.

*'One man had a legally held shot gun in the back of his car while we sat in front of the parochial house to guard it. If we were attacked, the others were likely to have had high powered rifles, we might as well have had a pea shooter!'*

*'In the mid 90's, when the Irish language classes were going, we used to take it in turns to sit outside while classes were on just to keep an eye on things, there was that high a level of threat.'*

Particularly, though not exclusively, in community A, participants commented that the reason more sectarian incidents do not take place is because Catholics structure their lives in a way which minimises risk.

*'Measures have been taken which prevent more incidents from taking place.'*

*'Keep your heads below that line ...and you'll be fine. There'll be a reminder you're a second class citizen - go back in your box.'*

In community C, reference was made to efforts in the Catholic community to stem sectarianism from within;

*'We've had problems with tri-colours and black flags. We've gotten all flags taken down. If there are tri-colours - you can't say - take them down- you have got to say - consider our situation here. You say don't demean the flag, if you want to give it regard, do it in the proper way. You don't use the tri-colour to antagonise people. If you can communicate with young people - push the positive vein - marginalise the negative. If you tell people what to do, you're doomed to fail.'*

### Consequences of Sectarian and Violent Incidences

*'It's there - especially for the kids - they're often called Fenians and they come home and ask us - what's that?'*

People spoke of the consequences of sectarian incidences on their daily lives and experiences and also on those of their children. Apart from the more obvious serious consequences of feeling unsafe in their own communities and re-structuring lives to avoid sectarian attacks, participants identified a number of additional ones. These include;

- A feeling that people have no right to live in their communities
- Children being made aware at an early age that they are 'different'
- A general sense of unease and vulnerability
- Re-enforcement of beliefs and stereotypes
- Reluctance to organise as a community
- An increase in personal / community security measures
- For Irish speakers - avoiding speaking Irish or wearing clothing or emblems which could identify people as Catholics
- A reduction in numbers attending Irish language classes
- Denying where they were from (at police and army checkpoints)

*'You are afraid as a community to be seen together.'*

*'The kids are walking in having been asked 'are you Catholics?' The kids found out they were Catholics because the other kids told them. It was their first awareness of being different.'*

*'I had eight of a family...I was raised to be prejudiced against English occupation. I had an uncle killed by the Black and Tans in 1922...my mother had always told us - 'the police will always let you down' - we would have set out to prove her wrong, but my mother wasn't so wrong.'*

*'The Irish language teachers would have said to us to be aware. We did feel vulnerable and there was a definite draw back in numbers for a while.'*

*'We don't feel as isolated as you might think...'*

### Local Involvement in Sectarian Incidents

*'The people who did it, and they can be named locally, are from (outside the area, names a predominantly Protestant town). I would think there was no local involvement.'*

One of the consistent features of the discussions on sectarian incidents was a belief that the perpetrators were from outside the community. Participants were confident that there was limited (if any) local involvement. In community A, while participants clearly believe that perpetrators now live within the community, the over-arching belief is that most of the sectarianism is orchestrated by people who have moved in from Belfast, many of whom it is alleged, have paramilitary connections. In one area, where a young person was murdered relatively recently, although people felt that he must have been identified from within the community, they believe that the killers were from elsewhere.

*'People are moving to country areas to move away from that, after 30 years of Trouble they've had enough, but some people bring it with them.'*

*'(Referring to a local 'Protestant' town) 90% of people there, you couldn't get nicer, but even the people from there themselves have a problem with the other 10%. The 10% who have moved in are moving in from Belfast, they are from paramilitary backgrounds and they are influencing the kids.'*

### Mixed Marriages

*'It's definitely not religion that's the problem.'*

The initial response to a question on mixed marriages was that they are 'no problem' and that happiness and finding the 'right person' is the most important consideration. Many participants had family members in mixed marriages. However, on reflection of the question in some instances, reservations were expressed, mainly in relation to the religion or politics of the children but sometimes in relation to the reaction of other family members. Some raised the issue of the children's religion and suggested that it is a more important concern than whether or not the marriage itself is 'mixed.' Some suggested that if social class was introduced into the equation it would become problematic. In one workshop, participants who for the most part had expressed positive attitudes towards mixed marriages were asked to comment on what their attitude would be if the marriage was to result in family land was being transferred to Protestant ownership. All responses were to the effect that land would not be signed over.

*'They're more accepted now...people don't worry so much about it anymore.'*

*'My sister goes out with a Protestant, dad just mutters but doesn't really say anything although he would prefer her to go out with a Catholic.'*

*'I wouldn't have a problem marrying a Protestant but the children would have to be Catholic.'*

*'It would be a problem if I thought they would have to change their religion to be accepted.'*

*'I wouldn't like them to go out with someone who was in one of the kick the pope bands – it's more of a class thing. When class is mixed with religion it would bring trouble on the family.'*

### Policing

*'I'm slightly more confident (in them) now, I know people in it now. If it was (to stay) predominantly Protestant, I feel they would stick to their own side.'*



The question of attitudes to the PSNI met with a variety of responses. Many of the participants from all areas indicated they would certainly contact the police if they were subject to any crime. However, there was also a fairly high degree of mistrust and a feeling that 'nothing would be done.' While most participants would expect to receive fair and equitable treatment from the police many added they would not be surprised if they didn't. In a couple of areas, participants commented that there is an insufficient police presence to manage crime levels. When participants were asked whether or not they would feel comfortable about themselves or their children joining the police, all responded 'no'.

*'At the time of the fire they were more than good. They did what they could. When it was rebuilt they would check the place to make sure everything was okay, even now, they would keep an eye out.'*

*'They are pleasant to speak to, I have no hassle. You would hope to have no issues with them.'*

*'For public safety yeah it's ok to talk to the Police.'*

*'I would hope police would treat you with courtesy but I wouldn't expect it.'*

*'There is still mistrust and a perception that nothing would be done about it.'*

*'Now we would go to the Ombudsman. There was a great feeling of impotence. The police weren't for us. Now, we are more aware of the equality agenda. Younger ones wouldn't accept what we put up with.'*

*'They don't do anything. A friend of mine was up with a Dublin registration, it was targeted. The police response was 'what do you expect driving a Dublin reg?' Apart from that, generally, I think they're not sectarian.'*

### Changes in the Police

*'They've had no choice. They have had to change.'*

While there was acknowledgement that there have been changes in the police service all participants who spoke on this topic noted that the police had no choice. Reference was also made to the positive work being conducted by Nuala O'Loan's office but there was dissatisfaction that this is often viewed as a 'concession.'

*'They've started to do things we would have expected them to do all along – I think that's changed. They're started to see the role of policing as being one to deal with criminal rather than political issues.'*

*'Protestants see everything as a concession.'*

### Police During the Troubles

Some people referred to the differential treatment they received from the police during the Troubles. Participants commented on the fact that during the Troubles, they always presumed their (GAA) premises to be bugged and prominent members to have their phones tapped.

*'I thought they were suspicious that we were involved with the IRA.'*

*'We would have been concerned that we would have been marked out. Some of them would be involved with the paramilitaries, reporting incidents would mark you.'*

*'We don't feel as isolated as you might think...'*

### Buying Selling Land

*'If a farm came up for sale now, a Catholic will buy it up. Time was when it was hard to buy land from a Protestant family. They even would have got aid to buy it – it was a Masonic thing. It wasn't in the ethos to sell land to a Catholic. So they would have gotten together to buy it instead.'*

The issue of whether land would be bought and sold between Catholics and Protestants was one which elicited a mixed response. It had clearly been an issue in the past and still was in some areas. In one community, it was no longer an issue as participants commented that there are no Protestants to sell land to so when land comes up for sale, there is no option but to sell it to a Catholic. Protestants would not be moving into the area. This has not always been the case. In another area there were mixed views, but overall it would appear that there is still an issue around Protestants selling land to Catholics;

*'When selling land Protestants did sell openly to Catholics. There were no Protestants left to sell the land to but there didn't seem to be an issue anyway.'*

*'It wouldn't be uncommon for an auctioneer to be told that land is not to be sold to a Catholic.'*

*'(Another local hurling club) bought land from a Protestant but had to go through a third party.'*

## The Future

The question of the viability of the future of the Catholic communities in the research areas was relevant in three communities.

### *'This is a Protestant location. The future is bleak'*

In community A, there was little real hope for the continuation of a Catholic community in the area. While participants expressed a high degree of hope that the community would survive, realistically, people felt it was not feasible. In particular there were concerns that there are insufficient numbers to keep the primary school open and its closure would, people suggested, *'sound the death knell of the community'*. People did however speak of the importance of developing their own community spirit and developing confidence in their own ability to survive. An end to control of the community by loyalist paramilitaries was seen to be critically important.

In community D, there was a greater degree of confidence. The presence of a strong community spirit was considered to be an important feature.

### *'Things can change, they could change'*

In community B, there were mixed sentiments in response to a question on the future of the community. There was a sense that while participants were not exactly optimistic about the future of a Catholic community in the area, there was an underlying hope that things might change over time. In particular participants felt that there is a future for Catholics who would choose to live in the rural hinterland and perhaps in new housing developments on the outskirts of the town. However, it appears that the research town will in reality, be off limits for Catholics for a considerable time to come.

## Concluding Observations

In summary, the experiences of the five research communities appear to fall into two categories. One experience is that the actual size of the Catholic community enabled people to express themselves as Irish without any great difficulty. The other is that Catholics as a minority have a strong sense of that minority status, were scared to express their Irish identity and were especially fearful of perceived or actual loyalist intimidation. In the case of the latter, these communities are for the most part silent and invisible.

While, as the title of this report suggests, there was an overriding sense of confidence and a determination to rise above the limitations brought about by minority status, this should not be interpreted as a reason for policy inaction in these areas to address the serious problems raised. The fact that communities are strong does not detract from the fear and intimidation people experience on day to day basis. In particular the power of loyalist paramilitaries in these communities must be removed if members of the Catholic community are to lead lives with an open sense of dignity and pride.

A key consideration for policy intervention in these areas is at what point does a minority community become sufficiently large that its minority status is no longer overly problematic and what are the other characteristics of communities apart from size which contribute to minority status being problematic? One way forward for minority communities may be the ability to organise and participate in community activity in a way in which they can develop a sense of control over their own lives and create a sense of safety in numbers. This however must be coupled with a political commitment to removing the causes of fear which may prevent this work from getting off the ground.



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