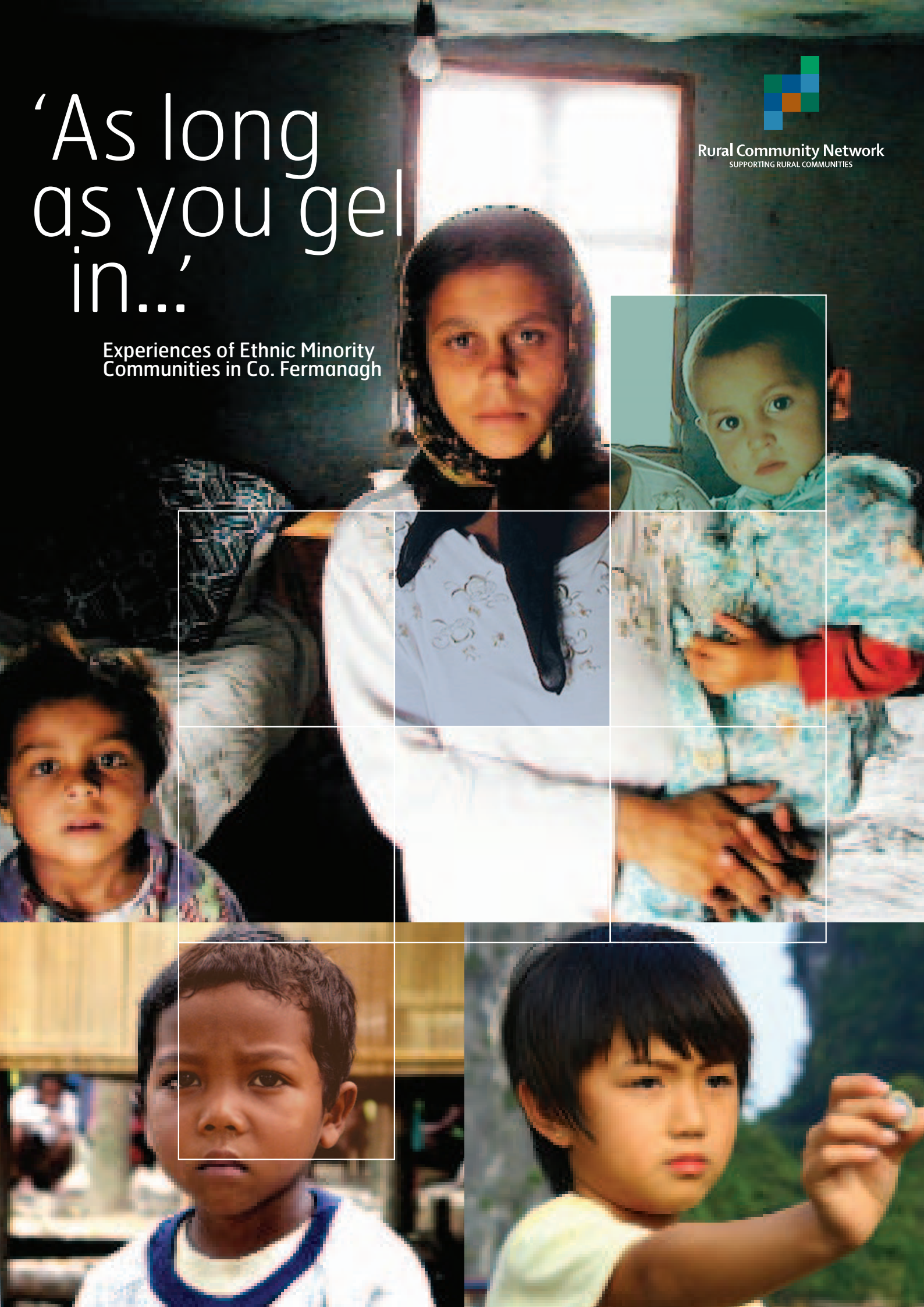


'As long as you get in...'

Experiences of Ethnic Minority Communities in Co. Fermanagh



Rural Community Network
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'As long as you gel in...'

Introduction

This report is the third and final one in a series which has sought to document the experiences of minority communities in rural Northern Ireland.

In 2003, Rural Community Network published a report '*You feel you'd have no say*' which expressed the views and opinions of members of minority Protestant communities living along the border area on their experiences as a minority. 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 commissioned a similar piece of research with Catholic communities in areas in which they are in a minority. The purpose of the project was broadly similar to that of the previous one with Protestant communities - to find out about people's experiences as a minority community in five areas and if and how everyday lives are

affected by the religious demographics in these areas. '*We don't feel as isolated as you might think*' was the published report of the research findings.

This report presents the third and final set of research findings and documents the experiences of minority ethnic communities. This research project, funded by the Department of Social Development and the Community Relations Council through Rural Community Network, was overseen by an Advisory Group comprising representatives of the Community Relations Council, Department of Social Development, Diversity Challenges and Rural Community Network. The intention of the research was not to provide a comprehensive report on the experiences of ethnic minorities, rather it was to provide an insight into how minority communities experience life in Northern Ireland and how the local or native communities receive and treat minorities.

Given the recent shift in demographics with the arrival of 'new' ethnic groups into the North of Ireland, it was decided to split the research into three categories, namely, recently arrived ethnic minority migrant labour groups, longer term residents (over five years) of non national ethnic origin and members of the Irish Travelling Community. The findings in this report are presented in these distinct categories.

In keeping with the methodology used in the previous two research reports, it was decided to select one geographical area in which to undertake the research on the premise that, notwithstanding inevitable variations in experiences between and indeed within areas, there is unlikely to be considerable variations in experiences throughout rural Northern Ireland.

Methodology

County Fermanagh was selected as the research area. Again, in keeping with the methodology employed in the previous two reports and in recognition of the value of discussion and the richness of information which emerges when people are provided with a safe space to talk, the primary method of gathering information was intended to be focus group discussions within each of the three categories. However, the lack of organised groups and, in some cases, the absence of a sense of identity as a community within individual groupings militated against this method for the most part. Where it was not possible to hold focus groups, one to one interviews were held.

The ethnic minority migrant labour group was perhaps the easiest category to access given that formal language classes and developmental support are already being provided to this group by an Enniskillen based organisation. Two large focus group discussions were held with members of the Polish and Lithuanian communities. The groups were mixed sex – the Polish one comprising five women and six men and the Lithuanian one comprising thirteen women and three men. Each of these groups already met on a weekly basis for English language classes. Each of the discussions was held through a translator. The findings in this section are therefore different in style to the two remaining sections as there are no direct quotes from participants.

Contact with the longer term ethnic minority residents was made through an existing women's group in the

county which supports and meets the needs of ethnic minority women. All enquiries to other sources in the county in relation to longer term ethnic residents were directed to this group. A focus group was held with five women, four of whom are married to Irish men. Despite attempts to set up a focus group discussion with men who had been living here for a long period of time, the only method which materialised was a one-to-one interview.

The Travelling Community was the most difficult to access, primarily because of the total absence of any dedicated support to the community in County Fermanagh with the consequent lack of contacts into the community. A second factor was the invisibility of the community. This is unsurprising given the research finding which suggests that Travellers which arrive to camp in the county are moved on within 24 hours. Consequently, families live within 'settled' housing estates, there are no sites and no roadside camps, therefore families are not visible or evidently Travellers. The final factor is the low numbers of Travelling families in the county. Contact was made with Traveller Development Projects/support workers in four surrounding counties (Donegal, Sligo, Monaghan/Louth and Omagh). Only one worker in those projects knew Travellers living in Fermanagh and when approached via this Traveller development worker, they declined to participate in the research. Contact was made with one family through a local community project which resulted in one interview taking place

with a Travelling woman. The two remaining interviews were a result of 'cold calling' to people's houses and resulted in two interviews, one with a young Traveller woman and one with a couple.

All interviews and focus group discussions took place between November 2006 and April 2007. To protect the identity of research participants, none of the specific areas in which the research took place will be named in the report and all references to towns, individuals and organisations have been removed.

All of the comments and findings in this report are derived from focus groups and interviews and are the views and opinions of those interviewed.

‘As long
as you,
gel in...’

Acknowledgements

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Marie Crawley
March 2007

Summary

This research set out to provide an insight into how ethnic minority communities experience life in Northern Ireland and how the majority community receives and treats minorities in its midst. It does not attempt to comprehensively represent in any way the stories or lives of any of the communities interviewed. It is a snapshot of a moment in time.

One of the most striking findings of the research is the extent to which most of the minority communities are self contained and have limited contact with the majority 'local' community. For the non-national ethnic minority communities, there are a number of factors which affect their sense of belonging to society and the extent to which they become involved in local mainstream activities. These include the length of time they have lived here, the extent to which they can converse in the English language and whether they have had children here. These factors do not of course apply to the indigenous Traveller population who have a history of living here for centuries, yet they also emerge from the research as a self contained community and one which is alienated from the political system in particular.

The most recently arrived ethnic minority communities interviewed as part of the research, mainly though

not exclusively of Eastern European origin, are primarily here for economic reasons. They have in the main, arrived over with, or to, friends and are very active in the economy. They are clear and open that their reason for being here is to work and it is, in the main, seen as a short term arrangement. Their preference (with some exceptions) would be to have these economic opportunities in their own countries where they could earn a living and be amongst families and friends. Lack of English language skills is one of the greatest barriers to an improved quality of life here as all social contact, whether that be in the workplace, communities in which people live or in an active social life, is impeded by lack of language. However, the presence of a sense of internal 'Polish' or 'Lithuanian' communities appears to compensate to a great extent for the lack of integration with the majority community.

These communities experience numerous problems associated with their distinct ethnicity. This has included verbal abuse, physical attacks, what appears to be bullying in the workplace coupled with a denial in some instance of basic employment rights. The abusive behaviour, which in the main seems to emanate from older teenager boys, had meant that individuals curtail their own behaviour in terms of socialising in local towns. Despite

this, these communities have developed a way of coping and of overcoming the problems. There is a strong sense of internal community and of people looking out for each other. At the focus groups, participants recounted stories of attacks and abuse. These were not accompanied by a sense of victimhood rather by a matter-of-fact sense of a purposeful community, integrating where it needs to and otherwise finding the support necessary within its own community.

In comparison, one interviewee who asked not be directly quoted (and therefore will not be cited in the remainder of the report) provides a sharp contrast to the difficulties of living here as an individual member of an ethnic minority as opposed to living here as part of a community. Despite having the language, integration has proved to be incredibly difficult and the sense is one of intense isolation. Her experience of racism is not in the overt form of name calling and physical attack, rather it is the subtle form of being made to feel the outsider, of being sided against as a local community closes ranks, of not being able to make friends and of realising that she cannot benefit equitably from services available here as they are tailored for the majority community and are based on a premise of knowing the system.

The long term ethnic minority communities who have lived here from eight years onwards have developed a sense of belonging and for the most part (and with the sole exception of a Chinese woman) have carved themselves a distinct identity and support structure. Key to this appears to be their active involvement in community activities, responsibility for which they have taken into their own hands. They see acceptance as part of the community as being proportional to what they invest within it and most of the participants have been pro-active in assuming an active role within the community sector. In terms of their acceptance within the broader community, they themselves note two significant factors. Most of the female participants were married to local men and this gives them an 'in' within their areas. Secondly, they all moved here as individuals and note that they may not be perceived as a threat as they are more diluted within the broader community. They are not, as they noted, seen as a 'wave' of something new.

The most striking aspect of the life of the Travelling Community is that despite there being a number of families in different parts of county Fermanagh, there is no strong sense of a Traveller identity in the county, a low Traveller profile and no specific developmental initiative with the Travelling Community. It is also

important to read this report with that in mind; the Travellers interviewed in this report have not benefited from Traveller specific developmental initiatives nor have they had the space to reflect on Traveller identity and experience and how that compares to that of the settled community.

Individual families who have chosen to live here for the time being have mixed experiences of being accepted by the majority community, ranging from a sense of being accepted to a strong feeling of not being wanted demonstrated in pro-active attempts by neighbours to get them removed using statutory services as a front. While all families indicated they are served in local businesses, reference was also made to most of the bars, restaurants and clothes shops in Enniskillen barring Travellers in a general sense. Again while interviewees expressed satisfaction with life in Fermanagh; other details which emerged in conversation suggested differently (such as not being able to access a local secondary school and a Traveller being wrongly arrested on the information of a neighbour). The Travelling Community is also that which emerges as the most disenfranchised; not having registered for a vote and a total lack of awareness of the voting or political system.

Overall, the experience of ethnic minorities is a mixed one and for

newcomers not a particularly positive one, in terms of how mainstream society reacts and responds. The provision of specific support and English language classes by Enniskillen based organisations is a positive step and shows that some service providers/development organisations are prepared for the challenge of meeting the diverse and changing needs of communities with dedicated services. The challenge appears to be for mainstream services to meet different language and cultural needs within existing provision. The other significant factor which emerges from the findings is the extent to which society as a whole responds to the new communities in its midst and whether it will move from a position of curiosity to one of active welcome.

Finally, there is a glaring gap in the absence of any dedicated support to the Travelling Community. The plea in all interviews for a Travellers' site in Fermanagh will go unheard as there is nobody taking up the mantle of pro-actively supporting that view and presenting it where action can take place. Until that happens, the greatest expressed need of the longest standing ethnic minority (i.e. a Traveller site) in Fermanagh will continue to be neglected.

1 Short term residents

Participants

The group of people from Lithuania had lived in Fermanagh from two months to two and a half years. Most of the participants (11/16) had lived here for more than one year¹. One woman had lived in England for two years prior to coming to Fermanagh. There were two married couples in the group and many of the participants had family members with them. One woman had her mother, husband and his wife with her, two women came with their boyfriends, and one came to join her (Lithuanian) boyfriend. Two women were with their daughters, and another was waiting for her daughter to join her. Three of the women came alone and had remained so. Of the men, two were married to members of the group and one had his girlfriend with him for the past four months. All of the participants were working in the county. A table outlining jobs held in Lithuania and jobs here is provided in Appendix 1.

All members of the Polish group were living in or around Enniskillen at the time of the focus group. One man arrived in Northern Ireland on his own, one arrived with two friends while one woman came to join her husband and children who were already here. One woman came with her husband, two of the group had been a couple in Poland and arrived together, two of the group were brother and sister and one man came to join a sister who was already working here. Several reasons were given for having chosen Enniskillen as a place to live; one person followed their family members here, one moved here after working in Strabane and

others mentioned that they knew of Enniskillen from 'word of mouth'.

Community involvement

Asked to comment on their involvement in community activities in Lithuania, participants responded as follows. One woman had been a member of the 'Lithuania's Way' political party and had been active in health and care work as a member of a doctor's (GP) community. In addition, she was a community and newspaper journalist. She had acted as sports organiser for figure skating. Another woman had also been active in politics in the Lithuanian Labour Party, and she also was a member of a singing club. Another had been a social work care organiser. Three women were in sports and fitness clubs, one had taken an active part in cycle racing, and one had played in her work table tennis team. Two women enjoyed travelling and two others said that they had not been involved in sporting or community activities. Of the men, one had enjoyed spending time travelling, one was involved in a study club and took part in internet lectures, and the other played in a basketball team twice a week.

In terms of their community involvement here, one of the Lithuanian women was an active member of the Socialist Party and the Trade Unions. She was involved in election work and considering running as a candidate in the next local council elections. One woman was involved in migrant education and social activities, one was a member of a fitness club and one of the men had joined a pool club. Apart from this,

there was no other involvement in any other form of activity within the community and, in particular, no engagement within mainstream community activities.

Most of the Polish group (nine out of the 11 participants) had been involved in sporting or what they categorised as community activities in Poland. Sports included soccer, darts and mountain dancing. Community activities included membership of secular youth organisations such as the Scouts, a community playschool and Catholic youth organisations.

No - one in the group was taking part in organised sporting or community activity in Fermanagh, although one person played soccer with friends at work and one went swimming in the public pool.

Religion

Fourteen of the 16 Lithuanian participants were Catholic and the other two Russian Orthodox. All of the Catholic participants had attended the Catholic church in Enniskillen, where they had been welcomed and all agreed that there had been 'no problems'. Several said that they liked the church, attended mass and took communion despite the service being in English. Several also said that they would like to have a Lithuanian priest and mentioned that there was a Latvian priest in Sligo and now mass in Polish was also available. One said that although services in English were 'OK' it would be 'luxurious' for people to hear a service in Lithuanian, especially on important occasions like Easter.

¹ 1-6 months = 2; 6-12 months = 3; 12-24 months = 7; 24 +months = 4

The two Russian Orthodox women said that they had no access at all to an Orthodox church or to Orthodox services. One said that she had Orthodox friends she met with, the other sometimes attended Catholic services which was 'no problem'. One participant recounted a situation where an Orthodox man had died here and had been given a Catholic mass before being taken to Belfast for cremation. She said 'it was sad but it worked out ok'.

All of the Polish group were Catholics and attended church in Enniskillen where they felt welcomed. There was a feeling of acceptance by their religious community and involvement to the extent that there was now a mass read in Polish and on one occasion, the use of a Polish religious custom.

"There was an Easter basket for food and the food was blessed for two families... we were the only two families there."

Socialising

Most of the Lithuanian participants' socialising took place in pubs, bars and restaurants in Enniskillen. Several said that they only go out to visit Lithuanian friends and that they don't go out with Irish people because they are not invited out by them or into their homes.

One woman attended social events in the Lakeland Forum in Enniskillen and travelled to Belfast and Omagh on social visits. Another woman said that she did socialise with Fermanagh friends that her (Lithuanian) husband

had befriended in the pub. One participant mentioned that in a previous year, the younger Lithuanians fielded a Lithuanian soccer team for matches. Two people mentioned that they only socialise with Irish people at work. There was agreement that there was 'a big problem with language' that hindered social interaction.

About half of the Polish group socialised regularly, mainly in two of the well known town centre bars. The others socialised with their (Polish) friends at their own or their friends' houses.

"Irish people don't invite me to their home."

Although another person hoped that they would be invited but added;

"It hasn't happened yet."

Only four of the 11 Polish people had been invited out by Irish people (with the exception of work Christmas parties). Of these, one had been invited to the landlord's house for coffee and one to a horseracing event in/near Belfast. Asked to comment on whether they felt welcome in local bars and restaurants, one person had heard that there were some places in Enniskillen where Polish people were not welcome. Another said that in the town centre bar where she usually socialised, 'things were OK after a few drinks' but 'the language barrier makes me feel a bit weird'. The language barrier appeared to be one of the main factors why people chose not to socialise more in the local town.

Relationship with the 'local' community

Asked to comment on the extent to which people felt welcomed by the local community and how local people reacted to and interacted with them, one of the Lithuanian woman said that 'an old guy asked where she was from' and when she replied 'Lithuania' he told her to 'go out'. Another said that sometimes at work she was left with the most difficult jobs to do by her Irish co-workers, partly because of her problem with language. Another woman said that in her workplace, her Irish co-worker 'didn't do anything, just sat down all day' and she had to do all the work 'because she was foreign'. Another woman told a story that she had been given a job in a local bistro, but the manager kept chasing after her all day 'telling her she couldn't work there because she couldn't speak English'. She lost her job as a result.

Several of the participants in the Lithuanian focus group recounted specific negative experiences, the majority of which are related to workplaces and people's experiences as employees, perpetrated by both by their colleagues and employers. One woman working in a local department store said 'it was the worst time in my life' because of her relationship with her (Irish) manager. She believes that there was a difference between the way Irish and Lithuanian people were treated in the store. Even the intercession of a local co-worker on her behalf (bypassing the manager) failed to help and she left because of 'the bad relationship between me and my manager'.

Another woman working part-time for the same store and under the same manager said that she had also found a better job elsewhere but when she left, they didn't pay her last wage. Although the manager wouldn't help, she eventually managed to recover her wages three weeks later. When asked if she was aware of her rights, she replied that she wasn't sure of her rights as a part-time worker. Yet another woman complained that at her workplace, the owner *'didn't pay up'*.

One woman recounted that when she started work, her *'boss didn't make up the employment papers'* – didn't in fact make her legal, so *'she was illegal'*. The local women working with her also took advantage and gave her all the difficult jobs, keeping the easy ones for themselves. She was working with three local people at one time and didn't feel welcomed, but she also said that at another time the *'ladies were nice, job bad'*.

Comments from the whole group were that neighbours try to help and the majority of people are friendly. Because the Lithuanians tended to live near each other, they had Lithuanian as much as Irish neighbours.

When asked who they would contact in the event of an emergency, many indicated that it would be by contacting Lithuanians first and then local people. One woman said that only on one occasion she had contacted local people for help in an emergency. Another said that because her (Lithuanian) husband had many Irish friends, she might contact them

first. One other woman said that she meets Irish people every day and that they are very friendly and intimidated that she would call for local help in an emergency.

Attacks on ethnic minorities

Participants were asked to comment on the degree to which they were aware of attacks on ethnic minorities in the county and to comment on whether this limited or affected what they did in any way. In the Lithuanian group, there was general agreement initially that Enniskillen was 'a very quiet city'. There was also broad agreement that people felt safe. However, there was concern over the behaviour of local children/teenagers towards them.

One woman living in a local estate said that the *'children were very noisy and silly'*, though it emerged later on in the conversation that these youths had broken their windows and *'threw stones at people in the garden'*. One woman said *'If I speak Lithuanian, they pay attention and shout go home, so I don't talk'*. She said this was mainly from teenagers and that she also had youth *'attack the windows'* of her home in a local housing estate. The children (from the estate) were aware that they were Lithuanian. Four other participants mentioned similar problems.

One man described an incident where a gang of 10 to 15 children broke the windows of his house while he was there. When he threatened to call the police they stopped and by sheer coincidence, a police car came past. He thought *'maybe the kids were scared'* because they didn't come

back. One woman in the same situation, being in the house while youths broke her windows, did phone the police. When the police arrived, the youths left and remained away while the police were there, only to return as soon as the police had left.

When asked if this made the respondents feel unsafe, one said yes it did and wanted to move house. Another said that she continued to lead a normal life despite these types of incidences.

All of the Polish group said they were aware of attacks on ethnic minorities. One woman said that a friend had their van attacked, but didn't believe it was necessarily because they were Polish. One person reported that in July 2006 in Enniskillen, a Polish man brought his wife and children here, but on the first day vandals/bigots from the area broke all the windows of the house. Their neighbours called the police. Apparently the attack was in connection with the previous owners/renters of the property. They left the house immediately, losing their deposit.

As to whether attacks or rumours of attacks affected their own sense of safety, one man said;

"Generally speaking we are aware it's dangerous so we are afraid to come/go out in the evenings."

Another man said that because of this they *'usually go out in a group of people together'* to enhance their sense of safety but the problem *'covers the whole town'*. When asked

if this limits where people go, one woman said that she felt safer here in Enniskillen than in Poland, and another said that as a group, her family felt safer here than in Poland. Another female said that one problem is that;

"If someone speaks to you, you don't know what they're saying and sometimes you don't know (whether) to stay or run away."

As to whether they felt unsafe going out on their own, all of the women said that they did feel unsafe, but for all participants this sense of lack of safety depended on the area they were in and the time of night. Five of the participants (four women and one man) believed they were more at risk because they were Polish. Most of the participants felt insecure at least some of the time.

One man said that even during the day, if they saw a group of people standing together, they would avoid them if possible or stop talking until they were past the group. There was general agreement that trouble was more likely to come from youngsters than from older people. Loud comments were often directed at them which the participants were often unable to understand, except for phrases like '*Polish b*****s*'.

One woman described a situation when she was walking home from work and passed three young people who shouted '*F*** you fat b*****s*'. She, and other participants, were puzzled by this type of unwarranted aggression, they couldn't understand

the problem nor why people were so aggressive towards them.

One man described a situation where he was in a public telephone box in a local housing estate talking to his family in Poland. A male youth of around 15 or 16 years old from the neighbourhood told him he wanted to use the 'phone, and asked how long he would be. The Polish man responded five minutes. The youth went away and immediately returned with a large piece of wood, threatened him with it and attacked the kiosk.

When participants were asked if they could recognise whether they were in Protestant or Catholic neighbourhoods, a few said they could tell by which flags were flying in the area, but they didn't seem to understand the significance of other signs and symbols.

When asked if they felt that being Catholic affected the way they were treated in certain areas, eight of the 11 participants said 'no' and three responded 'yes'. One person said that they had moved into a house in a local housing estate, paid the deposit and one month's rent in advance, but had moved out after one night because they were so scared, and had lost their money. He said that they believed this was because they were Catholic in a Protestant area. Another woman said that she wasn't too worried – she had had similar bad experiences in Poland. One man said that his boss at work is a Protestant, he was '*fair enough*' and always gave him a lift to work. One woman said that she was the first Polish girl in the

factory. A young guy had been hit by a Polish man at work and she expected a reprisal, but it didn't happen.

Social contact

Three of the men said they only had social contact at work, one adding that this had improved with his command of English and the length of time he was there.

One of the men said he had '*great contact at work*', mainly because the Polish man before him had worked at the same company for eight years and had '*built the way for him*', and also because he was a good worker. He had plenty of good contact with the customers.

Another man also said his only social contact was through work, and this was '*sometimes good and sometimes bad – if something happens (i.e. if he does something wrong) everyone knows straight away.*' He felt that '*Irish people were treated better than Polish*' and pointed to friction that could arise because of skills differences – '*Most Polish men are multi-skilled and doing everything like fixing machines when they break and Irish people think they're showing off.*

For the women, their social contact was also primarily or solely through work. One had a landlord who was a doctor who invited her to his family home, and she also worked as a cleaner which gave her social contact with her customer(s). Another woman worked in a local department store which provided her only social contact and similarly for another woman who was a supervisor in a local store.

Comments portrayed good social contact at work, albeit with wry comments such as *'they make me coffee and tell me to slow down!'*

Several people reiterated the important social opportunities provided by/through their church, saying that Irish people there were willing to make contact and learn about Polish people and customs, with some even learning a few words of Polish.

Sense of belonging

One Polish woman replied that she does have a sense of belonging, another woman agreed and said that it is *'grand'*, but after two years she will go back home. Another woman said that everyone thinks of coming here only to earn money and then to go back, and that they need a certain amount of time here to get a *'feel for the place'*. One man said that he missed Enniskillen when he was back in Poland. Another said that he likes the town, his wife was here and she likes it, but although they have a good feeling about Fermanagh, their children are too old to be moved from Poland. One other man said that because of the language problem and the grey weather, he is looking forward to going back to Poland.

Asked whether Irish people make them feel part of the community, one person said that generally they had good neighbours who make them feel welcome, as one (local) neighbour said, *'you can borrow anything you want except money'*. One woman was invited in for coffee by a neighbour and even though there was a big language barrier they managed to

communicate with the aid of maps and a dictionary.

In response to a question on a sense of belonging within the Lithuanian group, there was considerable head-shaking implying that many of the group did not. Two replied 'no'. One woman offered that her English teacher had said that *'all Eastern Europeans are uneducated'* but now that her teacher had come to know her and others she realised this wasn't true. Only one woman held a contrary view that she did have a sense of belonging and said Enniskillen people were very friendly, adding that she would like *'to stay here all her life'*. One woman said that she also wants to stay and while she doesn't really feel it's home, wants to stay here.

Political involvement

Only three of the 16 Lithuanian participants were registered voters. Several said that they preferred to vote in Lithuania and that they *'don't know the parties here'*. When asked if they would contact a local politician, two said that they would because they wanted to take part in politics and get to know the politicians.

When asked if they discussed the politics of Northern Ireland, two people said that they did. Several believed there was some similarity between the political situation in Northern Ireland and their own country emerging from being a former Soviet Republic. Most agreed that they talked about the Troubles with each other and with the local community.

One participant said *'everyone knows*

the history of the monument' (War Memorial Remembrance Day) and there was general assent to this. One woman pointed out that their children here were taught history at school.

In terms of their political preferences, participants were asked their opinion about whether 'the North' should stay as part of the UK or become part of a United Ireland. There were only a few responses. One woman said that *'their opinion doesn't matter'* because the situation here was very difficult to understand. Another said that theirs was just opinion, what will happen *'depends on the wishes of the citizens of Northern Ireland'*. The same person elaborated to say that because of Lithuanian history, as a result of their experiences of the former Soviet Union, she was more likely to support a United Ireland solution which meant breaking away from the UK.

This latter view was endorsed by the majority of the participants when they were asked for a show of hands to express how they would vote in a referendum on the matter. No one voted for Northern Ireland to remain within the UK. Ten voted for a United Ireland to include the North. Five said they *'didn't know'* and one did not vote saying that *'she didn't have the right'*.

Mixed marriages

One Lithuanian man suggested there should be more mixed marriages, one woman said it was *'no problem'*. One woman said that she had *'one daughter with two Irish boyfriends'* and didn't seem particularly worried. There was more general agreement that it was *'all about love'* and this was the most important factor,

though mixed marriages are *'sometimes problems for the parents'*.

The future

There was a variety of replies to a question on whether it would be preferable to stay here or to return to their native country. Within the Polish group, eight replied that they wanted to go back home for family reasons, to raise their children in Poland, or because they missed their family there. One man wanted to build his house in Poland, one *'wants to travel the world'*, and one said he's too young and doesn't know what he will do, though living and working here has the advantage that he can afford to visit his family in Poland.

The main reason given for staying in Northern Ireland was the wage difference which means that life can be very different – one week's wages here being the equivalent of one month's in Poland and that doesn't take into account the further difference in what that money can buy here. However if the wages were to be the same in Poland, there was a preference to return there.

Within the Lithuanian group, in response to a question on whether there was anything which would make it easier for people to stay, one woman would like a change of job and a decrease in rent. Rents were very expensive she said, but *'wages aren't particularly high'*. Another woman said that she would like her (Lithuanian) friends and family nearby. One woman's comment that *'language is the main problem'* met with strong general agreement. They *'walk like blind kittens'* she said

because they don't know the language or the laws.

The law ('rules') covering jobs, health care and taxes were very difficult for people to understand. They felt that because Lithuania was in the EU the laws should somehow be the same *'because we are members of the EU we must have one rule in all countries'*. Immigration rules and procedures were also perceived as difficult.

Development support

In the Lithuanian group, when asked if they needed any support other than English classes, there was general agreement that they did not and also general agreement on the importance and value of the English classes they did receive and the need for more. One woman said that they already had other support like benefits for the children. Another said that it would be important to have their children attend Lithuanian schools on Saturdays to teach the children their native history and culture.

2 Long term residents

This section presents findings from three separate sources; a focus group with five women who belong to a group set up by and for women from ethnic minority backgrounds; an interview with a woman of Chinese origin and an interview with a young man of Indian origin.

Participants

Three of the six women were from the Philippines and have been resident in Northern Ireland (NI) for between 13 and 19 years. All three are married to Fermanagh men and have from one to three children. Their reasons for moving to NI were marriage related.

One woman, who was originally from India, has been resident in NI for eight years and has an Indian spouse and one son. This son was interviewed separately. They moved here because of an employment opportunity offered to her husband (as a progression from work already involved in, in India). One woman who describes herself as Mexican American was originally from the USA, has been in NI for 12 years and has an Irish spouse and five children. Finally, one woman originally from China (Hong Kong) has been living here for 10 years, having moved to NI with her family when she was a teenager. She has since married here and has a young son. Her husband is Chinese. This family moved here for employment and education purposes (the parents having initially moved to NI leaving the children with grandparents in Hong Kong until a certain degree of security had been established here). None of the interviewees had friends or extended family here prior to moving.

Community involvement

Five participants who are active members of an ethnic minority women's group based in the county are also involved in a wide range of additional community activities. One woman took part in a school course in Business Management, had a library placement, and has been five years with the women's group. Another woman who is also involved in the local ethnic minority women's group, is involved with her children's integrated school parent's council, takes part in facilitation work and is on the management committee of another county wide voluntary organisation. One woman also works as a supply teacher in a local school. One other woman is engaged in multifarious community activities – on the management committee of a range of county wide community and voluntary organisations and as a trainer working with people with learning and physical disabilities. She describes herself as highly interactive with the local community.

The female interviewee (of Chinese origin) who does not belong to the ethnic minority group is not involved in any form of community activity but occasionally attends events organised by the group. She commented that her son is 'quite young and he doesn't want me going out!' The young man interviewed has played rugby for the local club at different under-age levels.

In their countries of origin, three women had been involved in various activities as students, two as 'student activists'. One woman had been very involved in community activities and as a student activist had become

involved in social work, fundraising and community work similar to her current activities here in NI.

"I worked for government media. I was a student activist and landed a job in the government media. It's part of the reason I'm more involved with the ethnic minority community here - once an activist always an activist."

"I was very much involved in India with the students' union and drama. I did a lot of social work and fundraising. People were very poor. I was always helping people...that's also the function (of the ethnic minority women's group) but in a totally different place/country. It's very different. It's new and creative."

Religion

Four of the women were Roman Catholic, one was Hindu, one was a Buddhist and the male interviewee was also raised as a Hindu. The Catholic participants all said that they felt welcomed into their Catholic churches and felt a sense of belonging to the Catholic community. Two women attended mass regularly either at the local chapel or the church in Enniskillen and one said she only attended rarely.

"I go to church; you feel you belong to the local community."

The woman who practises Hindu talked of the challenges in conveying to local people the nature of Hinduism. She mentioned that being perceived as a different religion and colour meant that acceptance was not easy, but familiarity and knowledge helped. Comments such as 'Are you a Catholic Hindu or a Protestant Hindu' were genuinely made! She took part in community activities and gave talks on Hinduism to help inform local people. She herself had studied at a convent school in India and was used to the idea of people having secular acceptance of the choice of their own religion. She described a degree of isolation from other Hindus as there were very few local Hindu families. Although she had a Puja shrine in her own home there was no local temple, the nearest being in Belfast, but she travelled with her family to Diwali celebrations in London. She was hoping to promote a Diwali celebration in Fermanagh under sponsorship of the Community Relations Council.

"I'm often asked what Hinduism is. Is it Protestant or Catholic? Where I live (in Fermanagh)...they would be a simple people with not much exposure to the world. I studied in a convent school and had a Hindu background, so it was very secular. It's difficult to explain to people here. So I have to explain what is similar or different in relation to the religions here....I have no worry that my religion will be diluted. That is the way we were brought up."

"The main challenge is that you think you're a part of the community but you have a different religion, a different colour. People of the same religion are accepted more...there's a handful of minority religions here."

The male interviewee who was raised in the Hindu faith no longer practises. He was critical of how religion is used divisively in NI and commented that Northern Irish society would benefit from more people with open minds about religion.

*"I don't really practice. I just believe in one god. Regardless of whether someone is Hindu, Muslim, Catholic or Protestant, there is only one god and people just have different ways of looking at god. The whole Catholic/Protestant thing...when it involves religion is a load of b*****. They are different, but getting god involved, I think - get a life!"*

"It would be good to see other Hindus living here who might be as open minded (about religion) as me or my mum. I think society is very close minded here although the younger generation are quite open minded - the older generation are not."

The female interviewee who practised Buddhism in China does not practise here, adding that she is not very religious.

Sense of belonging

Each of the participants had a different experience of a sense of belonging to the area, but all said they had now achieved this.

One woman felt that her home was here because 'my family is already here'. When she went back to the Philippines two years after she had arrived and after the birth of her daughter, she said;

"For the first few years, I felt I have to go back. Now, it's home. My family is here. ...to go back now (to the Philippines)...it's really different there."

Another woman from the Philippines said that it took her three to four years to reach a sense of belonging, but 'going out and doing courses helped me to feel I belong' and now she would not think of returning. Her sense of belonging was illustrated when she said 'I have to remind myself that I'm not Irish or British'.

"It took me a while...three to four years. I thought at first, what on earth am I doing in a place like this? I have no friends, I don't belong here...but now I feel I belong here....I work in the community...when they relate to me, the message is 'you belong here, you're one of us.' But there was a time when I was actually depressed."

A different view was offered by another woman originally from the

Philippines. She had been living in a small town in Fermanagh and had initially felt very depressed, especially by the weather, but also because of the lack of people on the streets. She wondered 'where all the people were' because street life and community was such an important social component in her home community. Her sense of isolation was further increased because 'most of the people were Protestant and I was a Catholic'.

"The first day I thought what am I doing here, there's no way I can stay here. I felt depressed straight away...and the weather! Then one day, we were driving through Enniskillen and I saw this lady - I shouted to my husband 'stop the car - she's Philippino!"

"It took a long time to get used to here. Sometimes, even though there are now many more people from the Philippines here I'd like to go home...maybe when I'm older, now the family are first."

The female Indian participant originally came from New Delhi 'which has a huge population' and Fermanagh seemed 'such a quiet place'. She felt 'like a fish out of water' but 'gradually, through community work, I became involved'.

When you get involved in community work, it gets better. I feel more comfortable now. I feel a sense of belonging. I want to be a part of the

community but I want to hold onto my Indian-ness. I think a blend of the two would be good. I'm very proud of my culture and I'm proud to be here and to adapt to the culture here."

"The more they (neighbours) knew me, the more they accepted me. They gave me help...it took seven to eight months, but it got better every day."

However, she talked about the problems her son had initially experienced when attending the local school. 'If people see a different colour they don't accept him'. He had been bullied and 'called a 'toastie''. She referred to the patronising attitudes of staff and students alike. This was explicit during computer classes when it was assumed he wouldn't be able to take part and 'everyone had a computer but him', even though unknown to the staff he had already learned the computer skills in question at home.

"They patronised him. They thought he'd be an observer, but he had the skills. They think we're coming from a third world country...it's knowing how to deal with this."

It took her son seven to eight months to integrate into the school. After a while, he became part of the students, and they realised he was an eleven year old boy the same as everyone else; 'they're the same as me and accepted me for my values and work'.

Her son referred to his initial anxiety about moving to a strange country and how he coped at the outset.

"Before coming here, I hadn't even spoken to anyone from Europe. I wondered if a stranger comes in - are they going to accept me? I was quite scared...initially I felt really isolated. I just stayed at home, watched tv. I tried to get to know people...and to get to know other guys on the basis of what interests we shared, what we had in common."

"One thing I remember - so many questions - they bombarded questions at me. So many people asked me so much. In my first year, it was questions, questions. In my second year, they were putting the answers to those questions together. The questions were out of curiosity. They hadn't seen an Asian person before. People are going to be curious. I was the first Asian boy to go to that school."

"They (classmates) didn't treat me differently; they were just intrigued. Nowadays, I think people are more open minded, the colour of your skin doesn't matter as much."

He now however has a sense of belonging;

"Yes, I feel it now. I think (I started to feel that I belong) when I finished (local secondary school) when I was 18 /19. I had picked up the accent in school. I felt very separate when I moved here initially; now I feel the same. People don't look at me any different now. I just gelled in."

Finally, the woman of Chinese origin also has a sense of belonging to the community which she attributed to getting married and settling down here.

"In a way (I feel a sense of belonging), yes, because I was a young age when I came here and from once I married and had my family I felt I had settled into this community."

Asked to comment on what she felt it was like for her parents, she said;

"My parents are happy enough once all the kids were here. My dad speaks the language but my mother doesn't...they would think about moving home. But they go back over two or three times a year. We go back over home all the time too. My husband has a mum and sister back home so one of the advantages is that we have a house to go to back there. Half my

mum's relations are in the UK but she doesn't have any here. But, her whole family is here. But it's hard for her here. She would mix a bit with other Chinese women in the town."

Reaction of 'local' community

Participants were asked to comment on whether they thought local people are pleased they are here. 'No' was the answer initially voiced by all participants in the ethnic minority women's group, later qualified by further details.

People 'always assume you want to exploit financial benefits' and ask 'are you an alien, here to claim benefits?'. All participants agreed that 'people assume we are here for the benefits'. Some local people also say 'my job is being taken away by a foreigner' and even call out on the street 'you're taking away my job', 'go back to your own country'.

Other negative behaviours involved mocking their accents, calling one Philippine woman 'Chinese', and making fun of a woman while she was working. She said that when challenged they usually stop - 'I just look cross at them'.

"They don't expect you to challenge...I have been confronted. I have been patronised."

Other unpleasant behaviours ranged from patronising comments like 'your English is very good' to 'serious over-complimenting'.

Sometimes local people asked 'do you like it here?' and continue with comments like 'have you come here to escape the poverty?', 'at least you're not going to starve here', or even 'are you a mail-order bride?'

When asked how often this kind of comment occurs, one responded said it was often 'When you least expect it', and another 'every now and then, but things have changed'.

Late teen youths acting as a group rather than individually, particularly boys, tended to be the most abusive section of the local community.

"It's always in a group, they never do anything on their own."

Several participants said that some personal comments were more naïve and arise from honest curiosity or ignorance, for example one child asking 'Why are you brown?' and from older local people who have never seen coloured people before and ask straightforwardly curious questions.

"Some people don't mean to be patronising...it's also to do with their age group. They say a general thing and they don't mean to offend. They talk about the black babies aspect, but they're coming from a real place. They're being honest in themselves...they often ask questions from a place of really wanting to know."

"My wee girl, they think she's Chinese, at school, they ask her 'why are you brown?'"

Several participants said that getting out into the community was helpful, emphasising 'we are here and want to be part of the community, it was up to us to go out and to feel a part of the community.'

One woman referred to a situation when a family member was in hospital.

"They are used to Asian doctors, anaesthetists, but it's different when it comes to treating patients. They were finding it hard to deal with him as a patient. It was a very new experience for them, it wasn't negative but it was a total surprise that they had never had an Asian patient."

Both of the other two individual interviewees; the young Chinese woman and young Asian man referred to the two different attitudes which prevail in the community.

There are two ways to look at it. The majority of people don't mind different cultures or nationalities living here - another (section) prefer if it was all original Irish.

"There's a certain type of people that will accept and welcome people...as Polish, Jewish or Latvian...some people think it's cool to be more multi-cultural. Beforehand, this was a small town, now it's a pretty big town. I think people moving in has made it more open minded. People here, they might think 'they look

different - they're not one of us' now they can't do anything to one person, because there'll be another one beside you."

They also had some difficult experiences.

"(At the time I was in school) other students on the streets would make comments. When I was waiting for the bus, other students threw stones at my sister and me. Yesterday, at the Forum, I brought my son (to the crèche), I heard kids (seven/eight years old) saying abusive things (about his being Chinese). It was very hurtful, when I moved here, I got used to it. I brought my son to the park a week ago, young ones stuck their middle finger out to my husband and son."

"It's gotten better over the years. In the old days, there wasn't much nationalities living here. Now they're seeing far more - four or five times more population than in the early days. When we moved here, we were only the fourth or fifth family to move to Enniskillen. In other places, Chinese people were more familiar, but 10 years ago, it was unusual here."

"When people ask you about why you are here, do you think, is it curiosity or because they think you

shouldn't be here? If they ask the question, maybe they think we shouldn't belong to this country."

"There was one guy. In my first year, he mocked my accent and taunted me. He never did it directly. He kept doing it even when my accent changed! In fifth year when we were at a disco, I asked him why did you make fun of me? He said 'what do you mean?' I left it at that and that was the end of it. One or two stood up for me, the others found it quite funny. It did bother me for a time. I wouldn't be able to concentrate in school...it made me so angry. I thought this is so not fair."

"The first time I went to a party; all the girls were commenting on my colour. One girl said to me - you have a lovely tan - what are you using?! I said 'sunshine!' I didn't know if it was a compliment or a racist comment!"

The Chinese woman said that she would not know if her parents had been subject to any incidents or abusive behaviour. In referring to the incidents which happened herself she said she wouldn't mention (what happened to her) at home.

"It's not a discussion we would bring to the table, it's not an issue we would talk about."

Socialising

When asked how welcome or safe people felt when out in pubs, bars, restaurants and other social venues, there was a range of views.

One woman said that she perceived some pubs as Protestant and, as a Catholic, was more careful in these. Another said that she felt comfortable in some Protestant pubs and bars but identified one in particular where she did not, so she avoided the place 'Because I don't want my whole evening spoiled'. The women from the women's group varied in their perceptions of different bars and some frequented bars that others wouldn't go to, but they tended to agree that if it 'looks rough then its likely to be less tolerant and more prejudiced'. One woman relied on her Fermanagh husband to identify which pubs 'are particularly rough and I don't go there'. Another said that 'some pubs have many social activities, fundraising and so on, but some pubs are just for drinking' so she identified the former as better places to be in. There was a suggestion that social class made a difference, in that 'some places were more polite'.

"There are places you would go and places you wouldn't go...they may be perceived as a different place or maybe they just don't know you. When you're socialising, you want to go to a place you'll enjoy."

"Some places are more open-minded."

"Some places are rough and

less tolerant, they will tell me right to my face...it may be a class thing."

One woman joined a tennis club in her local rural area and met her core set of friends there. She also found a local pub 'where I feel comfortable and I feel comfortable even going there on my own ... I don't even notice that people notice' she said. She has become involved in many local community activities such as the Girl Scouts, the GAA and local community events.

All of the women enjoyed a high level of social contact and all were involved in community activities. The young man of Asian origin socialises in the same places as his mates from school and where he socialises is not an issue for him.

"No (there is no issue). In society here now, it doesn't matter whether you are Asian Muslim, Jewish; as long as you gel in. People know you for who you are. Your reputation is as who you are. If there was a gang of random Asian people - they might get bother."

The Chinese woman also goes out with people from the town whom she knows through school or work. While she enjoys going for meals, she noted that 'lots of Chinese people do not', adding;

"A lot may like to, but if they work in a restaurant, by the time they finish work, the pubs are closed by then

and the language is another problem."

Relationship with 'local' community

Asked if there were any problems with neighbours, one woman said that 'originally for the first few months they watched you and tested you' but 'when you get to know them they are very nice'. Another said;

I wasn't instantly embraced, but that would be the same for everyone ... it just takes time ...there was never anything about my race or colour.

One woman had problems in one village but said of another location 'my neighbours are great'. Another said of her neighbours that they are so great that 'I can't get them out of the house'. While all the participants agreed that everything was 'ok with the neighbours' one woman noted;

"Nobody has ever invited me into their home."

The Chinese woman's social contacts are mainly with other Chinese people but she also has regular contact with local people. She lives in a detached house in the country and while she and her family are very close to an old lady who lives next door, they do not socialise much with other neighbours. In an emergency, she felt they could 'of course' go to the neighbours and they would be happy to help.

The young man from Asia has contacts with local people and he commented that it is especially easy in university as people are more open minded than in Fermanagh.

Asked if age of local people made any difference in how they were treated, one woman said that (Asian) boys get bullied at school. Another said that one of her sons 'he went to school early and this made a difference ... his friends protect him when he gets bullied by outsiders'. Another woman agreed that the younger children get bullied.

Attacks on ethnic minorities

Participants were asked if media or other reports of attacks on ethnic minorities in the area had affected their own behaviour but there were few reports that it had. One woman said however;

" It makes me aware we have to be careful. It makes me realise that this will be more of an issue with more people (i.e. ethnic minorities) coming here."

Another said that she had 'experienced resentment about foreign workers coming here ... the eastern Europeans are often housed together and this causes them to be perceived as a threat ... maybe it's more to do with work' adding;

" We're spread out and we blend in. We're not seen as a wave of something."

One said that with us 'it's all verbal, but thankfully no-one has thrown a brick through the window into a Phillipino's house' (as they have with the Eastern Europeans).

One woman reported that there had been trouble in a local town for some

Philippino nurses 'whose house was beside the footpath and some kids threw fireworks in through the letterbox. The police visited three times and tried to get the kids, plus the local community association supported the nurses and they are still there'.

The Chinese woman commented that;

" Whenever I hear of these cases, they seem to be far away from me. We do have an alarm in. Our house has been attacked, but because of the alarm, they ran away. I would still worry that something would happen to us or our friends."

The young Asian man was aware of attacks from second hand information and was surprised that they had happened as he didn't expect people to be that narrow minded. It has not, however, restricted his own behaviour in any way as he commented he would be able to defend himself but added that it might be different for an Asian girl.

Effects of global events and 9/11

Asked if there had been any change or fallout from global events such as the 9/11 attacks, one woman reported that someone had said to her (Indian) husband 'to stop the bombing' and he had replied saying 'I'm not Muslim and I'm not an Arab ... he'd been asked and had to answer'. This had been asked 'not in a rough way ... more curiosity of what it was all about. There was a time when I was more worried about others, especially the young (Asian) men.'

In another reported incident, possibly related, some boys had set fire to a garden shed.

The young Asian man was unaware of any incidents which had taken place and added;

" But that really makes my blood boil. If it's someone with a different colour skin, let's beat him up...I think - go to school, do your work and learn something. It boils my blood; it is so stupid. It gets me hurt and angry."

Political involvement

Six of the seven participants were registered to vote. The other woman who was a Philippine citizen said she 'would love to vote'. No one supported a particular local political party and one woman said she 'voted only for individuals'. The young man added:

" I'm sick of the political parties here. Each option is extreme; if you wanted to be involved in a political party, really it's either the DUP or Sinn Fein - and with these, violence comes free...I'm not interested in that."

When asked if they discussed politics with local people, all said 'No'. For three women this was because they 'want to stay neutral'. One said that in her social group 'In the tennis club no-one discusses it, it's not polite conversation and I would never introduce it into a social conversation'. Another woman said;

"I'm not allowed to. My husband doesn't want me to ...we already have a problem because Sinn Fein always come to us (as a group) so we get aligned with Sinn Fein and the SDLP, but the DUP have never visited us once."

The Chinese woman commented that she is not very knowledgeable about local politics and added that this is not untypical of people who live here and belong to different cultures.

"No. I wouldn't know very much. Many of the different cultures don't vote here because of the language and they don't know enough to vote. Different languages on election cards and leaflets would help. People would be more inclined to vote."

When asked if local people tried to inform or influence their politics, the participants all agreed that this didn't happen because they wouldn't talk about politics. For those married to Irish men, there was also a perception that the women 'vote with their husbands'.

The male interviewee referred to a school mate's attempt to categorise him according to political lines here.

"One fella came to me and asked me what I was. I said 'I'm a Hindu'. He said 'are you a Catholic Hindu or a Protestant Hindu?' I said I didn't know. He said, 'you're a Catholic Hindu - remember

that! You're in a Catholic school; you might as well be a Catholic Hindu.' I said ok. I didn't understand what he was talking about."

Views on the political future of Northern Ireland

Two women, one of whom identified herself as a Republican or Nationalist, thought that Northern Ireland would become part of a United Ireland.

One woman said 'No comment' and two others commented that what they wanted to see was 'Functional government for them (the politicians) to DO something ... to get on with it'. They perceived the current situation as politicians 'involved in an active fight with each other' rather than working for the good of the people.² Having said that, there were several comments that 'We haven't been here long enough to understand what's going on'. One woman said that she doesn't have an opinion one way or the other while the male interviewee suggested NI should stay part of the UK because it would be financially better off.

Mixed marriages

No one was against the idea of mixed marriages between their ethnic group and the local population. Two women said that they 'would be happy for their kids to marry anyone as long as they were happy'. The Hindu participant wondered 'if my son married a Hindu girl, would he be happy?' One of the Philippine women said that she didn't care one way or another, and pointed to the fact that the Philippines had been an American colony in the past, so mixed marriages

were not unusual. The participant from the USA said 'my kids blend in better in California', and mentioned that her boys 'always had blonde-haired, blue-eyed girlfriends here'. It was also unproblematic for the Asian man. The Chinese woman said she would be 'fine' about it and would expect it as her son was born here and grew up here. She added;

"My parents would prefer our own people but it's our own choice. My sister's fiancée is from here...they weren't ok at the beginning but they are now. They have to be! It's our lives and what we choose. But with my sister's fiancée - my mother cannot communicate...(that's the problem), but also culture wise."

The future

Asked if they planned to stay for the long term, the general consensus was a qualified 'Yes'. One woman said 'Que sera sera ... I love being here but don't know where I might be in the future ... I'm happy to be here at this time of life'.

Another said 'I have five kids so there's little chance of moving soon... but maybe sometime I'll have somewhere in the sun (as well)... when you're feeling low the weather will kick you over the edge'. This comment raised general agreement, that the awful climate might induce people to move.

When asked what else might make them want to leave, one woman said 'the political situation here ... there

² This focus group discussion took place before the power sharing decision of March 2007.

seems to be no hope for the future of Northern Ireland ... it's not sufficiently stable'.

Another said;

" My son wouldn't even think of going to university here ...I'm very pessimistic. It's not a very big country - surely it's something we can fix. I'm very pessimistic. It's the one thing that bothers me. Everybody is so negative. You just want to shake people up."

The man interviewed said that his decision about the future would be based on employment opportunities but added that if he has children he would like them to settle and grow up here but to learn about their Indian background.

" If NI stays part of the UK, I'll probably stay, if it merges with southern Ireland, I'll have to see what the job opportunities are like. Staying is about having a good job. But I really want to go back and visit India... I will teach them (my children) about their Indian background, about the country I grew up in... I'm able to speak Bengali - I'd teach the kids Bengali."

For the Chinese woman, the possibility of moving back to China is more real, which she added has nothing to do with a shortcoming in life here.

" So far we haven't planned, but it's the big 'don't know', but I would consider moving home...maybe if I retired...If my son lived here long term, that would be ok. It's more difficult for him to go back because of the language problem. We would expect him to know Chinese but we wouldn't expect him to write in Chinese...At home we all speak Chinese. My son goes to the crèche three times a week but he still knows Chinese more than English. When he's up to nursery or P1 he will have more knowledge of English."

Development support

Several comments were made about the perceived needs of Polish and Eastern European people here, about how a Polish - English - Polish dictionary could be made widely and easily available to help communications. The Chinese woman said that there are already English language classes available in the local college and added;

Not many Chinese people go to classes. They stay here for a few years and then they go home - they don't feel they need to or want to learn English.

Another suggestion was to have people from ethnic minorities in visible government positions 'to show a bit of colour' and 'nowadays you should be able to find someone who can speak languages'.

Finally, the male interviewee said he would be interested in an ethnic minority group for men;

" I would be interested in something for guys - a Men of the World! Depends on what we were going to do...if we all have different opinions, I don't know how it would work."

3 The Travelling Community

All three families interviewed had been living in County Fermanagh for under three years; two of the three having lived there for approximately one year. Two had moved from Derry and one from Sligo. All had moved around a lot in the years before coming to Fermanagh and had lived in various places and in various types of accommodation - halting sites, houses and B&Bs.

All three interviewees had a preference for site accommodation, an option unavailable in County Fermanagh.

"We were on the road - I'd rather have a caravan...but they wouldn't leave you stay in a caravan. There's no hope of that in Fermanagh, especially Enniskillen. They have a 24 hour move."

Two of the three families opted to live in Fermanagh because it is quiet and a 'nice place.' One of these families had a long standing tradition of living in the county, having been born there and 'coming and going' over the years. While the third family was allocated a house in Fermanagh, they too were satisfied with the option.

"This place is supposed to be quiet, which it is and the people are dead on."

"We had been travellin' round different places to see what they were like. We thought Enniskillen was a nice place and we'd like to settle in for a while."

Two of the families travel in the summer, one adding that most Travellers like to travel a bit in the summer and have a house to go to in the winter.

Community involvement

None of the interviewees were involved in any form of community activity and most did not appear to be aware of what was available locally. One was aware of a local resource centre and had made phone calls from there when she first arrived in the area. When the nature of community activities and options were described, one woman commented;

"I'd love to know how to read and write (and then maybe go to things happening in the Centre) I would love to do that and kill an hour or two."

Children from all families attend local schools and in one of the families they attend activities in the local leisure centre and trips organised for children. All families were happy with the local schools and commented that the children had not experienced any problems there.

"They had no bother settling in - it's great."

"It's 100%. They're treated ok."

One mother did refer to not having been made aware of a homework club being available at the local school but having found out for herself. Her child was experiencing difficulties at school with homework and she, as the mother, was not in a position to help

as she does not read or write. She noted that it would be useful to inform parents of the availability of the club as it has been a great help to her daughter.

While one of the interviewees referred to there being no problems with the local school; later on in the interview, the following emerged. One of the daughters in the family had left school at 14. She was 14 when they moved to the area and when the mother approached the local school, they were informed there was no room. She also said that because the daughter was 'so far back', she would have to attend primary school instead. Obviously the daughter did not want that option as 'everyone would be laughin' at her.' A place did become available in the secondary school and again the mother approached the school. The principal was to call the family when she was ready to take her, but the call never came. The daughter's education therefore was ended at that point.

Position within the community

The concept of belonging was one which did not resonate with interviewees and is perhaps an inappropriate question in the context of a nomadic community. Instead, people responded to the question of whether they felt they 'belonged' to the community in terms of how they felt about living there.

"The people know us and we get on well with them 100%. It's very peaceful, there's no callin' names. Nothing. My mother was born here. I've been around here all me life -

this is the only time we've settled in a house. There's a 24 hour move on. We'd love to live on a site, but in a trailer they move you on. I'd like to stay in Fermanagh, but this is only a three bedroom (and the family has eight kids). It's nice and peaceful and the settled people give you no bother. I have a cousin and family in Fermanagh - it's nice - it's more or less what you get used to."

"I hope so (that I'll stay here). The kids are settled. I don't like to be moving them again."

Relationship with the settled community

Asked to comment on relationships with the 'settled' neighbours and whether people originally from the area were pleased they were living there; there were two categories of responses. One, which was the perspective of two families living in the same town, was very positive. They referred to good relations with the neighbours and not receiving 'any bother' from settled people.

"No bother. Everybody knew we were Travellers (when we moved here) but they didn't pass any heed. We're all the same."

"We get on with them 100%."

There was general satisfaction on the part of these two families, with one young interviewee commenting 'I'd

live my life here if I had my own way.'

At the time of the interviewee, a young settled woman from the area was visiting. She is her only settled friend in the area but the other neighbours she would know to see and speak to. The second family also referred to knowing all the neighbours and the relationship being healthy.

"I nearly know everybody (neighbours)...everything is 99%. (Referring to members of extended family having married into settled families); ..everything is fine /ok."

The other perspective from the third family was very different and reference was made to attempts from locals not to have the family housed in the area or to be moved out.

"When I came in first, there was a lot of complaints about us. People phoned the police and social services - they were saying I was leaving the kids on their own. They basically put in complaints to get us removed. The police kept coming but I was always here - they were surprised - but they stopped coming. The police were always getting phone calls. (The people here) would go agin' you. People will come and say things to the police and the Housing Executive - they go behind your back and ring police and social services. They never say anything to us. The kids don't get hassle. I know they're

ringin' to try to get me out. It'll take a bomb to get me out!"

"I know by lookin at the people I'm not wanted. They'll say hello but you know by how they look at you they don't want you."

A local settled woman was also visiting this house at the time of the interview. Referring to her, she said she is her only contact with settled people and that her mother is also a 'very nice woman.'

"People say 'hello' but I get lonely. I do. I get depressed now and again but what can you do. You have to survive."

Interviewees were asked to comment on whether there are factors which affect the relationship with the settled community such as other families moving into the area or members of extended family coming to visit. It transpired that the absence of a halting site and the local policy of moving families on militates against this as members of extended families, in the main, do not come to camp in Fermanagh.

Finally, asked who they would call on in the event of an emergency and specifically whether they would turn to settled neighbours or would contact other Travellers, two of the families would call to settled neighbours, one commenting;

"There's another Irish family across there. They're very

friendly. You've a mix here - you've Catholics, Protestants, refugees...my kids play with the kids here. You mightn't get it like this in every area."

The third interviewee said her that she would contact the police in an emergency.

"I'd call the police. I'd phone the police before I'd go to the neighbours."

Attacks on Travellers

Asked about attacks on Travelling families living in the area, one interviewee referred to a boarded up house across the road.

"There used to be a Travellin' family living there. They used to sell drugs and the locals put them out."

This incident happened while this particular family was living in the area but it didn't affect them in any way.

The other family was unaware of any incidents and the third commented that attacks on her family was her reason for leaving Derry.

"That's why I left Derry. My house was smashed at 3.00 in the morning. We left very first thing. (Referred to her kids' doing stupid things like stealing bikes and annoying neighbours' and that maybe being the reason why the house was attacked)."

"Later on in the conversation,

she also commented; The wares were attacked in the Waterside in Derry - round the corner from where we lived. We called the police - it didn't happen again."

Two of the interviewees do not take a drink but all go out for meals regularly in local hotels or restaurants. None of them experience problems in being served and all said they are treated well. The young woman who was interviewed did however note that most Travellers are barred from pubs, restaurants and clothes shops in Enniskillen. Asked why (and referring to bars) she responded;

They start rows...you have to have respect when you go into people's places and have manners. I think it's right that they're barred - they'll learn a lesson.

Political involvement

None of the interviewees were registered to vote and none of them, in the first instance, understood what was meant by the question on whether they are registered to vote.

"Don't know anything about that. Don't know about votin'. I've heard about it alright."

"I don't know what that is."

When the question was explained in detail, one respondent said that he would probably vote Sinn Fein (but is not registered and has never voted). None of the interviewees discuss the politics of Northern Ireland either among themselves or have had any

conversation about it with settled people. The relevance of a question on whether interviewees would have a preference for Northern Ireland to be part of a united Ireland or part of the UK was not understood, although one man finally commented that he would prefer it if there was a united Ireland.

Mixed marriages

None of the interviewees had an issue with mixed marriages (between Travellers and the settled community) and two cited a number of mixed marriages (to both Catholic and Protestants within their own extended families which were unproblematic. All stressed the importance of their children's happiness being foremost;

"Me sister is married to a settled boy. We didn't pass any heed...it's about happiness at the end of the day and whoever you fall in love with. I wouldn't really pass heed. I don't really see the difference."

"As long as the kids are happy...it'd be up to them. Once they don't meet fellas who will beat them or treat them bad."

"I wouldn't mind. Once they're happy, I'm happy."

The future

Asked what they would like their children to do in the future, in terms of going back on the road or settling in Fermanagh, all essentially said it was up to the children themselves but, in one instance, a preference for the family to go travelling was expressed;

"Eventually (they'll probably go on the road). It's up to themselves. I'd like them to...it's (travelling) an instance that will never die out."

One interviewee commented that Fermanagh was a good place for Travellers to live as *'people are very nice to Travellers'* but another commented that there is *'nothing for the family to do around the area'*.

Development support

While the interviewees were unaware of the type of developmental support which is available to Travellers in other areas; they all said they would like if there was something available specifically for Travellers in Fermanagh and one added that they would love if there was a halting site available for Travellers in the county.

Observations for future work

The following concluding comments were based on a discussion on the findings involving representatives of the sponsor organisations.

Non-national ethnic minorities

- The research found that members of ethnic minority groups who have been living here for a short period of time, mainly known as 'migrant workers', see their tenure in Northern Ireland as a short term arrangement and hope at some point to return to their native countries. However, experience in other countries has shown that despite the sincerity of aspirations to return, these hopes may not be realised (for example, the Irish diaspora in London and the US). When people put down roots and have families, they are more likely to stay than to uproot and return to their native countries. It is at the point when the situation becomes long term in nature that tensions and problems are likely to arise. In NI, the majority community has the advantage of benefiting from previous experiences in other countries and has a responsibility to plan for a multi-cultural society on a long term basis, despite current aspirations being articulated as short term.
- Some of the feedback in the report on developmental support suggests a need for leaflets to be provided in different languages while others highlighted the continued needs for English language classes. The two suggestions reflect two disparate points of view in terms of the most effective means of supporting

ethnic communities. This report does not recommend one means of support over the other but notes the distinction in the approaches.

- Involvement of participants in the research in sporting activities (mainly individual activities) highlights the importance and potential of sport as a means of developing integrated team based sporting activities. These would not only provide opportunities for social contact and integration but potentially open up a world of social activities which frequently accompanies sporting events.

The Travelling Community

- All community planning exercises must take the needs of Travellers into account as a recognised ethnic minority grouping. The lack of a representative organisation for Travellers in Fermanagh undoubtedly makes consultation with this community a challenge for service providers, who may have neither the dedicated resources nor the capacity to enter into the type of process with local Travellers which will ensure that needs can be identified accurately and responded to appropriately.
- Valid consultation requires that the people being consulted with are adequately equipped to participate in the consultation at the outset. For instance, it is accepted that to

consult with people whose first language is not English requires extra resources for translation. Research shows that Travellers, who are distanced from settled society and whose nomadic lifestyles and traditions are at odds with 'settled' society, have low levels of educational attainment, high levels of illiteracy and very low expectations of achieving any social status within settled society. This is equally true regardless of whether Travellers are living in houses or are on the road. Their tradition and identity is that of nomads and consequently their way of life is different from settled people. As such they are distinctive from all the other ethnic groups who have contributed to this research. This distance and distinctiveness makes it hard for service providers to understand Traveller culture, and very few Travellers work as service providers. The general relationship in society will be and is reflected in the relationship with service providers. Thus participation will not happen without being resourced, fostered and planned for in a deliberate and long term fashion, and in the case of Travellers this requires capacity building, access to information and above all else a trust building process.

- Given the lack of any Traveller organisation in Fermanagh, it is not

surprising that this research experienced great difficulty in even identifying or making contact with Travellers locally. This bears out the theory of distance and it follows that where there is such mistrust, frank and open exchanges will not readily take place. Travellers awaiting decisions from service providers regarding welfare issues are unlikely to say anything that is even mildly critical of the social conditions they experience to a person who is not a Traveller and with whom they have no previous relationship of trust. Equally, because Travellers have been the poorest and most severely disadvantaged group in our society, their concept of what constitutes fair or equal treatment is predicated on a low or non-existent baseline: essentially this means that what is perceived as being a great improvement by Travellers may still fall far short of what is considered adequate for settled people. Starving people find bread as satisfying as gourmet food.

- The lack of a Traveller representative organisation means that in County Fermanagh, there is no existing organisation within the county pro-actively promoting the needs of the Travelling community. So, for example, while all Travellers were clear on the need for a site the question arises as to who will actually lobby and push for this to happen. Travellers do access existing services as families or individuals but there is no opportunity for them to build their capacity to participate in decision-making on matters which affect

their lives as a recognised ethnic minority.

- The potential of such work has been demonstrated elsewhere through the work of Traveller community development groups and organisations. Participation and capacity building has resulted in Travellers identifying solutions to their own issues, for example, accommodation and it is now well documented that in order to provide appropriate services Travellers must be involved in service design. In the case of this research the absence of dedicated developmental work with Travellers, and consequent difficulties in engaging with Travellers and eliciting their views, could be seen as a reflection of the continuing and very real social exclusion experienced by this group.

Concluding comment

- There is a wide range of views and experiences in the report, not surprising, given that despite the modest size of the research project, members of seven different ethnic groups were interviewed, from three different continents and crossing four religious belief systems (and none). The diversity and differences of opinions in the report and the difficulty of drawing a single conclusion to the findings mirrors work with ethnic minority communities. There is no one response, no single way of providing a service that will meet the needs of all.
- The differences and the complexity in working with people from highly

diverse backgrounds while challenging in terms of meeting needs is also, however, the richness in this work. It is this richness which must be embraced as we begin to plan for a society which is no longer and will no longer be homogenous.

Occupations in Lithuania and Fermanagh

Appendix 1

Lithuania	Fermanagh
Hospital Engineer	Production operative
Doctor (MD) in government, municipal and prison service	Husband working, taking GMC exams to practice in UK
Hospital nurse	Bar cleaner
Dress and clothes designer	Production operative
Shop assistant	Production operative Electronics factory
Internet café manager	Worker in mouldings factory
Factory Engineer	Production operative
Bar worker	Sandwich maker
Water well engineer	Production operative
Shop assistant	Cleaner
Engineer	Production operative Electronics factory
Shop assistant	Hotel laundry worker
Student (completed studies in Social Work)	Production operative
Drama teacher	Production operative
Insurance company Manager/Consultant	Production operative
Foreign Language Teacher	Production operative Foreign Language Teacher

Community Relations Council



Department for
**Social
Development**
www.dsdm.gov.uk

dc
DIVERSITY
CHALLENGES

Rural Community Network
38a Oldtown Street
Cookstown
BT80 8EF
t. 028 8676 6670
f. 028 8676 6006
e. info@ruralcommunitynetwork.org
w. www.ruralcommunitynetwork.org