

# Communities in Dialogue

## A Citizens' Panel Toolkit for Schools

Supporting schools in Northern Ireland to give a voice to young people from newcomer and minority ethnic backgrounds.



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## Foreword by Paul Caskey, Integrated Education Fund

Over recent years Northern Ireland has become home to an increasing number of people from various parts of Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas, presenting tremendous potential to enrich the diversity of our community and our cultural perspectives. Simultaneously, it has brought challenges to a country slowly emerging from 30 years of conflict, a conflict that was characterised by sectarianism and violence between Nationalists and Unionists. There has been concern that such violence and intolerance could spill over to the new migrant population and, sadly, at the time of writing, Northern Ireland has recently experienced an increase in racist violence and the media has been dominated by debate about our response to ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. Our challenge is to build a truly shared society in which everyone can live, work and socialise together free from intimidation and prejudice in the context of fairness, equality, rights, respect and responsibility.

In the education world, there has been a significant increase in the number of newcomer and minority ethnic pupils in our schools and we believe that schools can play a crucial role in counteracting prejudice and promoting positive values in relation to difference. We are delighted to be able to share, through this resource, an innovative approach to engaging the whole school community in contributing to a positive future for all. This toolkit has emerged from a project which began in 2010 when the Integrated Education Fund (IEF) conducted a case study with a North Belfast integrated post-primary school, as a means of gaining deeper insight into the experience of newcomer and minority ethnic pupils within Northern Ireland's education system and society. Primarily the case-study involved developing a deeper understanding of the issues facing young people from newcomer and minority ethnic backgrounds through an innovative initiative called a Citizens' Panel. This initiative placed the voices of these students at the heart of this project by giving them an opportunity to relay their personal stories. Their personal accounts provided a platform for engaging in dialogue with the wider school community and a means of building openness, trust and relationships as a consequence of such dialogue. The intention of the Citizens' Panel was to offer direction for improving the experience and outcomes of young people from newcomer and minority ethnic families. At a school level it was hoped that this would inform practical approaches and methods for addressing issues affecting such pupils with the intention of easing the process of their integration into the wider community. The school's Citizens' Panel contributed to their ability to develop a series of inter-linked local activities focusing on respect for diversity and inclusion, in its widest sense, as a means of positively assisting the integration of young people from newcomer and minority ethnic backgrounds. Following this pilot, two subsequent Citizens' Panels were designed and delivered by post-primary schools in Dungannon and Derry. Each event provided benefits to the young people at the centre of the events, the school itself and the wider community.

We believe the Citizens' Panel concept provides a template for an event which can be adapted to suit any post-primary school environment in Northern Ireland and beyond. The three schools which have hosted these events have kindly agreed to share their good practice in the following toolkit which presents a step-by-step guide to delivering a Citizens' Panel in your school. We are deeply indebted to these schools and to the Open Society Foundations for supporting and funding this initiative and hope you will find the following information as thought-provoking and informative as we have found the process of engaging in this project.

Paul Caskey, July 2014



Is your school ethnically diverse?

Do you have pupils from minority ethnic and / or newcomer backgrounds?

Would you like to give these pupils a voice and ensure that key members of the community and local politicians hear and learn from their experiences, challenges and achievements?

Do you wish to offer your young people the opportunity to influence positive change in the local community?

If your answer is 'yes' to any of these questions please take a look inside this toolkit which is designed as a step-by-step guide to running a Citizens' Panel in your school.



## Why should your school be interested in using the Citizens' Panel technique?

The Citizens' Panel is a perfect example of how schools can extend their services to the local community and fulfil some of the requirements of the Department of Education's CRED Policy and 'Every School a Good School'.

More detail about the process, implementation and outcomes of Citizens' Panel projects with Oakgrove Integrated College, Integrated College Dungannon and Hazelwood Integrated College are contained within this document and you might also want to refer to the case study 'Welcoming Newcomers in Northern Ireland: A Case Study with Hazelwood Integrated College'.



The benefits of this project have been widely recognised, as indicated by the following quotes.

"We believe it is important to encourage the sharing of good practice developed by individual schools and this case study provides useful information for the Department of Education and the Inclusion & Diversity Service. The experience of the pupils, as shared in their very personal accounts ... were concerning but also encouraging as they showed how supportive and welcoming Hazelwood Integrated College has been and how the school has helped them to develop."

Paul Sweeney -  
Permanent Secretary of the  
Department of Education

"The case study... will be useful for DE and the IDS as they promote the sharing of good practice ... I hope that the students who took part in the case study found it informative and life enhancing and I am grateful for their contribution to our understanding of how to make our society a welcoming one to all."

Caitriona Ruane -  
former Minister of Education

## Introduction to the Citizens' Panel concept

The first 'Citizens' Panel' which was held at Hazelwood Integrated College was part of an Open Society Foundations EU funded Project 'Integration & Diversity in Education in Europe' (IDEE) addressing the positive integration of newcomer and minority ethnic students into a number of EU education systems and wider society. The main aim of the project was to involve young people from newcomer and minority ethnic backgrounds who may have found themselves excluded or not in a position to fully participate in their local communities due to a lack of invitation or opportunity and because they may not always be seen as equals.

Four students from minority ethnic and newcomer backgrounds presented details of their experience of coming to Northern Ireland and the challenges they experienced in terms of education, cultural difference, feeling part of the community and personal experiences of exclusion and discrimination. Following these presentations (which provided acknowledgement of the expertise of these young people because of their personal stories), invited guests were facilitated, in small groups, to consider how the experiences of these young people could be positively enhanced at the school and community level.

Invited guests, in this instance, were members of local community groups, parents, school governors, the student council, other pupils from minority ethnic and newcomer backgrounds and pupils from two other integrated schools.

Recommendations emerged from a collation of participant discussions. These recommendations are noted in the document *Welcoming Newcomers in Northern Ireland: A Case Study with Hazelwood Integrated College*. There was also engagement with a Panel consisting of a community police officer, equality and diversity officers from two government councils and the Mayor of the local council. They shared their thoughts in light of the young people's stories and the discussions in small groups.



Sergeant Caskey, representing community policing for the area, spoke of his thoughts about the event:

“It was a pleasure and privilege to be invited to attend the Hazelwood Citizens’ Panel. I found the event an excellent forum for debate and engagement. It is vital that young people have a voice on what are important issues affecting life in their community. I found it a rewarding experience and congratulate them for making a vital contribution to this issue. I hope such work can continue, not only at Hazelwood, but at other schools across Northern Ireland.”



John Harkin -  
Vice-Principal of Oakgrove Integrated College,  
L/Derry, commented on some of the positives:

“It was really beneficial for our school to run a Citizens’ Panel on Human Rights Day. As a rights respecting school we are keen to create genuine opportunities for our young people to express their views and to stand up for their peers.

It was great that our Citizens’ Panel was joined by young people from 5 other schools in our Area Learning Community. The format worked really well for us and feedback from our young people was that we should carry out a similar activity every year on International Human Rights Day.”



## Benefits to the School

Two subsequent schools piloted the process and adapted it to meet their school and community needs. Oakgrove Integrated College ran a Citizens’ Panel on 10 December 2012 and Integrated College Dungannon on 12 February 2013. All schools have reported the benefits of using the technique.

- The school actively engages with the wider community
- Gives a voice to young people from minority backgrounds
- Tackles rather than avoids conflict / difficulties created by fear of difference within the community
- Gives young people from minority backgrounds an opportunity to inform local decision-making / policy
- Promotes ‘social responsibility’ and ‘equality’ within the school and community



# Overview of the Citizens' Panel process

There are 3 phases of engagement:

Preparation

Implementation

Evaluation & Monitoring

## Preparation - Self-reflection

Preparation involves the school engaging an appropriate staff member to support and facilitate young people's awareness of their personal experiences of being in a minority group - the opportunities and challenges this presents and what they have in common with other young people from newcomer and minority ethnic backgrounds. Support should be given to three or four young people in how to raise their voice and relay their story (on page 13 one teacher describes the preparation process involved in her school). While the young people engage in self-reflection, relevant members of the school and local community should be invited to a half day event in your school on a selected day and time. A template information leaflet is provided in Appendix 1.

During this process your school should adopt the Citizens' Panel template and make it appropriate to the needs of your school and community. It is then important to prepare a team of facilitators to help guide and record discussions at the event. These facilitators can be youth or community workers involved with the school, governors or parents who have facilitation skills, teachers or Key Stage 5 pupils who show an aptitude for facilitating discussion. You will gather your facilitators in advance of the event and provide them with training to ensure there is consistency in the management and recording of small group discussions (refer to pages 15-17 and Appendix 2 of this toolkit for guidance on training your facilitation team).

## Implementation – exchange of ideas, values & interests

The early part of the event will involve the young people, who have elected to speak about their experiences, informing others (such as teachers, school senior managers, pupils from other schools, school governors, local politicians, 'experts' etc.) about their experiences through giving a presentation.



"...I will always have to contend with that same man in my town who shouts out 'Hey, Nigger' from his car and yet isn't brave enough to say it to my face when he passes me in the street.

This behaviour can't be completely gotten rid of but it can be kept to a minimum as dialogue is continued and opportunities for inclusion and integration are created..."

16 year old male student at Dungannon IC



"...there were moments when I did feel excluded from conversations, and I didn't want to think this all happened because I was black."

"No one should look negatively at the other. Instead talk to the little boy or girl sitting alone as, you never know, you might just change their life."

18 year old female student at Oakgrove IC, Derry / Londonderry



## Developing and delivering a Citizens Panel in your school

### The preparation phase / Empowering young people to have a voice

Immediately after their presentations it is important to give participants an opportunity to respond to what they have heard through a facilitated discussion in small groups. This discussion allows everyone the opportunity to share their immediate reactions. Following initial discussions, a focus turns to the invited panel of local politicians and community representatives who will provide their response to the personal stories, subsequent discussions and any questions emerging from the small group dialogue.



The most critical aspect of the Citizens' Panel, in terms of ensuring its success, is to identify and give a voice to those young people who would benefit most from sharing the more challenging aspects of their experience. The process of preparing them to speak openly is crucial. A comprehensive insight into this process is provided by EAL co-ordinator, Andrea Gibson, who worked intensively with four students to prepare them for speaking at the Hazelwood IC Citizens' Panel. She wanted to ensure the students were confident and comfortable to undertake the task.

Andrea took the students through a process of encouraging them to candidly express their thoughts and experiences and gave them permission to be open about the more difficult aspects of integrating into a new culture and attempting to settle into a new education context.

In her own words, Andrea provides detail of the preparation process:

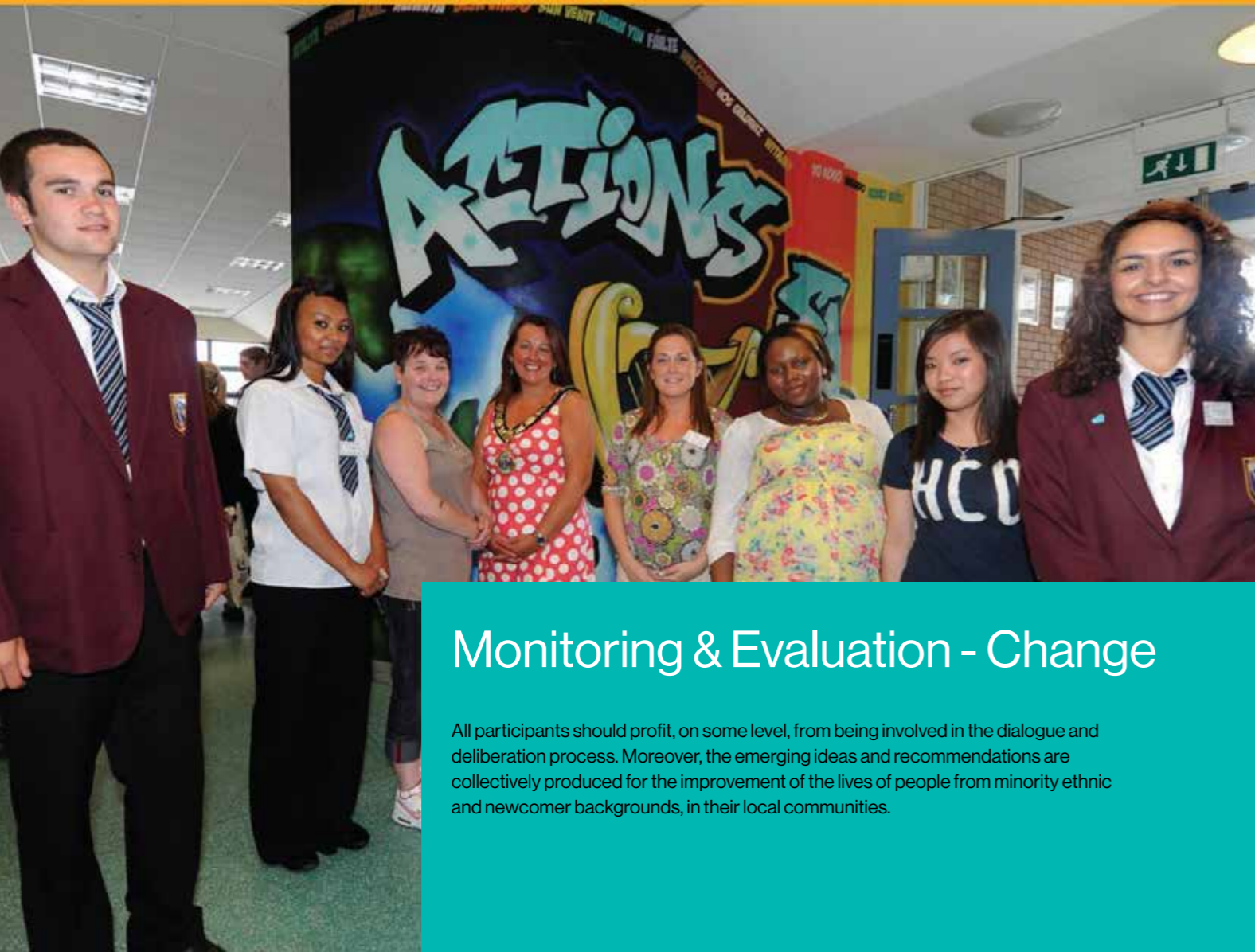
"Due to the sensitive nature of each of the student stories it was important that they felt sufficiently relaxed to share. I have been on familiar terms with each of the students as long as they have attended the college and this made it easier to contact them and make known what I would be asking of them.

Each student was seen individually, at a specific time, and in a designated room. I used my own room, because they are familiar with it and I think they felt immediately relaxed in that they would not be seen by others as doing something out of the ordinary by coming or being there. We discussed the day and in general terms the issues that would be raised during the course of the event. I asked if they would be willing to take part and then went on to discuss the level of their particular input. Once I knew that they were willing to take part, we then discussed the possibilities of recording their own personal journey. This was a difficult moment. We would be raising issues and incidents that, for the most part, they wanted to forget. For the older students, it was harder. They did take some time to think about the implications. At this point it is wiser to give space and time to think, so we sat in silence. There was no hurry, and there was no need at this point to say very much (I'm a trained Coach. Silences don't make me feel nervous or ill at ease. I qualified a number of years ago, so this was an ideal situation for me, I knew that they would come to their own decision without any extra pressure on my part. They needed to know that they could say 'no' at any point).

They came up with their own boundaries, on what could and couldn't be said, what incidents could be and could not be talked about, and what language should and should not be used. We came to a few topics that we decided could be negotiated (each student had a different level), and took it from there. The stories themselves were delivered in an 'interview' fashion. I got them to talk about life in general, funny family stories, and events they remembered. No particular order was asked for at that point. Once they felt comfortable enough, it was easier to go to specific incidents that shaped their growing years. There were a few 'I'd forgotten all about that' moments, along with 'I remember now how angry / happy / confused those made me feel' at times. On several occasions the use of foul and coarse language had to be discussed. It was only ever reproduced with their permission and consent. It was used by them with the greatest reluctance. At every step the students were in control of the copy and story."

## Monitoring & Evaluation - Change

All participants should profit, on some level, from being involved in the dialogue and deliberation process. Moreover, the emerging ideas and recommendations are collectively produced for the improvement of the lives of people from minority ethnic and newcomer backgrounds, in their local communities.





## Developing a Programme

Choosing an appropriate date depends very much on other commitments within school. However, there are many benefits in tying your event in with an international equality or diversity date, as Oakgrove Integrated College did when they chose International Human Rights Day to host their Citizens' Panel. Potential dates are noted below.

Your next step is to design a leaflet which is eye-catching, clearly outlines the purpose and aims of the event and contains an outline of your programme. An example is provided in Appendix 1 which you can use as a template for your promotional materials.



## Preparing the facilitation team

Small group discussion forms an integral element of the Citizens' Panel programme. If you select and prepare a team of facilitators in advance it will help participants feel comfortable when it comes to sharing their thoughts. It is the role of facilitators to help guide and record discussions at this event.

## Key Equality & Diversity dates

8th October  
Humanitarian Action Day

10th December  
International Human Rights Day

10th November  
Human Rights Day

18th December  
International Migrants Day

16th November  
International Day for Tolerance

21st March  
International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

20th November  
Universal Children's Day

21st May  
Diversity Day

Your facilitators may be any of the following:

Youth or community workers involved with the school

Governors or parents who have facilitation skills

Key Stage 5 pupils who show an aptitude for facilitating discussion

Teachers

You should gather your facilitation team in advance of the event and provide them with training or a briefing to ensure there is consistency in the management and recording of small group discussions. Two presenters from the first Citizens' Panel, in Hazelwood Integrated College, went on to train as facilitators and facilitated small groups during the subsequent events in Derry / Londonderry and Dungannon. Their initial experience gave them the impetus to develop their own valuable and transferable skills in group work and facilitation.





Facilitators play an integral role during two main sections of the event:

The first discussion, immediately after the 3 to 4 young people have presented their personal stories, is designed to gauge initial thoughts & generate a question for the external panel

The second discussion, following the views expressed by the external panel, aims to elicit actions and recommendations

A power-point presentation used during the training of facilitators, before the Oakgrove IC Citizens' Panel, is provided in Appendix 2.

Oakgrove Integrated College ran their programme with the additional element of placing a focus on the work of the school's Unity Team. The Unity Team was established to make the school a safer and happier environment for everyone by students working alongside staff in order to explore issues of diversity and learn the skills needed to challenge negative behaviours. A fundamental principle of the Unity Team is that speaking up for others is the most effective way to change negative behaviour, support victims and encourage those who engage in bullying behaviour to change their ways. The Unity work in Oakgrove IC follows the model suggested by Steve Wessler, former Attorney in Maine, who founded the 'Centre for Preventing Hate' and supported Oakgrove IC in developing a Unity Team in 2005.

Therefore, as part of the Citizens' Panel facilitator training, it was important to introduce the Unity concept. This was done by showing Steve Wessler's TED Ex talk from U-tube, discussing the powerful impact of his experience and thinking and exploring how it could relate to the dialogue generated during the Citizens' Panel.



## First facilitated discussion in small groups

### Introductions in small groups & initial reflections for the first 10 minutes:

Introduce yourself to the group and encourage them to introduce themselves

A short warm-up activity may be appropriate to help everyone feel comfortable

Ask for initial thoughts on hearing the students' personal stories

### Guiding questions:

What do you remember most from the personal stories you heard?

Why do you think young people from minority backgrounds are sometimes treated differently / badly in this community?

What needs to happen to help these young people feel welcome and included in school?

What should be done to enable these young people to have success in a career or academically once they leave school?

What needs to happen outside school, in the community, to help them feel welcome and included?

Record their thoughts on a flip chart



## Second facilitated discussion in small groups

### Guiding questions:

What do you think the school can do to initiate or do more to help young people from minority backgrounds feel included and welcomed and part of the school?

What can you personally do to help young people from minority groups feel included, welcomed and part of the community?

How can you ensure action is taken after today?

Generate a written list of:  
Recommendations - proposed actions and / or solutions

Notes should be recorded from each discussion group

## The implementation phase

After a brief welcome by the school Principal, or other key figure within the school, the early part of the event is handed over to the young presenters who will speak honestly and openly to the gathered audience about their personal experiences in Northern Ireland.

To provide you with an insight into the possible content of these accounts, one example from each of the 3 Citizens' Panels is reproduced with the permission of each speaker.

I moved to Northern Ireland from Lithuania on 24th of June 2005. I moved simply because my mum had told me that I would have a better life here and that she had a job, despite me being perfectly happy where I was with the rest of my family. I still decided to move. I missed my mum too much and didn't know better at the age of 10.

Currently, in my house, I have a step-dad who is American and a brother and a step sister who are Irish. This means that, in my family, there are 3 different nationalities under one roof. Therefore I know a few things about nationality and what it represents. When I moved here I only knew the English that I was taught in school, which is very little, so when some girls said something to me I just smiled and said YES and when a boy cursed at me I could only look at him and I couldn't say anything to him or any of the teachers and for some reason I was too scared to tell my parents.

I joined a small Catholic primary school in my area just because it was close to home and not knowing much English I couldn't spark up any conversations with the pupils, although I did with a few people who I called friends. They lived in my street and went to the school with me so I even got to hang out with them outside school which was great as I began to learn English everywhere I went. We weren't the most popular crew but I didn't care until other kids started picking on me and calling me names which did not relate to me. These names seemed like the first thing that came to their minds like "Nigger" or "Polish bastard". I knew what they meant but I didn't understand why they were calling me these things, as I was neither. I thought that these people were just trying to act cool and had nothing better to do.

Besides they didn't even know me or who I was or where I was from. I didn't understand the point of it at all. Until one day, one of my so called friends started picking on me for no reason and talking the same way as others. As time went on he was beginning to get worse and worse. It soon became so bad that I didn't want to come outside anymore or go to school, as this one boy was trying to make my life a misery. It seemed like he was doing all of this just for "fun".

Other boys that I used to be with did nothing, as this one person was more popular than them or me. Soon enough I was the one who just followed them not saying a word, until they told me to stop following them. I was sure that all of this was happening because of popularity and I didn't have the guts to tell anyone as I thought it wouldn't help. Soon enough I spent day by day just sitting in the house after school or weekends doing nothing or just watching TV.

When I began secondary school I was scared and had very low self esteem as I feared that I was going to get bullied again. I also had a very bad start to the year as I had a broken arm and had to wear a cast for more than half of the year. Although this was the case, Oakgrove teachers and staff kept a close eye on me and constantly asked me if I needed help or had any worries or fears or anything.



"... other kids started picking on me and calling me names which did not relate to me. These names seemed like the first thing that came to their minds like "Nigger" or "Polish bastard."

"Oakgrove Integrated College was the place that helped me gain the confidence and turn my life around."

They also helped me develop my English further by having extra English classes. This was a major boost to my self-esteem as now I could express myself more freely and be myself more. Also I could spark up any conversations with my friends and instead of saying just YES to all the girls I could speak to them properly.

Oakgrove seemed like the best choice I had made all my life and I was feeling much happier being there. It gave me the self-esteem to stand up to others and be myself more freely. In school I never had any experiences of being bullied or picked on seriously and if I saw anyone being picked on I always tried my best to try to get the name of the person who was being bullied so I could report it to one of the staff, so the person wouldn't have to go down the same path as me.

Although I was still having problems with people from my street, after not seeing them for over a year I finally had the confidence to go out and stand up for myself and tell that one person to back off, and tell him how I felt. Even though he laughed at me, others didn't. Soon after this other boys kept on knocking at my door to come out and play with them and soon enough the bully apologised to me. To this day I still talk to them all, although I do have new friends, I don't have any enemies and I can finally feel like I am at home.

In my opinion once a child is being bullied he/she needs someone who understands them and who can help them by just being there. Once the person can get the confidence he/she needs they can start being themselves again and start enjoying life. Only then can they stand up to people who are trying to ruin their lives. Oakgrove Integrated College was the place that helped me gain the confidence and turn my life around.

Year 14, 17 year old male student from Lithuania, Oakgrove IC



My name is ..... and I'm 17 years old, I'm a year 13 student at Hazelwood College. At the moment I'm sitting my AS Levels in IT, Health and Social Care and Cope. I think I have always known deep inside that I was different. It sometimes felt that there was a different drumbeat or dance inside of me that no one else seemed to have or hear. My dad is black and my mum is white. They met each other when my mum lived in Liverpool for a while. My mum and dad split when I was very young so I've never really had him in my life, so while I don't miss him, I did miss having a dad. My step-dad, however, is my real dad and isn't that what every little girl dreams of, of having a dad in her life that thinks she is the most wonderful thing ever.

We left Gloucester when I was two and came to live in Belfast with my grandmother. I think it was about then I started noticing I was different. When I went to the local crèche and then nursery school I could see that I was different from all the other kids. Nothing happened much until I was in primary school, and that was the first time I heard the words "Hey you Paki!"

I was in a group of loads of other kids all playing and running around, but I knew instinctively that they were shouting at me. The words confused and frightened me all at the same time. They touched insecurity in me that I don't think any kid should feel at such a young age. My stomach tightened and I wanted to run away and hide. From then on I would day dream about being white. I didn't want to be different or stand out in the crowd. My mother remembers the first time she caught me putting baby powder all over me 'I just want to be white! To be white, in my mind, came to mean to be safe. Even my brother wasn't safe. People from the area would come to him and tell him that I wasn't really his sister, I couldn't be, after all, he was so white and I was so dark. They told him I was adopted, not really his sister. The taunts began in earnest after that. They never shouted at me when the grown ups were around. "NIGGER", "PAKI", "SHIT N SUGAR", on and on.

Once the teacher in primary school caught a boy shouting at me, "Hey you Paki, Nigger face!" He had a disability himself and had to walk with crutches. He had to write me a letter of apology; I still have it to this day. At the time, I couldn't understand why, if he was different, why he should pick on someone else who was different.

Then I came to Hazelwood Integrated College. Life here has been so much better. There were lots of kids like me here. Some even darker than I am! I've made some great friends and they have been very protective of me. Now the only racist names that are thrown my way are from those outside of school. Not that long ago, a girl that I thought was a friend, turned on me and shouted out the words that she knew would wound me "Get the fuck out of here you Paki whore!" The person who made up the rhyme "sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me" didn't know what they were talking about. It was hard growing up 'different', but I know that I'm grateful and thankful for who I am and the adult I'm becoming. I have inner resources and strengths that others of my age don't have. I'm tolerant and understanding of others and their position in life. I'm brave enough to stand my ground and wise enough to know when it is time to walk away. I have one more year at school and then it's time to move on. I'm grateful to the staff at Hazelwood for their support and encouragement through all my stages here.

Year 13, 17 year old female student Hazelwood IC, North Belfast

"...the racist taunts began in earnest... The person who made up the rhyme 'sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me' didn't know what they were talking about."

18 year old female student at Hazelwood IC in North Belfast



“For me, places like the youth club give people a chance to communicate and make themselves known to each other. Yes, the usual teenage gripes continue but it does help to stamp out the racism and xenophobia that unfortunately bubbles under the surface.”

I came to Northern Ireland from Portugal. I was born in Guinea-Bissau in Africa but moved to Portugal with my mother when I was a small child. My father lives in London. I have 2 stepbrothers who still live in Guinea Bissau, 1 who lives in Portugal and 1 more in London. When I lived in Portugal I went to a boarding college because my mother could not afford for me to stay at home. My aunt and cousins were living in Portadown at the time and they told my mother and I about living in Northern Ireland. My mother has family in Portugal so she stayed with them and I moved on the 24th of December 2012. My story is not a happy one at times but it has moments where living here has been and still is very happy for me. I am by no means innocent with what I have to say and everyone has his or her part to play.

When I arrived here the first thing I remember was the rain. It was raining when I arrived and save a few days of sunshine here and there, it feels like it hasn't stopped since. The weather for many Portuguese people and me is always a factor when we compare our countries. I arrived at the airport with my brother and his friend. My first experience in Northern Ireland was being taken aside at the airport for a drug check. Out of everyone on the plane, we were the only people singled out for a drug check. It is not for me to say why but I think Hollywood and American cop shows have a lot to answer for.

When I arrived in Portadown on Christmas eve, it was evening and naturally everything was closed. When I went inside my house I don't think I went back outside for another two weeks. I suppose I was scared and didn't know what to do, where to go and above all, how to do it. I had no English. My aunt enrolled me at Integrated College Dungannon. When I first came to the school I remember feeling embarrassed. I was always embarrassed to say anything. In the canteen, I pointed at things. The dinner ladies and all the staff were nice to me but all I could do was point. The students talked to me in English but I couldn't answer. I didn't know what they were saying. At first it was okay but then small incidents started to happen like when a student started throwing biscuits at me in the playground. Other things happened like in the computer room one student wrote on his screen, 'Ireland, the new Portugal'. He then started calling a Portuguese friend of mine gay and they started a fight. Thankfully at our school, the teachers don't tolerate bullying and the problems were dealt with.

Quite often for me, it was outside of school in my hometown of Portadown where things got worse. Last year in Portadown someone threatened a friend of mine. It was over a girl as far as I remember. When they started fighting I stepped in and separated them. The next day the same person who started the fight stopped me on the way into town and said something, which I didn't understand but I ignored him and shook my hand to say that I didn't want any trouble. I saw the same person again later that day in the shopping mall. I was with my friends at the time and we were hanging out and laughing. The other person had a group of people with him and they came up to me and said 'why are you laughing? Monkey boy, go back to your country.' After some time being hassled by this person, I asked him if he wanted to go outside but at that point a security guard asked me to leave. I didn't want to start anything and didn't want the situation to happen but, in the end, I was the one asked to leave.

Two days later, the same person came to a bus stop I was waiting at with my friend. He was with another person. He called me 'bitch face' and, with no warning, he rugby tackled me. I was with my friend at the time. I'm not proud of it but I beat him very hard, even when he was on the ground. I can only surmise that, in that moment, all of my frustration with my difficulties adjusting to my new life came out. His other friend ran away and my friend stopped me and told me to run away which I did. Later that evening, the police came and put me in handcuffs. My aunt tried to stop it but they told her that it wasn't anything to do with her. Maybe they thought I was older and as such didn't have a guardian. I was put in the car and brought to the station. When I got there it was midnight and I had to make a statement but the police did not have an interpreter and I also needed a lawyer so I had to return at another time. When I did, I was told the boy who tackled me told the police that 16 black people attacked him. The video was shown to me and my statement was shown to be correct and the boy's case was not strong as he reported in his official statement that there was a large gang who attacked him. It also clearly showed him tackling me first. My statement was sent away and I was called to the station later in the summer and told that I had a 32-month good behaviour contract or I would have a criminal record. I am still on this contract and nothing like this has happened since, nor do I wish for or look for anything like that to happen again.

Of course, it hasn't all been terrible and for me personally it has been the youth clubs in Portadown that has offered a safe place for my friends of different nationalities and people from Northern Ireland to meet and get to know each other. I go on a Tuesday and Wednesday evening. The only way it can get better is by talking. From what I can see, it is a fear of the unknown which of course is only human. For me, places like the youth club give people a chance to communicate and make themselves known to each other. Yes, the usual teenage gripes continue but it does help to stamp out the racism and xenophobia that unfortunately bubbles under the surface. As it happens, the boy who reported me to the police that time also attends the youth club and we since have talked on several occasions and though not immediate friends, we do have time for each other to at least say hello.

I will always have to contend with that same man in my town who shouts out 'Hey, Nigger' from his car and yet isn't brave enough to say it to my face when he passes me in the street. This behaviour can't be completely gotten rid of but it can be kept to a minimum as dialogue is continued and opportunities for inclusion and integration are created with the provision of youth clubs and such organisations. Thank you very much for listening to me today.

16 year old male student from Guinea-Bissau & Portugal, Integrated College Dungannon

In each case, these personal accounts were delivered with confidence and openness, helping set the tone for the rest of the day. A testament to their huge impact on participants is summed up by the following quote from a participant involved in subsequent group discussions:

“It was quite uncomfortable to hear their accounts and what they have gone through. However, no matter how uncomfortable it is we need to hear it, we need to let others hear it, we can't just say 'no it is too hard' and brush it under the carpet. These are real people, these are real issues and this is really happening.”

## Initial thoughts



## Capturing the response to student accounts

Immediately after their presentations it is essential that participants have an opportunity to respond to what they have heard, through a facilitated discussion in small groups. This discussion allows everyone the opportunity to share their immediate reactions.

Participants should be divided into pre-designated facilitated working groups to openly discuss their thoughts. It is recommended that each group should have no more than 8 participants and a facilitator. The smaller groups allow for increased involvement and more effective management from the group facilitators, to ensure everyone's voice is heard. It is generally best to place students with their peers rather than in groups with adults. It is also worth bearing in mind that the presence of their teacher in the group can sometimes stifle discussion. Views are recorded and collated, after the event, to inform a summary report. An example of the 'initial thoughts' collated summary, from the Integrated College Dungannon Citizens' Panel, is relayed right:

Those students who presented spoke of feeling passionately about the importance of sharing their experience and being extremely grateful to their school for providing a platform for them to do so. They talked about a feeling of empowerment at having their voices placed centre stage – that for once they were acknowledged as the 'experts' on the experience of being a newcomer or minority ethnic student in a new education context. One teacher commented, after the Hazelwood IC event:

“They were all pleased to be asked to speak and were chuffed that people were interested in them and their story. I think they all got a lot out of the experience.”

“We must always put ourselves in their shoes in order to gain insight and empathy” said one participant and the value of hearing such personal accounts was echoed through each group. An array of initial thoughts was expressed as the groups were struck by the impact of moving to an unknown environment at a young age, leaving behind a familiar culture and taking a step into the unknown, bearing in mind that the decision to make a new life in another culture was not the choice of the young people but the choice of adults. A recurrent theme, in the three accounts, was recognised as one of strong feelings attached to being separated from other family members and the family broken up. There was recognition that the latter is difficult in any situation but the challenges and difficulties are exacerbated when young people also have to adapt to a completely different culture and hear and speak an unfamiliar language.

A common thread identified in the three accounts was expressed in terms of feelings of isolation and exclusion, due to a lack of opportunity to make good friendships at the outset. All groups acknowledged that an initial lack of English language skills created barriers to communication which, in turn, impacted on confidence levels and self-esteem. The resilience of the three young people was noted and the tremendous effort they had to make to overcome these barriers in order to feel more integrated into the local community. However, it was noted that this takes time and persistence.

The negative reactions of those local young people, who the presenters recounted meeting initially, was considered “embarrassing” and disappointment was expressed at their belligerence and lack of awareness or compassion. Moreover, participants were particularly shocked by the open hostility and actual (or perceived threat of) physical violence which was apparent in each poignant, personal story. There was a strong feeling that such prolific “bullying” needed to be challenged and a safer environment created for all newcomers. Some participants saw distinct parallels with the experience of the Traveller community in Northern Ireland.

The groups were then provided with time to think more deeply about why young people from minority backgrounds are sometimes treated poorly when they come to NI and to develop an understanding of what might need to happen to make them feel included, welcomed and able to achieve in educational terms. During this session they were also asked to generate a question for an invited, external panel who had been present throughout the morning.

All groups saw language difficulties as creating an initial barrier which could prevent the development of relationships to promote emotional security and provide an excuse for local people's reluctance to make initial attempts to engage positively and get to know that person. It was further noted that some local people appear uncomfortable with difference and can regard it as a threat.

One group assumed that bullying of newcomers would be more likely by those local people with a poor understanding of their own cultural background. Indeed one participant commented: "it doesn't lessen our cultural identity to become involved with others." Another group saw this as related to Northern Ireland's unique history and how it was "insulated as an island through the troubles". The insular, inward looking aspect of the society was noted in several groups and one theory was that people not travelling off the island may create a sense of "the natives fending off the invaders." Indeed, several groups believed that historical and existing levels of segregation within NI society served to reinforce cultural barriers, making it more difficult to reach out to newcomers and sometimes provoking a siege mentality ie. 'they're taking our jobs'.

Stereotyping due to misconceptions about people from other cultures and minimal education about difference was identified as being at the root of problems. One group made additional connections between the prejudice and discrimination shown to newcomers and discrimination and negative behaviour aimed at those who are different in other ways, such as Irish Travellers.

## Generating questions for the external panel

During this first discussion, groups are also asked to generate a question for the invited external panel. This panel should be comprised of any combination of the following:

- Community police officer
- Good relations officer from the local council
- Mayor
- Local MLA and / or councillor
- Representative from a key community organisation
- Faith representative



It was, therefore, recognised as important that schools and youth clubs consciously attempt to counteract stereotyping and prejudice while positively educating young people about diversity in order to contribute to the process of counteracting mistrust.

The importance of being open and 'welcoming' to newcomers was regarded as essential by each group and to be the responsibility of all whether at a personal, school or community level. At an individual level it was articulated that being aware of newcomers and willing to engage could potentially make a difference to people's lives. However, it was also considered crucial that action should happen at a community level. Various groups expressed a view that celebratory events, focusing on culture, music and food, would provide a good platform for cultural exchange and learning. One participant commented that there is "Still a long way to go with community relations and we've got to keep working at integration". The multitude of agencies working on community / good relations was noted and a feeling generated that for greater impact there should be a more co-ordinated approach which could be truly effective in encouraging integration and social cohesion.

Examples of questions which have been asked, at different Citizens' Panels, are reproduced below:

What are you doing to get involved in the community and how can you relate to young people (from newcomer and minority ethnic backgrounds)?

How do you help protect us from sectarianism and racism?

What policies do you have in place to raise awareness of prejudice and racism? What successes have they achieved to date?

Are the statutory agencies aware of and have they effective policies in place for child protection?

How is the police service in Northern Ireland adapting to meet the needs of a more diverse community? Do they engage in additional training? Is the international community represented on the police force?

How do each of your organizations help encourage racial equality?

What is your personal opinion about, and experience of, foreign people moving to live in Northern Ireland?

How far would you go to stop racism in Derry and how can we as young people get involved in stopping racism in Derry?

In what ways would you prepare the community for foreigners coming in?

What can we do better to encourage those from minority communities to feel more welcome? What opportunities does Derry City of Culture present?

As a group of young people we feel that people can be picked upon because they are different. This happens to newcomers as well as lots of other groups, eg. different races, religions, sexuality, abilities, gender etc. How can schools improve diversity education everywhere?

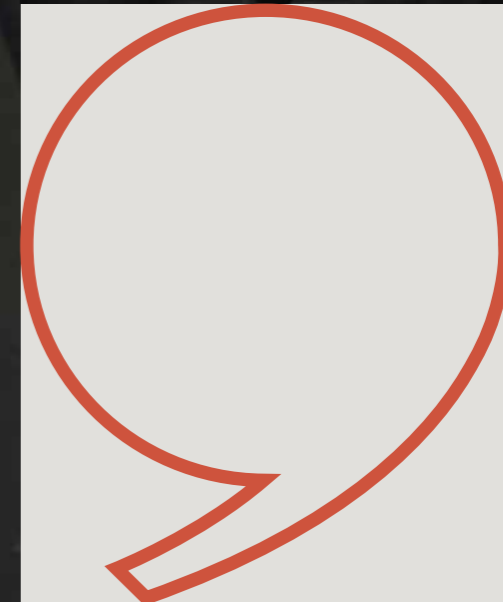
As a group we feel there are not enough cross-community groups within the area for young people to interact with their peers. We feel there is not much encouragement to include those from different countries and this has a major impact on the individual as they may experience feelings of worthlessness and social isolation. How do we respond to that?

## The Evaluation Phase

### Actions & recommendations for change

It is hoped that all participants will contribute to and benefit from the dialogue and deliberation process. The ultimate aim is to establish an environment in which suggestions and recommendations, for improving the integration experience of people from minority ethnic and newcomer backgrounds, can be generated and shared.

An example of the recommendations and proposed actions which emerged from the Citizens' Panel at Oakgrove Integrated College are provided in the following pages. These recommendations were collated according to those specifically for 'school', suggestions for 'community' and those 'personal actions' which were identified.



# School recommendations and proposed actions from Oakgrove Integrated College, Derry / Londonderry

There was clear recognition, from all groups, that schools are fundamentally important in the overall process of making the transition from home to Northern Ireland as positive as possible. It was felt, therefore, that schools should invest time in getting teachers actively involved in improving the integration process by providing them with the skills to ensure that diversity is respected and stereotyping minimised. Participants were in favour of creating more integration activities; running sessions and workshops to encourage greater learning about the diversity of cultures within the school and maximizing on that diversity in order to "break down ignorance". There were also specific suggestions for enabling this process, such as teachers taking time to introduce pupils to each other through the use of interactive methods in class as well as a proposal that the school should set up a meditation / non-stress group. The encouragement of integration through sport, music and art was identified by numerous groups and the importance of each school holding whole school multicultural events and activities which would encourage their families to feel connected to the school. Moreover, it was suggested that the school should take time to create relevant international connections based on the diversity within the school.

Since all groups had identified English language skills as a potential barrier, there were numerous views expressed related to increasing provision of intensive language support. The importance of providing extra support, in small groups, was highlighted as well as the suggestion that this should not only occur during the school day but should also be offered by the school after hours. However, there was also a reference made to the level of English being used in class and the benefits to be obtained from encouraging teachers to consciously consider using easily comprehensible language suitable for newcomers. On the subject of language skills, while it was positively noted that some schools encourage newcomer students to sit a GCSE in their home language, usually early in their time at school, it was recommended that 'A' levels in newcomer languages should also be encouraged.

One school position pinpointed as particularly relevant was the careers advisory role as it was felt important that schools should provide good quality guidance to support newcomer students in making positive decisions about career opportunities.

Buddy systems were encouraged for those schools not already operating a buddy programme and it was felt that mentoring of younger students by older, established students could provide huge benefits for all involved due to positive role modelling and the increased level of security felt by newcomer students. The positive involvement of young people in the process of integration was highlighted in a number of alternative ways ranging from the student council becoming involved in supporting newcomers to the whole student body taking part in the Rights Respecting Schools Award. It was also deemed important to find a variety of means by which the views of newcomers could be aired to ensure the school was being inclusive. Creating opportunities to listen were considered important as well as allowing views to be expressed anonymously, such as via a suggestion box.

It was regarded as important that all students should be reminded of the school's anti-bullying policy and that innovative approaches to counteracting bullying, such as setting up a school Unity Team, should be embraced. There was considerable support for Unity Programmes for additional schools as well as a request for an increased number of events, such as the Citizens' Panel, where a range of Derry / Londonderry schools would gather together and share. It was considered highly beneficial to run anti-bullying and diversity workshops which are shared between local schools.



The importance of a buddy system was identified by each Citizens' Panel. The EAL co-ordinator in Hazelwood Integrated College describes their system:

"The 'Buddy System' is not just for our Newcomer Students. Hazelwood IC has a policy of identifying vulnerable students as early as possible and making sure that each of these students has a friend they can identify with. We have Reading Buddies where year 13/14 students are encouraged to develop their own coaching and reading skills with year 8 students. We use the Summer School to locate the newcomer students and use this opportunity to let them team up with someone. However, they usually make a natural choice themselves. We then endeavour to place them in the same form groups, so they spend the maximum amount of time together. If we have someone who arrives later in the year, we ask for a volunteer or discuss the best candidate with the class tutor or year head. In practical terms it is, especially for the first few weeks, someone to get lost with, go to break and lunch with, and someone to help decipher the world they now find themselves swimming in. We know that it is essential that newcomer students feel as comfortable as possible during their first formative weeks. The students are also given permission in the form of a 'Time Out' card that they and their 'buddy' can use if the newcomer student starts to feel overwhelmed. The card allows them to come to a designated room (mine really) and take a rest for a period of time. It can be as simple as resting or doing something they like or using the time on the school computers."

## Community recommendations and proposed actions from Oakgrove Integrated College, Derry / Londonderry

The Oakgrove IC report also provides an insight into the recommendations proposed at a community level:

"During City of Culture 2013 Oakgrove IC and Lisneal should meet on the Peace Bridge alongside Cityside schools and exchange gifts, pledging a commitment to challenging racism and sectarianism."





"Today I realised that the smallest things we do can make a difference. Also that it doesn't take much to make someone feel welcome... From today I will do my best to put myself forward to make someone feel included."

Participant at the Oakgrove IC Citizens' Panel

All groups acknowledged the need for everyone at community level to get involved in the issue of welcoming and including newcomers. It was felt that groups as diverse as the media, politicians, police, churches, schools, community groups and multi-cultural and culturally specific groups have a responsibility to challenge stereotyping and prejudice and promote positive messages about integration and diversity.

The input from the external panel had highlighted a range of community initiatives about which participants previously had limited knowledge. Therefore, a desire was expressed to better avail of current youth and community projects rather than a strong feeling that new community projects needed to be created. Instead, it was noted that there should be a greater reaching out, via wider advertising and direct invitation, from these projects in an attempt to engage newcomer and minority ethnic families. The programmes specifically mentioned as being of interest were the City Council funded 'Prejudice: Face On' and 'R.E.A.C.H Across' which uses a Unity model. It was considered important for general cross-community projects to widen their remit to include people from a broader range of ethnic backgrounds and it was felt that local people could contribute by taking part in a neighbourhood scheme or joining a group, such as the Derry Friendship Club, which is specifically designed to provide a welcome to people new to the City.

It was felt, by some groups, that the local community would benefit from education about people from world cultures and that opportunities for training and workshops should be facilitated by partnerships between relevant community groups. Also, it was thought that having shops with food from different countries would be beneficial to the city and everyone should be encouraged to access these shops. The City of Culture 2013 was recognised, by most participating groups, as offering a positive opportunity to embrace culture as music and international food events would form part of the year long celebrations. There was a desire for the range of events to be opened up to everyone and for all cultures in Derry / Londonderry to be represented and included.

Similarly, it was felt that major sporting activities and events in Derry / Londonderry should consciously be designed to include everyone and one group noted the importance of putting more energy into the 'Kick racism out of football' initiative.

There was strong feeling expressed that the local media could play a more positive role, attempt to avoid negative stereotypes and pinpoint local stories about community integration.

## Personal Actions

One way of recording some final actions by each participant is to encourage them to write a 'note to self' which can be collected from them at the time and posted a few weeks later as a reminder of their pledge to take action. In their 'note to self' they record what they had learnt which would influence them to do things differently in the future and contribute to making their community a more welcoming place for people from diverse backgrounds.



"I have learned to respect other people from different cultures and backgrounds. I have also learned that it's of prime importance to stand up for and help people who are getting bullied for being part of a different culture. By joining groups outside of school I can ensure people are not bullied."

Participant at the Oakgrove IC Citizens' Panel

# Sources of funding and / or support

Good luck as you begin the process of planning a Citizens' Panel event for your school and community. We wish you every success and offer some suggestions of sources which could potentially provide support and / or funding. A few examples are noted below.

## Northern Ireland Community Relations Council

[www.community-relations.org.uk](http://www.community-relations.org.uk)

The Community Relations Council was formed in January 1990 as an independent company and registered charity. It was set up to promote better community relations between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland and, equally, to promote recognition of cultural diversity. Its strategic aim is to promote a peaceful and fair society based on reconciliation and mutual trust. It aims to do this by providing support (finance, advice, information) for local groups and organisations; developing opportunities for cross-community understanding; increasing public awareness of community relations work and encouraging constructive debate throughout Northern Ireland.

The Council's work falls into three main areas: encouraging other organisations, both voluntary and statutory, to develop a community relations aspect to their policies and practices; working with churches and groups which have a primary community relations focus and encouraging greater acceptance of and respect for cultural diversity.

## District Council Good Relations Unit

The Community Relations Unit of the Office of the First Minister & Deputy First Minister provides funding to District Councils to deliver the District Council Good Relations Programme, which has been designed to support local community relations initiatives. All District Councils participate in the Programme, employing at least one Good Relations officer to manage and deliver community relations initiatives locally. For details of the Community Relations programme in your area you should contact the Good Relations Officer in your local Council.

## Integrated Education Fund

IEF [www.ief.org.uk](http://www.ief.org.uk)

The Integrated Education Fund (IEF) was established in 1992 with money from EU Structural Funds, the Department of Education NI, the Nuffield Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, as a financial foundation for the development and growth of integrated education.

The IEF's Promoting A Culture of Trust (PACT) Grant Making Programme is open to all schools in Northern Ireland for projects that promote a culture of trust and the development of paths of reconciliation through education.

The aim of the programme is to fund projects in schools to promote the development of skills, structures and relationships that enable schools, pupils and their parents, staff and governors and the wider community to increase their understanding, acceptance and respect for political, cultural and religious differences.

## CRED Community Relations, Equality & Diversity

[www.credni.org](http://www.credni.org)

The CRED funding scheme has been designed to support school and youth settings in the implementation of the CRED policy therefore the criteria for funding have been taken directly from the CRED indicators which accompany the Department of Education CRED policy.

## Additional information

### Rights Respecting Schools

[www.unicef.org.uk/rrsa](http://www.unicef.org.uk/rrsa)

The Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA) recognises achievement in putting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child at the heart of a school's planning, policies, practice and ethos. A rights-respecting school not only teaches about children's rights but also models rights and respect in all its relationships: between teachers / adults and pupils, between adults and between pupils.

### Steve Wessler

[www.stevewessler.com](http://www.stevewessler.com)

He is a human rights educator, trainer and advocate. He works with schools, colleges, non-profit organizations, healthcare institutions, law enforcement agencies, work places and communities to prevent bias, harassment, discrimination and violence. Since 1992 he has presented and facilitated many hundreds of workshops, lectures, keynote addresses, and conflict resolution dialogues across the United States and in Canada, Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East.

### Unity Teams

The brainchild of Steve Wessler, author of *The Respectful School* and former Director of the Center for Preventing Hate, Unity Teams bring attention to and strive to end bullying, teasing, harassment, and the use of degrading language. To establish a Unity Team, a school must send a team of students to participate in a full-day training session led by Wessler. The training consists of team building exercises, cultural proficiency training, and action planning. Wessler's training techniques ask students to be honest about their own experiences in relation to diversity and their observations of the experiences of their classmates. Students often share honest and challenging stories of what they face in their day to day experiences, but also share positive experiences they have had as well. The goal is to establish a baseline of what the reality is in their current schools and then to come to see themselves as agents of change in their ability to impact the climate and culture of their schools. Students are then encouraged to design and lead special projects in their schools, sharing their learning and experiences with peers in order to promote a positive school climate for all students.

## Useful reading

### DENI (2011) Community Relations, Equality & Diversity in Education Policy

[www.credni.org/contents/what-is-cred](http://www.credni.org/contents/what-is-cred)

### DENI (2009) 'Every School a Good School - Supporting Newcomer Pupils' Policy

Accessed from <http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/21-pupils-parents-pg/newcomer/newcomer-policy.htm>

### Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2008)

'Every Child an Equal Child: An Equality Commission Statement on Key Inequalities in Education and a Strategy for Intervention'.

Accessed from <http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/ECkeyinequalities.pdf>

### National Children's Bureau NI and Ark YLT (2010)

'Attitudes to Difference: Young people's attitudes to and experiences of contact with people from different minority ethnic and migrant communities in Northern Ireland'. London, NCB

# Glossary of terms

CRED:	Community Relations, Equality and Diversity Policy
CP:	Citizens' Panel
CRC:	Northern Ireland Community Relations Council
DE:	Department of Education
EAL:	English as an Additional Language
ELB:	Education & Library Board
ESAGs:	Every School A Good School
ESOL:	English as a Second or Other Language
GCSE:	General Certificate of Secondary Education
IC:	Integrated College
IDS:	Inclusion and Diversity Service
IEF:	Integrated Education Fund
NICIE:	Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
PSNI:	Police Service of Northern Ireland

Sincere thanks to the schools which hosted Citizens' Panel events and gave the IEF permission to reproduce photos and extracts.



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# Communities in Dialogue

## A Citizens' Panel Toolkit for Schools

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