

Cross-Border Cross-Community Youth Project (CBCCYP) Bill of Rights

Background Information About CBCCYP

CBCCYP began as part of CFNI's Supporting Transition Initiative. The Project was designed to facilitate interaction between three youth groups with mixed backgrounds. The make up of the three areas involved in this project offered a complete spectrum of the political/religious/ethnic geography of N. Ireland and its border regions. For a diverse range of reasons, these areas have been the victims of the deeper divisions within society. The need for this project arises from the ongoing efforts in each of these areas to overcome the barriers to wider social integration. It is hoped that this project will help to foster an ethos of inclusiveness among the young people of the participating areas.

A thumbnail profile of the three areas should help give a sense of the project's direction and remit in bringing young people together and creating opportunities to build broader relationships beyond narrow and stereotyped prejudices.

Strabane: medium sized border town (Co. Tyrone, NI), rural hinterland, republican/nationalist/Catholic, high levels of deprivation, conflict-related issues e.g. ex-prisoners, ex-combatants, victims etc.

Harryville: small area of medium sized town (Ballymena, Co. Antrim), rural hinterland, loyalist/unionist/Protestant, high levels of deprivation, conflict-related issues e.g. ex-prisoners, ex-combatants, victims etc., unresolved interface/intercommunity/sectarian tensions.

Newtowncunningham: small border town (Co. Donegal RoI), rural hinterland, politically and religiously mixed, latent intercommunity tension, traditionally suffered high levels of deprivation and isolation, currently undergoing the first development phase in decades.

The Newtowncunningham Youth Forum was formed in 2005 in an attempt to create a focus point for 15-18 year olds in the Newtowncunningham area. It has operated as an adjunct of the Newtowncunningham Community Development Initiative.

The Strabane youth group was drawn from three parts of Strabane: Lisnafin, Ballycolman, and Carlton Drive. All these areas participate in

an umbrella group called the Melmount Community Forum which looks after their collective interests.

The Harryville youth group came from a youth club established under the auspices of the local community development group, the Harryville Partnership Initiative.

Six young people and two youth leaders from each area met for two residential weekends to discuss the Bill of Rights and what it might mean for them and for society as a whole. Without any previous training or prompting from adults, and without the use of books or the internet or any other resources, the young people first identified what rights they knew about and could agree were important:

1. Right to be part of a community
2. Right to be accepted in any community
3. Right to life
4. Freedom from poverty
5. Right to a clean environment
6. Freedom from torture
7. Freedom from harassment at work
8. Equality before the law
9. Right to be heard/express yourself
10. Right to live in peace
11. Right to education
12. Right to appreciate life
13. Right to identity and culture
14. Right to safety
15. Right to truth
16. Right to vote (at 16)
17. Right to protest
18. Right to a private life
19. Right to practice religion
20. Right to move freely
21. Right to live where you like
22. Right to a fair wage
23. Right to marry
24. Right to a fair chance
25. Right to healthy living
26. Right to access health treatment
27. Right to sexual orientation of choice
28. Right to a house
29. Right to clean water
30. Right to know my rights

Other rights identified during the course of this discussion proved to be controversial and engendered differing levels of debate. The following list gives these issues in order from the most controversial to the least.

- A. Right to choose (a abortion)
- B. Right to euthanasia
- C. Flags and marches to express religious/political belief
- D. Should young people be allowed to leave school so young?
- E. Right to marry at any age
- F. Right to gamble
- G. Right to march
- H. Right to fly a flag
- I. Right to 12th July and 11th night
- J. Right to Republican commemorations

Following these discussions, a process began to identify and prioritise six rights which should be instituted or underpinned in the Bill of Rights because they represented the deeper values of Northern Irish society. The six rights they chose were:

- The right to life
- The right to practice religion freely and without fear of discrimination
- The right to live in a peaceful and safe environment
- The right to live healthy lives
- The right to education
- The right to be treated equally, including equality before the law.

On the issue of the Preamble to the Bill of Rights, the young people felt that the “right to a fair chance” expressed and summed up what the Bill was about. The type of words they felt should be used in the Preamble were: help for everyone; interdependence; equality; inclusion; and, tolerance.

On the issue of implementation, it was agreed that because there were already differing levels of protection for certain rights or categories of rights, that a mixture of enforcing and implementing bodies would be the best way to get results. These included: special courts and judges, specialised solicitors/panels of specialised solicitors, political sub-groups

and forums, police/specialised police unit, Bill of Rights ministry, independent commissions, a rights legal aid fund.

The young people also felt that full implementation would require an awareness raising strategy involving newspapers, TV, radio, internet and other media. They suggested that the Bill of Rights should be celebrated in adverts, be promoted by celebrity rights ambassadors, community and youth rights ambassadors, and should be made part of the NI schools curriculum.

There was also a suggestion that agencies who do implement the Bill of Rights should somehow be “named and shamed”.

Other written comments from the various workshops are listed below:

- Why do you want our opinion on the Bill of Rights?
- If one person has the right everyone should have it.
- Why are there rights?
- What are the boundaries on a right?
- All rights are important.
- If the homeless have rights how come they need an address to get a job?
- Why has it taken so long to set up a Bill of Rights?
- Should everyone have the same rights?
- Is there a different Bill of Rights in each country?
- Will it really make a difference?
- What rights do we need that we don't have?
- We should have the right to vote at 16 because more laws affect us then.
- Should those who kill others still get the same rights?
- Should asylum seekers or immigrants get so many benefits when people here live on the streets?
- What are your rights as a person?