

Housing Community Network



Report of Annual Community Conference 2nd October 2008

This year's S.C.N.I. conference once again proved to be a most enjoyable occasion celebrating a host of innovative and exciting projects undertaken by members of the Housing Community Network across all areas of Northern Ireland. The change in format for the conference was agreed by a working group comprising of representatives from S.C.N.I., C.H.C.N. and N.I.H.E. who also decided upon the topics based on the following themes:

- Environment
- Education
- Intergenerational work
- Partnership
- Social

Conference delegates were afforded the opportunity to visit stands of nominated groups from each of the 35 District H.C.N.s; and what a wealth of good practice and innovative and exciting projects are happening on our very doorstep!!! Delegates enjoyed this important networking event and many made useful contacts.

The Chairman of N.I.H.E. Mr Brian Rowntree officially opened the conference stating that this annual event was the most important in the N.I.H.E. calendar. He expressed his gratitude to all the exhibitors, congratulating community groups and pointing out he is continually impressed with the breadth of work undertaken by members involved in the H.C.N. Mr Rowntree indicated his intention to attend Central and Area H.C.N. meeting over the next 12 months and upon invitation would attend the District H.C.N. meeting, indeed this was extended to any Community Group who wished to meet with him. The Chairman went on to highlight the pressures on housing due to the current global financial difficulties, despite this he very much sees H.C.N. having an integral role in ensuring the effective delivery of future housing services.





Following lunch, Brian Holmes (Director of S.C.N.I.) explained the format for the conference proceedings he made particular reference to the sponsors who continue to support the event year on year, namely Marsh Insurance, Youth Justice Agency, Playdale, H.E.A.T. (Heat, Energy & Associated Technology) and Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. Brian then introduced the five projects from across Northern Ireland each demonstrating innovation and creativity in the areas of

- Environment
- Education
- Intergenerational
- Partnerships
- Social

1. **Balnamore & District Community Association (Ballymoney), presentation by: Louise Watson CARBON FOOTPRINTS**



The Mill Youth Club in conjunction with Balnamore & District Community Association designed a package of activities to consider the impact of their daily lives in the context of how it impacts on the world around them. The project had a 4 step plan:

- Have you got the energy?
- Reduce, Reuse and Recycle
- Get on your bike ...or feet!
- Water Waste and Smart Shopping

Under these headings many activities were carried out over a 6 month period April - September 2008 and included the following:

- Textile recycling involving Oxfam Ireland
- Promotion of Eco Energy, with every household signing up and receiving low energy light bulbs.
- Low energy day
- Walk to school day
- Encouraging Smart Shopping and Fair Trade
- Youth club made draught excluders and worm compostors
- Fuel poverty road show
- Promotional days at the local Community Recycling facility, providing information to young children in terms of what happens to all the materials



- Raised awareness of locally grown food and food miles
- Making and distributing efficient watering devices.

The Future

It is hoped that the community will continue to be more environmentally aware and through some simple lifestyle changes continue to make a contribution in providing a safer and healthier environment for all.



Contact Details:

Louise Watson & Helen Russell (028) 2766 5483

*L-R : Jim Doherty (Glebside Com. Assoc.)
Louise Watson (Balnamore &
District Com. Assoc.)
Seamus Kearney (S.C.N.I. Liaison Officer)*

2. Lenadoon Community Forum Education & Training Project (DVD)

This is an innovative programme aimed at addressing the employment needs of local long term unemployed, women returners and disadvantaged people living in the Glencolin Electoral Ward.

The ethos of the project is to address the learning needs of adults in order to improve their educational attainment and enhance the employability of those individuals who might otherwise be excluded from the labour market, whilst at the same time putting in P.L.A.C.E. a range of support mechanisms, including free childcare provision.

In addition to the courses on offer, one to one training is also provided by the Training Co-ordinator if required, and students also have the benefit of individual needs assessments, CV skills, job search techniques, IT training, numeracy and literacy support, work advice and guidance and job search assistance from the local Job Assist Centre.

The Future

Lenadoon Community Forum has developed strong links with employers who have benefited in the past by being able to tap into the pool of qualified students coming through the project. The Forum also works closely with the local Job Assist Team and Greater Shankill Health Employment Partnership. Using N.I.H.E. and Housing Associations as a means of channelling information, Lenadoon Community Forum can easily inform new residents of all the services available at their complex. To date over 3,200 participants have already taken part in the project.



Contact Details:

Renee Crawford (028) 9043 0003

Above: Students with their Tutors at the presentation evening for Lenadoon Community Forum Training & Education Project's E.C.D.L. course

3. P.L.A.C.E. (Portadown Local Action for Community Engagement) Presentation by: Cyril Moorhead Intergenerational

The issue of bonfires and associated problems was highlighted by P.L.A.C.E. as one that could benefit from a combined multi agency approach looking at health and safety, environment and good relations. It was recognised that work was needed to develop some form of social cohesion and hence promote relationships between the community and at the same time to address peripheral issues like drug taking, alcohol abuse and anti social behaviour.



Cyril Moorhead (P.L.A.C.E.)

The project involved bringing together members from the community, P.S.N.I., Fire Authority, Housing Executive and Education as 'key stakeholders' to present a road show around local schools highlighting their individual roles as well as looking at health and safety matters such as fire risk.

The programme has seen a reduction in anti social behaviour, supported by statistics from P.S.N.I. In relation to Intergenerational work, bonfires are being supervised by local volunteers. The project also has wider reaching benefits as there is an increased sense of pride with a reduction of fear and intimidation felt by the older residents. In addition children are being made aware of the dangers of fire, the impact of burning certain materials, and the costs associated with their clean up and general respect for the entire community.

The Future

With the success of this project P.L.A.C.E. is developing a programme to roll out the road shows throughout the Borough of Craigavon. The project has also initiated the further development of intergenerational working through the "Reaching Out" programme. This will be a 2 year programme looking at issues such as social and economic isolation, community issues such as drugs, alcohol and anti social behaviour.

**Contact Details: Gordon Blevins
P.L.A.C.E. Initiative
1b Address Park,
Portadown
(028) 3833 7458**



*L-R: Gordon Blevins (P.L.A.C.E.),
Cyril Moorhead (P.L.A.C.E.),
Colin Ross (N.I.H.E. District Manager)
Richard Mealey (P.L.A.C.E.)*

4. Skipperstone Glen Partnership Working (DVD)

Skipperstone Glen in recent years was abandoned and neglected and increasingly became a focus for anti social behaviour. Local residents yearned for it to be restored to its former natural beauty.

It was agreed that Whitehill Community Association would apply for funding from UTV Peoples Millions to clean up and enhance the Skipperstone Glen area. The project was successful in attracting the much needed grant.



L-R: L. Mahaffy (C.H.C.N.), P. Bowen (S.C.N.I.), L. Mawhinney and A. Douglas (Whitehill Com. Assoc., Bangor)

Working alongside local agencies, the initial stage of the project was completed during the autumn of 2007. A trim trail including exercise equipment was put in place for all residents and a dipping pond and wildflower meadow have been promoted as a fun educational tool for local children at school and in playgroups.

The Future

In order to sustain the project Whitehill Community Association has recognised the need to continue to work in partnership with all the relevant statutory and voluntary agencies. Over time it is anticipated the project will:

- Contribute to the physical and emotional health and well being of local residents.
- Contribute towards the building and strengthening of relations within the community
- Promote intergenerational projects in the area such as gardening club, there is an ongoing attempt to build bridges between the older generation and local youth to highlight the positive attributes of each group.



Contact Details:

Sharon Hunt (028) 9147 3324

5. Cookstown “ Breathe Out “ Programme Social

The audience at this year's conference were bowled over by the performance The Wizard of Oz from a group of very talented children from Cookstown Community Youth and Sports Club.



The Breathe Out concept was initiated in the Summer of 2007 by Julie Bell (S.C.N.I.) who approached a recent graduate from Cardiff University, Janet Nelson to possibly facilitate singing lessons for children and young people in Cookstown. The idea quickly developed and a creative team established, the Breathe Out name was adopted and the team ready to commence a programme of activities.

The programme was piloted in October/November 2007 and provided warm up games, breathing exercises and singing lessons. Following on from the success of the pilot, a tailored programme was developed for Cookstown Community Youth and Sports Club which involved children from various backgrounds including those from urban and rural estates. The 'breathe out' programme was held in Cookstown Leisure Centre, with the workshops in operation from 10 -11 a.m. each Saturday morning from 1st March - 5th April. Musical extracts from the Wizard of Oz were rehearsed and the children prepared a performance for their friends and families.

The Future

The programme has been very beneficial to the development of the children and plans have been prepared to share the experiences with other communities through the Housing Community Network.

Contact Details: **Janet Nelson**
 'Breathe Out' Co-ordinator
 (028) 8673 7436



After the presentations, Mrs Lorraine Campbell, Assistant Director of Housing & Regeneration (N.I.H.E.) gave an overview of the Digital Inclusion project a collaboration between S.C.N.I., N.I.H.E., MyGroupNI and D.F.P.

Digital Inclusion Project..... Background Information

INTRODUCTION

As part of a major Digital Inclusion initiative across Northern Ireland, Supporting Communities NI in partnership with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive are currently offering all community/residents groups affiliated with Housing Community Network, a free website including software licences.

The design and implementation has been established in conjunction with Supporting Communities NI, MyGroupNI, and the Department of Finance and Personnel.

BENEFITS

There are numerous benefits to community/residents groups by participating in the project namely:-

- Increase outreach for S.C.N.I. / N.I.H.E. with community/residents groups
- Assist community involvement in the digital age
- Dissemination of information
- Information and advice available via S.C.N.I. website e.g. factsheets/funding enquiries
- No tricky web development to setup the mini portals

TRAINING PROCESS

All groups were advised of the digital inclusion training through their H.C.N. meeting and S.C.N.I. Liaison Officers. Each community/resident group had to nominate 2 people to attend a training session and this could be a young person or someone who would provide assistance to the group with maintaining their website.

Initially the training was conducted within the 5 Area H.C.N. meetings and the feedback received was extremely positive with a benefit rating of 94%.

Since April 2008 the programme has been rolled out to D.H.C.N. groups.

The digital inclusion training is conducted over a 2 hour period at a venue suitable to the participants and a practical working session is undertaken whereby the groups are given experience in 7 key areas:-

1. Logging In
2. Adding information to the Info page section
3. Building a Page
4. Adding folders to the Gallery
5. Adding images into the Gallery folder
6. Creating a link to a document (word, pdf etc)
7. Creating a link to a website

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER TRAINING?

When community/residents groups have undertaken the training there will be continued support from Supporting Communities NI, MyGroupNI (telephone helpdesk, 9 - 5 p.m., Monday-Friday), and District Office appointed staff who have completed the training.

It is anticipated that the project will be completed by December 2008 with the aspiration that communication with community/resident groups will be electronic via email and websites therefore reducing the carbon footprint.

AWARD MADE TO COMMUNITY GROUP:

As training for this project is well underway it was agreed to acknowledge the efforts made by participants in developing their own community portal. ***MyGroupNI offered an award to the group who have made the most effort to update their website since undergoing the initial training, by way of regular articles and inclusion of photographs.***

The Award was made to **Dhu Varren Community Action Team**



(Christopher Dallat, Betty Martin and Angela Young from Dhu Varren Community Action Team)



Background Information

Dhu Varren estate is situated on the edge of Portrush town. The estate has had a chequered history but over the last few years there has been a concerted effort to 'put it on the map' for more positive reasons.

In May 2007 an extensive nomination process was undertaken to ensure that a new group formed would be representative of all sections of the estate and following the formal voting process a new Community Group - **Dhu-Varren Community Action Team (D.V.C.A.T.)** was constituted in June 2007. They operate from a Community House provided by the Housing Executive in the heart of the estate and work in partnership with a wide variety of statutory and voluntary agencies. Like many other areas they want to improve the quality of life of local residents.

D.V.C.A.T. has had a very busy year organising lots of activities and projects to help encourage the residents to get involved. An important milestone was reached on 4th September 2008 when the Chairman visited the estate and formally launched two entrance features. In addition the group had the opportunity to share their priorities and future plans. This includes extending the opportunities for education, enhancing social activities, building on youth outreach and developing a Multi Use Games Area. Part of the strategy developed to address the poor image of the estate involved utilising opportunities for positive PR. The local press are now bombarded with good news stories and the development of a website has provided another platform to help raise the profile of the estate and the group in a very positive and effective manner.

Website address: www.dvcat.seni.biz

To close the conference Mr Colm McCaughley, Director of Housing and Regeneration discussed issues the Housing Executive will be looking at in the future with particular reference made to the following:

- *Mystery Shopping*
- *Tenant Led Inspections*
- *Digital projects*
- *Hard to Reach Communities*
- *Disability*
- *Rural, village voices*
- *Inter Community Network*
- *Young Persons Forums*



Mr McCaughley thanked all those who contributed to the event, he acknowledged and praised the work of Supporting Communities NI and thanked all the participants, sponsors and delegates. He concluded by highlighting the importance N.I.H.E. place on the value and role of the Housing Community Network.