

**I HAVEN'T  
BEEN  
AFFECTED  
BY THE  
CONFLICT** **BUT...**

**Voices from young  
people in Northern  
Ireland and the border  
regions of Ireland**

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# PREAMBLE



**Within 'Sectarianism and Separation in Northern Ireland: a perspective-based evaluation on the contribution of youth work' (Mc Mullan, 2018).**

**Many young people could not recognise or identify how the conflict in Northern Ireland affected them. At first sight, this could be interpreted as young people being unaffected by the conflict, but upon further probing young people were able to identify multiple ways in which the legacy of the conflict affected their everyday routines, choices and behaviours. Gramsci's (1971) theory of hegemony and critical consciousness in civil and political life emphasises how common sense realities and discourse can often be suppressed or undervalued (Ryle, 2008).**

The research findings by Mc Mullan (2018) have further been complemented by practice-based workshops and reflections with young people throughout 2018 and 2019 at YouthAction NI. Workshops were facilitated with young people in which they could explore deep-rooted attitudes and behaviours that are often so normalised that they can be difficult to recognise.

451 young people have contributed to this resource. The rich insights from the young people have been collated into this booklet entitled 'I haven't been affected by the conflict but...'. This title reflects the sentiment of many young people who initially expressed that they hadn't been affected by the conflict, but upon further exploration were able to identify and recognise many factors such as division, restricted mobility, politics, marches and parades and sectarianism.

This resource gathers views, perspectives, stories and images from young people about their experience of growing up in Northern Ireland and the border regions of Ireland, specifically exploring how the conflict affects their everyday lives and choices.

Educators and young people can use this booklet alike. It is a tool for promoting further discussion and noting similarities and / or differences from the perspectives presented by young people in the booklet. The statements can be used in a variety of ways such as: Agree/ Disagree; reveal one statement at a time and discuss how you feel; take a category and read all statements and from this create a news story board. The key is to be creative.

## **Acknowledgements**

- Thank you to all the young people who contributed to this resource (South Tyrone, North West, Newry, Kilkeel, Dundalk, Belfast).
- Thank you to all the youth workers who recognised the need to gather insights from young people. These insights provide an informed need based on deliberate depth of exploration about how the conflict continues to infiltrate the minds and behaviours of many young people.

I haven't been affected by the conflict but....

# DIVISION

"We're not really living in peace; we're still quite separate."

"Derry is concentrated on division. I went to an Integrated school which helped open my mind to other communities."

"There are so many things that divide us: different sports; flags; paramilitaries; culture; kerb painting; holiday destinations; Irish/British; Queen and monarchy; and cultural backgrounds."

"Living in segregation – this explains my childhood."

"The walls shut people off from being able to grow."

"I take the long way home to avoid the others – you can feel a change in the atmosphere."

"It all comes down to history."

"I never met a Protestant until I was 16yrs old."

I haven't been affected by the conflict but....

# FLAGS

"Flags can be offensive to others."

"It depends on where you live if you are able to fly a flag."

"Flying a flag can be freedom of expression."

"You should not burn flags, faces or puppets on bonfires."

"People should be allowed to celebrate without being judged."

"The fighting between Catholics and Protestants has to stop - no more hanging flags."

"It's alright to celebrate your culture, but just don't rub it in people's faces and get their backs up."

"You should be allowed to fly the flag that represents your country, culture and background but only at important events."

"Working class people were involved in the flags dispute... showing their discontent."

"Flags can represent you, your culture and your community. But they can also cause arguments and tension - they mark your territory in a negative way."

"Everyone should be allowed to do things or nobody should - it should be equal. It would just be easier if nobody flew flags or marched."

"In an ideal world yes, in reality no. Because people will be offended, if you were to go to someone's street and wave your flag they will get offended. You can just go around waving your flag but you should be proud of where you are from."

"If I know my human rights correctly, we have our right to freedom of expression. If it's not harmful to anyone else I think we should be able to fly our flag as a form of our own individual expression. It is our nationality, it is showing where we live and I think that is important."

"If you don't want to cause conflict have respect for others and their beliefs. We should be able to have flags in our own areas and maybe have a flag for everybody (Universal flag)."

"It's a good thing and maybe also a bad thing to. In terms of it being good it shows where you are from and what you are proud of. Bad thing is that it causes trouble and conflict. It is a good thing and a bad thing I suppose."

I haven't been affected by the conflict but....

# MARCHES AND PARADES



"All marches should be restricted to particular areas."

"Marches and parades are intimidating and cause fear."

"There is so much disrespect to other religions and cultures."

"We think yes and no because it is like a freedom of expression of like who you are and at the same time it will cause conflict and fights if there is a parade. Let's take Newry for example. The 12<sup>th</sup> of July parade is kept in a Protestant area and St. Paddy's is marched around the town, like if they were controlled they should be allowed."

"Marches and parades can bring people together as long as there is respect."

"Marches and parades should be restricted. You could have an environmental march but you are hardly going to want it to march down a motorway because it's dangerous. You have to have restrictions no matter what."

"Marches and parades add to the division and conflict."

"I don't mind marches at all. I think they are a great way to get people together to celebrate your culture and history. I do the St. Paddy's day parade and I would invite all my Protestant friends down it wouldn't matter who you are. We were saying it's really the hate, you should be respectful. If you are in the band be respectful of yourself. I don't think they should be restricted I think everyone could be involved with that."

"I think it causes a lot of intimidation. Everyone has their own areas where they could parade but you don't need to go out into somebody else's area and throw it in their face. It causes intimidation and fear. It causes a serious division and conflict in the community itself instead of creating peace. You are disrespecting others religions and beliefs by throwing it in front of them. There is no need to go into what you know as a Catholic area and sit an orange band in the middle."

I haven't been affected by the conflict but....

# THE CONTINUING LEGACY

"We're haunted by the legacy of the Troubles."

"Past inequalities in services has led to inequalities such as in policing and the army being predominantly Protestant."

"If you asked someone why they were fighting they would most likely not have an answer."

"Protestants view Catholics as getting schooling and education and then jobs."

"Older people never got help that they needed as a result of the Troubles."

"Paramilitaries are stepping into fill the vacuum through informal policing."

"Paramilitaries are back making themselves known - doesn't help."

"Protestants feel like the old Catholics."

"The words Derry / Londonderry are associated with how you identify as either Irish or British."

"My Nana (Catholic) witnessed a group of soldiers being refused service at the local chippy purely because they were soldiers (many of them being young soldiers) so she went outside and asked them what they wanted to eat, then she went back into the chippy placing a big order of food for her family and the boy soldiers. The soldiers were so grateful and thankful for her, her response was "all you boys are someone's son and brother, maybe someone's husband, I don't care about the fact you are soldiers.""



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# SAFETY

"I have created a false back story of who I am just in case I am asked questions in a different area about my name, family and school."

"Catholics and Protestants is all about territory - don't go here and don't go there!"

"Friends and their attitudes can hold you back; I would fear bullying and what they might think, say and do; and there are consequences if you do something different in your community."

"I felt nervous about working in other areas."

"We learn to keep our mouths shut when we are out of our own area."

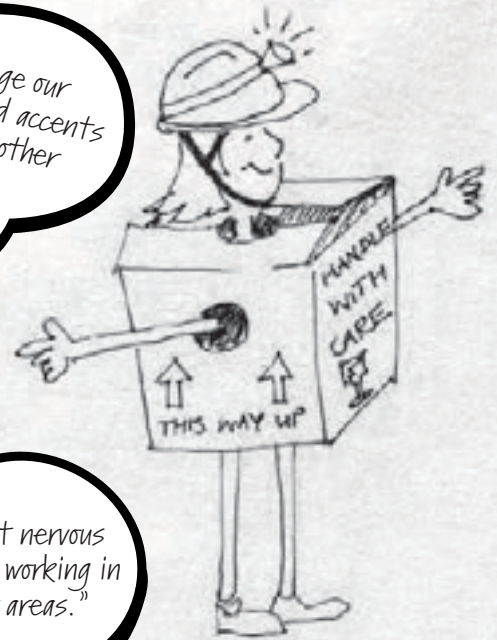
"I'm not allowed to walk through different areas - it's unsafe."

"You need to defend your community."

"Be yourself and don't let anyone change you."

"You don't want people disliking you for the choices you make."

"We change our names and accents going into other areas."



"As someone who is mixed (Mother is a Catholic, Father is a Protestant) I was bullied due to not being 'Protestant enough' because we never went to parades or festivals/events nor did I wear clothes or decorate my room in a similar fashion that the bully (Protestant, union jacks etc.) did."

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# SECTARIANISM

"I get on with them (Protestants) but I'm still sectarian."

"In our youth project you knew who was Catholic and Protestant."

"When I was on my way home from a dancing competition as I'm an Irish dancer and was swearing my schools tracksuit in town, some people were staring at me but luckily nothing happened."

"I have been bullied by Protestants for being Catholic, particularly in primary school."

"It's mad how people spend so much time trying to suss out who and what you are here."

"There is still sectarianism going on in both communities. We need to come together to remove that hate."

"We laugh it off when people give us stick for being black fooooooooo - it's a coping mechanism."

"Me and Katie got the wrong bus from school up to Glengormley and it was a Protestant area so we covered our school badge."



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# FRIENDSHIPS



*"Things are definitely better now than what they were during the Troubles. There are more teams mixing and playing together and we're seeing a lot more mixed teams emerge which is great to see."*

*"Having new friendships breaks the separation in some ways. They might not be discussing identity and division issues but it opens up a new world for you."*

*"Be happy with who we live with or next to."*

*"Relationships last during the group but afterwards other factors may cause the friendship to come to an end."*

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# MOBILITY



"Brexit is going to ruin opportunities for travel and cross border movement."

"We need extracurricular activities to make new friends. More opportunities to experience other cultures."

"I know that Catholics go to Santa Ponsa on holiday and Protestants got to Magaluf."

"Northern Ireland is a great place as we have free education and health care."

"We are proud to be Irish and Ireland is so welcoming."

I haven't been affected by the conflict but....

# PARENTAL INFLUENCE

"I think it really comes down to how someone is brought up, no one is born with hate in their heart."

"Young people are encouraged to be sectarian and there is a lot of ignorance from parents."

"Adults in communities are often blocking progress. My da said I couldn't go."

"Hate starts at home."

"Parents have a big influence. They can be sectarian or homophobic and this can end friendships."

I haven't been affected by the conflict but....

# EDUCATION

"Studying the arts has helped me reconnect with my Irish heritage. I was brought up in a Protestant background and through British culture and now I am only realising this whole other culture on my doorstep."

"We need to learn from the past, but leave it there."

"There should be more integrated education to encourage young people to work and play with their peers who they might not necessarily get a chance to otherwise."

"We would like to meet up and join in in a class with a school with a different religion."

"Young people don't know what it's about - our history."

"I love learning about both religion and history from both sides."

"Going to an integrated school has shown me that it is certainly possible."

"I know nothing about the conflict, I wish I knew more."



"We want our school to be integrated. We don't want to offend each other with politics. Support different races. Do things more naturally."

"Mixed schools help young people to appreciate others. The education system is made for an adult agenda. It's stacked against young people."

"It's important to learn our full history in schools, our own history, not that of Spain or Germany, plus knowing a shared history, not whether my story is worse than yours."

"Being in a mixed school has raised me to respect and accept everyone."

"We don't know anything about the conflict, so how are we meant to make a difference?"

"Have cultural get-togethers with different schools."

"Our parents were involved in the 'cause'. Is there more than one cause? Is this different on either side? What were and are the causes?"

"There should be more integrated education to encourage young people to work and play with their peers who they might not necessarily get a chance to otherwise."

"Young Protestant males focus on trades, not school: to make money not education. Anyway there is no oomph in Protestant education."

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# RELIGION

*"Religion is used as an excuse - but it dictates how people behave."*

*"Don't bring religion into everything. No one asks. Just accept and understand others."*

*"Protestants and Catholics bleed the same blood, we have the same feelings."*

*"I don't like to see the separation. We got separated from meeting people at school because of religion. If it wasn't for this group I wouldn't have met these 'uns."*

*"I feel bad for people who can't get to know someone because of their religion."*



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# LACK OF PROGRESS

"The older generations are the ones that have a problem with being LGBTQ+, most young people are fine about it".

"I feel frustrated in my own community - I just wanna shake it up."

"Northern Ireland is stuck in the past."

"Catholics and Protestants always fight. There will never be peace."

"Northern Ireland is not a great place to live as there is no government and no jobs."

"The councils and the government need to be putting more money into the development of young musicians. If there was more money given to our education, can you imagine the amount of talent that will rise up out of this place?"

"Our school doesn't let gay people bring their partners to their formals, there's been a bit of a kick off about it but the school have said now you have to request this in writing."

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# GENDER

"We have been surrounded by male politicians for so long that it has become acceptable... when will this start to be challenged?"

"It's important young people know about gender and how diverse it actually is."

"More women need to be in politics."

"Men dominate politics so there are barriers to women."

"Having more women in power might change things."

"Women are traditionally programmed to sit back and wait."

"There should be more support for gender equality and to legalise LGBTQ+ marriage."

"Men have more to say - people listen to men quicker."



"Women need to get as much recognition as for their involvement in the Troubles. While men are in the museums, women are unseen."

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# POLICING

"The police should be more mixed to help to stop rioting, bombings and hijackings."

"The PSNI treatment comes from legacy."

"PSNI and Protestants are linked with paramilitaries."

"People are arrested for wearing an Irish flag but not unionists."

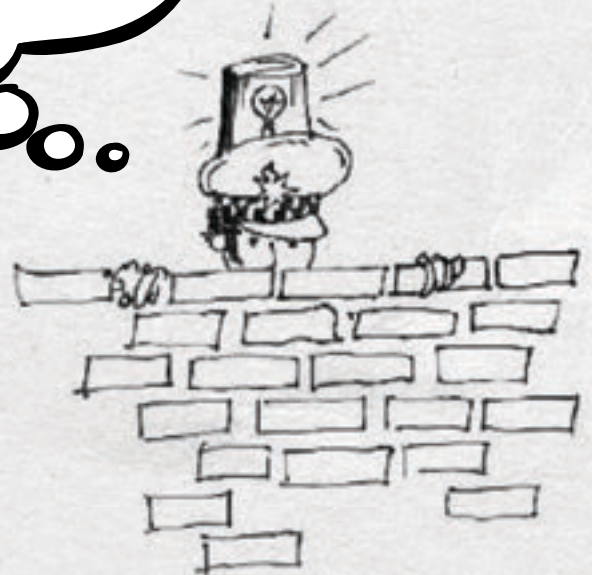
"The police system can be good."

"We should carry on fighting with the police but stop the bombing."

"The PSNI hang about waiting for trouble."

"The police should treat everyone equally."

"Catholics and Protestants are not treated equally by the police - Protestants get away with things."



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# POLITICS

"It shouldn't be lower than 18yrs because young people are too busy on phones, having a social life and are too young."

"There should be more money put into housing, the environment, education and children."

"Politicians don't get on so how do they expect others to get on?"

"We would like to learn about local politics and the voting system."

"Campaign leaflets are hard to read with too much information, make the language clearer and use less big words and more young people will vote."

"Most people are voting for the wrong reasons."

"Voting age should be brought down to at least 16 so younger people get a say in what happens in their country."

"It's boring. Make it more interesting."

"Political parties might be lying about what they're saying so that they get more votes."



"I didn't realise how voting can affect my families' money, my school and my healthcare."

"Brexit has increased racial issues and religion causes most issues."

"Politicians are having a negative affect instead of a positive one."

"Not all young people are uneducated on voting as they do their own research."

"There are too many religions influencing government policy so that stands in the way of protecting the rights of all LGBTQI+ people."

"Politics is generally prejudiced. We need something that is balanced and reaches out to young people who do not want to be labelled as loyalist or nationalist."

"If I was a politician I wouldn't push my own agenda. I would listen and ask for young people's opinions."

"Some just don't want anything to do with it (the peace process). They just want to leave it up to the politicians."

"There needs to be fairer representation of all age groups and under-represented groups in government. If we were in there we could make a difference."

"Everyone wants peace but Brexit might undermine this."

"Politicians should be organizing youth group discussions but won't because they are too motivated by money."

"The ideal politician should treat people fairly; be truthful; be compassionate; be responsible; listen to the public; be imaginative; and be brave."

I haven't been affected by the conflict but....

# PEACE AS A PROCESS



"Both communities have benefited from the peace process."

"Peace works and there has been improved relations."

"No matter how much peace there is there is always a minority that will disrupt the peace."

"The European Union has really helped the peace process but Brexit has really undermined this."

"The peace process has brought down the walls metaphorically and literally for both. Taking away that fear people have walking the streets, the border patrol, the police, people have made to feel a lot safer walking around and that has helped to improve relations between Catholics and Protestants."

"I think the Good Friday Agreement does well for both parties as the peace programme has taught us to come together and to learn of each other and to stop the discrimination and racism. It allows us to work better together and the Brexit I fear is going to cause a division again between Catholics and Protestants and I have to agree with the Dundalk people, everyone feels a lot safer now than we did before the Good Friday Agreement."

"Up until this point it has helped both sides. We have made leaps and bounds, with prisoners being released. But the problem now is that with Brexit happening, everything has been undermined. We are at a crossroads now and how this will affect Catholics and Protestants and our relationships. Borders and everything will just cause a whole shit show."

"Peace is shoved in your face."

"Since it has been brought in we have had the two biggest political party's brought together (the DUP and Sinn Fein) and there has been a power sharing in government which has brought Northern Ireland a lot of opportunities. We have received a lot from the EU in terms of funding, Peace funding and that kind of stuff."

"Put our differences behind us and learn to get along."

"We've come a long way, though. Things are a lot better than they used to be - so maybe there is no next step - maybe we just stay here?"

"Stop the beef, start the peace!!"

"We feel safer as a result of the peace process."

"We have been taught to live and learn together."

"Peace isn't cool."

"There was a Protestant dominancy and we were not prepared for the reality of the Good Friday Agreement. We were left in the dark by political representatives who be there when it suits them."

I haven't been affected by the conflict but....

# DISCUSSING ISSUES

"These groups taught me how to learn about politics, how to live on my own. We didn't learn any of that in school."

"We can't change the past, the future is more important."

"Having space to discuss issues gives us confidence to raise discussions with others."

"I think it would be good for others to understand 'this is what happened'. We need to not let this happen again."

"I don't get why this is still being talked about, why don't we move on and talk about a different future?"

"We don't care at all - it's not our job to make decisions or explore these issues."

"Peace-building can be tokenistic; bringing groups together but not addressing the issues."

"Depends on what group you're with - whether it's easy to talk about the Troubles."

"Riots can be used to cover things up. Young people aren't educated on this. They don't hear the other side of the story."

"Young people don't care about dwelling on the past."



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# CHANGE MAKERS / PEACE BUILDERS

"It's our country now and tomorrow."

"Most young people are keen to have peace, some didn't hear much about the Troubles in their personal and family lives."

"Have a facebook page promoting quotes and actions of peace."

"Twenty years on from the Good Friday Agreement, there are many out there who wouldn't have a good thing to say about it. But from an arts point of view, artists have been helping to re-image communities through the arts to help promote tolerance and understanding and in finding positive, new ways to express identity and tradition"

"Sports have played a key role in promoting peace since way before the peace process - 'Mary Peters' is from the Protestant community and has managed to create peace in the communities she's engaged with through decades of good work".

"There's a lot more we can do. You just don't wanna stop. I think we should keep going until we get sick of trying."

"We need to let Protestants and Catholics socialise together."

"We think young people are keen to build peace in Northern Ireland. Young people have the strength to make change and we don't want people to project their views on us."

"Bring all communities together."

"Young people have barriers to doing cross-community activities."

"Do we have choice or influence?  
Can you stand outside your culture and yet be accepted?"

"Try and speak to the others - give it a go."

SMART COOKIES

That's the way our  
Cookie crumbles

"Taking a stand, and thinking what can I do about this? Taking a bit of responsibility - not going 'this is everyone else's problem' - how can I help to move this forward?"



**Peace building is:**

**TRYING TO FIND PEACE WORKING TOGETHER**  
**MAKING FRIENDS TOGETHER**  
**BRINGING THINGS TOGETHER**  
**NO JUDGEMENT BRINGING**  
**RESOLVING CONFLICTS TOGETHER**  
**BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS**  
**BEING KIND SORTING OUT PROBLEMS**  
**AND FRIENDLY EVERYONE IS HUMAN**

**NO HATE**  
**LOVE**

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### Join Us:

Young people can join  
the Youth Network for Peace  
Contact Seán McDonnell  
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Workers and volunteers can join  
the Youth Work Network for Peace  
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