

working notes

*facts and analysis of social
and economic issues*

The Voices of the North-East Inner-City

Reading the City Centre Riots

Early Childhood Home Visiting

Community education and the NEIC

Stretched to the Limit

This is the air we breathe

The Changing Faiths of Dublin's
North-East Inner-City

Working Notes

Facts and analysis of social and economic issues
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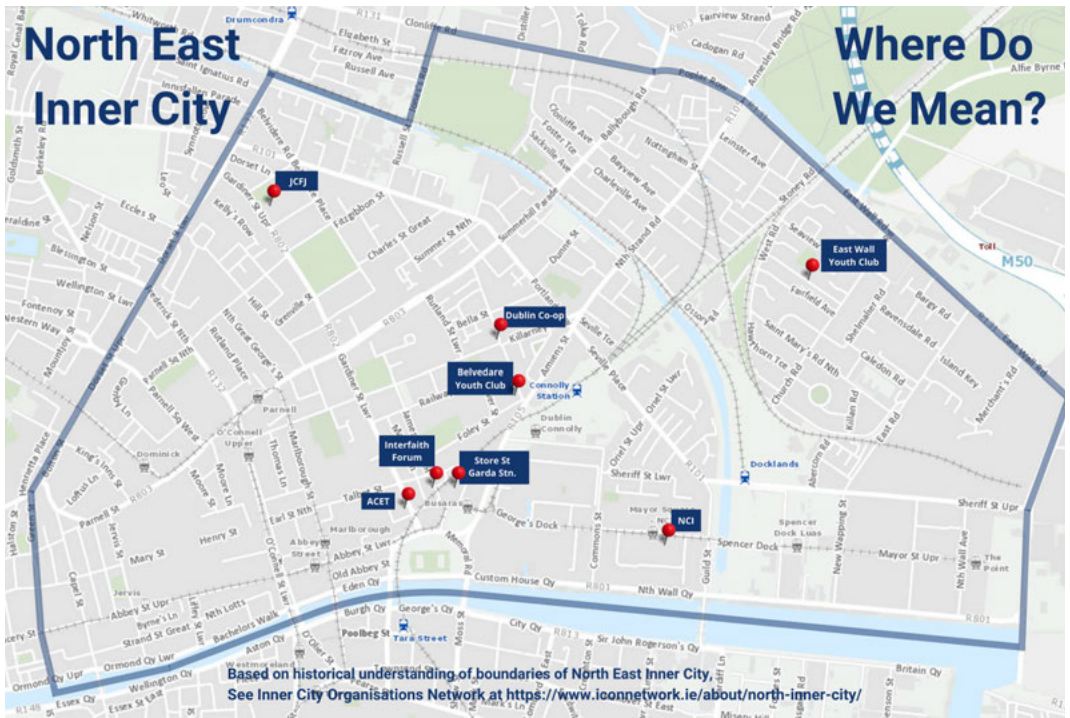
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Editorial

Fr Niall Leahy SJ

Irish faith communities are at the forefront of the reception, welcome, and integration of our society's newfound diversity. When people gather together to worship God they gather in their diversity. More importantly, when they walk back out onto the street every Sunday, they walk out feeling that a few more threads of that divine web of belonging have been delicately weaved through all the bodies and souls that had gathered. This peaceful diversity is made possible by Christians embracing their identity as sons and daughters of God. It is a process —sometimes fast, sometimes slow— of realising that who we are is not ultimately based on what we look like, where we come from, how we talk, what we possess, what people think of us, or what we have worked hard for and achieved. All of these are contingent and secondary realities. Instead of holding on tightly to these threads, we are meant to place them in the hands of our God who carefully and patiently knits them together (Ps 139).

In my time as a Jesuit priest in the North-East Inner-City, I have had the joy and honour of being welcomed into the lives of people whose families have been part of the tight-knit local community for generations. They have nothing in common with the young men who took trains from Celbridge or Longford to wreak havoc on November 23rd. They are as parochial as any other Irish person, but they are not racist. For some time they have not been happy and this unhappiness is simply an honest reflection on the sociological reality that comes from the dramatic demographic tumult that has been thrust upon them. Moreover, when your locality is neglected for decades, even as all the politicians are busy extolling how successfully they are managing the economy, resentment grows. The streets around St Francis Xavier's church are filled with emergency accommodation. The doctors are over-subscribed. The schools are struggling – heroically – to meet the needs they face. The kids have nowhere to play. When a building goes up, it is likely apartments for wealthy foreign students or hotels for hen parties from Leeds rather than what is needed: family homes. The threads of the web of



Map of NEIC including locations of community development and advocacy organisations. Credit: Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice

belonging have been systematically stretched to breaking point and it feels like everything is unravelling. The vicious attack on November 23rd took a knife to an already threadbare community and things could no longer hold.

In the four decades that *Working Notes* has been published, JCFJ has never produced an issue like this. It does not address an overarching social theme or a particular social policy but it is concerned with a locality. It is an attempt to respond to the carnage of November 23rd before it is forgotten. It is an attempt to frame the reality of this vibrant and friendly part of our city ahead of the Local and European elections. The people who live in the North-East Inner-City are struggling against the odds and in many cases flourishing. But they are doing that largely without the support they need. Surrounded on all sides by quangos and boards, there is a flourishing civil society that is systematically famished by the short-term funding priorities of the government. Home to levels of diversity unparalleled anywhere in the State, the community has done a remarkable job of adapting. This community is the primary victim of the

riots. With all the moral grandstanding that followed and the deplorable talk in the Dáil by politicians about “scumbags” and “thugs”, this simple fact has been neglected.

When we sent out word about this *Working Notes*, every single group responded positively. Not every group was in a place to write something. But this enthusiasm and willingness to collaborate, to welcome good ideas, to put our heads together on getting the truth out is remarkable, especially when the funding arrangements seem almost designed to set one group against another. The issue begins with the words of staff of the Dublin City Co-Op, an alliance of 13 grassroots inner city community development organisations dedicated to the delivery of social, economic and cultural services in the aftermath of the riots. This essay stands as a document to how the people actually living and working in the area have suffered because of this violence.

Interspersed between the essays are a series of photographic vignettes assembled by the JCFJ Communications Director, Cherise Boraski, loosely grouped under the title of

“Humans of the North-East Inner-City”.

This is neither a scientific cross-section of the area nor a statistically robust interrogation of people’s perspectives, but an opportunity to hear from ordinary people working and living in the neighbourhood about what matters to them. This issue is about hearing voices often drowned out by others. Through these short interviews, we hope to give another perspective on the needs of our place.

Josephine Bleach, director of the incredible Early Learning Initiative based out of the National College of Ireland has written an essay that explores how home visiting is catalysing transformative change in the area. That this proven intervention is not properly funded by a State enjoying bountiful surpluses testifies to the sense of locals that they are overlooked. Education is so central to social rejuvenation and the love of learning is so embedded in this area that it is only fitting that we also welcome Tom O’Brien to write about the Community After Schools Project (CASPr) of which he is manager. CASPr is a community-based organisation that aims to provide educational support to children, parents and other adults in order to tackle educational inequality in the NEIC. Recognising the trauma which intergenerational poverty and addiction can instil in children from this area, the after-school programmes aim to foster relationships and create a safe environment where they can flourish.

Dr Eunan Doyle is a retired Detective Superintendent with years of service in the North-East Inner-City. Since the knee jerk response to the riots was one of criminal justice, we are delighted to have Dr Doyle’s penetrating contribution. The idea of “containment” is one that community leaders instinctively understood has been at play in the neighbourhood, but we now have a clear description of how the interests of locals are in competition with the interests of investors and political rhetoric in the policing of the area. Children, families, and older people’s opportunity to flourish in an illicit drug free environment is sacrificed to profit; as business representatives have an outsized effect on whole-community policing decisions.

Richard Carson has been working in the North-East Inner-City for decades. His remarkable essay is informed by those years of working at the front-lines of public health, his deep involvement in the new Christian churches that have arisen in the area, and his profound understanding of the social history of the neighbourhood. His essay is both a philosophical reflection on how the past echoes into the present and how decisions made decades ago shape and constrain possibilities for tomorrow. Adrian Cristea brings the issue to a close with his description of the groundbreaking work of Dublin City Interfaith Forum. This is just one example of people in this neighbourhood already putting into practice what some might think impossible – establishing and growing a real social harmony between religious communities. As with so much else, the people I live with in the North-East Inner-City already know what they need and will not be slow to build it. Is it too much to ask that they would have the real support of the State as they do that?

Martin Luther King famously said that “a riot is the language of the unheard.”¹ The ordinary people of the North-East Inner-City were not involved in the riots; they are its victims. But their voices remain largely unheard. We hope that this issue of *Working Notes* helps raise the voices of the people of the North-East Inner-City and that the many brilliant initiatives they sustain become more famous than the tired stereotypes and caricatures that seem to dominate among our political leadership. My neighbours deserve that.

1 Rev. Martin Luther King Jr, “The Other America” (Grosse Pointe High School, March 14, 1968), <https://www.gphistorical.org/mlk/mlkspeech/>.

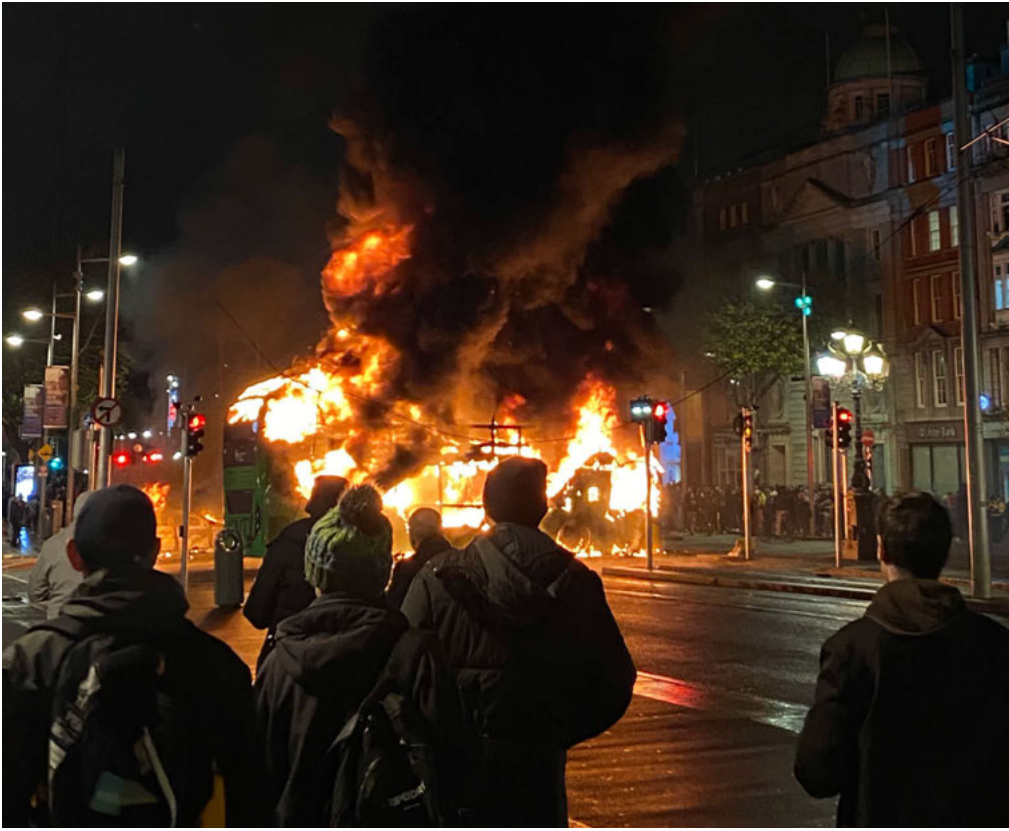
Reading the City Centre Riots: Thoughts, Feelings and Reactions of the Dublin City Community Co-op

Sofia Clifford Riordan

Sofia worked for Dublin City Community Co-op as Policy, Advocacy & Programmes Officer and led out on drafting advocacy papers, position statements and thematic reports. She holds a MSc in Human Rights and International Politics, from University of Glasgow and a BA Social Care, from Technological University Dublin. Prior to joining the Co-op Sofia worked as a Social Care Worker in various residential and homeless service settings.

Noel Wardick

Noel is the CEO of Dublin City Community Co-op since 2015 Noel holds a B.Comm and a Masters in Economic Science from UCD. In addition to his senior management roles Noel has considerable governance experience having served on a number of boards in the not-for-profit sector. Prior to joining the Co-op Noel worked in international development and spent several years living and working in the Horn & East Africa.”



Dubliners watch as a Dublin Bus is engulfed in flames during the 2023 Dublin riot. Credit: CanalEnthusiast, WikimediaCommons

INTRODUCTION

Last year, November 23rd began as any regular Thursday with people setting about their day. By the end, Ireland watched on horrified at the crimes, chaos and violence that unfolded in Dublin city

centre. In the early afternoon, as children were being collected from outside Gaelscoil Coláiste Mhuire on Parnell Square, three young children and their childcare worker were stabbed in a senseless attack.¹ One child was left with life-threatening injuries. This unthinkable event was followed by a descent into disorder and chaos, with anti-immigrant sentiment and racism pervading the riots that seized the streets. Emboldened by the opportunity presented, crowds attacked and overwhelmed An Garda Síochána. O’Connell Street—the city’s main thoroughfare—and the surrounding area was

soon ablaze with burning vehicles, with plumes of toxic smoke spiralling into the night sky.²

People have been profoundly affected by the school attack and subsequent riots, in particular those who live in the north inner city and migrants. Recognising that their staff team were affected on multiple, intersectional levels by both the school attack and riots—due to their diversity of backgrounds, personal, and professional experiences—the leadership team of the Dublin City Community Co-op³ (hereafter Co-op) quickly provided a space and a mechanism for their staff to emote, articulate their thoughts and make sense together of the violence they had witnessed.

1 Kitty Holland, ‘Dublin Stabbing: How the Chaos Unfolded on Parnell Square’, *The Irish Times*, 23 November 2023, <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2023/11/23/dublin-stabbing-how-the-chaos-unfolded-on-parnell-square/>.

2 Conor Lally et al., ‘Dublin Riots: Violent Clashes with Gardaí and Vehicles Set Alight after Children Injured in Knife Attack’, *The Irish Times*, 23 November 2023, <https://www.irishtimes.com/crime-law/2023/11/23/dublin-stabbing-attack-live-updates-three-children-injured-chief-suspect-detained/>.

3 ‘Dublin City Community Co-Op – An Alliance of Dublin Inner City Community Development Organisations’, accessed 9 April 2024, <https://dublincitycommunitycoop.ie/>.

This essay is drawn from the direct quotes of Co-op staff⁴ who participated in this process.⁵ The aim of the essay is to allow these raw feelings and insights to speak for themselves, with a conscious decision not to over-editorialise their words. This commitment to listen to those with knowledge and “skin in the game” is at stark odds with how the State and its institutions disregarded insights from people who had tried to warn them that the ingredients—poverty, deprivation, and inequality⁶—for an eruption of violence were in place. After a brief history of the Co-op, the essay will present five themes which emerged from staff’s initial reactions and conclude with what is needed by the community.

THE DUBLIN CITY COMMUNITY CO-OP

Established in November 2014, the Co-op is an alliance of 13 grassroots community development organisations, based in Dublin’s inner city, which have come together to ensure the much needed development and delivery of social, economic and cultural services continues within their communities. Its creation was prompted by the absence of a local development company in the inner city, which had resulted in Dublin’s inner city communities becoming increasingly less visible and without a voice at a time when the country was experiencing harsh austerity; the evisceration of community development funding; and an increasing demand for support services due to a State failing in its duty of care. Operating in the most disadvantaged areas of the inner city, the member organisations are present in Dublin 1, 3, 7, and 8 as well as disadvantaged areas in Dublin 2 and 4. An essential element of the work of the Co-op is with “hard-to-reach” target groups. The “hard-to-reach” are those perceived as difficult to engage due to their social circumstances, characteristics and behaviours, and their institutional relationships, such as not using healthcare or other services.

4 All staff members have been given pseudonyms.

5 The original report is available on the Co-op website. See Sofia Clifford Riordan and Noel Wardick, ‘Events of 23rd November 2023-Dublin City Centre-Compilation of Staff Thoughts, Reactions and Feelings’ (Dublin City Community Co-op, 2023), <https://dublincitycommunitycoop.ie/reports/events-of-23rd-november-2023-dublin-city-centre-compilation-of-staff-thoughts-reactions-and-feelings/>.

6 Robert Sweeney, ‘The State We Are In: Inequality in Ireland 2023’ (TASC, 2023), https://www.tasc.ie/assets/files/pdf/he_state_we_are_in_tasc_2023_final.pdf.

The Co-op has fifteen employees, including its Chief Executive Officer. One staff member referred to the team as a “microcosm of the population of the inner city,” which is made up of people whose families have lived in the community for generations; people who are non-Irish born but to whom Dublin is home; and those who work in the inner city and live elsewhere. Another staff member described them as a team who had been through “the horrors of the Hutch/Kinahan murder feud, the recession, the pandemic, the endless challenges caused by decades of poverty, neglect, abandonment and working in a state created ‘poverty-hub.’” Their collective experiences only add further weight and poignancy to their thoughts and feelings on the riots described below.

CASCADING EMOTIONS

Naturally, emotions ran the gamut from anger to grief with everything in between. Kasia suggested that there was a qualitative difference to the events of that Thursday, compared to other crises faced by the Co-op:

“We’ve all lived through the recession, the pandemic, other historic events and still, we came through. That Thursday though, felt different. Not only that Thursday, but the days and weeks that followed.”

Eloise expressed feeling “shocked, sadness and scared of the whole situation from the stabbings to the riots” and not feeling safe anymore. This was echoed by Grace who was heartbroken that “the place I grew up in is now not safe,” to the extent that she and her family were scared to be home. Further to this, Luka added that “Ireland doesn’t feel comfortable, let alone safe, for me right now, and I am tired of speaking about my and others hurt and pain, so that I/we are afforded a little bit of humanity.” Luka also noted a numbness amid all the intense emotions:

“There is a numbness that I feel too, a numbness stemming from exhaustion, exhaustion from speaking ad nauseam, about the collective fear many ethnic minorities have and currently are expressing and experiencing right now across Ireland.”

As Orla made her way to work the day after, she felt confused and felt “despair and horror at the posts of people saying things like ‘hunt them down’, or when watching images of a lone Garda being surrounded by a lynching mob.”

As other staff reflected on the absent State in the months before, anger was added to the mix of emotions expressed by Daniel:

“I think I have been destabilised by the events like I have never been before. I know I am upset, emotional, fearful but mostly I’m in a near blind rage with the state that they have allowed our country to get this close to a dangerous precipice despite all our warnings over many many months.”

He continues:

“When the anger with the State quells mostly I’m am left with feelings of terrible sadness at what happened and especially at what drove the events of 23rd November ... when one thinks of some of the phrases and slogans in common public use such as ‘Kill all Immigrants’ and ‘Let’s meet at 7 pm and go hunting for migrants’ the urge to put my head in my hands and just start crying is overwhelming.”

For many staff, their local community was at the forefront of their minds. Having also attended the school where the attack happened, Mark noted that:

“It felt very surreal for me not only being from the north inner city but also having attended Gaelscoil Coláiste Mhuire as a student, and currently having siblings there. I’ve seen similar events happen abroad in the UK or US, but never would I have ever thought an attack like that could happen in Ireland, let alone in Dublin on my doorstep.”

Expressing deep concern for the children and parents involved in the school stabbing, Amelia lamented that this event was used as a catalyst “to wreak havoc and division on our community - saddened, disappointed, and disgusted me but unfortunately did not shock me.”

ANTECEDENTS TO THE RIOT

Eruptions of violence to this scale and ferocity do not happen in a vacuum. They have foundations laid well in advance. Thinking of the months and weeks leading up to the riot, Orla pinpointed “older men who are weaponising this tragic situation to serve their own malevolent ends.” Amelia recounted a change in the local atmosphere, noting that something had irrevocably changed:

“Two weeks before the riots that took place in Dublin city, I had walked down to the llac Centre⁷ around lunch time as I often have done a million times before this being the community that I grew up in. I have never felt afraid or uneasy in my community. I remember remarking on my return to the office that I had witnessed three separate incidents on this short walk that for me reflected the undercurrent of tension and uneasiness that was palpable in the air.”

Broadening the focus to the An Garda Síochána, Daniel expressed both severe disappointment and praise for the police force:

“The shocking lack of preparedness by senior Gardaí and their failure to see this coming is something I honestly cannot fathom. We knew it was coming, how could they not know? I have such admiration for the brave Gardaí who faced down the rioters on the night of the 23rd November but the fact that they were so exposed and let down by their leadership is terrifying.”

Daniel continued:

“Not only were the riot organisers ‘hunting’ for immigrants they were also ‘hunting’ for Gardaí and Garda vehicles ... terrified doesn’t even begin to describe my feelings watching the events unfold. Despite individual Garda bravery and courage on the night of the riots the institution of the Gardaí suffered a humiliating defeat, and the Far Right is now emboldened beyond belief ... does the

⁷ A shopping centre between Parnell Street, Henry Street and Moore Street.

government have any idea how scared this makes people feel?”

Other staff explained the antecedents to the riot in terms of the failure of the incumbent and past Governments. Peter was unequivocal that it is ultimately due to “the consistent failure of successive Irish Governments to tackle wider social issues in the country, such as health and housing.” He expanded on his point:

“It beggars belief that this came as a shock to some political quarters. You would have to be very naïve to think there would be no repercussions as a result of concentrating people from a myriad of cultural backgrounds, a lot of who are coming from regions of serious conflict and highly traumatised, in an area which is already dealing with disadvantage and poverty, without sufficient mental and physical health supports. The existing communities were already trying to navigate a system which is under extreme pressure to deliver services.”

Taking a slightly different tack, by reflecting on her own heartbreak and how to navigate it, Orla arrives at the same conclusion of State abandonment over generations. Describing how she sought solace in the aftermath, Orla explains:

“I went for a walk and called one of my wise women. I heard myself say ‘my heart is broken’. I tried to explore this by finding a reason why, engaging in solution finding but my wise woman told me ‘simply be heartbroken’. That was such a relief! ... Allowing it gave rise to the heaviness lifting. My resisting the heartbreak was creating the heaviness. The communities we work in carry heartbreak over generations.”

Yet this abandonment is only one of the many dispositions of how the Government responds to the NEIC. When the NEIC makes the news for any reason that may reflect poorly on the Government, those who call it home are quickly “othered.”

“

The communities we work in carry heartbreak over generations.

“OTHERING” IN THE AFTERMATH

From the staff reflections, it became clear that their anger was fuelled in part by the labelling and othering⁸ which Government Ministers⁹ and the media quickly engaged in to shift unwanted attention. Claire expressed deep anger at “the language and labels once again being associated with the North-East Inner-City and in no way a real or accurate reflection of the people that live in our community.” This fury was mirrored by Eloise as she was “angry how the situation was handled and how our city and the people of the North-East Inner-City are being labelled.” Lamenting the consequence-free opinion-making of social media, Seamus saw “social media churn out opinions relentlessly who did not know the people, the area, the context” yet he points out that the references to young thugs ended up “demonising every young person when arrests show it is the older men organising right wing groups lighting the tinder box.”

Irish media, which takes its tone from Government responses, was singled out for its destructive and hurtful bias to the communities of the north inner city. Identifying the coding which is used when different events are reported upon, Sean’s analysis was insightful:

“As for the media with their ‘othering’ and disgusting bias against the good, honest and proud people of the north inner city ... when celebrations happen

8 Othering is based on “the conscious or unconscious assumption that a certain identified group poses a threat to the favoured group. It is largely driven by politicians and the media, as opposed to personal contact. Overwhelmingly, people don’t “know” those that they are Othering.” See Peter A Powell, ‘Us vs Them: The Sinister Techniques of “Othering” – and How to Avoid Them’, *The Guardian*, 11 August 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/nov/08/us-vs-them-the-sinister-techniques-of-othering-and-how-to-avoid-them>.

9 During a Dáil Éireann (Irish Parliament) debate following the riots, the Minister for Justice, Helen McEntee TD, labelled those involved in the violence as “scumbags” and “thugs.” When challenged by the Oireachtas Committee on Justice, the Minister refused to apologise for her choice words, instead saying that they accurately reflected the images she saw on 23rd November. At the time of writing, “Scumbags” remains on the public record of Dáil Éireann. See Tim O’Brien, ‘Dublin Riots: Helen McEntee Refuses to Withdraw Use of Term “Scumbag”’, *The Irish Times*, 12 July 2023, <https://www.irishtimes.com/politics/2023/12/07/dublin-riots-helen-mcentee-refuses-to-withdraw-use-of-term-scumbag/>.

in town, when parades such as the Easter Rising celebrations happen in town the media reports them as taking place on O’Connell Street or in the city centre but when there is a riot or violence in the very same area they report the events as taking place ‘in the north inner city’ ... and they wonder why people are angry when they have to listen to these flawed and hostile portrayals.”

Considering his personal response to this prejudicial reporting, Padraig noted that in the days following the attack and the rioting, “I felt extremely marginalised and saw prejudice from the news media and especially the government as everyone in the riot were labelled as ‘White Irish Men’ from the ‘Inner City.’” While still being in a state of shock from the events at the school which he had attended, Mark felt “a lack of care and complete disregard from the government and Ministers of Justice and Education toward myself and other victims of the school.” Another staff member, Benjamin, highlighted the cruelty of this “immediate knee-jerk response of both blaming migrants and locals for issues that are so far beyond their competencies to manage, nor should it be it for them to manage.” While the Government, Ministers, and particular media outlets sought to deflect and obfuscate any careful analysis of the riot, the Co-op staff were unambiguous with where the majority of the blame lay.

GOVERNMENT FAILURE

In many policy areas—whether housing, environment or health—a common refrain that is levelled at this coalition Government is its disconnection from reality on the ground. This refrain was echoed again in a very impassioned way. Peter identifies the concentration of need without commensurate resources:

“To then increase a population concentration with high needs into a community without increasing the crucial services to support all community members, goes beyond thoughtlessness and enters the realm of ignorant dissociation with life in the real world.”

Considering the social profile of politicians, civil servants, and decision-makers, Sean picks

up empathy and understanding as a cause for the disconnect:

“Most Gardaí are white, most officials are white, most politicians are white ... and most are middle/upper middle class. They simply haven’t a clue what is happening under their noses ... they have no idea what it’s like to be scared shitless because of how you look, speak and sound.”

For Eloise, the “situations in the community is gonna get worse if the government don’t make change, it’s a poverty trap and we are feeling like second class citizens.” While the events of that week impacted on everyone, Claire recognised that it was all “piloted by lack of knowledge, understanding, support, education, and resources.”

Many staff expressed no hope that genuine political leadership will be provided to begin to redress decades of State abandonment. When surveying the political landscape, Benjamin sees:

“a complete lack of political leadership around all the issues that face the inner city, the intergenerational issues and complexities being weaponized to give simplistic answers to issues of poverty, health, housing, employment, education, migration, and most of all the othering of the inner city like it’s a disease or contagion that might infect middle Ireland.”

Drawn from experience of politicians’ engagement with the NEIC, Orla delivers an excoriating critique:

“I feel rage at the blatant disregard of the politicians to an authentic analysis and understanding the nuance of the circumstances that actually gave rise to this situation. Disingenuousness, lack of leadership, faffing about the place, lies that they didn’t know this was coming despite numerous warnings, a refusal to think beyond their own narrow lens, their willingness to continue to point the finger, look for the quick reason and solution, wag the finger and blame people for their own understandable reactions

characterise the majority of politicians I've heard speaking and it frustrates me, nay suffocates me - I literally feel it like a pressure on my chest and I nearly can't cope for my own red mist"

Yet, like the many people who live in the north inner city, there is a resilience, and maybe stubbornness, to the Co-op staff which allows a fragile hope for the future to remain. But it is not a sentimental hope.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

While Grace wonders whether she and her family will feel safe and welcome again, she knows that Dublin is a city worth fighting for:

"Dublin is my chosen home and I moved mountains to be here. To see the place I love most, the city my children know as home, dissolve into such chaos and rage broke our hearts. This city is a living, breathing thing and it's unwell."

Other staff noted how difficult it can be for families and small businesses in the NEIC. Succinctly, Eloise was saddened as it is "so tough bringing up children." After speaking with families following the closure of the schools on the day of the attack, Benjamin feared that "a number of these families will leave and in a number of cases school was/ is the only safe place they had, and this is being taken from them." He also recognised that "local hard-working businesses like One Society cafe could lose everything after the riots while the multi-millionaire owners¹⁰ of the homeless accommodations are sitting pretty fills me with rage."

Displaying a toughness in the face of adversity, Kasia acknowledged;

"the disappointment and despair that the Irish state has failed its own citizens and all the people that have chosen to make a better life here and to contribute to the Irish future. How do we come back from that? How do we mend the burned bridges, how do we mend the broken

trust? How can one day turn one's life on its head and leave you thinking, "is it worth it anymore"? I could leave, me and my family but then again, THIS IS ALSO MY HOME and my COUNTRY!"

While there are no easy answers, the Co-op staff were still willing to do the difficult work. For Sean, "it's been a crushing and devastating few weeks for us, we are very shaken but I can tell you one thing we'll never give up and never give in ... the consequences of doing that are just too grave to even think about." Recognising that the current anti-racism responses are not working, Benjamin identified the need for a "much deeper work to begin to combat it [racism] as well as seeing that all inner city residents have a stake in our society no matter what"

Not seeking the solace of easy answers, Orla wants to finally "see someone in power stand up and be willing to be accountable for it, for working towards meaningful responses without any of the pathetic excuses and guff." Spaces for listening to each other is central for Claire, both to bring people together but to also expel the loud, destructive voices;

"The divide needs movement and change to narrow the gaps ... to understand or listen to the other and the whisper of the ordinary trying to just live life day to day, communities both new and old."

CONCLUSION

For many of us, the events of November 23rd maintained our attention for a couple of news cycles, until our focus was inevitably drawn elsewhere. The thoughts, reactions, and feelings of the Co-op staff, from this exercise in team self-care, offer us a window into the experience of those who live, work, and care about the communities in the north inner city. Those who live in the north inner city are still dealing with the social and emotional fallout from the riots.

What comes through from the staff reflections is the deep concern that the State has not stepped outside of its narrow frame of understanding to analyse and reflect on how and why such things happened. Because things

¹⁰ Cormac Fitzgerald, 'The Firm behind Ireland's Largest Homeless Family Hub Was Previously Paid Millions to Run a Direct Provision Centre', *TheJournal.ie*, 2 May 2018, <https://www.thejournal.ie/family-hub-direct-provision-3827657-Feb2018/>.

like this do not just happen. The anger and hate that drove the riots was utterly misdirected and inexcusably expressed. However, it came from somewhere and denying this fact will only fuel it more. Unaddressed social issues are the bedrock upon which extremist actors have been able to incite racism and violence against migrants. They have been able to do so because there is a vacuum of responsibility for these social issues stemming from the failure of the government to take responsibility where it is due. The far right has utilised this vacuum to push the narrative that migrants have caused Ireland's ills which, in reality, existed prior to the influx of people seen in 2022. Arguably the most pivotal of these social issues, around which people become most impassioned, is housing.

must be emphasised, the far right did not by any means capture the minds of most residing in the inner city nor do they represent the views of the people therein.

However, it is crucial to understand that the government's failure to overcome the country's social problems has provided fertile grounds for the far right to grow their abhorrent ideology in a small but not insignificant number of those vulnerable to it. At the risk of sounding alarmist, the riots should serve as a warning about increasing polarisation, radicalisation, disorder, and violence if we fail to change course. Space is desperately needed to reflect on this day and everything that culminated in its manifestation.



Unaddressed social issues are the bedrock upon which extremist actors have been able to incite racism and violence against migrants.

The description of the NEIC as a “state created ‘poverty hub’” crystallised decades of Government policy into a succinct description. As disproportionate numbers of international protection applicants and refugees were placed in direct provision accommodation sites across the inner city and the number of homeless people housed in local Bed and Breakfasts grew,¹¹ some feared that existing social issues and already stretched services would be put under increasing pressure. These social issues were not resolved, and genuine concerns were left unaddressed by the State. The far right has picked up these unaddressed concerns and hardships as an opportunity to gain support for their racist ideology. Insidiously, they framed the social and economic issues experienced as resulting from migration, igniting fear over resource scarcity, and invoking conceptions of an in-group threatened by an out-group. It

¹¹ Patrick Freyne and Jack Power, “The Most Disadvantaged Neighbourhood in Ireland”: The Dublin Street Providing Housing for Many of the City's Homeless’, *The Irish Times*, 12 February 2023, <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-style/people/2023/12/02/the-most-disadvantaged-neighbourhood-in-ireland-the-dublin-street-providing-housing-for-many-of-the-citys-homeless/>.

WHAT IS NEEDED NOW?

1. Dismantle the “Poverty Hub” Created in the NEIC

The State needs to recognise and acknowledge that it has created (and continues to grow) a “poverty hub” in the NEIC that needs to be dismantled. A failure to do so risks dangerous and destabilising outcomes such as that witnessed on 23rd November 2023. To this end, an immediate moratorium on homeless hubs and direct provision centres in the NEIC is needed.

Communities within the NEIC readily acknowledge their duty of care to vulnerable and marginalised people but they are being asked to bear a disproportionate weight in relation to their collective resources. Future decisions on homeless hubs and direct provision centres need to be based on the principle of redistribution, where each community in Dublin and Ireland has a fair share in the State’s collective duty of care. Leafy suburbs with surplus resources and amenities must play their part and recognise that their dereliction of responsibility places excess pressures on other communities with much less.

2. Investment to Eliminate Inter-Generational Poverty

A determined and properly resourced investment to eliminate inter-generational poverty is needed alongside a recognition that State resources currently being provided are piecemeal, opportunistic and massively insufficient. When a particular community has been starved of social investment for decades, the investment required to redress State failures is much larger than the initial annual investment required, as social problems quickly become complex. Business-as-usual with tokenistic investment, for which the community is expected to feel grateful, will ensure this crushing and dehumanising poverty will endure for further generations.

3. Eradicate the “Drugs Industry” Contained Within the NEIC

Until the “drugs industry,” which is embedded and endemic in the area, is eradicated, the NEIC will continue to be plagued by crime, social disadvantage, violence and high levels of individual and community trauma. A three-step approach is proposed:

- Remove the open drug-dealing from the streets as this is terrifying for a local community to navigate when going to schools and shops. If it can be removed from O’Connell Street and business districts, then it is possible for the residential streets where people live;
- Criminal justice response to the medium- and high-ranking members of the drug gangs. The focus should not be on the young lookouts and couriers who are trafficked into this industry with promises of easy wealth;
- Public health response to support those with addictions and suffering the consequences of substance use.

4. Sincere and Committed Political Leadership

Compassionate, committed, and courageous political leadership is required when addressing matters of immigration, as opposed to reactionary soundbites and policies based on little or no analysis and underpinned by a desire to garner votes and win “popularity.”

5. Create a Brave Space

This concept refers to a supportive place where people are enabled to share honestly and equally to facilitate individual and collective learning, facilitated by racial justice trainers.¹² The concepts of sharing, listening, and understanding are easily comprehensible by the intellect and easily professed but much less often practised. In essence a brave space is a supportive environment where participants are encouraged to speak openly and critically from their own experience toward the end of mutual learning and liberation.

The term was originally proposed back in 2013 by Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens in the context of social justice education.¹³ While creating a safe space has been the focus for a long time, we are now calling on policy makers, political leaders, community activists and organisations to create “brave spaces.”¹⁴

NEIC need leaders who will:



Dismantle the “Poverty Hub” Created in the NEIC



Investment to Eliminate Inter-Generational Poverty



Eradicate the “Drugs Industry” Contained Within the NEIC



Sincere and Committed Political Leadership



Create a Brave Space

Figure 1: Five asks of politicians in the upcoming Local Elections¹⁴

12 Staff within the Co-op have completed Racial Justice Training provided by the National Youth Council of Ireland which aims to support youth workers to become more proactive in tackling racial injustices. The training builds a youth worker's understanding on the long-lasting impacts of racism on young people. See 'New Training - Racial Justice in Youth Work', National Youth Council of Ireland, accessed 18 April 2024, <https://www.youth.ie/articles/new-training-racial-justice-in-youth-work/>.

13 Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens, 'From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue Around Diversity and Social Justice', in *The Art of Effective Facilitation*, ed. Lisa M. Landreman, 1st edition (New York: Routledge, 2013), 135–50.

14 Local and European elections are taking place on the 7th June 2024. The Dublin Inquirer developed a Local Elections Voter Guide to help residents in Dublin identify and contact their local candidates. For more information see: <https://dublinvoterguide2024.ie/>

Humans of North-East Inner-City *Lewis*



*Lewis Byrne was born and raised in Ballybough and is a Community Worker with Dublin Community Co-Op.
Credit: Cherise Boraski*

Just like the kids I work with in the Larkin Community School, teaching them, giving them their initial lessons for cooking, health and nutrition, and obviously with health and nutrition and athletics. I was involved in a lot of football, you know, like we're really heavily into our football around here, and I would've also been involved in some of the local teams as well growing up. But it never really gelled with me, and then I eventually got into martial arts through one of my cousins. Now, along with the community work, I'm also a professional MMA fighter. So, doing the whole martial arts over the last like 7 or 8 years, that's also led me down to coaching now. So I coach the Youth MMA teams in Ryano Finglas, and they compete all over the world. A couple of my kids were actually just competing there in Serbia at the youth championships. I was away at the time so that I couldn't go over. So some other coaches looked after them, but one of the kids I coach won a silver world medal. So that was a good moment, you know? Also, being involved with the whole martial arts scene. I would've travelled to like a lot of different places all over the world to fight over the last couple of years. That's like, it's given me so, so many different opportunities to do those sort of things. That's such a big part of my own life as well. The job that I'm working at, there's just a really nice, um, sort of, they complement each other, you know?'

'I was really involved in different community services, youth services, and things like that. I feel that had a really profound effect on me growing up and a really good effect as well. That led me down the path I am now; I work for a community organisation that gives back to the community in similar ways to the ones I would've taken part in growing up. So it's all come full circle for me now, and it feels really nice, you know? Even now, my little sister she's 11 or 12. She's also involved in the Ballybough Youth Club. So it's great just to see the next generation and now working with the next generation of kids coming up.

Early Childhood Home Visiting – a critical lifeline for families in Dublin’s Inner City.

Dr Josephine Bleach

Dr Josephine Bleach is the Director of the Early Learning Initiative at the National College of Ireland. She was awarded a PhD by Trinity College Dublin in 2008 and has published extensively on the topics of early learning and parenting.



Parent and child doing homework ©iStock-1034464980

Stretching into Friday 24th November 2024, as Director of the Early Learning Initiative (ELI), National College of Ireland (NCI), my phone lit up with lots of messages about the violent assault and subsequent rioting in our community. Our work to date in delivering home visiting programmes since 2007 and our learning within the North-East Inner-City (NEIC) from coping with the violence associated with the 2016 gangland feud served us well. We immediately instigated our critical incident policy. Our team of home visitors began contacting the families they visited to ensure that they were okay. Over the next few days, weeks, and months, we supported our families to restore their sense of safety, security, and belonging in Dublin's Inner City. Visiting families, some of whom had literally barricaded themselves into their accommodation terrified to venture out, Home Visitors were anxious to reassure children and parents that they were welcome in the area, that they had friends in the community, and that we would continue to visit and support them. The work continues with much collective reflection on our response and the supports being offered to the diverse range of families living in the area.

“

It highlights the importance of ongoing prior community development and innovation when a crisis occurs as well as demonstrating how early childhood home visiting (ECHV) is a proven service delivery strategy that helps children and families thrive. It is an essential local community lifeline.

Our response to the violence in Dublin's Inner City was a prime example of how prevention and early intervention works for children, families, communities, and for Government. It was the result of years of planning, relationship building, collaboration, hard work, multiple ongoing innovations and restorative conversations between children, parents, front-line service delivery staff, local organisations, businesses, statutory agencies, policy makers, and politicians. It highlights the importance of ongoing prior community development and innovation when a crisis occurs as well as demonstrating how early childhood home visiting (ECHV) is a proven service delivery strategy that helps children and families thrive. It is an essential local community lifeline.

This paper outlines how ECHV started in Dublin's Inner City, the innovative community action research process used, and how local Home Visitors – all women employed by NCI – have become a crucial support for families through good times and bad. It also highlights how a community, with Government support, develops the resilience required to deal with and heal from unexpected traumatic violent circumstances.

BACKGROUND

NCI is a third level learning, teaching, and research institution with an unwavering commitment to widening access to higher education, a provider of degree and master's programmes in Business, Computing, and Education, to over 6,000 students. In 2002, NCI relocated to the NEIC and established ELI to 'change lives through education' through the provision from birth of an integrated prevention and early intervention programme of activities, training and support for children, parents, and educators.¹

An initial survey of need found that while local parents had high educational aspirations for their children, they did not understand their pivotal role and were not confident that they had the skills to support their children's learning.² International research shows that early learning is the foundation for all future learning and success at school. At three years of age, there are already big differences in language development between children from affluent and low-income backgrounds. This gap continues to widen, determining a child's educational outcome before they even start primary school.

With support for parents as the primary educators of their children a priority, involving local people as co-constructors of programmes and in the decision-making processes was perceived as key to educational change.³ Central to the work of ELI is the belief that

early intervention and a supportive home learning environment are critical if children and young people are to achieve their full potential. As a result, a community action research approach was chosen to develop ELI's programmes.⁴ Acknowledging, respecting, and utilising the expertise and experience within local families and communities is at the heart of the cyclical process, which revolves around participants coming together to deliver high quality services and share their learning.



Figure 1: Process of programme development in ELI

ELI's programmes start with the objective of addressing an emerging real need with a few families asked to trial and critique a pilot initiative. Using their feedback, a programme is developed, trialled with more families, and if working, it enters our annual community action research process. Working in partnership with our colleagues locally and nationally, the programme can be then scaled up. There is a continuous feedback loop with children and parents actively participating in the ongoing development of the programme. As one participant said, '[w]e are listened to by the ELI. They follow up on suggestions and see them through. Our needs are addressed, and ELI keeps in contact with us.'⁵

1 Early Learning Initiative (ELI), "End of Year Report 2015-16" (Dublin: National College of Ireland, 2016).

2 Dartington Social Research Unit, "National College of Ireland Early Learning for Children in North Docklands: Report of Findings" (Dublin: National College of Ireland, 2006).

3 Josephine Bleach, "Improving Educational Aspirations and Outcomes through Community Action Research," *Educational Action Research Journal* 21, no. 2 (2013): 253–66.

4 Josephine Bleach, "Community Action Research in Ireland: Improving Educational Outcomes through Collaboration in the Dublin Docklands," in *Palgrave International Handbook of Action Research*, ed. L. Rowell et al. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 177–88.

5 Early Learning Initiative (ELI), "End of Year Report 2008-09" (Dublin: National College of Ireland, 2009).

ELI'S DUBLIN'S INNER CITY OFFERING FOCUSES ON

4 PRIORITY AREAS

Feedback is very positive with satisfaction rates at **94%** (N=2,441) and indicators of learning at 91% (N=2,138) in 2022/23 like previous years

Home Visiting and Parental Support
nurturing a positive home environment
through playful learning interactions
N=1,338 families



Literacies
improving social, language, STEM,
coding and thinking skills.
N=3,468 families



Educational Guidance
helping young people access further
education and career opportunities
N=612 young people



Capacity-Building
training and mentoring and supporting
quality practices
N=404 professionals



From 400 participants in 2008, ELI delivered 25 educational support programmes to 5,528 families in Dublin Inner City, alongside another 3 programmes to 2,946 families nationally in 2022-23.⁶

HOME VISITING – A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP AND CRITICAL LIFELINE FOR FAMILIES

Research in Ireland, which is corroborated internationally, consistently finds that parents have a powerful influence on their children's educational and social development.⁷ This is also reflected in the Irish constitution which recognises the crucial role of the family as the natural and primary educator of the child (Article 42.1, 1937) with rights and duties to active participation in their children's education. Research has also shown that early education is key, with early childhood home visiting significantly improving the lives of children and their families.⁸ Demonstrable impacts include improving maternal and child health, preventing child abuse and neglect, increasing family education and earning potential, promoting children's development and readiness to start school, and connecting families to needed community resources and support.

Choosing a suitable home visiting programme to start with was difficult. Eventually ParentChild+ was chosen as it had more than forty years of rigorous research demonstrating its success in the United States.⁹ It takes a non-didactic approach, enabling adaptation to the Irish context. It maintains a focus on parents as equal partners with Home Visitors in ensuring children develop the language and literacy skills needed to start school ready

⁶ Early Learning Initiative (ELI), "End of Year Report 2022-23" (Dublin: National College of Ireland, 2023), [https://www.ncirl.ie/Portals/0/ELI/ELI Annual Reports/ELI End of Year Report 2022-23 final.pdf](https://www.ncirl.ie/Portals/0/ELI/ELI%20Annual%20Reports/ELI%20End%20of%20Year%20Report%202022-23%20Final.pdf).

⁷ Margaret Josephine Bleach, *Parental Involvement in Primary Education in Primary Education in Ireland* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2010).

⁸ Josephine Bleach and Susan Brocklesby, "Early Childhood Home Visiting in Ireland," *Education Matters Yearbook* (blog), 2023, <https://irelandseducationyearbook.ie/downloads/1EYB2023/Irelands%20Yearbook%20of%20Education%202023%20-%20Early%20Childhood-7.pdf>.

⁹ National College of Ireland, "ParentChild+ Programme," Early Learning Initiative, 2022, <https://www.ncirl.ie/About/Early-Learning-Initiative/Dublins-Inner-City-Programmes/Support-for-Parents/ParentChild-Programme>.

Figure 2: Priority areas of ELI's Dublin inner city offering

to learn. It began in the Dublin Docklands in 2007 with five Home Visitors and 15 families. Today, ELI directly supports 20 organisations delivering home visiting to 1,500+ families nationally, while advocating for all 4,340 families receiving home visiting in Ireland through the Home Visiting Alliance. However, NCI's priority remains Dublin's Inner City and our local NEIC community. In 2022/23, 238 families who received an ELI delivered Home Visiting Programme lived in the NEIC, representing 71% of ELI Home Visiting families in Dublin (N=337). This has increased by 24% since 2021/2022 (N=192). Family diversity is reflected in figure 3 below, which compares the national statistics from 2023 State of the Nation's Children Report with data collected by ELI in 2022/23.

THE RANGE OF ELI HOME VISITING PROGRAMMES

Dublin's Inner City families usually begin their ELI Home Visiting and Parent Support journey with our ABC 0-2 programme, which aims to improve the long-term developmental outcomes for children from pre-birth to two years of age.¹⁰ Through weekly visits, the Home Visitor and parents discuss how baby and parent are doing with a focus on attachment, nutrition, sleep, health care and over-all child wellbeing. Home Visitors also demonstrate baby massage, which relaxes both parent and child and encourages lots of cuddle and tummy time for baby. In 2022/23, 128 ABC 0-2 families received 1,236 visits.

Family Diversity: ELI Service Users Vs National Average

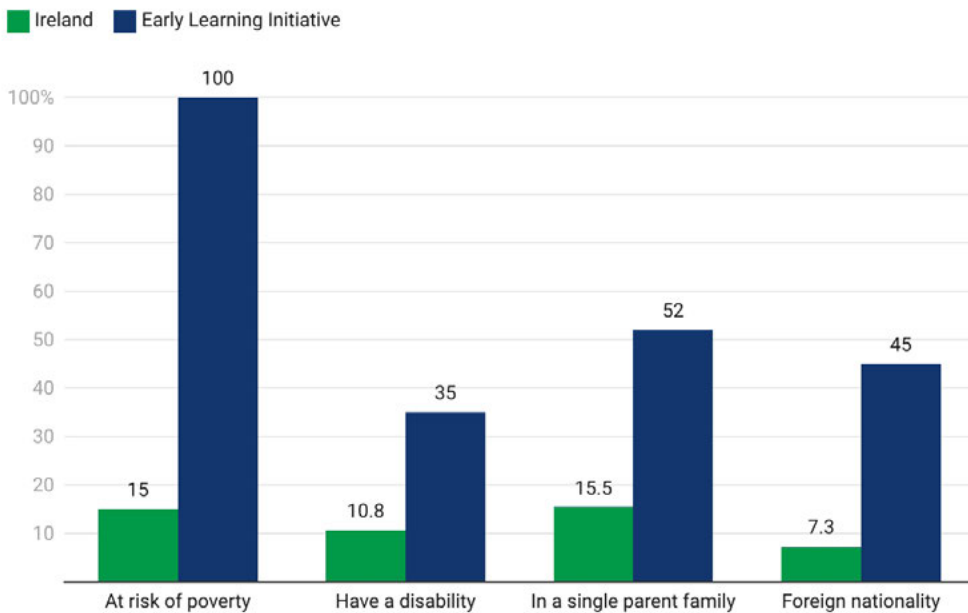


Chart: Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 3: Family diversity among ELI service users (compared against national averages)

¹⁰ Early Learning Initiative (ELI), "End of Year Report 2022-23."

When the child is around 16 months, some families move on to our ParentChild+ Programme, which is an innovative 2-year literacy and parenting programme that strengthens families and prepares children to succeed academically. In their twice-weekly visits, Home Visitors model for parents how to talk, read, and play with their children. Families then continue these activities between visits. In 2022/23, 138 ParentChild+ families received 3,915 visits.

With the increase in families in homeless and emergency accommodation, Home Visitors developed the Home from Home Programme, which is an adaption of ParentChild+ but in 12-week blocks. In 2022/23, 27 Home from Home families received 211 visits. Having reached out to former participants during COVID-19 and seeing the challenges they were experiencing; the Stretch Graduate Programme was developed. It provides differentiated supports to families, who have finished our ECHV programmes. In 2022/23, 40 Stretch Graduate families received 315 visits with another 34 receiving termly check-in calls. Home visiting is supplemented by Parent Support Programmes, where parents can learn more about supporting their children's learning, developing their parenting networks, and accessing other services in the area. In 2022/23, 1,065 parents attended ELI's Parent Support Groups (N=775) and parenting courses (N=290).

COMMUNITY RECOGNITION FOR ELI INITIATIVES

For NCI, employing local people as ELI Home Visitors was critical to the engagement and ownership by the local community. Easily recognisable in their distinctive uniforms, the Home Visitors are the ambassadors for education and parent support on the street and provide an accessible point of contact, information, and referral for families. Known as the 'book people' and/or 'pink ladies,' extended family members encourage new parents to contact the Home Visitors for support. People stop them in the street to ask for help, with contact details recorded on hairdresser cards, bookies slips, and receipts. Referrals also come from our local partner organisations, in particular the Public Health Nurses (PHNs),

Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs), Tusla Family Support Workers, and most recently the Children's Disability Network teams. This note from a parent in 2022 highlights the support provided and its impact on families.

Thank you for your support during this time. You were there in our tiny apartment and the stressful situation we were living in. You were there when I could not stop crying and feeling lonely. Thank you for the job you do. Supporting families like you do is essential in some situations and it really makes the difference. Waiting for your weekly home visiting sometimes really saved my life. I really hope I'll meet you again, 'till then I wish you the best of luck. And thank you, thank you again.

Evaluations, both internal and external, continually highlighted the positive impact of ELI's Home Visiting Programmes on the families involved with parents learning a different and more enjoyable approach to relating, talking, reading, and playing with their children. The children involved are developing normally for their age with the benefits extending to siblings and extended family. At developmental checks, PHNs notice the gains made by children who are on ELI's Home Visiting and Parent Support Programme and those who are not. SLTs see the improvement in the children on their waiting lists (2.5 years wait), the vast majority of whom no longer need speech therapy. Primary teachers see these children enter primary school ready to learn. As one parent told us:

The Home Visitor is very good with my child and I'm learning a lot from the techniques she's been using. I'd never have known how to explain properly or encourage him in the ways I am now. My reading has come on better and I am calm. I am a lot more relaxed, and my child is the same with me.

GOING BEYOND LITERACY AND NUMERACY

Over the years Home Visitors have supported families through many challenges: intergenerational poverty, unemployment, social isolation, trauma, mental health issues,



While positive changes in one family and service is always welcome, it is the collective impact on a number of families and services in an area and the national system that is needed.

educational disadvantage, homelessness, violent feuds, COVID-19, as well as long waits for disability and other child services. Indeed, during the peak of the pandemic, Home Visitors were some of the only people in contact with the most isolated families, delivering home learning packs, checking in with 345 vulnerable parents and virtually visiting families to support home education and well-being.¹¹ As one parent told us, *“Thanks for everything these last 2 years. Even with all the madness you still went above and beyond for us, and we’ll be forever grateful.”* Despite all that goes on in our Dublin’s Inner City community, including the recent riots, parents continue to sign up and engage in the programmes. With the support of our local Home Visitors, whose mission is to ‘save the next generation,’ parents strive to provide a happy, secure educational home learning environment for their children. They are determined that their children will thrive in education, career and life.

HOME VISITING AS A GRASSROOTS-DRIVEN MEANS OF COMMUNITY CHANGE

Successful change is complex. While positive changes in one family and service is always welcome, it is the collective impact on a number of families and services in an area and the national system that is needed for best emerging practices and continuous improvements to be resourced and embedded into policies and organisations.¹²

ELI’s success is due to its network of partners, including Government, whose long-term sustainable support enables us to innovate and pivot to meet the emerging needs of the families and communities we work in. While all contributions are welcomed, tribute must be paid to ongoing reflective practice and advocacy of our local Home Visitors. It is their voices, informed at the front-lines, that have been critical to the identification of gaps in service provision for local families and subsequent innovations. One example of this is a programme

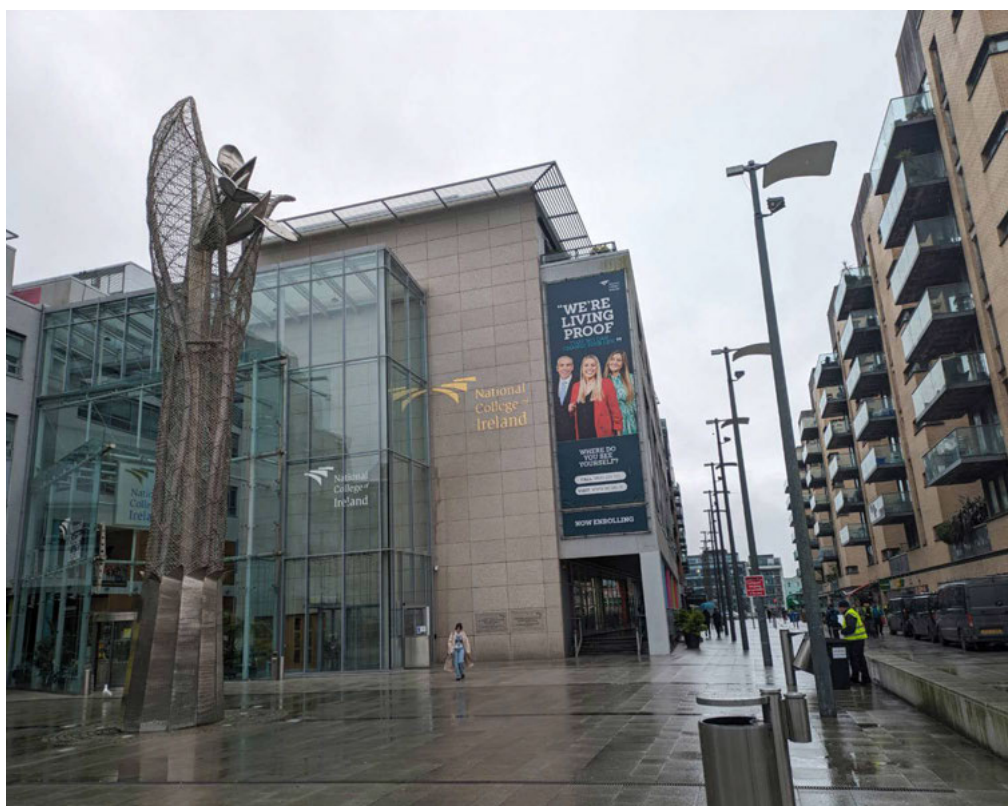
that was funded by the National Early Years Access Initiative in 2011 called the Docklands Early Numeracy Programme. This embedded early numeracy into all ELI programmes, in response to the insights of our Home Visitors. In 2014 as part of the national Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme, Home Visitors, in collaboration with the local PHNs, developed the ABC 0-2 Programme, and now through Sláintecare, they have integrated it into the national Community Families Programme. Subsequently they developed the Home from Home and Stretch Graduate Programmes. Since 2016, they have been involved with the NEIC Initiative, the critical incident group, and other relevant local networks.

As conflict, trauma and violence increased in the area, they incorporated Restorative Practice, Trauma Informed Practice and Infant Mental Health into their engagement with families. With the increase in waiting lists for assessments and services for children with a disability, our Home Visiting Team applied for Toy Show funding for the Parenting365 programme, which supports families with children with additional needs. In 2022/23, 64 families engaged in the Parenting365 programme, with one parent saying, *‘For the first time I didn’t feel alone. I learnt a lot about different needs. It’s been amazing talking to the staff and learning their experiences.’* Through the Home Visiting Alliance, Dublin’s Inner City Home Visitors have been involved in the development of the national approach to home visiting as part of the First 5 agenda,¹³ as well as a Home Visiting Feasibility Study and Data Framework which will inform the Government’s vision for home visiting, shaping its delivery at both local and national level for the foreseeable future.

¹¹ Josephine Bleach, “Parents’ Voices through the COVID-19 Pandemic, Family Wellbeing and Home Education,” *Education Matters Year Book* (blog), 2021, <https://irelandseducationyearbook.ie/downloads/IEYB2021/YB2021-Primary-13.pdf>.

¹² Bleach, “Community Action Research in Ireland: Improving Educational Outcomes through Collaboration in the Dublin Docklands.”

¹³ Government of Ireland, “About First5,” Gov.ie, September 28, 2023, <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/5d81e-about-first5/?referrer=https://first5.gov.ie/>.



NCI building located in the NEIC. Credit: Cherise Boraski

CONCLUSION: HOW TO BUILD ON THIS SUCCESS

As a third level institution founded by the Jesuits, social justice is at the heart of what NCI does. When NCI established ELI, parents told us, *‘I love my child. I want them to do well but I don’t know how.’*¹⁴ Figuring out this ‘how’ in an ever-changing context is what Home Visitors and parents, supported by NCI, do together. Offering a listening ear and compassionate voice, while promoting the dignity, autonomy, and responsibility of children and parents for their own learning, decisions, and lives, is central to the Home Visitors’ role. Collaborating with Government, partner organisations and colleagues to support families and create high-achieving positive learning communities, where everyone works together to enable children to thrive, is an essential element of ELI’s Home Visiting Programmes. Our community action research processes support reflection on experience and

practice; and the collection of data to measure progress, assess impact, develop theories and address emerging needs. Together with Government and our partners, ELI’s Home Visiting Team have helped create a more just, humane and supportive community in Dublin’s Inner City that is responsive to the needs of its most vulnerable population, while advocating for positive systemic change.

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity, adapt to challenges, and recover from setbacks. While Dublin City Council workers cleaned up the streets after the riots and restored the physical space, Home Visitors were addressing the emotional and mental trauma experienced by children and families and supporting them to recover from these awful events. Over the weeks and months following the violent incidents, families came into the safe space of NCI to celebrate togetherness and our resilience at the Rummikub Competition (N=70), Christmas Party (N=250), Parenting365 (N=20) and STEM Play and Learn events (N=53). Quietly

¹⁴ Dartington Social Research Unit, “National College of Ireland Early Learning for Children in North Docklands: Report of Findings.”

in homes and organisations all over Dublin's Inner City, restorative conversations were being held on how we can support each other to move forward and create better brighter futures for our children and community.

Immigration, homelessness, and the influx of refugees are key issues in Ireland today. In Dublin's Inner City, we have dealt with these issues for years and have created, despite the impression given during the riots, an inclusive community, where agencies work together to welcome and support the indigenous population as well as the newcomers from all nationalities, creeds and cultures.

Home visiting has been key to creating an open-minded, tolerant, welcoming learning environment by offering supportive wrap-around services for children and parents living in our neighbourhood. For families, who are socially isolated and excluded, home visiting gives them a sense of solidarity and community in terms of knowing they are not alone in the challenges they are facing. Nobody knows what the future holds for our society, but with Government and partners' support, our Home Visitors will rise to these challenges and continue to support families in Dublin's Inner City to ensure that children in our community, no matter who they are or where they come from, thrive in education, career, and life. The power of home visiting to forge connections within a community is explained by a member of our Home Visiting team:

Having been reared and worked in the inner city, I feel with working with migrant families that I have learned and understood more about migrants' culture and values which has changed my perspective, so while they benefit from the working with the Home Visitors, we also benefit from working with the families too. ELI is a doorway into the community for many families.

The biggest challenge for ELI, our Home Visiting team and our partner NEIC prevention and early intervention services is securing the funding to meet the existing and increasing complex needs of children and families in the area. With no committed

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The image that comes to mind as we make the rounds of public servants, both local and national, is that of the Little Red Hen, continuously being told, “Not I”. Luckily, to date, with support from our amazing partners and supporters, we have been able to do it ourselves, but it is tough going trying to meet the diverse emerging needs of marginalised children and families without adequate secure multi-annual funding.

multi-annual funding, it is very hard to plan sustainable services and provide security to both families and professionals delivering services. While the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Tusla and NEIC are very supportive to ELI, they are reliant on annual State funding and cannot commit beyond the calendar year. The image that comes to mind as we make the rounds of public servants, both local and national, is that of the Little Red Hen, continuously being told, “Not I”. Luckily, to date, with support from our amazing partners and supporters, we have been able to do it ourselves, but it is tough going trying to meet the diverse emerging needs of marginalised children and families without adequate secure multi-annual funding. We call on Government, both local and national, to take responsibility for the wellbeing of our community and adequately resource essential services, such as ELI's Home Visiting Programme, for the most at-risk children and families in vulnerable communities. Otherwise, the community will have few resources and little resilience to respond to incidents such as those on Thursday 23rd November 2024.

Humans of North-East Inner-City

Adrienne



Adrienne works in ELI and has been a Parent-child plus Home Visitor for 16 years. Born in the NEIC and raising her own family here. Credit: Cherise Boraski

I went there for the whole day, and it didn't matter where you went, it's just everybody was together. We don't have playgrounds here anymore, and they need to actually change them for children with additional needs. I mean, they need to be catered for nowadays, say, like children with additional needs have these types of toys or these types of objects that you can climb on and things like that that are more sensory aware. We run the Parent 365, a program that is run for families with children on the spectrum that either have a diagnosis or don't. It's a safe space for them to come once a week because there's no judgements. Because we would probably have a little background on if a child becomes triggered or overwhelmed or stuff like that. So what we always hear back from the parent is, 'I don't feel as if I'm being judged when I walk in here because if the child becomes overwhelmed and he's overstimulated. Like everybody just backs off and lets the parent work where there's no judgements. We also have access to the sensory room here. So the parent, if they choose to bring the child off, they regulate themselves. If they want to come back in, they come back in. If they don't, it's fine. Come back in, come back the next week. But then we offer supports too to the parents through Zoom calls so that they can learn other information or even self-care for themselves. And I know the NEIC runs in East Wall; they have groups, too, but they're not everywhere in all of Dublin. So there's an awful lot of children being left out.'

'One of my favourite memories was from when we had playgrounds in the area where I grew up. That was Sherrard Street and Brígids Gardens. We actually had; it was kind of divided back then. You had the girl's playground and the boy's playground. But the best thing about the summer months was you were out from early morning till the last thing at night and the furthest you went was either you played in the gardens, you played in the playgrounds or then you either went on outings with the people who ran the clubs, you would've went to Portmarnock for the day. You would've went to Bray for the day.'

Community education and the NEIC

Dr Tom O'Brien

Dr Tom O'Brien is the Manager of Community After Schools Project (CASPr) based in the North East Inner City. Tom was awarded his PhD from Maynooth University in addiction treatment in young people in 2004



CASPr staff meeting with Pascal Donohoe. Credit: CASPr

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

I am an adult and community educator working in the North-East Inner-City (NEIC). In this article I will explore some of the challenges and opportunities facing this community in the context of my work as manager of the Community After Schools Project (CASPr).

The NEIC of Dublin has a rich and complex history, marked by various social, economic, and cultural changes over the centuries. The NEIC was once the home to many of Dublin's political and social elites, many of whom lived in the elegant Georgian houses that surrounded Mountjoy Square, Gardiner St and Gloucester St. The Act of Union (1801) unintentionally transformed the area, as the elites vacated Dublin for London, leaving behind what became Tenement Dublin and some of the worst slums in Europe. This transformation was intensified by the Great Famine, which drove starving people from the West of Ireland to Dublin's North Inner City. Both of these events transformed this part of

Dublin from a place for the rich and powerful, to a place for the poor and dispossessed. Tenement Dublin became synonymous with overcrowding, unsanitary living conditions and widespread poverty and disease.¹

In Tenement Dublin, the Docks was the main source of employment, until container shipping replaced manual labour and the NEIC was hit by the problems of high unemployment and alcoholism, Ireland's first drug problem. Drug problems usually require the fertile soil of human suffering to take root. Drugs provide people with a way to manage the suffering associated with alienation² and a lack of recognition.³ Karl Marx theorised how the working class become cut off from themselves as they are forced to serve the interests of the elite classes. In the words of Jim Larkin, *'The great appear great, because we are on our*

1 Kevin Corrigan Kearns, *Dublin Tenement Life*. (Dublin: Gill, 1996)

2 Gajo Petrovic, "Marx's Theory of Alienation," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (1963): pp. 419-426.

3 Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*. (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1996)



It seems the poor, dispossessed and powerless are the last to have their voice heard and their needs met in a neoliberal world that values profits over humans.

RETURNING TO THE NORTH-EAST INNER-CITY

In the early nineties, I found myself living in an iconic building, the convent on Sean McDermott St., the location to a Magdalene Laundry. The Laundry was still operating at that time, and I got to know some of the women unjustly incarcerated there. The Magdalene Laundry was one of many Irish institutions that worked on behalf of the State to cleanse the unwanted, rebellious, delinquent or insane.⁵

At the time I was a member of a new Salesian Community that established a presence on Sean McDermott St. in 1992. The Salesians were an Italian religious order founded by Don Bosco, whose mission was to work with young people on the edges of society. The drug problem was emerging at the time and we were in a position to partner with the community to establish the Crinan Youth Project, a specialised service for young people dependent on substances. I left the Salesian community in 1999, but returned to Sean McDermott St. to complete my PhD research on medical power and addiction treatment for young people.⁶

Paula was the first teenager I knew who used heroin. Drug use became her way to distract, soothe, and comfort herself, from the pains of her life, until one day there was no more pain and she was gone. She became a statistic in the failed war on drugs that continues to be waged on the streets of the NEIC today.

knees. *Let us rise*.⁴ Later the German Political Philosopher, Axel Honneth, saw humans in a struggle for recognition on three levels: legal, social, and relational. When these fundamental needs are not met, we experience what he calls 'disrespect'. Poverty, exclusion, racism, sexism or unemployment are forms of disrespect. The continued alienation and disrespect experienced by people of the NEIC in the eighties and nineties, opened the door to a new and more deadly drug problem, one associated with heroin, a drug problem that continues to inflict enormous suffering on the North-East Inner-City today. Both Marx and Honneth would argue that heroin users are in a struggle for recognition and search to overcome their sense of alienation.

The most recent history of the NEIC has been reshaped by new social, cultural and economic changes. The growth of the financial services centre or 'IFSC' has seen an enormous increase of wealth being traded and exchanged within the NEIC. New apartment blocks and gated communities are rising up to create a new skyline alongside the local and historical communities, many of whom feel left behind. These changes are taking place against the backdrop of years of austerity in response to the economic collapse that stripped this community of many vital services and supports. Despite being one of the richest countries in the world (at least on paper), the government is unable to provide housing to everyone who needs a safe and secure place to live. This is not surprising since the housing crisis can be traced to a legacy of political corruption and the fallacy that the market will deliver housing for all.

Finally, there is the rise in immigration and our inability to provide accommodation to asylum seekers and refugees, many of them living on Gardiner St. It seems the poor, dispossessed and powerless are the last to have their voice heard and their needs met in a neoliberal world that values profits over humans. The rising tide has not lifted all boats equally within the NEIC and in that vacuum the community has always organised itself to fight for all humans of the NEIC, equally and fairly.

4 Rory McConville and Paddy Lynch, *Big Jim: Jim Larkin and the 1913 Lockout* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2013), 82.

5 Mark Coen, Katherine O'Donnell, and Maeve O'Rourke, *A Dublin Magdalene Laundry: Donnybrook and Church-State Power in Ireland* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023)

6 Tom O'Brien, "Discourses in Drug Treatment. Exploring the meaning of drug treatment in the Crinan Youth Project". (PhD Thesis. Maynooth University, 2004)

THE COMMUNITY AFTER SCHOOLS PROJECT

Having managed addiction services for many years, I now find myself managing a service with a focus on children from the NEIC. I quickly realised these children are the sponges of the trauma that addiction spreads from one generation to the next. Early intervention in their lives, through transformative experiences may nudge them towards a safer pathway.

The Community After Schools Project (CASPr) is a community based organisation that aims to provide educational support to children, parents and other adults in order to tackle educational inequality in the NEIC. Our children's services include a crèche in Sean McDermott St. for 15 children and two after school projects catering for 70 children daily. We have a long waiting list for both after school projects. There are an estimated 1,800 primary school children in the NEIC and only a fraction of those have access to after school programmes. The adult education service offers courses in Early Years Education, Learning to Learn and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Our new adult and community education strategy aims to provide new services to parents in the form of one to one support and advocacy, as well as workshops and short courses.

At the heart of CASPr is a group of staff and voluntary board members deeply committed to educational equality and services for children from the NEIC. CASPr was established in 1995 during a period of organic blossoming of community projects in the NEIC, supported by a powerful network of people under the umbrella of the Inner City Organisations Network (ICON), led by Fergus McCabe and many others. The drug problem was deepening, people were dying and there was a fear associated with increased crime and the spread of HIV through

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Children are the sponges of the trauma that addiction spreads from one generation to the next.

intravenous drug use. So the government invested in the community infrastructure and services for children, youth, addiction, education, and community. However, since austerity measures were introduced, funding remains insecure on an annual basis and insufficient to meet the needs of this community.

While mainstream services like schools, hospitals, and social work do excellent work, many people fall through the net. In the NEIC community services have always evolved and responded to catch those falling through the net and provide local spaces to connect with people. The NEIC has a long history of community development connecting people to each other and to a local infrastructure that they come to depend on.

CONNECTION IS KEY

I am in primary school. It's 1979 and my teacher, Mr. Sherlock, notices me staring out the classroom window. 'Would you like to go outside and have a closer look?' he asked. 'Yes, Sir, I would'. I replied. So, I proceeded to leave the classroom and then the school building to make my way up to the horizon where the football pitch was situated. I sat there looking back down on the school that had now shrunk in size. When the bell rang, I returned to class, and never remember looking out the window again. Mr. Sherlock had connected with me, with empathy, compassion, and respect. Looking out the window for me was a self-soothing ritual, to avoid the stress of having to concentrate as well as the need to avoid how I was feeling. Our primary need is to connect with each other.

Sometimes just being a child can be traumatic, but if you live in the NEIC, that trauma is multiplied as children risk being exposed to violence, death, abuse, neglect, hunger, and exploitation. Trauma is then played out through various behaviours in school, at home and on the street.⁷ Too many young people get sucked into drugs as their preferred way to manage the fear that lies at the heart of how they are feeling. Many young people fall

⁷ Dalma Fabian, "Lifelong Harm of Trauma and Homelessness," *Working Notes* 32, no. 83 (2019): 4-10.



Community After Schools Project Awards. Credit: CASPr

between the cracks as they try to navigate the transition into secondary school. Local Youth Services like the SWAN, Crinan or LYCS have played a vital role in keeping many of these young people connected.

My transition to secondary school was a rough one, that involved a lot of ‘mitching’ from school, and hiding in pool halls and handball allies. I was sixteen when I sat and failed my leaving certificate. Labelled a school failure, ‘educationally disadvantaged’, I wasn’t bothered because I didn’t have many didactic experiences of education, except for the one constructed by Mr. Sherlock. Education didn’t make much sense to me, as it didn’t connect with my world in any real and meaningful way. This is the experience of many thousands of young people who are classified as ‘educationally disadvantaged’, for leaving school early or for failing their Leaving Certificate.

Though I left school at 16, with only 4 passes in my leaving certificate, I had completed a PhD by the age of 36. Schools do great work and play an important role in our lives but for many it’s a painful experience. I was fortunate to find my passion and return to education as an adult. However, many remain scared by their experience in school and remain educationally disadvantaged throughout their lives.

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Educational disadvantage is a way to describe the systematic fractures in our educational system that allows too many to fall through the cracks and leave school early.

Educational disadvantage is a way to describe the systematic fractures in our educational system that allows too many to fall through the cracks and leave school early. Most of the research suggests that remaining in school increases your chances of going to further and higher education, securing higher paid employment and sustaining better health for longer.

Education is key, but it must unlock access for everyone equally. Where you are born and your parents’ employment history will significantly influence your chances of staying in school and doing well or not. If you are born in the NEIC your chances of doing well in education or employment are already negatively impacted.

A lot is being done in schools to reduce educational disadvantage, but unless we address the systemic inequalities in our neoliberal society, little will change at the macro level.

Too often we seek to address systemic failures, by covering the cracks and silencing those who speak up and out against the failings of our state. The education system itself is a legacy from the industrial revolution, that aims to produce a compliant workforce, for the owners, controllers and political elite who benefit from structural inequality.

The popular idea of formal education and raising educational outcomes as a way out of disadvantage is not true.⁸ It is more challenging for disadvantaged children to engage in education and achieve curriculum outcomes compared to their better off peers. The hidden curriculum with its unwritten rules and expectations of the dominant culture, makes it more difficult for children from disadvantaged communities to thrive in school. Schools provide an advantage to those already advantaged by their cultural capital and established security as beneficiaries of the status quo.

The Brazilian philosopher of education, Paulo Freire also outlined how schools are not places of social liberation but centres for what he called ‘banking education’ that act to maintain the status quo and place of marginalised groups.⁹ Giroux¹⁰ calls for educators to connect the classroom knowledge to the experiences, histories and social worlds of students, making learning more immersive and relevant. To my delight some of these concepts are making their way into the Early Years Education curriculum.¹¹

PEDAGOGY BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

New to the childcare sector when I arrived at CASPr, I was excited to realise that the term ‘Early Years Educators’ had replaced the traditional term ‘Childcare Workers’ acknowledging the evolution of the sector. Our staff are educators, not childminders.

8 Michael Grenfell, Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts (Durham: Acumen, 2008)

9 Paulo Freire, *A Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin Random House, 1970)

10 Henry Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy* (London: Continuum Publishing, 2011)

11 “Aistear and Siolta Practice Guide,” Aistear and Siolta, accessed online 2nd April 2024., <https://www.aistearsiolta.ie/en/introduction/>

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Why should children have to accept the assumptions of the world they inherit?

I was also excited to realise that at the heart of CASPr was a pedagogical approach. CASPr draws inspiration from Freire’s work within our adult and community education service, within the limitations of the systems that fund our programmes. He argues for a different type of pedagogy, one based on dialogue rather than monologue.¹² Supporting our staff to think critically and reflectively prepares them to engage children in the same process. Why should children have to accept the assumptions of the world they inherit? CASPr works to nurture their imagination, inspire their creativity and protect their hope. Providing children with transformative experiences can influence the direction they take in life.

CASPr’s pedagogical approach is framed within ‘Aistear and Siolta’. Aistear is the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2009a) and Siolta, is the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (2006) both of which are used together within CASPr to develop a high quality curriculum that supports the children’s learning and development.

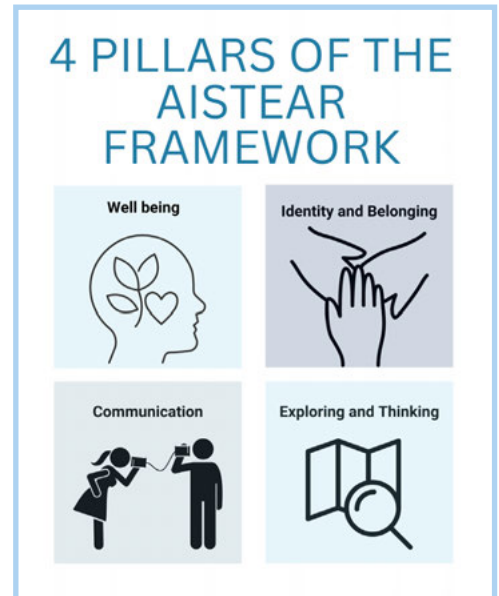


Figure 1: Four Pillars of the Aistear Framework

12 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.



The world is a better place with children that feel safe, nurtured and who are flourishing.

CASPr prioritises the formation of nurturing relationships, that are trauma informed and child centred. The work of Stephen Bavolek¹³ reflects the essence of what CASPr is trying to achieve, i.e., nurturing emotional relationships. Many children who attend our services are exposed to community violence, fragile family structures and inconsistent nurturing, leaving them traumatised and hurt. Empathy and the development of secure relationships is at the heart of the work of CASPr. Keeping them safe and secure is important of course, nurturing them with engaging and fun activities makes the experience enjoyable, but making the children feel loved, special and unique is where we focus most of our attention.

The After Schools Project provides an important mental and emotional break from school, which is by design more competitive and demanding. Having fun in a less structured environment in turn makes the school experience less stressful, knowing that is only part of their day. In this way CASPr acknowledges that the children exist, according to Urie Bronfenbrenner, within a series of systems he calls Ecological Systems, the child being the microsystem, situated within family, community, cultural, economic and political systems.¹⁴ As the children who attend our service are from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, this awareness supports the child to understand that life is not black and white, but layered beautifully as each child is unique and different. Each child can be a teacher for the next, each learning from the other and so on. The world is a better place with children that feel safe, nurtured and who are flourishing.

CONCLUSION

A lot has changed since CASPr was established in 1995. Today we face old and new challenges. We have an ongoing major drugs problem in the NEIC, with significant annual drug related deaths, progression routes to prison rather than university, the rise in territorial gang violence, the economic crash, austerity, homelessness, a rise in immigration, Covid and the Dublin riots. These are issues that affect the population the length and breadth of Ireland, but are particularly concentrated in the NEIC for historical and cultural reasons.

The Early Years Education sector has also been transformed during the same period with multiple support agencies and funders now involved, along with significant regulations with oversight from TUSLA inspectorate and compliance obligations under the Charity Regulatory Authority. However, there are significant challenges recruiting Early Years Educators and their pay and conditions do not reflect the value of their work and the important role they play in society.

The NEIC is a better place because of the community organisations like CASPr and the work they do for and on behalf of the citizens. The State is not able to solve these problems alone. The most effective and sustainable solutions are born out of trusting relationships between the state, civil society and the people. There is a need to restore trust in each other and work together to make the NEIC a just and equal community for everyone. This will require investment in anti-poverty approaches, built on participatory democracy and a shift away from neoliberal practices. CASPr plays a small role in that process and will continue to fight for and to advocate for the children of the NEIC.

¹³ Steven Bavolek & Fran Kaplan, *Nurturing Parenting Programs. Program Implementation Manual and Resource Guide* (Asheville, NC & Park City, UT: Family Development Resources, 2007)

¹⁴ Urie Bronfenbrenner, "Towards an experimental ecology of human development," *American Psychologist* 32, no 7(1977): 513-531.

Humans of North-East Inner-City

Amy



Amy Cooney is a ELI Parent plus worker, born and raised in NEIC ©Cherise Boraski

I genuinely didn't know what I wanted to do with life when I came outta school. I saw a job opportunity, went to work in retail, done that for a couple of years, ended up not knowing what else to do. I was like, I don't know what to do. I got a community employment scheme in childcare. Found that I got a grá, a love for childcare. Working in the community crèche, I thought, what can I give back to my community that they gave me for, like, so much of my childhood? Even though some of it was awkward and odd, my community really did give me that little bit of saving help, like the clubs, the youth clubs, the bits and the bobs. Fast forward to maybe I'm 26/27, going to a private crèche. I hated it. Totally hated it. It was in the same community. It was actually totally different. The love wasn't

there. It was money, money, money. To me, it was a business. Whereas the community was the love, the love, the love. I ended up there and found out I was having me own baby. He's now 10 this October.

Getting to be a ma changed everything with me. I looked at the area more. How can this area work for me, for my child? I thought about moving down to the country. Would my child be better off in the country, in the suburbs? Would it be better in the city? Thank God I chose the city because I love the city. We are such city people. He, same as me, went to the community Crèche; the community Crèche taught him so much. What he is today wasn't only me. It was down to the Crèche and the people of this area. This area raised him and raised me as much as anything. Like my community it's perceived bad. It's not bad. Everywhere we go is bad. Everywhere we go is good, but just come and judge yourself and don't listen to anyone else's judgment because it's what you make of an area that the area makes of you. Really and truly, like, you have to become part of the community. Get to know your community. Don't be afraid of your community. And every question you ask your community is not a stupid question. It's probably a question that somebody wanted to know and was afraid to ask.

Stretched to the Limit: Policing in Dublin's North- East Inner-City

Dr Eunan Dolan

Eunan Dolan has over 40 years of experience with An Garda Síochána, finishing his career as a Detective Superintendent at Store Street station in the North-East Inner-City. He completed a professional doctorate at the University of Portsmouth in 2016.



Garda Irish police cars outside the GPO in O'Connell Street. ©iStock-1294573364

INTRODUCTION

Policing has many different and specialised functions such as one sees in police procedural dramas on television or one reads about in books. This article is not about that type of policing, rather it is about the mundane policing of foot patrols and community engagement which is, in fact, what the vast majority of policing actually is. This article is informed by research I carried out in the mid-2010s, when also working as a serving police officer. This article attempts to show how policing in Dublin's North-East Inner-City is perceived by the residents and businesses in the area. It is set out as follows - a short description of the NEIC followed by a theoretical discussion of policing as a public service. I will then present a select number of views and opinions on the policing of the area from the police themselves and the various communities in the area. These interviews will be used to give as representative a view as possible in a short article. Finally, issues raised in the interviews will then be explored and discussed further in the closing section.

POLICING AS A PUBLIC SERVICE

The NEIC of Dublin presents the Garda Síochána with a significant policing challenge.

The city centre is a cultural landmark; the site of protests and marches; an area with a very high footfall of pedestrians; and a hub for transport routes with all the traffic this entails, both public and private, running through it. Within the boundaries of Dublin Postal District 1, all facets of modern urban life can be observed from extreme poverty to extreme wealth.

It will be assumed that fairness and equity are necessary for the provision by the State of a public good such as policing. It is against this backdrop that this article sets out to assess the perception of the fairness or otherwise of the distribution of policing as a public good in the north inner city of Dublin by the communities in the area and, if this distribution can be explained by the effect of external power on the Garda Síochána policing the area. This article is premised on the concept that external power, though intangible, has an effect on how policing is carried out. It will be argued that this power resides primarily in groups with the most social capital. Power is a capacity whose workings are not easily observed. However, the existence of external power can be deduced from the outcomes achieved by certain groups in society.

Policing in the north inner city raises issues of fairness, proportionality and justice for the police managers in the area. They have to deal with huge demands on the service in an era of increasing resource shortages initially caused by the austerity programmes of the early 2000s. Conditions of all public sector workers suffered as a result of this austerity which, it would appear, has led to public jobs being less attractive to prospective job seekers thereby exacerbating the resource shortage. Shortages in other public services such as health are often very visible due to the much published issue of patients on trollies in emergency wards. However, such shortages in policing as a public good are not so apparent especially in the short term. Policing is part of what Barlow and Hickman-Barlow describe as the “political economy whereby political and economic institutions are integrally intertwined.”¹ This leads them to claim that “the methods by which the police seek to secure the social order are largely shaped by a particular character of the political economy in operation at that time.”²

Academic research has indicated that the delivery of a police service is circumscribed by external power. That power may be embedded in the structure of Western society which, Brogden and Ellison contend, is divided in a way that affects policing because “...such societies [are] characterised by deep structural and (increasing) economic inequalities exacerbated by the fiscal crisis,”³ which begs the question ‘how can the police act, other than to sustain these fissures?’ Manning has questioned the function of public policing by asking: “if democracy rests on equality, justice and basic rights and responsibilities what role do the police play in shaping them?”⁴

As power is an abstract concept, it is hard to quantify it in any meaningful way. Morriss describes that the effects of power can be shown by decisions made or not made (in this case by local Garda Management) explore

whose agenda benefits?⁵ This is the only way that a comparison of the relative power of different groups power can be gauged. Therefore, how policing as a public good is delivered could be an indication of the relative power of the different groups that make up communities of the north inner city and, as a consequence, explain, to some extent, how policing is delivered.

VIEWS ON POLICING IN THE NEIC

An Garda Síochána Staff

The dilemma faced by police managers in the NEIC is basically how the policing resources are allocated to both the business area of the city and the residents. In order to assess this distribution, quotations⁶ are taken from the author’s professional doctoral research.⁷

A senior police manager describes policing in the NEIC as:

“a competition between doing the right thing on the ground in terms of policing and doing what is required and what is expected. Some of it is probably coming from outside, they are probably responding to some of the media reports and the subsequent questioning by politicians –you know- that suggest.... that the likes of O’Connell Street is unsafe...The engagement by the police is quite significant... There have been over 14,800 stop and searches within the area over the last eleven-and-a-half months, which is a huge figure. So there is no doubt there is a consistent engagement with people who are engaging in, whether it is drug-treatment, drug-taking, or drug-buying and whatever is going on up there...The pressure comes on the police to deal with a problem that is not a policing issue, there are elements to it, the drug dealing, absolutely, and that must be dealt with, but the underlying issue here is, not a police issue, but we are

1 David E. Barlow and Melissa Hickman Barlow, ‘A Political Economy of Community Policing’, *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management* 22, no. 4 (1999): 646.

2 Barlow and Hickman Barlow, 647.

3 Graham Ellison and Mike Brogden, *Policing in an Age of Austerity: A Postcolonial Perspective* (Wolverhampton: Routledge, 2013), 104.

4 Peter K. Manning, *Democratic Policing in a Changing World* (London: Paradigm Publishers, 2010), 104.

5 Peter Morriss, *Power: A Philosophical Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

6 These quotations are representative of the research and in line with the findings

7 Eunan Dolan, ‘An Exploratory Study to Assess Perceptions of the Power Dividend: Does External Power Affect the Fairness of Public Policing in Dublin’s North Inner City’ (Professional Doctorate Thesis, Portsmouth, University of Portsmouth, 2016).

still under pressure to deal with it, above everything else, we get the pressure to deal with...Provide a unilateral policing response, which went against my better judgement, I would prefer not to have done it... I know that wasn't going to solve the problem. It was going to solve the problem, for me, in my local area and for some of the businesses in my local area and God -knows they deserved a bit of relief from it. Absolutely I make no bones about that, but it came to the point where either I was going to be removed, the Super around here were going to be removed.... At some stage someone was going to look for a scapegoat for this.... Despite the fact that the evidence showed it was not a police problem”⁸

A different senior police officer describes how they approach policing in the area, apparently equating low level problems in one area with serious crime incidents in another:

“The problems in O’Connell Street are very low level, low impact stuff - it is not major stuff. But whereas if you look at the other side of the district, where there has been literally a huge number of murders over a period of time, ... Whether it is a career influencing situation - if I didn’t cover O’Connell Street, you know, I would argue, if I didn’t do the same in Sheriff Street, and if there was an increase in major crime down there then the same could be said for that as well.”

A Garda describes why they think they are on the beat:

“in O’Connell Street and all the areas uptown, because people from so-called good areas of Dublin or Ireland go through there, and people like that have the influence in the country, they don’t want to see drug dealers or drug addicts hanging around in the streets. Whereas nobody has any real reason to visit Sheriff Street, nobody cares what goes on there”

⁸ At the time of this interview a policing operation named Operation Boardwalk was underway. Operation Boardwalk was an operation designed to provide increased high-visibility patrolling of the Liffey Boardwalk, Bachelor’s Walk and Eden Quay.

A clerical officer in the police station:

“Correspondence from the businesses would go directly to the superintendent and they themselves would draft a reply, whilst other correspondence will be sent to a sergeant and the superintendent would not see it, unless it was about a particularly serious matter.”

This divide, at a bureaucratic level, seems to represent an inbuilt bias towards a certain section of the community “because the business community have a louder voice.” This interviewee continued to describe the process by which this happens:

“... for the businesses, they would normally be thrown to the superintendent to look at” (referring to post trays in the district office) “for the other people, it would go more to the inspectors to be sent to a sergeant, but the superintendent would rarely see these letters.”

Business Owners and Representatives

The views of the business community include those of representatives and former representatives of city centre business organisations and the views of an independent small business owner. A prominent figure in the business community was able to describe the Garda response to problems in the O’Connell Street area as “excellent”. Whilst a CEO of a city centre business organisation, describing Garda operations in the city centre uses the words: “excellent” and “very successful”. This interviewee was able to say that “I think that what we have to say does feed into the decision-making process”. This person envisaged their organisation as having a future role in changing legislation on begging.

A CEO of another business organisation describes having discussions with senior officers in a very “frank manner” when they were “pushing very hard for something like Spire” (Operation Spire was a previous Garda Operation focussed on O’Connell Street. At the time this research was being carried out, a different operation named Operation Boardwalk was under way with basically the same aims). The interviewee said that they had “a part in getting Operation Spire under way.”



Dublin's Spire ©iStock-1294573364



Personal access by a certain class of person to senior Garda management could have an effect on the deployment of Garda resources.

Describing ‘Operation Spire’, this interviewee used the words “*bloody marvellous.*” A small business owner also deems ‘Operation Spire’s a success, whilst describing the situation that gave rise to it, as “*scandalous.*”

The powerful elite in Ireland is comprised of people, who, amongst other things, “play golf together”.⁹ The “other things” referred to may be the social opportunities some people have in society not available to everyone, when they refer to having: “*spoken to senior ranks ... in a very frank manner.*” This person also said that “*it would be rare to launch full attacks at public meetings.*” The implication of this is that personal access by a certain class of person to senior Garda management could have an effect on the deployment of Garda resources.

⁹ Perry Share, Mary P. Corcoran, and Hilary Tovey, *A Sociology of Ireland*, 4th ed. (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2012), 95.

Community Representatives

Meanwhile, an anti-drug worker had this to say:

“They will use the media and every politician that they can. Then we cop... The guards are up there for the business community because the business community, they have bigger voices... They get more attention than we do, as community people I believe... it doesn’t matter if it is true or not, in our story, in our belief we feel that the Gardaí give more time to the business community because they have access to TDs, city councillors, media... that they use. We have the same access but we don’t use that access.”

A community activist was very forthcoming about how they perceived policing in their community:

“Some people would refer to it as selective policing, I would describe it as reactive policing in that, the policing presence now and I suppose looking at the last ten to twelve years, particularly in Sheriff Street/ Seville Place area, is practically non-existent, unless... there is a shooting

or some serious incident. Policing has been on an invisible scale. There has been a level of non-policing. It is the old – ‘left to their own devices situation’... It has become kind of endemic now by kids that are... two, three, four, five years of age – six...are looking at the damage that is being done on a daily basis by the thirteen, fourteen, fifteen-year-olds, and it has become a kind of cycle now, especially, in the Sheriff Street stretch. You can do anything you want to do, to whoever you want to, what you want - there will be no comeback. There will be no charge either police wise or Dublin City Council wise...The case we put forward at that meeting and the pleas that we made went nowhere and there was huge anger.... We weren’t surprised, the attitude is a sure, ah fuck, it is only Sheriff Street... That police don’t give a fuck!”

A professional in the area describes how, school children were exposed to drug dealing on the way to school:

“Very hard to keep our enrolments up... The policing situation is having an impact on it because, drug-selling is so open here, and it is so open. I was coming back from a meeting and a parent of one of the pupils in school, he said: ‘hi-ya [teacher’s name] as he was selling drugs to somebody, to some young girl. It is just like they are passing some milk or borrowing sugar...because I think it is Sheriff Street. I think there is a group kind of attitude by everyone in society that we should just be left; we are reckless, we are lawless down here, but these were four-year-old children... Someone could have died here... I don’t think that would be happening in the better off areas...I don’t know if there is a bigger plan in action... We are prime real estate here... Is there something bigger at play...? And the letting the place go down in a state of chaos, and then say, it is better just to move things out and break down the community, and send it off in different directions, schools and housing.”

A youth worker’s comment encapsulates the problem and a part of the solution:

“Visibility of guards would act as a deterrent to some young people. Any kind of visible presence that says you can’t get away with this, you know, everybody knows at the end of the day you won’t get away with it. But the young people don’t see that. They see... made two-hundred quid today, or maybe three-hundred quid today... will make the same tomorrow.”

The on-street issues in Dublin’s north inner city are the results of years of neglect and a failure of other agencies to deal with the issues of poverty, drug addiction and homelessness. The situation facing the Gardaí in the NEIC could be described, as Bittner puts it, “almost anything can be constructed as a police problem”¹⁰ and, as James further comments that “[t]he police deliver a wide range of services that involve something that ought not be happening and about which someone had better do something now.”¹¹ This could refer to the way the Gardaí try to police the business area.

On the other hand, the policing response to the residential area should be, as Bittner writes, “in almost all instances the police service is a response to citizens’ demands ... this citizen demand is a factor of extraordinary importance for the distribution of a police service and the fact that somebody did call the cops is in itself cause for concern”¹². Conversely, this could describe how the residents perceive the Gardaí’s lack of response to their calls. They are not important enough to really matter.

HOW POLICING RESOURCES ARE ALLOCATED

Basic resource allocation is what is in question here for the police manager. This issue does not involve redistribution rather; it operates in

10 Egon Bittner, ‘Florence Nightingale in Pursuit of Willie Sutton: A Theory of the Police’, in *Aspects of Police Work* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), 233–68.

11 Adrian James, ‘Forward to the Past: Reinventing Intelligence-Led Policing in Britain’, *Police Practice and Research* 15, no. 1 (2013): 1–14.

12 Bittner, ‘Florence Nightingale in Pursuit of Willie Sutton: A Theory of the Police’ cited in Tim Newburn, ed., *Policing: Key Readings* (Devon: Willan Publishing, 2005), 163.

the *pareto optimal*¹³ space of a limited resource. Therefore, decisions about its allocation have to be made. According to the first senior officer quoted above, policing in the north inner city is “*a competition between doing the right thing on the ground in terms of policing and doing what is required and what is expected*”. Policing activity in the previous eleven-and-a-half months (prior to the interview) which involved 14,800 drugs stop and searches was described by them as an area of concern because they believe “*without a shadow of a doubt you are going to break it [human rights]*.”

The officer has fears about taking policing into a risky area regarding the human rights of people in the city centre which arise in the context where, “[t]he pressure comes on the police to deal with the problem that is not a policing issue.” This begs the question - why do the police risk breaching a person’s human rights over an issue that is not essentially a police one? What group of people in society are that powerless that the Garda Síochána can contemplate such an approach?

The type of policing described could fit in with what Robert Reiner describes as the police role in the reproduction of social order.¹⁴ According to Reiner, “general and specific order” are “simultaneously reproduced in all social orders.”¹⁵ The specific order that is reproduced is the “distributions of advantage and power benefiting particular interests.”¹⁶

Dublin’s north inner city has historically been one of the most deprived areas in the city. As it is adjacent to one of the major business areas in the city, there will always be pressure on the Gardaí to adequately police the area in a time of reduced resources. This is a matter completely beyond their own control. However, how they use the resources at their disposal raises basic questions regarding what society expects from their police service. All decisions have consequences, some unintended.

One of the unintended consequences could be that when people from the residential areas travel to the business area they see a huge effort to stamp out anti-social behaviour—drug use, public drinking of alcohol, unruly behaviour and loitering—by the police. They cannot help but notice that these types of behaviours do not attract the same attention in their own residential areas. This can lead to the impression that the police service they receive is one of containment so as to keep the problems where they will not attract too much attention. Even though the consequence is unintended it does not mean that they are unforeseeable and this has been the de facto situation for a very long time. If the perception of some of the people interviewed is that policing of the residential areas of the district is one of containment rather than engagement, then the following outcomes can be expected.

Children’s access to an illicit drug free environment is not possible. There are knock-on effects for their life chances - restricted education opportunities or a pathway to serious crime. As the neglect of these areas continues, the illegal drug industry could become integral to the economy of the area and, as a result, the Gardaí become an economic threat to some in the community thereby making community engagement more difficult and contributing to the unravelling of civil society. The illegal drug world is notorious for its feuds. The north inner city has suffered disproportionately in a much publicised recent feud with a significant number of young men murdered or in jail doing long sentences. Perhaps one of the most insidious effects of containment rather than engagement is the rise of drug debts and intimidation in the community and the devastation this causes families as they struggle to pay off their children’s drug debts.



Children’s access to an illicit drug free environment is not possible.

13 Pareto optimality (also referred to as Pareto efficiency) is a standard often used in economics. It describes a situation where no further improvements to society’s well-being can be made through a reallocation of resources that makes at least one person better off without making someone else worse off.

14 Robert Reiner, ‘Policing a Post-Modern Society’, in *Policing: Key Readings*, ed. Tim Newburn (Devon: Willan Publishing, 2005).

15 Reiner, 166.

16 Reiner, 166.

On the other hand, people have a right and a necessity to make a living, to go about their business in a civilised and safe environment. Failure to adequately police the business area could lead to business closures, loss of jobs and loss of faith in the city as a place to invest in. The city streets are part of our cultural heritage and the Gardaí have a responsibility to ensure that they can be enjoyed by everyone. However, as shown above, there are serious risks attached if an overzealous policing approach is taken that is not cognisant of human rights and a proportionate response.

CONCLUSION

This essay is based on the perceptions of people who are in the police themselves or have interactions with the police. It would be hard to characterise what has been said about policing in the north inner city as being fair, equitable or proportionate. Similarly, it is hard to blame the police in the area for this situation as they are faced with policing without adequate resources to meet all the demands and, at the same time, having to deal with legitimate and powerful demands on its resources.

The solution to this issue of the power differential is a societal challenge that cannot be found in media fear-mongering and political soundbites. Ultimately, it is a question of the type of policing that people want. One based on welfare and justice or one based on the neoliberal ideas of crime control. The former would require a huge cultural shift in Irish society. But what is clear from the interviews is that the police service as a whole, not just the north inner city of Dublin, is ill-equipped to deal with its agenda being set externally.

Humans of North-East Inner-City

Ian



Ian Tracy is an Architect based on North Great George Street for 12 years. Credit: Cherise Boraski

different people over the years. So we had a vegan food critic, we've had web designers, and we had a lovely firm of Spanish / Mexican graphic designers who took up half the front of the studio, and they were lovely, but they also lived on the top floor apartment here. So there's offices downstairs, in the front and here. The basement and the return are apartments. And then there's two apartments above as well. The graphic designers were working here and living upstairs. So we had the most amazing party one Halloween that went through the whole building, but the graphic designers had a little attaché, and we climbed up onto the roof of this building, and we're looking out over this area. So maybe I just like being at height. I dunno. But I'd love it if it stayed as diverse as it is. And I think that is not a cure-all, but I believe it's a significant component of fighting against some of the more endemic social problems we have. That if you can keep people here, keep the diversity of views, give some people a cultural output or the ability to see other people, just that, that mixing of people to keep it at our genes, I think contributes in part, maybe not significantly, I don't know. But I think it's a contributing factor to not just having a nice city to live in but kind of ensuring everyone is seen and helped.

The First building we were in, I think it's still there, but going on to the roof, kind of just as we were moving out the last few days there and just being up on the roof of a building in the city centre and getting to scan around the horizon.

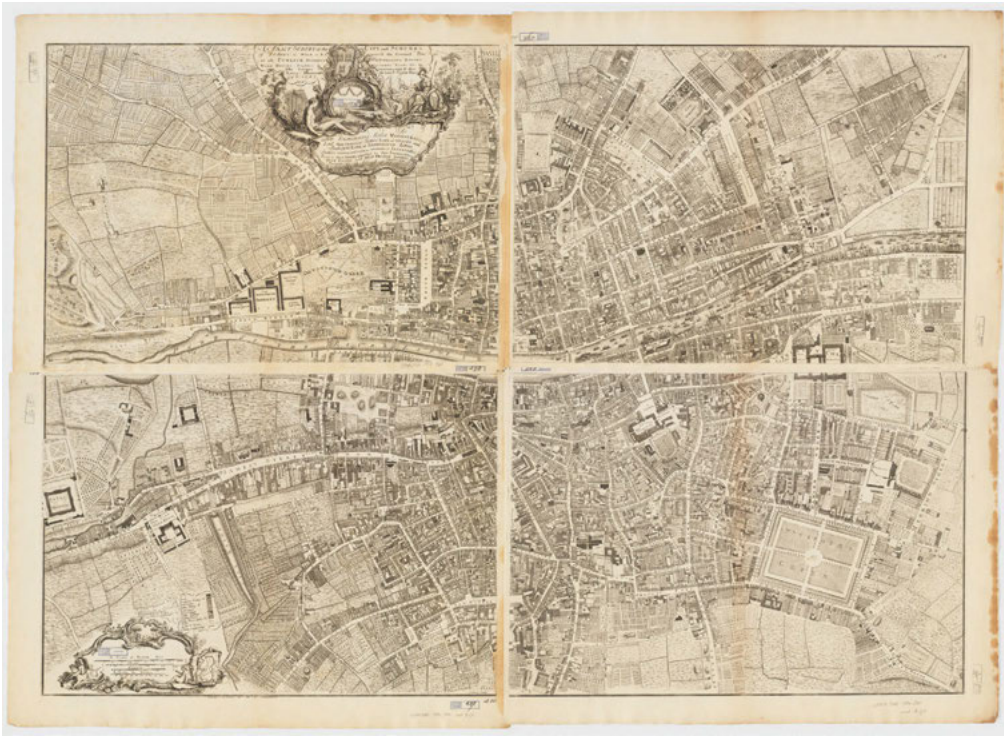
It's quite nice. It's a similar feeling if you're ever in the cafe in Marks and Spencer on Grafton Street. It's really maybe just for architects, I don't know, but like the diversity of roofs and how all the roofs are formatted and built, and it's kind of, you know, 250 years of history in roofs and how they're formatted and built and maintained and how they've changed and adapted. So being up there and getting to look, getting that unusual view of the city centre. And now you've just triggered a memory. So it's all architects here at the moment. But we've sublet to

This is the air we breathe

Sharing suburban place and story
in the North-East Inner-City
of Dublin.

Richard Carson

Richard Carson leads ACET Ireland - a gifted team of ten staff and a few volunteers responding through a range of projects to migrant health, community addiction and HIV. His walking tours on themes of race, place and theology along Lower Gardiner Street and its surrounds have featured on RTÉ Lyric FM, Culture Night and with numerous schools, colleges and community groups.



John Rocque's map of Dublin 1756 (Harvard University Map Collection)

*"The breath of God brooded over the waters".
Genesis 1:2b*

On 9th May 1914, just weeks before the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and sandwiched between the Larne and Howth gun-runnings, *The Irish Times* published an editorial entitled "Disused Churches".¹ The article was the announcement of the closure of Trinity Church on Lower Gardiner Street, a venue that had, in the mid-19th century, been packed with thousands of worshippers every weekend and was later described as a "citadel of Protestantism."² The editorial is a remarkable piece of writing. Declaring "no spiritual tragedy", it assures the reader that there is little to grieve at the seeming decline of the north-east inner-city congregation. The people were merely heading to "the pleasant suburbs" and the tram lines would lead them there. The writer's disregard for the declining North-East Inner-City as a place of life, need, and hope could not be more stark and the patronising nadir comes with a quotation from Bishop George Berkeley: "Westward the course

of Empire takes its way." Berkeley's prose, including this particular line, had profoundly shaped the idea of manifest destiny – that the United States of America's expansion and conquest was a blessing and directing of God. But for *The Irish Times*, "westward" was not the plains of Colorado nor California but rather the likes of Castleknock.³ "The movement of modern cities is from the centre to the circumference" states the editorial with confident certitude, as the reader is left with little sense that there is any remnant of connection between the Trinity Church congregation and the place they leave behind.⁴

In this essay I will explore how the understanding of place at work in this move from the centre to the suburbs has been formed in the setting of colonial modernity.

1 "Disused Churches" in *The Irish Times*, 9th May 1914, p. 6

2 "Trinity Church: Meeting of the Congregation" in *Weekly Irish Times*, 30th May 1914, p. 15

3 Terry Fagan, a local historian who grew up in the north-east inner-city holds archives which include actual rent books from landlords living in Castleknock for their tenement properties around Gardiner Street. Terry's walking tours of the area are not to be missed <https://www.facebook.com/montowalkingtours/>

4 The Sunday following the editorial's publication, 261 people attended worship in Trinity Church and a dispute began between the Diocese and many parishioners which would run for five years and require the intervention of the Charitable Commissioners before Trinity Church was closed in 1919. It reopened as a place of worship in 2008, when Trinity Church Network, a coincidentally named independent evangelical church, took over the building following its time as the Labour Exchange.

I will go on to show how this understanding is not limited in impact to geography, but also informs how we tolerate the division of wealth, as well as the way we share the story of a place. We cannot make sense of the challenges and opportunities facing the North-East Inner-City today without understanding how these streets came to be. As such, it will be the streets of the North-East Inner-City of Dublin which will concern us. I will then use a rarely discussed environmental and health issue in the area – air pollution – to illustrate how the connection of the suburb and the centre is, despite our best efforts, inescapable. I will conclude with a brief afterword about a phenomenon at present day Trinity Church on Lower Gardiner Street that reconnects our imaginations of the past to the future.

PLACE

The Yale University theologian, Willie James Jennings, offers us an understanding of the way of thinking about place and our shared lives together which is at work in the announcement of the Trinity Church closure. His contention is that from the late medieval period, “race” rather than place became the defining feature of one’s identity in the world.⁵ The land from which one found meaning was no longer relevant, so its riches could become commodities for the Empire as the modern colonial era emerged. The constructed idea that skin colour was not merely a biological differentiation but a social and political categorisation allowed for a racialisation of humanity. This loss of land as identifier was not merely an incidental factor in the emergence of “race” but a fundamental *dis-place-ment* in how we view the world and our relationship to it. Place could now become something one found oneself on rather than where one was found in. This redefined our interdependence within the world and thereby allowed the likes of the Trinity Church congregation to move to the pleasant suburbs without consequence or regret. Note that it was not merely that the editorial exhibited a lack of care or concern for the North-East Inner-City. That can be assumed. The key issue is that the congregation were so thoroughly dis-placed

5 Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 24-28.



His contention is that from the late medieval period, “race” rather than place became the defining feature of one’s identity in the world.

from the ground beneath their feet that such care or concern was impossible.

Jennings cites the great Native American religious scholar, Vine Deloria Jr., in saying that the colonial move “drained the world of its spatial realities. Native peoples were forced to think their lives temporally and not spatially.”⁶ Where you are moving, growing, developing toward (temporal) is far more important than where you live, share, experience life with the land and one another (spatial). This is the imagination that still holds sway. This move of displacement, according to Jennings, was first and foremost a theological one, led by European colonial powers looking to justify their understanding of how God was at work at the encounter of the so-called ‘old world’ with the ‘new world’. It was not merely a reorientation of identity but an engagement and application of the power that those colonial nations wielded, and so Christian theology, Jennings suggests, must engage with this story of power in place.

While the imperialistic tone and political setting of the editorial may seem distant to current readers, Jennings would argue that the story of displacement and its infection in our imagination is very much still with us today. On 3rd December 2023, in the shadow of the Dublin riot just 10 days earlier, *The Irish Times* published an editorial about Lower Gardiner Street and the “two city blocks” that include Trinity Church. Some of its text eerily mirrors the 1914 editorial, though in a very different political context:

The truth is that ever since independence successive administrations – and by extension the people who elected them – have treated the population of Dublin’s inner city with suspicion and disrespect. From the tenements of the early 20th

6 Vine Deloria Jr., *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*, 30th anniv. ed. (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 2003), pp. 61-76, 113-32.



Mercy Christian Fellowship Sign still standing.
Credit: Richard Carson

century onward, people who generally live in the comfortable suburbs have made decisions that affect the lives of those who live in the centre. Too often those decisions have been misconceived. Sometimes they have been disastrous.⁷

NEED

The “pleasant suburbs” of the 1914 editorial may now be described as “comfortable” but the story is the same. Indeed, over 100 years on a further demonstration of displacement can be seen in the landscape of the area.

The 1980s brought an attempt to reinvigorate the then dilapidated north city docklands through the creation of the Irish Financial Services Centre (IFSC). Special low-tax arrangements allowed many of the world’s leading banks and financial institutions to find a corporate home in the area. While the IFSC’s impact has extended downstream and across to the south-side, the companies represented in the IFSC and within the boundaries of the NEIC⁸ (by my own back-of-the-envelope calculations) have assets worth about €2 trillion. They are rarely if ever understood as being a part of the NEIC. They operate on, but not in, the NEIC. It is worth remembering that displacement not only delivers an altered and fragmented view of the land. According to Jennings, it also fragments our understanding of need such that the possibility of imagining needs together is eroded.⁹ Needs, even those

7 The Irish Times view on homelessness and Gardiner Street: the inner city takes the burden again. *The Irish Times*, 3rd December 2023.

8 The NEIC (North-East Inner-City) is both a geographical area and a defined focus for a Department of the Taoiseach led regeneration initiative. For details of this work see www.neic.ie

9 Willie Jennings, *Theology and Mission Brady Lecture*, Northern Seminary, Illinois, USA, 10th June 2022

as simple as shelter, food, and safety are fragmented all the way down to the individual. And so, the fragmentation of need and place, established in the colonial period, now finds its fulfilment within the story of the NEIC as wealth is so spectacularly divided by a matter of a few feet. The tall ships carved into the south pediment of the Custom House are in full sail as prevailing winds carry the bounty of global trade to the North-East Inner-City. “Commerce” is the name of the statue that stands tallest on the building, yet, to this day, the generated wealth immediately fragments on arrival at the docks. It is in this light that Fintan O’Toole, seeking to make sense of this part of the NEIC, described it in both material and geographical terms as “Ireland’s most segregated district.”¹⁰ Jennings puts this in devastating theological terms when he states that: “Every time you go from one neighbourhood and enter another and see inequality and say ‘that is the way it is’ you are calling that which is demonic, natural.”¹¹



A piece of World’s End Pottery, named after World’s End Lane (now Foley St) where it is believed the Delamain family lived. They established their delft factory as Huguenot refugees, at the corner of Frenchman’s Lane, a site now opposite Store St Garda Station. The photo was taken in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, July 2022.
Credit: Richard Carson

“

Every time you go from one neighbourhood and enter another and see inequality and say ‘that is the way it is’ you are calling that which is demonic, natural.

10 Fintan O’Toole. A tiny area of Dublin is Ireland’s most segregated district. *The Irish Times*. 25th July 2023

11 Willie Jennings, *Theology and Mission Brady Lecture*, Northern Seminary, Illinois, USA, 10th June 2022.

STORY

Not only fragmenting our understanding of need and place, displacement also fragments our stories – disconnecting us from one another and giving the appearance that the story of the NEIC is merely its own. But the NEIC has always been shaped by what is outside of it. While, as the human geographer Doreen Massey was right to remind us,¹² the local carries agency and accountability, it is the global which both carries the impact and is easily overlooked. So it is crucial that we are able to tell and share our stories of the area. Without them we will fall for that trap of temporality that keeps us from appreciating how we relate to one another in a place. As Philip Sheldrake highlights in response to Michel de Certeau's attack on modernist planning: "Stories are more than descriptors. They take ownership of spaces, define boundaries and create bridges between individuals."¹³

To understand the story of the North-East Inner-City we need to go back to the beginning, or at least a beginning in the early 18th century when the quay walls of the River Liffey allowed the swampy land and ponds to be steadily reclaimed. While the Gardiner family owned most of the area, the impact of the Wide Streets Commission and the streetscape we are familiar with today were still a long way off. The land was replete with vegetable gardens and orchards. The soft soil, no doubt, demonstrating a rich biodiversity.¹⁴ Of the residents we can ascertain, there was clearly a presence tied to the recent religious wars across Europe. Huguenots from France, like the Delamain and Du Lac families, or from Holland, like the von Beaver and von Verigan clans, occupy what is now the Foley St, Railway St and, of course, Beaver Street areas.¹⁵ The property deeds of the time, which

describe the area as "a suburb of Dublin City" show the likes of Ephraim Hand, Abednego Hudson and Hosea Coates as among those living closer to what is now Lower Gardiner Street, suggesting a Jewish presence adjacent to the nearby synagogue on Marlborough Green. That synagogue was associated with families descendant from Marranos Jews who had been forced to convert to Christianity in Spain or Portugal but continued to meet for Jewish worship in secret before seeking refuge in Ireland. This extraordinarily diverse mix of people and plants finding refuge from that which was outside is the early story of the NEIC. All other chapters in its story build on this foundation.

The opening of the Custom House in 1791 transformed the area. John Beresford's efforts in the parliaments of London and Dublin to gain permission for its construction massively benefited his brother-in-law, Luke Gardiner, who was building up the streets we are so familiar with today. But just four years after the opening of Carlisle (now O'Connell) Bridge (an architectural sibling to the Custom House), the bodies of Protestant Thomas Bacon and Catholic John Esmonde were placed on display on the bridge, following their execution for their part in the 1798 Rebellion.¹⁶ Their killings took place within a fortnight of each other. At that same time, Luke Gardiner, Lord Mountjoy, was also killed, while leading the British forces at the Battle of New Ross in Wexford. Though still nascent, the area developed an immediate familiarity with trauma which will last to this day.

Though the elite continued to dominate residency and ownership, the Act of Union of 1801 began a steady decline for the area through the 19th century. This was exacerbated when the rural poor find there an urban home after the Famine, as their little wealth is steadily transferred from the landed gentry to the suburban landlord, via the tenements. The era of tenement housing included the emergence of 'Monto', Europe's largest red-light district, which drew soldiers and sailors of far-flung lands as its clientele. The twentieth century brought some

12 Doreen Massey. Geographies of Responsibility in *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*, Vol. 86, No. 1, Special Issue: The Political Challenge of Relational Space (2004) pp. 5-18.

13 Philip Sheldrake. *The Spiritual City* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2014) p.109.

14 John Rocque's map of Dublin (1756) is a highly accessible resource for understanding the history of the area. It is most easily viewed through Harvard University <https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/scanned-maps/catalog/44-990114744870203941>

15 Some incredible archiving work is taking place to allow access to the many thousands of deeds drafted around the country since the 18th century at the Registry of Deeds Index Project Ireland <https://irishdeedsindex.net/grantors/index.php>

16 David Dickson, *Dublin - The making of a capital city* (London: Profile Books, 2014) p. 257



HSE Naloxone mural on the St Peter's Bakery site on Parnell St. Installed in spring 2023, six months later the spike in overdoses took place. Credit: Richard Carson

changes, with inner-city parishes and housing developments emerging, including the building of new outer suburbs for the working classes.¹⁷ However in the 1980s a perfect storm hit the area. A regime change in Iran opened up a trade route for heroin into Western Europe, while the trade routes of capitalism carried HIV from the opposite direction. High youth unemployment and an insipid public health response to the emerging crises devastated the area. More recently, all the facets of our housing crisis can be found within the area. The prevalence of emergency accommodation signals another chapter of those seeking refuge on our shores being hosted in this area.

As recently as late 2023, another global regime

change is impacting the area. This time, it is the tumult in Afghanistan, affecting the supply of heroin again. Dangerous synthetic ingredients are being added to the drug, thereby leading to a massive increase in overdoses. The mortality levels of the past were only avoided by the administration of naloxone, an opiate antidote, in dozens of settings by trained workers around the inner city. This current challenge has gone effectively unnoticed by wider society, which should in itself testify to the reality of the NEIC's problems.

The impacts of global capital flows and its financialisation of property is also being felt harshly in the area, and largely unobserved by those outside it. In autumn 2019, three churches, which were using the hall within the St Peter's Bakery building on Parnell St, were asked to vacate the premises as the new owner had been granted planning permission to build student accommodation on the site.

¹⁷ Dublin's suburban story is, of course, a complex one. The city exhibits both the "old world" scenario of poorer communities living in the outskirts and the 'new world' scenario of the wealthy moving out to protected suburbs. That story must include the NEIC itself as it fits well to the understanding of "inner suburb" articulated by Nathan and Unsworth: Max Nathan and Rachael Unsworth. *Beyond City Living: remaking the Inner Suburbs in Built Environment* Vol 32:3 Summer 2006, pp. 1-20.

With little fanfare and no media coverage, the 700 worshippers had to find new homes at the edge of the city, where public transport access is poorer and there is greater reliance on the private car, thereby increasing the precarity of already fragile settings of diaspora life in Ireland. To this day, the faded signage of Mercy Christian Fellowship, the lead tenant up to 2019, is still in place on Parnell Street. On the placard some words of future hope – “Jesus is coming soon” – are in conversation with the absent congregation, who moved from the centre to the circumference as history repeats itself. Whether it is New Ross, Tehran, London, Crumlin, Kabul, Blanchardstown, Boston or Berlin, the story of the NEIC is of a place defined as much by what is outside and what is within.

Engaging in such storytelling is not a task of mere nostalgia nor tepid historicity. Rather, it is to encounter the very place where we dwell. The story of how need came to divide so spectacularly in adjacent settings is no coincidence but a tangible reality best encountered with a short walk or cycle through the area. Jennings vividly, and with a sense of cautious warning, uses a meteorological metaphor to connect our present circumstances with the past: “Remember the wind, remember her voice, she knows the origin of the universe.”¹⁸

BREATHE

The opportunities to explore the connection between the NEIC and that which is outside of it are legion. Housing, healthcare provision, wealth, education, childcare and much more are all worthy of analysis. However, I want to focus in on an environmental and health issue which is often neglected in local and national debate. It shows how the links of place, need and shared story are inescapable and as immediate as the next breath we take.

The southernmost section of Lower Gardiner Street, at Trinity Church, was once Lime Street. While its etymology is uncertain, the likely reason for its name, just like the

more famous streets of the same name in Liverpool and London, was the presence of lime kilns on the site in the early 18th century. With toxic and odorous fumes, lime kilns in urban settings did not last very long and were prohibited alongside glass houses and other similar contributors to air pollution. However, the area around North Wall was still a suburb of the city rather than subject to its bye-laws, and so through the 18th century it carried the burden of production of those industries still linked to the fumes that had a profound impact on the health of the local population.

A key factor here is the prevailing wind. In an extraordinary study for the Spatial Economics Research Centre, the position of 5,000 chimneys across 70 English cities in 1880 were analysed alongside deprivation indexes.¹⁹ A clear link between the south-westerly breezes and poverty was found.

“Basically what we’ve been seeing in the past, because of pollution and wind patterns, is rich people escaping the eastern parts of town, because they were very polluted” stated co-author Yanos Zylberberg. “Past pollution explains up to 20% of the observed neighbourhood segregation whether captured by the shares of blue collar workers and employees, house prices or official deprivation indices.”²⁰ Once set in place in infrastructure and institutions, this pollution-informed poverty becomes incredibly difficult to undo.

This image of Georgian or Victorian air pollution may seem distant to our current circumstances, as removed as a Dickensian novel. Yet, we are currently experiencing another silent killer, though this time odourless and less obvious. In 2021, following research on far-reaching evidence of how even low levels of air pollution impact health, the World Health Organisation dramatically amended its guideline limits for a number of

18 Willie Jennings, *The Bampton Lectures, Lecture 3: Overcoming the Delusion Condition of Home Ownership*, University Church Oxford, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uL4dj6Td2hl>

19 Stephen Heblich, Alex Trew and Yanos Zylberberg *East Side Story: Historical Pollution and Neighbourhood Sorting* Spatial Economics Research Centre, LSE, 2017 http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/82544/1/SERC_Spatial_Economics_Research_Centre_East_Side_Story_Historical_Pollution_and_Neighbourhood_Sorting.pdf

20 *Blowing in the wind: why do so many cities have poor east ends?* *The Guardian* 12th May 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/may/12/blowing-wind-cities-poor-east-ends>



Water bubbling up on Lower Gardiner Street. Credit: Richard Carson

key pollutants.²¹ Nitrogen dioxide (NO_2) is particularly linked to emissions from motorised vehicles and its limits were cut from an annual average of $40\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ to $10\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. Monitoring of air pollution in Dublin City is sketchy at best but we can clearly see how areas of heavily motorised traffic link to higher NO_2 levels.²² Junctions, such as around Heuston Station, show levels over $50\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. However, it is the inner city residential areas that are most noteworthy. Monitors on Pearse Street showed levels over $60\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, six times the WHO limits. Gardiner Street, with a monitor adjacent to the award-winning and recently refurbished Diamond Park, with its stunning playground and landscaped terrain, came in at $50\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.²³ With the odd exception for a busy junction, once one leaves the inner city core, the NO_2 levels drop to below $20\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ – in the vast majority of places still above the WHO limits. The kilns may be long gone but the cars have taken their place.

The physics of NO_2 care nothing for the lines we draw through our institutions and imaginations. Its only barrier of concern is the lining of the bronchial tubes of the children who play in the Diamond Park, and unless the initiatives of the Dublin City Centre Transport Plan and the Dublin Region Air Quality Plan have a profound effect, the impact on the respiratory health of these children is inevitable.²⁴ It may be that it is not so much a policy change that is required as a change in our imaginations. Where fragmentation still holds power, we need to reimagine our relationship with the ground beneath our feet and with the lines we draw across it. “We are of the dirt!”, Jennings declares, challenging our self-designation in a place that keeps us distant from that which is adjacent.²⁵ Regardless of how it appears, such a move would not be some new radical offering, but rather a truly conservative move – back to our relationship with place and one another. It starts, contends

21 World Health Organisation. *What are the WHO Air quality guidelines?* <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/what-are-the-who-air-quality-guidelines>

22 Environmental Protection Agency, *Air Quality in Ireland report 2022*. https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/air/Air_Quality_Report_22_v8v2.pdf

23 Environmental Protection Agency. *Nitrogen Dioxide Diffusion Tube Survey in Dublin: 2016-2017* https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/air/Technical_report_NO2_diffusion_tubes_Dublin.pdf

24 The specific disease outcomes most strongly linked with exposure to air pollution include stroke, ischaemic heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer, pneumonia. *Health impacts: Air quality, energy and health*, World Health Organisation, 2024. [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-\(outdoor\)-air-quality-and-health](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-(outdoor)-air-quality-and-health)

25 Willie Jennings Can “White” People be Saved: *Reflections on Missions and Whiteness*. Fuller Studio, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRljWZxL1IE>

Jennings, with the communities that have been left behind by the lines we have drawn through cities and communities with our insistence on elevating the temporal at the expense of the spatial. To live across the lines that have formed us, with patience, presence, joy, and hope is the first and crucial step. All of these, and particularly joy, are an act of resistance against the forces that drive us to despair, the forces that keep us apart and insist that our fragmentation, even the fragmentation of death itself, must have the last word.

Weaving through how displacement and fragmentation form, our story, our needs, and our place can seem overwhelming. We live and operate so deeply in the imagination of these forces that to escape them seems as impossible as it is to stop breathing. We need something radical. Yet for all the big-picture focus Jennings offers us in his work, it is with the small and simple that he believes we must start. Decisions on town planning, active transport and places of play for all can be a part of “a reckoning with the history of control” and lead to “a shared project of living in ways that materialise the redemption of God”.²⁶

FLOOD

The book of Acts is the account in the Bible of the early church. The sequel to Luke’s Gospel, it describes the collision of cities with Empire, of hospitality with persecution, of intimacy with inclusion and much more. A powerful observation of the book by Jennings is that in it “almost no one is doing what they want to do.”²⁷ It is the Spirit of God that sets the agenda in a way that is transcendent, transparent, and, crucially, transgressive. Our desires, intentions, and plans are not enough for the extraordinary challenge of overcoming fragmented places and peoples. To paraphrase Solzhenitsyn, the line of separation runs right through every human heart. Our greatest need may be for that which is beyond ourselves.

On the odd occasion, after some heavy rainfall or nearby construction work, the basement in Trinity Church is flooded. It is a reminder that in the Lower Gardiner Street area, the water table remains high. This could be dismissed as a mere incident of geography and engineering but it should be a prompting that we are bound to the soil beneath our feet, to the swamps and ponds that give us life, that came before us and will outlast us all. Maybe then we might remember that we are bound to one another, that in our fragmentation of need and place we are still holding out hope that all will be made new.

²⁶ Willie Jennings, *The Bampton Lectures, Lecture 4: Addressing the Hateful Condition of the Line*, University Church Oxford, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uL4dj6Td2hl>

²⁷ Willie Jennings, *Acts. Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2017) p. 254

Humans of North-East Inner-City

Fr. Anish



Fr. Anish John is the Indian Orthodox Priest for the Parish worshipping at Cathal Burgha St. George Street, a Migrant and a Father. Credit: Cherise Boraski

In the Indian Orthodox tradition, we can marry. So I have a wife, working in the hospital and two wonderful kids, who just moved here in 2022. I moved to Ireland in 2017 primarily to do my PhD at Maynooth while also being the parish priest here for the Orthodox community, who worship in the city centre. It's the Church of Ireland church, and we rent from them. I came to a place which was very different, very strange for me in 2017. Then, my wife came in as an international student. She studied in Letterkenny, a Master's while I was living and working in the parish in Dublin. So, we were in two different places for a couple of years, and then she got a job and moved to Dublin. As a family, our hope would be settling down and having our own house, because, as you know, the rents are crazy.

For the church, our dreams and hope for the city is for a reduction in the tensions that are there now, existing. I can feel that in the air, you know, when you go out to the city when you interact with people, and there's the feel of hate towards the other, and the strangeness that there is around migrants. That needs to come down. I serve a parish where the migrant community is largely employed with the healthcare sector. Most of the Parishioners, with whom I interact day in and out are nurses, doctors, physiotherapists, and other healthcare professionals and students. During the riots, I remember that the church was closed for a couple of weeks. We didn't use the parish. We thought it was not safe to do. We didn't worship for two Sundays because we were right in the middle of the city. So it's not a very safe thing to do with so many people from the migrant community coming together in that place. But I would always try to highlight the best that the city can offer. So, the connectivity and the pool of people from diverse religious traditions and cultures who come into the city is the highlight for me, rather than the other aspects of the riots that have happened in the past and stuff like that. So there's a pool of rich, diverse religions and cultures that you can sense that you can engage with while you're in the city. That's something, which is a highlight. And we are an example as a migrant community, using a Church of Ireland church for such a long time. There's an element of sharing, you know, the sacred space as well. So that itself gives a great message of community being together, different cultures. Integration, which is happening in the inner city, is very evident. You walk through the inner city, and you can see this.'

The Changing Faiths of Dublin's North- East Inner-City:

Building Bridges Across Communities
with Dublin City Interfaith Forum

Adrian Cristea

Adrian Cristea is the Executive Officer of Dublin City Interfaith Forum. He has a background in sociology and social work and holds a master's degree from Trinity College Dublin.

“Human migration is an important part of our ancestral story. The places we live shape us, the places we leave behind forges our history, and the places we might travel to becomes our mysterious future.”

Kilroy J. Oldster

THE CONTEXT OF IMMIGRATION AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

In the space of the last two decades, the fabric of Irish society has changed profoundly. But it would be a mistake to think that change itself is new.

If we go back a generation, we quickly recall that at that point Irish was in flux. According to the 2006 Census, Ireland’s population then comprised about 10% of non-nationals.¹ Whilst this was not significantly different from our European neighbours,² the pace of this change certainly was and is near unique in modern peace-time history.³ Other countries have faced a much more gradual change in their cultural mix, they had much more time to gradually test the waters. Ireland has been subjected to a somewhat more sudden immersion in the deep end of multiculturalism. A direct consequence of this demographic change is the surge of many religious groups. One of the most innovative and dramatic changes in the Irish religious landscape is the birth and spread of immigrant-led religious groups.

Today, the number of people living in Ireland who were not born here has grown from 466,000 in 2006 to 757,000 in 2023.⁴ The North-East Inner-City of Dublin has undergone even more significant demographic shifts in recent years, leading to an even greater intensification of the diversity of

its religious landscape. These changes have significant implications for community cohesion and integration, and they underline the importance of interfaith dialogue and engagement in the area. Informed by the social data and community initiatives, this essay aims to shed light on the evolving religious dynamics in the area and the role of the Dublin City Interfaith Forum (DCIF) in fostering understanding and cooperation among diverse religious groups.

In 2006, in the North-East Inner-City of Dublin alone, the scale of the change in the religious landscape was staggering and evident to those paying attention. For instance, one church building, Abbey Presbyterian Church, eighteen years ago became home to three Pentecostal Congregations: French speaking Congolese, Nigerian, and Romanian. St. George & St. Thomas Church of Ireland parish, in Sean McDermott Street, was hosting an Indian Orthodox Congregation. Today the parish still continues to provide this accommodation. In the vicinity there used to be a Gideon International Ministry Church and a House on the Rock congregation, both meeting in the Royal Dublin Hotel. The Royal Dublin Hotel is now long gone, and with them those congregations. A little further down Sean McDermott Street you’ll find Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, who were already back then hosts to a Romanian Catholic Church; a relationship that persists to this day. The newer congregation is now well established. One of the most historic churches in the city, St. Saviour’s Parish in Dominick Street, used to be home to a Croatian Roman Catholic Chaplaincy. Whatever assumptions Irish people might harbour about the conservative nature of religious communities, it is inarguable that they have always been at the forefront of diversifying movements in our society.

The North-East Inner-City of Dublin has long been a hub of immigration, shaped by waves of migration over centuries. Waves of refugees arriving on shores is not new – the traces of the arrival of Huguenot exiles in the late 1600s are still easily found in the area. Industrialization and urbanization in the 19th century attracted migrants from rural areas

1 Central Statistics Office, “Census 2006 - Non-Irish Nationals Living In Ireland” (CSO, June 30, 2008), <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2008pressreleases/census2006-non-irishnationallivinginireland/>.

2 Johan Wullt and Anne Herm, “Immigration in the EU27 in 2006,” Text (Luxembourg: Eurostat, 2008), https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STAT_08_162.

3 In an excellent report produced for the Irish Catholic bishops in 2006, the geographer Eoin O’Mahony recorded the dramatic change in migration flows that had occurred in the previous years. In 1995, Ireland was still in a net-emigration pattern. By 2005, the annual net-migration level was over 50,000 people. Eoin O’Mahony, “Demographic Change in Ireland 1995 to 2005:” (Maynooth: Irish Episcopal Conference, 2006), 11.

4 Central Statistics Office, “Population and Migration Estimates, April 2023” (CSO, September 25, 2023), <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2023/>.



A street sign for The Dublin Christian Mission in Chancery Street. A non denominational organisation situated in the inner city. © shutterstock_1545931400

of Ireland and abroad, seeking employment opportunities in factories and ports. The influx of workers from rural Ireland, particularly during periods of economic hardship such as the Great Famine of the 1840s, contributed to the growth of diverse communities in the area. Additionally, Dublin's strategic location as a port city facilitated immigration from other parts of the British Empire, including Britain itself, as well as from Europe and beyond. Sailors, traders, and workers from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds settled in the North-East Inner-City, adding to its ethnic and religious diversity. The historical migration patterns in Dublin's North-East Inner-City were accompanied by the establishment of religious institutions catering to the needs of diverse immigrant communities.

Catholicism has historically been the dominant religion in Ireland, and churches and parishes served as focal points for internal migrants, providing spiritual guidance, social support, and a sense of community. However, alongside Catholicism, other religious traditions also took root in the North-East Inner-City, as a result

of immigration. Protestant denominations, such as Anglicanism and Methodism, were present, reflecting the religious diversity within Ireland itself. Moreover, and more recently, immigrants from Europe, Asia, and Africa brought with them their own religious practices and traditions, including Judaism with evidence of a Synagogue at Marlborough Green, off Marlborough Street dating as far back as mid-18th century.⁵ With centres in Talbot St., Sherrard Lane and Hardwicke Place, at the time of writing, the Muslim Community is completing the Holy Month of Ramadan by showcasing its diverse and vibrant presence in the area. Similarly, Buddhism, well established in James Joyce Street, is enriching the religious tapestry of the area.

This level of religious diversity in Dublin's North-East Inner-City has profound implications for contemporary trends in the social landscape. First, it highlights the long-standing presence of diverse religious

⁵ Patrick Comerford, "The Synagogues of Dublin: 3, Marlborough Green," *Patrick Comerford* (blog), September 30, 2019, <http://www.patrickcomerford.com/2019/09/the-synagogues-of-dublin-3-marlborough.html>.

communities in the area, challenging the notion of Irish society as homogenously Catholic. Second, historical migration patterns have shaped the social, cultural, and architectural fabric of the North-East Inner-City, with churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and other places of worship serving as visible markers of religious diversity. Third, the historical coexistence of multiple religious traditions underscores the importance of interfaith dialogue and engagement in fostering understanding, tolerance, and cooperation among different religious communities. By recognizing and appreciating the historical roots of religious diversity, and celebrating the contemporary diversity, we are better placed to see our communities flourish today.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW(ER) FAITH COMMUNITIES

New and existing faith communities in Dublin's inner city continue to face practical challenges, including finding suitable places of worship, navigating planning regulations, and securing financial resources. Among the practical needs of the new faith communities, and this seems to extend right across the spectrum of new churches, is that of finding a comfortable place of worship. Many of the new faith communities started in halls and lounges of hotels or the dining rooms of asylum seeker hostels. In some cases, the groups had to move on because hotel proprietors feel there's a conflict between this use of their premises and their license, or simply because of the level of 'noise'.

Through our work at grassroots level with diverse faith communities in the Dublin inner city areas and further afield, we note that initial specific needs such as sourcing appropriate places of worship in order to respond to the continuing increase in membership, are becoming now both more pressing and more complex. This is almost always followed by the difficulty in negotiating the complicated planning application process and financial costs. Due to the increase in attendance numbers, the need to have a bigger space arises, and this brings with it



The historical coexistence of multiple religious traditions underscores the importance of interfaith dialogue and engagement in fostering understanding, tolerance, and cooperation among different religious communities.

the challenge of meeting the costs. These difficulties put great pressure on the leaders, many of whom are not on any salary.

A pertinent question now emerging is how long a 'new' faith community is considered new. Religion is almost always a way of life closely connected to one's cultural expression. This variety of places of worship now part of our civic landscape are so much more than just a spiritual or a praying space. They cater for information and social needs of their members, and offer a sense of reconnection with one's own culture and identity. We're also witnessing the emergence of a new, younger generation now asserting themselves with faith and community trends and ideas and ideals sometimes quite different and in conflict with those of their parents. They are seeking new directions, new horizons and where and how they will get support is a real question. Should the wider community of the city not be more open to them?

Many immigrants coming to Ireland already have contacts or have gathered knowledge, not only about the social and economic life but also the religious life. They arrive with an idea about where their own ethnic community worships. For others, where they go to worship depends on his/her first contact or where they find themselves living e.g. an asylum hostel. However, a final choice is usually made after becoming established and conversant with other places of worship in the city and deciding which mode of worship they prefer.

In his book, *Embracing Difference*, Canon Patrick Comerford, eloquently makes the point that the new communities in Ireland have brought with them their own religious identity and that their faith community also welcome people from beyond their own ethnic

lines.⁶ He also highlights the important role these faith communities play in preserving people's identity and homeland-connections. It can also be argued that a significant number of the immigrants who have joined a black or ethnic minority faith community may have worshipped in a mainstream place of worship but have felt that they were not welcomed and accepted, or were labelled and devalued. Situations where some groups in a congregation are stigmatized and looked on as second class citizens do not bode well for integration.

Often, immigrants are perceived as asylum seekers and erroneously regarded as second class citizens. As we all like to be valued and respected, people move towards or start a fellowship where they can feel very comfortable and respected for who they are, rather than what they are. Given that most of the newly established ethnic churches and faith communities are not yet members of the established Inter-Church and Inter-Faith structures and thus not within the existing networks, DCIF focuses on the need to work with such groups in the communities in which they are established.

BUILDING BRIDGES ACROSS COMMUNITIES WITH DUBLIN CITY INTERFAITH FORUM

At the end of January 2012, in Wood Quay Venue at the official launch of the DCIF, the then Lord Mayor of Dublin, Andrew Montague stated:

"It is with initiatives such as Dublin City Interfaith Forum that we dialogue and work together through building relationships that promote integration, nurture harmony, and deepen understanding and respect."⁷

It is impossible to sum up in a few paragraphs over a decade of building bridges, sharing common grounds, and promoting integration. Through interfaith dialogue and engagement,

the DCIF continues to advance human rights, promote integration and interfaith respect, and helps to create a better understanding of our cultural and religious diversity.

Since its inception, our Forum has been committed to creating relationships of deeper respect and acceptance of each other as human beings. If we can harness the extraordinary resources that the faith traditions offer, problems such as racial and religious prejudice can be alleviated perhaps even overcome. This deep sharing is important for all people, but it is especially important for people whose spiritual nurture comes from other parts of the world. Their faith dominates their whole life. For many it is what makes their life.

Religion and culture can't be separated. DCIF works to prevent religious and ethnic communities – including the more vulnerable communities – from being marginalized or ghettoized. DCIF stands united in challenging racist behaviour through our various actions and initiatives. It is not difficult to notice how things have changed in the world; sadly, not for the better. With a concerning rise in the number of right wing, supremacist, and neo-Nazi movements gaining traction around the world, social media is providing an easy conduit for fomenting racism, hate speech, and vile images. The ready availability of platforms where these hate-filled messages can be promulgated serves to normalise destructive prejudice. Even more concerning, the more this language is tolerated, and the more it seeps into the national discourse, the more it becomes acceptable and mainstreamed. It must be called out for what it is and whenever and wherever it is manifested, as with all other manifestations of racism.⁸

"Safe Haven" is DCIF's interfaith response to hate and extremism.⁹ It is a training programme supported by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. The programme works with our faith communities and supports them in addressing the serious

6 Patrick Comerford, *Embracing Difference* (Dublin: Church of Ireland Publishing, 2007).

7 Irish Council of Churches, "Dublin City and Faith Communities to Launch Interfaith Forum," Irish Churches, January 30, 2012, <https://www.irishchurches.org/news-blog/741/dublin-city-and-faith-communities>.

8 It is noted elsewhere in this issue how violent, racist speech was a hallmark of the November 23 riots and these leaked Whatsapp messages and speeches are prominent in the accounts of migrant and immigrant people.

9 Dublin City Interfaith Forum, "Safe Haven" (Dublin: DCIF, 2021), <https://dublin.anglican.org/cms/files/Safe-Haven-e-Session-2-Outline.pdf>.

impact caused by racism and hate crime. Such programmes can change someone's life. More importantly it can save someone's life.

CONCLUSION: INTERFAITH ACTIONS ADDRESSING CURRENT CHALLENGES

DCIF is concerned with people: how they live, what they believe and how their lives are shaped by what they believe. We do not pretend that there are no differences. There are differences. They matter. They matter because the people who believe these different things matter. DCIF's work is extraordinarily multi-layered and multi-dimensional as we seek to help people.¹⁰

The reality today is that every major city is now the home of many faiths. There is hardly a city in the world which is peopled by devotees of only one faith. We, at DCIF, continue our work to build bridges across ancient rifts, to build bridges out of the walls that keep us apart and work in partnership with others, towards establishing dialogue, promoting interfaith respect and understanding of our religious diversity. The conversations around interfaith are both enlightening and challenging. As the face of Dublin and Ireland changes, so does the range of faith communities and the importance of the development of a cohesive society that understands, acknowledges and respects its diverse parts as the principles listed in the DCIF Interfaith Charter states:

To promote dialogue between the different communities of belief co-existing in our city; we believe this to be fundamental to guaranteeing the necessary conditions for living together in peace, justice and solidarity.¹¹

In conclusion, by understanding the historical forces that have shaped this area, we as part of the community invested in the area and as stakeholders, can better navigate the complexities of religious pluralism and work towards building a more inclusive and harmonious community for all residents, irrespective of their religious affiliations.

This changing religious landscape of Dublin's North-East Inner-City presents both challenges and opportunities for community cohesion and integration. Interfaith dialogue and engagement, facilitated by organizations like the DCIF, are becoming more and more essential for promoting understanding, cooperation, and social harmony. By embracing diversity and building bridges across religious divides, the community can work towards a more inclusive and united future.

“

We do not pretend that there are no differences. There are differences. They matter. They matter because the people who believe these different things matter.

¹⁰ For example, in the week prior to writing, we completed the rolling out of the Safe Haven programme for the 6th consecutive year. Last month we participated in consultations with the An Garda Síochána Diversity Forum. As I write in April 2024, tomorrow we'll celebrate the *Eid ul Fitr* with our Muslim friends across the City. Later this week we'll be in All Hallows Campus. Next month we'll host our bimonthly meeting and there we'll plan the celebration of World Refugee Day 2024 as we have done each year since 2012.

¹¹ Dublin City Interfaith Forum, "Dublin City Interfaith Charter" (Dublin: DCIF, December 20, 2016), https://www.dcif.ie/_files/ugd/b5fa3c_a987bd2da38e43c497cacdfe8dfe5e9f.pdf.

Humans of North-East Inner-City Carmel



Carmel Cosgrove is a volunteer and founding member of East Wall Youth, Founding member of HOPE, Board member of Friends of Gateway and previous Lord Mayor of East Wall. Credit: Cherise Boraski

‘There was three women and about eight men. And we decided we’d call ourselves East Wall Against Drugs. And it started out we put letters into everybody’s letterbox. ‘Do you know a drug dealer?’ There’s no point in floating about with it. And we got back a response. And it wasn’t news to us because we knew who was selling drugs. We set ourselves up and used to have the marches and the meetings in the old community centre. There was meetings going on at Sean McDermot Street and Sherrard Street, and you’d go to one on Monday night, we’d march on somebody and crowds of people would go. I have to say; it was the older people down here because most of, the younger people were working. And I’m saying women of my age, then, they sat out. So we had a local fella

down here, and they sat outside his house for 10 days. And we got him out. It went on from there. And then we decided, after about 18 months, what would you do with the one or two people that were addicted in the community that we knew of. We’d have to do something. So, we met up with people from Sean McDermott Street, and we used the Crinann, it’s the old Magdalene’s convent. It was like-minded people from all around the city. And we got people in to facilitate meetings, to educate us to see could we help them, because at the time, there wasn’t very much help. So then we decided that that’s what we’d do. ‘Cause we’d have to help people. You couldn’t just throw them aside. After, we used to deliver programs to schools, drug awareness and things like that. We got funding and an office on the North Strand, and it went from strength to strength. Now we have 4 paid people. But now you could have about 80 clients a week up there. And you help them to get clean. It has to be a holistic thing. So HOPE is going marvellous. I’m delighted to have been a part of that. I still am.

Just know there’s good and bad everywhere. But I would say to people like, you have to take a chance on where you’re going to live. No matter where you live, you have to be part of the community. You can’t stand off from the community. Don’t be afraid in your community. Get out there and say, well, could we organise our own football match? Could we get kids? Would there be anyone there with skills? That’s when your community starts. But all I can say to people is, if you are in a community, please, please be part of it. Cause you can’t stand back from it. And there’s no point saying, ‘Oh geez, there’s nothing’. If you are not going to do anything. And then once one person makes a move to do something, ‘Ah, sure, I’ll help you with that.’ And don’t be afraid to ask for help. ‘I was thinking of doing this’, but you’d be afraid, you know? People are generally very good.’

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