



NIMMA NEWS



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NIMMA homes in on Shared Housing

NIMMA has joined a government departmental committee designed to help ensure the smooth set up of ten new-built shared social housing neighbourhoods in the Province.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Jennifer Hawthorne, who has already overseen the roll-out of nearly 50 established shared neighbourhoods across the country, will chair a group that seeks to promote mixed housing as part of the government's 'Together Building a United Community' initiative.

She said: "This £20 million project, which will be delivered over the next two years, will provide homes in Newtownabbey, Belfast and Down.

"The Department has agreed five potential pilot sites and all allocations in TBUC schemes will be made according to the housing need of applicants on the waiting list for these homes. The schemes will be built and managed by local Housing Associations who have been tasked to deliver the TBUC shared new build programme".

The group of housing, community and statutory experts who have been selected to oversee the housing element of TBUC has been set up specifically to advise and guide the department on how best to tackle the range of problems that often face the establishment of such neighbourhoods.

Jennifer said: "There will occasionally be difficulties of a local and even national nature, but we are greatly encouraged by the success of our established shared neighbourhood programmes and take heart from the results of the 2010 Life and Time Survey which found that 82 per cent of respondents would prefer to live in a mixed neighbourhood.



Chairman Ken Dunn welcomed NIMMA's involvement in the new scheme.

He said: "NIMMA is committed to the wider availability of mixed social housing and conscious of the fact that social housing estates are currently highly polarised.

"We know what it means to mixed couples, who do not have the wherewithal to buy their own homes, to be able to live in areas where the residents have signed up to a mixed charter that guarantees that an area will not go above 70 per cent occupancy by one section of the community.

"These are early days for this scheme, but the intention and personnel to succeed are firmly in place".

**NIMMA is here to help. Simply telephone
Belfast 02890 235444 or e-mail info@nimma.org.uk.**

Time to Talk

Call for critics to debate Integrated Education

The recent attack by both CCMS and the

Catholic Commission on Integrated Education has re-opened the debate about our divided education system.

The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education's (NICIE) has called for public debate and NIMMA News gives its Chief Executive Noreen Campbell a chance to put the record straight.

Noreen writes; "CCMS called on the Department of Education to dispense with its statutory duty to encourage and facilitate Integrated Education. We are shocked and dismayed by this controversial demand and concerned by the deeper implication that that this would have for the Belfast Agreement, which includes the same commitment. We are equally concerned by the reasons advanced for such action.

CCMS argues that our society is too polarised, with divided communities fearful of each other, for Integrated Education to be successful. The integrated movement was established to address this division. Fear of change runs deep in our society and there is much evidence of such fear in the CCMS's submission. CCMS's submission is based on the assumption that the statutory obligation is being fully implemented. NICIE argues that this is not the case and a recent judicial review reminded the Department of the need to keep this obligation live.

CCMS draws attention to the issue of transformation but fails to explain why only one maintained school has ever explored this option, Clintyclay Primary School in recent months. CCMS also has never explained why they have not supported the transformation process by appointing Catholic governors to the boards of transformed schools.

CCMS ignores the barriers to the expansion of Integrated Education. The most significant is the absence of a means of planning for providing the choice of integrated schools. A catholic parent seeking a catholic education will have a choice of these schools at hand. The same parent, if they wish an integrated education, is expected to get together with other parents and plan this provision themselves. Such a situation is inequitable and discriminatory and must be redressed.

CCMS says we must wait for a mature society before we can change. NICIE says trust the wishes of



NICIE Chief Noreen Campbell

parents, reflect the changed society we have and recognise the power of education to lead and shape change. These are the issues we wish to debate urgently in a public forum with CCMS".

Teachers Have Their Say

Critics of Integrated Education have missed the point, according to the Association of Principal Teachers in Integrated Schools (APTIS)

It stated; "The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools' submission does make uncomfortable reading, because it highlights that integrated education has not been sufficiently encouraged nor facilitated. Its conclusions about integration are however simply opinions, and in the view of APTIS they miss the point.

The stance taken by CCMS is frankly odd, out of keeping with the needs of NI as a society as it struggles toward unity and lasting peace – it offers a strangely aggressive attack on a sector that could and should be developed afresh.

CCMS makes a point that a dictionary definition of 'segregation' involves enforced separation. We believe that lack of choice for parents and children in some areas represents exactly that; enforced separation through restricted options and a lack of integrated education for them.

The CCMS view of integration is disappointing and potentially divisive, bearing in mind that we are all educationalists with children at the centre of our work, including their values.

At worst it's a distraction; it does not appear to focus on the need for the barriers and divisions of the past to be replaced and for young people to become both transformed and transformational leaders for the future.



Post Box

'A heartwarming e-mail from Canada just perfect for Christmas'

Ed



'You Sent me a Gift'



I am so impressed by your organization and by its efforts to improve the situation for mixed-marriage couples! How I wish my own family members had had the advantage of such an agency. It's quite an achievement.

I should explain that I am the grandchild of mixed marriages on both sides. You would think that after all this time, there would be no after-effects, but there are. At least three families shunned, disowned or disinherited the members marrying out and we wound up in Canada, partly as a result.

(Ironically, my grandparents on my mother's side settled in Montreal, where they were resented for being "English," not French, and then their daughter, my mother, married a man from Western Canada, which is traditionally at odds with Eastern Canada. I have dealt with the situation here with humour, but I have to: I was born in Ontario, which is resented by everybody.)

I grew up with my parents and Belfast-born grandmother in the same household, and for a year or so after my grandmother died, we also had a boarder with us from Belfast. We had numerous friends from Northern Ireland as well, so for me there was much more contact with Irish culture than most grandchildren of émigrés could expect to have. Still, what I knew of the original culture was watered down; my siblings and I were deliberately sheltered from the worst of it.

My grandmother was the product of a mixed marriage, so she taught us tolerance: "There is only one God," she would say, "and every church is the House of God." I accepted her logic and her openness unquestioningly and, in my late teens, was perfectly happy to attend an Irish Catholic college despite my Protestant upbringing. It never occurred to me that I might not find so much understanding on the other side.

I knew little or nothing as yet about Ireland's "tribes," its plantations, its long history of unrest, or the War of Independence that led to Partition, and so I was entirely unprepared for the reception I got in the college: chilly at best and openly hostile at worst.

I didn't have any idea what my Irish Catholic name and Protestant upbringing would mean to the Irish Catholic religious who met me; I didn't know what beliefs they would ascribe to me based on my upbringing (beliefs I quite likely didn't hold, as I was already a free thinker); and I didn't see the slightest inconsistency in studying Irish

despite my many Ulster Scots forebears. I'd never heard the term at that point; all the people I knew considered themselves Irish. All I knew was that, in my new Catholic environment, I was somehow in the wrong and an outsider, and it was very painful. In retrospect, my presence must have been very painful for them too; I wish I had known how to ease their fears and maybe help us all.

In recent years I have wanted to strengthen my ties to the island and have made an effort to learn more about its history and its issues. The more I've learned, though, the more fearful of sectarianism I've become and the more conflicted I've felt over my own mixed heritage (mixed on both sides).

At first I felt I had to take sides – or that I might be forced by new Irish contacts to take sides —and that pressure made me very anxious. But thanks to NIMMA, I can now see a much healthier path. I've realized that having a foot in both camps can be an advantage, not a disadvantage.

Instead of feeling that I need to "belong" to one tribe or the other, I've realized I can view the history of both sides with compassion, not partisanship.

I've realized that I have permission to stay "in the middle," as my grandmother did with so much grace. Even my Canadian-ness, which had left me feeling like an exiled outsider, now seems to confer the gift of distance and some objectivity. After all, in this country, it is acceptable to be of any religion one pleases, and to be of any "tribe."

I have read the stories in NIMMA's 'Mixed Emotions' book and can't thank you enough. The first typifies what my own forebears seem to have gone through, and it's a sobering story about shunning. Yet the marriage described was successful and worthwhile, and it helped me to know that. The more recent stories do show more and more tolerance and hope, which is wonderful.

I really like the idea of feeling "lucky" to have a foot in both communities, as opposed to feeling that one is somehow not a genuine or acceptable member of either community.

It would have helped me a great deal to have had stories like these to consider when I was at that Catholic college, feeling both "wrong" and rejected and not really understanding why. Better late than never, though; these accounts have helped me now. They've given me a way to position myself, and that is exactly what I needed.

Thank you very much; you sent me a gift.

Maureen, Canada



Comment



From the Chair.....



“There will always be room at NIMMA”



The model for all our homes

Distance is no obstacle to providing pastoral care thanks to the marvels of e-mail. We’ve known this for quite a while now, thanks to correspondence from as far away as America and Australia, but it’s always nice to get a warm reminder that we’re doing something right – especially when it comes from three thousand miles away.

So it was this month in the season of goodwill to all men when Maureen got in touch from Canada. Sadly she had been experiencing all sorts of problems about her Irishness or lack of it, despite being two generations away from the old sod. Other people’s perceptions and prejudices were to blame as always, but Maureen was able to get in touch with NIMMA and get some much needed reassurance. Needless to say her story – in full on page 3 – rang a few bells with us at the office, none of them festive, and I was glad that Paul was quick to explain that nationality, like language, does not have an exclusive denomination. Maureen’s story reminds us that mixed marriage, even at a distance of miles and years, has been the victim of intolerance and sectarianism, but that it will always survive.

Closer to home, NIMMA’s place on a new committee to help set up 10 new-build shared social housing neighbourhoods, has come as a welcome boost. We have long crusaded for such areas, with Anne Odling-Smee a stalwart in that battle, and to date the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has rolled out nearly 50 shared neighbourhoods across the Province. These new sites will be the first new-build homes to fulfil stringent sharing criteria and we are delighted to be part of the mix.

Christmas and the ‘no room at the inn’ response made me think of last year’s nativity play and the super sharp seven-year-old ‘innkeeper’ who explained his lack of vacancies with a gruff, “Should’ve booked early, we’re always busy at Christmas”.

NIMMA has also been busy, but there is always room at our inn. We have maintained a constant flow of information to our customers- that includes just about everyone in the Province - via our newsletter, although financial restrictions have forced us, like the vast majority of charities, to release this through e-mail only.

Enquiries to our hotline on Belfast 90 235444 remain constant, while statistics show that our website at www.nimma.org.uk is, for most people, the first port of call for information about mixed marriage. Our public profile is strong and set to get stronger with the February/March 2015 launch of our new book of real-life stories about the children of mixed marriage.

Economic and political uncertainty continue on this island, NIMMA itself is desperately in need of funding and urgently seeking a core funding partner, but we remain optimistic that more and more of our young people are meeting and mixing educationally and socially. We trust that our new book, with its stories of love, compromise and perseverance, will be a great help to our young people.

May I wish all our readers a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year as we look ahead to 2015 and a more inclusive and welcoming society for all of our people.

Happy Christmas and a Peaceful New Year.

Ken