

(Cont'd. from page 1)

allocating duties and co-ordinating actions. Communication skills, together with individual and group co-operation competences were learned and employed.

The Outward Bound Course was designed to give the group the opportunity to travel through some of the most spectacular and remote areas of the Sierra Tramuntana using the knowledge and skills developed in the early stages of the course.

The Mallorcan expedition (Monday 30th March to Monday 6th April) was a formative experience which the organisers hope will contribute positively to the participants' future life choices.

In their evaluations, the young people were asked what they liked about the overall programme and what they learned. The following are some of their comments:

"I learned how to navigate, how to work together as a team, not to give up on the mountains and some Spanish. This programme helped me to learn more about my identity, the history of Belfast and how to respect others."

(Young person, aged 15 years.)

"I liked the people who took part in the programme and the expeditions in Spain. I learnt that any religion can work together."

(Young person, aged 15 Years.)

"I liked everything about the programme; learning to cook, and meeting up with the other group. I learnt to respect other people's decisions, listen more and how to organise myself better."

(Young person, aged 17 years.)

Apart from the Forum's contribution of £3,000, there was another significant contribution from Donegall Pass. Belfast City council chose Charlene Graham as a winner of the Community Safety South Belfast Gold Award and Charlene, most generously, donated her £500 award to the Programme. Congratulations and well done, Charlene!

Forum Continues Campaign For Better Services

Continuing Donegall Pass Community Forum's recognised remit as a lobbying vehicle, the Forum's Development Manager has attended meetings with various MLAs and local councillors in an ongoing attempt to improve services to the Donegall Pass community.

Several meetings have been held with Cllr Michael M'Gimpsey MLA, Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, during which the Forum has highlighted the work of Highway to Health and supported it in its efforts to secure future funding to ensure that the delivery of health and wellbeing services is sustained in Donegall Pass for the benefit of residents.

Minister M'Gimpsey led several 'walk-about's in the area, accompanied by Forum Staff and Committee Members, which resulted in yellow lines being painted on roads throughout the area in an attempt to alleviate the problem of commuter parking. The poor condition of footpaths in the area was noted and actioned with the Department for Regional Development (see article 'Falling Into A Vertical Trip Line' on page 3).

Minister M'Gimpsey also acted upon the Forum's concerns regarding the lack of funding being released by the Department for Social Development. The Minister, moreover, encouraged the Forum to seek additional funding

to deliver counselling services for the Lifeline service.

Elaine Mansfield (Forum Development Manager) was selected to represent the community sector in South Belfast as part of a delegation which met Margaret Ritchie, Minister for Social Development. Elaine highlighted the problems that communities were experiencing due to inconsistencies in, and shortages of, crucial funding.

The Forum made representations to the Minister for Regional Development, Conor Murphy MP MLA, resulting in discussions about how best to resolve the ongoing problems of commuter and pavement parking in the Donegall Pass area. The Forum's campaign, in partnership with other inner-city area organisations, for the removal of the Department for Regional Development's ludicrous and totally unacceptable proposal to levy a charge on residents for a Parking Scheme was successful. The charges have been scrapped and a new scheme is currently being proposed.

Additionally, the Forum has held meetings with other MLAs, facilitated by Dawn Purvis, Bobby Stoker, Jimmy Spratt, Dr Alasdair M'Donnell and Alex Maskey, to highlight issues concerning community provisions, housing, services and the needs of residents.

Donegall Pass Women Power-Up

Following its successful 'Get fit for summer' programme, the Womens Group is planning to deliver training in D.I.Y. from the end of September. Sessions will be held on Wednesday evenings from 6pm to 8pm in the Community Centre.

The Chairperson of the group, Valerie Best, commented that "Women are interested, more than ever, in learning how to carry out basic repairs in their homes - as it is often too expensive and unaffordable to bring workmen in to do these".

The Women's Group originally received a 'seeding' grant of £1,500, secured from the Community Relations Council by Donegall Pass Community Forum and, from last September, the Group has taken on various projects in the community, including organising the children's Hallowe'en party and fundraising for the pensioners Xmas hampers.

The group has also attended several training sessions in Personal Development and Health Promotion, Community Relations and Cultural Awareness.

For further information please contact the Forum (9032 6256).



Donegall Pass Festival Group

The Forum was able to contribute £500 this year towards the Festival's annual Big Day Out and BBQ at Crawfordsburn Country Park.

Over 90 children and parents attended. An organising team member, Kelly Anne Watson, commented that, "Everyone had a super day out. It's a lot of work - but worth it to see all the happy faces and everyone enjoying a good feed."

173 Hampers For Senior Citizens

Over £1,600 was raised for the Senior Citizens' Christmas Hamper Scheme - with a contribution of just over £173 from the Donegall Pass Women's Group 'Quiz Nite' - thanks gals! Donegall Pass Community Forum raised almost £1,450 through the generosity of the Consarc Design Group, Nacco Staff Charity Fund, UTV, Acclaim School of Motoring, Barclay Communications, Diageo, Lavery's Bar, Mivan Group, Sainsbury's, Tesco (Dublin Road), South Belfast Highway 2 Health, Wrightbus Ltd., Donegall Pass Community Development Company, Martin Downey, The Rubber Stamp Company and an anonymous donor. Thanks to them all!

The Forum will try to repeat this performance for Christmas 2009 (in spite of the economic crisis) - any volunteers? If you are aware of senior citizens that we missed last December - please let us know at 9032 6256.

Forum Plans September 'Open Day'

The Forum is currently planning an 'Open Day' to be held on Wednesday 30th September 2009 in the Main Hall at Donegall Pass Community Centre. The event is scheduled to run all day from 10.00am to around 8.00pm.

Exhibitors from the training & education, health, employment, community, advice and other sectors will be present to meet and talk to residents - to 'show their wares' and discuss, and to try to fulfill, the needs of the people of Donegall Pass. Food and refreshments will be available. Everyone is invited - see you there!

School Of Music Moving

The School of Music has begun the process of moving from Donegall Pass to a temporary home in North Belfast. This venerable institution has been a 'fixture' in the Pass for a very long time and, while it's sad to say goodbye to 'old friends', the school's move presents an opportunity for the Donegall Pass Community, through the Forum's Development Company.

In the meantime, Cllr Michael M'Gimpsey MLA will be arranging a meeting with Mr David Cargo (Belfast Education & Library Board) to hear the Board's plans for the building and to discuss various options.

Residents' Parking

Following the successful Forum-led protest against the



imposition of annual residents' parking fees, the Department for Regional Development insisted on wasting yet more public money by retaining the services of yet another consultancy to send out yet another questionnaire at the worst time possible, i.e., during an European election. The accompanying leaflet, showed a parking designation map that had already been rejected by Forum representatives. The Forum, despite numerous requests, is still waiting to have sight of the survey statistics. Watch this space!

Falling Into A Vertical Trip Line

Most people will be aware of the deplorable state of the footpaths in the local area, especially the main Donegall Pass thoroughfare. Members of the Forum recently took part in a "walkabout" with two engineers from the Department of Regional Development and Health Minister Michael M'Gimpsey, in order to ascertain the extent of the damage and to see what could be done to speed up repairs to the footpaths and kerbstones. The whole exercise turned out to be an object lesson, if one needed to be learned, in the mindless and stupid bureaucracy that passes for accountable government in this country.

One tends to look back to a happier time when if there were problems with the state of disrepair of roads and pavements the relevant authorities would send their workmen out to remedy the situation. Alas, that is no longer the case.

What we have now, like everything else that affects public services, is a system that is so nonsensical and unworkable as to defy belief. It would be reasonable to expect that a hole in the road would be fixed, i.e., filled in when necessary. It would also be reasonable to expect that footpaths would be reasonably level and safe to walk on for those that use them. Not so, folks.

For starters, holes are no longer called holes by the Department. Holes enter the world of governmental "gobbledygook" and "newspeak" and now become, "Vertical Trip Lines". No, don't laugh, I kid you not. Not only do they take on this new title but also it would seem that there are various kinds of them. Some are deemed suitable for repair some are not.

How does the Department decide which of these VTLs are holes and which are not? Believe it or not, they measure them. They even have a little tool for the purpose. Not only that, but these "vertical trip lines" have to be a certain depth before they are deemed suitable for filling. "Vertical trip lines" must have a depth of 20mm. If they do not meet this criteria then they are left alone. This results in footpaths that resemble badly made patchwork quilts, made all the worse by heavy rain.

There is, of course, another reason - and this says a lot more about our government departments and their attitude. It is the question of "compo" and how it relates to our claim culture. If someone trips on one of these "vertical trip lines" and makes a claim for personal injury, there is a distinct possibility that if the said "vertical trip line" is found to be only 19mm deep, or less, then that person may lose the right to claim.

How petty and ultra-bureaucratic is that? Who is it that sits in a room and comes up with a figure of 20mm? Have these people so little to do? No doubt it was the result of a weekend seminar involving over-priced consultants and "blue sky", "out of the box thinking" sessions.

Recent reports in the press have highlighted the fact that the Department is wasting enormous amounts of public money continuously patching and filling when it would be cheaper to completely re-lay these surfaces.

We also learn of reports from the Department of Finance calling for across-the-board savings and yet this kind of nonsensical waste continues unchecked.

Meanwhile, in correspondence with the Department, we are told that, "we have no plans to carry out such major works, (resurfacing), in Donegall Pass, we are currently assessing the footways and carriageway... for possible inclusion in a future resurfacing programme. You will however appreciate

(Cont'd. from page 3)

that such a programme is implemented on a priority basis, subject to availability of financial resources". In other words, they have no money. What money they do have for such work, however, is being wasted on the continuing programme of patching and make do.

The money is being wasted sending three men and a lorry to fill "vertical trip lines" 76.2mm x 30mm x 20mm, (approx 3"x1¼"x¾" in old money), who then have to return at a later date to fill in another one that has appeared due to more damage caused by drivers who use the pavements as personal car parks.

Michael McGimpsey, to his credit, hauled the departmental representatives over the coals regarding the state of the pavements, especially the section that runs between Oak Street and Virginia Street - pointing out numerous broken tiles that used to be wheelchair access, and broken kerbstones in Apsley Street. Within a few days the now familiar yellow squiggles had appeared designating the legal 20mm and non-legal 20mm "vertical trip lines". A few days later a few, but not all, of these had been patched. A workman throwing down handfuls of tarmac and stamping it flat with his boot carried this out.

It transpires that this is not the repair, as such, but, in fact, what is termed "temporary re-instatement". What this means is that when the Department eventually gets around to the real patching job, this temporary re-instatement will be dug up and then re-patched.

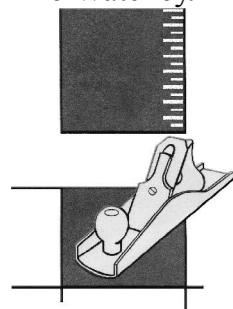
The same shoddiness was seen when the repairs to the kerbstones in Apsley Street occurred. A workman with a bucket of cement was seen slapping handfuls of the stuff into the large holes, sorry, "vertical trip lines", between the kerbs. It was like watching a kid making mud pies. Not long after this work was carried out the rain came down and, within minutes, the entire filling had been washed away - leaving the kerbstones in exactly the same state as before. At the time of the inspection it was still possible to pick out what was left with the tips of the fingers, such was the terrible consistency of the cement mix. A prime example of shoddy, sloppy work.

Questions must be asked as to how a government department can be allowed to get away with such an extraordinary waste of public resources. Not only does it waste these resources, its representatives then have the audacity to go on public record and admit to it.

Be assured that the Forum is doing everything it can to try and get something done about this and will continue to put pressure on the Department. We believe that its attitude is not acceptable and that the rules and regulations that bind them need a drastic overhaul if we are to get our streets back into a condition that does not resemble some third world village goat track, and that is safe to walk on.

We are tired of listening to these people talking out of their collective "vertical trip line".

The Watchey.



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Useful Numbers:
Advice Worker (Marie - Tuesdays): 9032 6256
Donegall Pass Community Forum: 9032 6256
Donegall Pass Community Centre: 9032 7661
GEMS NI (Employment Outreach): 9033 2313
Gingerbread NI (Lone Parents): 9023 1417
Housing Executive Main: 038448 920900; Repairs: 038448 920901; Housing Benefit Enquiries: 038448 920902
Job Centre (South Belfast): 9054 5432
Labour Relations Agency: 9032 1442
Lifeline (Depression, suicidal feelings): 0808 808 8000
P.S.N.I.: 9065 0222
South Belfast Highway 2 Health: 9031 5791
South Belfast Roundtable (On Racism): 9024 4070 (Ext. 15)
Sure Start (Inner City South Belfast): 9094 2525

Forum's Housing Executive 'Open Day'

The Forum was pleased to assist the Donegall Pass Residents' Group in arranging a 'Housing Executive Open Day' in Donegall Pass Community Centre. One of the event's main purposes was to afford tenants, and potential tenants, the opportunity to renew their annual housing applications.

The event was extremely well-attended by Housing Executive tenants who were able to inform the attendant Executive staff of the many issues that cause them concern and considerable frustration. The majority of the complaints that were voiced involved the scandalously sub-standard state of the repair 'service' which the Housing Executive, in its wisdom, has 'out-sourced' to a contractor. Many tenants complained of poor quality workmanship and spectacularly maladroit administration.

The Housing Executive, itself, attracts strong criticism for its own below par handling of complaints, constant buck-passing and lack of prompt and proper responses to tenants' legitimate concerns. The Housing Executive is (and has been for a very long time) aware of this patently unsatisfactory situation and has absolutely no excuse for its, apparently, supine attitude and lack of action to radically tackle and remedy the problems.

The Forum, and the Residents' Group, will continue to press for the necessary changes that will result in the provision of an efficient and responsive, good quality, repair service.

07892 490232 **BIG KAHOONAS**
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Thanking Everyone for their Support - see you all Soon!



THE PASS FORUM NEWS

www.donegallpass.org

Donegall Pass Community Newspaper

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August 2009

Forum Partnership Nets £180,000 For Donegall Pass Residents

Donegall Pass Community Forum's advice partnership has resulted in Donegall Pass residents being better off by £180,000. During 2008 (the latest full calendar year for which statistics are available), Marie McCallin, the Advice Worker who works with the Forum, had confidential face-to-face interviews with 126 Donegall Pass residents who had concerns with Disability Living Allowances, Pension Credits, Attendance Allowances, Carers Allowances, Housing Benefits and other Housing Queries, etc. - and, as a result, received backdated payments and new receipts totalling £180,000, which equates to an average of almost £1,500 per interviewee (£30 per week).

DLA and Housing Benefit (and other housing queries) represented the issues that occupied most of Marie's time - at approximately 26% and 20% respectively. The other most frequently occurring matters were: Attendance Allowance (11% approx.), Pensions Credit (11% approx.), Carers Allowance (10% approx.), Working Tax and Child Tax Credits (9% approx.), Income Support (8% approx.), Debt Counselling (5% approx.), Job Seekers Allowance (4% approx.) - with Family, Employment and other miscellaneous issues representing the remainder of concerns.

The Forum's Chairperson, Mr Harry Todd, commented, "These amazing figures demonstrate that if it were not for the existence of organisations like Donegall Pass Community Forum, with its ability to form partnerships with projects, such as the Advice Project, enabling them to carry out their work in the area, Donegall Pass would be a great deal worse off."

Marie McCallin is available on Tuesdays - please phone the Forum at 9032 6256 for a confidential appointment.

Forum Funds Youth Exchange Programme

Young people from Donegall Pass and Rosario Youth Centre were the beneficiaries of Donegall Pass Community Forum's decision to approach the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs (An Roinn Gnóthai Eachtracha) for financial assistance under its Anti-Sectarianism Fund. Due to the funding obtained from the Irish Department of

Foreign Affairs the Forum was able to make a donation of £3,000 towards enabling 12 young people (6 from Donegall Pass and 6 from Rosario Youth Centre) to take full part in the South Belfast Area Project's Community Relations Programme - Mallorca International Outward Bound Residential, February 2009 - May 2009.

The project's aim was to provide young people, from both Unionist and Nationalist traditions, with an exciting opportunity to take part in a two-phase programme that included informal education, outdoor education, and trips to interesting places - finishing with an International Residential in Spain. Olé!

The first phase of the project brought the young people together in a space in which they all felt safe and where they were supported and encouraged to examine their individual values and beliefs and to learn from one another. They took part in a 10-week course designed to enable them to examine community relations questions through various activities, e.g., discussion workshops, city-wide educational trips and a preparatory weekend residential,

in Delamont Outdoor Education Centre, Killyleagh. The group produced a photographic display of Belfast and the group's experiences during the process - incorporating what participants, individually and collectively, considered to be important to their respective cultures. The photographic displays are available for viewing at the Forum's offices.

The programme's second phase involved the use of qualified instructors teaching young people cutting-edge



Project Launch Event - Left to right: Hollie, Billy-Joe, Gail, Marie, Ryan, Lauren, Eddie, Neil, Karina, Cameron, Olivia, Michelle, Chris, Catherine and Laura.

techniques to prepare and equip them for life in an open-air environment. The young people took part in activities aimed at instilling leadership skills whereby instructors gradually hand over responsibility - creating opportunities for the group to plan routes, make decisions and learn from mistakes.

As they progress, the young people are challenged by their experiences, learning to live with and support each other. Each participant lives a simple, independent lifestyle during the course, having a low impact on the natural environment, and learns, at first hand, the effects of human activities on nature.

Group members developed an understanding of how to work as an effective team and each team was helped to identify goals, including planning, making group decisions,

Cont'd. page 2