

Sustainable Northern Ireland

Faith Waste Project

Final Report January 2006 – January 2007

Context

During 2006 Sustainable Northern Ireland has carried out three closely related projects promoting waste reduction and the reuse of materials, diverting them from landfill to find a future productive use either at home or abroad. All the projects also promoted a general 'waste reduction' message as a way to introduce the concept of sustainable lifestyles.

The Faith Waste project worked with a variety of faith communities to raise their awareness of waste issues and how environmental matters tie in with other aspects of sustainable development, specifically the social agenda appropriate to faiths. It was funded by Better Belfast with landfill tax and therefore was restricted in its work to groups within the greater Belfast area. The Project was designed to investigate whether, to what extent and in what ways, faith communities could be targeted with messages about promoting more sustainable lifestyles. Traditionally work with 'communities' in Northern Ireland has concentrated on community groups based in specific localities or 'communities of interest'. Working with faith groups to tackle specific sustainable development type issues is a relatively new idea, and the project had the dual goal of reducing waste and raising awareness of sustainability issues with such groups.

Faith groups have many years of experience in community development and project management. Indeed, religion or faith lies at the heart of many of the close knit communities within the city of Belfast which has been enriched by beliefs other than Christianity as emigrants have arrived in increasing numbers over recent years.

Faith based groups were selected as partners in this project for a number of reasons:

- Their beliefs generally promote a pro-environment and socially conscious philosophy, so they are often willing to undertake lifestyle changes for reasons other than personal gain.
- They have premises central to and used by the community where people meet regularly.
- Key workers are respected because of their faith and long term perspective, acting as the voice of local sentiment and opinion. This can promote long term sustainability, and provide a focus for community activities.
- Their members are drawn from all parts of the population regardless of age or social background.



By addressing this target audience, who have had little interaction with the overt sustainable development or environmental agendas to date, we may promote a waste reduction message within a sustainable development framework, demonstrating that goods that are no longer wanted can be given a second life and be of use to others, while diverting them from the waste stream. This work can stimulate partnerships which will continue to deliver the activities and 'message' after this short project has been completed.

The Faith Waste programme complemented its sister project, called Swap Shop also funded by Better Belfast, which identified organisations dealing with reuse, primarily in the greater Belfast area. By encouraging and facilitating networking among the groups we hoped to increase the amount of goods which are diverted from landfill to charity shops or similar mechanisms or facilities to provide social benefits either at home or abroad. The two projects complemented each other in that these were the very organisations that were able to work in partnership with the faith groups who could supply material for the shops.

Aims

- To educate and promote waste minimisation among Belfast's faith groups and to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill.
- To raise awareness of the inter-relationships of environmental, social and economic aspects of reuse.
- To establish linkages between the faith and other groups involved in social projects to promote reuse (e.g. charity shops).
- To recognise that unwanted items can have a productive use for others, either at home or abroad.

Objectives

- Work with 20 faith communities in Belfast.
- Encourage "reduce, reuse, recycle" within the groups, preferably to develop a waste management programme, delivered to the group by one of their members.
- Organise visits to the landfill site, recycling centre and a glass plant.
- Hold two workshops (April and August).
- Provide a Project Newsletter (April and September).
- Run a Competition for the client groups.
- Hold a Project Conference / Banquet.

Level of involvement

The Faith Waste Project contacted over 60 faith groups including Christian churches, other faiths, ethnic groups and philosophical groups. Some groups which were not specifically faith orientated have become involved with this project due to some of their members holding a faith perspective. There are now 38 groups (some having associated sub-groups) which have participated in the project, each of which has worked enthusiastically to further their own goal to reduce waste. Nearly 200 people were actively involved in the project and almost 80,000 were reached with its messages.

Approximately 50 charity shops, recycling organisations and waste management companies have also been contacted, all of whom are prepared to work in conjunction with faith groups in receiving waste material or other goods which may have a resource or financial value, including the recycling of ink cartridges, clothes, mobile phones, videos and cds. Of these, about 15 have taken a more active role in this project.

Project Outputs

One of the advantages of this new and innovative project was the lack of specific constraints on how to achieve the desired objectives.

The rationale for the project

- We wished to recruit organisations to the venture that represented as wide a geographical and social spread within the greater Belfast area as possible, so any subsequent growth of the project could affect most areas of the city.
- We would not confine our associations to places of worship only. Any gathering with a faith perspective or similar groups could associate themselves with the project due to some of their members being people of faith. This resulted in a rich assemblage ranging from social economy groups to student bodies.
- Growth of the membership of the programme was based on detecting key people who would open gateways to their group, from where we could network and share our message with other belief groups.
- The waste outcomes were achieved through a community development perspective. Each group was treated individually to see how our waste proposals could deliver whatever the group wanted to achieve. Thus their involvement may have encouraged new youth leaders, developed their citizenship programme for young people or encouraged cross-community / multi-racial understanding.
- The method of our involvement was determined by the group's beliefs or way of worship and practice. Hence some of the training, influence and trust-building was achieved by SNI staff attending fellowship meals or religious festivals.

Activities

- Speaking at general assemblies at primary schools,
- Teaching in primary classes (assisted by advisors from Belfast City Council),
- Advising leadership committees on the importance of waste issues to their faith group and preparing a leader within each group to speak to their faith group,
- Addressing church services and meetings,
- Working with youth and uniformed organisations,
- Speaking to a women's group and a group of old age pensioners,
- Involvement in various Summer and Community Programmes or Festivals,

The details of the participating organisations, their involvement, the quantifiable outcomes and the waste avoided are provided in a table listing all projects and their inputs and outcomes.

Workshops

On 5th April 2006, approximately 30 guests attended the first Workshop which was held in the City of Belfast YMCA (Stranmillis). Four guest speakers addressed the workshop on various issues.

- **Stewardship of the Environment**, *Fr. Ireneaus, Orthodox Priest*
- **Waste Management**, *Martin Doherty, Belfast City Council*

- **Developing a Waste Project**, *Glen Jordan, East Belfast Mission*
- **Encouraging Group Action within a Faith Group**, *Pastor David McMillan, Windsor Baptist Church*

On 9th August 2006 over 30 guests attended the second workshop, also held in the City of Belfast YMCA (Stranmillis). Six guest speakers addressed those attending.

- **A Faith Perspective**, *Rev Henry Kees, Methodist Chaplain, Queens University*
- **What Happens to Waste**, *Sonia McElroy, Belfast City Council*
- **The NEEDabag Project**, *Shirley Lewis, Bag Lady Productions*
- **Recycling in India**, *Mukesh Sharma, Hindu Community*
- **A Faith Perspective and How it has Affected My Work**, *Paul Griffith, Christ Church*
- **Getting the Sustainable Message Across**, *Howard Davey, City of Belfast YMCA*

The workshops also included discussion sessions from which a number of suggestions were obtained, including:

- There is a need to devise, produce and distribute a list of small scale potential ideas and projects that can be delivered by all faith groups.
- The importance of encouraging participation and involvement with Eco-Congregations must be addressed.
- Recognition of the importance of the faith aspect that although the target audience is small, it is still a significant driver for action when it comes to Waste Management and Waste Minimisation. Churches can be a champion for environmental stewardship.
- Investigate the possibility of faith groups receiving small scale sponsorship e.g. for wormeries, compost bins etc.

Celebratory banquet

On 3rd October 2006, the Faith Waste banquet was held at Belfast City Hall. Over 100 guests attended the banquet which promoted the work the faith communities had accomplished. The event promoted the waste message in general and expanded the sustainability message through the context of the banquet itself, which included locally produced, seasonal, organic and Fair Trade food. A welcome by Councillor Bernie Kelly of Belfast City Council was preceded by a performance arts contribution. Speakers and information on the food and sustainability were interspersed between courses. Breidge Gadd of the Big Lottery Board awarded the prizes to the competition winners.

Those presenting at the event included:

- ***Bhangra Beats on Indian Dhol Drums***, *Artsekta Group*
- ***A Faith Perspective on the Environment***, *Fr. Martin Magill, St. Oliver Plunketts (Catholic Church)*
- ***Sustainability: Why we need it now!***, *Murray Watt, Sustainable NI Board*
- ***Grace & Why we are grateful***, *Ron Ellsdon – St Bartholomews (Church of Ireland)*
- ***Practical Action***, *Hunter Kirk - Haven Christian Centre*

- ***The Future is in your Hands***, Audio Visual Presentation, Gary Mc Farlane, CIEH

The event was highly successful as judged from feedback of those attending as regard to the content, efficiency of the message and sense of community.

Competition

All groups participating in the Faith Waste Project were invited to enter the Faith Waste competition. Groups displaying the greatest signs of creativity, who had been highly influential towards encouraging others to minimise their waste and who had reduced their own waste significantly were awarded an environmental prize to benefit their entire group. Private business sponsored some of the prizes, which included a receptacle for segregating waste, bird boxes and saplings and an eco-kettle.

The prize-winners were:

1st Prize: Stormont Presbyterian Church with a combined Reduce, Reuse, Recycle contribution. They supplied linen bags for use by members, organised a clothes collection for Oxfam and developed a poster competition involving their childrens' group.

2nd Prize: Clonard Monastery Youth Centre collected aluminium cans from homes and a youth club and crushed them using a home made crusher, before acquiring a manufactured crusher. Older members of the youth club engaged with younger children to develop an art project to draw attention to their can crushing activities.

3rd Prize: Belfast Humanist Group changed their practice by using china instead of paper cups, linen bags to minimise waste, auditing members' donations to charity shops, organising house clearances and undertaking two community clean ups per year.

Day Trips

Faith groups were given the opportunity to attend field visits to Bryson House Recycling Centre (Mallusk), Palmerston Road Recycling Centre (Belfast) and to Quinn's Glass Factory in Fermanagh. 14 people representing seven groups took advantage of this opportunity. Interestingly, all who took part went on to fully commit their organisation to the project.

Faith Waste Newsletters

Three editions of the newsletter were produced, in March, August and December, providing general waste information and examples of good practice and updates on the project and its participants' activities. Contributions were freely forthcoming from the groups. Newsletters were distributed to all the faith and charity groups and other groups / individuals associated with the project, with copies of each produced. A number of the participants distributed copies to each family in their organisation and copies were sent to local councillors and councils outside Belfast to promote the project.

Outcomes

One of the hallmarks of our method of working has been the positive relationships forged between the participating communities and individuals and the SNI project workers. Regular review visits, good communication and aligning our contributions to the needs and desires of the group have delivered a comprehensive set of outcomes from which all the groups have benefited.

All the objectives have been accomplished and the aims of the project have been addressed. The main outcomes are:

- Waste minimisation and good stewardship among Belfast's faith groups have been extensive and their reduction has been noticeable, in some cases ranging up to 50%.
- Partnerships have been developed to raise awareness of the inter-relationships of the environmental, social and economic aspects of reuse, and also to promote practical work. This has involved establishing linkages between the faith and other groups involved in social projects to promote reuse (e.g. charity shops).
- Groups have seen that their unwanted items can be a productive resource for others or become a means of raising revenue through a range of self-involvement programmes and training deliveries.
- Churches have observed that this project has allowed capacity building within their organisation, developing individuals, sub-groups and associated organisations.
- Partnerships have been established through networking within faith groups, between different denominations, cross-community and cross-cultural working and across different sectors.
- Awareness and influence from the groups has gone well beyond the confines of the participating organisations themselves, impacting on family, associates and partner groups.
- Large scale events have spread the message to a wide and varied audience.
- Faith communities have a prominent role within two newly formed fora arising out of our projects – a Churches Environmental Panel for Belfast and a NI Association of Charity Shops.

Lessons and Recommendations

What has been accomplished?

- The groups are in various stages of development regarding waste management. The timescale of the project was too short for some of them to fit active waste management activities into their existing youth and adult work programmes, however, some plan to start schemes in January 2007. Others are widening and deepening what they have commenced with Faith Waste through BCC and other agencies, Eco-congregation or developing their own work-plans. A third category has worked with us long enough for trust to have built up to allow specific projects to follow on from awareness raising.
- Faith communities are represented on two newly formed forums:
Churches Environmental Panel for Belfast
NI Association of Charity Shops.
- Faith Waste has highlighted that waste management issues can involve positive cross-community and cross-sector working and practice.
- Partnership working is at a crucial and initial stage and should be encouraged through the above mentioned forums.
- The benefits of the projects were only possible by two officers being in post to drive the programme. Busy faith leaders / practitioners have their own priorities and will only have the time to commence a new venture with the aid of an external driver. Most groups are now past this vulnerable stage and its hoped that it will be able to continue.

What can the future hold?

- Deepening and broadening the work being done by the groups on waste management.
- Continuing to explore and develop the concept of using the vehicle of community development for each of these groups to deliver waste outcomes.
- Encouraging the Churches Environmental Panel for Belfast to develop 'teeth and legs' as a group by involving councils and other agencies, as with the Charities Forum. The Forum should apply for funding for future sustainable development projects, hence gaining the personal drivers these groups need to advance on issues in a focused and dedicated way.
- Carrying on the work of the Faith Waste project to empower the groups and individuals involved to make their practices sustainable and habitual.
- Taking the opportunity to introduce other sustainable development practices to these groups.
- Obtaining funding for groups from non-environmental sources.

Lessons from the work

- Success was only accomplished by rigorous and reflective practice, applying a community development model, selling the message on grounds of what can we do for you, as well as social and ethical grounds.
- Faith groups can be used as focused groups for waste management practice in society.
- The success rate in involving groups was approximately one in two contacts despite much effort.

- Time, patience, empathy, people skills, and evening and weekend working were as important in the building of trust and successful recruitment of individuals / groups as knowledge of waste and environmental issues.
- Concentrating on key people to lead to decision-makers within a group is more productive than going through hierarchical faith group structures.
- Undertaking review visits with all groups.
- Keeping groups aware of project news and good practice through a Newsletter.
- Providing logistical support and advice to participating groups and facilitating any necessary contacts for them.

Conclusion

The work of the project carries on and is gathering momentum as the groups take ownership of the processes and concepts put in place through the Faith Waste project. The success of the programme has been down to the relationships built up by the project officers, the client groups, and the other agencies that assisted in the delivery of the goals of Faith Waste. These relationships contributed to the enjoyable nature of the work and should go some way to ensure future success for the participants as they develop their waste management and sustainable development practices.