Restoring relationships

a community exploration of anti-social behaviour, punishment beatings and restorative justice

in collaboration with

Greater Shankill Alternatives

compiled by

Michael Hall

ISLAND (29) PAMPHLETS

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Introduction

As if the suffering and grief caused by the political violence of the last thirty years wasn't enough for Northern Ireland's beleaguered communities to have to endure, another scourge has added its burden – the endless catalogue of mindless acts of anti-social behaviour. Local television regularly relays images of teachers, parishioners or residents surveying the smoke-filled interior of a classroom, a church hall or a playgroup, a look of utter bewilderment on their faces. And every week countless individual dramas which never receive media exposure are acted out: houses burgled, cars vandalised, pensioners beaten up and robbed. A sense of despair and helplessness permeates many working-class communities, made worse by the realisation that these actions are invariably perpetrated not by 'outsiders' but by young people (and adults) who have grown up within their midst.

Given the policing problems which developed as the 'Troubles' progressed, many people turned to the paramilitary organisations in an attempt to redress this situation. Punishment beatings and shootings proliferated. RUC statistics record that over 1000 individuals were the recipients of punishment shootings and beatings over the last five years alone (emanating from both Republican and Loyalist organisations). But many beatings and threats never become 'statistics': RUC figures for 1999 list 206 cases of paramilitary-inflicted punishments, yet *Base 2* (NIACRO Youth Justice Unit, which works with individuals and families placed under paramilitary threat) received 624 referrals during the same year. Even allowing for the fact that an actual threat was found to exist in only 74% of cases, it still indicates a sizeable and largely hidden problem.

Those people in our communities who demand that paramilitary organisations 'deal with' anti-social elements are not inhuman ogres – they are just ordinary people who feel isolated, helpless and angry, and who, driven to despair, see few options open to them. The court system seems to have failed law-abiding citizens – in the community's perception the legal system displays more consideration for offenders than it does for victims. The police are often perceived to have more urgent priorities to contend with; while many individuals in Republican and Nationalist areas would be averse to any police involvement.

In recent years, however, people at community level have been trying to provide new options. In both Loyalist and Republican areas projects based on ideas of 'restorative justice' have emerged. These projects differ from one another depending on local conditions, as well as community perceptions towards the police, but they all have one thing in common – an attempt to develop a

community response to the problem of anti-social behaviour, and to establish an alternative to punishment beatings and shootings.

Within the present justice system crime is seen as a violation of law, and the state's response is basically 'retributive', equating punishment with justice. Restorative justice schemes, however, see crime as a breakdown of human relationships, and focus on healing and repairing the harm caused by crime. To assist in this, a trained community mediator facilitates a face-to-face meeting between victim and offender. This encounter allows the opportunity for community, victim and offender to determine 'justice' together. This usually manifests itself as an agreed period of volunteer work in the community, often directly related to the original anti-social behaviour. Not all victims agree to meet offenders face-to-face, but nevertheless they are still brought into the process in a way not provided for within the present criminal justice system. The *Greater Shankill Alternatives* restorative justice project has contrasted the two approaches:

Retributive	Restorative
Crime violates laws set by government.	Crime violates relationships between people.
Focus on placing guilt.	Focus on needs and responsibilities.
State is central to the process.	Victim and offender are central to process.
Rules are key.	Assumption of responsibility is key.
Victim plays minimal role.	Victim's participation vital.
Offender takes mostly passive role.	Offender required to be active in the process.
Offender marginalised from the community.	Offender marginalisation decreased.
Directed and lead by professionals.	Community and voluntary involvement.
Focus on the past.	Focus on the future.
Low percentage of restitution.	High percentage of restitution.

While a restorative justice approach might seem relatively straightforward, in the Northern Ireland context nothing is ever that simple. In many quarters 'restorative justice' is viewed with deep suspicion. Is it an attempt to sideline or undermine the police and the state? Is it merely a 'soft option' for young thugs? Does the fact that so many ex-prisoners wholeheartedly support restorative justice projects create any question marks over the purpose of such projects?

Given such questions, *Farset Community Think Tanks Project* felt it would be a worthwhile exercise to collaborate with *Greater Shankill Alternatives* in initiating a debate on community perceptions regarding restorative justice. A small group of people was brought together to discuss the issues surrounding anti-social behaviour and punishment beatings within a community context: parents, a local trader, a clergyman, a youth worker, a police representative, workers from restorative justice projects, and, not least, some young people who had become associated – for one reason or another – with the *Alternatives* project.

Michael Hall
Co-Ordinator, Think Tanks Project

Preface

When setting out to explain what *Alternatives* is and what as an organisation we aim to achieve, I find myself first having to clarify and explain what *Alternatives* is not. I suppose this is common practice in the cynical and 'zero-sum' mindset that is a product of our situation here in Northern Ireland.

There have been many negative comments made with regard to what 'restorative justice' projects –in our case *Greater Shankill Alternatives* – are about. Unfortunately a lot of these comments have been based on misconceptions, misinformation and, in some cases, downright mischief-making. It is my hope that this pamphlet, by providing an opportunity for honest and open discussion on the benefits of restorative justice and *Alternatives*, may go some way to combating some of these misconceptions and create a better understanding among those who may have genuine concerns around what *Alternatives* is trying to achieve for the Greater Shankill and, indeed, for our wider society.

It must be stated clearly that *Alternatives* came into being not as an alternative to the formal justice system or to undermine or replace the police. Its aim was to offer a non-violent approach to dealing with anti-social activity and subsequently provide a viable alternative to paramilitary punishment attacks. We are not the long arm of the police or the paramilitaries, but simply a genuine community response to the scourge of anti-social activity and its impact on our community.

We recognise that paramilitary punishment attacks are not the answer, but, unlike others who offer only hollow condemnation, we have been pro-active in attempting to put forward an alternative where such attacks are replaced by a more positive and humane way of dealing with criminality in our community. Neither are we a 'soft option' or in the business of rewarding wrongdoers. We encourage offenders to face the consequences of their actions, take responsibility for them, and actively make amends to their victims and community.

Unlike the criminal justice system which excludes and disempowers victims and communities from the justice process, *Alternatives*, based on a philosophy of Restorative Justice, sees the victim and community involvement as essential in the process of true justice.

Unlike our juvenile detention centres which we would argue merely provide containment (costing tax payers millions and achieving little by way of behaviour change among offenders), *Alternatives* is committed to a long-term holistic approach of working with everyone who has a stakehold in their community. We are convinced that an approach which incorporates prevention, intervention and reintegration of offending young people is the most productive way of achieving behavioural change.

Billy Drummond
Support Worker, Greater Shankill Alternatives

Restoring relationships

The 'offenders'

Irrespective of the fact that all sections within our community can participate in what is termed 'anti-social behaviour' –adults as well as juveniles, females as well as males – the widespread perception is that it is young males who are at the core of the problem. Whether this perception is accurate or not, the reality for an organisation like *Alternatives* is that the vast majority of those it works with do fall into this category. For the purposes of this publication, therefore, a number of young males were brought together for a preliminary discussion, to set the subsequent discussions by the adults within a context. The discussion with the young males was focused, not on the types of anti-social behaviour they or their peers might have indulged in, but on their feelings about community and state responses to such behaviour. An obvious first question was why they indulged in anti-social behaviour in the first place.

> Those who get involved in stealing do it for money . . . for drugs. Most housebreakers spend it on drugs.

> You only go joyriding 'cause you're bored and you've nothing better to do. And some people get a real laugh when they do it. There is a risk though.

Is this risk part of the attraction?

> Aye. We do it with our friends. You get a better buzz out of it when there's a crowd of you.

> Anyway, when you're doing it, you don't always think about the risk, you don't think about that part of it. It never goes through your mind when you're doing it that you're going to get caught, like.

> You don't think about things like that until you get out of the car. When you get in you're just flying about.

And what of the community against whom this behaviour is directed. Are their feelings ever considered?

> Not really. I suppose you never stop to think that someone else could do the same thing to your ma or da.

Note: All indented paragraphs represent a quote, and spaces between quotes indicate when a new contributor is 'speaking'. In line with Think Tank procedure, no quote is attributed, a policy which experience has shown allows for more openness.

We expect them to be upset; I mean, you're bound to expect it. The ones who do it must expect it. But . . . you still do it. It doesn't stop you.

The community think we're wee bastards. Wee scums. But we think some of them are ould bastards too.

When asked why they should feel bitter about a community which is, after all, only reacting to their behaviour, the rights and wrongs of this behaviour take second place to the youth-community antagonism which has clearly developed, and almost serves as a justification for such behaviour.

So *they* have a right to think things about us but *we* don't have a right to think something about them? They're sitting calling us wee bastards and all . . . and we can't call them things back?

An even greater antagonism is evident with regard to the police.

They're black bastards! Scum of the earth.

They're stinkers. No-one likes them.

Most Catholics think the police are only picking on them ones, while Prods think the peelers are always picking on them.

How has the post-ceasefire situation impacted upon the young people in their dealings with the police?

I think we're worse off now; the police are taking it out more on youth. You can't even walk up the street without them stopping you, searching you in the middle of the street in front of people.

Or driving dead, dead slow alongside you. I think it's got worse with the police.

Before the ceasefire they would have mainly searched older ones, now it's anybody – for no reason.

You can't sit in the park in groups; we did that and they put us out of it.

Before they were looking for terrorists, now they're looking for wee hoods that they think are running about wreckin' the place.

However, not all opinions about the police are so negative.

They don't annoy me, like.

And what would you do without them? If there were no police your windies could be getting broke by Catholics, and then who are you gonna 'phone?

If there was no police these areas would be just run by the [paramilitary] organisations.

There's good peelers and bad peelers, just like there's good people in the

organisations and bad ones, and good Catholics and bad Catholics.

Despite such antagonism, most of the young males would still prefer to be apprehended by the police for their misdemeanours than by the paramilitaries.

> I think the community should go to the police when things happen, 'cause I don't think it's right getting beat up by the paramilitaries.

> You would get some would go 'till the police, old people would go to them. I think that's better.

> You'd still rather get caught by the police than by the organisations, 'cause the organisations beat you on the spot.

However, this preference to being dealt with by the police had an ulterior motive behind it.

> They give you a caution, or take you to court. That's it, then it's over.

> What young people think is that if they go through something and it wasn't too bad they would say to themselves: that wasn't so hard, I could do that again.

> The first time I was caught by the police – I was rioting at the time – I was shitting myself. But see now, see if the peelers lift me, it's just wee buns. See if they ask you a question . . . the first time they caught me I was: "yes, sir; no, sir; I'm sorry, sir." But see now? I just tell them to fuck off, get away from me, I haven't done nothing . . . just deny everything.

What about being targeted by the paramilitaries?

> They don't ask you what you're doing, or why you're doing it – they just beat you up. But they're child-beaters.

> I'd rather be got by the peelers.

> But if you get beat by the organisations you can't go to the peelers, that's the way it works. You can't report that you got beat up, you can't give their names, so that they can get charged with assault.

> If you used your head you would steal cars outside the area. That way the community doesn't see what you're doing. If you were thick you'd steal cars from around here, 'cause then the community want the organisations to sort you out.

> They've nothing else to do, they're beating people up 'cause they've no Catholics to fight with.

> The paramilitaries are still doing beatings even though there's supposed to be peace. That's why most hoods hate them.

The perception among the young males is that those involved in carrying out so-called paramilitary 'punishment beatings' are wedded to a culture of violence.

The two [paramilitary] organisations are even fighting each other, even though Prods are supposed to stick together. To tell you the truth, I couldn't care less about it if they both shot each other's fucking heads off.

Same here; I couldn't care less if the IRA and the UVF just started shooting each other dead, as long as they wouldn't take it out on the community. As long as it's people from the organisations, as long as no-one innocent gets shot dead.

I don't think peace will last either. I think things'll probably start up again soon enough.

However, the perceived rivalries between the paramilitary organisations is mirrored in the young people's own territorial rivalries.

I fought with Catholics not because I didn't like them, I fought with Catholics 'cause there was a riot going on, and we'd riot with anybody. Even the Ballysillian ones. The Sandy Row ones don't like us. Same with the ones from Tigers Bay. Or the Dundonald ones. When you go over to the Ice Bowl they watch you constantly.

But we would do the same with ones coming into our area from Rathcoole or Mount Vernon, we wouldn't want them to wreck our area.

What do the young males feel about *Alternatives* as an approach?

I think hoods would think the best about *Alternatives*. You would do what you could for them to thank them. Even for just listening to you . . . no-one usually wants to listen to a hood.

I joined [an *Alternatives* programme] 'cause to me it was a way of not getting your ballocks knocked out by the organisations. Soon as I joined it I thought it would be a wee gift, a couple of hours voluntary work and you're away. But fuck me, it wasn't, it was hard graft. But I think it's really good.

It stops most young people from getting their legs broke or kneecapped or threw out of the community.

But has it made them think about what they were formerly doing to the community?

It's made me think a lot now, but it wasn't like that when I just started it – then I just thought: I've got out of another situation, I've saved myself from getting beat up. But as you go through it you start to wise up a bit.

'Anti-social behaviour' in its community context

Although most types of crime are inherently 'anti-social' to some degree, 'anti-social behaviour' as a term is generally restricted to a particular kind of crime, committed by a particular type of perpetrator. Such a restricted definition is something adopted by the police as well:

> The police see 'anti-social behaviour' as the 'lower' type of crime: the criminal damage, the neighbours' rows . . . all those things we would label mundane crime,as opposed to more serious crime – and quite separate from paramilitary crime, which is a totally different issue altogether. Having said that, while it might be mundane to the police it is certainly not mundane to the community, and the police accept that there is a big problem with regard to anti-social behaviour. Furthermore, there is a relationship between it and more serious crime; I feel that if the police can sort out, with the assistance of the community, the anti-social behaviour – by giving people a better quality of life – then the more serious crime actually starts to decrease.

For the workers in *Alternatives* a similar perception exists:

> We would also term 'anti-social crime' as all that low-level stuff: the likes of joyriding, housebreaking, shoplifting, anything that doesn't involve serious violence. But things like serious assault, or anything of a sexual nature, we wouldn't see as being within our remit. I have to point out too that a lot of people have the perception, justified or not, that because of the situation here for the last thirty years the police have focused far more on the political unrest. And yet anti-social behaviour still impacts heavily on people in our communities. It might seem quite trivial when set against all the pain and grief which has resulted from all the political stuff, but for someone who experiences anti-social behaviour at a personal level it is quite upsetting.

It is the fact that anti-social behaviour is so widespread within the community – no-one seems to escape it – which makes it seem all the more oppressive.

> I live on Workman Avenue and when I look around the neighbourhood I feel that the anti-social behaviour that is going on is more than an organisation like *Alternatives* can handle. It is so prevalent, it is so overwhelming. On our street it is just a constant part of life – day in and day out. And it depends on just what you define as anti-social behaviour as to where the problem begins. A young couple live a street over from me, just had their first baby, and they recently bought a car. And the husband was complaining to me about the constant hassle it was having their car parked outside the house. At night the local kids come and literally jump on it, like it was a trampoline. And these are 10-year-olds, who have no sense of valuing another person's property. They're jumping on the bonnet and on the hood of the car and it's an ongoing struggle for him, night after night. There's also constant problems

with elderly people getting their windows broken, kids throwing stones, and how you get a handle on it I just don't know. It can feel overwhelming just living in the community at times. It is a big, big problem.

And what about the widely-held perception that 'anti-social behaviour' is a problem mainly of young people.

When we talk about anti-social crime are we only talking about youth? One of the things young people throw back at us is that every time we talk about anti-social crime we only talk about them, while obviously there are adults involved in various types of anti-social behaviour. But the perception in the community seems to be that it is young people who are doing it all.

One group of young people told me that when they stand at the street corners, even when they don't talk very loud, they get constantly moved on by local people. But outside the local pubs on a Friday or Saturday night there's all these adults out cursing and swearing and creating more disturbance than the young people ever do at the street corners, yet nobody says a word to them. There are double standards, and young people can see this.

That's probably all true, but the feeling out there in the community is that most anti-social activity in the area *is* committed by young people. I think that's the reality as well. When we carried out initial research for the *Alternatives* project, we looked at the figures of who was on the receiving end of punishment beatings and 80% were between the ages of 17-25. So that was the age group we started to concentrate on. But since we opened our doors we've noticed that the age level has dropped dramatically; kids as young as 12-13 are equally involved in this type of activity. Now I'm not saying that all of them would have been beaten up or shot but these were the ones who were causing the problems to the community. So we had to lower our 'age range' a bit and see what we could offer to all these young people.

The perception too is that most of those involved in anti-social behaviour are males, but how accurate is this?

That is the perception, but to our knowledge there are a lot of young females involved with groups, gangs – call them what you want – who would be involved in that type of activity. But people don't think when they see a group of young girls together that they're up to no good, when the reality is that they can cause as much mayhem as anyone.

In a group they also agitate the young fellas and the young fellas want to show off –we've all done that ourselves.

There are a lot more young females who commit anti-social crimes than the statistics would show, 'cause there is that gender thing where even the type of crime they might be involved in would be different from what young males would be involved in. But they're still involved in a large percentage of crime – more shoplifting rather than joyriding – which may not seem as serious or as threatening by the community.

What the statistics don't show, and I am sure this could be confirmed, is that 80% of young males up in court for stealing cars were accompanied in the car by a young girl.

That's true. I have attended juvenile court and it would scare you the number of wee girls who're up in court for allowing themselves to be carried.

Girls would steal quicker from a shop and if they're caught it's a case of: get out and don't come back in here. It's not reported, but you steal a car and it *is* reported. I'm a shopkeeper and I believe there's a lot of shoplifting by young girls that's not being reported.

Even if it is accepted that 'anti-social behaviour' is mainly a youth problem, are there different interpretations as to just what constitutes 'anti-social behaviour'?

When I was growing up I drank cider in the park the way kids now drink cider in the park. It wasn't deemed to be anti-social then, it was part of growing up. But it's not just a matter of drinking cider in the park any more, it's all the activity that goes on alongside it. The likes of the vandalism when they're drunk, the vandalism when they're on their drugs or their solvents, or when they're sniffing stuff. It's the accumulation of all that which brings young people to the attention of the community. And when they're standing round street corners, it might not seem anti-social, but if you're a pensioner living in that end house you're frightened to go out of your door. Therefore to that pensioner it *is* anti-social, and it's trying to re-educate young people as to what's acceptable and what's not.

The problem is that when you say to them that what is seen as normal to them – standing around street corners –isn't normal to us, you're almost putting them on the first step of the ladder of being 'separate' from their community. And if they have no jobs or anything else to give them self-esteem, then there's a direct road from that first occasion when they are accused of being 'anti-social' to real criminality.

The adult world also seems to be at a loss when trying to understand the expectations of today's young people.

I think if you take the BB [Boys Brigade]: how many lads who were in the BB or any of these groups are in trouble? I found when I was in them I hadn't time to fight. I find that if a lad's in the BB or the Scouts you get very little trouble out of them.

There's not many of them want to join the BB and the Scouts nowadays. And there's too much else going on for them –drugs are too easy got.

The likes of the BB was there as a structure at a time when there was no other facilities. You ask them now to go to the BB and they'll look at you as if you're daft. You'll maybe get them up to the ages of 11, if you're lucky, and then, bang, they're away. And the same thing is starting to happen to youth clubs. It used to be you could've said: come on into the youth club, you can

play pool or table tennis or the arcade . . . that doesn't stimulate wee lads or wee girls now. How could that compare with getting chased by the peelers or stealing cars and all the buzz and excitement? We need to be more challenging for young people; going to the youth club doesn't give them status, which is what a lot of them are looking for. And the way some of them seek status is to try and be the best joyrider, the best housebreaker. And when you ask them what they want to do when they're my age, they don't even think what they want to be next week.

We have to get all this into perspective. We don't want to give the impression that all young people are only interested in taking Es and joyriding – I would assume that it's a small minority who get into trouble.

I think a lot of people, especially of my generation, would say: give them a pool table, and they'll be okay. But young people have moved on from that now, they're talking about cyber cafes and other things.

I was on the management board when we were trying for a Millennium bid to build the Spectrum Centre. And we were trying to build in things for the young people, things *we* felt they wanted. And it wasn't until some time down the line that the kids said: why don't youse listen to *us*? So they had a workshop of their own and came up with their own ideas. And I'll tell you what – I got one hell of a shock. I had to sit down and think: we need to listen to these kids.

I think everyone is recognising is that we need to listen seriously to what young people are saying. We invited the police along to talk to some young people, and they came in civvies and the young people were sitting talking to them just the way they would talk to each other. There was a lot of straight talking, a lot of swear words, but at the end of it they seen the police as real people, not just as uniforms. And we found in talking to the young people that the dislike they have for the police is the same dislike they have for paramilitary organisations – it's authority that they don't like. They think they know it all when they are teenagers, but didn't *we* all know it all when we were teenagers? A lot of us working in the community forget that we were once young ourselves, we forget about the transformation we had to go through from being a teenager to being an adult, and we think that everybody should think as an adult. But it takes time and there's not enough people in the community who listen to young people with a young person's ear.

Is it that society itself has changed for the worse?

Our community have lost much of its former cohesiveness. The trust that used to be in the community is not there to the same extent. You don't see much evidence nowadays of the 'open-door' policy that people had, when you could just walk in on your neighbours; neighbours who would light your fire for you if you were working late, or who took in your children when they came home from school. The Troubles have had a major impact on making people in the community more inward-looking.

And not forgetting redevelopment. The planners of some parts of the Shankill left people with no sense of personal territory. In the Lower Shankill there are bits of grass stuck here and there which belong to no-one in particular.

The Shankill was row upon row of terrace houses and everyone knew one another, now I don't know who is living close by. What with redevelopment and the Troubles the community spirit is not there to the same extent. And with the loss of that community spirit you also have a loss of the old ways in which the community, without resorting to violence, was able to keep potential troublemakers in their place.

The family unit has gone, your granny was close by and she helped her daughters get houses close by. But that's all changed, the Shankill is not the same as it was.

Consumerism is a problem too – with "I'm all right, Jack" attitudes. People don't feel the same need to concern themselves with helping the community. Now it's all individualism, people are competing more, and saying: I'm not going to let them have more than me.

What about the institutions, such as the churches, which traditionally helped bind together the fabric of working-class Protestant areas?

I think that part of the reason why churches are increasingly perceived as irrelevant in the inner city is because they have shrugged off their responsibilities and said the problems are outside our walls. And really what they should have been saying was: how should *we* be changing so that we are responding to these problems in a different way? What should we be doing, for example, to provide a different way of addressing this? How are we listening to young people, are we open to learning and open to dealing with anti-social behaviour in a creative way? And I think that's taking responsibility for a problem rather than trying to put it onto the young people. I think it's a shame that the church has not been more involved in supporting and encouraging projects that involve restorative justice models.

I entirely agree with you. I have been in Tennent Street as a police officer for nine years, having been born and reared in this area. But in those nine years I have asked on numerous occasions for the churches, of all denominations, to support the police in community relations. Maybe an individual clergyman would have done it, but in general they have shied away from getting involved with community issues. They will get involved with people who attend their church, and the children of the people who attend their church, but the kids who hang about the street corners they do not want, and have neglected them.

An added problem, if agencies such as the church remain aloof, is that when the police respond to what the community perceive as problems, they risk alienating the young people in the process.

Our problem is that if bodies like the church won't get involved it is *we* who

have to respond to calls from the public. If you're getting bothered by kids standing outside your door, and you ring the police we are obliged to attend to that call. Now the kids might not be doing anything wrong, and maybe this is the first time they have made real contact with the police, but unfortunately it's a negative contact, one of conflict and antagonism. We tell them: "you have to move on." "Why!" "You just have to, 'cause you're told." There's no reason why they have to move on, but because we were called we feel obliged to move them on, 'cause the old-age pensioner there is terrified. Although they haven't done anything she is just terrified by the fact that they are there. So we move them on, and it's "fuckin' black bastards!" We really do need more positive ways of getting in contact with the youth, that's something the police have neglected over the past thirty years.

And here is an example where the church has failed. That little old pensioner is probably connected to a church somewhere so if she feels afraid of young people outside her door, as well as the police being contacted to move the young people on, why aren't they asked to contact the minister to go visit her and help her deal with her fears? The church avoids its responsibility for the youth problem. Let's take responsibility for our community.

Maybe it's our [the police's] fault, because on more difficult issues like controversial parades or serious public disorder I can make 'phone calls to certain people who can talk to people who are rioting and get it stopped – hopefully. I mean, it has worked reasonably well in Tennent Street over the past five or six years, and we've had very few problems during Drumcree week when the rest of the country has been riot-torn. And if we can do it at that level, why can't we do it at the lower level? Probably because we haven't bothered, that's why.

It is a complex problem and needs a totality of approach. All the agencies must see it as a shared problem. These young people haven't been parachuted into our community, they are part of that community, and how the community responds to that can either worsen or improve matters.

However, just as these young people were not parachuted into the community, neither are they bereft of adults who are supposedly responsible for them.

I think most people will say: aye, but it starts in the home with the parents. If you know what your son's doing, or what your daughter's doing, then they'll not be getting involved in that type of activity. The problem is that that's not the reality. The reality is that most young people get up to mischief because they are young people, not because they are bad. It's a part of growing up, and they're making mistakes, and they have to make mistakes before they can move on.

My young lad has been in trouble, not through any fault of mine. I can't be there all the time, especially when you're trying to run a business. You can't always lay the blame on the parents. I often wonder if there is a problem health-wise in some of these kids which hasn't been recognised.

There is – 'attention deficit hyperactivity disorder'. One of my lads is on tablets for it and it just completely changes him, it is unbelievable. One minute they're just really hyper the next there is . . . well, it takes about fifteen minutes for the tablets to work . . . but when it does, they are as nice as ninepence, couldn't do enough for you. It's only being acknowledged here now, but it's been well accepted in America for years. It's an illness and it's not their fault. The brain cells aren't controlled and on the spur of the moment these kids just do these wild things. They don't stop to think; it's something to do with the brain filters, they're all muddled up.

One of the worst things as a policeman is bringing a child home or ringing the parents up to tell them that your child's been caught stealing a car. And although there are some parents who don't give a damn,most parents *do* give a damn, and the shock on them is horrendous.

The problem is that a minority of parents *don't* feel any such responsibility.

Sometimes you get a negative response. I hear it from my young officers. Maybe your car's been damaged, and you say: look, it's that young fellow there. We take him home and find we get as much abuse from the parents! And we say: look, your child has damaged somebody else's car . . . and you're told to fuck off or whatever. And for the young policeman it is extremely frustrating and depressing.

There's not the same respect any more. When I was young, if somebody was brought to my home, and if their parents said I had smashed their window my da would've beat me. But now what happens is that if somebody brings somebody that's done wrong, they say: "have you nothing else to do with you time, go away and get lost!"

One of the things that came up in the research I was doing was that people were saying that in the 50s and 60s if the police came along you run out of the road. If they caught you up to no good they would have hit you a smack and brought you home and you would've have got another hammering in the house because you gave cheek back to the police. Now if the police bring somebody to the house the parents say: "did you put your hand on my son – I'll bring you to court!"

What role have the schools played in all of this?

Is it education as well? Do teachers just want to get the kids through school without too much bother? Is it the ones who haven't got qualifications or exams or are in jobs who get into all the trouble?

Schools have really failed a lot of these kids. They're put out and nobody wants to know. They get an hour in the library, but what else have they got?

Well, the education system failed my young lad, and I would like to know if it's a lack of proper education that's behind a lot of the ones who steal.

I was speaking to a few teachers and they said: we are under pressure for

results, we have to work the system, and kids who don't show an interest will get left behind. We have a class full of kids and we can't give the time to every single one of them that they might need.

One of the things that frustrates me is that a young person is expelled in his or her third or fourth year but the schools won't give them their Leaving Certificate so they can then go on for training. They won't say they have cut them free, so you have kids wandering around in a no-man's land for a whole year, when they'd be better off in training schemes. And then they get frustrated and is it any wonder they get into trouble?

Schools and education authorities have a statutory responsibility to provide young people with a full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude and ability. Probably the reason why they don't give out the Leaving Certificates is that the schools and education authorities don't want to provide statistics on their failings, 'cause they will show they're not doing what they're supposed to be charged with.

I look at it from an alternative perspective; I work for 'Pathways', which provides alternative education for young people in their last year – those who would normally drop out – and research shows that dropping out of school is a significant factor in terms of offending behaviour. And when a lot of young people drop out they're not occupied during the day, and it usually means they're up all night with their Playstations or whatever, or out with their mates on the streets, and sleeping all of the next morning.

Your scheme would've suited my young lad fine. The teachers were just disregarding him in his last year at school, just told him to sit there and not annoy anyone. He dropped out.

What we all seem to be saying is that there's a certain moment in a young person's life where if they happen to go down the wrong path and they don't get the opportunity to correct it, it's as if they've lost that opportunity, and they can't come back from it. And they're stigmatised if they do something wrong, they're stigmatised if they refuse school and that makes it worse and makes them feel less self-assured, and the whole thing just compounds itself. What concerns me is that there is that small gap to do something for and with young people, on their terms as well, and if we miss it, we are just creating more problems in the long term. That's why from the education point of view, or the restorative justice point of view, I am all for these approaches, to try and turn it around.

The definition of education generally is very narrow and the system tends to stream young people into ability and year groups. But schools are restricted by the National Curriculum which stipulates that *every* young person must achieve such and such. It's easy to slag off education, but teachers have a very difficult job with what they have to do for the whole class. There are changes in the offing at the moment, but it will be a slow process.

There was a consensus feeling among the Think Tank participants that co-operation at all levels was essential if the problem of anti-social behaviour was to be addressed.

> I think the community, the police, everyone, has to work together. I think this is important because when they do work together they might see that they are not responsible for some of the causes of the problem. It's okay asking: what's the problem on the Shankill? The real core of the problem on the Shankill may actually be *outside* the Shankill: in Brussels, in the US, or wherever the control of international commerce rests. The present difficulties facing the shipyard, and the constant movement of industries out of here – these are things well beyond the control of the people of the Shankill. The reality is that the community and the police and everyone else are left to cope with the impact of decisions taken *outside* this community. It's not just a problem of vandalism or whatever, it's a problem of no jobs, poor educational achievement, increasing alienation. By working together on these issues maybe people will see the bigger picture.

> Could I say right away, and we're speaking openly here, that the police cannot deal with anti-social behaviour, we need the support of the community. We have tried in the past to rely solely on the courts, but that doesn't work. The statistics show that the police in this area only solve 11% of reported criminal damage, that's broken windows right up to the attacks on buses and the damage to your car. That is all we can solve – 11%. Now, obviously, we would want to solve more – but we can't. And this is why I support *Alternatives*, because we must work with the local community. It is the only way we will give the people of this area a better quality of life. So that your friend can sleep easy in his bed at night, and not have his car – for which he is probably paying a fortune on a monthly basis – vandalised or wrecked.

> Many people in the community really try to give young people what they want, but there's two sides of this coin: the young people themselves have to accept responsibility for the actions they are taking and the harm they are doing to their community.

> You can't make young people change, you cannot compel them to change. The only people in the community who can change are those individuals who say "I am going to change".

> What I find difficult to understand is the amount of unnecessary damage and vandalism that is caused to their own community for absolutely no reason. I can understand the stoning at the interface, it's the culture – on both sides. I don't like it, but I can understand it. What I can't understand is why they do all these things to their own community. For example, the churches have to bolt their doors on the Sunday from the inside so that they can have their prayers in peace, because especially at times like Hallowe'en their doors would be opened and bangers thrown up the isle. Now these are local kids hurting their local community – I find that hard to take in at times.

Imperfect responses

Although the resources available to the police and courts are extensive, the perception at grassroots level is that, despite such resources, the problem is not being adequately addressed and certainly not being resolved.

From the community's perspective, even when young people are lifted, for anti-social behaviour or whatever, usually nothing actually seems to happen. A neighbour told me recently he surprised two young lads trying to break into a house. He knew the pair but when the police asked him if he could identify them he said he couldn't. Now why did he say that? He said to me: do you think I'm going to waste my time running up and down to court when those pair are just going to get rapped over the knuckles by the judge and send on their way? Who will reimburse me for my loss of earnings?

From the traders' perspective they would have that attitude also. Even talking some years back, when people were shoplifting or breaking into shops, traders wouldn't really go to the police. They felt it was a waste of time in most cases, it was better just to get back to earning a trade. And the police can surprise you, too. One trader, who has since moved off this road, once caught an old woman shoplifting and the policewoman's response was: "surely you're not going to prosecute this old woman?" But this little 'old woman' had been stealing in *every* shop on the road! He himself was tortured with her, and to him it was the last straw; she would be in every day and he would be putting her out. But that was the police response, so traders feel let down by the police. I can understand why traders would go to the likes of the paramilitaries. At one stage on this road the shops were getting broke into every night, and no mistake about it, it was the paramilitaries who stopped it –just like that! Things stopped, no break-ins, no nothing. The police couldn't do it, but yet withal by speaking to paramilitaries something was done about the problem, at least on that occasion.

But the paramilitaries don't actually address the symptoms, and it just happens again and again. The paramilitaries and beatings are not the solution.

No, but it helped the traders. There was one trader's shop which was broke into and when he went and seen the paramilitaries the stuff was actually brought back. You don't get things back when you use the courts, and traders feel just as badly let down by the courts. You have people who have been stealing from shopkeepers – people from this community who work for the shopkeepers – they're stealing from their employers, it happens everywhere, and they go to court and they confess to stealing thousands and they get fined £100 and given 20 hours in the community. What use is that when he's near put the jobs of four or five people at risk?

It is a dilemma. I have friends who in almost all other circumstances detest violence and yet when they hear of some pensioner who lives alone being attacked and beaten up – you see them all the time on TV with their faces black and blue with bruises and gashes – their first reaction is: shoot the bastards who did that!

I am against shooting anybody but I don't only think of the effect on the young lad who is shot but on the family; it's them I would feel sorry for. I mean, I have a young lad there and I wouldn't say he's 100%, you're always waiting for someone coming to your door. But if someone did come – the effect that would have on my wife and myself if he was shot, I think that's something you have to take into consideration. That's why I would be against shooting them. And sometimes a bullet doesn't mean anything; they say: I got it, it's alright.

That's true; they're showing off their injuries like medals now.

It's the effect on the parents. They are not only punishing the young offender, they are punishing the whole family.

I went to a parents' group that Probation opened for the parents of offenders, just to let them talk to one another and see that they're not on their own. And see what some of them girls have went through, they're ready for committing suicide 'cause they can't take any more. But people don't always think of the parents.

In the view of the police, or certainly their representative at the Think Tank, the political situation was partly to blame for diverting police attention from anti-social behaviour.

If we use the phrase 'during the war situation', especially when the Troubles were at their height, I think anti-social behaviour was very low in the priority of the police. In fact, I would go so far as to say that the people who suffered from anti-social behaviour actually wouldn't ring us because they would say: well, the police have enough to do. I have heard that said more times than enough. Since the ceasefire things have changed dramatically, in that our priorities are now totally reversed. Anti-social behaviour is definitely a priority now, and from a personal point of view I would say that the police are finding it exceptionally difficult to deal with. There needs to be retraining, which everyone talks about though little has been done. Police officers on the ground need to realise that they are not anti-terrorist police officers any more but normal police officers who have to deal with the ordinary mundane problems of their community – and I think that is proving more difficult than anybody expected.

There were also other perceptions held by people in the community regarding the priorities of the police over the past thirty years:

Because of the linkage, as you say, between the 'war' and anti-social behaviour, there have always been allegations that rather than tackle anti-social behaviour

by young people, at times the police were happy to make use of it. Because police priorities were anti-terrorism, those involved in petty crime were told they'd be let off if they 'helped' the police in other matters.

I think the widespread impression was there that young people who were involved in that type of activity were given a by-ball by the police because the police were able to glean other information from them about terrorism.

It's fair comment, but in all honesty, I think it didn't go on as much as people suspected it went on. However, I would say there is no doubt in certain cases with certain individuals that they were targeted with the end result being to recruit them, there's no doubt about that.

Without trying to support the police in any way here, I think that any police force, if they were fighting terrorism, would probably try to use whatever means they could to combat it. But unfortunately we in the community suffered, in that some of the young people who were involved in some of that activity seen themselves as being able to get away with it because they were providing information for other things, maybe low-level stuff . . . we're talking here about the '£10 tout' and the '£20 tout', getting a few pounds for passing over information. And I would argue that the community suffered because of that situation.

I think everybody got caught up in circumstances directly related to the ongoing war. Not only did the paramilitaries emerge onto the scene and they practised their own form of retribution on these young people, but the police were caught in a dilemma: what's our priority? There are people being bombed and killed and mutilated and here's a handful of young people breaking a few windows. If one can feed into the other, well, so be it; we'll stick with it until others manage to resolve the political problems. But today's reality is that, as you said, we are now in a new situation and the police must respond in a new way.

That is absolutely right, and the police can only do that in co-operation with the community. This past week or so we've had terrible problems with kids stoning at the end of Tennent Street and the Crumlin Road. Now what I have noticed over the years is that the kids involved are getting younger and younger. You're talking about between six and twelve years of age. What I say to anybody is: please tell me how to deal with a six-year-old throwing stones, who when you go over to him tells you to 'fuck off'. How do you deal with that? Now, I've had negotiations – and I'll be quite open about it – with representatives of the paramilitaries, to help us deal with the situation, and one of them actually said to me: you're right, even we would have difficulty dealing with six to ten-year-olds. But again, these kids haven't known any different, it's a culture to them: come this time of year, it's time to throw stones at the Fenians, they're over there. And it's the same culture over on their side because once the Loyalists appear, the green side appear, and there's a stoning match, and it's exceptionally difficult to deal with.

The old 'community cop' idea, the 'Bobby on the beat' has all but disappeared and you now have 'invisible' police officers driving up and down inside their vehicles, and the personal link has been lost. Now, it has been lost in other countries, it didn't need to have violence to lose it, for the monetary concerns have maybe dictated that you can't afford to have a Bobby on every street, but I think the community has felt the loss of that very deeply. There used to be a respect there, but it was there because you knew the person and could relate to them, but now, apart from a few individuals, the police have become remote from the community, not always through their own making but through changed circumstances.

My perception is that policing as a profession is becoming an increasingly middle-class one, and middle-class policemen will find it hard to relate to the likes of the people of the Shankill and the Falls.

Yeah, it's a middle-class police force policing working-class areas.

The problems, of course, do not stop with police and policing, but with the whole legal system, a reality acknowledged by the police themselves.

Whenever I joined the police you were taught that once you got the culprit to court that ended your job and it was up to them to decide. And whatever they decided it was none of your business, you went back out and you done your job as a police officer. Well, that's a lot of crap because when you are called to an old person's house who's just been broken into and she's absolutely terrified and maybe you do make someone amenable for it, most likely a young juvenile, you can always remember the look on that poor woman's face of absolute horror because her house had been violated. And whenever you go to the court and the old woman's there to give evidence, she's on her own, *nobody* helps her, the policeman might help her depending on his nature. But whenever the culprit stands there and is found guilty *he* will have everybody there to help him! Everybody is there to help the defendant, but nobody is there to help the poor pensioner who is terrified out of her mind. I think what gets to most policemen isn't just that these people are let off, or that their sentence is too light, but the amount of help a defendant gets as against the victim. And when you go to the magistrate's court, or the county court or the crown court, your magistrates and your judges are all upper class, there's very few from the middle class even. And they're remote from what is happening at community level. I think police officers now are shying away from the courts and are more prepared, if the offence is not too serious, to lecture the child, to try and help them, to steer them towards the likes of *Alternatives*, 'cause it has a better effect than the courts have.

From the community's perspective, if the police do make someone amenable for that burglary to the old person's house, especially if it has been people from the community who encouraged her to report the matter to the police, and nothing comes of it or the court lets them off, then people will say: why bother phoning them, sure that kid has already been up three or four times – it's a waste of time.

I agree. People are inclined to blame the police for everything. Now, sometimes it is the police's fault and I accept that. But you're right: because that guy has got out of court and gotten bail, people will say: there's no much sense in us ringing you. They don't accept that it was the court let them out, their attitude is: we called upon you for help and we'll not do it again.

As far as perceptions are in the community, I would argue that the vast majority of people don't see a difference between police and courts, they see it as all one, and it's 'them' that are dealing with it.

To my mind, even if the courts do give out sentences, it still doesn't solve the problems we have at community level. The system for juveniles isn't working, re-offending is very high. To me the young offenders centre is just a breeding ground. I think it makes them worse, not better, because they can actually learn more criminal 'skills' while they're in there.

And once a young person is threw into Lisnevin, even if they come out wanting to change, they now find themselves stigmatised. If they want to do anything people will say: you were sent to Lisnevin? They're not going to give him or her a chance once they know that. So it actually defeats the purpose of trying to reintegrate them back into the community, it pushes them further out and limits their options if they do want to change their ways. And on top of that, it costs a fortune to send a kid through a system which everyone knows isn't really working. That money could be redirected into crime prevention. It's a quick-fix solution but it is not getting to the core problems, whether emotional or economic.

The young people not only pick up other skills there, they are often introduced to new behaviour – promiscuity and all that.

From what's been said, it would seem that none of the present types of response –police, courts, paramilitary beatings – is the answer. Nor do any of them even put offenders off from re-offending. And among the young people themselves, rather than being scared by such responses, they're actually curious about them. What was Lisnevin like, what was the beating like? Ah, no big deal. Whereas an approach such as *Alternatives* and the Glencairn Complementary Programme sounds as if they are all about maintaining the young person within the community to address and look at the problems, so that the community is more likely to see if the young person has learnt anything. And it's almost like a learning process for the community in terms of having confidence in themselves to be able to address those problems.

A new approach

What is a scheme based on 'restorative justice' ideas, such as *Alternatives,* offering to both offenders and the community?

> When the legal system takes over it's the lawyers and the barristers who do all the speaking on behalf of the offender, there's no-one speaks on behalf of the victim, only themselves, and that's usually in their report to the police. Once a crime has been committed the natural thing the police ask is: who committed it, and let's punish them. Restorative justice asks: who's been hurt, who's caused that hurt, and how can it be healed? That's the difference. Our first port of call at any time is the victim to find out what their needs are, and to find if we can meet those needs. Now victims vary greatly in their reactions. Some people want instant justice, some want revenge because of what happened to them. And I think that's something victims shouldn't be feeling ashamed of – it's a human-enough response. But we try to find out what the needs are and whether we can meet those needs as far as the victim is concerned. Whether it is an apology, or their car returned to them, or the damage paid for –whatever. Now that doesn't happen under the criminal justice system, although in some cases maybe it would, where damages have to be paid. But by and large if someone is fined £500 for stealing a car the victim doesn't see any of that, that goes into the state coffers. Whereas in restorative justice if there's £500 worth of damage and the offender can give that £500, where it's possible we feel that that's the first thing that should be done. And so the healing process starts to kick in –the victim gets something, the offender gets something out of it, and the community can get something out of it. And hopefully, eventually, the young person sees the error of their ways, they see the person whose car they stole, or the owner of the house they broke into, as a real person. And they see the property they stole or damaged as not just a bit of steel on four wheels, or a television, but a possession that someone owned, which someone had to work a lot of time to get. And when young people begin to see that – which we have proved does happen – they start to see victims as real people, and victims see offenders sometimes as real people. And it's when you see them sitting across a table, and you see all the hurt and the anger coming out, but at the end of that if both of them can come up with an agreement that they're both happy with, surely that has to be the way forward.

> As a minister my experience of a programme like *Alternatives* is that it provides a resource for the police *and* the community, so we can say: how can we look at this in a holistic way? I know that *Alternatives* uses counselling and works with the families – that's encouraging.

> And we don't just deal with the young people who get caught up in anti-social crime, we target *all* young people in the area, for they all have the

potential to get involved in trouble. We encourage young people to come into our centre, we go out to other centres and speak to young people and try to find out what their fears and perceptions are – rather than just trying to tell young people how to live their lives. It could be the police moving them along, paramilitaries moving them away from street corners, but nobody takes the time to find out from young people themselves what they want. Unfortunately some of them are aspiring to be drug runners and the like – because they is nothing else for them to do. And it is getting to talk to them and telling them that there are other activities they can do, that they can get involved with, which might enhance their job prospects a year down the line.

Alternatives runs four nights a week and two afternoons. And over 90% of the young people in the groups we run are not actually on a [restorative justice] programme but are just young people who we're working with. And in any group there are young people who have never been involved in anti-social behaviour, some who are, some who have been thrown out of school and some who are actually prefects at school. So it's not a situation of a group of kids who have all been in trouble or on probation not interacting with other kids who could be different role models for them. And they all get on really well together, and we treat them equally.

We also took a conscious decision that bad behaviour wasn't to be rewarded, 'cause there's any amount of people in this area who just go about their work, come home to their children, their children don't get involved in trouble, but yet they don't seem to be getting any reward for being good kids. And unfortunately the perception is that if you're a bad boy or a bad girl you get taken away on trips and things, and we took a conscious decision not to do that, not to offer rewards. Okay, there may be rewards as part of the programme but that's rewards that they have earned. But *as a right* it shouldn't happen, 'cause there's a lot of kids out there who say to themselves: where are *they* going this weekend? The Mournes? Well, how do you get on that? You get referred by the police or Probation? And how do you get referred by them? And you know the answer to that . . . and it's a vicious circle. When we first opened our doors people were coming in with the coat up and the hat on so they wouldn't be seen because there was a stigma about coming here. Now there's like an open door policy, the stigma has gone, it's not just about targeting young people who've been involved in anti-social activities, it's about getting all young people in – some of who would be referred to here, some aren't – talking to them, listening to them, finding out what their fears are, asking them what they want out of life. If we can slowly work at that, with the support of police, youth workers, probation, and get some sort of support and backing for what we're trying to do then maybe we *can* begin to start thinking of taking those young people away.

Ironically, when you bring them in and just let them talk that's probably one of the best activities you can provide for them.

I think the difficulty too with probation and the courts and the police is that

one of the successes of our programme is that it's all about relationships. A probation officer has files that thick; they're seeing a kid maybe for an hour every fortnight and they're supposed to make a significant impact on that young person during that time. And the same in school: if you're not the high flyer, the one who's easy to teach, the teachers don't want to know the kids and throw them to the side. Now it might sound corny or airy-fairy, but if you're building up a relationship with a young person and they're asking themselves: what's going on here, he or she's not standing there pointing the finger at me . . . okay, they're holding me accountable for things, but they're doing it in a way that I haven't experienced before. And building that relationship is the whole essence of our work, our way of getting through to a young person who is used to everyone shouting at them – parents, teachers, etc. A different attitude is more likely to get through to them.

I agree totally that relationships are important. When a young person comes onto our project [Pathways] the relationships have gone wrong somewhere, and any traditional relationship with adults that they have had are usually negative. On our scheme there's 10-12 hours work a week with any young person, and that is critical. It's important that we're prepared to work through the good and the bad times with them, helping them to learn social skills, empowering them to have skills and be able to negotiate rather than flare up when they confront something.

All kids have a purpose in life, no matter what type of job they end up doing. There's some kids *Alternatives* referred to me can't spell but they're dead on, they're great workers. So because you can't spell doesn't mean you can't get a job and enjoy life and stay out of trouble and earn a few quid. It's just finding a purpose in life for the young person; that's what happened to my young lad, twenty-one days he attended school in his last year, it was a total waste.

It was those who had been involved in accepting a 'referral' who expressed most optimism about the project's benefits.

We had a young person who came through *Alternatives,* we were asked if we had any community service he could do. And he had been involved in joyriding so his 'contract' involved a certain number of hours in community service. And a few months before that we had some young people break into our church and the community centre down the road and they had set fire to the parent and toddler room and had totally gutted this room, it was just a black hole –£60,000 worth of damage. And this kid came every day, and he came motivated and I supervised him, and he did his work, he put his hours in. It was a learning experience for him to see the impact of young people's behaviour on a whole community project, but it was also good for us. When that kid came to us, he worked his guts out cleaning the blackest smoke out of all of our closets. I mean, the place was a mess, but he worked hard. And it was interesting to see how other people coming in and out of the centre reacted to him – and it was his choice to talk about why he was doing the volunteering work, he came totally anonymously – but over tea or coffee

people would ask him what he was doing there. And he would say: "I'm doing volunteering work, I was a joyrider." It changed people's views about kids who get involved in joyriding; they saw him as a person. So, unknowingly, he was educating other people.

Maybe that's what he wanted to happen all along, he just wanted to be treated equally as a person.

I'm a parent and my son was in trouble and came to *Alternatives* and went on the programme and it completely changed him. It learned him to respect other people and their property. He's no angel, but he's completely changed. I couldn't be with him 24 hours a day. I couldn't be with him and know what he was getting up to when he was out. People was coming back to me, but I tried my best. He was frightened of paramilitaries, but he was still going to different places where he thought he could hide from them, and he was mixing with certain ones who were going to get him into more trouble, so this was the last option open and thank goodness it's here, 'cause it worked.

I was involved with a case where a young lad took away a car and crashed it into another car. The victim got something out of that, the victim got the damage paid – everything that he was out of pocket for. Now if that had've been solely a police-led project that victim would not have got anything back; indeed, he would have been further out of pocket through excess on his insurance. This way it was dealt with in a manner that both parties were happy with. Now in that case the victim didn't want to meet the offender, which was fair enough, but he got a letter of apology. The process goes through without them actually meeting if that's what the victim prefers, and that was done through a third party and it was successful. Not every meeting has to take place across a table, but the outcome was the same, the victim was happy with the outcome.

Windows can be repaired in half an hour, but feelings of hurt can't be. A letter from the offender saying they were sorry would be more satisfying to a victim than any response they're likely to get going through the court system. At least restorative justice gives an explanation, and a reassurance that the anti-social behaviour was not personal but random.

I've been working alongside *Alternatives* and there's been young lads caught and they've been ordered to clean places, and believe you me they done a good job. They might have felt ashamed about people knowing but they gave it back into this community. And if they're caught spraying paint or doing anything I think that if they are made to clean up, and told: this is your own community you've done this to. You should help them to build up pride in their community. But I don't think putting them into one of these centres does any good; even those who put them there know you're going to come out worse. If you can give them pride in their own community, try to lead them back into that community, not throwing them out into someone else's where they have no pride in or nobody knows them.

Or they give them their 20 hours of community service but they pack them away off down to Rathcoole or somewhere else, where there is no shaming process that there should be on the road. Whereas the shame should be there for everybody to see – this is a thief, or whatever.

Alternatives' volunteer work within the community would not be intending to shame people. We just want these young people to acknowledge that they have hurt people and done wrong; and it's about giving them an opportunity to put something back into their community. Obviously we would try and put them into a volunteer placement that's relevant to what they've been doing. And although it's hard graft, for many young people it has actually been a very positive thing for them, maybe for the first time they got praise and people said: you did a quare job there. You wanna seen the references some have got; you would be happy with it anywhere you went. The emphasis wouldn't be for it to be negative thing, although it's understandable that people in the community want the volunteer work to be hard – as a kind of punishment – but in most cases, even when it was hard, the young people themselves have said: yer man gave me a hamburger and chips there 'cause he said I done a good job. So it's been a positive thing for them. But in the likes of Lisnevin they just come out labelled as an 'ex-offender' and that's it.

The important thing you said there was give them a chance. For although there are some persistent offenders who are beyond hope, the majority, once you get in and talk to them, are just like everyone else, and just need a chance. And they could integrate into the community, but by throwing them outside you merely reinforce and compound the problem.

What about the community in general? How do they feel about such schemes? Is there a growing acceptance?

Having watched with keen interest a programme like *Alternatives* it seems to me that a really big challenge will come not with the young people – the young people will come because it is a good programme and is providing them with good stuff – the really big challenge facing a project like *Alternatives* is the adults. How do you educate adults in the community as to what restorative justice is, how do you educate adults so that they are taking responsibility for their community, getting involved in a project like this, thinking about young people differently. And the other big challenge is how do you educate the politicians. That is the big challenge, 'cause you get painted with this brush that is not constructive.

Because we've had 30 years of using the courts, and punishment beatings have deterred some young people, there are those who want to stick with what they're used to. Others imagine this is a 'do-gooder' scheme and that we're taking the young people here and there. But we've had kids come in here and say: if I had've knew what I was going to be asked to do I'd have probably took a beating or a bullet; at least I would have got it over with, and maybe got a pat on the back from my mates. Whereas it's harder for them to face up to their responsibilities and the realities. It is a long-term process.

I suppose the wider community want to be supportive but they also want to feel there's a certain amount of retribution involved –after all, it's the community who have suffered all these years.

But even people whose shops were burgled and were looking for blood, once they saw them doing hard work they were giving them a pat on the back.

It's easy to point the finger, and that's what a lot of politicians do. And they recommend taking the 'easy' option: send them to court, lock them up and never let them out again. But that doesn't solve the problem; a lot of young people who go into institutional settings come out a lot harder, they know all the moves. It doesn't stop them from being arrested again 'cause those are the people who are in the frame should anything go wrong. We find that the young people are actually more humble after going through our programme as opposed to being harder. They're looking at the other side, they're looking at the victim's point of view, they're looking at the harm they've caused. Whereas in the past in the courts they just sat in silence and the solicitor done all the talking for them. Under this system they have to do a lot of talking themselves, a lot of explanations why they done a certain thing, saying why they're sorry for doing a certain thing and meaning it, and coming up with ideas that pays something back to those they have harmed, both the victim and the community. Which is a whole different approach.

Obviously when someone is referred to the scheme, the scheme contacts and seeks to involve the victim. Have any victims not wanted to be part of it?

It would always be an option and that would be the difficulty, and the risk you take when approaching victims. What you need to do is a lot of preparatory work in terms of letting them know what we're trying to do, for it's totally new. And not everyone referred to the scheme has been under threat by the paramilitaries, some parents just felt their wee lads were heading that way.

Have any victims said they were not happy with the approach adopted?

There have been victims who have said they were not prepared to meet with the perpetrator, and that's been okay, and it is still their choice. That's the risk we take; if they're not happy they can still approach the police, or they can go ahead with the paramilitaries; that's up to themselves. I think it's our job to say: well what's it going to get you? This is what we're hoping to deliver for you; this is what we're hopefully going to deliver for the young person, so that not only you but someone else won't be a victim of them.

And what of the police point of view? Is their relationship with such schemes only lukewarm; do they think that *Alternatives* is undercutting their role?

I think at local level they are very keen, 'cause there's an acknowledgement that the police know rightly that they alone can't deal with the problems out there. And in turn we see the policing role as complementary, we would in no way try to undermine the police.

Do the police have a policy on the matter?

At the minute the police have put forward protocols for restorative justice, and the criminal justice review, which has been delayed and delayed, may turn round and say that there is some policy on working with community-based restorative justice. But at higher levels I would say that there was a bit of uncertainly about actually working with groups like the Glencairn Complementary Policing Programme or *Alternatives* 'cause they're not sure how to deal with them. And I'm sure they've got one eye on West Belfast as well, which I would imagine would have a strong bearing on police attitudes. At the higher levels of the police they say they want a model of restorative justice which they say can work across Glencairn, West Belfast, Bangor, Newtownards, South Armagh, anywhere. But it's not going to happen, it'll never work. But at local level I think Tennent Street acknowledge that in some way we can complement what they're doing, and I think they're happy to work with us on that.

Same with us up at the Glencairn Complementary Policing Programme. Up to now certain individuals have been more than helpful to us, although the ones on the street are a bit . . . well, I suppose they're insecure in their own jobs at the moment, and that's a sensitive point. As well as that, having to approach a paramilitary or an ex-paramilitary to sort out a problem at community level is going to be a big problem for some of them.

I would imagine there is also a political problem for the police. Say everyone in Tennent Street was quite happy with *Alternatives*, and said: okay we will support your restorative justice scheme . . . could that be taken as a sign that they also have to support another scheme in Republican West Belfast where the intention is to keep the police completely out of the equation? So the police maybe want to support your scheme, but can't for political reasons.

Was it the perception of the police representative at the Think Tank that the police will eventually move to embrace restorative justice?

The needs of the Shankill Road people are different from the people who live in Bangor, and different again from the people who live in Ballymena. Different problems, different priorities. The difficulty is that Headquarters want a policy to cover *all* the restorative justice schemes in Northern Ireland. Well, politically, that will never happen. For a long time the police will never be involved in the Republican 'Blue Book' schemes, that's a cert. But I feel that every local police commander should be able to get involved with whoever he wants, because it's his job to police the community, and the needs of the Shankill Road people are not the same as the needs of other areas. Depending on where you serve there are different needs and different priorities for that community. One set of principles for restorative justice schemes I don't think will ever work, and that's why I can never in the immediate future see a total integration by the police into the schemes. Headquarters talk about working with the community, they talk about a partnership with the community , but they don't know yet how to go about it.

I think that the powers-that-be are trying to wrap it all up into one programme, one project, and that's impossible. Republicans will not, and will never as far as I can see, or for the foreseeable future, work with the police. But *we* shouldn't be held to ransom because of that. We have argued from the very beginning that the police should be on board, should be working closely with restorative justice projects. And the management committee of *Alternatives* honestly want that to happen, they have encouraged it from Day One, but unfortunately it hasn't happened. I think it would be far better if the police were working in conjunction with us on this programme, because it's going to have a better effect for everybody in the community.

It is actually beneficial to the police. The more they can reverse the trends of the last thirty years and begin to work with the community, the better for them surely. The more they show they're prepared to work with those who are genuinely trying to tackle community issues on a day to day basis, then the more the police will be seen as less remote.

Restorative justice schemes are not the answer to everything, but neither is policing, neither is probation, neither is social services. This is new; restorative justice is new to Northern Ireland, and it is frightening people, because if it works a lot of people may be put out of a job. It's funny how institutionalised people like police, probation, social services, think. I am very disappointed, and will be very disappointed, if when the time comes that I retire that I am not fully involved, *officially*, in *Alternatives*, I'll be exceptionally disappointed. And I think that the police will have lost a great opportunity for going back into the community to work with the community and try and solve this problem of anti-social crime. There's not a day goes past when you don't read in the papers that damage has been caused somewhere in Northern Ireland, whether it is to the city cemetery or wherever; it's just not the Shankill Road, it's everywhere. And it has to be tackled, and the police cannot do it on their own, it's as simple as that.

I can understand where the establishment are coming from in saying that everything has to be going through the system, has to be accountable, but in the type of things that we're dealing with – vandalism, petty theft –while that's filtering through the system it's not tackling the problem, the problem still persists. And those who point the finger and say: but why don't they do this or do that, I would say: come and help us try something new. We haven't got a magic wand, but at least we're trying to do something that's going to benefit the community we're living in, the community in which we're bringing up our families, families who we don't want to have to go through the type of things we've all seen over the past twenty/thirty years. There has to be a better way and if schemes like this can be a stepping stone to that then help us, support us, let us try something new. If it doesn't work, well so be it, let's go back and try something else. But don't stop trying or don't keep pointing the finger at people who –to put it crudely – are getting up off their backsides and trying to do something for their community.

And it's also about trying to do things at a local level. The trend in almost everything today is for decentralisation, more local area control. And that will include the police: okay, they might have a universal mission statement, a set of principles, but they should have an operational flexibility as how to interpret those principles.

I think there's also an element of certain people in the police and in the professions saying: who are these people? Is this paramilitaries, ex-prisoners running this? Sure those people can't change, what gives *them* the right to be doing this, *we* are the people who should be dealing with this.

I think we have to be realistic; we've had a culture for thirty years where people have got used to certain ways of dealing with things like anti-social behaviour. And I think it's a mistake for people from outside to assume that paramilitaries are running about looking for someone to beat up. It's not like that; the reality is that much of it has been a response to demands by people in the community, who for thirty years have knocked on the doors of the paramilitaries and said: that wee shit up the street has done this or that, go and sort him out. You've had thirty years of that, a whole attitude of punishment and vengeance, not always justice. To try and turn that round will take ages.

It's not just a matter of the community saying to the police and others: we believe this is the way to go about this – it is about *all* of us looking at the problem and asking how best can we tackle this? The community can't tackle it by themselves, it has been tried over thirty years and failed. The police can't tackle it by themselves, they've either tired or didn't try hard enough over thirty years and failed. So, if everyone understands that the problem is there, and understands that restorative justice can be part of a solution, then the more people involved in it – from the grassroots, from social services, probation and whoever is involved in it – looking at it and coming up with a programme that can maybe work here in this area, then I think that is the way forward. And, thankfully, to date all those agencies that we were in touch with all at various levels said 'yes', maybe that is the way. But very few of them, I must admit, have actually had a hands-on approach and grasped the nettle and got involved in this.

There are people in this area who want to see restorative justice given a chance, other people who say no, let the police deal with it, and there's a certain section of the community say let the paramilitaries deal with it. Not one of those options is the answer, but if everybody sits down together maybe we can come up with something.