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# Forthspring Inter Community Group Ltd

## The Way Forward - A Brief Overview

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Company Limited By Guarantee: NI31276  
Charity registered with HMRC: XR16266

# Background to the Organisation

## Background to Forthspring Inter Community Group

Situated on the Falls / Shankill Interface, Forthspring Inter Community Group has over 14 years experience offering facilities and delivering much needed community services on a cross community basis. Over this period the organisation has had many successes delivering for the local people and has developed a strong reputation within both the local community and the wider community sector based upon our commitment to peace building and good relations.

The organisation is situated in a unique location literally on the Springfield and Woodvale interface. This uniqueness is further reinforced by the fact that our facilities have entrances from both the Springfield area (predominantly Nationalist) and also the Woodvale area (predominantly Unionist), with both of these areas also being located amongst the most deprived wards in the whole of Northern Ireland. The communities living within the catchment area of the organisation face a range of social problems which are both demanding and ever changing. Based upon the level of extensive research that we have undertaken and also experiences over the past 14 years, it is evident that the levels of polarisation and community relations problems within this interface area have only served to exacerbate the levels of disadvantage and deprivation experienced by local people.

In recent times the political landscape within Northern Ireland has undergone profound changes as a result of the peace process and the establishment of the NI Assembly. At Forthspring Inter Community Group we have embraced these developments and it is our commitment to ensure that these developments are reflected within local community relations and the delivery of services at the community level. In order to do so however we require support from statutory agencies and government departments both in terms of new policy and funding directly for good relations and interface focussed work. This document has been produced to provide a snapshot of the work undertaken by the organisation, our financial commitments and future plans for development.

## Mission Statement

*“Forthspring works alongside people in creating an environment that builds trust and relationships locally and in wider society”*

## Current Programmes and Service Offerings

At present Forthspring like most community organisations and charities are facing challenging times however we continue to deliver upon our commitment to bring local people together and foster improved relations through targeted programmes and activities. To that end we are entering exciting times particularly in the field of youth provision with a new 5 year programme just beginning as a result of BIG Lottery funding. Detailed below are the services offered by Forthspring:

- *Springers Childcare*
- *Cafe*
- *Parent and Toddlers Group*
- *Detached Youth Programme*
- *Active Citizens Programme*
- *Senior Citizens Programmes*
- *Women Together Programme*

- *Conflict Transformation Programmes*
- *Shared Neighbourhood Programme*
- *Community Pharmacy*
- *Men's Group*
- *Community Planning Group*

# Need for the Services offered by Forthspring

There are a number of facets of need to be considered in terms of the proposed development which include:

- Current demand for the services offered by Forthspring Inter Community Group and local need identified through extensive consultation
- The location of the organisation and its local impact on good relations
- Government statistics for the area
- Strategic fit for the work delivered by Forthspring in terms of NI policy and in particular with reference to interface areas

## Current Demand and Local Need

There is a growing need and demand within both sides of the interface to access the services, programmes and facilities offered by Forthspring. We feel that this has been a result from both the proactive engagement practices employed by Forthspring in terms of reaching out to local people, targeting our services and programme to the needs of the local community and also a recognition that more people wish to access programmes and activities which can build their capacity and provide further opportunities for community involvement, accessing further education and securing employment.

In partnership with the NI Housing Executive Shared Neighbourhood Programme, Forthspring undertook a community survey exercise between September 2010 and January 2011 to establish a baseline of local residents attitudes towards the neighbourhood concept, identify potential areas of good relations work and also to produce an integrated plan of welfare and social services that could be delivered through Forthspring. The following key findings of the survey are detailed below:

- Over 75% of respondents favoured greater sharing between local schools whilst almost half of respondents did not favour their area being mixed
- Almost 75% of respondents are either not very concerned or not concerned at all about relationships between people of different community backgrounds
- 63% of respondents felt that for example, community social events would promote greater understanding and respect
- The survey indicated that 47% of respondents do not feel safe walking around the area after dark with 18% of respondents not feeling safe in their own homes after dark

- The majority of respondents were of the view that activities such as the provision of an after schools club for children, youth programmes, senior citizens programmes, a community café and garden and the provision of community social events would promote greater understanding and respect
- There is both the need and the opportunity for Forthspring to promote itself as a shared space to create the opportunities and the confidence necessary for the move towards a shared neighbourhood. Key to this will be a locally relevant and well managed range of services integrated with other key providers in the areas of education, health, youth provision and economic development

## Statistical Analysis

In terms of Multiple Deprivation both areas rank in the top 10% of most deprived based upon the Noble Indices, the NI Measure for Deprivation, experiencing high levels of deprivation under the themes of health, education, income and living environment in particular.

## Strategic Fit

It is clear that the multi faceted work that is delivered by Forthspring for the local communities in its immediate catchment area delivers upon a range of key themes that are prominent within the local community sector and government policy. These include good relations, regeneration, tackling deprivation, community education initiatives, community planning, engagement with the local community and social enterprise. The core focus of our work is good relations and bringing people from the Woodvale and Springfield areas together through a series of targeted programmes, structures and dialogue however there are significant added benefits to the local community as a result of this work. Forthspring feels that the work undertaken by the organisation at present and our future development plans will fit alongside current and planned strategies and funding priorities for the sector both on a Belfast and NI wide basis. These strategies include the following:

- OFMDFM – Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy
- OFMDFM – Social Investment Fund
- BCC - Planned Community Support Plan 2011 – 2014
- BCC – Peace and Reconciliation Plan 2011 - 2013
- DSD – People and Place: Neighbourhood Renewal

# Forthspring Achievements 2010 / 2011

## Achievements – 2010/2011

There were many achievements throughout this period that the organisation is very proud to have been involved in and delivered upon for the local community. As a locally managed and run community organisation, we feel and see the impacts and differences that our programmes and activities make in the everyday lives of ordinary people and are determined to continue to deliver improved community relations for the interface area over the next number of years. A snapshot of these achievements for 2010 /2011 is detailed in the diagram below:

### Youth Programme

- 700 contacts with young people across the interface through the Youth Diversionary project
- Approx 10 young people from each tradition previously heavily involved in rioting are now regularly attending and enjoying Centre-Based youth provision in Forthspring
- Summer 2010 saw a relatively low level of sectarian incidents compared to previous years
- 7 young people from each tradition completed their Level 1 OCN in Leadership and Youth Work
- Securing the 5 year Youth Matters Project through Big Lottery Empowering Young People funding

### Good Relations Programme

- Shared Future: Forthspring wishes to develop its site and services to enhance its role as a shared space for the two communities on the Springfield Road interface. We are developing the Forthspring Vision Project to develop innovative ways to redesign the building to meet the needs of the local communities
- Policy: the project worked with residents, young people, staff and board members to develop responses to consultations including the proposed Cohesion, Sharing and Integration policy and the DOJ proposals on community safety
- Publication of the Forthspring Story “A Parable of Possibilities which will act as a resource and training tool to inform good practice across Northern Ireland.
- Provision of a range of activities to promote good relations including the annual summer festival

### Forthspring Achievements 2010 - 2011

### Overall Organisation

### Play Programme

- Springer’s After-school Childcare continues to grow every year. There are now 24 children registered
- Last summer we ran a successful Summer Scheme for local children which supported 40 families. We were able to offer 10 off site trips during the summer
- Through Springers and in partnership with Ardmonagh Family Centre an eight week parenting course was held
- Springers also organised for the “Inclusive Neighbourhood Project” to come along and work with the young mums on issues around asylum seekers and refugees

- Shared Neighbourhood Programme - conducting an extensive survey of the interface in partnership with NIHE. This survey has highlighted the key issues within the area affecting community relations which need to be tackled in order for local people to be able to live, work and play together in peace
- Active Citizens project in association with British Council with participants fully trained and looking forward to planned International exchange visits to a number of countries throughout the world

# The Way Forward – Current Challenges and Future Plans

## Current Challenges

As with all organisations within the community and voluntary sector, these are challenging times for Forthspring Inter Community Group with the widespread funding cuts and general tightening of financial budgets due to uncertainty on many issues.

One of the main challenges that we face as an organisation is sustaining our core staff and programme delivery costs particularly in relation to our flagship community relations projects as our IFI Community Bridges funding comes to an end in the coming months. For the last financial year our expenditure exceeded £287,000 which includes salary, programme and overheads costs. Due the level that the organisation operates at in terms of finance and staff resources, it is important that we have an appropriate reserves policy in place however in recent times our accumulated reserves have shown a steady decrease. We are actively embracing the social enterprise concept in order to generate additional income into the organisation through the hiring out of our facilities, the cafe within our building and also through the provision of contracted services such as good relations focussed training programmes.

However we are firm in the belief that the NI Executive must show leadership on the issue of good relations, particularly the problems at interface areas and support organisations working to deliver peace within the most fractious areas in Northern Ireland. The level of uncertainty within the sector due to the financial climate, the end of several large funding programmes and the delay in the new CSI strategy is having a deep impact upon organisations such as Forthspring. As an organisation we feel that it is imperative that secure funding packages for a period of at least 3 years for core operational costs must be put in place to reinforce the work that has been done to date within interface areas and allow organisations to put in place targeted programmes and structures which can have a lasting impact upon local community relations.

A number of other major challenges that face the organisation over the coming months and years are detailed in the diagram opposite:



# The Way Forward – Current Challenges and Future Plans

## Future Plans

Although these are challenging times for Forthspring in many ways they are exciting times with the recent award of funding for a number of significant programmes, not least an award from Big Lottery of close to £500,000 which will support a 5 year programme working with “at risk” young people on both sides of the interface. As a progressive and proactive organisation, Forthspring has several key developments that it hopes to bring to fruition over the next number of years dependant upon securing the appropriate level of support and finance to do so.

Central to our future development plans is the refurbishment and re – development of our current facilities, in order to ensure that the organisation has facilities which are welcoming to the whole community and are reflective of both the core ethos of Forthspring and the needs of local people. This facility will be a truly shared space which can hope to deliver a shared future rather than a shared out future whereby resources are allocated to segregated communities divided by peace walls.

We see our future core programme of work as an organisation will be within the remit of conflict transformation and helping to develop improved relations within the Upper Springfield and Woodvale areas through engagement, dialogue and a series of co – ordinated developments and programmes. Building on the previous fourteen years work and learning we want to develop a cross interface community planning model. The interface area needs a long term interface plan based on sharing over separation to move forward to normalisation, a plan that is community driven with statutory and political support.

At the heart of our argument is the living paradox of reconciliation. It is where communities are most divided that shared space is most essential. Consequently we argue for the need for shared spaces at the very places where communities are most divided physically to facilitate the social intercourse that will allow interaction that in turn facilitates reconciliation.

Forthspring is committed to working for the removal of peace walls and ending segregation. Most people agree that the walls must come down. Many people think that they should come down but that the timing is not right. Our view is that the important question is how the walls can be brought down, not when they will come down.

Our answer is that whilst each peace wall will have its specific features and problems a number of pre-conditions are essential for walls to come down:

1. It must be acknowledged that walls are not the cause of division, they are a symptom of wider divisions in our society
2. Local residents must have re-assurances that their security situation does not get worse
3. Relations and respect between communities must develop to build trust
4. Interface communities must be a priority for social and economic regeneration
5. Political and administrative boundaries and policy must promote sharing over segregation
6. Shared facilities must be developed to facilitate interaction and relationship building
7. Local politicians must publicly endorse sharing and an end to segregation

All the above cannot happen without strong political leadership that prioritises interface areas and the removal of barriers that separate people and communities. Political leadership must be translated into an inter-departmental response to the issue. No one government department has either the resources or the range of responsibilities to tackle this problem.

There are reasons to be optimistic. People want sharing over segregation, particularly for their children. They want a future free from fear and division. Considerable resources and expertise has been developed in interface communities to manage and reduce conflict. The opportunity now exists to move beyond conflict management to conflict transformation and promote sharing over segregation.

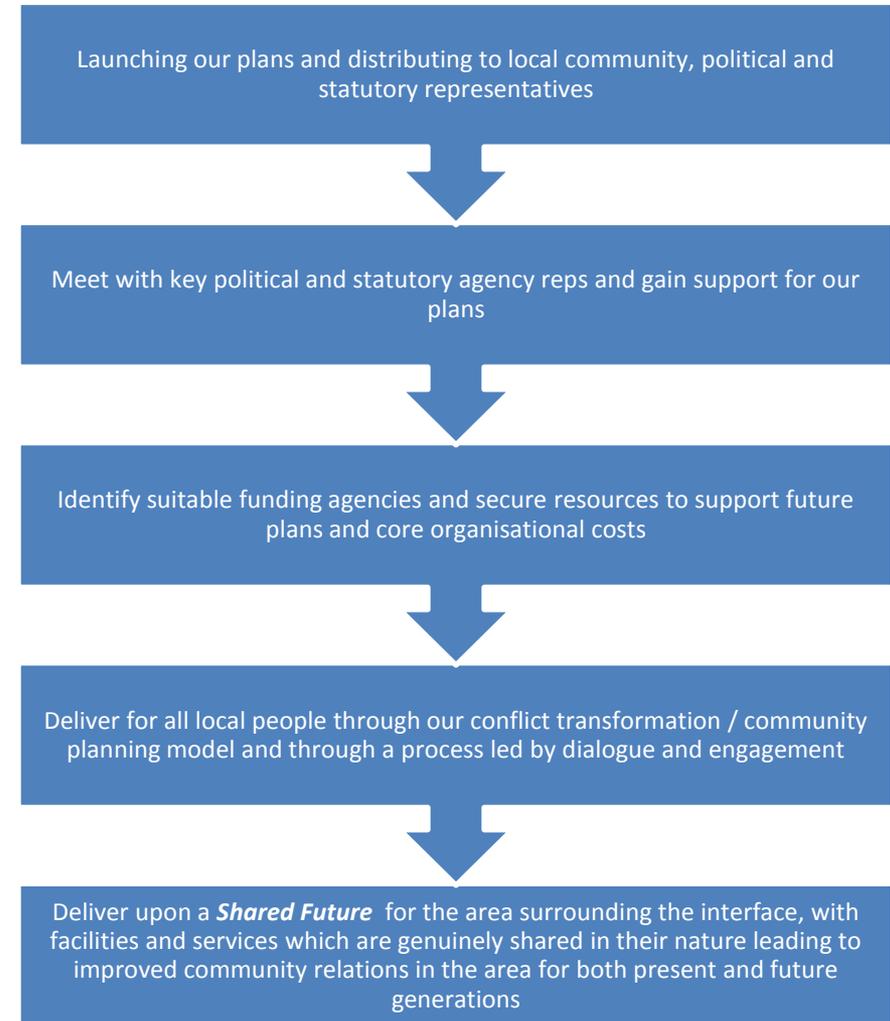
# The Way Forward – Current Challenges and Future Plans

*“The capacity to desegregate residential districts within Northern Ireland requires full political cooperation across the spectrum of political parties, agencies and the two states. Desegregation must emerge as a key component in the rebuilding of community lives that have been shattered by both contemporary violence and the history of modes of segregation”*

(Shirlow and Murtagh 2006, p27)

As part of our plans to support this conflict transformation and community development approach, the organisation will be targeting future funding programmes to deliver upon identified priority areas for development and in particular be approaching the following list of government departments, statutory agencies and elected representatives to obtain support for our plans:

- OFMDFM – with the Social Investment Fund and CSI strategy as key areas of interest
- Department for Social Development – with specific reference to Neighbourhood Renewal and any planned strategies for community development
- Belfast City Council – with any future Peace funding and the impending Community Support Plan being key areas of interest
- Local MLA’s and Councillors which represent the areas of North and West Belfast
- MLA’s which have specific remit within the area of good relations and community development including those that sit on the OFMDFM CSI Committee
- Councillors and other key representatives that sit on the Belfast City Council Good Relations Partnership



# Contact Information

If you would like any further information on the work delivered by Forthspring Inter Community Group or feel that you could help support the organisation, please find the contact details below :



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