

**Northern Ireland
Community
Relations
Commission**



What it does

Good community relations do not happen in a vacuum – they are a by-product of life in a healthy and peaceful society with which people feel they can identify and in which they can participate. The Commission cannot solve Northern Ireland's community problems. The solution can only come from all the people of Northern Ireland. The task of the Commission is to assist people to perceive the problem and tackle it. This requires realistic commitment, sound organisation and hard work. It is a process of building up to a solution, not of waiting for a solution to be found. This strategy of self-help is called **community development**.

It means more than the bringing together of the different groups in the community. It means exactly what it says – the development of a community.

This is the aim of the Commission.

Involvement with the community

This year a team of seventeen is employed by the Commission to implement the community development strategy. They are based in Belfast, Londonderry / North Ulster and Dungannon / South Ulster; they include specialists in operational research, women's organisations and local government training.

The team's task is to help local people by advice and encouragement to identify needs and to form new community organisations, and to assist them in tackling these problems.

The team is assisted by a number of publications, including a local bulletin for Community Development workers. Help and advice is also given to local institutions which wish to publish their own material.

Involvement with government

Advice to government departments and local authorities is tendered both formally and informally by the Commission. Ministries are advised on matters concerning social needs, the effects of proposed innovations and the Commission's views about required legislation.

Local authorities are also counselled by the Commission, and the effects and publicity of local government reorganisation is a particular area of interest.

Involvement with voluntary organisations

Much of the Commission's work is carried in concert with voluntary organisations. Some associations, like PACE, which are actively seeking to practise good community relations, are given grant aid and advice. Bodies like the Council of Social Services, which are actively engaged in remedying social malaise and providing new amenities, are also supported.

The Commission is particularly interested in supporting bodies like the Voluntary Service Bureau which are engaged in involving youth in tasks of social concern and community development. Very close liaison with educational circles is carried on through the Schools Community Project.

Research and training

Successful policies are impossible without intelligent research and the Commission regards the encouragement of research as one of its main responsibilities. Seven research projects, including investigation into civic education, new methods of adult education and the effects of the media, are at present financed by the Commission. Other projects will no doubt be stimulated by their findings.

The training of a professional cadre of Community Development workers is another priority. The Commission is encouraging Universities and Training Colleges to initiate Community Development and Youth Training courses and offering assistance in the running of these courses.

All these involvements and activities combine to form an integrated strategy of community development and involvement. The Commission's role is that of adviser and prompter. In the long run only the community can solve its own problems

The Community Relations Commission was established by act of Parliament in 1969 to foster harmonious relations in Northern Ireland and employs a professional administrative and field staff.

The Commission is independent of the government in that it has the responsibility for defining its own terms of reference within the limits set by the act. But it must report annually to Parliament on its work and achievements.

The Commission's functions are both separate and distinct from those of the Ministry of Community Relations which carries the responsibility of administering a programme of grant aid to projects in urban areas of special social need.

The Northern Ireland Community Relations Commission

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