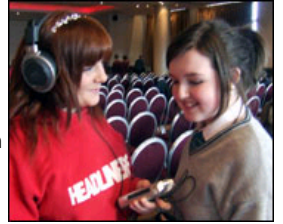


Facing up to Prejudice

Young people from the Northwest tackled prejudice 'face on' at a recent conference organised by Derry City Council.

While each of the schools in attendance had taken part in six-week projects examining different areas of prejudice, such as racism, homophobia and sectarianism, few felt that it impacted on their daily lives.

Many of those interviewed by Headliners felt that they had not been subjected to prejudice, while others opened up about their own personal experiences. Fergus from Foyle and Londonderry College said: "Me and another boy from my school were walking through the town and some people started shouting sectarian things at us", leaving Fergus and his friend with a bad feeling.



Alanna (13) from Park had been the victim of racist name-calling. She said: "Whenever I was in primary school, people would call me 'Blackie' and all that there because I'm tanned." Others said they had experienced it in school, out on the street playing and on the buses, where people thought they were older than they are. Between presentations from the various schools, Headliners shared the results of our on-going exploration of the themes of homophobia, racism and sectarianism.

In introducing the pieces, we said: "While researching for our stories we realised just how important young people are in shaping a peaceful future for all. After all, we are the present and the future generation. Possibly the politicians, decision makers and leaders of the future.

"Sectarianism hasn't gone away; young people are still affected by current and generational conflict. Although we are growing up in a much more peaceful environment than our parents and grandparents there is a lot more work to be done to keep progressing towards achieving real peace and reconciliation.

"In Headliners we seek to challenge politicians, church leaders, community activists, the media, government departments and others to listen to and hear what we, the young people of the future, have to say on these issues."

Many of the young people we spoke to at the conference believed that sectarianism was the most prevalent prejudice in the North West today but all agreed that prejudice in all its forms should be stopped. Fifteen-year-old Ashley, who attends Oakgrove College, said: "Make everything integrated so Protestants and Catholics could live among each other and everyone could get used to it" while 14-year-old Jan from Foyle and Londonderry College suggested: "Maybe organise some more things like this, get all the schools to try to come together."

Amanda, a 14-year-old pupil at Lumen Christi College, thought young people should take a practical approach to tackling prejudice. "We can make up posters and stick them up on walls in the city and say we reject sectarianism and racism," she said and Andrew (14) said: "Don't let anybody be left out." Conor (14) from St Joseph's said: "We could all try to change and work with each other and by going to courses, it helps when we talk to each other about it."

This probably sums it up for all of us. Even if we don't think we're prejudiced, we could probably make some changes to the way we think or act towards others and by getting to know one another better through meeting up and talking, we would be breaking down the barriers that prejudice builds up.

About this article

This story was written by Aine Cronin-McCartney and Amy Coyle.

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