

## Springhill has its say on sectarianism

Say the word 'sectarianism' and most people think of the Troubles and religious differences.

We wanted to know if it still exists today and if young people growing up in the Northwest mixed with the other community or whether the old suspicions had been handed down through the generations.

Young people from the youth club in Springhill, a single-identity estate in Strabane, explored the issue of sectarianism through interviews, definitions and word association. Some of the definitions they gave included 'leaving someone out because of their religion' and 'differences'. Words they associated with sectarianism included 'threatening', 'violence' and 'divisions in religion'.



We asked the young people a range of questions to find out if they wanted to share their future with Protestants. Here are some of their responses. Catherine Patton (14), who wants to be a midwife when she's older, has some Protestant friends but doesn't see them often.

She said: 'We run about the town but I don't think they're friendly! All there would be is fights if Protestants lived in Springhill. Having a Protestant boyfriend would bring fights to my family but I don't think Protestants are different to me.'

Darren Diver (16), has no Protestant friends and doesn't want to in the future. He wouldn't want to go out with or get married to a Protestant and doesn't think Protestants should live in Springhill. 'I don't really like them,' said Darren although he does have Protestant relations he goes to visit and he said he didn't think Protestants were any different.

However, 15-year-old Louise Diver has Protestant friends she sees every day. Louise said: 'We do the same as everyone else, just hang around. They're just normal people! Protestants living in Springhill would get battered because some Catholics don't like Protestants which isn't really fair. A Protestant boyfriend would be the same as any other boy.'

Caitlin, (11), says 'Catholics are more religious than Protestants, Protestants are people who fight all the time. If they moved into Springhill they would be fighting with other people which wouldn't do anything.' She added that she thought Protestants are different and wouldn't want to go out with or get married to a Protestant when she's older.

It seems that a lot of these young people in Strabane have very little experience of mixing with Protestants and they seem to have mixed-up views on them. On the one hand, many say they wouldn't want to be friends with Protestants, but on the other hand, they don't see them as any different from themselves. It seems that, without any shared experiences with Protestants themselves, they are repeating prejudices which they have maybe heard from older people.

Perhaps if the young people were to meet more Protestants and find out for themselves what they are really like, then sectarianism could be stamped out in Strabane.

### About this story

This story was written by; Dennis, Kirsten, Harry, Dylan and Ciarnan from Springhill Youth Club, Strabane.

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