

## FEATURE A LOOK BACK

TIM CAIRNS, DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

**For my look back, I wanted to tell the story of a family and a community group whose perseverance and will to improve their community exemplify the spirit of community transport in Northern Ireland.**

In the midst of inner East Belfast, community groups are leading the way in providing a better future for young people in the area. One such initiative is the U-Turn Project which seeks to help young people embrace a new future through sport and fitness.

This project, however, was developed in the midst of tragedy. In 2014, Robert Bunting a native of inner East Belfast, was diagnosed with Metastatic Malignant Melanoma and on the 6th February 2015 Robert lost his fight with the disease. Robert was passionate about his city and about sport. His family wanted a lasting tribute, a fitting testimony to his life, and with the help of Willowfield Parish Church and Willowfield Parish Community Association, the U-Turn Project was born. In May of this year a multi-use sports facility was opened on the Woodstock Road in Belfast. This facility includes a football pitch, basketball area and playground. The only thing missing from the project was transport.

That's why Robert's family, with Willowfield Church and Community Association, got together to raise funds

**U-Turn's minibus is what community transport is all about: transport by the community for the community.**

for a minibus which would be used by the U-Turn Project to help young people pursue activities that improve their health and wellbeing, and also to be used by other local charities. Members of the church, Robert's family and work colleagues, signed up for the London Revolution, a two-day, 185 mile cycle ride around London. The efforts of these volunteers helped raise enough money to buy the minibus which was on the road in June of this year in time for the opening of the sports facility.

### Making a difference

The bus has already been put to good use by the team at Willowfield and by other local charities and community groups. One of the first trips was transporting two vulnerable families for a holiday in Sligo. Without the minibus, these families would have spent another summer without a break. It has also been used by Willowfield's Moving Forward programme to help unemployed young men get back into employment; the bus was the only way these young people could get to their course and complete qualifications to improve their employability.

Every Saturday the minibus serves

the Willowfield 10th Old Boys FC to travel to away games in the Down Area Football League, giving them a focus and opportunity to improve their health and mental wellbeing. And this is just the start; the U-Turn project is looking at more innovative ways to serve young people in the city.

Transport is one of the biggest inhibitors for young people in East Belfast. In a consumer Council survey, 60% of young people in Belfast stated that they were constrained in their daily lives by a lack of access to transport. That is why initiatives like U-Turn, a community led solution, are important and need to be better supported by the Northern Ireland Executive. U-Turn's minibus is what community transport is all about: transport by the community for the community.

The team at U-Turn currently have only one minibus, but the need is great in inner East Belfast. With better funding, help and support, a titanic fleet of minibuses could soon be launched to help serve the needs of Belfast's young people into the future.



The U-Turn Project provides transport for community groups in Belfast.