

Interface gardeners cultivate a growing bond across the divide

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THERE are more than just greens being grown in this special garden after both sides of the Interface pulled up their sleeves to work in Belfast's first community garden. Just last year pipe-bombs were being hurled onto the site in the north of the city.

But now people from both sides of the divide have taken up their trowels and are cultivating peas and tomatoes in a piece of "no man's land" in the shadow of the wall at the Waterworks — the first community garden to be created in a Belfast city park.

The garden is being officially launched by Lord Mayor Pat Conway this morning. Among the 20 gardeners who take turns tending the peas and watering the tomatoes in the new garden are people from both the loyalist Westland estate and the Catholic estates on the other side of the interface, along with two refugees involved in a Bryson House project.

The team includes everyone, from complete novices to experienced gardeners, and ranges in age from 25 to 80.

Siobhan Craig, co-ordinator of local gardening charity Grow, said the site on the edge of the Waterworks park was a "bit of a no man's land" overlooked by a 20-foot fence that was erected over a decade ago in response to a series of sectarian petrol-bomb and pipe-bomb attacks.



Siobhan Craig from GROW in the new community garden in north Belfast

"We had chosen a difficult and challenging site," she said.

"But this is about working together as a team and growing together. It's not about the horticulture necessarily — it's about the community-building aspect of it. Once we have finished our planting and divvying up the jobs we sit down and have

a yarn about the area. It's a brilliant springboard for community action."

The garden isn't an allotment — instead, the gardeners divide up the tasks and share the harvest.

Gerry Davis, from the Catholic Antrim Road area, said he was going through a relationship breakdown and facing redundan-

cy when he signed up.

"It's very worthwhile. I've never been in this part of the park so close to the peace line — it's an experience for me to come and work in this area," he said.

Lynda McBride from Ballysillan was coping with bereavement when she signed up. "I'd walked past it a dozen times and it was all

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— SIOBHAN CRAIG

"This wee bit of land beside the peace line — I'd walked past it a dozen times and it was rubbish and beer cans, you name it. To see what it has turned into —

it's a wee oasis in the middle of a desert"

— LYNDA MCBRIDE

MATT MACKAY/PRESSEVE

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The scheme was funded under the Belfast PEACE III Plan with support from Ulster Garden Villages and Belfast City Council.

Anyone interested can contact Grow at Belfastcommunitygardens@gmail.com.