

## Changing Communities: recognising schools as sites of transformation

Five Nations Network Conference, Glasgow, Scotland, January 2019

### The Tale o' the Glasgow Girls

- by Euan Girvan, former teacher at Drumchapel High School in Glasgow

When Ah went tae the bilingual unit at Drumchapel High  
Ah hid been teachin English but keen tae gie this joab a try  
Teachin' the weans o' asylum seekers and o'refugees  
Tae learn the English language and it's qs and ps!  
Weil they came from war-torn Iraq and Afghanistan  
Fae Rwanda, Algeria, Sri Lanka and the Sudan  
A' different nationalities, languages and regions  
An' first they hid tae learn tae understaun' Glaswegian!

Noo the background tae this speil is that the Labour government  
Needed easing public pressure doon south so they sent  
Asylum seekers roun' the country but maist up tae Glasga fair  
Cos we hid empty public housing needing renting and repair.  
But the locals living here hidnae any wind o' this  
Maist gied a great welcome but some thought things were amiss  
That those jist arrived got the whale jing-bang for free  
So sittin' doon the gether for a blether wiz the key.

Information, get it oot there  
Education, no less-mair,  
Inspiration, get yer community  
Tae unite and fight against  
racism and poverty.

The schule wiz challenged by those kiddie-on performance tables  
Wi teachers workin' to dispel stereotypes an' labels  
The empathetic wans, who werenae hell-bent on promotion  
Had been nurturing city weans with duty and devotion.  
Yet it wiz a challenge tae take oan kids who had suffered fear  
Distressed by family separation, war and danger getting here.  
But in the base, protected, they slowly slowly came around  
Then got intae mainstream classes wi' the new hope that they'd found.

Amal's first day, gret her heart oot  
When Ah asked her, 'What's this about?  
She turned tae me, her een a' tearful  
An' said 'Ah am just so happy  
tae be back learning in a school'.

Oh, we needed experts in tae deal wi' the trauma in the weans  
Art therapy, music, drama, dance were keys to affect change  
Richard Morran wi' Save the Children and other charities  
Got the kids making plays and films and composing melodies  
Aileen Ritchie, Paragon Ensemble, the Carnival group

Got kids a' together, they were friends afore they knew it.  
And for both the girls and boys, doin' sport was jist the ticket  
We staired winnin' trophies for athletics, fitba' and cricket.

And Drumchapel weans learned of other cultures, stories, songs  
And staired djembe drummin' and dressin' in sarongs  
We learnt what to ca' oot in Somali when your goats are running wild  
And the song you sing with sadness when you are burying a child  
And although at lunchtime kids, stood in their race and gender pack  
And we teachers thought we couldnae find the integration knack  
The school wiz slowly changing, it'd had gone so very far  
Wi' friendly first years chirpin' ' How's it gawin' Mohammed Omar?!!'

Older weans, great fur teachin'  
Older weans, don't do preachin'  
Older weans, reaching oot  
Tae the younger weans on  
Whit prejudice is about.

But crash! Just like the plough into the mouse's cell  
Asylum-seeking families were tae suffer a new hell  
Dawn-raided, separated and forced into detention  
Ripped from their family home, deportation the intention  
The Home Office wiz duty-bound to assess every single case  
But ran a racket cuttin' numbers in the numbers race  
Illegally, they targetted national family groups  
And charted planes for 'removal', of these the 'low hanging fruits.'

At schule, asylum-seeking children just fell down tae the ground  
They feared that they, their families, would be next to be detention bound  
The Drumchapel children were appalled this was happening to their friends  
The staff were shocked that these children were being traumatised again.  
The Heidie wiz on the phone tae find where they had been taken  
Staff and pupils signed petitions on behalf of those forsaken  
And seven lassies came together with wan united aim  
To dae anything they could tae get their dear friends back again.

Home Office, inhumane  
Home Office, causing pain  
Home Office, a racist institution  
Still 'not fit for purpose'  
Needin' dissolution.

Noo this wiz well afore the social media malarkey  
And wiz real social history - despised by David Starkey  
Locked up weans in Dungavel was beyond our comprehension  
So we visited families there who had been forced in tae detention  
And the girls faxed and emailed cooncillors and oor MSPs  
And wi' hand-held cameras we made two documentaries  
We contacted the media gettin' features in the press  
We found ourselves engaged in the democratic process.

Martin Coyle and Kingsway Centre wiz central to our cause  
We started patrolling the estate wi'oot breakin' any laws  
Jean Donnachie and Noreen Real stood shoulder tae shoulder  
They became Glasgow Girls but as Grans -just a wee bit aulder  
They would make sure that families would get some decent sleep

If the Home Office vans appeared then their mobiles would go beep  
And tae the centre the families dashed safe and less afraid  
And the Home Office were thwarted- another failed dawn raid.

Naw, the Home Office didnae always have the upper hand  
By tracking flight paths and aeroplanes coming in tae land  
Wi' Frank McMaster on the website wi' a fine tooth-comb  
We knew which nationality they were trying tae send back home.  
And the girls used the footage that they'd shot wi' Lindsay Hill  
Whose BBC films told oor story and gave us hope until  
Driven by Jassim Johe to the capital we'd been sent  
To take oor campaign and testimony tae the Scottish Parliament.

Gie weans a voice, they'll use it  
Gie weans a choice, they'll choose it  
Gie weans a good cause, they can be trusted  
Tae campaign for fairness equality and justice.

So what did we achieve? well some detainees were set free  
After campaigning for years, there was a Scottish amnesty  
Following a school meeting wi' a Home Office high heid yin  
Kids sitting exams would not be subjected tae detention  
Some families got leave to remain, free tae tell their stories  
We got all-party support in Holyrood even fae the Tories  
By challenging the system, wi' oot raising any fists  
Seven Drumchapel High School girls became political activists.

Wi' the help o' NGOs and religious organisations  
Community and campaign groups opposed tae deportation  
Health service and education workers - all civil society  
We a' worked the gether tae set oor pals and their families free.  
Here they are-strong lassies now independent women  
Jennifer McCarron, Ewelina Siwak, Amal Azzudin  
Agnesa Murselaj, Roza Salih, Toni-Lee Henderson  
And Emma Clifford all fought to free children from detention.

Nearly finished, Ah'll soon be gone  
The campaign though, keeps going on  
So when tackling society's ills  
Dae it wi' the inspiration  
O' the Glasgow Girls!

That's me done, Ah'll finish there  
And introduce Amal and Claire  
Wi their great subject matter  
So thanks fur puttin' up wi'  
my singing and ma patter.