

Linda works for the Turas Programme that is run by the East Belfast Mission at 213 Newtownards Road.

She says she has been accused by the DUP of being 'unbalanced', but she says people should make a decision about the Irish Language Act based on facts, as Unionist John McAllister is among the many non-Catholics who support the idea.

She herself had no Irish six years ago, but on a cross-community taster session of the language with a group of women from the Short Strand she fell in love with it.

Linda is not a Loyalist but identifies more with communism like other members of her family. However, raised on the Newtownards Road during the Troubles, she remembers her father being a vigilante, and she did perceive the Irish language as being Catholic.

When she became more involved with Irish she was asked to facilitate a class in a mission hall where she lived, but through the Troubles she realised people were hiding the fact that they were learning Irish and even hid their books away through fear. Linda too had some negative reactions, but eventually Foras na Gaeilge provided money for classes and today hundreds of people have been through her classes, talks and traditional music nights. The PUP were the first party to let her talk about Protestants learning Irish and Dr. Gordon McCoy has now joined her at Turas. He is funded by Community Relations.

As there is no agreement on the Irish Language Act yet, Linda says no costing has been done, although there are proposals for £8.5 million over 5 years then £2 million a year to run. Linda says the language needs to be taken out of party politics. And while one DUP member has been helpful, others believe Irish speakers are all Sinn Fein supporters. Linda Ervine was proud to receive the 2015 Community Relations Council (CRC) Civic Leadership Award for her commitment to Turas. As she says of the Irish language, "We're sharing it out. It belongs to us all".

Shelley Leggett, 24th March