

## The Rory McDonagh Cross Border Leadership Project

“Exploring the role of sport in developing good relations and leadership skills”

The Leadership project was delivered by Co-operation Ireland between September and December 2015 in partnership with local youth organisations in Cork and Belfast, bringing together 32 young people from designated disadvantaged areas across Cork (Knocknaheeny, Ballyphehane & Cobh) and Belfast (Monkstown & Colin Glen).

Co-operation Ireland is the leading peace-building charity on the island of Ireland. Since it was established in 1979, Co-operation Ireland has created opportunities for groups from both sides of the border and from the two main religious communities in Northern Ireland to come together so they can learn about each other's traditions and cultural backgrounds in order to help build a society which is based on tolerance and acceptance of cultural difference. ( see [www.cooperationireland.org](http://www.cooperationireland.org))

### **Project Objectives**

- To develop confidence and self-esteem among young people with high levels of apathy, disengagement and anti-social behavior.
- To develop positive relations among the young people and communities on a cross community and cross border basis.
- To enhance young people's knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the role of sport in developing good relations and leadership skills.
- To develop young people's capacity to actively engage positively in their communities.

### **Project Outline**

The young people from Belfast and Cork engaged in a series of workshops within their own communities exploring their sense of identity and belonging, the role that sport plays in bringing people together to build positive relationships, and developing their capacity for leadership.

The young people came together on a cross border exchange on the 13 – 15 November in Greenhills YMCA Activity Centre in Newcastle Co. Down, the majority of young people (35) who participated in this exchange had never been across the border before. They participated in a number of team- building exercises and workshops where they presented their group and community profiles sharing aspects of their culture and role of sports in peace-building. They worked together to identify issues impacting young people in both communities and opportunities for them as young leaders to make a difference in addressing these issues. They also participated in a culture tour of Belfast, planned by the young people themselves, which helped to give the Cork group a greater understanding of the culture and history of Belfast.

## **Feedback from the young people**

Participants were asked to complete a feedback form to assess the benefits of participating on the project, individuals highlighted how participation had given them a greater understanding of themselves, their communities and of others with differing views and identities; they also listed the positive relationships established locally and with their cross border partner group; increased self-esteem and skills to actively participate and express their views and opinions

Responses from the young people included:

*“People who don’t have the confidence to talk to people are given an experience to meet people and talk about where they grew up. Got to listen to the views of the other group on different events. “*

*“Got to meet the other people from the other cultures to see who they really are and that stereotypes are not right all the time.”*

*“I met people not only from protestant Belfast but also from Cork who I would never have met otherwise. Improved my social skills. “*

*“I loved it because I met loads of great people who were very nice to me and didn’t judge me for where I’m from. I really enjoyed the activities and felt it was really easy to socialise with the Northern Ireland people. “*

*“I liked it as you become a good leader and get really good confidence to talk to people you don’t know. “*