

The Rory McDonagh Cross Border Leadership Project

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

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)

Project Outline

Prior to the exchange young people from Belfast and Cork engaged in a series of workshops within their own communities exploring their sense of identity as well as their perceptions of the ‘other’ community. Young people also participated in a series of workshops exploring sports leadership and the role sport can play in bringing together communities. Young people from Belfast worked with Monkstown Boxing Club to complete a Community Sports leader’s award and young people from Cork worked with Cork Sports Partnership on an accredited sports leadership training programme.

Thirty Five young people came together on a cross border exchange on the 22nd- 24th April in Cork, the majority of young people from Belfast who participated in this exchange had never been across the border before. On the first evening of the exchange young people attended the Lord Mayor’s reception; during the reception young people shared their experiences of the exchange programme and the impact it has had on them. Young people also performed local songs from their areas to those attending the reception.

The second day of the exchange was very much focused on sports; young people participated in a workshop held by Cork Sports partnership, which used sports as a tool to bring people together. In the second part of the day young people got the opportunity to engage with local sports leaders including Steven Ward, a silver medallist in the Commonwealth games from Belfast, Juliet Murphy All Ireland Winner in Gaelic Football, Nollaig O Neill, Cork City Marathon winner and Christina Desmond, winner in the All Ireland Boxing titles. The panel of sportsmen and woman shared their stories of how they got into sport and the impact it had on their lives, following this young people had the opportunity to put questions to the sports personalities.

Young people then visited the Glen Resource centre where they had the opportunity to participate in a series of sports challenges. This again helped young people to develop relationships and work together, using sports as a tool.

On the Sunday young people explored the culture of Cork and looked at the connections that exist between Belfast and Cork. Young people travelled by boat to Cobh, an area closely connected to the history of the Titanic. As both cities have strong links to the Titanic young people visited the Cobh heritage centre which gave young people an insight into the Titanic connection in Cobh, tying together the two cities.

The exchange ended with a short evaluation/ reflection session to reflect on the learning from the weekend. Young people's feedback is recorded below:

Feedback from young people:

What I learned

- Leadership Skills * You can be yourself
- Friendship * Everyone is equal
- Confidence * Responsibilities
- Teamwork * Independence
- Communication * New Comfort zone
- Don't be afraid to Talk to New People
- Trust * That I love Prods
- You can be yourself

How we worked as a team

- Great * Worked well together
- We couldn't understand each other's accents
- Learned sign Language * We worked together from the beginning
- Fabulous we used our teamwork skills
- We respected each other * We got to know each other better

What Surprised Me...

- When I said hello to people they said they loved my voice
- They were very friendly * Everyone got along with each other straight away
- We all got closer * The Prods were great
- That everyone got on so great we all co-operated
- No arguments * I couldn't understand everyone's accents
- Everyone got involved * I showed up
- I didn't get angry
- I didn't know who the Protestant and who the Catholics were

Final word

- Great experience and good chance to get to know new people
- Very fun * I spoke in front of a group
- Feel more motivated to do sport
- I meet new great people * We should all speak slower and clearer
- A brilliant project and will always remember this experience
- I would recommend this programme highly
- The prods were great, I want to Become one