

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

In total 38 young people from Belfast and Cork participated in the exchange residential held at Ardnabannon Outdoor Recreational centre from 18th-20th November.

Prior to the residential young people participated in a Community Sports Leader's award, which is an accredited sports leadership training programme aimed at helping young people develop the skills to teach basic sports skills to others in their community

On the first evening of the exchange young people explored their hopes and fears for the residential ahead, followed by the development of a group contract to ensure young people had a positive experience whilst on residential and boundaries were established. Following this young people participated in a community profiles workshop. The workshop aimed to explore the differences and similarities between communities in Cork and communities in Belfast. Young people were asked to prepare a community profile of their area and present these profiles to the group. Young people's participation in this exercise was excellent with many young people asking questions to the other groups demonstrating a willingness to learn about the 'other' communities and engage in positive dialogue.

On the Saturday young people participated in a workshop facilitated by Peace Players. The focus of this workshop was exploring themes of diversity, stereotyping and prejudice through sport. The session commenced with a series of name games based around different types of sports. This played a key role in helping young people get to know each other. Following on from this activity, young people were split into sub-groups and were given a series of challenges including identifying diversity among a sports team and choosing a team based on limited information, this activity was designed to highlight how we often attach our own stereotypes to people before getting to know the stories behind the person. The theme of sport ran throughout the session highlighting how sport can be used as a tool to bring people together.

Following the workshop young people were taken to Belfast, so the Cork group could get to know some of the history attached to the city. The group got the opportunity to visit Belfast City Hall, as well as completing a tour of Titanic Belfast and the Peace walls, highlighting

some of the important aspects of Belfast's history. Following the tour of Belfast young people had the opportunity to visit a local drop-in centre in the Short-Strand area of Belfast. During the visit they engaged in a game of football with some of the other young people attending the drop-in centre, as well as engaging with the local youth workers from the area.

On the final day of the residential young people participated in a workshop exploring the good, the bad and the ugly aspects of the area they lived in. They shared these with the rest of the group and the group found that many of the issues impacting their community was also shared by the other groups participating in the residential. Young people were asked to come up with a plan as to how they could address some of these issues and again shared these with the rest of the group. For the final task the group was split into sub-groups with a mix of young people from Cork and Belfast. They were asked to explore the qualities of a leader and share these with the group as a whole. Young people's participation in the workshop was excellent.

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

- **Why should you do a programme like this?**
 - Opportunity to mix with different people
 - Eliminate prejudice and discrimination
 - Make new friends
 - Learn about others and their communities
 - More confidence after the programme
 - I learnt how to unite different communities
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- **What have you gained?**
 - Confidence
 - Communication Skills
 - New knowledge about Belfast/ Cork
 - New friends
 - New experiences