

## **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](http://www.cooperationireland.org))

### **Project Outline**

In total 33 young people from Belfast and Cork participated in the exchange residential held at Trabolgan Holiday Village, Cork from 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> May 2017. The exchange visit reunited young people from Belfast and Cork who had participated in the previous exchange trip to Belfast in November 2016.

#### *Reception with the Mayor of Cork*

One of the highlights of the programme included a reception at Cork City Hall hosted by the Mayor of Cork. The reception provided young people from Belfast and Cork with the opportunity to share their experiences of participating in the Rory McDonagh Cross border exchange. Attendees at the reception included members of the Co-operation Ireland Cork Committee, key representatives from the local council and representatives from Bord Gas that had been involved in the delivery of the Cork programme.

#### *Workshops*

Whilst on the exchange young people also had the opportunity to engage in series of workshops exploring the themes of; emotional resilience, drama as a tool to share perceptions of you and others and a workshop exploring young people's opinions on Brexit.

The purpose of the emotional resilience workshop was to help young people explore coping mechanisms for everyday stress and was delivered by Psychotherapist Tony Hegarty, a follow on from this was a drama workshop helping young people explore perceptions of themselves as individuals and promote a positive attitude towards themselves by helping them identify unique talents in each other.

Young people also participated in a workshop exploring their opinions on Brexit and the potential cross-border impact. Young people were split into community groups and were asked about their understanding of Brexit. Belfast groups mainly focused on Northern Ireland's unique circumstances, while Cork groups mentioned issues that will be likely to affect Ireland, such as the border, trade, or pound to euro exchange rate. The groups were asked what they think will be the potential impacts of Brexit on their lives, both positive and negative. Most groups mentioned negative impacts. Cork young people mainly talked about

impacts on the border (controls, security, visas), and on trade (customs, drop in currency...). Belfast people expressed a lot more concerns. They identified some positive impacts, such as the end of European rule and money savings. But they mainly mentioned the impacts on the border, free movement and trade. They also talked about the loss of EU money, rights guaranteed under EU law and the potential impacts on the NHS. In general, young people from Belfast were much more aware and concerned about Brexit than young people from Cork, although all of them expressed concern at the potential negative impacts of Brexit.

### *Cultural Tour*

The exchange also provided young people from Belfast with the opportunity to learn about the culture of Cork. Young people had the opportunity to explore the city in groups with both young people from Belfast and young people from Cork, enabling young people from Belfast to learn about the city through their peers from Cork. The group also visited the Titanic Experience in Cobh. In the previous exchange the group had completed a tour of Titanic Belfast; therefore the visit to the Titanic Experience in Cobh helped connect the two cities through their shared history with the Titanic.

### *Conclusion*

The second residential highlighted that the first exchange has been really successful in helping young people from Belfast and Cork build relationships. Young people were very excited about seeing each other again. They got together as soon as they arrived at the residential centre, to play football and catch-up and were clearly excited to be reunited with their friends. During the residential, young people also had time to socialise together during free-time, such as the trip into Cork City Centre. Nights at the residential centre were also an opportunity for young people from Belfast and Cork to mix rather than stay apart. It was sometimes even difficult to get all of them back to their rooms as they wanted to stay with their Cork/Belfast friends.

The evaluation also demonstrated that young people really enjoyed the exchange, and they appreciated the opportunity to meet people they would not have met otherwise. The feedback was very positive. They emphasised the many friendships they built, and their will to see each other again in the future. In the end, this second residential helped strengthen the relationships which had been built during the first residential. Everybody was sad to leave, and the goodbyes were hard for some young people who started to make plans to meet again in the summer.

In conclusion the exchange enabled young people to continue the positive relationships that had been consolidated in the first residential and helped young people continue to learn from their peers about a different community.

