

The Rory McDonagh Trust 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 45 young people from Belfast and Cork participated in the exchange residential held at Ardnabannon Outdoor Education Centre from the 24th-26th November 2017. The exchange visit brought together young people from loyalist and nationalist areas of Belfast with young people from across Cork City.

Workshops

Whilst on the exchange young people also had the opportunity to engage in series of workshops exploring the themes of diversity, stereotyping and community profiles. On the first night of the residential young people had the opportunity to engage in teambuilding activities to help them get to know each other as a group. This was followed by a community profiles workshop. Young people split into each of their areas, Cobh, Bishopstown, Seymour Hill, and the Colin area. Each group had the opportunity to share what they liked about their community, what they would change about their community and their future hopes for their areas. The exercise really helped each of the groups learn about each other's communities as well as explore issues impacting communities on both sides of the border. It was evident that despite the large geographical distance between communities, there were similar issues impacting young people their communities. The group also explored the difference in issues North and South of the border, for example issues of sectarianism in Northern communities and how young people are helping tackle this.

Peace Players Workshop

Peace Players facilitated an interactive sports based workshop exploring the themes of diversity and stereotyping through sports related activities. The workshop helped demonstrate the dangers of negative stereotyping and the importance of challenging negative attitudes. The workshop also demonstrated how sports can be used as a tool to bring young people together from different backgrounds and promote the development of relationships by engaging in sports activities together. The workshop worked well in terms of helping young people develop stronger relationships and work together with young people from a different background.

Cultural Tour

On the second day of the residential young people had the opportunity to travel to Belfast to explore the capital city. Young people from both Cork and Belfast were taken on a cultural tour of Belfast where they had the opportunity to visit some of the famous sites of Belfast including the City Hall and Belfast's murals where they were given a historical insight into the reasons behind the Peace Wall and the progress towards peace in the city. The tour finished at Titanic Belfast where the group participated in an interactive tour of the Titanic Experience as both Belfast and Cork have close connections to the ship. The trip to Belfast ended with a trip to Colin Glen Trust, providing young people from Cork with the opportunity to see where young people from Colin Glen meet on a weekly basis and find out about some of the resources the centre has including the opportunity to try out the Trust's Zip-lining and High Ropes course

Conclusion

The residential concluded with a final workshop exploring how young people can be ambassadors for positive change in their communities. Young people were asked to consider the actions they can take to bring positive change in their communities and share this with the group as a whole.

In the final reflection session it was evident that the residential promoted learning and understanding between two groups of young people from the North and the South and a new found respect for those from a different community. Young people from Cork and Belfast felt they had an opportunity to develop new friendships with young people from a different community and in the process gain a deeper understanding of the issues that impact young people from different parts of Ireland.

The young people who participated in the residential are looking forward to the next part of the residential, where they can continue developing relationships with other young people from a different background. Young people felt energised and excited for the next leg of the programme, which will take place in Cork during the spring.