

**NORTH CONNACHT
YOUTH SERVICE,
IRELAND AND NORFOLK
YOUTH & COMMUNITY
SERVICE UK** did an
exchange in Carrick on
Shannon in Ireland

Development of the Exchange Idea

The youth workers from both organisations met at a Causeway funded Multiplier event in Athlone. The two organisations have an agenda to work with rural youth and felt they have much in common dealing with discrimination in the education system and their common social experiences.

The ten Irish young people had been involved in the youth group over the last two years. They were selected from a larger group because of their determination and commitment to the programme and their families supported the idea of an exchange. The groups believed that there were strong cultural ties between them and clear differences also. This exchange allowed them to examine these links, similarities and differences and to explore them as a group.

Preparation

The participants were very focused on preparing for the exchange, they took responsibility for planning and coordinating various tasks relating to the travel and accommodation, and preparation of workshops and activities to take place during the exchange.

The Exchange Itself

This was a very successful exchange the programme included team building (outdoor activities) and communication workshops that facilitate exploring common themes around rural and social isolation. Included in all of this was a social programme where the young people and the leaders had a chance to get to know and appreciate each other.

The plan for the exchange was very comprehensive and included a very well structured programme of cultural and social visits, workshops, inputs and training sessions. The young people themselves were very involved in the planning and delivering of the entire programme.

CALLAN YOUTH ACTION GROUP, IRELAND, did an exchange with Ovenden Youth Centre, West Yorkshire

Background

The UK partner visited Ossary diocese youth group and proposed making contact with young people in the area. The visit was proposed to the young people in the group who initially responded with some reservations and prejudice. The young people in the partner group had similar reservations and prejudice. The visit was facilitated by the leaders and was a very positive experience for all involved. Barriers were broken and the young people were eager to be involved in an exchange.

Development of the Exchange Idea

The idea for the exchange came out of the visit by the group from Ovenden. Initially leaders on both sides were alerted to the negative prejudices held by a lot of young people from each organisation prior to the onset of the visit. The results of the visit were that the young people developed a sense of understanding of each other and had their stereotypes broken down. This positive result added to the genuine interests of the young people in developing relationships between the groups and exploring further similarities and differences in their cultures led to the development an exchange.

Preparation

In order to participate in the exchange, each member going was asked to sign a contract agreeing to partake in the planning and organisation of the exchange. In agreeing to this, they also agreed to work to the best of their ability on these committees, for their benefit, for the benefit of others on the exchange and for the exchange as a whole. The young people learned a lot, especially learning to work together, the leaders were very pleased at the way each committee gelled and produced results.

Programme of Activities

While provisional time tables were drafted and presented to the group from both sides, each member taking part had an input as to what they felt would be of benefit and interest to the exchange and to our English Guests.

The Exchange Itself

The aim of the exchange was for the 2 groups to compare and contrast "What it is like to be me, where I live in the year 2000?". The programme included facilitated workshops on different themes and social and cultural trips The themes of the workshops were: Tradition and Culture, Political and Natural History, Building Friendships, and allowing the young people to think and ask questions which would help the to learn more about their previously held Irish -v- English prejudice and understand how to get past it as young people.

THRIVE, IRELAND run a special project with 36 participants from Ireland, Northern Ireland, England and Wales

Background

THRIVE is a community of professionals that offer quality tailor-made training programmes, organisation interventions and selection and assessment processes, this training is a result of expressed current needs in the Youth and Community Sector.

Development of the Idea

In Oct/Nov 2001 Causeway and Encounter organised a conference in Loughbourouh (UK) for organisations involved in Cross-border work. It was an issue at the event that youth groups/organisations needed training in conflict resolution before they would feel comfortable dealing with these issues within an exchange environment.

The key aims of the event were:

- To explore how exchange visits sponsored by Causeway could be improved by introducing sessions that enable young people explore how conflict between the peoples of these islands has affected the relationship between people.
- To equip participants with the skills and exercises needed to introduce "dealing with conflict" within exchange visits

The Event Itself

This project seeks to address the need identified by Causeway for exchange visits sponsored by the programme to address the key reason why it established ie. reducing the misunderstanding that arises from the conflict that has taken between the peoples on these islands. The project seeks to provide participants (both young people and leaders) with the skills and exercises needed to include this issue within the exchange visit. While recognising that much youth work (as with most adult education processes) needs to build trust between participants at the outset, and later introduce conflict issues within the exchange programme either towards the end of the first exchange or within the return visit.

ENABLE IRELAND, CORK

did an exchange with
Enfield Centre, England.

Background

Enable Ireland (formerly the Lavanagh Centre) was established in 1953, the Lavanagh youth group was formed in 1993 and aims to facilitate the social, personal and educational development of young people with physical disabilities through empowerment.

Development of the Exchange Idea

This was a second leg exchange; the first part was hosted in the UK and was very successful. Both groups have been involved in exchanges with various groups in the past and have found them extremely beneficial to the young people, felt this group of young people should have this opportunity. The partner organisation has a long history working with disabled young people and both have known of each other for a long time.

Preparation

The young were involved in planning of the programme, deciding on the activities and discussions to be carried out and also in organising food, transport and accommodation

The Exchange Itself

The programme consisted of a series of cultural visits, games, workshops and discussions designed to focus the young people on their ability to work within mixed nationality teams, to broaden their experiences both personally and culturally and to give them confidence and self-esteem.

LGYM / OUT YOUTH DUBLIN

LGYM, is a Youth Organisation that supports young gay and lesbian people. The opportunity to develop links with a similar organisation in Ireland was one that Causeway was keen to fund. Causeway hopes that other such programmes will be developed as the programme was of particular benefit for the young people at Out Youth Dublin, since young gay and lesbian people in Ireland suffer from a much higher level of homophobia than their English counterparts.

Thematically, the programme was designed to explore cultural issues and to use art and leisure as the canvas to develop team building and personal confidence. As the young people were mostly in their late teens, early twenties, they were intrinsically involved in the organisation of the programme. The democratic nature of their planning process also gave them the chance to develop concepts of team-work and notions of behavioural issues within the context of the group.

Whilst the strongly religious nature of Irish society confirmed the suspicions that the English young people held, it did give them the chance to discuss with their Irish peers the different means by which the Irish (and English) dealt with such antagonism. A culture of support was successfully established.

LGYM are hoping to repeat the programme with a Glaswegian group as well but the nature of their organisations makes match funding particularly difficult to find (especially so for the Irish). In addition, the majority of Gay and Lesbian Youth Organisations are run by part-time volunteers (due to the lack of public money) making it more difficult to plan for a bigger project. Yet, both partner groups had been fired with enthusiasm from the success of the programme and have nothing but the best to say with regards to the input from Causeway.

**BORDER REACH ARTS
PROJECT / CORK
COMMUNITY ART LINK**

Causeway funded an exchange programme with a particular degree of pertinence: the exchange involved a Youth Organisation from Strabane, Northern Ireland and one from Cork.

As with all projects that involve an exchange between Northern Ireland and the ROI, the significant issues lie around themes relating to conflict resolution and engendering cultural understanding. This particular exchange was set up by the two partner organisations with a view to using an artistic and creative process to explore these sensitive issues of culture and identity.

As a result, the ability to create a skills exchange based programme seemed to have produced a highly successful result for all participants concerned. Border Reach Arts project (based in Strabane) specialises in drama and its Youth Centre is actively involved in Young People's Theatre. Their partner organisation, Cork Community Arts Link, specialises in costume and prop making, hence a marriage of like interests furthered the vast enjoyment that participants from both groups experienced.

The group leaders were particularly pleased as this programme was organised without an Advanced Planning Visit. This demonstrated how well organised the youth participants had been. Their active involvement in the organisation of the project had proven to be particularly effective, as all elements of the programme schedule went swimmingly well, in addition to the fact that all members of both teams gelled from the very start.

Of particular note, the involvement in the St Patricks Day Parade in Cork was a high point for both teams. Working in conjunction in a relatively short period of time, the teams worked well together to produce costumes and an aesthetic display that gave them the honour of being awarded 'Most entertaining, Most Dynamic, Best Live Action' and 'Overall Winner of Parade', a clear indication that, in this instance, a solid connection had been developed between North and South.

Border Arts returned to Strabane with a full report on their activities. As with all exchange programmes, the ability to develop participants as spokesmen for their peers and their generation had been firmly achieved in this project. The parade, having been filmed for national media was a further plus. Participants returned with greater confidence, especially regarding their artistic scope and ability.

**NORFOLK YOUTH AND
COMMUNITY SERVICE /
YOUTH ACTION
PROJECT**

This exchange programme occurred having been planned for 3 months, the actual event turned out to be an unprecedented success since a significant gap of maturity between the two groups made it a very challenging event for the leaders to control and complete without mishap.

The theme primarily, was to examine crime prevention, a particularly poignant issue for the young people from Norfolk as they were all from risk areas and were no longer participating in formal schooling. They were, however, involved in education programmes and that degree of commitment emphasised and underlined their organisational skills in conceiving and developing the programme.

Consequently, the programme included a number of interesting activities: meeting with youth services that gave presentations on the juvenile justice system in Ireland; visiting a number of projects that target young school leavers (Youth Reach, Young Enterprise, Home Youth Liaison Service); workshops exploring 'new possibilities for juvenile crime prevention' and workshops on joyriding and car theft.

However, the initial difficulty lay in the fact that the Irish group were predominantly aged between 12 and 14, whereas the group from Norfolk were aged between 15 and 16. This resolved itself within a few days but the disparity in maturity did cause some problems. Ultimately, the two groups did develop bonds and structured themselves into a team-working environment with some aplomb. This is an issue that will be considered in the future as the final thoughts on crime and crime prevention were met through two distinct perspectives: the Irish group, younger in its maturity levels, still viewed crime with a certain degree of glamour, whilst their English peers viewed crime as a social disease that was more a way of life, driven through necessity. The major benefit for the English group, many of whom were from deprived and disadvantaged backgrounds, was the opportunity to travel away from home. This was very new to most of them and they gained confidence and independence through the exchange whilst realising that 'home' was actually an OK place to be.

**WREXHAM YOUTH
SERVICE /
SHANTALLOW YOUTH
CENTRE**

The background to the young people living in Derry, Northern Ireland is academically low. Due to lack of opportunities and through living in a high risk area, many of the young people attached to Shantallow Youth Centre had low levels of formal education. The exchange programme that occurred with Wrexham Youth Service (North Wales) gave the young people the opportunity to experience a more informal, experiential format of learning. The tangible end product was particularly impressive.

The theme of the exchange was to examine drugs and substance abuse in Derry. As a result, both groups had an immediate interest, as the theme was contemporary and relevant to their age groups. From the outset both groups gelled exceptionally well and within a very short period of time, the teams began to behave in a completely cohesive manner. They stopped being two distinct groups, splitting themselves up for the task of making a short video and cooperated in a unified approach. This followed on from the pre event preparation, where the young people of both groups had chosen the theme and were self-appointed partisans delivering an incredible amount of energy whilst fund raising to make the opportunity a real occurrence.

"I learned that their lifestyles were more or less similar to ours and that the problem of drugs was the same"

The two day shoot, was arguably the most successful activity. As four distinct aspects of group activity were required to conduct a successful shoot in a particularly short period of time, the readiness to fit into the self-assigned groups went very smoothly. Interviews were conducted with maturity and dignity, even in the face of some antagonism.

For the Northern Irish young people, the necessary contact with RUC officers was challenging but they conducted themselves with decorum. Increased confidence and self-esteem naturally followed. Meetings with the Mayor and other figures of authority proved to be as equally successful, since all interviewees spoke candidly about the social problems of drugs and substance abuse, making the video an almost complete final product, which had been achieved in an incredibly short period of time.

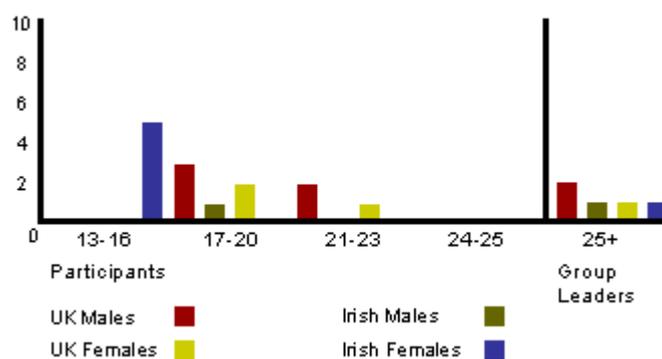
The significant benefits are again, more 'intangible'. The young people gained an insight into new avenues that they could follow later in life. And responded well to authority figures in a hostile climate.

**THE PRINCES TRUST -
YMCA SCOTLAND /
ADVENTURE SPORTS
PROJECT**

The exchange took 4 months of preparation. The Irish group were from Dublin, whilst the UK group were from West Lothian in Scotland. The main themes were adventure sports and cultural exploration. This was one of the exchanges that involved two groups from distinctly different backgrounds: the Irish were from a deprived community, much used to drugs, dealers and serious theft. Their Scottish counterparts in contrast were from quite a secluded region in Scotland, where life is relatively comfortable.

As a result, the Scots found that their expectations were challenged and evident from their write-ups, they appear to have dispelled some of the myths that had originally been associated with the Irish group. Ideas that young people from a deprived area would naturally behave in an antagonistic fashion were quickly allayed. In fact, both groups were surprised at the level of compatibility that existed between them. Both the Scottish and the Irish were exceptionally warm and friendly to each other and the creative evaluation presentations highlighted, in the main, the personal and social rewards that both teams had gained from the week that they had spent together.

The exchanged allowed participants to come together and take ownership of the project. Not only did they learn something different, but they learnt about preconceptions and why making them is wrong. Different people from different places may have different ways but that is not a barrier for communication, rather it makes for a very interesting starting point.



**SPECIAL PROJECT -
FARNEY/LIGONIEL
YOUTH GROUP**

A group of young people aged 15-17 years from areas of Belfast and Monaghan came together for a certified training programme in Active Citizenship to equip them with the skills which would enable them to get more involved in their communities. The young people also carried out a research project as part of the training which involved them determining the areas and method for research activity. The research focused on identifying the needs of young people and barriers they currently encountered with a view to providing solutions.

The level of personal development and increased self-confidence was identified by each of the young people. The religious differences between the Catholic group in the South and the Protestant group in the North gave rise to a lot of learning. They discovered that formal religion was not such an important issue for them, as it was not perceived as being connected to their beliefs. Issues of identity were addressed and the focus of the project was on "who we are" not "what we are".

Young people identified specific changes in their behaviour as a result of their increased self-confidence which included:

- Better levels of listening
- Increased participation and engagement in the project
- Increased knowledge about their project and partners
- Better ability to take risks
- Increased levels of assertiveness
- Better ability to stand up for own values
- Better ability to control their more emotional reactions