



Creative Ways to Reconciliation and Coexistence in Northern Ireland and Beyond Rural Community Network Northern Ireland, County Tyrone, Cookstown

Project Goals

- ◆ To implement creativity through the arts to establish a safe space in which young people can feel comfortable talking and sharing with others their experiences and thoughts
- ◆ To create dialogue among youth in Northern Ireland in order to understand the effects of conflict in their lives, attitudes and aspirations
- ◆ To empower young people to recognize their own potential to make decisions towards peace as well as instill the urgency of peace

Personal Goals

- ◆ To explore the field of coexistence and reconciliation work as a possible future career
- ◆ To understand and appreciate the complexity of the conflict in Northern Ireland for its many layers
- ◆ To share with young people in their



struggles and acknowledge the universality of youth, therefore breaking down the "them" and "us" feelings

Activities

- ◆ Created workshops using the arts to bring young people together based on their common interests as opposed to dictated social divisions
- ◆ Created a safe space within the group so that everyone in the group felt comfortable being around each other
- ◆ Worked on issues of concern regarding a young person's experience in the conflict as it relates to themes of reconciliation and coexistence

Key Dilemmas

- ◆ Trying to strip away my assumptions about culture and what is "right" so that I would be more open to the culture around me
- ◆ Building trust in small, tight knit communities of young people who were not used to outsiders, let alone foreigners
- ◆ Working out the identity issue for myself. I am an American-born Korean and I had to work hard at proving my American-ness



Lessons Learned

- ◆ I am more confused about what reconciliation would mean in Northern Ireland, but I think that indicates that I have learned more, in that I see the complexity of the situation better.
- ◆ When talking and working with young people you have to work on their level and appeal to their interests. But, you should never expect any less philosophy or intellect to come into the discussions.
- ◆ It takes a lot of energy for a whole community to make steps towards peace but it takes one nameless, faceless, ignorant person's actions to cause the entire community to regress into a state of fear of the supposed "other".



Page 16, far left: Eleven kids, ages ten to eleven, met every morning for a week to create a Web site that would tell the world who they are. Right: Sixteen girls from Protestant and Catholic backgrounds join in celebration called the cinnamon roll to congratulate one another for a job well done at the Loughshore Youth Forum.

Page 17, left: Sophia at the July 12th parade in Belfast. Below left: A page from Sophia's journal. Bottom: Shields representing counties from the area. Below: A mural on a building prompts the thought, "How much power should we give the past?"

