

# Civic Link

Summer 2008

## Welcome

### Editors note:

I would like to begin this year's newsletter by congratulating all our schools and youth groups on another highly successful year.

It was another busy year for Civic-Link, with the usual student exchanges and community panel hearings, as well as International delegations and 4 students having the opportunity to attend the Civitas conference in Washington.

This edition covers the project events of 2007-2008, as well as highlighting a few special events that took place at the end of our 2006-2007 Civic-Link year. Our first article is from Sharon Louise, a student from Banbridge High School. She documents

her Civic-Link experience this year.

This is followed by an article from four Belfast Boys' Model School students, who, along with 250 students from all over the world, travelled to Washington DC to present their project at the Civitas International Network showcase in July 2007.

We are also including a short editorial piece on the developments to the Civic-Link programme. One development is the pilot cross community Civic-Link project, which involves young people from September 2008. We are also in the process of developing web based technologies to help to deliver the project and to facilitate Civic-Link partnerships to work more collaboratively.

This year's newsletter concludes with an article about our International Project.

## Looking back on my Civic-Link year By Sharon-Louise, Banbridge High School

I wanted to be involved with the Civic-Link project because it was an opportunity to work with young people from Carlow to solve community problems. However it was difficult at first working with a group from a different background because I had all these stereotypes about them. I thought that they might fight with us because we had a different religion, that they would all love Irish music and eat lots of potatoes. Well, at least I was right about the potatoes!

What really opened my eyes was the fact that the young people we met had the same problems as us, even though we lived more than one hundred miles apart. We were a bit nervous of each other at first but really looked forward to meeting again in Northern Ireland on our second exchange. They helped us find solutions to our common problem of vandalism.

Being involved in this project has had several benefits for me:

- I met and worked with young people from a different background and learned that we could achieve much more if we listened to each other.
- I gained skills by interviewing our headteacher and others.
- It showed me the dangers of stereotyping and I learned to meet people with an open mind. You really 'can't judge a book by its cover'!
- It has given me experience on how to approach a public policy agency with a view to solving community problems.



Students from Banbridge High School and Carlow Vocational School and Carlow Regional Youth Service on 2nd exchange working on 'learning through partnership'

- **Belfast Boys' Model School in Washington D.C.**  
By Jonathon Clarke, James Craig, Jonathan Craig and Richard McLarnon
- **Civic-Link developments**

### **Belfast Boys' Model School in Washington D.C.**

**By Jonathon Clarke, James Craig,  
Jonathan Craig and Richard McLarnon**

Last July, four of us from the Sixth Form in Belfast Boys' Model School, representing our Civic-Link class, abandoned holiday plans and flew off to the International Project Citizen Showcase in Washington DC to represent the Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

As we sat in the plane we practised our speeches, already well rehearsed in Civic-Link public events in both Belfast and Dublin. At the end of a long day, we arrived on Capitol Hill. Settling into the stylish Hyatt Regency hotel, we started to meet other young people from South America, Africa, Russia and the Middle East and the enormity of this International Showcase became apparent.

The next morning gave us an opportunity to head to Mount Vernon, home of George Washington which we all thought was an appropriate place to start sightseeing. The heat was incredible. We lunched in a shopping mall and took in some of the many Washington monuments, before heading back to start putting together our boards ready for the following day. All the different teams assembled their year's work in the same big room and there was a buzz of excitement as we all checked out what everyone had been preparing, and listened to any number of different languages. Then came a huge surprise. At the official opening event the following morning, one of us was to start the proceedings and read, in English, a short piece from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. What an honour!

Jonathon Clarke, also our Head boy, did the honours the next morning and he was followed by other students reading similar pieces in languages including Spanish, Russian, French, Vietnamese and Arabic. After the Keynote Address, the 35 teams followed a tight schedule during which they presented their projects. The huge responsibilities which many had taken on became apparent. The problem for the students from Senegal, living in a rural community was inadequate drinkable water. Their project supported access to tap water for the entire village. The issue was similar for the Ecuador team. The team from South Africa investigated teenage suicide, Estonia addressed the problem of non-renewable energy resources and the team from the West Bank and Gaza tackled pollution in the hospital in Ramallah. Others projects focussed on issues as wide ranging as industrial pollution, the integration of HIV positive students in the classroom and school violence.

Our own presentation was unique, in that we presented five boards, one more than the other teams. As we work in partnership, we felt that was important to represent that experience. Our fifth board celebrated our friendship with Magh Ene College. Sitting in the audience for our presentation was the Head of the Northern



BBMS students with Marianne McGill, Co-operation Ireland and Judith Fawcett, Civic-Link teacher

Ireland Bureau in Washington and we were so proud to have her with us; she was so interested in and supportive of our work.

On the final day we took our projects to a Portfolio Display in the Russell Senate Office Building on Capitol Hill and enjoyed talking about our project, school and community to Senators and other officials. Finally, we wound up with an Awards Ceremony and disco. Our award now sits proudly this side of the Atlantic in the Headmaster's office.

A couple of days and several flights later, we (not our luggage) arrived exhilarated back in Dublin despite seasonal thunderstorms re-routing us through Atlanta and Frankfurt. The success of our project had offered us a once in a lifetime opportunity to share in this valuable international experience. We found people really nice and easy to talk to and still keep in touch by e-mail. The memories are still with us and our eyes have been opened to the wider world .

### **Civic-Link developments**

The cross community pilot project began this year. So far, we have 8 schools involved, with a further 4 to come on board next year. It is a pilot project which is setting out to test whether an active citizenship project can promote better cross community relationships. This year has involved the schools and local community stakeholders, with the young people beginning the project in September. We are looking forward to including their experiences in the next edition of the Civic-Link newsletter.

A development that should benefit all of our partnerships is the Web based technology we are seeking to incorporate into our Civic-Link project



• **Civic-Link Training 07-08**

As part of the continuing support of schools/ youth groups implementing Civic-Link, a series of training events were provided in the academic year 07-08 for the participating schools and youth groups. The primary aim of these training events is to introduce teachers and leaders to the activities and methodologies involved in the programme but also to provide them with an insight into what their young people experience during the programme and the exchanges. These events also provide an opportunity for all the teachers/leaders involved to share experiences and best practice, discuss challenges and strategies to overcome these, and most importantly to plan with their partner teacher/ leader.

There were two events run in September 07, the first of these was for new groups running Civic-Link for the first time with their young people, therefore the focus was very much on taking the participants through the key activities involved in the programme. Participants were also introduced to a variety of techniques to facilitate on-line communication and collaboration.



Two screenshots from our new eLearning Civic-Link eLearning environment

The second training event in September was run for teachers participating in a new International programme, where the groups involved were investigating issues related to infringement of Human Rights in the community and linking with schools in Idaho, USA. Dr Dan Prinzing from Idaho Human Rights also attended this event, giving an overview of the work being done on Human Rights in Idaho.

The January Training event focused on using drama and video as medium for bringing young people together to learn from and about each other. Teachers were given the opportunity to become budding actors/actresses in a drama workshop run by Chrissie Poulter from the Drama Department in Trinity College. This was followed by a film making workshop where participants were introduced to the use of video as a vehicle for sharing their communities and stories.



Teachers at training working through our 'perceptions' exercise

Finally training was held in April for schools/ youth groups involved in our capacity building programme, where new groups intending to get involved have the opportunity to capacity build in their own school/club.



Teachers at training in April, where they met their partner teachers for the first time

- **Caitlin Ní Fhrighil Student Pobalscoil Ghaoth Dobhair**
- **International update**

## Solving our common Health & Safety concerns

by Caitlin Ní Fhrighil, student of Pobalscoil Ghaoth Dothair

At the beginning of this year, our Transition class were informed about Civic-Link where we would come together with a school from Northern Ireland, Limavady High School, twice for two nights each time. We were to identify a common problem that we shared in our communities and find a solution to this common problem.

The Limavady students visited us first, arriving at Gartan Outdoor Adventure Centre, where we met for the first time. Both schools stayed together at the Dunlewey Hostel for the two nights. After a day of workshops & discussions, we identified our common problem as a lack of AED Defibrillators available in schools, which puts the health and lives of the students in danger. Later in



Pobalscoil Ghaoth Dothair and Limavady High School students on their exchange.

the evening we took them to Arena 7 in Letterkenny, which everyone enjoyed. By the end of their visit, we all had a solid foundation to work off for the second phase of the project.

After our first meeting each school was responsible for taking action such as informing the community of our project and to do further research to prove this problem existed. Come April 2008, it was our turn to return the visit and travel to Limavady High School, where they gave us a tour of their school, and did team building with each other, as well as updating each other on the progress we'd made on our research as well as possible policy solutions.

In the end, to address meeting the Health & safety issues highlighted by us the school management and Coyle's Coaches were kind enough to purchase and donate an AED Defibrillator for each of our schools. Additionally, it gave all involved the opportunity to experience the lifestyles of two very different communities and was overall a very successful project.

## International update

**Cindy Wilson, teacher at Centennial High School, Idaho, writing about the experiences of the students, teachers and schools involved in our International project.**

For the past 3 years, 5 of the Civic-Link partnerships have operated on a pilot tripartite basis, between Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Idaho. The purpose of these tripartite partnerships is to extend the opportunities for young people to develop mutual understanding, respect for diversity and civic action processes. For the teachers involved, it is an opportunity to extend their own teaching experiences and professional development.

The Pilot International Civic-Link project this year was designed to further strengthen and develop the 3-way links. To achieve this, the three schools in each partnership identified their community problem based on an agreed common Human Right. This provided greater structure for communication, collaboration and learning between the partners. Feedback from teachers on the Human Rights focus states 'all students had an opinion as it was universal and it was easy to spark interest from students in the human rights topic' and that the focus 'enhanced the international partnership.'

The culmination of the International project was a review day with the teachers from all three jurisdictions and a showcase of the young people's work. The review was an opportunity to share the learning from this year to see where the project proceeds to in the future; all the teachers involved were united in their belief that the tripartite partnership has benefited their

young people by widening their understanding and knowledge of other parts of the world.



Teachers from the Idaho, Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland schools involved in the International Project



**CIVIC-LINK**  
An operation Ireland's Project Citizens Initiative