

Civic Link

March 2009

Editor's note:

The 2008/09 academic year has seen many new and exciting things happening within Civic-Link. We have welcomed back 22 of the 32 schools from 2007/08 and have another 24 new Civic-Link schools joining the fun!

Groups involved in Civic-Link this year are working on a number of themes or different modes of delivery. Along with the launch of our Pure IT Civic-Link- where the students meet only through the online learning environment,

we have further developed the Human Rights theme. We also have groups working on a cross-community basis, as well as cross-border. This edition of the newsletter will contain stories from the groups involved in a range of these different themes.

We have also continued in our development of the online learning interface and our new look website, which will be launched within the next few weeks.



One of the most important parts of the Civic-Link process are the exchanges between the partnered groups. What follows are two stories from different groups about their 1st face to face meetings.

Our 1st exchange- Ballycastle High School and Chanel College

On the 15th December 2008, a group of 13 Ballycastle High School pupils travelled down to Dublin to complete a Civic-Link programme. When we got off the train we were welcomed by our Chanel College partners. We then all boarded the coach to the hostel in Wicklow and found ourselves talking to our partners, learning names and beginning to get to know them. After a while, everyone knew who was who and were comfortable talking to each other. Once we arrived at the hostel, we continued breaking the ice in our 1st workshop. This was to get all the students involved confident enough to talk in front of their partners. The second day we concentrated on learning more about our partners- their community and the problems they face. We also learnt more about Human Rights and what we felt was needed to change our communities for the better.

Our project involves us identifying a Human Rights problem that needs to be solved.

We also took part in activities that were designed to build stronger friendships between the 2 groups. I feel that everyone involved in the Civic-Link programme got on really well and became really good friends. I also feel that the workshops brought all the pupils together and we all learnt how to get along with other young people who come from different backgrounds from us. Everybody here from Ballycastle High School enjoyed Civic-Link and is excited about the next exchange!





...What a great start!

Our 1st exchange: Carlow Regional Youth Service and Banbridge High School

Our 1st exchange was from the 24th -26th November 2008 and took place in Carlow. The Banbridge students along with their teacher and Banbridge youth centre youth worker were greeted by five members of the Carlow group and were brought to The Vault (Carlow Regional Youth Service) to meet the rest of the Carlow students. The Vault is a new project, funded by the Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund and the V.E.C. and run by Carlow Regional Youth Services (CRYS) and provides young people with a space to meet and work.

Upon arrival in The Vault, the Banbridge group was extended a warm welcome by the Carlow young people and their leaders from the Carlow School Completion Programme and Carlow Regional Youth Service.

As well as lots of fun activities, we completed 5 workshops on our 1st exchange, which were designed to help us get to know each other, share information and make decisions about which problem to choose.

of each other and to explore what we and our communities have in common. This led onto sharing information about our community problems.

Once we had exchanged this information, we then began talking about our community problems. These were classified into 3 groups: problems just in Banbridge/Carlow and then problems experienced by both communities. We chose to focus on these and choose a common problem from the following list:

- Underage drinking
- Teenage violence
- Boy racers

We felt choosing a common problem would give us opportunities to communicate more and help each other to solve our common problem. After a discussion where we clearly identified what the problem actually was and how it was affecting our communities, we agreed that Banbridge would focus on underage drinking and how it causes violence and Carlow would explore violence caused by underage drinking.

As we mentioned above, we also had time just to have fun and get to know our partners. During the exchange we spent time relaxing and making friendships in the new "Vault" Project. We had the opportunity to take part in a sports session on the Astro Turf pitch in the Institute of Technology, Carlow, where we all learnt the basics of Lacrosse and played Tag Rugby. We visited Carlow County Council where Cllr Denis Foley, Cathaoirleach, greeted us and we spent time in Carlow Vocational School where we met Mr Joe Rattigan, Deputy Principal, and Sinead O'Keeffe, School Completion Co-ordinator.

The exchange was a great success and we are all looking forward to visiting the Banbridge group in the New Year.

written by the Carlow young people.



Cllr Denis Foley, Cathaoirleach, Carlow County Council, welcomed the Civic Link participants from Carlow Vocational School and Banbridge High School to the council offices.

For the purpose of the two groups getting to know each other and to get everyone mixing from the start, we played some icebreaker games. Once we had begun to make friendships, we then made a group contract and talked about our hopes and fears. Some of our hopes were to become friends and that by taking part in this project, we will make a difference.

One of the main activities of this 1st exchange is to decide on a problem that we would like to solve. So, after the ice breakers and team building activities, both groups shared their group and community profiles. This was very interesting as it showed us how many things we had in common. The reason for sharing these profiles is so we get a better insight into our partners, have an understanding

Our Civic-Link groups can move mountains!



**Young people's thoughts about Civic-Link.
What did you enjoy most/
what was the highlight?**

- Meeting new people and making new friends
- Working together
- Sharing our home town with others



Students from St Joseph's Secondary School presenting their project to teachers and delegates from the US Center for Civic-Education.

Young people on exchange working together



What did you learn/ gain from the exchange experience?

- To have self confidence
- It has given me a different perspective on other people and that it shouldn't matter what religion or ethnic group you belong to.

What skills do you think you now possess?

- the ability to talk in front of people
- co-operation
- patience
- be respectful and aware of differences

Developing the interactive learning environment.

Alongside our other pilots this year we have been using an online learning environment to further enhance the relationship building between partnered groups.

The 'Civic-Link station' allows the young people to create avatars of themselves, chat with their partners and create a group and community profile to share with their partners before meeting. This is intended to break the ice and begin a process of asking questions and getting to know the young people they will be working with during their Civic-Link year.

The young people who have been using the site have really enjoyed it- despite the teething problems with the system. Feedback from users has been taken on board and will be improved for next year- especially the ticket masters' repeated message!

Other improvements for next year will include an interactive 'meeting-point' where the young people will be set collaborative relationship building and project development tasks to complete.

Thank you to those who have used the station this year- we really value your feedback.

Please continue sending us your feedback and ideas you think would be useful for us to include in version 2!



A view of the inside of the station showing the new 'meeting point' symbol



ADVOCATING FOR STREET LIGHTING IN LIMERICK CITY

In December 2008, we were completing a human rights audit of our community. This time of the year was a very dark and sad time in Limerick city because an innocent man had tragically died in a case of mistaken identity. He somehow got caught up in the ongoing feuds in our city. People said that he was just in the wrong place and the wrong time— this made us angry and frustrated— is it really this bad? Can't people carry on with their daily lives without worrying about being in the wrong place at the wrong time? We all have a right to life, liberty and personal security.



As a class, we all felt so sorry for the family and friends of this man and felt that this was so unjust and unfair. We were concerned

and scared as we wondered— could this happen again? Who will it be next time? We realised that this was in fact an infringement of people's human rights as it was not safe— we were not being granted our right to life, liberty and personal security. We should not have to live this way.

Stab city to fab city

As a class we discussed how it is not surprising that our community get publicised in the media as 'stab city'. We decided we wanted to make an effort to change this— we would love to be known as 'fab city' instead. We cannot tackle the gangs in Limerick— we would not succeed. So we decided to brainstorm— what can we do? How can we make Limerick safer for the people in our communities?

We decided we would start small on our journey towards improving our city— hoping to reach fab city sometime in the future. Even though we are from different estates and areas in the city, we discussed how it is very dark at night in certain areas of the city. This is due to streetlights being broken and not maintained or

a shortage of street lighting. It was dark very early those evenings in winter, which made the problem with lighting all the more apparent.

So that was it – our safety was being affected due to the lack of adequate street lighting in certain parts of Limerick city. We wanted to address this issue to make the place brighter and safer.

Lighting the way.

We researched the legislation on the provision and maintenance of street lighting and discovered it was the responsibility of Limerick City Council. We emailed our local public policy makers and they have been very helpful. We have been in contact since and they advised us to carry out our study and depending on our research results, they will get an independent lighting survey completed and upgrade the lights if it is necessary.

So we took their advice and we are in the middle of analysing our questionnaires, which we handed out to both students in our school, and others outside of school living in the areas that we thought were worst affected. Once we have analysed our findings we plan on presenting them to Limerick City Council and hope to get one small task completed on our journey of turning Stab City into a Fab City!

The Civic Link Class

Presentation Secondary School

What to look forward to in our next edition.

Coming up in our next Civic-Link ezine:

- Stories from groups about their 2nd exchanges
- Reports on the end of project community panel hearings
- Our all new Civic-Link website: how to access it and the information it will contain to help your partnerships and projects



Civic-Link training.

During the Civic-Link year, a number of training events are held for teachers who are delivering the Civic-Link project. This year we have held events for all four Civic-Link models: Human Rights; Cross-community; Pure IT and the 'blended' Civic-Link. In late February this year, we also provided training for pre-service teachers from a range of teacher training institutions throughout Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The following article provides an insight into what that training event looked like.

Pre-Service training 2009

On the 26th – 28th February, students from Queens University Belfast, NUI Maynooth & University of Limerick gathered for a training event in Carlingford Adventure Centre in the village of Carlingford, which is situated on the beautiful Cooley Peninsula.

The aim of the initiative was to engage students from each University in a dynamic cross-border exchange programme and to provide them with an opportunity to develop positive relationships between pre-service educators from across the border and a range of Universities.

It also aimed to give the students an understanding of cross-border schools links through the experience of our Civic-Link project, promoting their engagement in similar projects during their teaching career. The initiative was an opportunity to expose pre-service educators to innovative teaching methods in the areas of diversity, citizenship and reconciliation.

The training began on Thursday with an introduction to Co-operation Ireland and our Civic-Link programme, focusing on the approaches and methodologies used in our work to build relationships between different identities to promote mutual understanding, and to encourage young people to actively engage in their communities. The format of the event was a mix of presentations and workshops, where the students had the opportunity to explore first hand strategies used to facilitate groups coming together for

the first time and learning to work in partnership, motivating young people to take action, profiling and mapping your community, researching your community to identify problems, identifying policy actions which can be taken to address these problems, and finally challenging & sharing perceptions held of each other.



*"I would definitely try to build up cross border initiatives especially over social issues affecting communities."
An evaluation comment from one of the students.*

The students themselves actively engaged in the methodologies introduced using the Freeze-frame technique to explore and share perceptions held of each other. Lively discussions were held on exchanging information on each other's education systems, on the practicalities of introducing these methodologies and ICT into the classroom.

Feedback from the students was very positive, in terms of working with other trainee teachers, insights gained about each other's communities and education systems, and resources and methodologies provided. In their evaluations the students commented on how they could now see the potential of using these methodologies in their own classrooms. "This is a fantastic way of showing how people from different communities can have the same or similar problems."

If you or your group have any stories of your Civic-Link year that you would like to feature in the ezine, then please e-mail them- along with any photos- to lstewart@cooperationireland.org or mlucaey@cooperationireland.org