

Beneavin de la Salle College Trip to War-Torn Children Exhibition and the Peace People

On Tuesday 4th April 2017 the Transition year class of Beneavin de la Salle College, Finglas, Dublin, and two teachers including myself, had the pleasure of fulfilling an invitation to view the fascinating War-Torn Children exhibition at Ireland's oldest Library, Belfast's Linenhall, and then afterwards to visit the Peace People on the Lisburn Road.

The day started early as we headed off on a bus from the school on schedule around 8.30am and arrived again on schedule at the Linenhall library at 10.30am. Walking up the steps from the front entrance it was apparent to all in the group that we were entering an historic building. Having gathered in a meeting room once inside it soon became apparent how historical the building we were in was. Roberta Bacic, curator of the exhibition, Deena Haydon and Rob Fairmichael from INNATE did the introductions and gave a brief history of the Library. The group was then split in two to facilitate easy movement around the exhibition and off the first group went with Roberta and INNATE volunteer Stephanica to view the exhibition while the group I stayed with remained in the meeting room with Rob and Deena.

Deena and Rob proceeded to engage with the students on a range of topics related to the content in the Library.



The students related what they knew about the various protests at Shannon airport and the link between Margareta D'Arcy's imprisonment for a peaceful protest on the runway at Shannon airport and the reason why we were visiting the Linenhall Library.



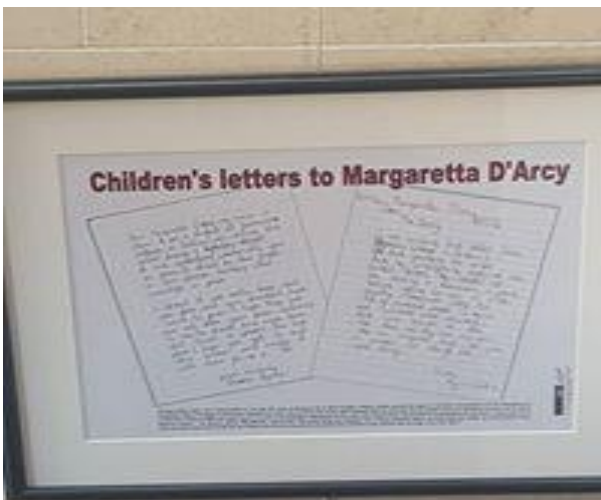
Some of the students who had written solidarity letters to Margareta while she was in Limerick prison were present and were delighted to see their letters on display in the Library.



We then proceeded to go downstairs and view the various posters on display that were linked to the War-Torn Children exhibition.



Two of the student's letters had been designed in a poster which hung on the wall beside the other excellently designed and thought-provoking posters made by Rob and INNATE.



We went on to look at more posters related to various conflicts of the past and present and then regrouped in the meeting room where Rob led the group on a brief poster-making workshop. By then it was time to swap with the other group and take a tour of the Arpilleras part of the exhibition.

Roberta and Stephania led the group to the top floor of the Library where we looked at photos describing the harsh realities of war, climate change and refugee camps with each framed picture accompanied by an arpillera doll. The group listened to the tragic stories and terrible conditions that families face when they were forced to leave their homes in parts of Africa and the Middle East.



Moving down the floors we were treated to descriptions of the textile arpilleras designs which told of stories from countries experiencing conflict from different periods of history including Germany in WW2, Chile during the Pinochet dictatorship and the conflict in the north of Ireland. These arpilleras were full of meaning and we were able to appreciate the depth of thought that had gone into making them. The students were asked which arpilleras appealed to them most and their answers were quite diverse. There was a good interaction throughout and good levels of interest shown.

The whole touring group then reconvened in the meeting room and we concluded our visit to the library giving thanks to our hosts for their time and welcome. We then boarded the bus to leave for the Peace People House on the Lisburn Road.

Upon the bus on the way to the Peace People there were expressions of hunger which were to be more than fulfilled by the fabulous spread put on by Anne of the Peace People. It was a great start to our visit and everyone was nourished by the great feast! After we had lunched we then heard Bob who welcomed the group formally and explained who the Peace People were gathered around the big living room. We then watched a short film describing the origins of the Peace People and their continuing work today. The students were glued to the screen and it set the mood nicely for the address given to them after by Nobel Peace Laureate Mairead Corrigan Maguire. She passionately engaged the students, and indeed everyone in the room, as she urged them to carefully choose their paths in life; paths which promote the cause of peace and justice, rather than war and destruction.



It was really moving to hear Mairead in full flow and her words will hopefully be remembered as the students make their own way in life. Anne and a few others from the Peace People then addressed the group on different aspects of their work and the common theme running through all the contributions was a desire to see a better future for all where situations of conflict have arisen.

After saying our thank-yous and goodbyes our final act was to pose for a photo on the steps of the Peace People building with the scarf that students in Kabul, Afghanistan had made and given to Mairead on one of her many visits of solidarity there.



The photo was duly sent to the group in Kabul who are studying English and were delighted that they were in our thoughts despite the distance between us.

All in all, the day was a remarkable one and very memorable for both students and teachers. We would especially like to thank Roberta for coordinating the trip and indeed all the people we met and were so welcoming and generous with their time. We plan to build on our contacts and give more students the chance to experience the empowerment that we all experienced that day to work for a world without wars and to promote true peace with justice.

Martin McMullan

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