

“This work is essential if Northern Ireland is to move away from a legacy of violent conflict.” (Public Achievement)

Project granted by the Youth in Action National Agency in: United Kingdom

Hosting organisation: Belfast Museum Group-Public Achievement [www.publicachievement.com](http://www.publicachievement.com)

Sending organisation: Las Niñas del Tul <http://lasdeltul.net/> Ibo Italia [www.iboitalia.org](http://www.iboitalia.org)

Activity dates: 01/08/2009 - 31/07/2010 (12 months)



## HELPING TO MEND FENCES IN NORTHERN IRELAND, UK

Sabrina (27 years) from Italy joined another volunteer, José (30 years) from Spain on a placement working for a year (2009/2010) with young people in Northern Ireland.

Their host in Northern Ireland was the organisation, Public Achievement, whose mission is to build democratic communities in Northern Ireland by working with young people and adults in ways which encourage active citizenship. Its focus is on inter-communal conflicts that have so troubled Northern Ireland over the past few decades. Different venues - schools, youth clubs, museums - are used for meetings with people where they can debate issues and prepare projects together under the guidance of a coach.

Sabrina and José played a full part in the programme of meetings and seminars for young people. The themes they dealt with were mainly connected with citizenship in a society which was still divided and sectarian in spite of the peace accords and power sharing. Their mission was to engage young people on public issues that can help them to learn the skills of working democratically and non-violently. They made a short film which was uploaded onto the hosts' website and made a lot of use of Facebook and Youtube.

Debating this crucial issue with young people was an intensive learning exercise for the young volunteers. They were told both versions of the history of the conflict and could more easily understand the background to a problem that has bedevilled the island of Ireland for centuries. They also learned how to negotiate and to guide a debate towards a consensus. Their knowledge of IT and project management greatly improved and their competence in spoken English was an added bonus.

The volunteers brought to their hosts the neutral ground that is so useful in conflict situations. The local young people could relate to them more easily because they were from other countries. The volunteers brought their own example of mobility to young people for whom visiting other parts of their own town was sometimes a challenge. The success of their work confirmed Public Achievement in its belief that international work and volunteering are essential to the ethos of the organisation.