

## Focusing on

# NORTHERN IRELAND

### Partnership President Visits Belfast

Partnership President Joe Leary visited St. Kieran's and Elmgrove Primary Schools as well as Youth Link Northern Ireland during his recent trip to Ireland. He was inspired by the teacher's dedication to their students and left resolved to do more for schools such as theirs.

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### Partnership Fosters Boston-Belfast Sister City Links

After a meeting with new Belfast Lord Mayor Arder Carson in April, the Partnership gave two Belfast schools grants for literacy and technology promotion. The Lord Mayor was in Boston on a diplomatic mission to build upon the Boston-Belfast Sister City Agreement signed in 2014.

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### Education for Peace: Youth Link NI

The Partnership gave \$10,000 to Youth Link Northern Ireland, a church-based organization committed to building relationships between young adults of different faith traditions and providing educational opportunities in youth work and ministry.

*read more on page 3*

### NI Human Rights Fund Supported

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Fund is an initiative sponsored by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland with the purpose of embedding a culture of human rights within NI and consolidating the peace process by delivering on the promises of the Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement. The Partnership was pleased to give the Fund \$30,000 for their admirable work.

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Students at Portadown Integrated Primary solve a math puzzle in their new classroom

## Portadown Integrated Primary Expands with Partnership Grant

When children enter the doors of Portadown Integrated Primary School in County Down, they are greeted with a culture of tolerance, understanding, and mutual respect. This ethos, cultivated by the centrality of the Rights of the Child in the curriculum, resonates with many parents in the area. For this reason, the school has been consistently oversubscribed.

While Portadown Primary School endeavors to admit as many as possible, they can only do so much in their existing space. Through a Partnership Grant of \$10,000, Portadown was able to purchase an additional classroom and secure permission to temporarily increase enrollment from 293 to 327 students. The new classroom, paired with the boom in enrollment, is enough for the Portadown Board of Governors to petition the Minister of Education for a permanent increase in pupil numbers and a new school building that will comfortably house all students.

*For more on Portadown's rights-based culture, turn to page 2.*

Please consider a donation in support of the Partnership's work in Ireland, North and South. Donors may select a specific school, village, town, or county as a recipient of their gift.





Partnership President Joe Leary with Elmgrove Principal Jayne Jeffers and Francis Murray from Belfast City Hall

## Partnership President Visits Northern Ireland

In late June, Partnership President Joe Leary visited Ireland, North and South, on a trip to evaluate program funding. While there, he had the opportunity to visit several grant recipients in Belfast, including St. Kieran's and Elmgrove Primary Schools and Youth Link Northern Ireland.

St. Kieran's and Elmgrove were selected by the Lord Mayor's office for their disadvantaged designation and potential for growth. St. Kieran's Primary is a maintained school with 392 students, 86% of whom qualify for free school meals. This is the highest percentage of free school meal recipients (a common indicator of disadvantaged status) in Northern Ireland.



A student play at Elmgrove Primary School

Elmgrove Primary School is a controlled school with 540 students ages 5-12. 70% of students are eligible for free school meals and 25% have special needs. To accommodate the wide range of pupils at this large school, teachers must use technology to their advantage. iPads have proven very advantageous with the younger grades especially, allowing students to play educational games that adapt to their ability while the teacher works with a small group at another station. Mr. Leary was consistently impressed by the passion, energy, and creativity these teachers exhibited.

## Partnership Fosters Boston-Belfast Sister City Links, Funds Two Belfast Schools

The Partnership had the privilege of meeting Belfast Lord Mayor Arder Carson when he visited Boston in April. During the meeting, they discussed the importance of education in paving a peaceful future for Northern Ireland and agreed to give two \$2,500 grants to schools of the Lord Mayor's choosing. He selected St. Kieran's and Elmgrove Primary Schools, which Partnership President Joe Leary visited in late June during a trip to evaluate program funding.

Presenting the schools with their checks, Lord Mayor Arder Carson, said: "The securing of the funding is a tangible outcome of our Sister City Agreement and links with Boston....The bursaries will benefit the children in these two primary schools making a difference to their communities."

Joe Leary was thrilled to see a high caliber of teaching, excellent school management, and enthusiasm for learning. Both schools serve very disadvantaged populations but are committed to create havens for the students to grow and prosper. They encourage the development of literacy, math, and technology skills through the establishment of specific initiatives such as the lunchtime library club at St. Kieran's and the integration of iPads into the curriculum at Elmgrove.

St. Kieran's Primary School used the funds for their accelerated reading program and lunchtime library club. These programs are designed to raise the bar for literacy across the school and challenge students to reach their potential. The lunchtime library club provides quiet time for students to relax and cultivates a passion for reading by allowing them to choose books that suit their interests.

Elmgrove Primary School purchased additional iPads with their grant, which are used for various academic activities by students of all grade levels. The iPads are used in pairs of two, fostering social skills and group learning, and are rotated throughout the school. Many students at Elmgrove do not have access to the same technology at home as students with more privileged backgrounds would have, so bringing iPads into the school is the best way to keep Elmgrove students competitive with their peers.

The Boston-Belfast Sister City agreement was signed in Boston in 2014 to promote academic, cultural, and business links between the two cities. The Partnership has been actively involved in the agreement since its inception, and looks forward to creating more linkages in the years to come.



Students at Elmgrove Primary School in Belfast play educational games on their new iPads



# Education for Peace: Youth Link NI

Youth Link Northern Ireland is a community based organization that works through the four main Christian churches to train youth in peacebuilding. Recognizing that over 70% of youth work in Northern Ireland is church based and thus isolated from other faith traditions, Youth Link NI aims to create a space for inter-religious dialogue and the development of cross-community relationships. This year alone, it will provide accreditation for over 700 young people and adult volunteers in youth work and ministry.

During Joe Leary's trip to Northern Ireland in June, he presented Youth Link NI with a \$10,000 check to go towards their educational initiatives. Youth Link offers an apprenticeship program for disadvantaged youth, a BA Honors Degree Program in Youth and Community Work and Practical Theology, and Continuing Professional Development for youth workers in the church sector, amongst many other things. These programs provide a rare opportunity for young adult members of the four different faith communities to interact with one another and bond over commonalities in their work. They also build a new generation of community leaders with knowledge of conflict resolution, human rights law, and youth work in a faith context.



Portadown students outside their new classroom paid for by the Partnership

## Building a Rights Based Culture at Portadown

*continued from page 1*



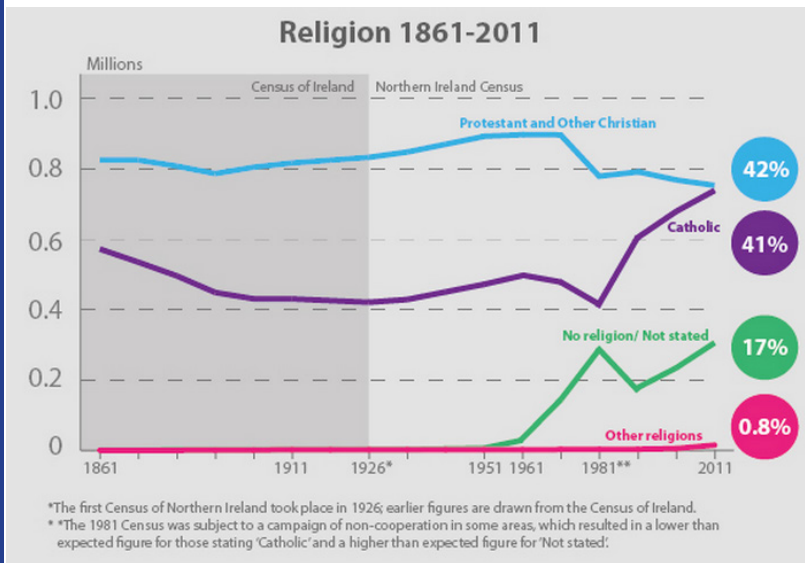
Students at St. Kieran's Primary School in Belfast participate in the lunchtime library club (top) and receive support as part of the accelerated reading program (bottom)



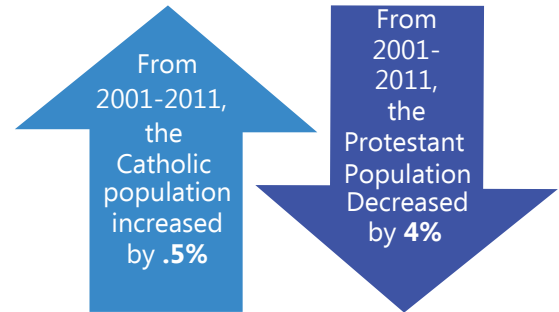
Colorful wall displays featuring information on after school activities, vocabulary words, and mathematical concepts line the halls of Portadown, each accompanied by an article of the Convention of the Rights of the Child. This is done so that students are able to understand their own rights, respect the rights of others, and advocate for those whose rights are being infringed on in their own society and beyond. As one student said "you needed to be knowledgeable about your own rights before you could do anything to help others."

While it may seem counterintuitive to build a cohesive community by focusing on individual rights, this approach allows students to see each other free of any stereotypes or perceptions they may have had about classmates with different traditions. It encourages them to grow and learn as equals, and hopefully enter society as such, paving a peaceful future for Northern Ireland.

# Understanding Northern Ireland: The Current Facts & Figures



TOTAL POPULATION: 1,840,000



Graph from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency's "Religion in Northern Ireland" Short Story, published December 2014

## Partnership Gives \$30,000 for the Promotion of Human Rights in Northern Ireland

The Partnership has had a longstanding relationship with the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland due to their innovative programming, grassroots support, and experience in peacebuilding. This year, the Partnership was proud to donate the proceeds of the Nollaig na mBan and St. Patrick's Day breakfast celebrations to the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland's new initiative, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Fund. The \$30,000 grant will be matched by Atlantic Philanthropies, doubling its impact.

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Fund is an effort to:

1. Embed a culture of rights throughout Northern Ireland
2. Build a fair and just society based on the principles of equality and respect
3. Consolidate the peace process by delivering the commitments on human rights and civic participation made in the Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement

## Our Mission

The Irish American Partnership works to empower the next generation of Irish leaders by supporting educational initiatives through direct grants to primary schools, science teacher training, university access scholarships, employment learning programs, and more. The Partnership provides forums for visiting leaders from Ireland to speak in the U.S., connecting Irish-Americans with their heritage and promoting economic development through tourism, trade, and mutual exchange.



## Get Involved

Interested in building a prosperous, peaceful future for Northern Ireland? Join in our efforts by making a contribution to the Partnership. Donations can be made to a specific school, village, town, or county, or designated to one of our program areas. For more information, visit [www.irishap.org](http://www.irishap.org).



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