



**M-E-**

**Good Morning. We would like to begin by introducing ourselves, my name is Mary-Elaine and this is Kelly. We would first like to thank you all for having us come to speak to you this morning. We are going to tell you a little about CFPNI itself, how and why we got involved, what we have experienced in the USA and not only how it has influenced us over the past two weeks but also how we know it will continue to have a long lasting effect on our future lives.**

**Kelly-**

CFPNI began in 1987 with the unique purpose of bringing together two teenagers, one Catholic, one Protestant, to help them see their similarities for example, boy problems, **weight issues** and the many other pressing issues of a teenage life rather than their differences. CFPNI aims to allow young people to travel to this country during the summer not for a vacation but for a “learning experience.” An experience designed to “promote further understanding through interaction.” It lets us witness that

people from different religions and cultural backgrounds can live in peace and harmony.

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**There are many reasons why we got involved. We both thought it would be a fantastic experience since it gives us the opportunity not only to learn of others around us but also to enhance our own personal development. It helps us to look beyond personal opinion and see that no matter what faith we believe or what religion we practice, we are all human beings. We are all people with the same desires and wants as each other, from world issues like peace, to the more personal like love and affection.**

Kelly-

Our first group meeting, after we had been chosen for the project, took place in January. We all entered the room nervous of the unknown and very self-aware. In some ways feeling vulnerable to preconceptions. It is common in NI when people first meet to try and gauge what religion that individual belongs to and this often leads to a barrier being raised as a subconscious defensive force. However, after some group games and icebreakers those earlier concerns became insignificant.

It was the third meeting when we found out who we were paired with and we were all a wee bit anxious both before and after they told us but now we could not image it any other way! It's amazing how close you can become to someone that you have only known properly for 4 or 5 months. One of the things we enjoyed and treasure the most was the residential our group went on in April; the Enniskillen and Londonderry group also joined us. This weekend involved outdoor games, team building activities and trust exercises. As a whole this weekend improved group dynamics and created new friendships and deepened the ones we had already made.

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**Coming to the US was a great adventure, as most of us had never left home, family and friends for such a long period of time. People asked, "Are you going to miss your home comforts?" or "Four weeks is such a long time, how are you going to cope away from home?" and admittedly we were a little apprehensive and you arrive with the belief that you are being welcomed as guests into a family however, before you know it, you come to feel a true member of that family. You soon realize that four weeks goes incredibly fast and in many ways much too fast.**

Kelly-

Since arriving in the US we have experienced a wide variety of activities. We have seen the views from the top of Pack Monadnock, visited the “Shaker” village in Canterbury, went whale watching and took part in a cultural diversity day, amongst many others. On the cultural diversity day we learnt more about other conflicts between religions in other parts of the world and how that has affected their society. Through watching the film “Promises” on the Palestinian - Israeli conflict, where resolution is not possible even though it is desired; we realized how fortunate we are. Although we have a long way to go, we have made the first steps in that journey towards a land of peace and understanding.

Not only did we learn about other countries, we also made better friends with the other Northern Ireland teens in New Hampshire. Our group came together and created a trusting atmosphere in which we could discuss delicate issues.

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**We are already more than half way through our stay and are trying to mentally prepare ourselves for going home. It will be odd returning to the old routine and not being able to speak daily with our new found family. Although we will be leaving them behind we will be taking home many fond memories and the lessons that through the Robidoux family we have acquired. Christine and her family have inspired us and touched us in many ways we wouldn't have known and so because of her influence we want to continue to work towards a more open minded and accepting society.**

Kelly-

In the future both want to work with youth in Northern Ireland both in our careers and free time. I would like to become a drama and history secondary school teacher and Mary-Elaine hopes to do child psychology with Spanish. Since we ourselves have taken part in a very successful cross community project we want to return what we have learnt to other youth. We are the generation that has the potential to make a difference and through the Children's Friendship Project we have realized how much we want to do that.

**M-E- Lastly, we would once again like to thank you for having us here today and likewise we would like to take this opportunity to sincerely**

**thank Christine, Greg and the boys for allowing us wild teens into your home. We really appreciate everything you have done so far and we will miss you deeply when we unfortunately have to leave. However we will without a doubt be keeping in touch...you are not going to get rid of us that quickly! Thank you!**