Football for Peace programme launched in Donegal

Football for Peace Ireland, a joint venture between the Northern Irish F.A. (IFA), the Republic of Ireland F.A. (FAI), and Inishowen Rural Development (IRD), was launched in Inishowen last week. Football for Peace is a coaching programme that promotes the development of cross-border and cross community relations through the medium of football. The programme is primarily funded by the International Funds for Ireland (IFI). Football for Peace Ireland is based in the cross border regions of Limavady and Derry (Northern Ireland), and Inishowen (Republic of Ireland).

Speaking at the launch, Anne Bonner, Board Member for the IFI, said: "Recent events in Northern Ireland have heralded the dawn of a new era of peace and prosperity on this island. We all have a responsibility to make sure that the benefits of this new era are experienced by everyone in our society. So it is particularly inspiring to see the people of the Inishowen Peninsula and the surrounding area come together and commit to making your community a better place in the way you have done so here."

The programme aims to promote peace and reconciliation and groups involved in Football for Peace Ireland include Catholic and Protestant children living in Limavady and Inishowen. The project is inclusive of boys and girls with disabilities, able-bodied youngsters, less-advantaged children, and ethnic and religious minorities, who work with each other as a team.

The programme is based on a successful pilot, after which an extensive evaluation was carried out by Justice Associates. The evaluation commended the positive impact of Football for Peace on both the children and coaches involved, in terms of their personal and social development. According to the evaluation, there was a clear and measurable change in the views and attitudes of the participants which validated the use of a football coaching programme as an aid to reconciliation.

Football for Peace Ireland is based on the original Football for Peace programme which has gained an exceptional international reputation. The Programme's ground-breaking work uses sport as a conflict-prevention tool for the development of peaceful co-existence in the Middle East. It is a large-scale, grassroots project which brings young Arab and Jewish people together to experience a values-based football programme in Israel. The University of Brighton and the British Council have been instrumental in the development of the Football for Peace programme. The coaching manual used by Football for Peace Ireland is adapted from the original devised at the University of Brighton and used with great success in Israel.

The University of Brighton, the University of Ulster, and the Letterkenny Institute of Technology are working together to develop partnerships to aid the sustainability of the programme.

Also speaking at the launch, Raymond Kennedy, President of the IFA, said: "Football for Peace Ireland is an innovative and challenging project which celebrates respect for diversity through the medium of football. The IFA is delighted to support this project moving forward, as it supports and compliments our commitment to the promotion of Football for All. We believe the Value-Based Coaching involved in the Football for Peace Ireland programme is a fun, safe and inclusive way of promoting respect for difference amongst young people in a meaningful and sustainable way."

Speaking as CEO for the FAI, John Delaney, said: "Football is a powerful tool for uniting people all over the world and I am delighted and proud to be working closely with our colleagues in the IFA on the Football 4 Peace Ireland project. Football is the largest participation sport in Ireland, north and south and we believe firmly in using it as a tool to break down barriers and prejudice based on gender, religion and social or ethnic background. The importance of coaching in this process cannot be underestimated and the Football 4 Peace programme's value-based coaching is fundamental in helping our young people learn respect and understanding, while enjoying our game. I wish all involved in this exciting and important project every success for the future."

IRD Chairman, Anthony Doogan, commented: "On behalf of Inishowen Rural Development Ltd, I would like to thank the International Fund for Ireland on funding the Football for Peace Ireland programme. I feel that this programme is extremely worthwhile as seeing first hand that the value based coaching exercises aid in the development of both the individual and the group. The Football for Peace Ireland programme creates awareness of culture and develops understanding between genders and religious beliefs. This is a very innovative programme and there is great excitement for the valuable contribution Football 4 Peace Ireland will make in improving community relations not only in sport but throughout our community. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those people who have already played their part in the development, design, and running of the pilot programme at all levels and who have committed themselves to improving community relations through sport."