

LOCAL NEWS

Out of Ireland, and the Troubles

Project Children welcomes Irish kids to a few untroubled weeks in CNY.

By Tim Fenster
Contributing writer

Forty-four children from Northern Ireland arrived in Syracuse early Friday morning, beginning their four-week stays with 38 area host families as a reprieve from the violence and religious segregation in their homeland.

They were brought here by Project Children, a nonprofit project of the Greenwood Lake Gaelic Cultural Society, which has arranged travel and host families for Northern Irish youth since 1975.

The project was started by

Irish immigrants Denis and Pat Mulcahy to take youth away from the Troubles — a more than 40-year-old conflict between Catholic and Protestant paramilitary groups — and to teach them about religious tolerance. Though violence in Northern Ireland has greatly lessened in recent years, the population remains divided, largely along religious lines.

The children's time in America "teaches them how to get along with people no matter what their religion is," said Mark Kotzin, volunteer media coordinator for Project Children Syracuse.

Kotzin and his wife, Ellen, are hosting a child for the third time this summer.

Nationally, Project Children

is bringing 96 children to America this summer, and the largest group is staying in Central New York.

Children staying with area families met their hosts at about 2 a.m. Friday at Blessed Sacrament Church at 3127 James St. In some cases, it was a reunion. Some families hosted the same children they had in years past.

"The kids were wonderful," Syracuse resident Jim Pickett said of the two children from Belfast he is hosting for the second consecutive year: Ciaran Quinn and Michael Balliday. "They got along well with my son — it was a good match. So we wanted to bring them back."

During their stay, the chil-

dren and their host families will enjoy a variety of free or low-cost activities provided by local businesses.

They will be admitted free to Irish Night at Alliance Bank Stadium on Thursday, and one will throw out the first pitch, Kotzin said. Discounted activities include the M.O.S.T., Lourdes Camp in Skaneateles and a course at Syracuse Children's Theatre, which ends with a performance.

Volunteers hope to expose the visitors to a world in which people are not divided by religious differences.

"They're kids just like any other kids," Kotzin said. "They just come from a different lifestyle. This opens a whole new world for them."