

# Importing a truly ancient rivalry

## Conflict? These visitors can relate

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Back in Belfast, William Tyrie collects Yankees and Red Sox caps. So when his plane touched down at Logan Airport in mid-April, the 19-year-old Northern Ireland native was still puzzling over why he'd been warned to leave his Yankees caps at home.

Like most of the young people traveling to Boston as part of the Wider Horizons Program, Tyrie was leaving behind a conflict even more intractable than the rivalry between Boston and New York.

"It can be really, really intense," said Tyrie, looking back at his life in one of North Belfast's few Protestant neighborhoods from the vantage point of his host family's living room here in Boston. "Whether you are Catholic or Protestant is reason to fight. One side is just as bad as the other."

Tyrie's eight-week Boston stay with a West End host was part of a plan by the Wider Horizons Program, which is sponsored by the International Fund for Ireland, to use job training and overseas experiences to bring those two sides closer together. Launched some 15 years ago, the program has provided 18- to 28-year-olds from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland with internships in cities worldwide.

This year, Wider Horizons came to Boston under the auspices of the Irish Immigration Center, a nonprofit organization created in 1989 to help newly arrived immigrants adjust to life in their adopted country. By design, the young people the program brought with it represented their native countries' most disadvantaged communities — the same communities, say program administrators, in which the political differences that have for decades separated Northern Ireland's Catholics and Protestants are often the most deeply entrenched.

"When the economics are not there, the divisions tend to be all the more severe," said Thomas Keown, who manages the Wider Horizons Program on its Boston end and hails originally from Belfast.

This year's Boston program focused on young people interested in careers in youth and community services, connecting them with nonprofit organizations through-



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/JANET KNOTT

Belfast's William Tyrie, 19, in a treasured Red Sox cap. Ireland's religious rivalry, he says, gets "really, really intense."

out the city.

For Tyrie, who interned at ROCA, Inc., a community service agency in Chelsea, that meant meeting young people whose backgrounds were in some ways surprisingly similar to his own.

According to Nicole Adame, who directs Project Victory, ROCA's after-school program for students ages 12-16, the youths from Chelsea initially had a hard time comprehending that the "street problems" in their new intern's community related to religion, rather than to race and culture.

But, she said, she had the impression that Tyrie's experiences back home really helped him understand the difficulties they coped with here.

"William struggles himself, so I think he can see the struggles in other kids," she mused.

Tyrie's love of American rap music didn't hurt, either, she said.

"The kids were surprised," Adame recalled. "I mean, they were just like, 'Here's this white guy from Ireland, and he listens to the same music we do!'"

Maureen Ridge, Tyrie's host mother during his stay in Boston, said that her young houseguest from Belfast in many ways reminded her of her own three children.

"Most of our conversations have been about William's work and what it's like for him being here," noted Ridge, who is Catholic and raised her family in the Mission Hill section of Roxbury. She emphasized: "William is really not a whole lot different from young people trying to make sense of their communities here."

Though Tyrie managed to take in a Red Sox game while he was in Boston, he said it's the break from all the fighting back home that he appreciated the most. "There's just not so many people arguing over stupid things like who's Catholic and who's Protestant," Tyrie said.

Ann-Marie Byrne, who coordinated the host family placements for the Boston interns, pointed out that going home is, for this particular group of Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland natives, critically important.

"Most of them were involved in youth clubs in their own communities, so they have that trust thing," she said. "When they go back, they will really be ambassadors and leaders."

In Tyrie's case, that means continuing the progress he'd already begun. About a year ago, Tyrie said, he and friends at Forthspring, the cross-cultural youth club he credits with helping him steer clear of the conflict he saw growing up, decided to start a football league to bring younger Catholics and Protestants closer together. Many young people signed up to play, he said. But, Tyrie remembered, those from the two religions refused to mix.

Finally, after about a week of watching the two groups stare one another down from opposite ends of a football field, he and the other captain dragged each team's leader to the opposing side.

Within a month, Forthspring had two football teams made up of equal numbers of Catholic and Protestant players, he said.

And, as for the two leaders? "Well, now they're best mates," Tyrie said.