

Feel-Good Graduation for Wider Horizons Trainees

IIC SHOWPIECE FINALE WRAPS UP TWO-MONTH VISIT IN STYLE

"I became more confident throughout the whole eight weeks working here. I wish it was longer," said Michelle Morton from Bangor, before her Wider Horizons Program graduation ceremony in Dorchester last Wednesday. Michelle has been working at ROCA in Chelsea.

Amid suits, elaborate dresses, laughter, tears and plentiful Italian cuisine, a dinner audience of over 60 people saw the nineteen youth and community work trainees from Belfast and Dublin receive graduation certificates from Lena Deevy - Executive Director of the Irish Immigration Center.

The group of young men and women, from communities in both Northern Ireland and Dublin, has been working in youth centers throughout greater Boston since early March. All successfully completed their overseas internships on the IIC managed program.

"You have been here for only eight-weeks. Not a long time looking back on it. But a long time in two ways," said Thomas Keown, speaker on the evening. "A long time in the amount we have seen each of you grow in confidence and in ability before our eyes. It has been fabulous to watch.

But even more so in terms of the number of lives you have touched through your work. Every one of your employers wrote testimonies for you because they were genuinely grateful for all you have done for them, and for the young people they serve. Usually at these kind of affairs I make up quotes and such

like. But this time I didn't have to."

A poignant music and picture presentation charting the trainees' two-month experience preceded Keown's remarks. The moving mixture of humor, gratitude and song touched every guest; and they all left knowing that they had been part of something special.

"I have hosted international students, language students and other exchange visitors in the past," said Marina James, a host family for two of the trainees. "But this has been the most complete emotional, mental and spiritual experience I have had with any program. It has been wonderful and tonight was 'feel-good' from beginning to end; a fitting close."

The group will spend the next two weeks in Belfast reflecting on their Boston learning, before being aided in their search for employment in youth services.

"You will be running into people in your communities and in your streets who haven't seen what you have seen. Or haven't been where you have been," continued Keown.

"But they won't have to imagine any of it because they will be talking to you. And you can tell them. What a difference it makes to our view of life when we know what else there is out there."

But the final word belongs to Joel Byrne, a graduate from Lisburn who worked at Jackson Mann Community Center in Allston: "I am eternally grateful for everything I was allowed to experience. I will never forget the kids or the people I worked with."