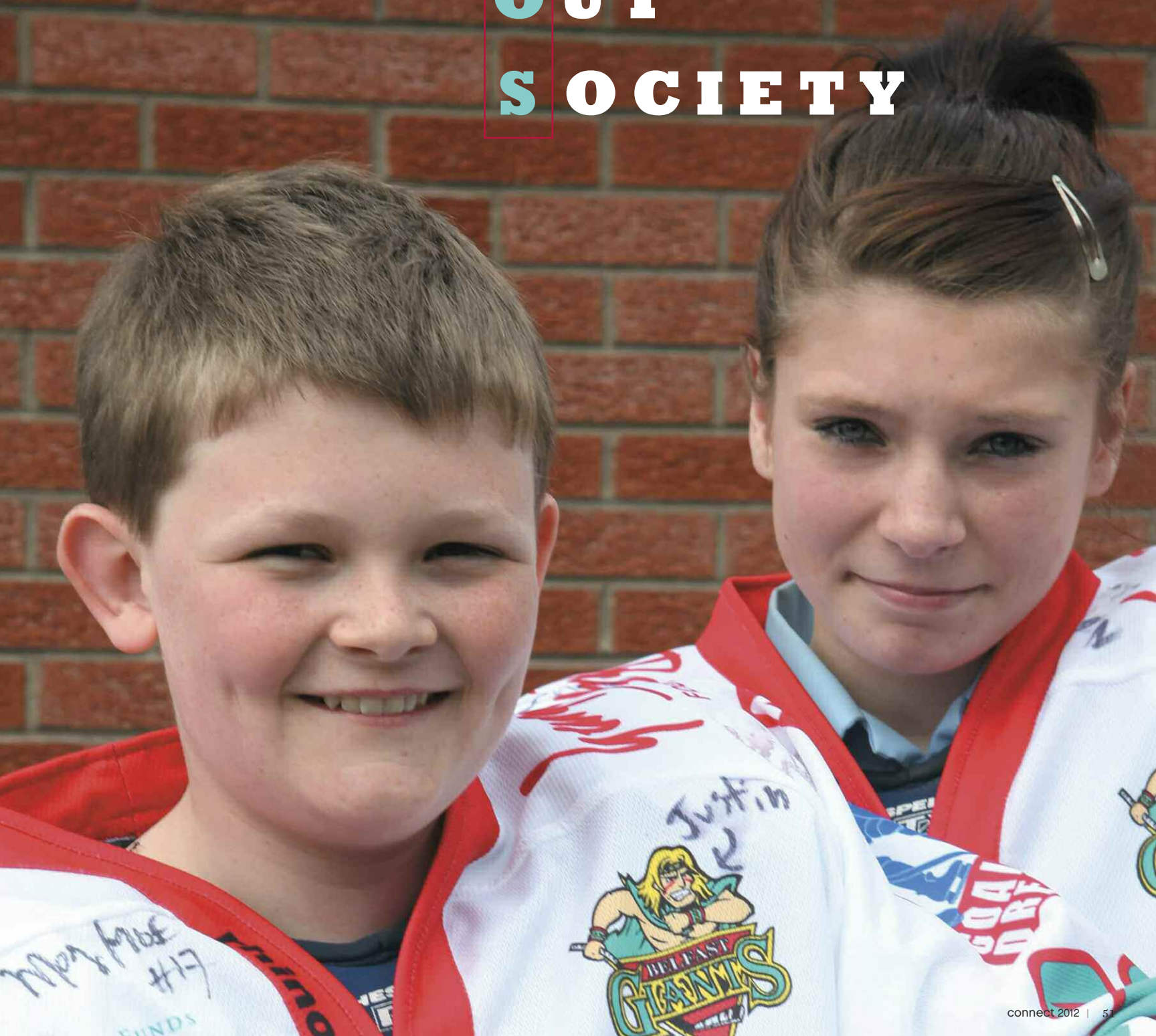




Hockey Education Reaching Out Society

# HOCKEY EDUCATION REACHING OUT SOCIETY



**With the help of The Ireland Funds and the Belfast Giants Community Foundation, the Giant H.E.R.O.S. program is Bringing Communities Together Through Hockey.**



**"THE PROGRAM BRINGS ALL KINDS OF KIDS TOGETHER. I'VE MET KIDS FROM OUTSIDE THE CAMP, EVEN KIDS FROM DUBLIN. WHEN I FIRST MET THEM, I WASN'T SURE WE'D ALL UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER, BUT WE HAD TO GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER FIRST. NOW WE GET ON WITH EACH OTHER. I'VE MADE LOADS OF FRIENDS. WE PLAY HOCKEY. WE TALK."**



## **IN THE LAND OF THE GIANTS, EVERYONE IS EQUAL**

A program with roots in Canada that uses hockey to empower children from disadvantaged neighborhoods is now making a difference to communities in Northern Ireland. The Giant H.E.R.O.S. program bridges community divides and offers children from high-risk and economically challenged areas in Belfast and Dublin a chance to interact and learn about one another. By bringing them together over the neutral sport of hockey, the program is teaching kids that teamwork and discipline can transcend fear and misconceptions.

Belfast has become the natural hub of the program as it has two ice rinks including the Odyssey Arena, home of the Belfast Giants pro hockey team. The Belfast Giants' motto is "In the land of the Giants, everyone is equal." The team believes that as a non-sectarian sport, the game of hockey can play a role in bringing diverse communities together.

The Belfast Giants Community Foundation has supported the Giant H.E.R.O.S. program. In a program sponsored in part by The Ireland Funds, over 30 young people from Catholic and Protestant neighborhoods in Belfast, disadvantaged neighborhoods in Dublin and Hollywood Army Barracks come together each year for a camp experience with the Belfast Giants team. Team-building activities include the development of hockey skills (culminating in a final game held at the Odyssey Arena), DVD production, swimming, and workshops around the four Giant H.E.R.O.S. pillars: discipline, respect, listening, and fun. In addition, the participants meet throughout the year to further foster the interactions between young people.

**"The Giants really believe in the ability of this program to change lives. By developing the experiences of young people today, we will encourage them to grow as people and help build a vibrant and peaceful society in the future," said Todd Kelman, Belfast Giants General Manager.**



**"THROUGH GIANT H.E.R.O.S. WE MET KIDS  
FROM DUBLIN. I MET THIS GUY NAMED CONOR.  
HE WAS MY FRIEND ALL THE WAY THROUGH."**

— Peter,  
age 12





The Giant H.E.R.O.S. kids from diverse communities in Ireland and Northern Ireland gather on the ice.

## COMMUNITIES COMING TOGETHER

The Ireland Funds have been involved with many cross-community and cross-border programs in Northern Ireland. Donors to The Ireland Funds are familiar with various initiatives that bring Catholic and Protestant children together including PeacePlayers International, Northern Ireland Children's Enterprise, and Cooperation Ireland. In addition to bringing Protestant and Catholic children together from various neighborhoods, the H.E.R.O.S. program has focused on a third and often-forgotten group of children in Northern Ireland: the youth living in the local Hollywood Army Barracks whose parents are British military personnel stationed in Belfast.

Ken McQuillan, Brigade Welfare Support Officer for Northern Ireland, explained, "The unique position that our personnel find themselves in is that they have largely gone unnoticed since the Peace Process and essentially still live 'behind the wire' with a sense of marginalization and isolation. So in addition to kids from Dublin and Belfast neighborhoods, the Giant H.E.R.O.S program reaches out to these kids from the barracks and says 'you are welcome here.'"

The Giant H.E.R.O.S. program has come a long way in bringing families together from all communities. Early on, the program had to convince families this was something their children could enjoy and get behind because of misplaced fears and misconceptions. Today, over 100 children have gone through the program and it has a waiting list of over 200 more who want to be involved.

**"Everyone shook hands.  
We were really good to each other,  
it was brilliant."**

—Charlotte, age 13

**"We've been coming to Belfast for 4 years and we love it! Each year we have watched the young people develop real friendships with each other, face and overcome some big challenges together, and learn how to work more effectively with their differences as well as what they have in common."**

—Norm Flynn, H.E.R.O.S. Canada Founder & Director