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# **Irish and Dutch Schoolboys Engage with Syrian Refugee Teenagers**

Irish and Dutch schoolboys used some of their summer holidays to take part in a one-week International Leadership Exchange Programme entitled “Migrants at our doorstep”

09/02/2016

The migrant crisis is one of Europe’s most urgent challenges. Many people have left their homes in distant parts

of the world, fleeing war and persecution, yet they are not always welcomed in parts of Europe. The Leadership Exchange helped Irish and Dutch schoolboys to engage with this issue, by striving to develop an attitude of service and generosity through hands-on activities and discussions. The programme theme was chosen to coincide with the Year of Mercy inaugurated by Pope Francis.

It took place in Grote Bunte, Nunspeet, the Netherlands, which is a youth centre located 90km from Amsterdam. The schoolboys, who were aged between 15 and 18 years, acquired a greater social awareness which helps them become responsible citizens who dedicate their talents, time and energy in service of those around them.

The programme included research presentations, debates and sporting

events, together with a meeting with teenage Syrian refugees. The highlight was an international basketball blitz involving the Irish, Dutch and Syrian teenagers. This took place in Utrecht, in the Buurtsportvereniging Sports Complex. One of the refugees, Hanni, who has taught himself English, gave a first hand account of his 15-day walk from Greece to the Netherlands where he is seeking asylum, having made the perilous crossing by boat from Turkey to Greece.

The programme was jointly organised by Brosna Educational Centres, a registered charity in Ireland, and the Josko Foundation (Stichting Josko) in the Netherlands, where responsibility for spiritual and doctrinal formation in both is entrusted to Opus Dei.

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