

Rainbow's End Project

Rainbow's End Project is a Reconciliation project which was initiated in 1994 as a Christian response to the sense of despair when violence in the province was at its height.

Three women, Gillian Aicken, Valerie Forsythe and Hazel Aicken, who lived in the townland of Ballinran which nestles in the Mourne Mountains, an area of natural beauty, felt that they should invite groups of mostly women and children from both traditions who had been bereaved through the violence, to the farm for fun days throughout the summer months.

The aims of the project are to provide a safe and welcoming environment away from the stress where people can come to relax and enjoy the beauty of the countryside. The groups transport the people and the hosts organise activities like trips on a tractor-drawn haycart, picnics and barbeques and treasure hunts. The farm animals, geese, hens, sheep, and cows are an attraction for the children, while the parents enjoy the beautiful cottage garden.

Each year the project has developed. Groups from areas experiencing conflict, and people who are in need of time out from stressful situations now come. New interests include a mini-museum which displays the historical items used by previous generations, a duck pond complete with ducks, a donkey and cart to provide rides for the children and recently a large pond and wildlife area. The old barns and outhouses have been adapted for wet weather contingency plans. The upper loft is used by the older children as a games room, while one small shed has been converted to a play house for the younger children, and another shed is now an art and craft room enjoyed by children and adults alike. The most recent attraction is a puppet show in a converted barn where all ages of visitors can join in a bit of fun with a number of unusual 'residents' of Rainbow's End.

Special efforts are made to encourage groups from both traditions, as reconciliation is a vital aspect of the work.

In 1996 the Project initiated and helped to co-ordinate an outdoor Nativity Play in conjunction with the local Community Association. "The Real Christmas" took place in the old Farmyard setting with local people recreating the well known story, the donkey and real shepherds with their sheep adding to the authenticity. Again all participants in the event, the planning team, the actors, catering team helpers and all the spectators were from both traditions. "The Real Christmas was presented again in 1999.

Rainbow's End Project has now entered a further stage of development by affiliating with The Quiet Garden Trust. A quiet Garden offers a house and garden as a place of spiritual refreshment and support. The Quiet Garden at Rainbow's End is available for individuals who would like time out from the stress and busyness of life to be quiet, to listen to God, to reflect, or simply to be. People come alone or with a friend, for a morning, an afternoon, or for the day. Privacy is respected, and a simple lunch can be provided if required. For further information 'Phone Hazel or Gillian Aicken 028 417 65452