

celebrating family

Family teaches kids to help others



USA LUCKOW-HEALY

Catherine Boyle is a very lucky, brave girl. At the age of 10, she has already traveled by airplane from Belfast to New York to Detroit - without her family - to live with an American family for six weeks.

On the Fourth of July - a day we celebrate our nation's independence - Catherine left the violence of Northern Ireland to spend six weeks of her summer with an American host family. She was greeted with open arms by the Lynch family of West Bloomfield.

Tom, Kate, Shannon and Liam Lynch are Catherine's American family. They are all participants in Project Children, a program that provides Northern Ireland's children between the ages of 10 and 13 with the opportunity to take a six-week vacation from their homeland's violence.

Project Children began in 1975 when

the first six children were brought to the United States by a small group of neighbors in Greenwood Lake, N.Y. Denis Mulcahy, a member of the NYPD bomb squad, and his brother, Pat, organized the group.

Over the past 22 years, thousands of children have made the trip. Project Children has expanded from its base in New York to some 16 states.

"The Irish children are selected to participate in Project Children by school teachers, priests, ministers and social workers," Kate Lynch said. "These people try to identify the children who will benefit most from a trip to the States."

Project Children volunteers feel it is important to get the children out of Northern Ireland during the summer months when school is out and they have a lot of idle time on their hands.

Large marches are staged in July and August commemorating various events in the centuries-old Protestant/Catholic conflict.

This is a time when tensions in Northern Ireland are especially high and recruitment by the paramilitary group is at its peak.

The children in the program have never known the freedom of playing outside without fear of violence. But they are very much like American children in the sense of being proud of their heritage.

Project Children encourages host parents to be sensitive to the children's defensiveness for their homeland, particularly in the face of the material wealth we may take for granted in the United States.

More than 19 years ago, Catherine's mother participated in the program, spending her summer in New York. The Boyles, who have three other children, ages 8, 6 and 3, believed it was Catherine's turn to experience something different.

Tom and Kate Lynch developed an immediate interest in the program after acquaintances of Tom's hosted two boys.

"Tom and I have always been interested in hosting an exchange student, but didn't feel our children were old enough to associate with a high school student. Catherine is a perfect fit."

Both the Lynchs and Catherine are

learning a great deal about each other's culture.

"There aren't too many differences in our everyday cultures, although Catherine's never had Pop Tarts or waffles... until she came to visit us. And she's very excited to go camping and travel to New York with us for a family baptism."

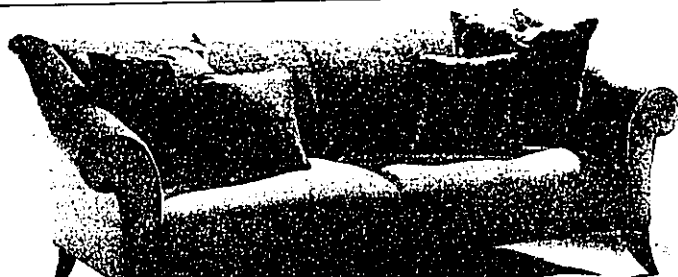
"If it's possible, we hope to take her to Massachusetts to meet her great-aunt for the first time."

The Lynch family is exposing Catherine to a peaceful environment away from the guns and bombing. Both sides are benefiting from their learning experience.

"The kids are enjoying their big sister while learning to accept someone who speaks a little different from us. And Catherine is teaching us her Irish dancing. She is a very generous, loving child who says she's having a brilliant time."

For more information, write Project Children, P.O. Box 933, Greenwood Lake, N.Y. 10925, or call (914) 477-3472.

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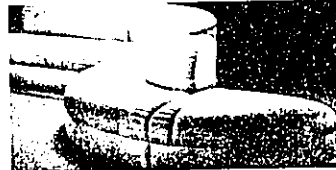
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