

THE EXETER-BALLYTOBIN/CALLAN PROGRAM

The summer before her senior year at Exeter, Zoe Brennan-Krohn '03 spent six weeks volunteering at Ballytobin, a small farming community located in County Kilkenny, Ireland, that offers youths with special needs an environment in which they can develop and thrive. "It was an incredible experience, unlike anything I'd ever been a part of before," says Brennan-Krohn. So moved by the experience was she that, upon graduation, Brennan-Krohn decided to defer her entrance to Brown in order to spend a full year at Ballytobin.

Brennan-Krohn is not the first Exonian who has made the pilgrimage to Ballytobin and the nearby Callan community, nor will she be the last.

This past winter, the faculty approved a proposal for the Exeter-Ballytobin/Callan Program, which will offer two Academy seniors a chance to spend their winter term living and working in these communities. There they will observe and assist a co-worker in the care of a person with special needs and participate in the overall functioning of the farm. They will also keep an electronic journal that they will submit via email to their advisers back at Exeter on a weekly basis, read selected texts and write a reflective paper at the program's conclusion.

"I would hope that the students who participate in the program will lose any possible

preconceptions they might have about disabled people," says Peter Greer '58, the Bates-Russell Distinguished Faculty Professor and instructor in English, who wrote the program proposal along with religion instructor Betsey Farnham after a visit to Ballytobin last fall. "I would also hope that they gain confidence in having relations with people so unlike themselves. Building relationships is really at the core of the Ballytobin community—relations with those in care and the other volunteers. It's as communal a world as I've ever seen."

According to Greer, an informal relationship with Ballytobin has existed for many years. Patrick Lydon '68, who, along with his wife Gladys, helped establish Ballytobin in 1979 and later founded the nearby Callan community (both are part of the Camphill network of communities for people with special needs), has returned to Exeter on several occasions to speak about his life's work. In 2001, Lydon received the John Phillips Award for his "service to humanity," and spoke powerfully during morning assembly. This is when Brennan-Krohn was inspired to get involved, but other Exonians had volunteered previously. Henry Clarke '95 and Will Seabrook '95 both volunteered at Ballytobin in the late '90s, and currently in residence are Duncan Hilton '98 (now in his second year there), Rebecca Ettliger '02 and Matt Loosigian '99.

According to Brennan-Krohn, Ballytobin and Callan are, in some ways, not so different from Exeter. "Both exist in their own little bubble and have their own way of doing things," she says. "And at both, you have to find your way with other people and how you can best contribute."



The strong informal ties between Exeter and Ballytobin—a residential community for youths with special needs located in County Kilkenny, Ireland, whose director is Patrick Lydon '68—will become even stronger next year with the introduction of a work-study program for two Academy seniors. This year four young alumni/ae are living and working at Ballytobin: (left to right) Zoe Brennan-Krohn '03, Rebecca Ettliger '02, Matt Loosigian '99 and Duncan Hilton '98 (not shown).