

**TABLE TALK WITH
DAVID WALSH '05 AND ADELAIDE FULLER '05** | By Famebridge Witherspoon

Adelaide “Addy” Fuller ’05 and David Walsh ’05 didn’t look much different when they got back from their winter term in County Kilkenny, Ireland, site of the Academy’s newest off-campus program. But their 10 weeks with the Exeter-Ballytobin/Callan Program—which they spent living and working at a residential therapeutic farm for people with multiple disabilities co-founded by Exeter alumnus Patrick Lydon ’68 and his wife, Gladys—were, the pair agree, a conversion experience.

“When you spend time with people



with special needs, you have to almost reinvent the way you listen and observe and perceive,” says Walsh, a three-year student from Tyngsboro, MA. “We learned so much more from the residents than they learned from us.”

“It was a wonderful experience because every day you felt the people around you were glad to see you,” says Fuller, a four-year student from Weybridge, VT. “It’s a simpler life. For example, all the food is prepared by hand, and a lot of that food is grown on the farm.”

Now in its first year, the Exeter-Ballytobin/Callan Program is open to two Academy seniors. The goal of the program, according to one of its creators, religion instructor Betsey Farnham, is to provide “an opportunity for students to learn in a very immediate way through living in close relationship with other people in a community that has at its heart service to others.”

Fuller and Walsh lived in the town of Callan, in two group homes known as “The Granary” and “The Workhouse,” respectively. Together with two administrators and other caregivers, they cooked, cleaned and worked with four adults with special needs. Some of their responsibilities took getting used to, says Fuller. “I’d never really worked hard out-

side before, and what we were doing was hard farming work: turning the ground for planting, spreading compost, planting seeds, pulling weeds and picking vegetables. But it was work with a purpose, and it was good for me.”

Fuller was not new to working with people with special needs. Growing up, she spent a lot of time with a family friend who is autistic and grew to appreciate their relationship. Once at Exeter, she joined the Best Buddies Club (as did Walsh), which pairs PEA students with area youngsters who have special needs.

Fuller spent her afternoons at Ballytobin, a separate residential farm located nearby, working with three autistic girls, ages 8, 12 and 14, in the community’s art center. Fuller grew especially attached to 8-year-old Kerry Jane and accompanied her to movement class, where participants learn a form of therapeutic dance to build motor skills. At first, Fuller recalls, Kerry Jane didn’t like the class and would only move a little. But over time, she not only danced, she also mastered all the steps. “What made it so special for me was that Kerry Jane had this really great moment,” Fuller says.

Walsh says he also found the daily responsibilities challenging, and not just the physical labor. “Patrick Lydon calls it ‘life sharing’ and that’s what it is. When you live at the house you have to dive right in and deal with whatever is happening.”

Walsh bonded with a 24-year-old man, Eoghan, who has Down syndrome. “The people living there are so attentive to the littlest things around them,” Walsh says. “Eoghan, for example, greeted me every morning with a big hello and a warm hug. If I had the slightest mood change, he would notice and ask me what was wrong.”

Fuller and Walsh join a growing number of Exeter alumni/ae who have lived and worked at Ballytobin. But they are the first Academy students to earn academic credits for their work, which also included reading and writing assignments, and a final project once they returned to Exeter.

Both say they learned much from their time in Ireland. “This experience changed my attitude about a lot of things, including my desire for material things,” says Walsh. “It really makes you realize what’s important in life, because you see what’s really important to someone else.”

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