



## THE COLHOUN SISTERS

Irish sisters, Bernie, Theresa and Gráinne Colhoun have been Amnesty International activists for many years. They speak about their experience:

Bernie:

'I learned about Amnesty from an early age but it wasn't until 5th year that I got to be part of a group in school. We tried lots of different ways to raise awareness around the school and in the local community. We organised musical events with local bands and guest speakers; we set up stalls with information and merchandise. We had petitions in the school whenever possible. One of the most important actions we did was taking part in letter-writing for 'urgent actions'. Every letter counts, and that's what gets global attention. Being involved with Amnesty really opened my eyes and made me more aware of what is happening in the world. I learned to be more proactive and that to bring about change sometimes you need to make the change yourself. I was also a member of Amnesty International's Student Steering Committee for a year, which gave me a lot of skills that I have used since leaving school. Through Amnesty, I became confident about my opinions and learned not to be afraid to stand up and speak out about injustice. I went to Africa for a summer of volunteer work. I don't know if I would have had the courage to go if I had not had the experience of knowing I could change a situation. In school, I liked the way art was used in many of the Amnesty projects. Visual images can really heighten the atmosphere of an event and grip people's interest.'

Theresa:

'Amnesty has been my life for a very long time. It has been the most influential thing in my life and I will never stop supporting its work. When I was about eleven, I never thought about injustice in the world. But one day my eldest sister was telling someone about an action she was doing for her Amnesty group, which she had set up herself. I can't recall the particular action she was learning about, but I remember thinking she was the bravest person I know and I wanted to be just like her. So I joined the Amnesty group when I started secondary school. It made me realise that everyone in the world deserves the right to freedom. I have loved every minute of being part of Amnesty and loved the campaigning and fundraising for the group. It has been very enjoyable experience. The most memorable experiences for me have been participating in protests and writing letters and finding out your letter made a difference to someone's life. Amnesty international is great organisation and I hope they keep up the great work and wish them all the luck in the world.'

Grainne:

'My eldest sister set up the Amnesty Group in my school 15 years ago, so from an early age I've been aware of Amnesty and the work it does. So, when I started secondary school I became a member of the school group. We take part in so many activities... annually we have a candle sale to raise money for Amnesty and this year we organised a gig to raise money and awareness about Guantanamo Bay. It was a major success and a brilliant experience. We got a lot of new members after the gig. Being a member of Amnesty has opened my eyes and made me so much more aware of the social injustices happening around the world. It has made me feel empowered and strongly motivated to fight for human rights. Amnesty gives you so many opportunities not just to help other people but also to meet other young people with similar interests. I have also made many friends at the Amnesty Annual Conference. Joining Amnesty at the age of 13 has been a big influence on my life.'