In the hubbub of the big things in our lives we sometimes overlook important small opportunities.

“So why are you people here?” asked the guard at the shopping area in Manizales, Colombia.

Working Team Belfast, a project of the World Forum Foundation in collaboration with NIPPA, the Early Years Organisation (Northern Ireland), was hosted by CINDE-Colombia (Centro Internacional de Educacion y Desarrollo Humano) the third week in May, to continue work focused on early childhood programs as a force for reconciliation in areas of the world traumatized by armed conflict. Work for the meetings was centered around advocacy.

For this group, advocacy is currently taking the form of a book to be published for release at World Forum 2007 in Malaysia (to learn more, visit www.WorldForum2007.com). The book, yet to be titled, shares strategies and stories of reconciliation work being done with children in several parts of the world. It is grounded in the belief that children who grow up knowing how to live with one another, those like and unlike themselves, are essential for a peaceful world.

So, back to the guard’s question. Duane Dennis responded with a bit of our story (I don’t think his Spanish is skilled enough for too many details!), and the guard was amazed. He shared that the only people who come from other places to his country are business people with plans to take things away. He couldn’t believe that we were there to figure out how to create a safer world for children.

As I thought about Duane’s story, I suddenly saw it for the powerful opportunity for advocacy that it was.

We continued working on our issues of advocacy: visibility, sustainability, printed resources, and position papers. Big work. But I also began to think about the smaller opportunities, the moments.

We were very visible as a group in Colombia because few people from other places visit. Everywhere we went, people saw us, watched us, heard us. And they stopped and stared. Each of those moments of eye contact became an opportunity for a connection. Maybe not words (I really need to work on my Spanish), but looks answered with open and friendly smiles.

The people we encountered in this beautiful place were very generous and gracious — and they were curious about us. “What do you hear about our country?” “What do you think of this place?” “Is it different here from what you expected?” “Who are you people?”

Our answers to these questions were opportunities to build bridges and connections as human beings, but they were also chances to do a little advocacy for children, for peace.

When we passed through immigration, I decided to use my new understanding of advocacy. When the officer asked me the purpose of my travels to Colombia, I did not say, “A business meeting.” Rather, I told him as much as I could squeeze in about the purpose of the World Forum in Colombia and my part in all that.

He didn’t ask for a copy of our book! But perhaps a thought lodged in his brain.

In the midst of all the big and important advocacy that is part of our work with young children and families, it is important to remind ourselves that we have tiny opportunities every day to create awareness and stimulate thinking. Let us use every chance we get.