

INTRODUCTION

My Lord President, Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The following report concerns itself with the Calendar year January to December 1979 and my task this evening is to review with you, the Council of the Irish Centre, the progress achieved during that period. The Management Committee will indeed appreciate your comments, criticism and recommendations. A living organization, and the Irish Centre is alive, needs constant input. It needs to be challenged by its own Constitution, by its members, by the needs of the day and the community. So I do invite you, the members of the Council, to discuss my report with a view to helping the new Committee in their work during the next twelve months.

WELFARE.

For a quarter of a century the Social Workers of the Centre have made themselves available to thousands of newly arrived and settled immigrants, who for social or economic reasons or in a spirit of adventure challenge or escape, felt it necessary to get away and forge for themselves a new and hopefully better life style. With initiative and enterprise and with supportive guidance encouragement and practical help the big majority have "made it good". For others, things went wrong or their inadequacy proved to weighty to survive against the tide which threatened them and eventually engulfed them.

The human problems and difficulties which occupied our Social Workers during the year have scarcely changed. The sense of dedication of the Social Workers and a faith appreciation of the personal dignity of each client coming to the Centre preserves one from dealing merely statistically with them. Two Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety Seven interviews were given within the precincts of the Centre, and Six Hundred and Twenty Three were seen and helped away from the Centre, in courts, hostels, hospitals or in their own homes. These figures give no indication of the time spent with each and the quality of the work done for these people, This is a colossal work-load.

The information service is becoming increasingly important and will it seems demand a separate portfolio within the Welfare Department. It is used extensively by individuals and by statutory and voluntary bodies in Ireland and the United Kingdom. There is a continuous two way flow of enquiries and information and some may take even weeks or months to resolve and may demand contacts with hospitals, police, clergy, solicitors and employers.

Information is sought on accommodation, work, returning to Ireland, training facilities, education, housing, and housing rights, health and social services, insurance claims, welfare benefits, pensions, sick or missing relatives, funeral arrangements etc. etc.. A comprehensive information facility and library is an immediate necessity.

You will have received the Annual Welfare Report already and can acquaint yourself with the details of the service to the individual. I would just like to highlight another dimension of the service directed towards the general community.

- Posters at Railways Termini is authorized by British Rail and helpful to the newly arrived, indicating where useful advice may be had.

Again one of the high lights of the year was the London Irish Festival. The Irish Centre together with the Irish community in London had a wonderful day of entertainment.

- Seminars for London based agencies promoting inter-agency relations and better understanding of the Irish Community.
- Federation of Irish Societies, a co-ordinating body of Irish Organizations in Britain and having a welfare committee to create greater awareness of welfare needs and sharing experiences and professionalism with all organizations doing welfare work. Two of our team are actually engaged in this work.
- A service to the resettlers i.e. co-operating with the Irish Rural Housing Organization to the benefit of prospective home buyers. Co-operating with the National Manpower Service and the Irish Industrial Development Authority.
- Involvement in communitarian efforts such as the Piccadilly Advice Service, the Camden Council of Social Services and the Camden Council of Community Relations.
- A tentative beginning to adult education by way of literacy classes, Irish language and a commitment to other facilities such as, legal advice sessions, pre-marriage courses, marriage counselling, family therapy, youth work and activities for the retired and career guidance as soon as the physical edifice will permit them. I have confidence that given their merited support our Social Workers are capable of reacting positively to these needs.

HOSTELS

An integral part of the welfare work of the Irish Centre is the Management of our three hostels. The St. Louise in Victoria was vacated during the year to permit a major rehabilitation work. Conway House for men and Marian House for ladies had a very busy year. With the welcome advent of a third social worker, through the kindness and concern of Bishop Birch of Ossory, regular visits were made to the hostels, thereby giving a more comprehensive service to the tenants. Of a total bed occupancy of 45,950 the actual bed occupancy for the year was between 39,000 and 40,000 representing 656 men and 157 ladies. Many others were placed in accommodation apart from the hostels.

Providing bed and board is a most basic human necessity but it is not all. Career guidance is provided and a percentage of our tenants take advantage of the many opportunities and educational grants that are available. Some again are not functionally literate so their literacy and numeracy needs are assessed and a tuition programme planned accordingly.

Personal counselling is available for those with adjustment problems and where necessary individuals are referred to appropriate community services.

SOCIAL CLUB

Despite the development work going on during the year and the hazards and inconveniences associated with tradesmen working on the premises, the social committee performed well. Mary Kenny and her too few co-operatives did trojan work. However I believe a good hard look should be taken at the formation of the committee - too few being asked to do too much work. The kitchens and the bar staff have worked extremely hard and with credit to themselves. The opening of the McNamara hall and the kitchens increased the pressure all round and apart from associated growing pains the new premises have proved to be an outstanding success.

Again one of the high lights of the year was the London Irish Festival. The Irish Centre together with the Irish Counties staged a wonderful day of entertainment.

This was a remarkably successful event and reflected honour and dignity on the Irish Community in Britain.

Culturally the Centre continues to promote traditional aspects of our Irish Heritage. Through the tireless efforts of Tommy Magurie, Joe Farrell, Paddy Crean and C.C.E., Irish music, song and dance as an entertainment and discipline is preserved and passed on. But in the midst of life, even life which is most enjoyable, sorrows come and sadnesses strike. So it was with our group, as that fatal accident, claiming three lives brought sudden sadness to us all. To the bereaved, may I offer a very sincere expression of heart felt sympathy.

DEVELOPMENT

The Development Programme of the Centre proceeded according to plan in 1979. Target times were more or less met. The first phase of the work reached practical completion with the opening and use of the McNamara Hall and kitchens and toilet block and the refurbishing of No.12 Murray St.. March 12th saw commencement of major works on St.Louise Hostel, which are now progressing with a likely opening date of November of 1980.

In February outline plans for a phased upgrading of Conway House, previously known as Hope House were prepared and passed by the Camden Council. The Housing Corporation approved our offer of advance in September and the detailed plans after a few unforeseen setbacks are now almost complete and one envisages commencement of work in the hostel in September 1980.

It is easy to read off the above paragraph of development work of the Irish Centre complex but I assure you it involved long hours of work, serious thought and even apprehension. The responsibility for such does not weigh lightly on the shoulders of the Administrative Committee members and guiding such a programme to its final completion is a daunting task for the coming years. Perhaps if I digress for a moment from the Annual Report and convert the above into financial terms you will see better the enormity of the undertaking.

Preparatory work on British Rail Site Camden Sq.	240,000.00
McNamara Hall & Kitchens Camden Sq.	530,000.00
Toilet block Camden Sq.	110,000.00
Professional Fees Camden Sq.	75,000.00
Equipment & Furniture Camden Sq.	20,000.00
To complete the final phase Camden Sq.	600,000.00
The new St.Louise hostel Victoria	800,000.00
Upgrading Conway House Quex Rd.	400,000.00
Refurbishing No.12 Murray St.	19,000.00
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	2,794,000.00

Towards that programme and its financing our up to date funding is I think meritorious, reasonably successful but there yet remains a long hard road ahead.

HOUSING CORPORATION

St. Louise Hostel	800,000.00
Conway House	400,000.00
Irish Centre Fundraising Efforts	620,000.00
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	1,820,000.00

Such figures point to the credibility of the Irish Centre as a living and viable organization. From a very modest beginning 25 years ago the Irish Centre has proved itself to be an

organization of which, you its Council, may feel justifiably proud. Our credibility before the Government of the United Kingdom and the Irish Government of Dublin has meant £1,500,000.00 and our creditability before our Irish people is to date worth £320,000.00.. There is room for optimism and in the foreseeable future our people will have a Centre truly worthy of them. I would wish to acknowledge here, my appreciation to the Government of this country, which through its statutory body the Housing Corporation gave its sympathetic understanding to our hostel programme. I would also like to acknowledge with a special sense of gratitude the grant from the Irish Government of £300,000.00 towards the physical development of the Centre and £10,000.00 towards salaries for our Social Workers.

The grant from Ireland to the total work of the Centre is of immense importance. It means recognition by the Government and demands accountability by us. An inter departmental delegation from Dublin visited the Centre in November and spent two days assessing and analysing the Centre, its work and needs on Friday April 25th. last a grant of £300,000.00 was agreed. I believe the Fr. McNamara's the John Vaughan's, the Tess Moroney's, the Dominic Donnelley's have been working for us up above. I believe the various Irish organizations who contacted local T.D's. on our behalf played a major role. I am aware too of the efforts of so many who are contributing so well to our fund raising campaign. I recognise the Bank of Ireland, the Allied Irish Bank, and Sea-Link U.K., the London Borough of Camden who have contributed in excess of £20,000.00 each. I am aware of the work of the London Irish Festival Committee, the County Associations and many other smaller organizations and generous people who through their donations are about to present a beautiful Centre to us all.

But of course it is not a building that we need. That is but a means to an end. The purpose of the Irish Centre, its role during the next 25 years is crucial. The physical restructuring of the Centre is essential but the human promotion, in all its aspects, of our people is of the very raison d'etre of the Centre.

The Centre is no small organization now. It has multiple facets, your interest as the Council of the Centre must be reflected in the Management Committee you appoint to run the Centre.

I would like to see the various activities of the Centre responsibly pursued by individual members of the Management. The day when a Director can run the Centre is over. The day when a group of people can run all aspects of the Centre all the time is done with. The Administrative Committee has done a tremendous job for the Centre and is continuing to do so. During the last few years we have been organizing ourselves along more specialized lines. It is imperative that this movement continues. There is a wealth of Irish genius in this city. I would request both at Committee and sub-committee level the Centre should harness itself much of this energy to face positively and progressively the demands of the next quarter of a century. I have produced a tentative plan which you have before you. This tries to portray the various aspects of the Centre, its Management and services. I do believe that while preserving democratic practice, the appointment of members for the Management Committee should keep in mind the portfolios to be filled.

Here I would like to welcome two new Trustees, both of whom have given long and faithful service to the Irish Centre. They are Mr.D.O'Riordan and Dr.L.Morton. I feel sure that with their interest business accumen and dedication, the Irish Centre is very secure.

FINANCE

The Development Programme in respect of 51/52 Camden Sq. reveals a nett expenditure in the year of £551,225.00 whilst £10,549.00 was expended on major and necessary improvements to 12,Murray St..

This expenditure has resulted in £381,843.00 Bank Loans. £69,455.00 Sundry Loans (Breweries etc.) together with Building Fund Creditors of £307,250.00.

The Accounts show that our Liabilities have increased by £534,996.00 to £808,965.00 whilst fixed assets have increased by £631,434.00 to £1,174,363.00. Fixed assets represent Capital Expenditure to date less Depreciation and bear no relation to the Current Market Value of the properties.

In reviewing the reliability of our sources of revenue it will be noted that the total received during the year from Building Fund. Donations,Charity Walk, Covenants, together with Management Charge and Surplus on Revenue Accounts, amounted to an overall surplus of £99,689.00.

CONCLUSION

Ladies and Gentlemen that concludes my report. But finally let me express a very sincere debt of gratitude to all who have made such a report possible.

To the Staff of the Irish Centre, to the Manager and Manageress, to the Secretary. To the Management of all three hostels and in a special way to Mr. M. Moroney and his Administrative Committee and to the many other volunteers who have put their expertize at the disposal of the Centre. Thank you.

W.J.CAGNEY,O.M.I.

DIRECTOR
