

London Irish Centre



Annual Report 1993/94

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AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF LONDON IRISH CENTRE CHARITY (L.I.C.C.)

The Community Services Department/London Irish Centre Charity, (LICC), aims to respond to an unmet need amongst Irish people for a culturally sensitive and supportive welfare advice and information service, which celebrates and promotes Irish culture, and counteracts the negative discrimination Irish people face as an ethnic group, especially in terms of their access to mainstream provision.

LICC aims are practised within an Equal Opportunities framework, and the ethos of LICC involves assistance and co-ordination with existing service providers in order to campaign for the specific needs of the various groups who make up the Irish community, as an ethnic group, to be met.

In conjunction with these, our objectives are:

1. To provide a safe and confidential environment for Irish people seeking welfare advice/information. Irish people are often reluctant to seek help from statutory agencies.
2. To empower Irish people by fostering social confidence through imparting knowledge of their options in terms of housing and welfare rights etc., in order to redress the discrimination they face because of a

perception that Irish people look after their own and because, despite C.R.E. recognition of Irish people as a distinct ethnic group, Irish people are ignored in equal opportunities practice and policy by statutory agencies.

3. To raise awareness of, and counteract the lack of statutory duty to meet the specific needs of various groups within the Irish community, eg., women, travellers, single homeless people, people with mental health problems, people with alcohol/drug dependency problems.
4. To campaign/lobby at a local and national level for recognition for the Irish community as an ethnic group, with specific cultural needs, and for these needs to be met with adequate resources from the statutory sector. The Commission for Racial Equality has recently acknowledged the Irish as an ethnic group. The 1991 Census has shown that 10% of the population of Britain is Irish.
5. To network and liaise with Irish and non-Irish statutory and voluntary agencies in order to appraise and develop services.
6. To assist those seeking employment, training and further education.



Senior citizens' party at The London Irish Centre. (Photo courtesy of Terry Smith)

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Over the years we have had many important visitors at the Centre. On 27th May 1993 we had the pleasure in welcoming Uachtarán na hÉireann, Mrs. Mary Robinson.

During her Presidential campaign she had visited the Centre and promised she would return.

The purpose of her return visit was to meet representatives from all the Community Care organisations in the Greater London area. She thanked workers and volunteers for "supporting our extended family" and praised them for "reaching out" to every member of the Irish community in Britain. And she emphasised: "It is very central to my being President of Ireland that I can communicate to you just how much you are valued and appreciated by Ireland."

On behalf of all the Agencies I express my deep appreciation for the historic visit of the President of Ireland to the London Irish Centre. Mrs Mary Robinson showed a deep concern for those experiencing the pain and suffering of having to leave their native land. Her visit was a source of great encouragement to every one.

The year was also marked by the departure of Paul Murphy who had been Co-ordinator of our Community Services for five years. Paul has been replaced by Christine Mohan. We also saw Anne Rynne return to her native Clare to take up a post there. Charlotte Curran left us in September to pursue further studies. We thank them for their dedication and service. We are glad to welcome John Glynn and Deirdre Robinson who have very quickly established themselves. With Maureen Rynne who has been with us for quite a few years we look forward to continuing to provide a truly professional service. The pages of this report will reveal to the quality, quantity and the many different areas of need that are met by our staff. They have to work under very difficult conditions with limited resources of personnel, finance and the knock-on effects of the recession.

I am always delighted to thank our volunteers as they are at the heart of the spirit of the Irish Centre — Una Cooper, organiser of the Day Care Centre for the elderly,

Brian Duggan, Missing Persons Bureau, Mary Kenny, Pensioners Christmas Dinner, Bingo, Jumble Sales etc. Thanks also to those who serve on the various Committees and to those who organise the social and cultural events of the Centre.

I wish to express my gratitude to the Irish Government (DION), London Borough of Camden, Lawlor Foundation, London Irish Festival, Society of St. Patrick, Family Welfare Association, AIB Bank, the Irish Youth Foundation and our many benefactors for their generous financial support.

THE ELDERLY

Large numbers of Irish people settled in the Camden area in the late 1940's and early 1950's. These are the Irish elderly of today and many of them are widowed. Some years ago the Irish Centre set up a Daycare Centre and luncheon Club to provide for their needs. Each day a four course lunch is provided, outings are arranged, birthdays are celebrated.

All this is organised, managed & orchestrated by one of our volunteers, Una Cooper. Una refers to the elderly as her babies and she treats them with loving care. Una has such tremendous energy, creativity and a zest for life and fun that the old people find they are not only getting bodily nourishment but that they are renewed in spirit as well.

In addition to all this activity there is the Afternoon Tea Dance organised by the Irish Pensioners Group which is held fortnightly. This group also organised a holiday to Spain.

Christmas is celebrated in style with the traditional christmas dinner followed by a dance for 250 old people. Mary Kenny voluntarily does all the fundraising and organising of this event.

The caring and the sharing eases the pain of loneliness and isolation of the elderly living in the big city far removed from family and friends.

ADVICE AND INFORMATION WORK

HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING

The Irish continue to experience extreme housing disadvantage in Britain. The over-representation of Irish people in the homeless population reveals the true extent of the barriers that Irish people face when trying to secure decent housing in this country.

The Irish homelessness tragedy involves a vast number of people from every walk of life — families whose homes have been repossessed, mothers and children fleeing domestic violence, the disabled, the mentally ill and the single jobless.

The adverse effects of homelessness on the individual and family have been well documented. Life for the homeless person or family becomes an essentially improvised, dehumanising and progressively depleted experience as they fall through successive floors of respectability, leading to cheap B&B accommodation, nightmarish resettlement units, often drug and alcohol abuse and finally sleeping rough.

SLEEPING ROUGH

Those who are homeless often face stark options — begging, shoplifting, prostitution or petty crime. Once on the streets it is hard to keep healthy. The shelter, warmth and privacy that the rest of us take for granted do not exist. Good food may be hard to find or expensive. It is almost impossible to keep clean and even minor illnesses become hard to cure, with G.P.'s unwilling to register those without permanent addresses.

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

The debilitating effects of temporary accommodation on health have been widely publicised. While families with children and those considered "vulnerable", may be legally entitled to housing under Pt3 of the 1985 Housing Act, the scarcity of public sector housing results in many homeless families and vulnerable people being temporarily accommodated in inappropriate Bed and Breakfast "hotels". The adverse conditions of this type of accommodation include overcrowding, and poor facilities for storing and cooking food. In respect of this, good nutrition is almost impossible, accidents are common among children and adults often suffer from depression.

WORKING TO TACKLE HOMELESSNESS

Statutory provision for Irish homeless people in Britain has always been scant. Traditionally voluntary agencies, such as ourselves, have provided the bulk of the care and this trend looks set to continue.

In the past year John, Maureen and myself have dealt with over 4,500 housing-related cases. In addition to the regulatory cup of tea, we aim to provide a comprehensive service to homeless users which is specifically tailored to all their needs. It seems appropriate that a homeless

person who may be besieged by a range of material, physical and emotional problems should have access to practical help in these areas, as well as help with actually securing accommodation.

Public Sector Housing

Considerable working hours and resources are spent assisting homeless users apply for accommodation under current Housing Legislation.

To assist an applicant to the Homeless Person's Unit, it is necessary to conduct a lengthy interview and draw up a detailed statement with regard to identification, address history/reasons for leaving etc. All advice workers have had training in *interview and counselling skills* and are able to offer a sensitive approach in areas of abuse and domestic violence. Lengthier interviews are allowed for those with literacy problems, mental ill-health and/or learning difficulties.

In order to provide concrete and written verification of the details outlined in any HPU application, we will liaise extensively with various agencies in Ireland and the U.K. including Social Services, Housing Authorities, Schools, Hospitals, Solicitors, Garda/Police, General Registrar's Offices, Commercial Outlets, Private Landlords.

Undoubtedly, much of this work is very time-consuming but it grants vital access to statutory housing provision for many of our homeless users. Users from the Irish Travelling Community in particular, having often had very negative experiences at HPUs, find this aspect of our service indispensable.

PRIVATE — RENTAL AND HOSTEL ACCOMMODATION:

Centre-users who are not eligible for local authority housing are advised on alternative accommodation options. Unfortunately access to low-cost social housing, is limited, making it a very frustrating year for us, in terms of helping Irish people secure appropriate housing.

Although the Centre keeps a register of rooms available to let, there is a general reluctance on the part of private landlords to accept DSS claimants as tenants. Those few who are willing to let to people claiming benefit, are still likely to demand a substantial deposit and rent in advance. This year such demands have effectively *excluded most of our homeless users from renting privately*. (88% of L.I.C. users rely on welfare benefits as their sole source of income).

The inaccessibility of private rented accommodation for most of our homeless users has meant that we have had to rely increasingly on hostel provision. While hostels provide emergency temporary relief, few of our users have found this type of accommodation satisfactory and many

have been positively frightened by some aspects of hostel-life.

DEVELOPMENT OF OUR HOUSING SERVICE

The Centre continues to be the biggest provider of housing advice and support to Irish people in Britain.

In the past year we have become concerned about the welfare of many of our vulnerable users who have managed to secure permanent housing. 80% of those resettled into permanent independent accommodation are given no help to furnish their home with even the most basic of household items. Those who are totally unsupported risk becoming homeless again.

Our users have repeatedly stressed that they require services which address all their problems. In relation to this, we hope to oversee and co-ordinate the homeless user's access to the appropriate services, and ensure that the appropriate agencies respond accordingly.

In addition to the frontline advice and advocacy on offer, the advice team will continue to actively promote awareness among Housing Providers of the needs of Irish homeless people and also provide information to those in Ireland about the nature of the current housing crisis in Britain.

DEIRDRE ROBINSON.
SOCIAL ADVICE WORKER.

WELFARE RIGHTS

Over a third of our clients are offered advice and practical assistance on accessing various Welfare Benefits. This aspect of our work involves advising new arrivals from Ireland and elsewhere to Britain, as well as those who are already resident here.

In the last year Irish people have experienced particular difficulty in initiating new claims. Three quarters of new Irish claimants had great difficulty proving their identification to the D.S.S. About half of that number were wrongly advised by the D.S.S. that a passport would be necessary to establish identity.

Worryingly, there seems to be no consistency from one D.S.S. office to another as to what constitutes acceptable proof of identification. These procedures result in further delays in the payment of benefit to Irish people and cause severe hardship. We were horrified at Christmas '93 to find a lone parent with 6 children left without any form of income when the D.S.S. suspended her claim due to insufficient forms of identification, after she had transferred her claim to a different office.

A major part of our time is utilised in assisting people apply to the Social Fund for essential financial support and challenge D.S.S. decisions. Like all other welfare agencies, we have found that the Social Fund consistently fails to meet the level of need presented. Failure to obtain Community Care grants has left babies without prams,

children without beds, families without cookers and the vulnerable without even the most basic of household items. Those who manage to obtain Budgeting Loans find their already limited income further reduced.

On a positive note, we have had much success this year encouraging our clients to take up their entitlement to Disability Living Allowance. Many clients had been unaware of this very valuable benefit and have felt that it has enhanced their quality of life dramatically.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

What is Domestic Violence?

Abuse can begin with insults and mockery, used to humiliate women and children and to frighten and control them. Women and children are kept short of money. They are stopped from going out. They are abused with/threatened with physical and/or sexual, as well as emotional violence.

The abuser may be a partner, husband, father, brother or son. Almost all domestic violence is directed by men against women and children.

There is a huge social taboo about domestic violence which in turn leads to feelings of loneliness, shame, and paradoxically guilt in the women being abused and compound an overall feeling of powerlessness, whilst for the abuser, 'the hiddenness' and secrecy means control is aided and increased.

Thankfully this situation is slowly changing as public awareness is heightened, and responsibility for the crime of domestic violence put firmly where it belongs, with the abuser, through national campaigns by Solas Anois, Irish Women's Domestic Violence Project and Zero Tolerance, and at a more local level by Domestic Violence Forums and Action Groups and Welfare Advice Centres like ourselves, on the unacceptability of violence, and the threat of violence, against women.

Irish Women and Domestic Violence

Within the Irish community there exists a strong socio-cultural and religious ethos, the decision by an Irish woman to leave a violent partner can be more difficult in an attempt to preserve the more established and familiar family structure.

Many Irish women do not have ready access to extended family networks, and are unable to seek 'refuge' from violence in other family homes.

Irish women's experience of emigrating on their own emphasizes a sense of isolation, vulnerability and lack of choice when faced with abuse/violence in the home. What is more, the Irish community has difficulty in accessing services generally in this country as they are often unfamiliar with, or unaware of, their rights or of the networks that can support them.

Various research studies have borne this out and pointed

to the fact that Irish women are much more likely to be found in insecure, low-paid jobs and poor quality housing than their English counterparts. All these social and economic factors severely limit choice for Irish women and ensure that they remain in unsatisfactory/abusive relationships with men.

The Centre's work with Survivors of Domestic Violence

In 1992 it was reported that 62.5% of households accepted as homeless in England gave relationship breakdown involving violence as a reason, (D.o.E. 1992). Of the Centre's women users who were homeless this year, 70% were so because of the above reason and, of these, over half were women from the Irish Travelling community.

One of the main reasons women stay with violent men or return to them after leaving is a lack of anywhere else to go, with street homelessness as a last resort. Alternative housing is often critical in enabling women to leave abusive men.

We, the workers at the Centre, Maureen, John, Deirdre and Chris, through on-going training on Domestic Violence, have gained much practical knowledge of the issues around Domestic Violence and are able to impart to women users advice and information on housing options, eg., a Women's Aid refuge, application to a local authority housing department as homeless, private rented/buying accommodation, gaining control of their present home; access to welfare benefit entitlement, eg., income support, child benefit, maintenance, (Child Support Agency), Council Tax bills, Social Fund payments; other money matters, eg., bank accounts, utility bills; legal rights with appropriate referrals to Family Law solicitors; informal counselling and referral to short term and long term counselling services and self-help groups.

Women who are survivors of/in fear of violence from the partners/relatives/children they live with often need advice from us on three main options. These areas we have greatly developed in terms of networking, liaison and information exchange with both statutory and voluntary agencies, as part of our essential service delivery to users.

1. Women's Aid Refuges

Women's Aid Refuges provide safe, temporary accommodation for women with or without children who have to leave home because of domestic violence. To respond to the urgent need for safe emergency housing for women and children fleeing domestic violence all of the workers at the Centre have built up good working relationships with refuges and women's hostels in England and Ireland while providing practical support and advice. However often women and children have to placed temporarily in bed and breakfast hostels before a vacancy in a Women's Refuge is available.

We have also participated in a number of Training and Review days at local refuges, particularly in Camden and Westminster, to update our knowledge and skills.

In addition, through membership of Camden's Multi-Agency Domestic Violence Forum, we have networked with various relevant organisations and local authority departments in order to enable us to provide a speedy and integrated response to the women user's practical, material and legal needs in what is an extremely traumatic episode in their lives. Through the Forum we have also been able to ensure that the needs of Irish women as an ethnic group are highlighted within the fields of domestic violence training.

2. Legal remedies

Often women fleeing domestic violence need legal advice in regard to protective orders such as injunctions, which can only be obtained after certain types of legal proceedings have begun. Also, speed in an emergency is vital and a solicitor can seek, and is likely to get, an emergency legal aid certificate over the phone if there has been recent violence or a further threat after previous violence.

We at the Centre are extremely fortunate to have a successful referral network with a range of legal expertise, especially so with Family Law Solicitors. One in particular has been an invaluable source of help and professionalism in assisting women users with child custody and domestic violence cases — Kay Glynn.

Kay also initiated the Centre's free and confidential Legal Advice Surgery every Saturday morning for Irish people living in London. This is facilitated by Kay and a number of Irish solicitors and barristers including Eamonn Sherry and Ed Fitzpatrick, (members of our Welfare Advisory Committee). An Irish based solicitor Risteard Pierce is also available for consultation once a month at the Centre regarding legal matters in Ireland.

3. Making an application as homeless under Section 58 of The Housing Act 1985 Part III

An application as homeless can be made to the Homeless Persons Unit:

- if a person cannot gain entry to their home
- by anyone who is fleeing domestic violence or a threat of domestic violence from the person they live with
- even if a woman is staying in a Woman's Refuge
- to any local authority regardless of their local connection
- if it is not *reasonable* for the applicant to remain in the home.

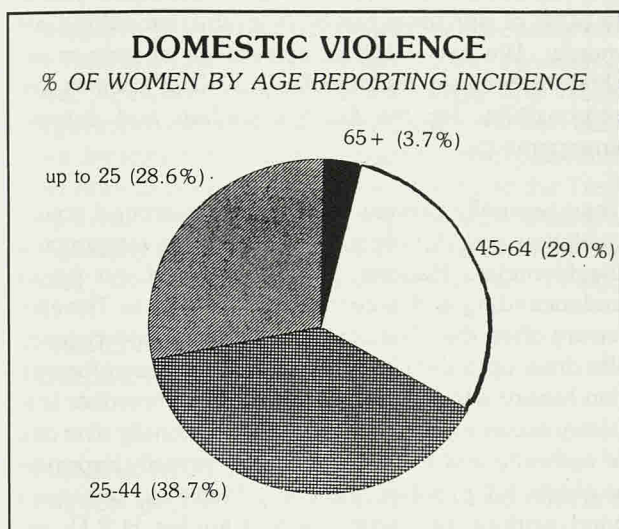
A woman fleeing domestic violence can pursue any or three of these at the same time.

A large proportion of our work time is taken up in assisting women users to draft their homelessness application to the H.P.U. In order to facilitate this we undertake intensive and investigative work in Ireland and over here to provide evidence of history of residence, as required for their applications, by way of phone calls, letter writing, requests for identification etc.

We also undertake advocacy work on behalf of users if necessary, i.e., when women users are so traumatised by their experience of domestic violence that they are unable to represent themselves adequately, we accompany them to the relevant departments and offer practical support.

Domestic violence is and continues to be a major issue for the Irish community and in turn of advice and information work for us at the Centre. The charts below graphically display the prevalence of domestic violence from a two month survey of 10 Irish Centres in London, Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham.

10 London Irish Agencies (Oct-Nov 1993)



SOURCE: FIS/CES STATISTICAL SURVEY
SOURCE AGIY/FIS/CES STATISTICAL SURVEY

Case study - Margaret and family

Margaret came to the Centre with her three children under five years old looking for assistance with food. She was interviewed by Maureen who noticed bruising around Margaret's neck and asked Margaret if she was experiencing domestic violence. Margaret quickly denied this, thanked Maureen for the help she was given and left.

Two days later Margaret returned with five children all under 10 years old. Her left eye was swollen and bruised and her mouth was cut. She was in a state of shock, her children were highly agitated. Maureen again interviewed Margaret in a room on her own while Deirdre and myself took it in turns to distract and pacify the children in another room, with toys, crayons and crisps. It evolved that after asking her partner for money for food the previous evening, he had physically attacked her, punching and kicking her and shoving the children. It was not the first time it had happened and not the first time that Margaret had left, however she was adamant she could not go back — she was shaking with shock and fear and felt her partner was capable of killing her.

We phoned London Women's Aid emergency swithchboard number to look for a refuge space for a woman and five children under 10 to be told no refuge would take that many children — that no refuge would

have space — that the children would have to be split up between different refuges. The thought of splitting up the family was totally unacceptable — the children were already extremely traumatised — for the two oldest to be without their mother in a strange house after what they had been through was unthinkable. We contacted instead two of the refuges we had good networks with and one of them managed to accommodate the whole family using an additional emergency room.

We were fortunate that time — however how many more Margarets are there who make the decision to leave and then find because of their family size that no refuge is able to accommodate them?

Refuges give women a safe space to decide how they want to move forward and practical and emotional support from other residents and refuge workers. There are only 150 refuges in England and Wales. The Metropolitan Police cited 100,000 reported crimes involving domestic violence in 1992. The Centre is affiliated to Solas Anais, Irish Women's Domestic Violence Project and supports its campaign for the establishment of an Irish Women's Refuge which will accommodate all Irish women and children fleeing domestic violence, regardless of a woman's age, whether she is single or has children, or the actual number of children.

CHRISTINE MOHAN - CO-ORDINATOR



Christine Mohan — Co-ordinator

THE ELDERLY

"Woman aged 75 found dead in flat. There for 2 weeks before being found."

News like this is often tucked away inside a newspaper on page 5 or 6. It usually only merits a few lines. It tells the reader absolutely nothing about the life of the woman or why she lay for two weeks before anyone raised the alarm.

We are told that the values of a society are reflected in

the way its elderly are treated. We would say that society here has failed many Irish pensioners and in particular Irish women pensioners.

53% of London's Irish born community are over 45 years old. Loneliness and isolation are common among elderly Irish people living here.

The majority of Irish born pensioners remain in Britain irrespective of economic conditions in Ireland. However, in the past year we have encountered a growing number of elderly Irish requesting information and assistance towards returning to their native land. This is partly due to the "Assisted House Purchase Schemes" being offered by local authorities to long-term tenants.

In March of this year, (1993-94 being the European Year of Older People), six of the Centre's elderly users were able to avail of a rehabilitative break in Ireland through the organisational skills and generosity of Kerry Emigrant Support Group. Some of these were forgotten exiles who had not returned home for over 20 years and had lost all contact with family and friends. Happily, all six are now in the process of being permanently resettled in Ireland.

The obvious positive outcome of this trip encouraged us to initiate a similar break for approximately 30 Irish elderly women and men, this September, in conjunction with Arlington Housing Association. The project is entitled 'Aisling' which means 'Returning Home'. We are at present in the process of fundraising and aim to make this an annual event.

A vacuum that has been highlighted by the elderly users of the Centre is the lack of secure permanent accommodation in an Irish environment. There are, at present, no mixed housing complexes designed specifically for Irish pensioners.

Through our participation at various consultative forums we raise awareness of these and of other issues important to the Irish community and at present, in conjunction with Camden Irish Forum and Camden Elderly Irish Support Network, are in the process of drafting a joint submission to Camden on its Community Care Plan to ensure that Irish people, as an ethnic group, and their various needs, are not ignored.

At a practical level, the Centre provides, for Irish elderly people in Camden, lunch club and day centre facilities and a tea dance every other Wednesday afternoon. At a policy level, it is essential to lobby for a culturally sensitive support network addressing the emotional, psychological, social and cultural needs of our elderly Irish people, if such tragic headlines as above are to be reduced.

JOHN GLYNN
(SOCIAL ADVICE WORKER)

TRAVELLERS

"Travelling is more a state of mind than an actual situation. Its existence and importance are frequently more psychological than geographical. The Traveller who loses all hope of ever setting off again or the possibility of doing so, also loses his identity as a Traveller." (Council of Europe, 1987)

Travellers are an Ethnic Minority in their own right. They have a distinct cultural identity which is closely linked with travelling and they share a long history.

At the Centre we try to nurture and promote respect for the rights of Travellers, including acceptance of their social and cultural lifestyle. At certain times during the year up to 50% of our users can be from the Travelling Community. We see a higher percentage of women and children because traditionally Travelling Women take responsibility for the family's welfare and domestic arrangements.

They normally present with problems around accommodation and identification, often on the suggestion of the Homeless Persons Unit. Because of our proven understanding and acceptance in relating to Travellers we are often their first contact with any support agency. We draw up a detailed statement of their accommodation history which enables them access immediate temporary accommodation. Travellers traditionally steer clear of authority and it can therefore be virtually impossible to obtain full proof of residence. However, we have a good working relationship with Camden H.P.U. and have been successful in promoting awareness of the specific cultural lifestyle of the Travelling Community among housing officers.

Irish Travellers are strict Catholics who would normally have their children baptised into the Church but often neglect having their birth registered with the State, resulting in enormous problems when trying to provide acceptable proof of identity for the D.S.S. It also hinders them in obtaining a passport. This lack of understanding by statutory bodies causes unnecessary financial hardship and restricts their freedom to travel abroad.

The Traveller values freedom of choice, economic independence, and the patterns of movement are not wanderings but routes that have a historical economic base.

The 1968 Caravan Sites Act is the only legal protection for Travellers to follow a culturally indigenous lifestyle. Because of this the present Government proposal to reform this Act has disastrous implications, i.e., to remove the duty on local authorities to provide sites and instead replace with 'discretionary powers'. As SHAC, (the London Housing Aid Centre), point out, this legislation is being introduced at a time of great social unrest in Europe. Travellers and Gypsies are victimised right across Europe — at present in Germany, Sweden and Romania, for example.

All organisations working with Travellers' needs recognise that the Repeal of the 1968 Act, coupled with the general offence of 'Criminal Trespass' in the forthcoming Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill is 'an attempt to outlaw a way of life', (SHAC Response to Government Consultation Paper, February 1993). Action Group for Irish Youth have argued that what is needed is proper implementation of the 1968 Act. Illegal camping by Travellers is a direct result of the lack of site provision due to failure of local authorities, (and central government directives), and because of prejudice.

We at the Irish Centre have a close link with the Travelling Community and strongly oppose any reforms which could jeopardise this unique way of life.

At a practical level, we try to meet the functional needs of Travellers such as clothing, food, travel expenses and basic household items. We encourage and facilitate registration with medical services, and liaise with education departments in order to arrange school placements. We strive to improve the service available to the Travelling Community while respecting their individuality and philosophy of life.... 'we work to live rather than live to work', (Jimmy Maughan, Irish Centre user, 1994).

MAUREEN RYNNE
(SOCIAL ADVICE WORKER)

MENTAL HEALTH

Irish born people in Britain have the highest rates of first and subsequent admissions to mental hospital of any migrant group. It is accepted that issues of misdiagnosis, emigration, cultural and historical factors greatly influence these figures. However this year 50% of London Irish Centre users recognised they had some mental ill-health difficulties.

Centre Advice Workers continually support users with mental health problems by enabling access to appropriate health care facilities including supportive day care projects and specialist mental health teams. Often the workers provide the vital link between the user and the service provider.

With the implementation of Community Care legislation, it has become even more difficult to link users with the appropriate service because of fewer resources. In the past year we have become increasingly concerned that many of our users have been neglected by the failure of this system. Often we are left to pick up the pieces.

Case Study — Tommy

Tommy came to London last year aged 18 years hoping to find work and a new life. He had very little money and on arrival in the capital was unable to secure any kind of accommodation. As a result of this Tommy was forced to sleep rough and beg to survive. He found it impossible to make friends among the other street homeless who mocked his Irish accent and he found street life very brutal, degrading, insecure and terrifying.

After two months of barely surviving, an LIC worker found Tommy cowering in a shop doorway whilst participating in a regular nightly soup run. The worker found that Tommy was not able to offer any details about himself, had trouble speaking and was shaking violently. He appeared completely disorientated and confused. The worker persuaded him to come to the Centre the next day.

It was obvious that Tommy's traumatic introduction to London had had a very damaging effect on his emotional well-being. The Advice Worker contacted the area Mental Health Outreach Team to have Tommy assessed and his needs addressed.

In the following months the Centre co-worked with the relevant statutory and voluntary mental health agencies to ensure that Tommy was found appropriate housing and support. Tommy is looking forward to moving into independent living accommodation within the next twelve months.

ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE

Many Irish emigrants experience problems associated with hardship, such as alcohol and drug abuse. Here at the Centre, the workers strive to create the opportunities for change for those who wish to address their problem(s). These include appropriate referrals to supportive agencies and detoxification units, and provision of short term and long term counselling. However we are concerned that such efforts are frustrated by the current lack of resources and are vigorously campaigning for the development of services which meet the needs of Irish people.

On a practical level, we accommodate all those who have a harmful relationship with alcohol/drugs by providing accessible washing and clothing facilities and often helping with food.

HIV/AIDS

Information and support services continue to be given to those Centre users currently living with HIV/AIDS.

Users were referred to appropriate professional health care services and counselling. For some, contracting the virus raised difficult questions about returning home to Ireland. Some who had lost contact with family and friends, felt it necessary to re-establish old relationships.

On a practical level, advice workers assisted with welfare benefit claims, housing, making travel arrangements and finding necessary funds to finance repatriation back to Ireland.

Everyday the Centre's Advice Workers advise on Safe Sex and distribute educational literature about HIV and AIDS.

COUNSELLING

The Centre has been able to avail of the professional helping skills of Frances Cummins, immigrant outreach

counsellor. Frances offers an invaluable service to our many users who may be experiencing difficulty in coping with life problems or emotional crises.

Frances makes strenuous efforts to target isolated sections of our immigrant community — making home visits to single mothers in B & B accommodation, those in frail health and to those serving prison sentences. Frances is an essential part of our service who enables the more vulnerable members of our community to cope with the pressures of emigration.

In addition Centre staff have already had training in counselling skills as a compliment to Frances' professional service. In September '94 the co-ordinator and advice workers will begin part-time study for professional counselling qualifications as a further development of our service.

EMPLOYMENT

This year we over-hauled our current employment and training library. An Information Technology Student on placement at the Centre totally updated our information systems, making them more user friendly and accessible. The Employment Room now contains comprehensive information on employment and educational opportunities in London. Users are offered free access to telephone and photocopying facilities, and staff are available to advise on job-search skills.

Various studies such as Labour Force Surveys 1989, 1990 and 1991 show a significant proportion of Irish emigrants continue to remain in low-paid manual jobs. Almost 1 in 3 Irish men are employed in construction and transport, in jobs which are often short-term and temporary by nature. The Labour Force Survey 1993 indicates that Irish men are twice as likely to be employed in construction than British men.

Similarly almost one-third of Irish women are employed

in personal services such as cleaning, domestic and catering work and the same problems of short-term and temporary nature apply. Again, the 1993 Labour Force Survey confirms this trend and indicates that almost half, 45%, of Irish workers are employed in manual occupations.

The economic recession in Britain has made it even more difficult for Irish people to secure full-time employment. In respect of this, Centre users are finding it harder and harder to find any work.

REPATRIATION

Up to a fifth of enquiries relate to returning to Ireland. Some of those enquiries are from individuals and families who are considering returning home on a permanent basis. They are provided with information and advice on housing, social welfare benefits, education, health and employment in Ireland and even household removals to Ireland. We work closely with Kerry Emigrant Support Team, one of the few voluntary agencies in Ireland offering support to returning emigrants in the form of rehabilitative breaks and access to permanent accommodation.

Sadly, on occasion, it is necessary to assist people with emergency travel to funerals, to the safety of a women's refuge, to visit sick relatives or to attend crucial child custody hearings. In addition we have enabled extremely vulnerable young people to escape dangerous situations in London and to return home. In these circumstances we have no recourse to Centre funding and must therefore attempt to obtain the necessary finances from other charitable networks through our own fundraising efforts.

We are particularly grateful for the on-going support we have received from the Council of Irish Counties Associations, Irish Chaplaincy in Britain, Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the Benevolent Society of St. Patrick.



Winners of The London Irish Centre's Céilí competition. (Photo courtesy of Terry Smith)

COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT — ADVICE SERVICE

MATERIAL AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT 1993-94

	%
Food	21
Clothing/Showers	22
Furniture	8
Grant applications	19
Emergency Travel to Ireland	16
Travel	14

Repeated British government cutbacks in welfare entitlements, coupled with the current harsh economic climate, have resulted in a shocking level of hardship among our users.

FOOD

While it may appear that welfare payments now make it unlikely that the disadvantaged will starve, the truth is that at least one in five of our users request support with purchasing food. Funds are strictly limited at the Centre, but in crisis cases food vouchers are provided and emergency grants offered for immediate needs. We have been fortunate this year to be able to distribute free EC Beef and Butter to our needy users. We also distribute information detailing sources of free food.

In addition to their daily work at the Centre, advice workers participate regularly in a "Soup-Run", in an attempt to reach Irish street homeless people in need of decent food and a friendly word.

CLOTHING/SHOWERS

The Centre maintains a well stocked clothes — room and provides showering facilities, both of which are used enthusiastically by a fifth of all those we work with. Many of our users are street homeless or living in temporary hostel accommodation. By providing showers and clothes, this service allows the most vulnerable to retain a sense of dignity. However this winter, it was necessary for us to distribute warm overcoats and jumpers to enable the survival of those on the streets.

With the complete failure of the Social Fund to meet people's needs, families are increasingly relying on the clothes room for everything from baby blankets to children's shoes.

FURNITURE

There was much concern this year that many people moved into permanent accommodation, without even basic household possessions. In one case, a mother of five small children struggled to cope in a flat that was empty of beds, chairs and a cooker. To counter this kind of hardship, advice workers apply for grants for furniture and essential household items on behalf of our users. We

also use our contacts within the voluntary sector to organise the donation of free furniture to those in need. On occasion, workers have managed to secure charitable funding for removals and have even given physical assistance.

GRANT APPLICATIONS

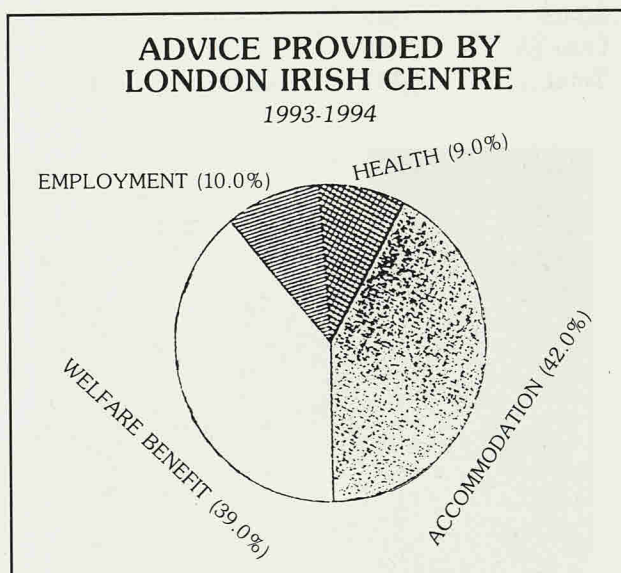
The huge gap between welfare provision and needs has resulted in people having to turn to the voluntary sector to provide the financial support once offered by statutory funds. In relation to this, much working time is spent identifying and securing charitable grants for our users.

We are especially grateful to the Family Welfare Association and the Council of Irish Counties Association for their generous support of all applications for assistance.

TRAVEL

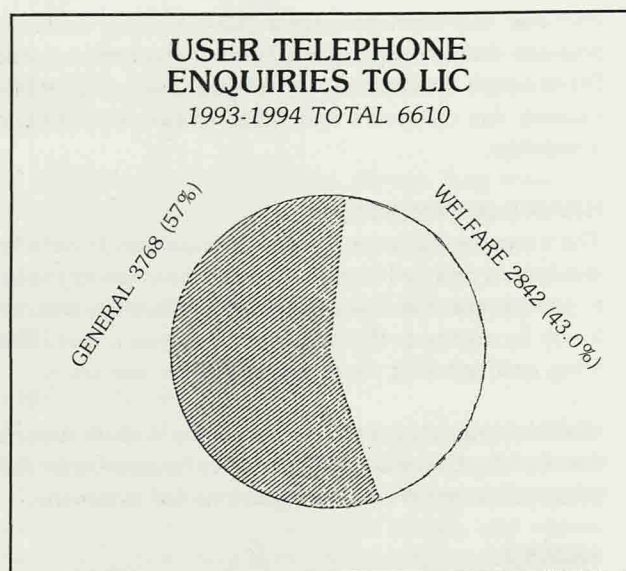
The Centre often covers the cost of travel for initial journeys to hostels, hospitals, and refuges. Special consideration is always given to those with very young children, women fleeing domestic violence, the vulnerable and young "new arrivals" to London.

Undoubtedly, this aspect of our service is financially burdensome but it is an essential complement to all the other services we offer.



SOURCE: London Irish Centre Statistics

STATISTICS ON ADVICE AND USERS



SOURCE: London Irish Centre Statistics

AGE RANGES AND GENDER OF USERS OF LIC

Age	Women	Men	Total
Under 15	20	15	35
16-17	133	210	343
18-25	471	731	1202
25-50	721	1096	1817
50-65	367	570	937
Over 65	85	141	226
Total	1797	2763	4560

USERS OF THE CENTRE BY ORIGIN

Irish Counties	Other Countries
Antrim	184 Africa 6
Armagh	14 Afro-Caribbean 10
Carlow	20 Bosnia 1
Cavan	41 Brazil 5
Clare	151 Chile 1
Cork	608 Dominica 3
Derry	81 England 196
Donegal	92 France 3
Down	38 Germany 6
Dublin	1130 Ghana 2
Fermanagh	28 Hungary 1
Galway	87 India 4
Kerry	94 Iran 2
Kildare	15 Italy 12
Kilkenny	41 Kurdistan 2
Laois	21 Nigeria 3
Leitrim	22 Poland 7
Limerick	125 Scotland 29
Longford	28 Somalia 8
Louth	58 Turkey 3
Mayo	80 West Indies 4
Meath	9 TOTAL 308
Monaghan	52
Offaly	11
Roscommon	48
Sligo	72
Tipperary	58
Tyrone	22
Waterford	75
Westmeath	83
Wexford	20
Wicklow	8

TOTAL CLIENTS 4560

2nd Generation Irish 836

Total of Others 308

Irish (By County) 3416

TOTAL 4560

STANDARDISED INFORMATION SYSTEM (S.I.S)

The Federation of Irish Societies and the Action Group for Irish Youth, in conjunction with CES, (Charities Evaluation Service), facilitated a feasibility study on the establishment of a standardised information system for Irish welfare agencies in Britain.

Although the Centre's existing manual statistical monitoring system did encompass the relevant information required for effective service delivery, the SIS format categorizes in more detail areas of advice, material aid and practical support and caters for the fact that the majority of users avail of more than one service at a time, eg., housing/welfare benefits advice in inter-linked with financial aid through grant applications and debt counselling. This data has enabled us to monitor and evaluate implementation of our Equal Opportunities Policies and to set specific targets for our work.

The fact that a number of Irish welfare agencies are now quantifying core categories of data about their users needs, and experiences, in this country will greatly enhance, through informed lobbying at a local and national level, the prospects of improved statutory service provision to the Irish community in this country.

The sample of data below is from the Centre's pilot study October 1993.

IRISH CLIENTS ONLY LONDON IRISH CENTRE (CAMDEN)

1st VISITS ONLY

Housing Category	Females		Males		Total	
Priv Tenant/Lodger	7	10%	34	16%	41	15%
Local Auth. Tenant	32	44%	29	14%	61	22%
Housing Association	1	1%	12	6%	13	5%
Owner Occupier	1	1%	1	0%	2	1%
Short Life Housing	1	1%	2	1%	3	1%
Hostel/Bed & Breakfast	4	5%	37	18%	41	15%
Caravan/Mobile Home	4	5%	3	1%	7	2%
Tied Accommodation	1	1%	2	1%	3	1%
No Fixed Abode	19	26%	86	41%	105	37%
Other	3	4%	3	1%	6	2%
Total	73		209		282	

Health Category	Female		Male		Total	
Physical Disability	12	35%	27	21%	39	24%
Mental Health Problem	9	26%	34	26%	43	26%
HIV/AIDS	0	0%	2	2%	2	1%
Alcohol Misuse	3	9%	31	24%	34	21%
Drug Misuse	2	6%	19	15%	21	13%
Other Health Problem	8	24%	17	13%	25	15%
Refused to Disclose	18		66		84	
Totals (Excl Refusals)	34		130		164	
		21%		79%		

Type of Harrassment	Female		Males		Total	
Racial Harrassment	8	18%	27	22%	35	21%
Sexual Harrassment	4	9%	4	3%	8	5%
Homophobic Harrassment	0	0%	6	5%	6	4%
Domestic Violence	20	44%	11	9%	31	19%
Police Harrassment	3	7%	29	24%	32	19%
PTA Harrassment	2	4%	8	7%	10	6%
Other Harrassment	8	18%	36	30%	44	27%
Refused to Disclose	21		77		98	
Total (Excl Refusals)	45		121		166	
		27%		73%		



Abbeyfeale Association function at The London Irish Centre. (Photo courtesy of Terry Smith)

CAMPAIGN WORK

At the beginning of 1994, proposed changes to two major pieces of legislation in the fields of D.S.S. and housing — i.e., a habitual residency test of 3 years for claimants of D.S.S., and the scrapping of the duty of councils to find permanent accommodation for homeless people in 'priority need' — had catastrophic implications for thousands of Irish people, both newly arrived and settled migrants.

L.I.C.C.'s response to both these areas of change was immediate. Information was faxed to the Dail's Press Offices and the Irish Embassy. Consultation responses

were sent to the Secretary of State for Social Security and the Home Secretary. And in conjunction with other Irish community groups, through Irish forums facilitated by workers/residents of Camden, Action Group for Irish Youth, (AGIY), and the Federation of Irish Societies, letters of protest against the changes were sent to local and national MPs, MEPs, councillors and church leaders.

Hopefully it can be seen that this campaign has been effective in that, unofficially at least, at this present time, the proposed changes to D.S.S. legislation, in regard to Irish people, have been dropped.



London Wexford Association function at The London Irish Centre. (Photo courtesy of Terry Smith)

MISSING PERSONS REPORT

1992/3 and 1993/4

FINDING THE LOST

The letters and the telephone calls keep coming every day requesting our help in trying to locate a family member who has not been heard from for many a long year.

Brian Duggan, another of our volunteers, has managed our Missing Persons Bureau for the past eight years with amazing success as the figures over the years demonstrate. Brian does not give up easily in his search for the missing person. He pursues every possible avenue. He is overjoyed when he succeeds and is disappointed when he fails.

This service is a strictly confidential service and the rights of the person located are fully protected. They are free to contact their family or not to make contact. Fortunately, most are glad to re-establish the bond of family.

It is important to know that this is an entirely free service whether the person is found or not found. However, we do appreciate donations.

Below are the statistics for 1993.

Results	1992/3	1993/4	Method	1992/3	1993/4
Located	66	52	Located through D.S.S./N.H.S.	36	34
Unsuccessful	52	31	Located through Irish Centre records	15	11
Not accepted	3	3	Located through clergy and garda	8	2
Brought forward to 1994	10	9	Other organisations	7	5
TOTAL	131	95	TOTAL	66	52

It is interesting to note that out of 1,174 cases received since 1985, we have succeeded in locating and re-uniting 467 of these cases, (40% approximately), with their families.

BRIAN DUGGAN

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

The London Irish Centre provides a wide range of social and cultural activities to first and second generation Irish and also to the non-Irish who are interested in Irish culture and hospitality.

We have Céilí every Sunday night which attracts a wide variety of nationalities. Anton Coyle teaches Céilí Dancing each Monday night. This is followed on Tuesday evenings with Set Dancing lessons given by Geoff Holland. Geoff also conducts a Set Dancing session on the first Sunday of every month and from time to time weekend workshops.

The Halpin School of Dancing provides Irish dancing classes for children and young adults. They also hold Feiseanna at the Centre and partake in Feiseanna throughout the Greater London area winning endless trophies and medals.

The Irish language is taught on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings by Siobhan O'Neill to both adults and children.

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann ensures that Irish traditional music is kept alive through the teaching of various Irish musical instruments including the uilleann pipes.



*Readers, writers and celebrities attended the very successful book fair at The London Irish Centre.
(Photo courtesy of Terry Smith)*

WORKPLAN 1993-1994

OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE	TASK	TARGET	RESOURCES	EVALUATION MEASURES	LEAD WORKER
1. HUMAN RESOURCES To facilitate staff's professional development and LICC's organizational development by identification of training needs in order to maximise the skills and potential of all staff, volunteers and management committee members, in line with LICC's aims and objectives.	A. Encourage Management Committee to attend training sessions on Funding/Contract Culture run by VAC, NCVO, AGIY and FIS.	Ongoing	Meeting time once every 3 months.	Feedback/reports to staff, Advisory Committee and Management Committee.	All staff & management.
	B. Staff to attend short training courses on specific and continued learning needs, eg. update on welfare benefits.	Ongoing	Apply for necessary funding through CENTEC.	Degree of utilization of knowledge by staff in their practical day to day advice work with users. Regular supervision/appraisals of staff by Co-ordinator.	All staff.
	C. Facilitate tailor made courses for staff to develop/improve service delivery.	Dec '94	Room space. Funding from Camden Local Authority.		
	D. Organise advanced First Aid training for all staff by Bloomsbury Health Authority in exchange for facilitating general nurse placements.	Sep '94	Meeting time one day a week with nurses, and once a month with Health Authority over three months.	Ongoing, review meetings with Health authority.	All staff.
	E. Organise attendance of one year part-time Counselling Skills course by all Advice staff.	Sep '94	Funding from Camden Local Authority.	Tutor supervision/assessments/certified examination.	All staff.
OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE	TASK	TARGET	RESOURCES	EVALUATION MEASURES	LEAD WORKER
2. Encourage the views of users on how to further improve service delivery of the Centre and representation of users on Management Committees.	A. Organise user involvement in the continuous development of policy/practice of the Centre through Open/Review Days.	Nov '94	7 training days for CM, 2 months to plan and facilitate 6 workshops with a view to ongoing programme of workshops.	Evaluation forms for users at the end of each workshop.	CM
	B. Facilitate user group meetings in order that user representation feed into regular team meetings, Centre Review Days, Management Committee and Welfare Advisory Committee meetings.	Sep '94	Room once a month for user group meetings.	User feedback on service delivery to team/Management Committee meetings.	All staff & management.
	C. Improve the structure of users' complaints procedure.	Sep '94		User feedback at Centre Review days.	All staff & Management.
3. INTERNAL POLICY WORK To further professionalize and update all employment policies and equal opportunities policies at the Centre.	A. Initiate Policy Sub-Group within Welfare Advisory Committee to investigate, revise and redraft all employment policies at the Centre.	Jul '94	Legal/professional expertise on Welfare Advisory Committee.	Alignment with employment/race/sex discrimination law.	CM + Policy Sub-Group of Welfare Advisory Committee.

OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE	TASK	TARGET	RESOURCES	EVALUATION MEASURES	LEAD WORKER
4. DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES	A. Expand on services of free Legal Advice Surgery, at present once a week at the Centre.	Mar '95	Legal/professional advice on Welfare Advisory Committee.	Client feedback maintained and monitored on case sheets.	CM and Welfare Advisory Committee.
	B. Rent a room at Centre to an external organisation to fund part time post of Social Advice Worker.	Dec '94	Room space to let out.		CM and Welfare Advisory Committee.
	C. Organise rehabilitative trip to Ireland for vulnerable long-term migrants, in conjunction with Arlington House, through Aisling.	Sep '94	Fund raising Appeal to various sources.	Success of trip and user feedback.	CM, DR & JG.
	D. Apply to Trusts for funding of 2 salaried posts:- (I) Outreach worker to work specifically with homeless families, Travellers, women fleeing domestic violence — in temporary accommodation, bed and breakfast, hostels, etc. (II) Social Advice Worker based at the Centre to provide advice/information/advocacy on housing options/welfare rights to all sections of the Irish community.	Apr '95		Success of application in meeting criteria.	CM + Welfare Advisory Committee + MC.
	E. Apply for funding from Camden and Islington Health Authorities for two salaried posts of Alcohol Worker and Mental Health Worker/Counsellor to work with Irish users at the Centre.	Apr '95		Success of application.	CM, WAC & MC.
	F. Initiation of a children's play scheme based at the Centre Camden Local Authority.	Sep '94	Room space, funding from	Parent/child user feedback.	CM, WAC MC.
	G. Development of a Children's room at the Centre to facilitate a safe environment for women and children users.	Dec '94	Room space funding from a Trust.	Feedback from user groups to team meetings, WAC and MC meetings.	CM, WAC & MC.
	H. Apply to Camden Local Authority for funding of salaried of part time Creche Worker specifically for Travelling children.	June '95	Room space.	Success of application.	CM, WAC & MC.
	I. Negotiate contract with Camden Social Services to provide alcohol rehabilitative assessments for users.	Apr '95	5 days training for staff.	Matching Local Authority criteria and maintaining specification for an agreed contract.	All staff, WAC & MC.
	J. Initiate an Employment Worker secondment for the Centre through Camden Careers Service.	Apr '95	Room space. Use of information systems.	User feedback through team representations at team meetings, WAC and MC meetings and statistics on users.	CM, WAC & MC.
	K. Highlighting the needs of the Irish community in all Local Authority plans through active participation at consultation meetings.	Ongoing	Meeting time for drafting reports.	Inclusion of an Irish dimension to Local Authority plans.	All staff.
5. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ADVANCEMENT Implement statistical database system for input on users, areas of welfare advice sought, etc.	A. Facilitate integrated learning skills training, eg., on computer literacy, for all staff.	Ongoing	Computer hardware and software.	Monthly monitoring of statistics. Reports on these to WAC and MC by CM. Success of statistical reports/applications for funding, eg., from Local Authorities	All staff

REFERRAL NETWORKED AGENCIES

GROUPS AND ORGANISATIONS WE FREQUENTLY WORK WITH

Action Group for Irish Youth
Alone in London
An Teach — Irish Housing Association
Arlington Day Centre
Arlington Hostels
Austin House
Basement Youth Project
Brent Irish Advisory Service
Camden Emergency Hostels
Camden H.P.U.
Camden Mental Health Outreach Team — “Focus”
Capital Housing
Cara — Irish Housing Association
Centrepoint
Circle 33 — Housing Association
Conway House
Council of Irish Counties Association
Cricklewood Homeless Concern
De Paul Trust
Employers — Private Employers, Employment Agencies, etc.
Family Welfare Association
Federation of Irish Societies
Haringey Irish Community Care Centre
Haringey Irish Cultural and Community Care Centre
Innisfree — Irish Housing Association
Irish Embassy
Irish Chaplaincy in Britain
Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas
Irish in Greenwich Project
Irish Support and Advice Centre, Hammersmith

John Kirk Centre
Kerry Association Hostel — Homeline
Kilburn Irish Youth Project
Lansdowne Centre
Lawrie Park Hostel
Lewisham Irish Centre
London Irish Women's Centre
Liaison Programme with local Divisional Police, Child Protection Team, and Probation Service
Liaison Programme with Travellers Groups and Agencies in Ireland
London Connection
New Horizon
New to London
Passage Day Centre
Piccadilly Advice Centre
Portobello Project
Positively Irish Action on AIDS
Prison liaison Programme
Private Landlords
Providence Row
Riverpoint
Roger Casement Irish Centre
Rugby House Project
Safe Start Foundation
St. Louise's Hostel
St. Mungo's Hostels
St. Vincent de Paul
Threshold Housing Advice Centre
YMCA

We also liaise with a number of organisations throughout Ireland, such as:

Emigrant Advice Centres
Evanus Refuge — Dublin
FAS — National training and Employment Authority
Government Departments

Haven House Women's and Children's Hostel — Dublin
Kerry Emigrant Support Group
St. Vincent de Paul, Ireland
Other Various Hostels

RETURN TO IRELAND PROJECT 1994

ARLINGTON HOUSE/LONDON IRISH CENTRE — AISLING

The Aisling Committee was formed in April 1994 to provide an annual Irish holiday for longterm Irish emigrants to Britain.

The committee consists of a joint working team drawn from **Arlington House Housing Association and the London Irish Centre**.

Arlington House provides living accommodation for 389 men, 42% of whom are Irish. In addition to providing a housing management and support service, staff provide a health care service, resettlement service, dependancy service, mental health service and specialised care for the elderly. An Irish Support Worker ensures that the needs of Irish residents are met in a culturally-sensitive way.

The London Irish Centre is the leading providers of welfare advice and advocacy for Irish people in London. practical assistance is offered with finding accommodation, accessing welfare benefit entitlement and health services, and advice and support given in matters relating to housing, employment, resettlement, domestic violence, discriminations, mental ill-health, drug/alcohol abuse, and repatriation. The Centre also takes an active role in campaigning for better housing and social service provision for the Irish community in Britain and seeks to provide real information about the emigrant's experience both here and in Ireland.

Irish Emigration to Britain

Irish people have been emigrating on a large scale to Britain since the Famine in 1847. The economic, demographic and social "push" factors of Irish Emigration have led to an emigration ethos — young people are now pressured into seeking their fortune outside of Ireland and those left behind no longer have a cohesive peer group.

While most emigrants from Ireland have been able to successfully establish themselves in London, there are many for whom the experience has been characterised by **isolation, poverty, discrimination, homelessness, alcohol addiction, disability and mental ill-health**. Many of the older men and women have found themselves alone and homeless after many years of labouring at casual jobs. (Irish casual and seasonal labour has filled gaps in Britain's economy when it is booming and is easily disposed of in recession).

There is often embarrassment and shame when emigrants haven't "made-it" and they feel unable to admit this "failure" to family and friends in Ireland, where traditionally there are unrealistic expectations made of the emigrant.

Many Irish emigrants wish to return to Ireland to spend their final years away from the hardship they have found themselves encountering in London. others wish to start afresh and make positive attempts to throw off the difficulties which the emigrant life has offered. Some simply wish to visit the country of their birth again and reaffirm their own sense of identity.

What can a holiday to Ireland achieve then?

Aims:

(1) on the simplest level the Committee hopes to provide a **rehabilitative** break in Ireland for the most vulnerable members of our community. It is hoped that participants will be able to offer each other **support, friendship and comfort** and it will be an opportunity for the isolated to interact once more with their own community. Undoubtedly, it will also allow a sizeable number to realise their dream of seeing their **homeland** again.

(2) Another important aim of the project is to establish a mechanism by which those who wish to make Ireland their permanent home again can test the water and dismiss some of the fears which may prohibit them from giving serious consideration to their desire. It is agreed that the Committee will take responsibility, after the holiday, for assisting those who decide to **return for good**, to do so.

(3) In previous ventures of this kind, participants who were experiencing **problems associated with hardship**, such as alcohol-abuse, appeared to gain better insight into their difficulties and were better placed to address the problem. In relation to this, Arlington House and the London Irish Centre are able to offer appropriate support and care-package for those who require it.

The Aisling Project hopes to reach the most vulnerable of our community in London — the longterm emigrant, homeless people, the isolated and provide respite from the harsh realities of emigration.