

London Irish Women's Centre



Annual Report 1994

Earlamh: Máire Mhic Róibín, Uachtarán na hEireann
Patron: M. Robinson, President of Ireland

59 Stoke Newington Church Street, London N16 0AR
Tel: 071 249 7318

MANAGEMENT REPORT

The London Irish Womens Centre is a feminist collective. We trace our roots back to the exclusion of womens issues within the Irish community in London and the need for an independent base from which Irish women could begin to identify and address the issues which touch our lives. Since the Centre opened in 1986, Irish women have had a place to go to where we can discuss, learn, celebrate, support, plan or just meet each other, whether in small workshops or in our hundreds.

We have had 5 major conferences, we have worked with Irish carers, children, young women, travellers, homeless, we have helped to set up many groups where Irish women could work together. Our culture has always been forefront in our activities and we have organised many cultural events and facilitated the exploration of our specific Irish women's culture.

Not only have we been finding our voices as Irish women, but we have been directing those voices towards the agencies and service-providers who have failed us so systematically in the past. The LIWC has been directly responsible for vital ground breaking research which can and has been used to change policies which ignore our needs. We have tackled the major problem of homelessness among Irish women and have reached out to those with in need. We have offered a unique service, over the years the workers at the LIWC have helped thousands of Irish women on a one to one basis, dealing with topics which range from straight forward information provision to supporting women through the trauma of domestic violence, to giving welfare and housing advice and offering counselling on an individual basis. In the present climate, where cutbacks in social welfare and healthcare have combined with lack of jobs to create a situation of escalating deprivation, the LIWC sees increasing numbers of women in need.

As Irish women and as feminists we have all too often been appalled at cases of injustice and prejudice and we have reacted in anger and lent our voices to those raised in protest. While we have worked closely with Irish community groups and agencies, we have been constant in our insistence that other Irish groups recognise the specific needs of Irish women. Our strong committment to equal opportunities comes from our recognition that many Irish women face multiple disadvantage and discrimination, Irish lesbians, Irish women with disabilities, Irish women born here, Irish Travellers, young Irish women, older Irish women, black Irish women, working class Irish women, we are keen to increase the representation of these disadvantaged groups on our Workforce and Management Committee.

We are very fortunate to have a group of skilled and experienced staff who display a level of committment without which the LIWC would not be able to provide its consistently high level of service to Irish women. The Management Committee would like to take this opportunity to thank the workers for the valuable contribution they have made to Irish women and for the professional standards they have set and maintained, often under tremendous pressure. ****

The role of the Management Committee is also vital to the running on the centre. Collective decision making has been a hallmark of feminism, and one which we hold dear at the LIWC. The Committee is elected by the membership of the centre at the Annual General Meeting and we are responsible to that membership. The debates and resolutions discussed at Irish Women's Conferences form the basis of our policies and practices. We aim to draw the membership of the Management Committee from all sections of our community, we are keen that all voices should be represented, and diverse opinions aired, so that the decisions we arrive at are based on a deep understanding of the issues involved. We very much value not only the work we do but the basis on which we do it.

Each woman on the Management Committee brings her own personal qualities so that the richness and diversity of the Committee changes as people come and go over the years. We learn from each other and develop our skills and abilities through sharing responsibilities and ideas.

Being a member of the Management of the LIWC involves a commitment, not only in terms of taking the responsibility of being employers seriously, and in conducting the practical business necessary to keep the centre running but in terms of a belief in the aims and objectives of the centre. We can never be complacent about what we have achieved and we need never be limited in our vision of the future. The Committee comes from the community it works for and we are always ready to listen to that community and to welcome new members who are willing to join us.

*** We take this opportunity to give thanks to Mary Crowe, Fundraiser/administrator who left us in January this year. Mary, who had been with the centre for more than 3 years had left an enormous contribution to the centre and was thoroughly committed to issues concerning Irish women. We would also like to extend a warm welcome to our 'new' worker to the staff team - Maggie O'Keefe as Information/Reception worker, who joined the centre in October last year.

Management Committee. June 1994

WHY LONDON NEEDS AN IRISH WOMEN'S CENTRE

CENSUS FIGURES FROM 1991 show 136,887 Irish-born women living in London. This represents an increase of 8.6% from the previous census in 1981. The ratio of women to men remains exactly the same as in 1981 - 1148 women per 1000 men (or 53.4% of the total Irish-born population). This figure is most likely an underestimation of the real total, since Irish people have not to date had a separate listing in the census.

If the numbers of Irish women are to be accurately estimated we need to include those born in Britain. This can be obtained by multiplying the Irish-born total by 2.5, giving us a total of approximately 350,000. This means that Irish women constitute a very significant proportion of London's population.

The greatest increases in population since 1981 have occurred in the 20 - 24 age group (an overall increase of 81.5%), and in older women (an increase of 22.1%). The 0-14 age group has increased by 105.6%. (see Roots & Realities 1993).

The population of Irish women spreads across both Inner and Outer London Boroughs - the boroughs with the highest populations being Brent, Islington, Hammersmith & Fulham, Camden, Ealing, Westminster, Haringey and Harrow, with boroughs Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth showing sharp population increases as well.

IN HOUSING, Irish women have moved into owner-occupation during the 1980's but the overall population is still well below the UK-born white population (44% compared to 59%). More Irish-born women are in local authority owned housing (29% compared to 23% of the overall population). Irish-born women are still very much over-represented in privately-rented housing (17% compared to 12% of the overall population). Within the measured 'quality of housing' indices, Irish women fared worse than any other group looked at - 'they are particularly disadvantaged by a lack of privacy and independently controlled accommodation'. (Roots & Realities 1993). (Census figures deal with Irish-born only).

IN EMPLOYMENT, the changes during the 1980's showed that numbers of Irish-born women increased in administrative and office - white collar services-work (10% increase) and in the managerial categories (4% increase), although both Irish-born and Afro-Caribbean women are still below the proportions of white-UK-born women in these categories.

The parallel development in employment patterns shows a decrease of Irish-born women in personal services which includes catering and cleaning jobs. Although Irish women are still well above average in this 'unskilled' manual labour sector, the difference with white-UK born women has been reduced.

In professional and related work the proportion of Irish women remains high and unchanged during the 1980's. Nursing accounts for the majority of this group although it also includes teachers and other professionally qualified people.

The need for an independent agency for women within the Irish community in London is self-evident given the statistics outlined above. The need is also evident from the continuing demand on services and the sheer variety of intense casework and counselling support that the centre is called on to provide.

Traditionally the needs of Irish women have been marginalised and overlooked both within and outside the Irish community. Irish women's conferences have clearly identified that on coming to Britain, Irish women face a different set of experiences and circumstances than do their male counterparts. The avenues to social networks in particular are not established for women. Their existence goes largely unrecognised within a community within which the dominant portrayal of the Irish immigrant is male identified.

Hence, the establishment of the centre as an initiative from Irish women who had begun to actively organise to reclaim a woman's voice in community affairs. Initial financial support came from the Greater London Council, and the centre employed its first worker in 1983. In 1986 it moved to a proper drop-in premises and with additional staff took on the task of providing a comprehensive welfare and housing advice support service.

One of the essential functions of the centre, through its services, is to assist women in counteracting the alienation and isolation of the immigrant experience - including that of those born of Irish parents here. This experience may be very different for the various minority groups within the community. Documentation undertaken during the 1980's, shows that this is indeed the case. For instance, the personal testimonies in 'Across The Water; Irish Women's Lives in Britain' illustrate the various complexions of the experience.

The centre's casework also shows the dimensions that can often surround even one individual life situation. Commitment, knowledge and sensitivity are required to adequately respond to differing needs. This is achieved in many ways. The centre is a safe environment for women. Our work empowers women to access available networks, services and other infrastructures including housing and health. We distribute information to the mainstream community about Irish women which facilitates an awareness of their needs. In our work we aim to dispel the stereotypes and distorted myths about Irish women both within and without our own community. We provide outreach and support services and we involve as wide a range of women as possible in the development of the centre. Adequate training for staff, management and volunteers at the centre are crucial to achieve this aim.

We hope that your understanding of the information in this report helps you to know why it is so important that a centre such as this, which offers a unique service, exists. We hope it will give you a flavour of the work we do on a day to day basis and inspire you to support our work both in principle, and in practical ways.

WHO we are, WHAT we do, WHY we do it and HOW we do it - these are the questions addressed here.

WHAT IS THE LONDON IRISH WOMEN'S CENTRE?

The centre is a voluntary organisation based in North East London serving all of Greater London's 33 boroughs and aiming to meet the needs of approximately 300,000 Irish women. We are based in a terraced two storey building with a shop front. On the ground floor is a reception area, a Kitchen area, creche and disabled toilet. Upstairs is office space, a counselling and meeting room and a private interview room. The centre has two fulltime and three part-time workers to cover all aspects of the centre's work including the financial, managerial and administrative duties.

The centre is a company limited by guarantee with a management committee which meets with staff on a monthly basis. The Annual General Meeting of the centre elects a new management committee for which any Irish woman who is a member of the centre is entitled to stand for election. The centre's core funding body is The London Boroughs Grants Scheme. Other funds are raised from a variety of public and private sources.

SERVICES PROVIDED

1. HOUSING AND WELFARE RIGHTS FOR IRISH WOMEN WITH SPECIAL PROVISIONS CURRENTLY FOR YOUNG WOMEN AND TRAVELLERS.
2. DROP-IN SESSIONS FOR WOMEN NEEDING EMERGENCY ADVICE, INFORMATION OR PRACTICAL HELP.
3. A RANGE OF SERVICES TO YOUNG WOMEN INCLUDING AN OUTREACH GROUP TARGETING YOUNG SINGLE HOMELESS WOMEN.
4. A COUNSELLING SERVICE WHICH PRIORITISES YOUNG WOMEN
5. A RANGE OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN INCLUDING ACTIVITY DAYS AND A CRECHE FOR EVENTS AT THE CENTRE.
6. REGULAR INFORMATION SESSIONS AND OPEN MEETINGS WITH SPEAKERS ON ISSUES OF RELEVANCE TO IRISH WOMEN.
7. OUTREACH WORK WITH TRAVELLERS AND TRAVELLERS GROUPS WHICH INCLUDES SITE VISITS.
8. THE CENTRE REPRESENTS THE NEEDS OF IRISH WOMEN AT A VARIETY OF LEVELS FROM STEERING GROUPS TO CONFERENCES.
9. THE CENTRE PROVIDES A MEETING PLACE AND FOCAL POINT FOR IRISH WOMEN WHO WISH TO MEET AND ORGANISE SUPPORT NETWORKS TOGETHER.

HOUSING & WELFARE RIGHTS

The Housing & Welfare Rights service focuses on 2 main areas of work

- providing practical advice & assistance to women,
- information and advocacy work.

Advice & Assistance.

The overwhelming majority of enquiries to the LIWC are housing & welfare related - 77% of the total. In addition, approximately 70 referrals are dealt with each month involving practical support for clients.

The Centre holds regular and emergency housing/welfare advice sessions for women under/over 30 years. Casework is also carried out by telephone and by correspondence. This is particularly important for women with disabilities or for those who live in outer London Boroughs and who need us to challenge the local housing department on their behalf or to pressurise the DSS into assessing their benefits more speedily.

Additional visits are arranged to Irish women who live on Travellers sites and whose childcare & family commitments make journeying to the LIWC and other Agencies difficult.

**** 24 yr old Margaret needed the Centre's help because she was homeless. She had already spent 3 years moving from one unauthorised travellers site to another with her young daughter. The latter suffered from a serious kidney disorder. Margaret was offered temporary rehousing from the Council but she could not accept this. She had already been devastated by the sudden death of her husband and wanted to be near to relatives and friends in her grief. The LIWC continues to put pressure on the Local Authority to offer her a pitch on a permanent site.****

Homelessness & bad housing present the biggest problems amongst Irish women using the LIWC. Cutbacks in Local Authority spending have resulted in a tighter interpretation of the homelessness legislation, and this has created huge problems for homeless families and single homeless women who are continually denied help when they are clearly in desperate need.

Travellers are especially vulnerable to homelessness (30% of travellers in London have no legal stopping place), but there are also large numbers of "hidden homeless" women who come to the attention of the Centre.

Many of our clients have put up with harassment, disrepair and overcrowding for years without complaining to the Statutory Authorities. The majority of these women are extremely isolated. Many Irish women are forced to remain in destructive and sometimes dangerous relationships as a consequence of limited housing options. Last year over one third of the housing & welfare referrals dealt with by the Centre were domestic violence related.

**** 47 yr old Peggy came to the centre for help after being beaten and bullied by her husband for 20 years. She decided to leave him after he had broken her nose and hospitalised her. The LIWC assisted her in finding alternative council accommodation and in getting a community care grant to set up her new home. She returned to the Centre for help 6 months later because her husband had traced her to her new home and was harrasing the family.***

The one thing all the LIWC's clients have in common - whatever their individual circumstances - is a lack of power. The housing market in London is essentially closed to people who do not have the financial means to secure decent accommodation for themselves. There is next to nothing available for people who are unemployed or poorly paid. This has been accentuated by the virtual freeze on Council house building which has developed over the past 15 years.

For Irish women, this housing crisis is compounded by their low paid position within the housing market, by anti-Irish discrimination and by a lack of information about rights and services. The newly arrived emigrants who approach the LIWC cannot afford to pay the astronomical rents demanded by the private rented sector, while those women who have spent years working in low paid jobs such as nursing and catering remain trapped in slum housing conditions.

*** Breda had been managing a pub with her partner for 4 years and they had invested an enormous amount of time and energy into furnishing and decorating their home. The couple were taken by complete surprise when the Brewery suddenly increased their rent from £12,650 to £31,270 per year. They were unable to renew their license and were devastated when their Local Authority refused to offer them alternative accommodation on the grounds that they were not in "priority need". ***

The housing crisis has not simply created an immense shortage of decent affordable housing. It has also weakened the political & legal power of tenants in both the private and public sectors. This has in turn drastically reduced the number of options available to Irish women in housing need.

The housing crisis has impacted in all directions. Those women who are living in overcrowded and unfit rented housing are forced to remain there, while those who have nowhere to live continue to experience one nightmare after another - in temporary accommodation, in squats, in hostels, on friends floors and on the street itself.

*** 39 year old Fionnuala became homeless because her temporary hostel accommodation became unsafe for her to remain in. She had settled into her home happily and had started a vocational course at a nearby college, when another resident in the hostel began to verbally abuse her. The latter had discovered that Fionnuala was a lesbian and began to intimidate and threaten her. When Fionnuala came to the Centre for assistance, she was not only in housing need, but also suffering from severe depression.***

Information & Issue-related work.

The role of the LIWC has been to give practical help to Irish women in obtaining suitable accomodation, but also to publicise the need for additional resources to be directed towards the community as a whole.

At present, Irish women suffer because in addition to the national housing shortage, there is also a lack of priority given to women's housing generally. In London, there are only 3,622 hostel places designated for women in comparison with 22,424 places for men. But Irish women are also disadvantaged by the fact that most Local Authorities and Housing Associations do not include the Irish as a separate ethnic minority category in their equality targetting programmes and in their allocation of resources.

The Centre continues to press for additional referral & nomination rights, but demand far exceeds the supply, and the limited housing that is available is often completely inappropriate. Very few places exist for heterosexual or lesbian couples to live together for example. There is practically no self contained housing or accomodation adapted for women with disabilities.

Refuge spaces are often unsuited to the social and cultural needs of Irish women who are escaping domestic violence. For this reason the LIWC has been very vocal in publicising the need for refuges to be established specifically for Irish women and is a active member of Solas Anois which is seeking to realise this objective.

The LIWC has also attempted to empower Irish women through the dissemination of information. This has included giving speeches and leading workshops at Housing Conferences. Several Information Sessions have been held at the Centre which have addressed the most pressing problems identified in the Housing & Welfare service.

These have included Information Sessions on Domestic Violence, Child Support Agency & Council Tax, Legislative attacks against the reproductive rights of lesbians, and Housing & Welfare Options for women returning to Ireland. The latter was held on two days running at the Centre with representatives from the Department of Environment & Social Welfare in attendance.

The past year has also seen the launch of a new Housing Booklet for Single homeless Irish women and private tenants. This was produced by the LIWC in conjunction with the Irish Womens Housing Action Group. The latter was set up at an Irish Womens Conference in 1988 and continues to be co-ordinated by the LIWC.

The booklet was the third in a series of information pamphlets. The first, entitled "What to do if you are homeless" had concentrated on the needs of homeless Irish families and those eligible for housing under Part 3 of the Housing Act 85. The second had informed women who could not afford to pay the Poll Tax of their rights. The most recent booklet funded by DION addressed the needs of the non priority homeless and those dependent upon the private rented sector for housing.

"INFORMATION FOR THE SINGLE HOMELESS AND PRIVATE TENANTS" received very positive coverage in the media in this country and in Ireland. Demand remains high and the booklet provides an invaluable guide to homeless Irish women and men who are attempting to negotiate their way through the housing market. It was in recognition of this demand that DION made additional funding available this year to reprint further copies.

Finally, the Centre has represented the needs of the most vulnerable sections of the Irish community in its representations to policy makers. Several written submissions have been made to Ministers over the past year, including the LIWC's objections to the Governments proposals to review the Caravan Sites Act 1968 and its current review of the Homelessness legislation. Both sets of proposals will have disastrous effects upon the travelling community and homeless people and the LIWC will continue to support these groups in their efforts to inform government policy.

Welfare Problems

The LIWC carries a very large and varied welfare caseload at all times. Women come to the Centre with debt related problems, and request our help with employment, welfare benefits and pensions issues. We give advice to women who require information on abortion, contraception and divorce or separation. There is also a counselling service and help with health related issues, including HIV and AIDS.

The low waged economy aligned with unemployment have created horrendous problems for thousands of people in this country. But Irish women are already concentrated amongst the lowest paid workers and the current recession has hit those areas of the economy upon which Irish women have traditionally relied, eg catering, the caring professions, office work.

Not surprisingly, debt related problems have dominated the work at the Centre particularly amongst elderly and disabled Irish women. The LIWC have encouraged women to take up benefits to which they are legally entitled, but which are frequently left unclaimed due to ignorance or pride. We have assisted women in making applications to the Social Fund and for Disability Living Allowance. We have also had to deal with many complicated enquiries that have arisen as a consequence of the introduction of the Child Support Act.

Perhaps it is a sign of the times that the LIWC has been forced to continue its reliance on the help of Charities in the past year. In particular we have received help from the Welfare Association for which we are greatly indebted.

Moving advice for single, homeless women: Living in Britain is not a bed of roses

HERE is invaluable, important advice for many single, homeless Irish women thinking of coming over to the great metropolis: do some homework before you leave, set aside grand and optimistic assumptions, and get your hands on a priceless new booklet released yesterday by the London Irish Women's Centre.

LONDON
LETTER

FRANK MILLAR



YOUTH WORK

The centre recognises the particular needs of young Irish women in London and targets approximately 25% of its services towards this group. The service is split between face to face work and outreach and research. The majority of enquiries coming from young women using the centre are housing related. A substantial number of these will be homeless and in immediate need of housing. The remainder are living in unsuitable accommodation and this can be as a result of violence, harassment or chronic disrepair. All of these women are desperately seeking safe and secure housing that is reasonably priced. The private rented sector with its insecure tenancies and high rents is not an option even those within relatively "good incomes" can consider..

Apart from homelessness (which is by far the greatest problem) young Irish women coming to the centre will have a variety of different needs. These cover areas such as employment, training, childcare, health, contraception, abortion, sexuality, welfare benefits etc. As the majority of young women using the service will be new to London they may also be experiencing culture shock. Many will speak about feeling overwhelmed and intimidated. They will also express doubts about their rights to benefits, housing, education etc. Even seemingly simple tasks such as registering with a GP can be difficult if you are new to London. All these issues are taken into consideration by the centre when working with young women and the service is firmly pitched at their needs.

The centre also works with large numbers of young single mothers. Again, a lot of these will be newly arrived and living in temporary accommodation such as hostels and B & Bs. They will have left Ireland for various reasons with domestic violence accounting for approximately a third of those given. Like a lot of single parents they are struggling to bring up their children on benefits. Young Irish mothers do however face additional problems. Migration has meant that they and their children are dislocated from the extended family and cannot avail of the support it has to offer. They are also trying to bring up their children in a culture that is alien to their own. It was for this reason that the centre decided to set up a creche provision here at the centre for young mothers. It operates two days a week and is funded by BBC Children in Need. The money raised covers 2 part-time creche workers salaries and has enabled us to buy much needed toys and equipment. The service provides temporary respite from the constant stresses and strains these families are under. It also provides a space where children can experience a positive image of Irish culture and mix with other Irish children. Women using the service have cited these as their main reasons for attending.

Isolation, or the risk of becoming isolated, can also be a factor in a lot of these young women's lives. In recognition of this the centre in conjunction with the Kilburn Irish Youth Project, runs a social group for Young Irish women in the evenings. It has been running for almost 3 years now and receives its main funding from the Irish Youth Foundation. It was set up in response to a need both organisations had identified from their work with young women. Up until 3 years ago there was no provision at night time that catered for the needs of this group from its

inception the group has proved extremely popular. Its main aim is to provide a safe place where young Irish women can meet and make friends. It also provides its users with access to informal advice on housing, benefits, education etc. The group has a regular programme of activities which is decided by both users and workers. It includes both educational and social type events. Some of the areas covered in the past have including workshops on sexual health, alcohol and drug awareness training, assertiveness training, careers advice. Our social trips (which happen approx once a month) includes things like visiting the cinema and theatre.

Most of the women who use the group are newly arrived and under 25. The majority are unemployed or are in low paid employment. Most cite loneliness and isolation as their main motive for joining. The group provides these women with an opportunity to alleviate this isolation. By providing access to a range of information that health and education it also helps increases their quality of life in London. Both organisations involved in this project feel that the need for such a group is undisputed and would like to see it continue for as long as there is a demand.

The centre is constantly in the process of updating its information on the needs and movements of young Irish women in London. Based on information contained in the 1991 census the centre became aware of a massive increase in the numbers of Irish women between the ages of 20 and 24 living in the borough of Harrow. Since the 1981 census there number had increased by 400% bringing their total to almost five and half thousand. It was for this reason that the centre, in conjunction with Cara Irish Housing Association, decided to run an open day for Irish women in the borough. Here they were able to gain access to a range of advice which included housing, benefits, health, nutrition, social groups, etc. Both organisations were concerned about the risk of isolation these women faced given that there was a distinct lack of Irish agencies or generalist agencies working with young people in the borough.

Other Outer London boroughs such as Ealing and Barnet have also shown marked increases in the number of Irish women living there and the centre is planning to target these areas in the near future.

COUNSELLING SUPPORT SERVICE

The basis of the counselling service at the centre is to offer women who are in emotional or mental distress, a safe and supportive environment in which to explore and clarify difficulties in their lives in the present. In the safety of a counselling relationship, a client can begin to look at her life situation and how she can access her resources to heal and empower herself.

The centre takes referrals mainly but not exclusively from the housing, welfare and youth workers at the centre. In this way the counselling works very well within the framework of the centre as a front-line service. Referrals come from a variety of other sources too - self referral, social services, youth services and voluntary agencies.

Research in recent years has highlighted the alarmingly high rate of psychiatric admission for Irish women. This shows Irish-born women having twice the rate of admission for depression as Irish men and 2.5 times the rate for English-born women. We also have the highest rate of admission of all groups for every diagnosis except schizophrenia (in this Irish-born women are exceeded by Afro-Caribbean people) and for alcohol abuse (in this we are exceeded by Irish-born men). These figures speak for themselves in terms of the need for comprehensive counselling services for Irish women. In this respect the provision offered by the Centre touches only the tip of the iceberg.

Women come to the counselling service with multi-farious needs. Some need assistance and support with problem-solving skills eg development of communication or assertiveness skills. Other problems include loneliness and isolation, family breakdown, domestic violence, child sexual abuse, rape, identity counselling, bereavement, HIV/AIDS and relationship crisis. Some women need long term support and counselling. Others will simply need a period of feeling supported during a difficult crisis in their lives.

Due to lack of resources the counselling offered is short-term. Demand is high and it is clear that the current 8 hours per week allocated to this is not enough. The centre needs to expand this area of work. In all cases we will try to find follow on counselling at the clients request. In this respect the centre links with many agencies and health services in order to make counselling as available as possible to Irish women.

The service was developed in 1989 as a way of responding to the need for a cultural and gender sensitive provision. Most of our clients come to the centre for counselling because they feel more relaxed with an Irish counsellor who is also female. Many state they choose the centre's counselling service because they are not frightened of meeting with prejudicial attitudes. We think this is crucial, as trust is a key element within the counselling relationship and a lack of trust can be a barrier to progress within the counselling tasks.

INFORMATION WORK AT THE CENTRE

The centre receives a regular stream of calls each week from individuals and organisations looking for information on resources and services in their area to suit their particular need. To meet this need we have a comprehensive resource information system on a wide range of areas - campaigns, bookshops, prisoners welfare, health and counselling services, women's centres and organisations and activities. Irish women often find that mainstream services do not always suit their cultural or information needs, or that they assume heterosexism, ableism, or sexism. We aim to have information that caters for those who experience multiple discrimination in society, eg travellers, single parents, lesbians, women with disabilities. We are currently updating and computerising our information system to facilitate easier access and retrieval.

Part of this includes updating our RESEARCH LIBRARY. We hold a library of research material gathered over the years which covers a range of topics including art, culture, civil liberties, equal opportunities, racism, heterosexism, mental health, homelessness, migration, suffrage, travellers, history, current affairs. These are available for women who wish to browse through or use for research at their own leisure.

Information work is crucial to represent the interests of Irish women at the 'second-tier' level. The centre participates in inter-agency bodies and forums eg Solas - Irish women's refuge Forum, Irish Youth Forum, Camden Irish Forum. During the past year we represented the needs of Irish women at many meetings and conferences, leading workshops, giving talks and presenting data and statistics at many conferences and seminars. Networking with and linking to other agencies both Irish and non-Irish, is a vital part of our work. This relationship of 'interdependency', whilst retaining our own autonomy and character as an organisation, plays an important role in increasing our effectiveness to address the needs of our client group. Some seminars and conferences which the centre addressed include;

CARA Irish Housing Association conference on single homelessness

Inisfree conference on housing and mental health

BIAS conference on housing and mental health

Southwark Irish Women's Conference

Lambeth Irish Advisory Forum

Cairde Irish Lesbian Group

Irish Youth Forum

Birmingham Irish Conference

Birmingham Irish Women's Group

Museum of London (Inter-cultural event)

Nottingham Irish housing group

Regular INFORMATION SEMINARS on a range of topics are a feature of the centre's aim to empower women in the community. During the past year seminars taking place included;

- * Domestic Violence
- * Legislative Attacks on the Reproductive Rights of Lesbians
- * Council Tax
- * Housing and Welfare Options for women returning to Ireland (2 sessions)
- * Child Support Act

Forthcoming seminars in the pipeline include information seminars in Outer London boroughs targeting younger women, The Criminal Justice Bill and Homelessness legislation.

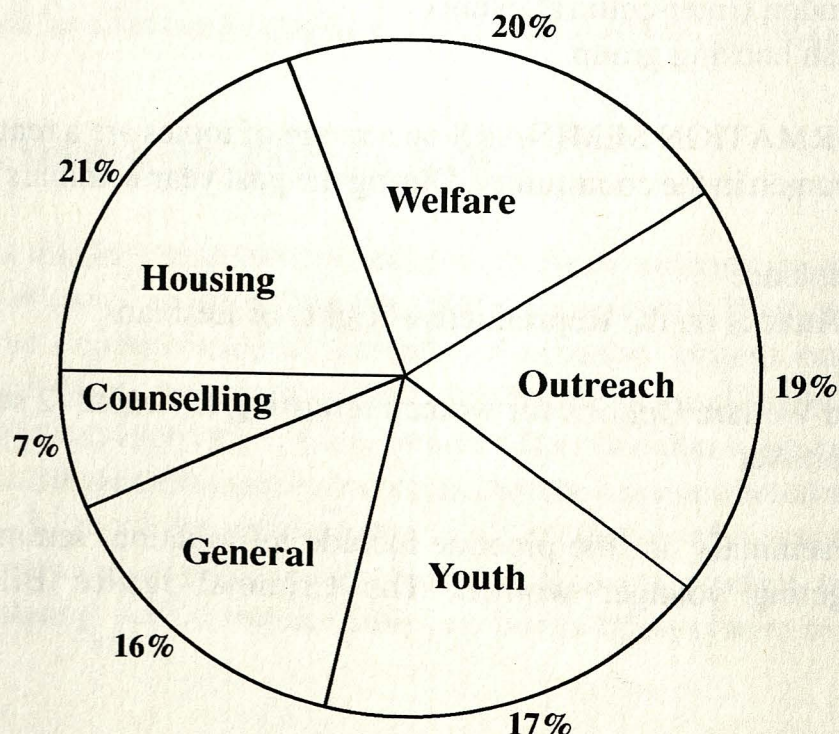
HOW DO WE KNOW WE ARE SUCCESSFUL?

The centre is concerned that it's services are flexible and accessible and meet the established aim - which is to address the needs of Irish women in the capital. To do this, monitoring is crucial to our ongoing development. In service delivery the major components of the monitoring and evaluation are;

- * Routine questionnaires to clients on their satisfaction with the service.
- * Measure of casework outcome.
- * Borough monitoring.
- * Monitoring by query/problem presented.
- * Comments/suggestions book for clients.
- * Visibly displayed complaints procedure with an annual review of it's use.
- * Regular mailing to members which invite participation and suggestions.

STATISTICS - MAPPING THE SCALE OF NEED

In 1993 the centre dealt with a total of 6212 queries, by phone, letter and drop-in.



The detailed casework dealt with by the centre totalled 642 in the same period - 228 women under the age of 30 and 414 women over 30.

In the casework referrals the breakdown of queries is as follows:

Debt and welfare	218	15%
Homelessness	317	21%
Housing	246	16%
Domestic violence	367	25%
Employment	36	2%
Health	195	13%
Childcare	114	8%
1493 categories		

77% welfare related; 23% health/employment & childcare

Fury at British bid to axe emigrants' welfare

Fiona Kelly

PROPOSED changes in the British social welfare system which could disqualify thousands of Irish emigrants from welfare payments has been met with angry protests from Irish organisations in Britain — and a call from our own Department of Social Welfare for a European Commission investigation into the matter.

Speaking at an adjournment debate in the Dail during the week, Minister for Social Welfare, Dr Woods, echoed the fears of Irish representatives in Britain that vulnerable Irish emigrants may be in danger of losing their welfare entitlements.

The Minister said he received a statement from the British Embassy confirming that the Secretary of State intends to introduce a "habitual residence test" which will require that emigrants claiming welfare from the British Government "must have a close connection with the United Kingdom and steady employment before they will be entitled to these benefits".

This means that young Irish emigrants without relatives or a pre-arranged job in London will not be able to get Government support while they are looking for work. Commenting on this, the Minister said: "Our main concern must be with the position of young emigrants who go to Britain seeking employment and find themselves, at least temporarily, dependent on social services."

The British Social Services Minister Peter Lilley

has made it clear that the object of this review is to stop foreigners claiming welfare in Britain.

As well as affecting Irish people emigrating to Britain in the future, it is also feared that many Irish already resident there may be subject to means tests which could disqualify them from payments. Mr Lilley has estimated that 100,000 immigrants — of all nationalities — are likely to lose their entitlements as a result of this review.

The three benefits in question are Income Support, Housing benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

Income Support is the equivalent of our supplementary welfare scheme and can be claimed by anyone living in Britain "as a benefit of last resort". It is most commonly used by school-leavers and homeless people who do not have enough credits to claim other higher levels of benefit. The other two benefits are available to people who have difficulty paying their rent or council tax.

The statement which Dr Woods received from the British Embassy suggested that long-term residents of the UK, who continue to hold Irish citizenship and Irish citizens returning to Britain who have worked there previously, will not be affected by the new measures.

Finer points of Mr Lilley's recommendation are still unclear however and officials in Ireland's London Embassy are to discuss the issue with the Department of Social Security over the coming weeks. There is also to be a process of public consultation over the coming week where the Federation of Irish Societies will be involved.

The London Irish Women's Centre deals with Irish women of all ages who have problems with social services in Britain. In Britain, Housing and Welfare Rights worker Angie Birtill claims that this latest proposal goes much deeper than a mere economic issue.

"It is blatant racism on behalf of the British Government. This move in Peter Lilley's office seems to be on the grounds that it will prevent foreigners from coming into Britain and 'scrounging off' welfare state".

"In times when our country has needed Irish people, it has been quick to recruit from Ireland, so not right that in recession, any times, they should be seeking to cut back on their entitlements".

Ms Birtill continued: "Irish people have contributed greatly to the economy over the years, many of them working in poorly paid jobs and living in meagre accommodation. A poll of Irish women working in Britain a couple of years ago showed that 81% of them were working in poorly paid professions, and teaching."

New statistical evidence highlights the extreme hardship and discrimination many Irish women face in London. Rachel Clare reports

Under siege on London's main drag

FOR nine years one woman, a nurse, put up with harassment from her neighbour — someone banging on her door every night, calling her an Irish dog, abusing her in the streets. The first time she had spoken about this was when she came to our office. Angie Birtill, Housing Rights worker at the London Irish Women's Centre

THE IRISH POST, SEPTEMBER 5, 1994

While the domestic abuse increasingly faced by Irish women suffering behind closed doors

SUNDAY PRESS, FEB 13, 1994

PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE FOR SALE FROM THE CENTRE

‘ROOTS & REALITIES; a profile of Irish women in London 1993’, brings together up-to-date information on Irish women's population, housing and employment conditions in London making comparisons between 1981 and 1991 census data and several Labour Force Surveys. Using a wide range of research sources, the document contains challenging discussions on aspects of Irish women's culture, anti-Irish racism, mental health and civil liberties. It also contains sections on the variety of experiences eg, being a lesbian, traveller, older or younger woman, disabled, Irish Women born in Britain etc. Here is a thought-provoking, detailed and uncompromising look at Irish women. It will be of interest to all Irish women in Britain and to others who are interested or have users/clients who are Irish. It is also an invaluable aid to Equal Opportunities trainers. Cost £3.00. Published July 1993 ISBN 0-9521522-0-7

‘What to do if you are homeless’

‘What to do if you are homeless’ covers the basic information needed by Irish women who emigrate to London and are entitled to help from Local Authorities under Part 3 of the Housing Act 1985. It covers the legal definition of homelessness and local authority duty to you once you fulfil these conditions. It lists Irish advice agencies, law centres and organisations who support Irish people in temporary accommodation. 50p. Updated 1991. A5 size 11 pages.

‘Information for the Single Homeless and Private Tenants’

Irish people are over-represented in the private rented sector for housing, and this over dependency leaves them vulnerable to changing markets, poor housing conditions and harassment. The problems that confronted them in the 1940's and 50's (No Blacks, No Irish signs) are as prevalent today as ever. This booklet is intended for those not eligible for local authority housing. It covers preparation for emigration, options once in London and where to look for accommodation. It explains the different types of tenancies, paying rent, repairs, dealing with harassment and unlawful evictions, other housing options (hostels, housing associations, short-life housing, co-ops, shared ownership) and gives advice on squatting and sleeping rough. It includes lists of advice agencies, Irish community centres, day centres, law centres, local authorities and specialist groups dealing with offenders, HIV/AIDS, lesbians, mental health, older women, parents/carers, students, travellers and young women. 50p Published May 1993. A5 24 pages.

CONFERENCE REPORTS

During the 1980's Irish women in London organised 5 conferences. These provided a large forum for women to meet and from them many new groups and initiatives developed which enhanced the lives of Irish women in the capital. These reports are a record of Irish women during that time. The foremost concerns and issues debated and discussed provide much interesting reading and give an representative account of what was important from the point of view of Irish women themselves. £1.

FUNDRAISING AND FINANCE

In 1993, core funding was raised through the London Boroughs Grants Scheme. Other contributors to our projects were The BBC Childrens in Need, London Borough of Hackney, Dion Committee, Irish Youth Foundation, EEC and the Allied Irish Bank. We supplemented this funding with income generated through membership subscriptions, hire of equipment and counselling. We would like to express our thanks and appreciation to all our funders whose financial support have enabled us to continue to provide this vital service to Irish women and their families in London.

The accounts to March 1993 reveal a healthy financial position with a small surplus at the end of the year. We have succeeded in getting a commitment from the London Borough's Grants Scheme for three year funding which effectively gives us a core fund to work from, and has enabled us to focus the Centre's plans over the next three years. This recognition by our main funders has only been achieved because of our proven track record in providing a highly skilled and professional service and our determination to continue this provision despite the major cuts in funding we have experienced.

Future Funding Needs

Over the last 6 years the core funding we have received has remained at a standstill figure whilst costs have risen due to inflation. Thus, the pressure to increase funding from other areas has increased year by year.

The existing services will continue to require additional funding next year and the development work we have outlined in our work programme, which includes, work in outer London Boroughs, an expansion of our counselling and case management service, a London Irish Women's Conference will all require further funding.

Administrative Needs

The Centre is also looking to upgrade the computer facilities that we have at present. Our computer is antiquated, slow and unable to meet the needs of 5 workers who all require a terminal at their fingertips. Further and ongoing computer training is essential. Acquiring a fax machine is also high on our list of priorities.

Building

The building at 59 Stoke Newington Church Street is owned by the Centre and we are responsible for its maintainance. We have succeeded with funds from the LBGS to decorate the inside in the last year but the exterior now needs decorating as a matter of urgency. Office carpets and furniture are in a bad state of repair and need to be replaced.

The fundraiser's task is therefore a daunting one, particularly with the cut backs in the voluntary sector. In efforts to extend our fundraising base we are also availing of professional fundraisers in the voluntary sector and we are continuing with our efforts to attain charitable status. We especially encourage members with skills in fundraising to join the Management

Committee and take an active part in our fundraising team. A membership form is included in this report.

FUTURE PLANS

The centre intends to continue with current levels of operation providing front-line welfare and housing advice, counselling support, information and outreach, youth work and work with children. In the current climate of cutbacks and recession, sustaining a high quality service is an achievement in itself.

Increasingly complex casework and the evidence from research indicate the need to extend our work in particular areas - especially the targeting of geographical areas of migrant settlement during the 1980's. These areas are mainly Outer London boroughs. The population increase in both younger and older Irish women point to a need for increased outreach work towards these groups in particular.

Apart from the obvious increase in numbers which in itself indicates a need, there are other considerations to be looked at in identifying new development areas. One of these is the government's proposed changes in rules for migrants claiming social assistance and housing benefit. If brought into operation this will create extremes of poverty and distress amongst new arrivals. This group, which comprises mainly of younger single women and young families, already face hardships of trying to integrate into a new system and often experience cultural dislocation and shock. They will face additional pressures in the effects of the new regulations. Agencies such as ours are absolutely vital in order to help in alleviating poverty and to represent the interests of this group of migrants to the statutory bodies.

Extended work with young Irish mothers will be a further concern of the centre in its future plans.

The Travelling community experience large-scale homelessness and hardship due to already severe restrictions on stopping legally on land owned by London local authorities. The potential effects of the proposed Criminal Justice Bill, whose effects will increase these restrictions on Travellers, are cause for grave concern. The 'spill-over' from legislation such as this falls on the shoulders of front-line agencies like ours try to assist travellers counteract the kind of 'social brutality' inherent in their situation. This is an area in which the services of the centre will continue to be needed.

The centre hopes to expand its counselling/case management work. Many factors contribute to the high rates of mental illness amongst Irish women (ref. *Roots & Realities* 1993). More and more, women who come needing help with a housing, welfare or related query need follow-on support of a counselling nature to enable her deal with problems in her life which prevent her from eg obtaining employment, making social networks - issues which increase and contribute to cultural alienation and dislocation. The centre sees a strong need for more

developed counselling services for Irish women.

In 1996 we hope to host the 6th Irish women's conference in London. This is a demand from the community we serve and fulfills a consultative role, enabling the centre to have as broad a forum as possible for Irish women to raise issues affecting their lives and facilitating ways of making community change.

Creating equality for all within the community is an on-going aim which will be given particular priority in the next three years. The centre intends to carry out a major review of how it serves the needs of minority groups - women with disabilities, older women and lesbians in particular, and how this service can be improved. We hope to back this up with an extensive training programme for staff and management.

Of course, achieving this requires funds and this takes time and energy. To establish a secure funding base is a priority. We will look at all options including charitable status and at new areas of funding opportunity to meet the growing and complex needs of the Irish women's community.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

The London Irish Women's Centre recognises the discrimination faced by Irish women in Britain, as women and as Irish people. We also recognise the multiple discrimination experienced by some groups in our community eg travellers, lesbians, disabled women, single mothers, elderly etc.

Our Equal Opportunities Policy attempts to address the inequalities that exist in our community. Issues such as direct and indirect discrimination, racial and sexual discrimination, and discrimination on the grounds of sexuality, ability, age, religion and colour are addressed.

In selection, recruitment and training of staff the Equal Opportunities Policy is followed. On all aspects of policy employees are expected to carry out their work duties in adherence with the EOP. The management Committee is responsible for over seeing the implementation of the EOP.

A full copy of the EOP is available on request.



Collective force: "It's important to try to speak out in a collective, campaigning way for Irish women."

pared to 28 per cent of British-born white women.

ANGIE Birtill emphasises the need to make collective sense of these individual cases. "It's important not just to give immediate practical help—to show

Irish community seriously is a form of invented racism. "There's a commonly held assumption, among very educated people, that the 26 counties are still 'really' Britain and that those who come over here are just going to have to muddle along."

just your fault that you can't get a job, that you live in sub-standard housing. To speak out is to be written off as a troublemaker." Geraldine Hickey, Youth and Childcare worker at the centre, grew up in Dublin and came across at 18 "just for the hell of it."

Roots and, disparate experience reveals the ex-dured by so in London today mands on the role as "

FOR nine years one woman, a nurse, put up with harassment from her neighbour—some one banging on her door every night, calling her an Irish dog, abusing her in the streets. The first time she had spoken about this was when she came to our centre." Angie Birtill, Housing and Welfare worker at the London Irish Women's Centre, speaks softly, but her anger is palpable. This isn't an exceptional story.

For 10 years the centre has been battling to establish the harsh truth about emigrant life in Britain's capital. Yet with little statistical evidence to support its



Angry: Angie Birtill

to display the "No Irish, Blacks" signs that dogged emigrants in the 1940s and 1950s. Angie Birtill and her co-worker the centre report that the barr which confronted this earlier era are still in evidence to

For although there is a general accommodation shortage in London, homelessness affects the population to a disproportionate degree—32 per cent of all emigrants in short-stay hostels year were Irish. In addition, numbers of women live in standard and inadequate rehousing. Disrepair, harassment and spiralling rents, coupled a surmounting

LIWC Condemn Homeless Legislation Proposals

The London Irish Women's problem, but rather the shortage

Fury at British bid to axe emigrants' welfare

Fiona Kelly

PROPOSED changes in the British social welfare system which could disqualify thousands of Irish emigrants from welfare payments has been met with angry protests from Irish organisations in Britain—and a call from our own Department of Social Welfare for a European Commission investigation into the matter.

Advice And Information Day For Harrow's Irish Women

Official statistics show a large increase in the number of young Irish-born women in various boroughs over London in recent years and this has led to concern about their representation as a migrant group.



the IRISH post

Vol. 24 No. 4 Saturday, January 30, 1993

45p

THE VOICE OF THE IRISH IN BRITAIN

11

IRISH WORLD

FRIDAY 28 JANUARY 1994

Woman's World

A Column For The Irish Woman In Britain
With Karen Murray

The LIWC - A Helping Hand For The Irish Woman In London

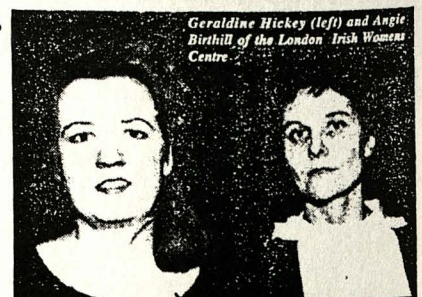
You never really realise how isolated so many Irish women in London are until you hear about the work that organisations like the London Irish Women's Centre do. Day in day out they deal with everyday problems that Irish women come across from housing to loneliness, from childcare

full-timers in the centre and is the Housing and Welfare Rights worker, dealing on a constant basis with telephone enquiries and people who drop in for advice. Her office is full of information about every borough in London so that she knows their policies on housing and can advise accordingly. "Housing is the biggest single issue that brings people to the centre," she explains. "There are

letters and phone calls and they also give women information about their rights, encouraging them to improve their lives. One of the major projects that the group is working on at the moment, in conjunction with other groups and organisations, is the Irish Women's domestic violence refuge, a project they have called Solace. According to Angie, domestic violence accounts for a third of all cases of homelessness

extensive research into how young Irish women in London live to find out the best way that she can help them.

The centre also has a part-time councillor, Brid Boland who counsels women on a short term basis from issues ranging to depression to problems of sexual identity or sexual abuse. Maggie O'Keeffe works part time as a receptionist/information worker and refers the women to the other



Geraldine Hickey (left) and Angie Birtill of the London Irish Women's Centre

management committee, which it applauded for the work done

Environment attending. The LIWC will hold a similar session on the

At the Annual General Meeting 19th January 1994 the Management Committee members elected are as follows;

Angela Garrigan

Mary Crampise

Maria Cross

Margaret Smith

Jean Cross

Staff members are;

Angie Birtill, housing and welfare worker.

Ger Hickey, youth and childcare worker

Maggie O'Keefe, information/reception worker (part-time)

Brid Boland, case manager/fundraiser/administrator

Shelagh O'Connor, finance worker (part-time)

LONDON IRISH WOMEN'S CENTRE (Limited By Guarantee)
 DETAILED INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT
 FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 1993

For Directors' Use

		<u>1993</u>	<u>1992</u>
INCOME	<u>£</u>	<u>£</u>	<u>£</u>
Grants: London Boroughs' Grant Unit		88,370	93,335
BBC Children in Need		9,808	-
London Borough of Hackney (Education)		1,260	945
London Borough of Hackney (Womens Unit)		1,200	-
Irish Youth Foundation		900	-
EEC Grant		6,014	-
Other Grants		3,207	-
Donations		718	20
Other Income		190	536
Conference Grants and Donations		-	159
Holding Grant		2,550	2,707
Interest		1,133	312
DION Committee		-	2,060
Allied Irish Bank		800	-
Membership		668	-
Hire of Equipment		297	-
Counselling		165	-
		<u>117,280</u>	<u>100,074</u>

EXPENDITURE

Salaries and Related costs	95,115	75,430
Staff Training	1,024	646
Rates and Services	4,940	3,520
Repairs and Maintenance	1,720	6,653
Stationery and Office Supplies	498	1,319
Telephone and Postage	2,733	3,033
Travel and Motor Expenses	140	25
Audit and Accountancy	1,351	1,057
Insurance	2,650	3,777
Miscellaneous	239	1,105
Tutors Fees and Training Course Consumables	866	834
Equipment Maintenance	284	695
Publicity/Advertising	1,463	1,060
Bank Charges	368	502
Depreciation	5,170	4,953
Release from Deferred Capital Income	(5,170)	(4,894)
Memberships and Subscriptions	302	-
Holding Grant	3,000	2,557
Events and Reports	1,191	(13)
Profit on Disposal of Equipment	(2,760)	-
Charity Fees	200	-
	<u>115,324</u>	<u>102,663</u>

SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) FOR YEAR

	<u>1,956</u>	<u>(2,589)</u>
Taxation	<u>283</u>	<u>70</u>
	<u>1,673</u>	<u>(2,659)</u>
Surplus Brought Forward	<u>3,054</u>	<u>5,713</u>
SURPLUS CARRIED FORWARD	<u>4,727</u>	<u>3,054</u>

REVIEW

ROOTS AND REALITIES - A PROFILE OF IRISH WOMEN IN LONDON

Roots and Realities is a profile of Irish Women's lives in London. This report is one of the most comprehensive produced on the subject, it builds on previous research; for example *The Irish Women in London* report completed by Browen Walters in 1988. *Roots and Realities* contains valuable information on housing, employment and mental health. It also provides information about the different women that make up the Irish Community (Older Women, Disabled Women, Travellers, Lesbian Women and Irish Women born in Britain). What is important about it is that it places these issues in the context of life in an immigrant community in London. This is vital to the understanding of why Irish Women face particular difficulties concerning housing, employment, civil liberties, etc. The first two sections of the report deal with Anti-Irish Racism and Irish Women's Culture. This background gives an insight into the social context which underlies Irish Women's experience.

Anti-Irish Racism: This section looks at anti-Irish racism in great detail. Firstly by providing us with some useful definitions, and then by giving an historical background to the emergence of anti-Irish racism. It then goes on to look at how Anti-Irish racism is perpetuated through institutional practices and secondly, through attitudes that are prevalent in society, such as the use of stereotypes in the media, Anti-Irish jokes, etc. It shows that Anti-Irish racism is embedded in British society, and looks at the effects of it on the lives of Irish people.

Irish Women's Culture: This section firstly looks at how Irish culture has flourished in London since the 1940's. It states that cultural expression is particularly important to a community that is not properly acknowledged within the mainstream culture in Britain. In the 80's Irish Groups also began to develop a strong political voice challenging the prejudice in that mainstream culture. It goes on to look at the position of Irish women and how they are excluded and oppressed in mainstream Irish culture. How Irish Women have found their own voice and recognition in a wide range of forums, from cultural groups to groups campaigning on a whole range of issues effecting women's lives.

This section is important because it examines the cultural position of Irish people in British society, then focuses on women. It looks back to what we have lost through the devastating affects of patriarchal culture and colonialism. It concentrates on how Irish people are affected by the loss of the Irish language. How this leaves you without a basic confidence in yourself and your roots. The themes of loss and exclusion presented here can be seen as a pattern through-out the report. They are shown here to be part of the processes that operate within Anti-Irish racism and patriarchal culture.

The sections in the report that deal with particular groups of Irish women will be useful to advisers. For instance, the section on older women looks at the areas in London these women live, the work they do and the accomodation they live in. Many moved into tied accomodation because of their work, and have had particular difficulties in moving into the housing market.

Housing: The section most relevant for advisers is the section on housing. It presents the most up to date research. Taking data from the 1991 census, it shows that the proportion of Irish people in owner occupation is still lower than the white population as a whole. Irish people are still over represented in private rented accommodation that lacks facilities. The most worrying item in the report is the numbers of Irish people sleeping rough. Statistics are presented from five projects, one of which is Bondway Nightshelter where they found that in 1990 more than 30% of homeless people encountered on the street were Irish.

It comments on the lack of resources available for young Irish women, and the effects of homelessness on Irish women in terms of health and morality. The report gathers together other research such as that done by CARA, which shows only eight out of 60 housing associations could give an accurate number of Irish people who applied, the same results showed up for allocation of accommodation and access to move-on accommodation. Virtually no figures are available for the numbers of applications from single homeless women.

In a summary of the points in this section it is stressed that there is urgent need for housing associations and local authorities to monitor the needs of single Irish people and families and the need for frontline advice agencies to pass on information about the housing needs of Irish people to housing associations and local authorities.

I would recommend that agencies get this report as it contains comprehensive information on the position of Irish women including the most up to date research and it also provides an insight into Irish experience, the underlying factors that have affected the lives of Irish people and Irish women. It is important for Irish women to read because it is recognising our achievements: how Irish people are challenging anti-Irish racism, and reaffirming our culture and asserting our identity in a variety of ways.

Cost £3 from:

London Irish Women's Centre
59 Stoke Newington Church Street
London N16 0AR Tel: 071 249 7318

Laura Sullivan - SHAC Bulletin

THE IRISH POST, AUGUST 7, 1993

Focus on women

Just to hand is *Roots and Realities*, the latest publication from the London Irish Women's Centre. A 38-page profile of Irish women in London, it picks up from where the 1988 Irish Women in London report by Bronwen Walter left off.

The new publication repeats the oft-quoted point that more Irish women than men have emigrated down the years to Britain and it complains that their contribution to Irish life here has at best been ignored and more often than not been marginalised.

Taking its lead from 1991 census figures, the report estimates that there are at least 136,887 Irish-born women in London compared to 126,002 in 1981. This total includes women born both north and south of the border.

Using official data such as the Labour Force Survey, it traces the extent of disadvantage

experienced by Irish women in areas like housing and jobs and bemoans the lack of official attention being paid to the mental health problems Irish women undoubtedly suffer.

Much of the report is also given over to highlighting the pernicious effect the Prevention of Terrorism Act continues to have on Irish life in Britain. Members of the London Irish Women Centre have been to the fore in campaigning against the persistent strip-searching of Irish women detainees in Britain and Ireland and the report concludes that there are grounds for taking Britain to court for breaching the European Convention of Human Rights.

The report focuses attention on minority groups and subsections within the London-based Irish community — the second-generation Irish, older women; their younger compatriots, lesbians and travellers.

Copies of *Roots and Realities* may be had for £3.00 from the London Irish Women's Centre, 59 Church Street, Stoke Newington, N16, telephone 071-249 7318.

I would like to help The London Irish Women's Centre.

Please tick the boxes which interest you and we will send you more information

Tax Effective Giving

Covenants []

Gift Aid []

Will writing and legacies []

Give as you earn []

Please accept my donation of £10 [] £25 [] £50 [] Other []

(Please make all cheques and postal orders payable to The London Irish Women's Centre).

Signature.....

Name.....

Address.....

.....

.....Postcode.....

Telephone.....

Please complete this form in BLOCK CAPITALS and send it to:
Fundraising Dept, London Irish Women's Centre,
59 Stoke Newington Church Street, London N16 0AR

THANK YOU FOR ANY SUPPORT YOU ARE ABLE TO GIVE

HOW TO JOIN US

Keep in touch with the Irish women's community!

Become a member of the London Irish Women's Centre and we will put your name on our mailing list. You will receive newsletters, information, reports and notices of meetings and events of interest to Irish women held by ourselves and others all over London.

Fill in your name and address and return this form with membership fee of £10 high-waged, £7 low-waged or £4 unwaged.

Group membership is £15 funded and £7 unfunded.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

.....

FEE.....

Funded by London Boroughs Grants Scheme.