

AGIYINFO

AGIY is a registered charity which aims to promote the interest and welfare of emigrant Irish youth in London

President Visits AGIY



President Mary Robinson speaking on her recent visit (December 6) to the Action Group for Irish Youth congratulated the organisation on its work. Seamus Taylor, Chair of AGIY warmly welcomed the President's visits. "The Action Group hosted your first meeting with Irish community groups in London as part of your Presidential campaign in 1990. You could say we have both travelled a long way since."

Seamus Taylor recognised the President's commitment to the Irish diaspora, "We are heartened to witness your ongoing commitment to the Irish abroad, acknowledging the Irish ethnic communities across the generations, the issues they may face, and their powerful potential as a force for good both worldwide and in relation to developments in Ireland".

After a presentation on AGIY's work the President was presented with a copy of the *Guide to London for Young Irish People*

Mrs Robinson said she hoped that the Guide would be widely circulated "I recognise just how important it is to have information available. Curiously, I have become more aware since becoming President that there is a psychological willingness for emigrants to prepare if they are going as far as Boston or Toronto. But the closeness and apparent familiarity of Britain appears to mean they are not prepared and not aware of the difficulties facing them"

The President emphasised the value of the Guide both for individuals and organisations in London and Ireland and was pleased to see continued support for proactive projects such as AGIY which worked to ensure life-chance equality for emigrants. After formal presentations President Robinson met with AGIY's Management Committee and staff along with invited guests. Some of those attending included, Ted Barrington, Irish Ambassador, Leo Sheedy (Chair Dion Committee) Cllr Sandy Marks, Mayor of Islington. Other organisations represented on the day were: Bridge House Estate Trust, The Prince's Trust, London Borough Grants Scheme.

Hidden Discrimination Against the Irish with in the Criminal Justice System

AGIY jointly with The Bourne Trust, Federation of Irish Societies, Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas and the National Association of Probation Officers launched the report *The Irish Community : Discrimination and the Criminal Justice System* at the House of Commons on the 24 February 1997. The report which is based on existing research and the collation of case studies highlights widespread discrimination against the Irish community within the British criminal justice system.

The report contains a dossier of 56 case studies which catalogue instances of stop and search which often lead to overnight remands in police custody and usually result in release without charge. Other cases reveal inappropriate remands into custody, and longer prison sentences than normal. The findings also show how Travellers are over-represented at all stages of the criminal justice system; a reflection of the institutionalised distrust of this group.

The meeting was chaired by Kevin McNamara MP and addressed by Harry Fletcher (National Association of Probation Officers), Kay Glynn (Solicitor Judith Walker Tavar & Co), Gerry McFlynn (Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas) and Prof. Jock Young (Head of the Centre for Criminology - Middlesex University).

Harry Fletcher on behalf of the National Association of Probation Officers said, "The report reveals hidden discrimination against the Irish. Research commissioned as early as 1989 pointed to the fact that the Irish were getting a raw deal in the courts. We now know that in the inner cities the Irish are more likely to be stopped by the police and are more likely to be victims of street crime than any other ethnic group. However, the Irish are under represented amongst those convicted of serious crimes"

Kay Glynn outlined her experience as a solicitor working with discriminated and often disadvantaged Irish; "Unfortunately I witness discrimination of Irish people throughout the criminal justice system on a daily basis".

Professor Jock Young outlined findings from his studies in Islington and highlighted the high rate of intrusive policing of the Irish community. He also emphasised the high incidence of Irish women who are victims of crime.

Gerry McFlynn of the Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas said, "The case histories in the report highlight the plight of the Irish community. A young Irish woman was recently arrested by over a dozen police on suspicion of carrying firearms. She was strip-searched and held in a cell overnight. There was no evidence and she was found not guilty. Last year three Irish families were arrested and accused of threatening behaviour. They were arrested by armed police, handcuffed and held overnight. They were later released to appear in court one month later and finally all charges were dropped."

He added, "In a third case a 25 year old man from Dublin has been detained three times in the last 12 months and released without charge. Although he has been resident in London for eight years he has now returned, disillusioned, to Ireland. These cases are not unusual. There is clear evidence of systematic discrimination against Irish individuals and families".

The report highlights the urgent need for further academic research into Irish people's experience of the British justice system. The report recommends:

- **that anti-discriminatory practice should be put in place as soon as possible if the confidence of the Irish community is to be restored.**
- **that the specific experiences of Irish Travellers of the criminal justice system should be monitored.**
- **the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which is seen by the authors of the report as both ineffective and an institutional form of anti-Irish discrimination, should be independently reviewed.**
- **There should be a distinct category of Irish in all ethnic monitoring and equal opportunity programmes.**
- **That awareness training be made available for all criminal justice professionals**

Copies of the report are available from AGIY : 0171 700-8137

Irish Community HIV/AIDS Research Programme

Since the closure of Positively Irish Action on AIDS (PIAA) in June 1996, there has been a gap in services available to Irish people living with HIV and AIDS in Britain. There is no evidence that the promise from the health authorities that PIAA's funding would be re-directed into providing an Irish dimension to mainstream HIV services, has occurred. A directory of services in Ireland and Britain produced by PIAA prior to closure, has not been distributed by health authorities.

Addressing this need, AGIY is very pleased to announce the start of a new research project which will keep the issues facing Irish people on the HIV/AIDS agenda. AGIY will collaborate with the Mortimer Market Centre, a leading clinical and research centre in central London for people living with HIV/AIDS, in running a project entitled *HIV Infection and Irish Migration In Britain*. This research project will produce a final report with practical recommendations for those who are working with Irish service users affected by HIV/AIDS. This will ensure that the research data and expertise built up by PIAA over a period of seven years, is made available to workers in the field.

Aims of Research

- ◆ To assess prevention and service needs of Irish emigrants affected by HIV and AIDS living in Britain.
- ◆ To ensure that research findings are disseminated to appropriate treatment and care services for Irish emigrants affected by HIV and AIDS.
- ◆ To disseminate findings of the project through a range of media including publishing in relevant academic and professional journals.

The project provides an opportunity for a unique collaboration between a statutory service within the NHS and a grass roots community organisation, both of whom recognise the importance of a culturally appropriate dimension to HIV/AIDS prevention and care. It also provides AGIY with an opportunity to progress its research programme on health issues and Irish emigrants in Britain.

All too often the needs of emigrant communities remain invisible within national policies. This research project will highlight the needs of one of the largest European emigrant communities affected by HIV and AIDS in Britain. The background of the research lies firmly rooted in the community which is the focus for the research.

AGIY was one of the first organisations to address HIV issues. AGIY has a specific remit to undertake research and established a close working relationship with PIAA. AGIY's extensive grass roots networks with Irish community organisations throughout the country as well as with emigrant and statutory service departments in Ireland will ensure that the research retains a community dimension. The involvement of the Mortimer Market Centre will ensure access to policy makers and purchasers throughout the health service and beyond.

Background to the project

A participatory action research programme was established at PIAA in 1994. 100 Irish people infected and affected by HIV were interviewed in depth as part of the project. Because the research was carried out within a community based organisation, information was also collected through observation and networking as well as the interviews. Focus groups were held to evaluate initial quantitative results. This part of the research at PIAA was funded by the European Commission.

Project details

The project timetable is from January to December 1997 with a researcher working three days a week. Oonagh O'Brien, who was the research and information co-ordinator at PIAA will work on the project, and will be located at the Mortimer Market Centre. Funding has been made available from the Dion Committee (Irish government) and the London Borough of Brent. Some of the key findings to date are:

- ◆ Irish emigrants who are HIV+ migrate to Britain for the same reason as other Irish migrants. There was no evidence of people emigrating because of an HIV diagnosis. The main reason given for coming to Britain was economic. People however DID report coming to Britain because of related issues such as drug use or being gay.

- ◆ 19% of interviewees were homeless or in temporary accommodation at the time of interview.

HIV Research continued.../

♦ 48% had injected their main drug of use and 35% had been in prison. 42% of those that had been in prison reported injecting drugs while in prison.

♦ 49% of interviewees had children.

♦ Interviewees reported a change in their drug use and sexual behaviour when they emigrated to Britain. The changes in drug use and sexual behaviour were reported to be harm increasing in terms of HIV infection and other viral infections such as hepatitis.

We look forward very much to the development of this project. The final report will be launched towards the end of 1997, and will be available as an impetus and tool for those wishing to ensure an Irish dimension to their service or to incorporate HIV and AIDS into Irish community work.

'One Better Day'

A profile of the Irish tenants of Arlington House, published by the Bridge Housing Association. The Irish comprise 40% of men in Britain's largest hostel for the homeless in Camden. Camden was a major centre for casual employment in the building industry. Hundreds of Irishmen were picked up every morning by building contractors to work on motorways and building-sites all over the Home counties. Patterns of heavy drinking for many when working in the insecure world of casual employment are worsened by the frustration of poverty and unemployment.

With the collapse of the building industry many of the men in the hostel have found themselves unemployed and isolated in Camden Town. Now with the help of Bridge Housing Association, the Irish tenants have published a book *One Better Day* which tells their story. Copies are available from Barbara Ruby, Bridge Housing Association, Tel: 0171 928 9966

AGIY Staff Team

Brian McCarthy - Co-ordinator
Donal McKinney - Policy, Information
& Administrator

AGIY is funded by the City Parochial Foundation, Dion Committee (Irish Government) London Borough Grants Scheme and the National Lottery Charities Board.

AGIY

London Irish Alcohol Forum

Following the London Irish Youth Forum - *Developing Services for Irish People with Alcohol Related Problems*, AGIY will facilitate the initial meeting of the London Irish Alcohol Forum.

Thursday April 24 1997

2.00 pm

at the

**London Voluntary Sector Resource
Centre, 356 Holloway Road, N7 6PA.**

**Nearest Tube - Holloway Road
(Piccadilly Line)**

1. Business Meeting:

To identify and clarify aims/objectives and plan programme for 1997/98.

The London Irish Alcohol Forum will:

Provide a forum for dialogue between all those concerned with the care of Irish people in London experiencing alcohol related harm.

Monitor the implementation of Community Care for this group.

Share information and promote best practice in providing culturally appropriate alcohol services to Irish people.

Facilitate the development of an Irish dimension to service delivery in mainstream agencies.

2. Topic for discussion and action:

Irish Drinkers and Homelessness

3. Presentation on 'One Better Day'

Joe McGarry, Chair Arlington House Irish Tenants Association.

AGIY would be grateful if you would confirm your attendance at the meeting - Tel 0171 700 8137