

# Crisis centre targets Irish

**A UNIQUE crisis centre for people facing homelessness, drug and drink problems is to open next month in Camden Town.**

Aimed at young Irish people it is to include among its volunteer staff former addicts from the streets.

Organised by the Camden Irish Centre, the drop-in centre is to open on October 7 and

will be the first in Camden for young Irish. Part funded by a Dublin-based youth trust, it is to be staffed by volunteers including former addicts and homeless youths, a district nurse and employment advice workers.

It is believed to be one of the few such centres to involve former victims of homelessness, drugs, drink and sexual abuse.

Up to 15 young people are expected at the cen-

*A new unit in Camden Town aims to tackle drug abuse and homelessness among young Irish people. Lee Gordon reports*

tre, open weekly, which will provide help finding accommodation, food, work training, drug and alcohol therapy, telephones and showers. Future plans include a

link with the government's new welfare to work scheme.

The centre is aimed at young Irish newly arrived in London, often double victims of discrimination

and poverty, says youth worker at the Irish Centre, Mairead Carney.

Many young Irish arrive with stars in their eyes but are quickly frustrated by the lack of work

and drift into a life on the streets, often involving drugs, she adds.

"A one-way boat ticket from Ireland will set you back just £15. London's the easiest place for young Irish people to get to," she said.

"Many arrive hopeful of finding work, escaping the drugs crackdown in Ireland, or fleeing paramilitary threats.

"But there is little construction work now and it all falls apart within two weeks - it's the quickest route to the streets."

Around 6,000 Irish immigrants pass through the Irish Centre each year - a fifth of those arriving in London. The centre is well placed to act as an alternative focus for Irish people from the pub, says Mairead.

"There are massive problems for young people in Ireland; problems with drugs like heroin and ecstasy, drink and domestic violence," she said. "We are aiming to break the cycle of young people arriving in London and turning into homeless adults."

"It will be a centre for people instead of pubs, which have traditionally been the focal point of Irish communities," she said.

"By working with people at a grass roots level we hope to stop the rise in the numbers of Irish people ending up on the streets and faced with drugs and prostitution as a way of life."

Among the volunteers are eight former clients of the Irish Centre's youth project, aimed at homeless, sexually and physically abused and drug addicted youths.

Volunteer work at the drop-in cafe offers them the chance to gain work experience and raise self-esteem, claims Mairead. And, she added, they are best placed to provide a listening ear for new clients.

"It's easier to reach people when they are talking to their own rather than do-gooders," she said.

"It also helps to raise their expectations of themselves, and their confidence.

"We hope to instill confidence and a sense of ambition. That's the first and most important step they can take in turning their lives around."

The centre, based at the Irish Centre in Camden Square will open on Tuesday, October 7. Mairead can be contacted on 0171 916 2222.