

14 June 2010

14:30 Introduction

Céad mílle fáilte

Welcome, everyone, to this gathering to mark and celebrate forty years of the work of the Irish Support and Advice Service, ISAS.

My name is Dermot Murphy, and I chair the board of trustees which oversees the running of ISAS.

I want to give a particular welcome to our guest speaker this afternoon, Dr Mary Robinson, and say how very honoured we are to have her here. We are very pleased to welcome also his excellency the Irish Ambassador (Bobbie McDonagh);

we welcome official representatives of the London boroughs where we work:

their worships the Mayor of Hammersmith and Fulham (Adronie Alford), the mayor and mayoress of Ealing (Rajinder & Gurmit Mann), the mayor and mayoress of Wandsworth (Piers & Elizabeth McCausland); the Leader of Hammersmith & Fulham Council (Stephen Greenhalgh), and the Leader of Sutton Council (Seán Brennan),

We welcome ~~Lord Dubs~~ Baroness Blood

and the Members of Parliament for Chelsea & Fulham (Greg Hands), for Ealing North (Steve Pound), and for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter).

Several of you here represent bodies which fund our work. To you all, welcome, and may I offer our most sincere thanks for your support which is vital to our work.

I am also very pleased to welcome several members of our pensioner groups who are here to celebrate with us.

Now I want to tell you a little about ISAS, and will then invite the worshipful Mayor of Hammersmith and Fulham to speak as the senior representative of the borough where we meet this afternoon; after that we will show a short video presentation about the work of ISAS, and then I will invite Dr Robinson to speak.

I hope that when the formal part of the afternoon is over, as many of you as can will stay for a reception. The members of the Board would like everyone to take the opportunity to meet our clients and our staff so you can learn first hand how much your support is appreciated and how well it is used. During the reception, some of our staff will be ready to take donations from any of you who feel moved to help us. Let me thank you in advance for your support!

We are here today in the Irish Cultural Centre, which plays a dynamic role in west London in fostering many aspects of Irish life; you can come here to learn Irish, to learn to play Irish music and instruments, to learn about

Ireland, and to enjoy the crack. Which is what two of our pensioner groups do when they meet here each week. However, Some of the people who come here make their way upstairs to the ISAS offices, where they can seek advice or help. It is the fortieth anniversary of the provision of that help that we are celebrating.

The Service was set up by Father Brian Lawlor in 1970, and to begin with operated out of the basement of St Augustine's church, just over there at the top of Fulham Palace Road. Father Lawlor began the service because there was a need to be met, and, I quote, he knew that "pious words won't fill anyone's stomach". A year later the service moved into a prefab in the church grounds, and took on its first social worker. Three years later it opened its first hostel. At that time its funds came from Friday night dances, a Christmas fair, raffles, from supporters in Ireland, and from some of the Irish county associations. Father Lawlor recalls that this fundraising was a way of making the whole community feel that they had a part to play in providing the service. By the end of the decade some funds came from the borough council, and some from the Department of Foreign Affairs' new fund, the Díon, now the Emigrant Support Programme. Father Lawlor was also involved in setting up a similar service in Wimbledon, and two years ago this was merged with ISAS. I haven't asked Fr Lawlor if he thought that forty years later the service would be as necessary now as then, even if the nature of the need has changed to some extent. I am delighted to say that Father Lawlor is here with us, and I believe that we should acknowledge his vision, enterprise and energy.

Part of our mission is to succeed in meeting the various needs so well, that the service becomes redundant. We are not there yet.

14:40 Mayor of Hammersmith and Fulham

As you have just heard, one of the first outside bodies to fund our work was the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. By creating this Centre and through grants, the Borough has continued to help assure the presence and activity of ISAS. I am very pleased that her worship the Mayor has agreed to address us this afternoon.

Thank you, Mayor, for your kind remarks. And for situating the Irish members in the larger community of the Borough.

14:50 DVD

The mission of ISAS is to support the vulnerable, solve problems and bring people together. We provide help through surgeries and home visits, and through regular meetings of our pensioner groups. The best way for us to show any donor that their support is deserved and well used is by letting you hear what the people who come to ISAS say about it. Last month, one of our Board members, Peter Curran, unfortunately unable to be here today, shot and edited the video you are about to see.

Peter interviewed some of our clients so that they could tell their stories, and say what ISAS has done for them.

SHOW DVD [or Plan B]

We are very grateful to all the people who you have just seen for agreeing to help us make this record of our work.

They are here today. Thanks a million to Barbara, Bridget, Martin, Pauline, Veronica, Bridie and John.

You heard how much our clients appreciate and value the help they get from the staff of ISAS and from the volunteers who work alongside them. We are very fortunate to have such a loyal team of committed, hard-working people: Carole, Cathy, Frances, Helen, Katie, Marianne, Mary, May, Sarah, wendy, and the director, Mike.

15:00 Dr Mary Robinson

To do justice to the achievements and contribution of our main speaker this afternoon is no easy task when it has to be done as briefly as possible. It is an honour to be able to pay tribute to the former President of Ireland who did more than anyone else to recognise the diaspora, change attitudes and bring together the Irish scattered across the world. She was Ireland's first woman president, a fitting accolade given how much she had already done, as a Senator, for women's rights. In her next post as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights she spoke up and spoke out on many issues, giving a prominence and power to the position that it had not had before. She continues to work for human rights. When, three years ago, Nelson Mandela established the group of Elders, he invited her to become a member. Here she works alongside Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Jimmy Carter, Graça Machel, and Aung San Suu Kyi among others; together they use their leadership, experience, and influence to make the world a better place to live in. She is soon to return to live in Ireland. Ladies and gentlemen, Dr Mary Robinson.

15:15 Thanks and gift

Dr Robinson, we are all very grateful to you for taking the time to join us today, and, through your presence and your speech, for making this a very memorable occasion. We have a gift that we would like you to take as a token of our thanks. It has a significant story behind it, because this is a work of art created by one of the people helped by ISAS. Tom McCullough wanted to show his gratitude and held an exhibition of his work here a few months ago; his artistic talent was very successful in raising funds for the service. With this gift go our thanks for all you have done, and our best wishes for success in all that you continue to work for.