



Irish Charitable Trust

Operating from the Irish Centre, Hammersmith as the operational organisational, **The Irish Support & Advice Service**

Working with the needs of the Irish Community in order to give them suaimhneas within their lives.

Annual Report 2001/2

Registered Charity Number: 1053278

Members of the Committee

Kay Curtin	Trustee	(resigned)
Margaret Doyle	Chairperson	
Fr Bob Dunn	Trustee	
Michael Feerick	Trustee	(resigned)
Anne Killeen	Trustee	(resigned)
Charlotte Kearns	Vice Chairperson	
Gerry Keegan	Treasurer	
Alice Casey Kennedy	Member	(resigned)
Patrick McNally	Co Sec	
Bob Mulcahy	Trustee	
Jacqui Reid	Trustee	
Joe Rice	Trustee	(resigned)

Registered Office

The Irish Centre
Blacks Road
Hammersmith
London W6 9DT

Auditors

M. Bell & Co
Chartered Accts
56 St James St
London E17 7PE

Bankers

Allied Irish Bank
Sovereign Hse
361 King St
Hammersmith
London W6 9NA

Solicitors

Cliona O'Tuama
Hamilton House
1 Temple Ave
London EC4Y 0HA

Manager's Report

Once again, the last 12 months have been a challenging time. However, within that period we have also continued on the strategy to review, and re-structure, the service both internally and externally.

The major changes to the internal structure, is to have worked at bringing the recording and reporting systems in line with the Community Legal Services, Quality Mark standards. The result of this initiative is that we have now attained a Quality Mark level 3. We shall work towards the next level in the next 12 months.

Externally, we are proud to have jointly hosted with the Irish Centre, a visit from the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, who visited the service in November 2001. The President recalled her childhood days of visiting family in the Hammersmith area. She is well aware of the need for the service for the Irish Community.

The next major event, is that of hosting a visit and being involved in the Task Force on Emigration, from Ireland. Each of the Irish services like the Irish Support & Advice Service, had an opportunity to voice their concerns and needs, in order to continue offering the service to all those both in the UK and arriving here from Ireland. We all await the results of this report which was presented to the Irish Government in June 2001.

Finally, we were asked to host a visit from Dr John Reid, Northern Ireland Secretary, in the early part of this year. This was a great success, and he was overwhelmed by the facilities offered, but also the talents within our culture. Young Katie Crean, not only played the harp, but also sang unaccompanied. Dr Reid, left feeling that he had shared every aspect of our culture, but also became aware of the needs for the service here in West London.

Financially this has also been a challenging year, and the management committee have been assisting me in reviewing all aspects of our structure in order to take the service forward, and to encourage a sustainable programme

of funding and service.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all involved, and none more so than the staff and volunteers. They have continued to work fully committed to the service for the vulnerable people, and have done so in the face of continuing change.

Stella Houlihan

Chair's Report

We have again reached the end of another year in the service of the Irish Community in West London. We are only a couple of years away from celebrating our 30 years as a service in Hammersmith. However, in order to sustain a viable service for the vulnerable people, we have had to continue our programme of review and re-structure.

The results have been that we are a much healthier and streamlined organisation, and this will help maintain a professional and yet sensitive support service for the Irish people that we serve.

We welcome the forthcoming year with the knowledge that there is a need, and we shall be here to deliver the support required.

Margaret Doyle

Introduction – the last twelve months

The Irish Support & Advice Service has continued in the last twelve months to focus on working for the Irish Community in West London, and none more so than focusing on a continued reviewing and re-structuring of the service offered.

This has been achieved greatly by working on bringing the service, internally to an acceptable level. This task was a time consuming effort and has taken place over the last two years. We are pleased to report that we have now been accepted onto the Quality Mark, level three standard awarded by the Community Legal Service. This has been warmly received as recognition for the hard work that has been put into this project.

Externally, we have continued to be recognised as a much needed operation, most importantly for the core service as an advice centre. The service offers help with housing, welfare, Irish pensions, Irish birth certificates, repatriation, and many other needs.

The core service has been greatly assisted by the support services in place. This is through the outreach service, the counselling and therapy services, legal advice and referral service (which is a seamless system through the CLS referral mechanisms).

We must, at this point recognise the hard work of all involved. Without the support of the management, staff and volunteers this could not have achieved

We must also extend our thanks to all the funders, who have maintained their support and listening ear throughout this year of innovative change.

The service is now ready to go forward, streamlined and healthier, in order to be an acknowledged, accountable, and ready to serve the Irish community within West London.

Welfare Benefits Advice Worker

I have been in my present role as Welfare Benefits Advice Worker for 18 months now, and have been at the core operation of the service.

I have maintained the advice for the Irish community within West London by offering some clarity to the, often complicated area of Welfare Benefits and form filling.

We see a steady stream of people at the office each day. Each case differs in its needs for attention. The client may often be in a state of extreme anxiety, and the first task that I have to address is to ensure them that I and the service, will give them as much support as is needed in order to gain them the end result. This may go as far as appointing a solicitor through the Community Legal Service referral system.

Some of the major successes that have been achieved this year, is that of appeals for Disability Living Allowance. For example, I have appealed on behalf of one person, and won a payment of £26k, other cases have been in excess of £5k. This in its self proves the need for the service, as an important support and monitoring service, to ensure that these people get what is rightly theirs.

I have also been involved, in supporting the team of volunteer workers, who are operating in administration, outreach, and other important support services for the organisation.

I would summarise this year as a very challenging but rewarding year.

Ann O'Donnell – Welfare Benefits Advice Worker.

Outreach Service

The Outreach service makes contact with the part of the community who would not normally have access to the drop in service that we offer. However, these people are often in more need of a support service. They are often elderly, isolated and housebound.

Therefore, my role is important in allowing them access to all of the services that are available to others who do attend the centre. My role covers all aspect of need, that is welfare benefits advice, and form filling, grant applications, housing, counselling and many other services. I take to these people the services that are offered by all of the workers at the centre.

With a background in nursing, I can often identify the health and well being needs of the people that I visit.

The role is demanding, with a variety of tasks involved, but it is most rewarding work.

Mary Bolger

Housing Service

The housing service that we offer is that of a referral system. We have strong links with all of the agencies that are involved with housing of the people within borough, and of an Irish nature.

For example, we have contact with lbH&F Housing officers throughout the borough. We also are very much in contact with Notting Hill Housing Association, and for example, Threshold Housing Association and Shepherds Bush Housing Association. From the Irish aspect we deal with Cara Housing, An Teach, and Innisfree Housing Associations, for which we have referral rights for our clients.

We also have a good contact and relationship with the West London CAT team, Solas Anois, Hammersmith & Fulham Women's Refuge, and many other agencies.

The needs of the clients are often to deal with housing issues, gaining housing, preventing eviction, neighbourhood disturbances, discrimination, and unsuitable housing or condition of premises etc. The clients may also be escaping domestic violence or personal matters.

There are also many cases where we have to call on the more specialist skills of mediation agencies or legal agencies in order to deal with the clients needs in a more specialist manner.

Although I am available on a part time basis only as the housing officer, there are still a number of clients who are being dealt with successfully by our service. Examples of the clients that we have successfully dealt with are; travellers trying to settle, ex-prisoners setting up a new life, young people fleeing the family home and the problems that they have left behind, women and children running from domestic violence.

Vulnerable people have many problems to face. This is always made worse when their home is at risk, and can often be the last straw. We are pleased to be able to help such a vulnerable part of the community.

S. Martin

Therapy, Counselling, and Supervision

The service has ran three therapy groups for a number of years. Mental Health, Elders and Women's groups. In line with local authority reviewing of the service offered we have been looking at alternative and refreshing ways in which to run our groups and look forward to new programmes for the Autumn. However, the basic tenets of each group remains:

- The Elders group as a forum for reminescence, support and a free flowing and spontaneous dialogue of joys as well as concerns.
- The mental health group as a confidential space in which to look at problems encountered in everyday living; to gain and give support.
- The women's group giving the opportunity to share problems and develop strategies for dealing with them, to empower and encourage personal enfoldment.

The groups are held in 12 week sessions, with the intention of new attendees at the start of each 12 weeks.

'One to One' counselling has grown immensely in the last year and offers clients the opportunity to explore their issues in a dynamic and personal relationship to the therapist. There are 4 Psychotherapists/Counsellor on board and they see an average of 3 to 4 clients each. During the service's 2 year inception, 35 clients have been treated on short term, long term basis.

Supervision of groups and 'one to one' counsellors and groups is a vital part of the counsellors and psychotherapists personal and professional development. It provides teaching and guidance at tracks clients progress within the therapeutic alliance and looks at ways in which the therapist can be more effective in facilitating change and growth in their clients. Supervision also explores the unconscious dynamics at play in the client/therapist relationship and looks at ways to use this knowledge creatively.

Brandy Martin

Irish Birth Certificates- Repatriations and General Administration

As a long standing volunteer I support the service with the following skills:

Firstly I have set up and operate a system for applying for, processing and accepting Irish birth certificates on behalf of our clients. This allows my colleagues to assist the clients in my absence.

The most important points with regards to obtaining birth certificates for clients is that it is a legal document. We have to maintain a professional and secure system, in order to achieve the receipt of the document and that it is handed to the correct person. The certificate is often needed in order to secure benefit payments. Therefore, the need is urgent.

This involves making contact with any one of the 26 county offices within Ireland also the Belfast office, in Northern Ireland. I offer assistance by helping to complete the paperwork, ensure that we have the correct information, and keep in touch by telephone to each office, in order to process the application.

The next service that I operate, is that of applying for funds in order to send people back to Ireland, as is their wish. There are many reasons for their wish to return, and we have to be as sensitive and professional as is needed for each case. I have to say that this service is successful and achieved through funding by the SVP in Ireland, and I have to acknowledge our gratitude on behalf of the clients for their support of this much needed service.

Finally, I do offer general assistance within the service, assisting with benefit claim form filling, general queries at the reception, and accounts assistance to the manager. The role is very much needed, and though it is often challenging, it is also rewarding to know that I am helping.

Owen McGuirk - Volunteer

Pre '53 Irish Pensions – Quality Mark -Client Monitoring

Although Joe Rice has now left the service, and has resigned his post on the management committee, it is important to acknowledge the important work that he offered whilst with the organisation.

Firstly, Joe took over the operation of the **Pre '53 Irish Pension** applications that had been instigated by the large response to the change in legislation within Ireland two years ago.

Joe, had set up a recording and reviewing system, that allowed easy access to all applications, that we had processed on behalf of the clients. This enabled Joe to offer an excellent service to the clients when progressing or querying a clients application.

The system has also allowed the organisation to continue offering an excellent service to the clients now that Joe has left. We have had a number of successes, and small donations from clients who are now in receipt of pensions for contributions they made in Ireland prior to 1953.

Joe was also involved and assisted the manager in applying for and obtaining the Quality Mark, level three.

Joe's assistance involved reviewing each of the roles within the service, and looking at the operational and procedural role of each person. This allowed the manager to asses what work had to be done within each role in order to work towards the improvement of the service.

Finally, Joe worked on developing a database system for recording all client files, the result is that we have a monthly graph to give an overview of the numbers of clients that we see at the core service each day. A report is also produced monthly advising the manager which clients each advisor is working with, and a base report of all clients that are being dealt with by the service and the status of the file eg, archived or open. This is an important management tool document. Well done Joe, and thanks for all your support.

Advice Service and Support Service Times

Advice Service

Drop in' (appointment arranged by the advisors only)

Monday	(10am 1pm) (2pm 4.30pm)
Tuesday	(10am 1pm) (2pm 4.30pm)
Wednesday	CLOSED
Thursday	(10am 1pm) (2pm 4.30pm)
Friday	(10am 1pm) (2pm 4.30pm)

Counselling and Therapy Groups

Initial appointment arranged confidentially with the psychotherapist supervisor. Afterwards weekly meetings as agreed and convenient to both client and therapist/counsellor.

Referral agencies

Preferrably referral by arranged appointment with other agency. Alternatively by signposting the client to the agency with details of contact telephone number, address and opening times and operational methods.

In house – Solicitor (Rogers & Burton)

By appointment arranged with the receptionist at the drop in service. Surgery held last Wednesday afternoon, each month.