

Innisfree
Housing Association

Annual Report
1989/90

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS
INNISFREE HOUSING
ASSOCIATION LTD
1989/90**

CHAIR: TIM HARTNETT

VICE-CHAIR: MARY CRIBBIN

TREASURER: MICHAEL SMITH

MARIE DALTON

MARY CONNOLLY

DONAL MAC CRAITH

JOHN KEENE

JIM O'SULLIVAN

MICHAEL O CALLANAIN

MICHAEL MORAN

Fr. W.DEMPSEY

MARGARET GALLAGHER

NORA O'DONNELL (Resigned)

SECRETARY

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Housing Corporation

Registration No LH 3829

Register of Friendly Societies

Reg No 24847R

**Member of National Federation of
Housing Associations**

CHAIR'S REPORT

Innisfree Housing Association was established in May 1985 by a number of concerned people in the Irish Community who wished to provide housing for the many single homeless and badly housed Irish people in London. Reports and personal experiences of working with homeless people prompted the founders to develop specialist provision. Being aware of the cultural and social context of homelessness in London for Irish people the Committee set about providing a hostel and short-life housing and sought registration with the Housing Corporation.

Reports by Irish groups and housing bodies show that the Irish are least likely to be owner-occupiers, live in the worst housing conditions and suffer the most homelessness throughout London.

Innisfree Housing Association aims to assist the housing needs of homeless Irish people in London and is particularly concerned with the older single homeless with a history of living in hostels, lodgings or sleeping rough. We are especially concerned with the plight of young Irish emigrants, whose housing difficulties present them with severe problems and who do not qualify for Local Authority housing.

Innisfree Housing Association which is not party political currently manages fifty short-life properties owned by Paddington Churches Housing Association, Network Housing Association, Shepherds Bush Housing Association, Metropolitan Housing Association and a number of London boroughs providing accommodation for over 130 people. In addition the Association manages two shared housing schemes in Cricklewood and Acton for 12 single homeless people.

The wide range of severe housing need among Irish people in Britain from the Irish elderly to the new emigrants, those with health and mental health difficulties, homeless families and those who cannot afford to secure any accommodation, demands that the Association continues to develop its provision.

On the 30th January 1989, Innisfree Housing Association attained registration with the Housing Corporation. We welcome this support from the Housing Corporation towards our efforts and also the support received from the London

Borough of Brent in obtaining registration. This registration now allows us access to part of the Government-backed Housing Corporation annual budget. Innisfree Housing Association has already applied for and received an allocation for shared housing and move-on accommodation. This marks an historic recognition of Irish housing needs and the efforts of Irish voluntary organisations addressing these needs.

The new financial regime where a loan element was incorporated in Housing Corporation funding coincided with our development programme. Unlike larger and well established Associations, Innisfree does not have large reserves to cushion rent levels and the evaluation of risks for our Association in this new regime is vital. We must develop, however, if we are to meet our objectives and by working closely with the Housing Corporation and large local Associations we have reduced these risks to a minimum.

Lack of revenue funding has severely limited our ability to develop and it should be an embarrassment to public funding bodies how their Equal Opportunities Policies and strategies have provided so little for Irish homeless people.

After 5 years service to the Association as Chair I would like to record my appreciation to all those who have assisted and those who have persevered with the setting up of Innisfree Housing Association when it seemed that the obstacles were overbearing. The continued and dedicated involvement of Committee Members and the hard work of staff under difficult circumstances provided many people with a home they would not otherwise have found.

The newly-elected Chair Mary Cribbin will undoubtedly better the Association with renewed vitality and effort.

Tim Hartnett

Chair

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The past year has seen some success for the Association. From a timely registration by the Housing Corporation we have now moved to a stage of having acquired our first units of permanent housing.

The year has changed the basis of Innisfree HA to that which now resembles something of a more secure housing provider. While still retaining its community base and meeting those housing needs which we were established to meet, the Association now functions more effectively. Our strong links with Housing Advisory agencies, Local Authorities and the Irish Community ensures that Innisfree HA is well placed to respond to Irish housing need in a structured way.

Over the year our housing provision has increased but there is now a need to develop a formal consultation process with tenants and licensees. We have moved from a time when every licensee knew all the staff and could exercise their "consultation rights" directly and often assertively to a situation where the communication gap is a little bit longer. A priority therefore which will run alongside greater housing provision is greater communication with the licensees and tenants for whom the Association was established.

The adoption of new policies on allocations, referrals, rents, equal opportunities and repairs and maintenance during the year will ensure that the Association can provide a more responsive service to Irish housing need and a better service to tenants and licensees.

Although there have been successes both in housing provision and improvement in the lives of many homeless and badly housed people, I feel that more could have been achieved. The major obstacle in our progress has been lack of and uncertainty over revenue funding. Without adequate resources in staffing and premises the Association is hindered. The total revenue funding received last year in grants from Local Authorities and LBGS was £19,000 - LB Brent funding the majority of that amount. Indeed, one might question how the relevant Equal Opportunities Policies practiced by funding bodies can provide so little to assist Irish homeless people.

The Housing Corporation and especially the North London regional office has provided Innisfree HA with much needed support in developing our transition from short-life to permanent housing provision. The Association has been greatly assisted by its links with Network HA, Paddington Churches HA and LB Brent.

Through the establishment of Innisfree HA and its consolidation over the coming year we have created a structured response to Irish homelessness where all who are concerned can contribute effectively for the direct benefit of homeless people.

During the year have been a number of developments which have enabled us to respond to Irish housing need.

- * The 6 bed shared housing scheme in Acton was opened in April.
- * Two new staff members were appointed.
- * The Association secured funding for an 18 unit scheme of permanent housing.
- * The first three permanent units of move-on housing were completed.
- * Further short-life housing was brought into management in LB Harrow and LB Hammersmith & Fulham.
- * The Association took on the short-life use of Brondesbury Hall and No. 3 The Avenue from LB Brent.
- * A considerable number of short-life and hostel residents were permanently re-housed through the establishment of nominations with other Housing Associations.
- * The Association received the support of LB Camden to extend its provision in the borough.
- * Close co-operation was established with the Migrant Training Scheme to cater for the housing needs of the most vulnerable trainees and develop a strategy for permanent solution to their housing needs.
- * The Fleadh '90 festival provided funds for a worker shared between MTS and Innisfree HA to pursue further housing options for young Irish homeless people.

- * The Federation of Irish Housing Groups was proposed by the Association to develop a concerted approach for provision across London.
- * The NFHA Equal Opportunities Sub-Committee is now developing a research project on Irish Housing Needs in conjunction with the CRE.
- * Finally, we have assisted in reducing the teacher shortage in London by providing temporary short-life housing to homeless Irish teachers.

The year ahead will hopefully consolidate our provision of permanent housing. There are some factors which continue to restrict our provision of housing. Not least of these is the uncertainty of funding of the post of Director. The temporary office situation prevents us having a permanent base. The level of housing management time of dealing with residents' difficulties is an area that needs greater consideration.

Our programme for the year ahead which although limited, will provide more housing, covers a diversity of work and of course relies on the continued support of the Housing Corporation, Local Authorities and funding bodies as well as those Housing Associations who are concerned with Irish housing need.

- * The development of the consortium with Network HA, ASRA and UJIMA to provide 30 permanent units over 2 years funded by the Housing Corporation.
- * The completion of an 8 bed dispersed hostel in Kilburn with PCHA.
- * The satisfactory development of our proposed scheme in LB Camden.
- * Negotiations with the Health Authority and LB Brent for a scheme for young Irish people who have had a short stay in a local psychiatric unit.
- * Support is expected from LB Brent for provision of a scheme for Irish elders.
- * We are exploring the possibilities of providing Private Sector Leased property to house homeless households from B&B accommodation, a great many of whom are Irish.
- * Pursuing the MTS housing strategy to secure short-life and permanent housing for homeless Irish young people across London.

- * We are working with Notting Hill Housing Trust and Metropolitan HA to develop schemes in LB Kensington & Chelsea, LB Harrow and LB Barnet.
- * The Association is seeking to develop move-on housing and a high care shared housing scheme in LB Harrow.
- * We are continuing to highlight Irish housing need through lectures, reports and through the media.
- * Production of a Business Plan to develop the viability of the Association and set out its targets.
- * Through the NFHA we hope to secure a greater awareness of Irish housing need and subsequent provision. The completion of a major research project would greatly assist this process.
- * Continuous evaluation and regular Management Sub-Committee meetings will ensure that we provide an efficient and streamlined housing service to our tenants.
- * Regular contact with researchers and housing agencies to develop our policies in meeting Irish housing need.
- * Participation together with Irish agencies in highlighting housing need and providing a concerted approach to meeting this need.
- * High priority will be given in the year ahead to developing an effective consultation system with licensees/ tenants.

With the support of the Management Committee I hope that we can achieve most of these tasks in the year ahead.

Padraic Kenna

Director

WHY AN IRISH HOUSING ASSOCIATION?

All immigrant groups experience difficulties with housing in London, and the Irish are no exception. In the past Irish people have not been identified as having any discernible need, and it is only now that Irish people and statutory bodies are becoming aware that Irish needs have been ignored. Lack of housing is the single most common difficulty for Irish in the capital. The extent of their housing deprivation has been analysed in a number of reports on housing and homelessness in London. Altogether, the research carried out highlights the disproportionate need for housing among Irish people of all ages and particularly among single Irish people.

- * 32% of the residents of short stay hostels in London are Irish.
- * Only 4% of homeless people in London who moved from hostels to permanent move-on accommodation are Irish.
- * 46,000 people emigrated from Ireland last year - the majority to London.
- * Irish people are over-represented in private rented housing which has little security and is often in a poor state of repair.
- * Many Irish men and women are seriously disadvantaged in the labour market often working in low-skilled manual and non-manual work characterised by low wages and casual employment.
- * Council housing has been the main tenure for Irish people (44%) and this is now in decline resulting in decreased housing provision affecting Irish people.
- * Many Irish people experience loneliness, isolation and racism in London as a result of lack of adequate housing.
- * Lack of housing for Irish migrant workers causes these workers to become homeless.
- * Many young Irish are forced to squat and the resulting criminalisation of these young people causes many problems.

- * Irish women are especially vulnerable to homelessness in the early stage of their arrival in Britain with an inadequate support system and later in their lives as low paid workers.
- * The extent of Irish homelessness in London is visible to all and yet the numbers are growing.
- * There is a failure by statutory bodies to provide housing for Irish homeless people or to appreciate and understand the social and cultural context of Irish homelessness.

It is against this background that the need for a housing association to deal primarily with the needs of Irish homeless people emerged.

Innisfree Housing Association was formed to meet the acute housing needs of homeless and badly housed Irish people in London who do not qualify for statutory assistance with housing.

As an Irish housing association, Innisfree is aware of the distinct culture and identity of Irish people and the contribution they have made as migrant labour to the British economy and society. Innisfree recognises the diversity of the Irish Community within a multi-cultural society and subscribes to equal opportunities in principle and in practice. Our Equal Opportunities Policy is designed to ensure that applicants are treated equally regardless of the background, religion, or way of life.

Clearly there is a need for a housing association such as Innisfree to be able to respond to housing difficulties faced by the Irish Community in London. As a housing association primarily for Irish people, Innisfree has the awareness of the reasons for Irish homelessness and is also able to provide support and offer the opportunity to integrate into a multi-cultural society without compromising their Irish identity.

Innisfree Housing Association is a structured response by Irish people to the housing problems faced by Irish people which utilises the resources of public funding to target housing provision for those in greatest need.

SHORT-LIFE HOUSING

Innisfree was the first Irish housing association to use short-life housing for single homeless Irish people. Innisfree currently manages fifty short-life properties housing over one hundred and fifty people.

Short-life is a unique form of housing. It involves bringing into use properties that are vacant and often in considerable disrepair, for the temporary accommodation of the homeless. Short-life organisations do not own the properties they manage. They are leased or licensed on short-term contracts from owners of property for a limited period of time that can range from six months to as long as ten years.

In the dwellings it manages, Innisfree Housing Association aims to house those who are either homeless, imminently homeless or living in unsatisfactory conditions and who also have little chance of finding suitable alternative accommodation. In the vast majority of cases this will mean single people and childless couples since families who are homeless may seek assistance from local authorities under Part III Housing Act 1985.

Innisfree Housing Association is particularly aware that there are sections of the community who have long suffered imbalances in its own housing service and to ensure that disadvantaged groups are granted equal access to its accommodation.

Innisfree Housing Association receives property from a variety of different owners, public and private, spread all over London, although the vast majority of existing stock is provided by Paddington Churches Housing Association and Network Housing Association.

Given the current wave of emigration of young people from Ireland and that many end up in low-paid jobs the demand for short-life increases.

Over the past 12 months we have increased our short-life provision. Over the year properties were also provided by Shepherds Bush Housing Association and Metropolitan Housing Association.

The provision of short-life housing for teachers in a large property supplied by LB Brent has reduced the shortage of teachers and ensured that they could find somewhere to live. Similarly short-life housing has provided a valuable option for

young trainees on the Migrant Training Scheme who could not secure private rented housing.

Short-life housing is now provided in the London boroughs of Brent, Hammersmith & Fulham, Barnet, Harrow, Hounslow and Camden. In the coming year the Association will seek to maintain and manage a similar number of properties although it is recognised that the supply of short-life housing is diminishing.

The Association will provide a more efficient service to licensees through computerising our rent and maintenance systems. We also intend to encourage greater participation of licensees through representatives being appointed to the Management Sub-Committee, regular newsletters and meetings.

INNISFREE'S SHARED HOUSING SCHEMES

CRICKLEWOOD & EALING

Innisfree presently has two shared housing schemes one, Catherine Colman House in Cricklewood which opened in July 1986 and our more recent one in Acton which opened in April 1990. We prefer to call these projects shared housing schemes rather than "hostels" as the term "hostel" does not adequately describe the housing schemes. The term traditionally carries with it certain negative connotations which we feel our residents neither wish nor deserve. For the majority of our residents the major problem in their lives was homelessness. Other problems such as unemployment, lack of confidence and alcohol dependency tended to stem from this.

The projects have six residents each, with their own comfortably furnished bedrooms. Kitchen, lounge and other facilities are shared. All of the residents, currently there are four men and two women between the ages of 35 and 59 years in each house, have had a history of living in ties accommodation, lodgings, sleeping rough or living in hostels providing short stay accommodation. Each residents' needs can be met by the environment the project provides. Each project has a worker who does not live in, and consequently the residents take much of the responsibility for the day to day running of the house.

The workers offer support an assistance on Welfare Benefits, employment, re-settlement, etc. The workers also undertake the care and management of the property i.e. ensuring repairs and decorations are carried out and the purchase of household supplies and supervises the residents in their responsibility for keeping the property clean.

House meetings are held regularly so that each resident can air their views, ideas and any problems that may arise. They also offer opportunities to welcome new residents and share experiences in an Irish setting.

MOVE-ON HOUSING

For projects like this to be successful it is essential that access to move-on accommodation is secured. In the case of Catherine Colman House there are two nominations per year to Network HA and for the Acton house there are two to Ealing Family HA. We would like to thank both associations for their help in this.

During the coming year we will be approaching other Housing Associations to grant Innisfree HA nomination rights to their permanent move-on accommodation in order to ensure that spaces are made available to Irish people who are in housing need.

A typical example of a resident of the shared housing project is Seamus. He was referred to Innisfree HA by LB Ealing's Housing Advice Service and was one of the first residents to move into our Ealing housing in April 1990. He had left Ireland in his early teens and had always lived around the Acton area. Now in his mid-fifties, he found himself homeless after the breakdown of a long-term relationship. Only the generosity of friends kept him from living on the streets. Like so many others in this position he found that he could not carry on working without having a secure base from which to do so. Once his housing problem had been resolved he began to look for work and he is now back working at his chosen trade. He has been nominated for permanent move-on housing to Ealing Family HA and is expecting to be housed by them within the next few weeks.

Another resident who has benefited is Brid. Brid left her native Co. Galway in 1956 aged 22 years. She found employment as a chambermaid in one of the many large hotels in London's West End. This type of work involves living in the place of employment. Because of the long hours and frequently heavy work she developed back trouble. Also as she became older, hotels were less eager to employ her when there were so many younger, fitter women to take her place. Consequently, she not only lost her job but a place to live as well.

For the next year or so, Brid lived in a series of short-stay hostels until she was finally referred to Innisfree. She moved into Catherine Coleman House in November of 1986 and for the next two years she was encouraged to gradually develop the skills to lead a more independent life. Eventually Brid was nominated by Innisfree for permanent move-on accommodation. This was in June 1988 and for the first time since arriving in London in 1956 Brid finally had a place of her own, somewhere she could call home.

These examples serve to illustrate the fact that it is the lack of a decent secure place to live which is the major problem for most people, their other problems tend to stem from this or are exacerbated by it. When housing can be offered to such people at an early stage, before homelessness becomes a way of life, then they can be helped to regain control over their own lives and fulfil their true potential as productive members of the Irish community in London.

Innisfree HA is seeking to develop similar type shared housing schemes as a solution to the housing difficulties facing Irish people in this category in London.



THE LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREE

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles
made:

Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the
honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace
comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where
the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple
glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the
shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the
pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)
wrote these lines while walking the
streets of London on a wintry even-
ing at the end of the last century.