

London Irish Centre

37th Annual Report 1991



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Co-ordinator:
Social Advice Workers:
Receptionist:
Receptionists — Volunteer:
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Missing Persons — Volunteer:
Youth Leader:
Day Centre — Volunteers:
Conway House:
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Changing Times.....Needs.....Demands

We have noticed many changes in the work and the responses demanded of our centre. Even within the space of the last twelve months some changes have been particularly pronounced. While the number of new clients we have seen has fallen marginally (-2% on 1990) and the total number of clients has increased marginally (-1.4% on 1990) the total number of face to face interviews conducted here in the centre increased 24% on the 1990 figure! The actual number of clients has changed little but the input per client in terms of time, effort and resources has increased. What has changed is the actual clientele and their situation in a socio-economic environment where opportunities, options and possible solutions are more limited. 3/4 of our clients were new to the centre in 1991; it is this group that is most reflective of present circumstances and trends.

The general impetus of service development in recent years has been on newly arrived young emigrants. Indeed this category is still a very significant part of our work. The largest single problem presented was accommodation; a problem raised in 45% of interviews with new clients. In many respects it is the 25 plus age group (55% of 1991 new clients compared with 45% in 1990) that have most difficulty in securing accommodation and employment as the services are not there for them.

People aged between 25 and 60 are assumed to be socially and economically equipped in such a way that they have no need of recourse to welfare and support services. Our experience is that this presumption is almost innate within service provision and presents an almost insurmountable handicap in attaining acceptance and self-sufficiency.

Our clientele for the most part reflect a very vulnerable section of society; they are those least prepared and least equipped to survive in an ethos of survival of the fittest. The AGIY publication, "A Guide To London For Young Irish People" recommends that a new emigrant needs at least £800 to cover the first month in London. Given accommodation costs and the current level of unemployment in London this can be considered to be a reasonable limit. 69% of our new clients had no money whatsoever on their first approach to our centre, a further 23% had less than £100.

THE INTER AND LEAVING — WITH WHAT?

65% of new clients in 1991 had no academic qualification of any sort — the same figure for 1990 was 53% while in 1988 it was 44%. The standard yardstick for Irish academic qualification is the Leaving Certificate. 9% of 1991 new clients had the Leaving Cert. compared to 18% in 1990 and 23% in 1988. The 1991 figure for attendance at primary school only was 48% while the

figure was 25% for 1988. Half left school at the age of 14 or under while in 1990 the figure was 36%. The following Pie-Charts compare Irish Centre figures for academic qualification with the figures of a major national survey conducted from University College Cork in 1989 which studied academic qualification of migrants from Ireland. The UCC survey's findings received a lot of media attention as they challenged the popular image that most Irish migrant are well educated young professionals seeking bigger salaries abroad; yet there is a world of a difference between the UCC and Irish Centre figures. The age range for both sets of figures is quite similar but that is where the similarities end. It is obvious that our clientele are among the most disadvantaged of migrants; a fact confirmed by our figures for the employment status of new clients.

ANY CHANCE OF A START?

9% of new clients were in employment at the time of their first approach to the Irish Centre. 34% had no work experience or formal training while 32.5% were in the general labourer category (up from 26% in 1991 and 15% in 1987).

A figure of over 90% unemployed is consistent with previous years however it is now particularly worrying as it becomes harder to secure employment; even claiming social security benefits takes longer now as complicated structures and rules are coupled with record numbers on the live register. The resultant situation is one where more and more clients are dependent on our services to maintain them until they can get some foothold on the ladder of self-sufficiency.

O MARY THIS LONDON'S A WONDERFUL SIGHT

A consistent average of 26% of new clients were female between 1986 and 1990. Our 1991 figure was 31%; again a significant change in a short space of time. It is difficult to pinpoint the reasons for this. An element of it is probably the increased number of referrals of homeless Irish families we have been receiving from the local council. We also believe that women tend to be better survivors and avail of more informal avenues of assistance in time of need, but now given a deepening economic crisis more are forced to approach more formal sources of assistance such as the Irish Centre and other voluntary and statutory services.

3/4 of new female clients were in the 18-39 age-group. 70% of males were single while the figure for females was 35%. These facts point to a greater level of familial commitment on the part of our female clients and this is the primary factor in their approaching our centre.

Our workload is increasingly welfare related with a longer term input; something that has always been an element of our work but now more prevalent. Previously our work was more employment based with initial input geared towards securing accommodation/employment and being successful in doing this. This now takes longer to do and hence our limited resources must go further, for longer, with more people. It is hard for our work to be preventative as more of our resources are geared towards reaction to crises.

We believe that the current drop in emigration has bottomed out and that we are on the threshold of another wave of emigration from Ireland. Since a peak in 1987 our number of new clients has been dropping steadily — however the drop from 1990 to 1991 was only 2%. According to our calculations our new client numbers will be up at least 7% for 1992.

Emigration develops its own momentum : we expect large increases in the following years. This is especially plausible given admissions by the Irish Government that unemployment is soon expected to reach a record figure

of 300,000 in the Republic. Economic “push” factors are more significant with the more poorly educated migrants while “pull” factors are more significant with the better educated.

Our figures show that in general our new clients tend to be older, less well qualified and require more support from us as they are so ill-prepared for their move to London. There are many Irish migrants here who are not very marketable and without options or clear goals, but rather are displaced, marginalised and disposable. Their difficulties in London are very often symptomatic of problems which have their roots elsewhere.

In the meantime the Irish Government’s DION funding for projects and agencies in Britain has remained at a constant £500,000 and hence their commitment has been decreasing in real terms and at the same time being spread around an increasing number of projects. Now is the time for a co-ordinated and wholesome development and investment in services for the frighteningly ill-equipped and vulnerable people that will find themselves in London over the coming years.



Paul Murphy (Co-ordinator), Mrs. Small, Mr Jim Turner (Mayor of Camden), Jim Myers (Vice-Chairman), Mary Allen, H.E Mr. Joseph Small (Irish Ambassador), Fr. D. Cormican (Director of The Irish Centre), Briege McIntyre (Mayoress)

A Day in the Life

9.30am, and our "Open" sign has just gone up. The first few clients of the morning shuffle in, rubbing their hands. "Hi! How are you? Is it cold enough for you?" "get yourself a cup of tea, and I'll be with you in a few minutes, OK?" Someone enquires about the possibility of a cigarette, and our receptionist complies.

Soon, all interview rooms are occupied. The latest instalments in life-stories are exchanged between Advice Workers and 'regulars', while in other rooms it's the first episode and a relaxed atmosphere is established more slowly, with casual chat and the assurance of confidentiality.

For one man in his fifties, it's the first approach ever to an agency such as ours. He had always been employed until recently, and separation from his wife hasn't helped matters. Clearly embarrassed, he admits that he is homeless and penniless. A few phonecalls on, the last remaining vacancy in a hostel accepting older men has been filled. After ensuring that the client is aware of his benefit entitlements, directions and bus tickets are given. "Keep in touch now . . . we can work on longer-term accommodation".

A young woman who was accepted by one of 'our' valued landlords last week is now feeling secure enough to seek work as a nanny. She is given our list of agencies and today's Standard, and settles down to phone around.

"I've got no money and I'm on the dole,
I've got happiness in my soul . . ."

Strains of a familiar song announce the arrival of a familiar face.

"O happiness, happiness, the sweetest song that I possess!"

Our receptionist is answering a series of telephone calls, ranging from "Where can I buy Irish dancing shoes?" to "How many Sainsburys are there in London?", while continuing to greet clients and type letters.

A young woman's drug use is out of control. Distressed, she gradually imparts her story . . . she has coped up to now, though her habit has led to involvement in prostitution. Recently, friends have died after overdosing and she's just beginning to think about HIV. The worker listens, and the woman considers the options suggested.

At one o'clock there is a break for lunch. At two a woman and her three young children are seated on the steps of the Irish Centre, complete with suitcases. Since arriving in Euston this morning, they have called to the Homeless Persons Section, and have been referred here for help with preparing a statement. A worker establishes the fact that the family have a place to stay for tonight at least. The children are becoming agitated and boisterous . . . someone finds a box of toys. The statement is prepared, detailing the domestic violence which forced the mother and children from their home. Vouchers to buy some basic groceries are given. "See you tomorrow . . . take care now!"

"Is anyone in the shower?" A young man who has been visiting the Centre for a few months has found himself on the streets again, and is in need of a general clean-up. His worker attempts to resolve DSS problems over the telephone.

A sixteen year old lad has tired of London. He has spent some time in a nightshelter and has realised that his age renders claiming bene fits and finding accommodation rather difficult. He is desperate to return to his family. The local priest is contacted . . . he generously agrees to pay the coach and boat fare, which is booked. Before he leaves, the young man is urged to think very seriously before any future move to London.

And so the day goes, like other days, yet unlike any other. Workers seek to resolve common difficulties and ease personal tragedies. By 4.30, when the doors close, there have been a few laughs, and it has been a good day.

Needs and Responses

In 1991, workers at the Irish centre conducted 5113 **face-to-face interviews**, dealing with a total of 10,789 enquiries which covered a broad range of topics. Several factors, most notably the deepening recession, were reflected in changes in our client profile and in the type of problems presented.

In line with recent years, **accommodation** advice was sought as part of 33.3% of interviews. In the majority of instances, this entailed Advice Workers making use of contacts with nightshelters, hostels, B&Bs and private landlords to arrange immediate accommodation. We were also involved in making referrals to 'move-on' accommodation, including Housing Associations. Another important aspect of our work was in assisting families, pregnant women and others considered by Local Authorities to be in 'priority need' to prepare statements explaining their circumstances. In addition, we advised on matters as diverse as illegal evictions, squatting and Housing Benefit.

Employment-seeking was an issue raised in a significantly smaller percentage of interviews than in either of the two preceding years — 15.6% in 1991, as compared to 23.1% and 22.1% in '90 and '89 respectively. In many cases, this lack of interest was coupled with a sense of despair following many months of fruitless jobseeking. The Irish Centre continued to provide telephone facilities, up-to-date lists of employers and agencies and a range of newspapers and publications for those seeking work, as well as referring clients on to any relevant careers offices, training centres or jobcentres.

Repatriation continued to be sought by our clients, particularly younger people, as an alternative to intolerable problems faced in London, such as homelessness. Where the fare could be guaranteed by a relative, priest, social worker or charity, workers were able to arrange return to Ireland. However, in cases where this was not possible or practical, other advice or assistance was given. In emergency cases, specifically involving bereavement, the Irish Centre has access to charity funding.

Advice and information on **health, education and general matters** was requested in 39.4% of interviews. Much of this rise can be attributed to the increasing number of people we saw who had medical difficulties including HIV and AIDS, and encompasses referrals made to drug, alcohol and mental health projects.

The percentage of interviews in which **welfare benefits**

was presented as an issue was up by almost 10% in 1991. This is indicative of the widespread increase in unemployment. Complications caused by DSS rule changes and restructuring may also be a factor. Clients experienced an alarming number of frustrating delays and mistakes with their benefits. Staff at the Irish Centre negotiated with DSS offices by letter and telephone, seeking to resolve difficulties. Advice and help was also given on claiming entitlements.

For many of our clients, delays in processing of claims originated with their lack of adequate **identification**; which was often symptomatic of unprepared emigration. It proved a particular problem for many travellers whose births had never been registered. We were able to apply directly to the General Registrars in Dublin and Belfast for birth and marriage certificates. According to the requirements of some DSS offices, even these original documents were considered insufficient as proof of identity; and people were obliged to compile supporting evidence. The Irish Centre assisted by procuring baptismal certificates, testimonials from professionals in Ireland and by offering explanations of travelling culture.

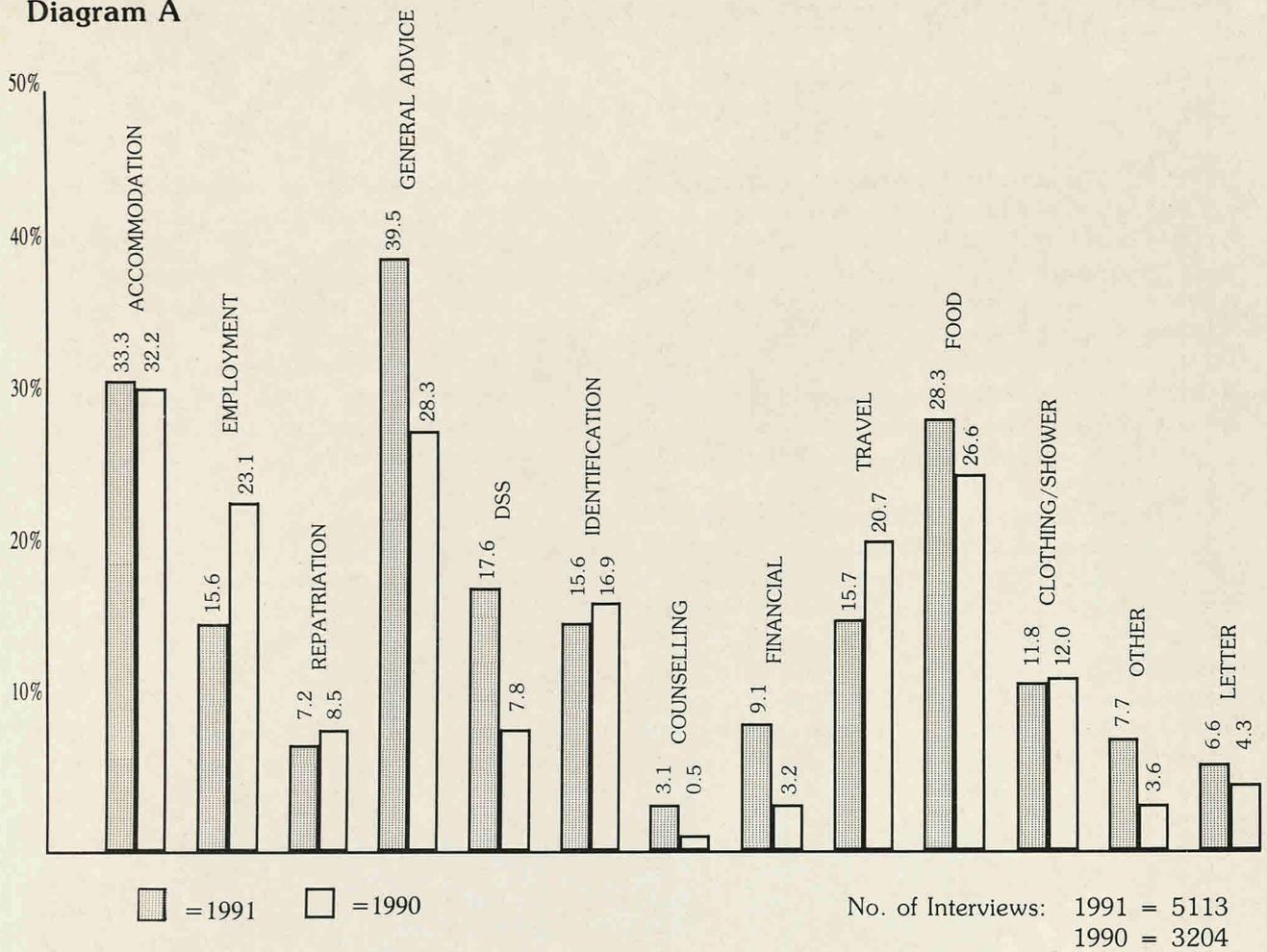
Advice Workers noted that **counselling** was a component in 3.1% of interviews this year, compared to 0.5% last year. We found that economic difficulties were taking their toll in the form of family break-down and depression. Referrals were also made to specialist counselling and support services.

The amount of **financial** advice needed has also escalated — by over 6% — as the general level of poverty of our clients worsened. This category covers advice and negotiation around fuel bills, rent arrears, Poll Tax, multiple debt etc; and includes applications to charitable trusts on clients' behalf for funds to purchase essential items such as clothes and furniture.

The demand for our other services remained steady in 1991. **Directions and bus tickets** were given to those travelling to accommodation or employment. The facilities of **shower and clothes rooms** were open to all. In 28.3% of interviews, clients requested assistance with food — the most fundamental of human needs.

Whenever possible, Irish Centre workers endeavoured to **visit** clients; especially in cases of hospitalisation, imprisonment or disability.

Diagram A



Comparison between 1990 and 1991 — percentage of interviews in which each problem was presented as an issue.

Phoncalls, Letters and Casual Callers

In 1991, we received 6062 telephone enquiries — an increase of 16.6% on 1990. The types of problems presented in these calls followed a similar pattern to those presented by personal callers, with the addition of queries on entertainment and leisure, and requests for translations into Gaelic!

We had 205 ‘casual callers’ — they included researchers, students and visitors from interested agencies; making general enquiries and seeking information on Irish issues. The resources of our library and press-cuttings file were made available to these people.

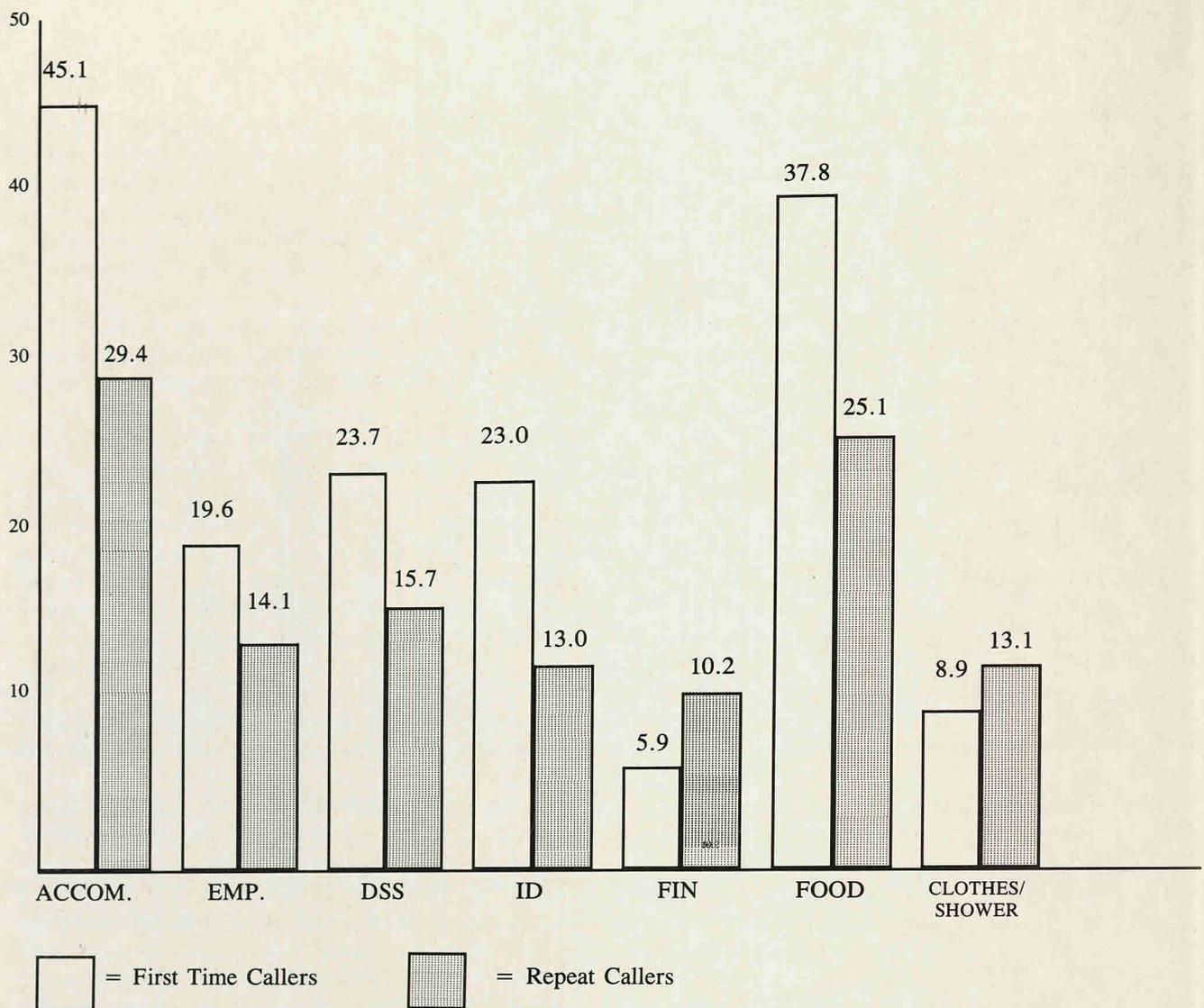
We answered 120 postal enquiries on a variety of subjects — information for intending emigrants and those planning resettlement in Ireland, advice on pension entitlements, taxation etc. was given.

Summary

Problems presented in interviews -----	10789
Casual callers -----	205
Phoncalls -----	6062
Postal enquiries -----	120

	17176

Diagram B: Comparative Figures for First Time and Repeat Callers during 1991.



The Diagram shows the percentage of interviews in which each problem was presented as an issue. (Figures which are similar are not included i.e. General Advice).

Those we served

We noted marked differences in the problems presented by first-time callers and those presented by repeat callers. First-time callers tended to be confronted with immediate crises, very often involving homelessness. They tended to raise more issues per interview than did repeat callers. Repeat callers were often those for whom youth, advanced age, mental illness, alcoholism, homelessness, illiteracy or other issues added to support needs. Frequently, they required the help of workers in tackling

ongoing problems with benefits, debts or budgeting. For example, only requests for clothing/showers and financial problems were presented in a greater proportion of interviews with repeat callers. This reflects the incidence of homelessness and vulnerability among these clients. Work with these clients is oriented towards empowering the individual and discouraging long-term dependency on the Irish Centre.

Emmet – Young, gifted and Irish.....

Emmet has been known to the London Irish Centre since 1985. He was seventeen years old with a severe alcohol problem when he first came to London. He approached the Centre for accommodation and was referred to a shortstay hostel in the West End.

Emmet returned continuously for move on accommodation, advice on DSS, employment, food, travel cost and counselling. We tried to get Emmet to confront his addiction but he did not or could not see the real dangers of alcohol.

As time progressed Emmet was given accommodation with a Housing Association and during this time began to accept and face his alcoholism. He stayed off the drink for quite a while and staff then encouraged some training. He was referred to the Migrant Training Company and was accepted for a computer technology course. Emmet was very excited about the prospects of doing a course. He attended the opening day which was held

here at the Centre but then decided he could not accept the course offered him as he felt dirty and stupid in comparison to the rest of the pupils. We told him we would get clothes and the tutor tried to persuade him not to leave. Emmets opinion of himself was so low that anything outside of his circle was seen as threatening.

Emmet began drinking again and turned to crime to support his habit. We were concerned for him and continued to support him wherever possible.

Then one day Emmet came in and said he had enough. He wanted to be referred to an alcohol recovery project and staff obliged. Emmet is now recovering from his addiction and is doing voluntary work with handicapped children. He rings the Centre weekly for support and to thank us for not giving up on him. We delight in seeing Emmet enjoy a new life from a different perspective at the age of twenty four.



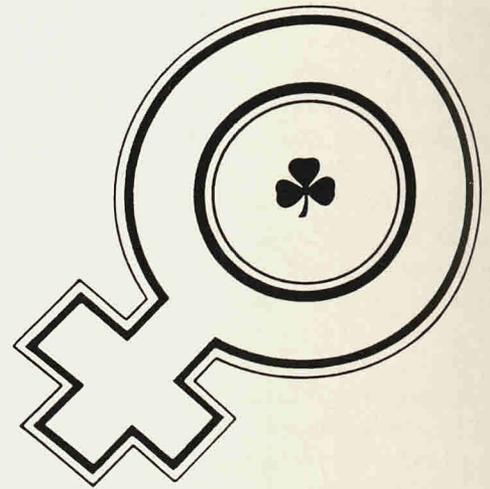
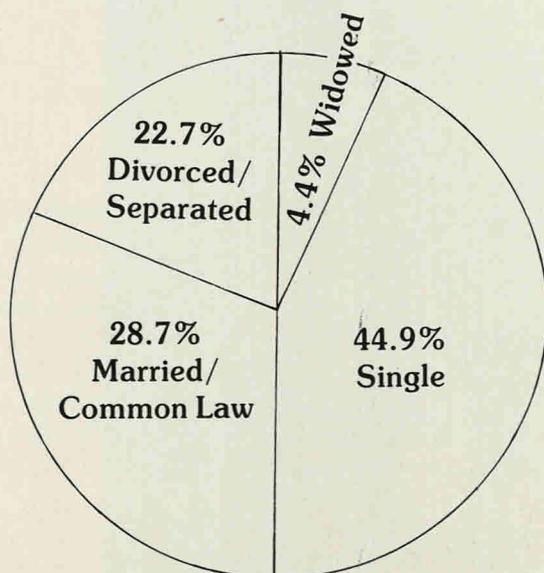
Irish Women

We are heartened that in 1991, there was a 5% increase in the proportion of our new clients who were women, bringing the figure up to 31%.

In the past, some Irish women may have been reluctant to approach certain agencies. There are several possible reasons for this: Irish agencies may have been regarded as church-based; a perception which could alienate some women, particularly lesbians, single mothers, divorcees and others who may have experienced rejection in Ireland. In addition, it is estimated that half of all married Irish women in London have non-Irish partners — this would hasten “disidentification” from Irish organisations. Often, Irish women are reluctant to approach helping agencies due to strong cultural pressure to succeed in their roles of ‘good’ wife or mother. Many of the women we see are actually apologetic about seeking assistance.

A factor in the increased numbers of women we see is undoubtedly the pressures of long-term recession. However, we hope that more Irish women are now finding that our service is accessible to them. We welcome all Irish women and their children, and offer an anti-sexist, non-judgemental approach.

The marital status of our new female callers is represented by the chart below: 28.7% were married or living with a partner. The corresponding figure for men was 16.8%. This would suggest that our female clients had more familial commitments than did males. 22% of women compared to 12% of men were divorced or separated; and most of these women had sole responsibility for children after relationship break down. Of the single women we saw, many were mothers also. In this context, the newly-introduced Children’s Act will surely have an impact on our work.



Three-quarters of new female clients were aged between 18 and 39. 81% were unemployed, and a further 11.3% were unavailable for work — i.e: students, retired, sick.

Difficulties with housing, welfare benefits, finance etc. were common to both sexes, but for women they were frequently compounded by other issues. Many women we saw became homeless after fleeing domestic violence, and were then obliged to provide proof of their maltreatment. We found that those women not judged to be ‘in priority need’ of council housing (young/ healthy/ childless) tended to endure long periods of ‘invisible homelessness’; sleeping on friends’ floors, for example. When such resources were exhausted, Irish Centre workers were approached. We found a severe shortage of hostel places for single women, while those in privately rented accommodation were often vulnerable to harassment.

Women have told us of transfer of benefits causing payment delays after separation from partners. Meanwhile, mothers struggled to support children disturbed by the upheaval.

A sense of isolation was commonplace among our female clients, particularly women with children and older women. Most seemed to have less contact with traditionally ‘Irish’ social networks in London than did men, who tended to gravitate towards building sites, Irish pubs etc. Some women were simply in need of a listening ear, while others were referred to specialist counsellors to work on feelings around abuse, pregnancy or other issues.

* ‘Irish Women in London’ — London Strategic Policy Unit 1988.

Josephine's Story

Josephine is 35 years of age. While in her late teens, she married. After a few years, it became apparent that he was an alcoholic. Josephine was subjected to verbal abuse and physical violence, including rape. During the late stages of Josephine's first pregnancy, her husband was arrested for drunken driving. The following day, she went into labour prematurely, and there were fears for her child's life. Josephine had a nervous breakdown and decided it was time for her to divorce her husband. Her mother and family disapproved of the divorce, and so testified against her as an unfit mother. Fortunately, Josephine was granted full custody of her child, but stress caused her to suffer another breakdown, which necessitated a stay in hospital. After this, Josephine raised her son alone for five years.

She entered a relationship with another man — they were happy together, and in time decided to marry. Josephine had another baby, and the family was content for over a year. Sadly, her second husband also began to drink and beat her. He started an affair with another woman, and forced Josephine and the children to leave the family home.

Josephine approached the council for help with accommodation. At this stage, her son had begun to suffer anxiety attacks, eczema and incontinence, all of which were diagnosed as resulting from the trauma of both separations. This intensified Josephine's own feelings of guilt.

At the time of her first visit to the Irish Centre, Josephine had just been offered permanent housing, but had no furniture or household items whatsoever. She was refused a Social Fund grant because her partner had previously claimed such funding. We arranged for an urgent payment to be made by a charity to enable Josephine to buy some basic items, and applied for further funding from another source. Practical help was also given, in the form of blankets, crockery and saucepans.

Josephine was very relieved to be given space to talk about her feelings, and agreed to a referral to counselling. She has found this very helpful, and she and her children are now settling into their new home. Josephine is attending a part-time degree course at a local college. She sometimes returns to the Centre for a chat, or for support with problems she experiences.



Directors Report

1991 was a year of celebration for Camden Town — its 200th anniversary. Traders Community groups and the local council shared in celebrating this great event. This was highlighted in newspaper articles and local festivities. We had a special night at the Irish Centre hosted by north London Comhaltas Ceolteoirí Éireann.

The Irish are very much part of that 200 years. They settled here in Camden because of its close proximity to Euston Station, their point of arrival into London. It was for the same reason that it was decided to set up the Irish Centre in Camden Town — a haven for the newly arrived Irish immigrant.

Today the London Irish Centre is still a haven for the newly arrived immigrant providing a very wide range of services as you will read in this report.

1991 may have been a year of celebration for Camden Town but it was also a year of hardship for our newly arrived and recently arrived immigrants — increasing unemployment, increasing homelessness.

Our primary concern throughout the year was to help the homeless especially those young Irish people who ended up sleeping 'rough' in London.

For the Borough it was a difficult year with high budget deficits to be tackled and various issues to be resolved. The street cleaning was privatised; the development plan for Kings Cross is still being processed; the education service has been taken on by the Borough — adult education has suffered a great reduction in funding; and of great negative significance for our Community Services Department, there was an eight month strike by Social Workers. Presently being studied are proposals to contract out to private or voluntary agencies, the Borough services of luncheon clubs, meals on wheels and home helps.

Despite the pressures on the London Borough of Camden, it managed to maintain its grant to the Irish Centre with a small increase for inflation. This was much appreciated as a support to the Centre in its work with Irish in the Borough — young and old. The installation of a disabled lift was a welcome addition to the Centre's

facilities, increasing wheelchair access to all sides of the Centre.

It suffices for me to express my deep gratitude to our staff and volunteers for their hard work, and dedication in caring for those in difficulties. Much was able to be done through the co-operation of other voluntary and statutory agencies both here in Britain and in Ireland.

The new year saw the departure of Fr. Tom Scully, O.M.I. who had given devoted service and excellent leadership to the Centre during his term as Director/Chaplain. His main great achievements were the restructuring of the Social advice team, providing facilities for Computer training, research into opportunities in education and training for young Irish immigrants, setting up a Day Centre and Luncheon Club for the elderly. On behalf of all the Irish Centre I say, Go raibh míle maith agat agus beannacht De leat.

Firstly I would like to thank all who served on the various Committees; the Administrative Committee, Welfare Advisory Committee and the Social Committee.

My thanks also to those who supported us financially, London Borough of Camden, Irish Government D.I.O.N. Committee, The Lawlor Foundation, Toyota Ireland, Council of Irish Counties Welfare Fund, the Benevolent Society of St. Patrick, Family Welfare Associations, the County Associations, Irish Centre Hostels, Irish Centre Social Club and the Irish Youth Foundation.

A very special word of thanks to our many fund raisers who helped especially in our raffles and all our donors.

Without all this help and co-operation it would not be possible to carry on serving the needs of the Irish in London.

It was encouraging to receive a 5% increase in the Grant from the London Borough of Camden and disappointing to receive a decrease of £9,000 in the Grant from the D.I.O.N. Committee.

Missing Persons — A Loved One Lost

The London Irish Centre is the only Irish agency in Britain which provides the service of locating missing loved ones. The person might be missing only a few days or perhaps 40 years.

Brian Duggan, a voluntary worker, and ex-Mayor of Camden runs this department. He literally pursues every avenue to locate the person. It is such a joy when the lost are found and disappointing when the search is unsuccessful.

Brian says: "Of all the cases we were successful with this year the most rewarding, in my opinion, was the reuniting of a mother with her daughter after 41 years".

We started the year with a balance of 12 cases carried forward from 1990. During the current year we received

a further 125 applications, making a total of 137 applications to be dealt with in 1991.

Results

71 located
40 unsuccessful
4 not accepted
22 carried forward

137 TOTAL

Methods

16 found through Irish Centre/Irish Centre Hostels records
39 found through DSS/NHS records
6 found through Gardai
10 found through various organisations and churches.

71 TOTAL

We received a total of £683.00 in donations to the Missing Persons Section this year.

PROFILE OF BRIAN DUGGAN, THE MAN WHO SEEKS OUT A LOST GENERATION

The Finder

One man deals with the unknown number of Irish people who "go missing" in Britain.

Last year Brian Duggan successfully traced a young Irishman and put him back in contact with his family.

Brian had been contacted by the find Martin (not his real name) Irish Centre re...

DSS DECIMATE IRISH MISSING PERSONS SERVICE

EXCLUSIVE

The only missing persons service for the Irish in Britain has been decimated by a Department of Social Services withdrawal of co-operation, it emerged this week.

The Missing Persons Service, based in the Camden Irish Centre, has been running for almost 40 years and a change of policy by the DSS has left the strength of providing the service. Brian Duggan, who has run the operation for seven years, said: "The new ruling means we can't deal with 50 per cent of the cases as get day-in/day-out service will become negligible and 40 years will be a waste of the drain."

Computer

The DSS provided a letter forwarding service for the centre whereby the last address of the missing person, on computer at DSS headquarters, would receive a message asking them to get in touch.

Up to now the service was provided for most cases under the banner of "welfare purposes". The exceptions were limited to reasons such as debt collection and husbands and wives looking for their spouse.

But now the service will only look for relatives if there is a "family trauma" or illness within the family who cannot be traced.

work was becoming "increasingly lightweight in character" and they must restrict the service "to protect us from criticism of improper use of our resources".

The department had stopped the service in June 1991 after "a number of complaints from various quarters, including some via Ministers and MPs". And the reason they gave in the Irish Centre was that the work was done voluntarily and they had more pressing demands.

But the decision was reversed within a month pending a review by the director of central operations, Mr Roberts, at their Newscastle Upon Tyne headquarters.

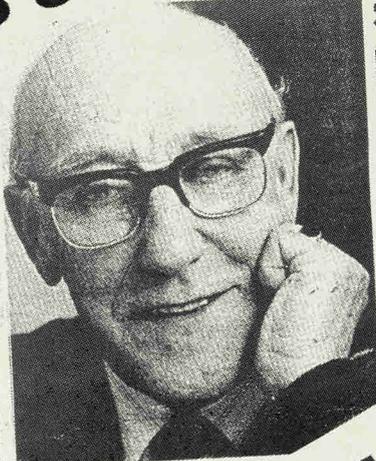
Welfare

He concluded that they would "restrict the provision of our services to where there are clear 'welfare' grounds or other equally valid reasons that would not attract public criticism for misuse of Civil Service resources".

The Missing Persons Service started in 1951 and, since inception into the job, has a 100 per cent success rate.

He said: "I just don't know how many families who have been reunited through our service."

MISSING PERSONS SERVICE



Brian Duggan - "building bridges between parents and children". Photo by Mairead O'Heocha.

DEAD BODY MYSTERY

An unidentified man was found dead in Camden Lock last week and the Police's only lead is a shamrock tattoo with a 'Mayo' inscription on the back of the man's hand.

He is thought to be in his late 30s or early 40s and was seen near Camden Lock at 4pm last Wednesday.

College Hospital.

The man was described as having long brown, unkempt hair and was wearing shabby clothes. The police said that he is possibly a vagrant and hoping that the tattoo will help in identifying him.

By Thomas Larkin

and I felt as if I knew him but I couldn't put a name to the face. He also felt that he might have been a heavy drinker and is hoping for a photograph of the man to circulate around the Centre. The Police then contacted the Arlington Day Centre but no identification was obtained. Friday and confirmed that the man was identified as being last seen at PC Lewis took fingerprints of the man and is hoping to find the identity of the man soon.

contact with their family." The biggest problem is the "kids between 16 and 18", who make up 73 per cent of the cases. Because people under 18 do not receive Income Support unless they are on a Youth Training Scheme, and to apply a person had to have a permanent address, the chances of tracing them are greatly reduced. "The only way I can find them is if they've called to one of the advice agencies or centres. They don't really exist according to the DSS." "A lot still think the streets of London are paved with gold but when they come over here they end up sleeping on the streets." "It helps if I know they come over here they end up sleeping on the streets." Tracing down older people who have not been in contact with their families for years is even more difficult. Again the reason they lost contact is often a row about something trivial.

There are certain kinds of 'missing people' which Brian will not trace. When a wife or husband leaves their spouse and comes to London, or takes children with them, Brian does not try to trace them. The other case is when an adopted child is looking for his real parents.

"If I am contacted about a missing wife or husband, I refer it to the Centre's director, Fr Scully. It's a difficult situation because if I find them I can't tell the spouse as there are often legal difficulties."

Brian is a spritely 69-year-old from Tipperary and the only person in Britain providing a Missing Persons service for Irish people. He is a former Labour councillor in Camden and was Mayor of the borough for a year. And his voluntary work keeps up the busy lifestyle to which he is accustomed.

He praises the workers at the Camden Irish Centre for the help they provide in searching for people - this unofficial 'back up team' is indispensable. But he needs someone to work "on the streets", as do the logwork he can't do, as people can be in its budget from it.

Service to the Elderly

The Day Care Centre celebrates its fourth anniversary in April — it's formal opening was by the then Minister of Labour, Bertie Ahern, T.D.

We now have a membership of eighty and continue to serve **one hundred and fifty meals each week, from Monday to Friday**, and at the moment we have a waiting list for vacancies. Apart from the cooking, the service is run with the help of a strong group of volunteers — Many Thanks!

We have had quiet a number of outings during the past year, including visits to the theatre, trips to the seaside, etc. Here I must mention the wonderful support and help from Fr. Tom Scully, OMI. On two occasions during the year he has played host to us at St. Peters, Leigh-on-Sea. We also, on our last visit, had the pleasure of having the Mayor of Camden, Jim Turner and the Lady Mayoress join us. Our annual Christmas Dinner/Party

as always was a great success as was our Carol Concert. At the time of writing we envisage a trip to Ireland.

One big disappointment of the year was the fact that our Keep-fit class, held once a week for one hour, had been cut by Camden Council. I believe that this class was very beneficial to our members and a deep feeling of regret is evident, particularly as this was the only activity left to us as our craft classes were cut some time ago.

Help is given to anyone who seeks it, such as filling applications for rent rebate, disability allowance, etc. With the more serious queries we have the assistance of our trained professional Advice Workers.

We hope to go from strength to strength in the coming year with the help of our Director, Fr. Denis Cormican, OMI.



Travellers and Traditions

In the last year the London Irish Centre have seen well over a hundred travelling families. Traditionally, they travelled the country-side, at first on foot but later in horse drawn carts and wagons, making and repairing tinware, sweeping chimneys, selling small house-hold wares, and doing whatever odd-job work they could find. Today, they live on the roadside in caravans, on official sites and some have been settled in houses or flats. An urban people now, they live by odd-job work which is not very plentiful and on welfare. In a society dominated by growing industry and fast life there is not much room or understanding for their traditions or basic needs. Staff at the Irish centre have been privileged to be able to sit and work with travellers and listen to the experiences to which they as an ethnic group have had to face in London and Ireland. As Irish travellers they have been discriminated against for being Irish and also as travellers.

The centre has a good working relationship with Camden Homeless Persons Unit and as a result of this they refer many families to the centre. Staff are sensitive to the greater needs of the travelling community which sometimes require more detailed statements regarding their circumstances. It is not uncommon for a traveller to have no contact with official bodies which quite often causes immense problems with the relevant Housing Authorities. In addition to statements we try to meet more practical basic needs such as clothing, bedding, cutlery, cooking utensils, food and travel expenses when possible.

In the case of proof of pregnancy being required arrangements can be made for registration with a medical doctor.

Identification is also a problem within the travelling community as in the past it was not seen as important to register the birth of the child. They supported their own community and therefore did not need relevant birth certificates. It is traditional for travellers who are a very religious community to Baptise their children but unfortunately a Baptismal Certificate is not recognised as a suitable form of identification for housing or DSS purposes. A full Birth Certificate is necessary.

Travellers are often seen as dirty, uneducated, drunken louts. They are often obliged to exist without running water, sanitation, or refuse collection. This engenders hostility by the dirty appearance and accumulation of waste. While such conditions are allowed to persist it is inevitable that antagonism will continue towards them. They are often refused services in public houses, hotels, restaurants and access to cinemas. It is not uncommon to see blatantly racist signs such as "NO TRAVELLERS ALLOWED" displayed. The humiliation, isolation and the emotional bruising will take years if ever to overcome. Staff at the Irish Centre provide a temporary relief for them while at the centre. We will continue to fight for their needs and rights as an ethnic group.



Health

For a variety of reasons callers to the Centre have expressed increased anxiety about health and health & safety issues. Some are young people who have suffered injuries at work due to accidents caused by inadequate safety precautions and over pressurised work practices. Healthy young men who emigrated for work are now disabled or severely handicapped. There are the middle-aged and elderly whose bodies are growing old and whose need for health service provisions is increasing. The former confidence that the famed N.H.S. gave people is now weakened by the changes imposed in the past few years. Staff deal with peoples queries and worries and direct the callers to the appropriate service/doctor, etc. Recently, enquiries have grown about the health service in Ireland. Many retired and near retirement age people are comparing likes and dislikes between the health services and social security systems. Hopefully, in 1992, European barriers will drop sufficiently to make questions about different prescription charges and different bus pass conditions for the elderly and disabled less complex.

Emigration in Ireland is not limited to the employment hopeful, our staff frequently deal with registered disabled and long term sick people who have chosen to come to Britain to seek a better life or even just for a change of circumstances.

We have chosen in this report to highlight two areas of health which have raised the concerns of staff:

Mental Health:

1991 was a significant year on the mental health front. The combined pressure on the statutory services from the mentally ill among London's homeless, the extensive structural changes in the N.H.S., the retreat of the social service departments in most London Boroughs into obligatory work only and in our immediate locality, an ongoing six month strike by Camden Social Workers meant that over a hundred such people came many times to our door for help in 1991. The voluntary sector in London has been left to absorb the unmet needs of mentally ill people. Despite these pressures the Centre is proved to have maintained its policy to provide an open-door information and advice service five days a week, with staff available to clients thirty seven and a half hours a week. The Director and volunteers are also available many additional hours.

Being near the centre of London we get Irish people coming from several Boroughs. Despite the shortcomings of the statutory services, particularly prior to the D.O.E. initiatives late in the year, our positive relationship with one social services team in Camden must be highlighted.

We have found Camden Mental Health Outreach Team extremely co-operative and they have on many occasions come to the Centre to interview and assess clients who

were homeless and in need of specialist support in the area of mental health. For example, on one occasion, a client who was extremely disturbed and exhibiting symptoms of psychosis warranted a professional assessment by the Team who willingly and rapidly came to our aid. The client was subsequently "sectioned" for twenty-eight days which was necessary for his own safety as well as the community in general. On other occasions clients have been assisted through the Homeless Persons Unit system by the team and therefore, secured temporary accommodation.

Camden Mental Health Outreach Team was created out of the housing department's concern that a large percentage of their clients have mental health problems and have no support. Their two main functions are research and support. Research includes identifying gaps in service provision for people with mental health problems, information gathering, evaluating and assessing needs. In terms of support they offer "hands on support", including counselling, practical life skills training, group work advice and education. This process begins with referral — mental health assessment — intervention — follow-up.

We have a good working relationship with the Mental Health Outreach Team and look forward to continued success in the forthcoming year.

HIV/AIDS:

During 1991 the HIV/AIDS epidemic has continued to have an impact on the services provided by the Irish Centre. Though the numbers who have disclosed to staff that they are HIV+ or have AIDS are still relatively small, we have experienced, first hand, the very complex issues involved for clients who are living with HIV/AIDS. Some of these people have been diagnosed HIV+ in Ireland and thinking, for whatever reason, that they would be ostracised by their family, friends and community if they disclosed this information, they felt forced to come to London where they believed it would be easier to maintain anonymity. For these people, the further isolation which results from emigration is yet another burden they have to cope with.

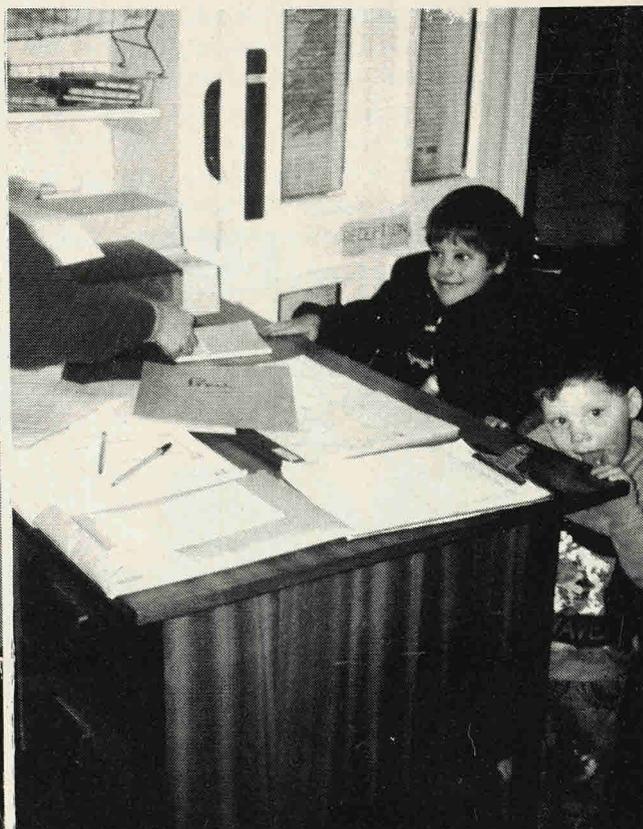
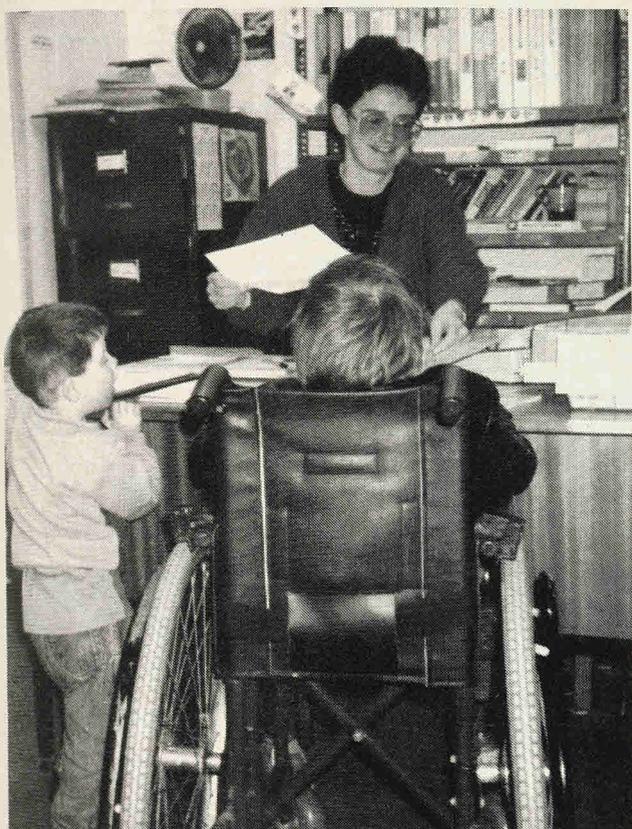
The HIV/AIDS group are no longer confined to specific "at risk" groups. It is now beginning to affect men, women and children from all walks of life, this includes Irish people. Having to cope with the medical aspects of a potentially fatal and debilitating condition causes tremendous stress for anyone, however, dealing with the pressure of the social stigma attached to HIV/AIDS, much of which is the result of unfounded fears and misinformation, only serves to exacerbate their situation.

Staff at the Irish Centre have felt it necessary to respond to these needs. In 1991 we organised an "In-house"

Awareness Course. This raised a number of issues for us which we have now incorporated into our practise. We have also reviewed our Equal Opportunities Policy and our Policy on Confidentiality, considering the importance of these in relation to this client group. We offer dual support in practical help and counselling. Our written information and advice is widely displayed in the Centre and hopefully the open-minded atmosphere will encourage greater client confidence in making enquiries.

In addition to increasing awareness of this condition, we hope our part in publicising the services available and the issues surrounding its transmission will also contribute to the prevention of further HIV/AIDS.

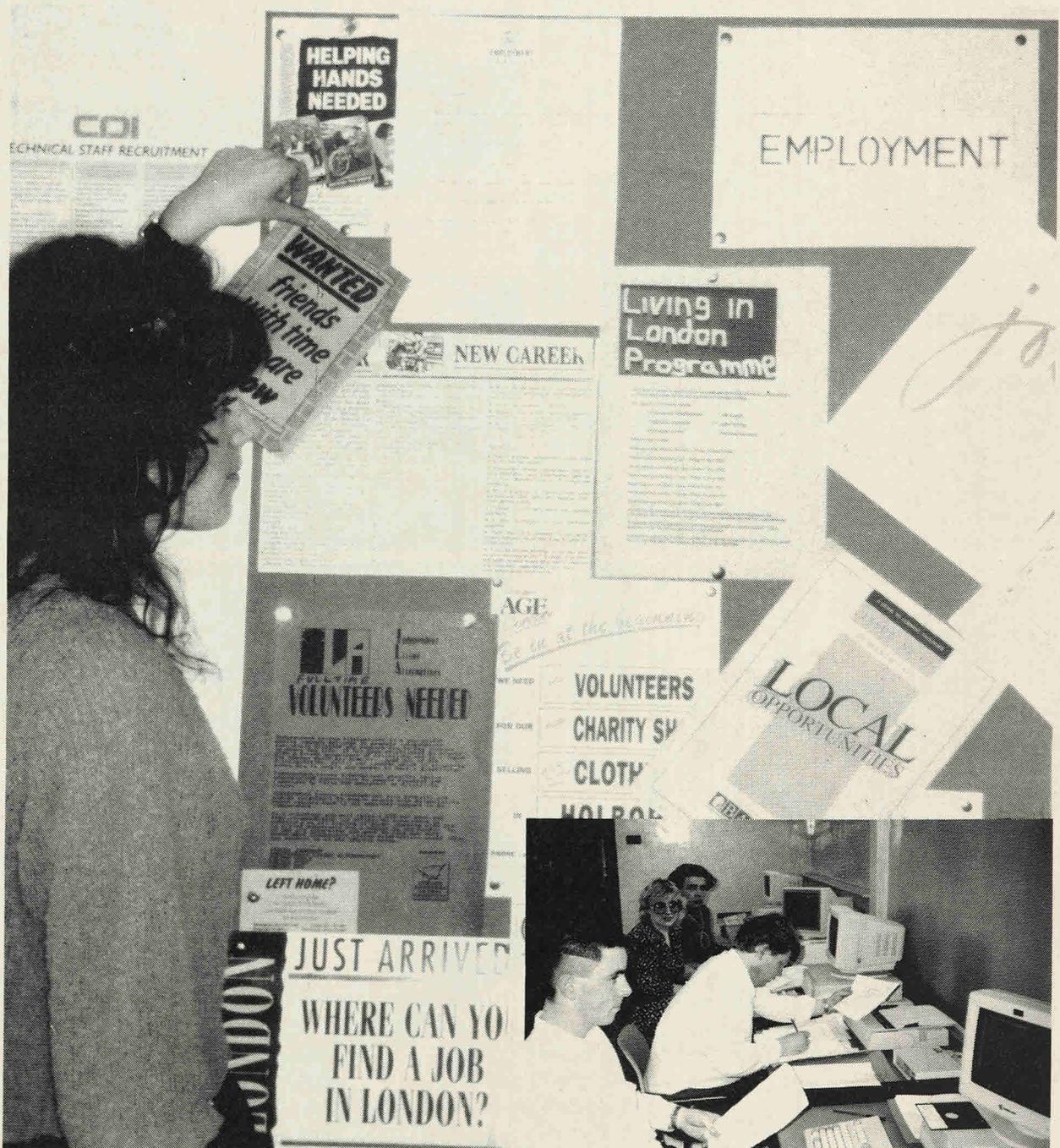
For those diagnosed "positive", coming to terms with their condition, fear of what the future holds for them and the aloneness felt are what demands support and we are happy to provide this service.



Migrant Training

As part of a London Network of Information Technology Courses run by the Migrant Training Company the Centre has provided facilities for this scheme for the third year running. In 1991 there were two twenty-one week courses with a total of twenty-five trainees. Each does seven City and Guilds modules for which certificates are awarded. A four week work placement is part of the course which includes word processing, data base,

spreadsheets, office practice and a communications course. In addition to a quality course geared towards having a marketable skill in a developing industry the trainees are offered good financial support during the course. The funding for the course is from a variety of sources including the European Social Fund. Over 50% of the trainees are Irish, the rest are migrants from other countries.



Prison Liaison Work

Release from prison after serving a sentence or being on remand is always a critical moment for an Irish person in Britain. Getting their feet up on the social ladder is crucial to their maintaining their self-esteem, state of liberty and crime-free way of life.

Released prisoners can come to us from all over the country. We have always been the first port of call for those released from Pentonville which is only a mile from the Centre. These can be on our doorstep by 8.30am whereas others can arrive at any time of day. Those coming from long distances will have received one-way tickets to London where they are supposed to have pre-arranged contacts and an address at which to stay. Often these arrangements are just wishful thinking. Short-term remand prisoners may be released with little or no money, long-term convicted prisoners are released with two weeks discharge grant — £47, £62 or £79 — depending on age.

Irish prisoners may have withheld knowledge of their incarceration from relatives so the unfortunate career mishap needs to be kept hidden. There may be no returning to the safety of family contacts until there is a big wad of money in the pocket to display the returning emigrants success. For a newly released prisoner this day can be a long way off.

The Centre has extended its contacts with local prisons in 1991 and special attention is given to such clients to see that the whole range of the Centre's services are available to them. The Centre is participating with the Community Care Committee of the Federation of Irish Societies initiatives to increase publicity of advice centre services to Irish people in prison close to time of release.



The Birmingham Six celebrated their first night of freedom for sixteen years at the Camden Irish Centre
(Photo by Terry Smith)

Michael – A Journey Through Life

Michael's father died when he was four years old. His mother, a polio victim tried her best to rear her five sons single handedly. It was surely a difficult task for her and living in the heart of the city did not help matters. At the age of 17, Michael began to drink and 'mess about' with various types of drugs. It was not very long until the addiction set in. Fortunately help was available from many sources including Detoxification Units, Rehabilitation Centres and the most valued source of all, support from a mother whom he loved so dearly.

His recovery was remarkable and at the age of 24 he went on to live through what Michael called 'The Golden Years' when 'life was wonderful and a joy to live in'. Sadly these three short years ended very abruptly when his eldest brother made an attempt on his life. For what reason nobody knows. Michael panicked and fled, not just his home or his city but fled his country and soon found himself walking the streets of London.

He had heard the usual stories relayed of a wonderful city filled with riches and gold but Michael was not to avail of them. He describes his life in London as 'down hill all the way'. He never recovered from the attempt made on his life, he fell prey to drink and drugs once again and he never secured permanent accommodation but instead strayed from hostel to hostel, shelter to shelter and skip to skip.

Michael suffered from anxiety, depression, paranoia, amnesia, hallucinations and reached a stage of chronic

alcoholism. In his own words, he described himself as being "powerless over alcohol" and "a hopeless alcoholic". Being homeless compounded Michael's difficulties.

Michael came to see us at the Centre in Sept. '91 and since then, with the assistance of the Camden Mental Health Outreach Team, temporary accommodation was secured for him and contact was made with the Camden Housing Support Team with view to permanent accommodation. This was the first step in meeting some of Michael's long standing needs.

Michael was very excited about the prospects of having a place to call 'home', so much so that he handed himself into the Police to face outstanding charges. He wanted to start afresh, make a new life, start living again. He is now in Prison serving a thirty day sentence in order to 'clear his name'.

The following is an extract from a letter written by Michael whilst in prison

To the Irish Centre:

"Thank's for looking after my case for me.
I am not wanted by the Police anymore,
and I have a clean slate to get on with
my life and my business"

Love M.

Initiatives

- In-house training : Alcohol Awareness with Rugby House Mobile Alcohol Service.
- In-house Training : HIV/AIDS with Camden HIV Unit.
- All staff members are to receive professional First Aid Training.
- All staff have undertaken progressive training in Social Security Benefits and Representation of Clients.
- Prison Liaison Programme: Pentonville Prison and Feltham Young Offenders and Remand Centre. Reciprocal visitation, Training and on-going Liaison.
- Liaison programme with local Divisional Police, Child Protection Team and Probation Service.
- Close liaison with the Family Welfare Association in developing the interests of vulnerable clients.
- Advice stall at major London Irish festivals: London Irish Festival/Roundwood, Finsbury Park Fleadh, Kilburn Irish Youth Festival. Southwark Irish Festival to be included in the future.
- Active programme in improving access for women to our services.
- Support and Outreach Programme for Irish people moving from temporary accommodation to Local Authority accommodation of their own. Development of resources for this group: Furnishing, Processing Housing Benefit Claims, Social Fund Applications and Appeals.
- Development of Support Programme for Private Landlords. We rely on private landlords for affordable and secure accommodation. Because of the benefits system very few landlords are prepared to accept clients who claim Social Security. Developing contacts, outreach advice and support to encourage Landlords to accept DSS claimants.
- Liaison with individual employers and facilitating clients in approaching employers.
- Fortnightly clinic at Pensioner's Day Centre, Murray Street has been initiated.
- Installation of Disabled Access Lift and adaptation of building and facilities.
- Participation in the planning and execution of a major survey on Alcohol use among Irish Migrants under auspices of the Federation of Irish Welfare Societies.
- Liaison with YMCA, Irish Development Office. Participation in Survey on Return Migrants.
- Liaison with Traveller Groups and Agencies in Ireland.
- Regular Liaison with Camden Mental Health Outreach Team in response to the increasing number of clients with Mental Health problems who are homeless. We provide an essential contact for these clients.
- Christmas Hamper Appeal : Social evening for agencies and friends of the Centre. Food and Toys for over Fifty Families and Homeless Individuals were purchased and distributed as a result.
- Continued and Expanding participation in numerous local groups and initiatives.

Irish Centre Hostels Limited

Over the past year, Irish Centre Hostels Ltd. has had the opportunity to thoroughly examine its achievements, and more importantly, the policies which will shape its future development. It is an encouraging situation, despite the economic recession which affects all parts of society.

There are four separate hostel projects, all operating independently, and addressing needs in very different sectors of the community. All four hostels are functioning successfully in bringing quality accommodation at affordable rates to those who most need it.

Conway House — 77 bedspaces

Conway House is primarily concerned with providing accommodation to young Irish immigrants. However, we also provide support and advice to many immigrants who gravitate towards Kilburn due to the large Irish community in the area. We get many callers enquiring about work, accommodation, social benefits, repatriation, passports, assistance at court or perhaps looking for food. Consequently our work is very demanding and extensive. We are on duty 24 hours per day. A large percentage of our callers come between 5.30pm on Friday and 9.00am on Monday morning. This is a time when most welfare agencies are closed.

St. Louise Hostel — 130 bedspaces

The tradition of St. Louise's has always been a hostel where girls between the ages of 17 and 24 years coming to London for the first time would receive hospitality and a warm welcome. Although the hostel caters for working girls, during the past year we have taken in girls who have had little or no money, no identification, some have been wandering the streets alone or at risk. We have been

approached on many occasions by people who see these girls at railway stations and other such locations hoping that we can help as we have the name of helping those less fortunate.

An Caislean — 19 bedspaces

Due to high emigration from Ireland in the 1940's and 1950's there are now many Irish pensioners in London in need of comfortable accommodation. At 18 Quex Road, Kilburn we have developed a specially designed house to accommodate 19 residents in single bedsits with communal facilities.

Mee House — 23 bedspaces

This project at 20/22 Quex Road, NW6 is called after Fr. Paddy Mee, OMI who was responsible for the purchase of Conway House in 1973. It comprises of 23 bedsits with shared communal facilities and was opened with the following in mind:

- to introduce residents to independent living.
- to prepare residents waiting to move to permanent housing.
- to further enhance and encourage a working ambiance.

Future Prospects

We have been given a grant to build 20 self-contained flats at 54 Highgate Road, Kentish Town under the "Single Homeless Programme". We appreciate the confidence the Housing Corporation is showing in the Association, and look forward to working more closely with the Corporation in the years ahead.

Conway House Hostel
20-22 Quex Road
London NW6 4PS

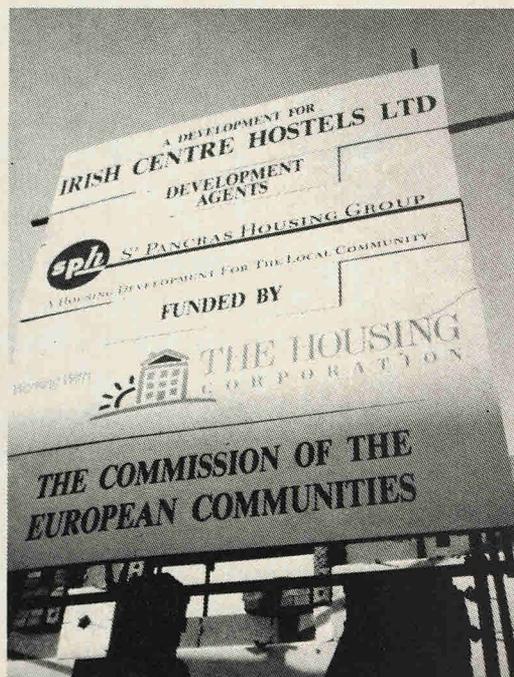
Tel: 071-624 2918
Fax: 071-372 6633

St. Louise's Hostel
33 Medway Street
London SW1P

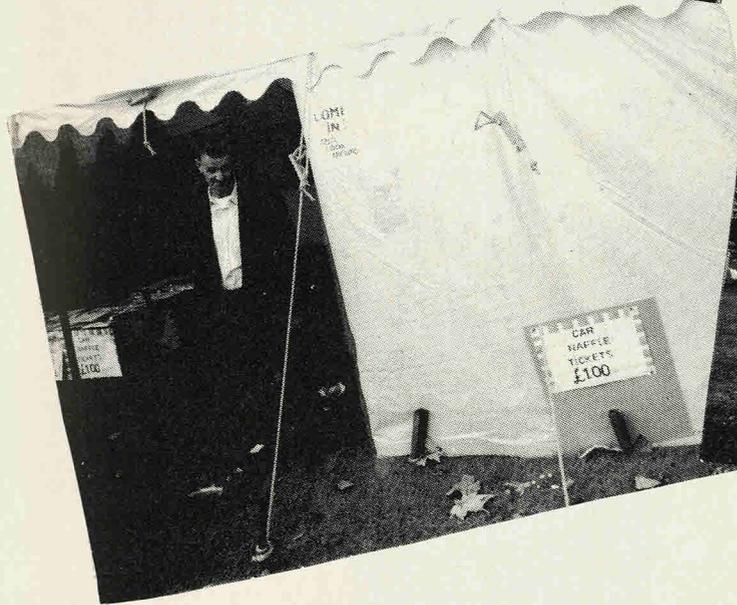
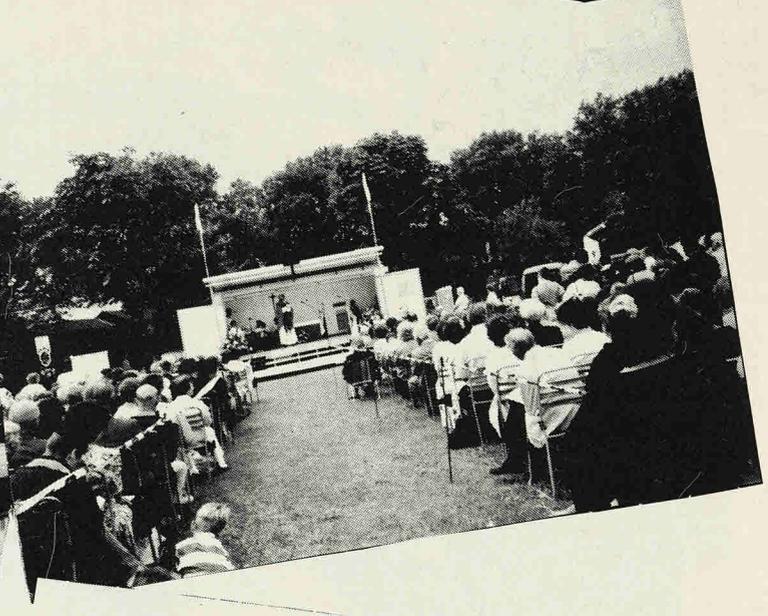
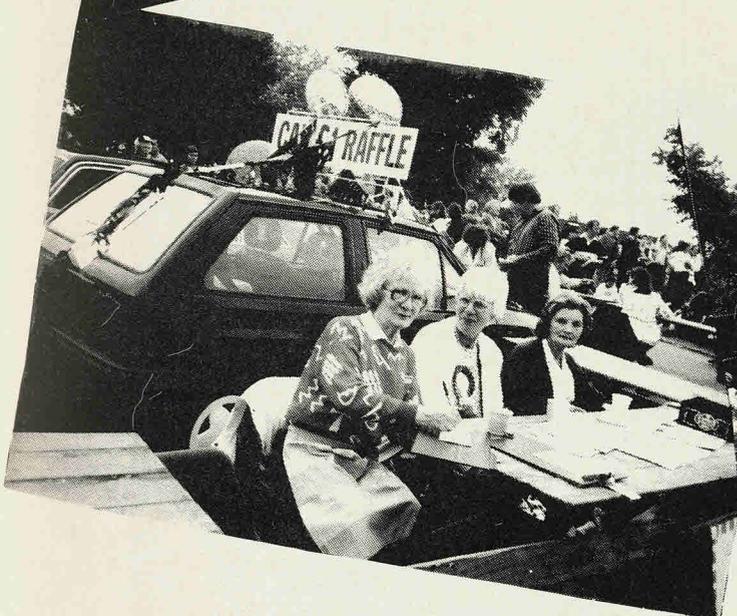
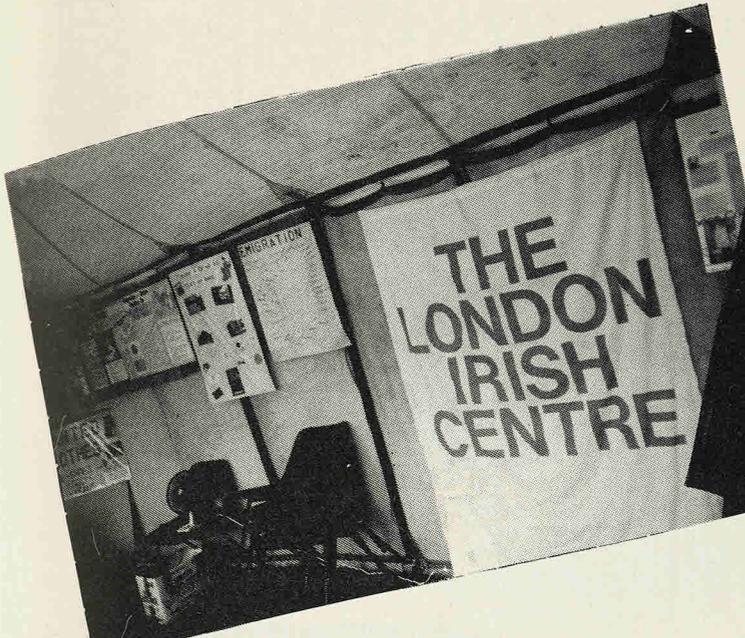
Tel: 071-222 2071
071-222 6588

An Caislean
18 Quex Road
London NW6 4PL

Tel: 071-624 2918



Fundraising



London Irish Centre Community Services Department Financial Report for 1991-1992

INCOME:

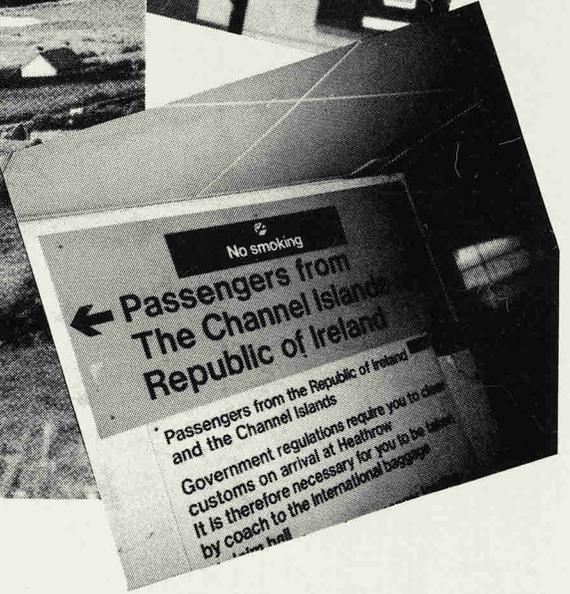
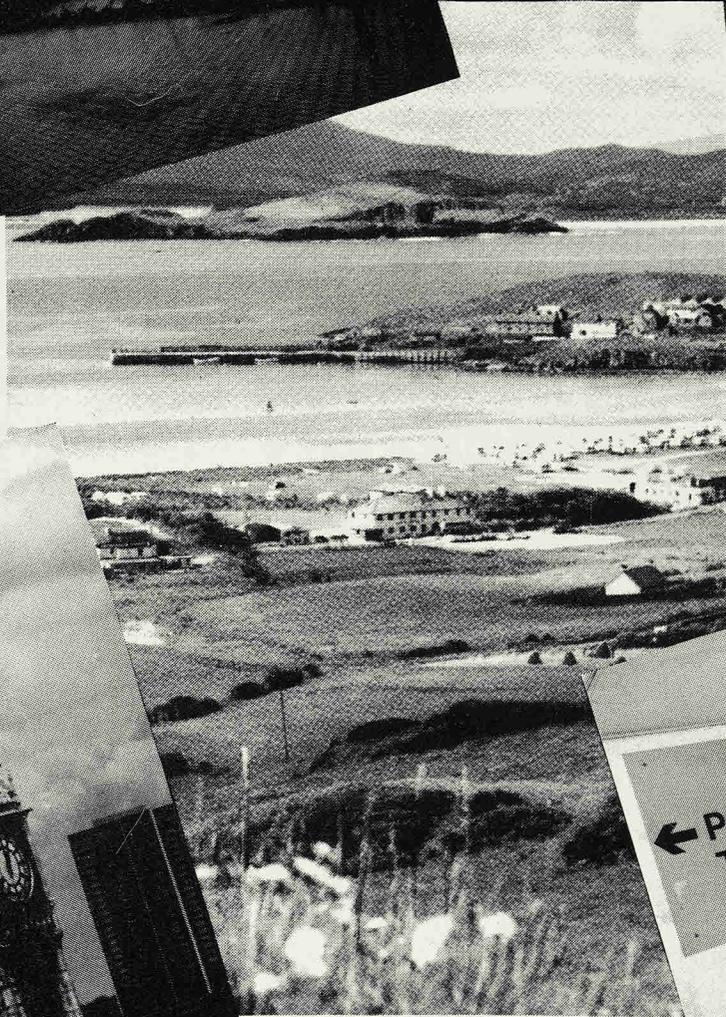
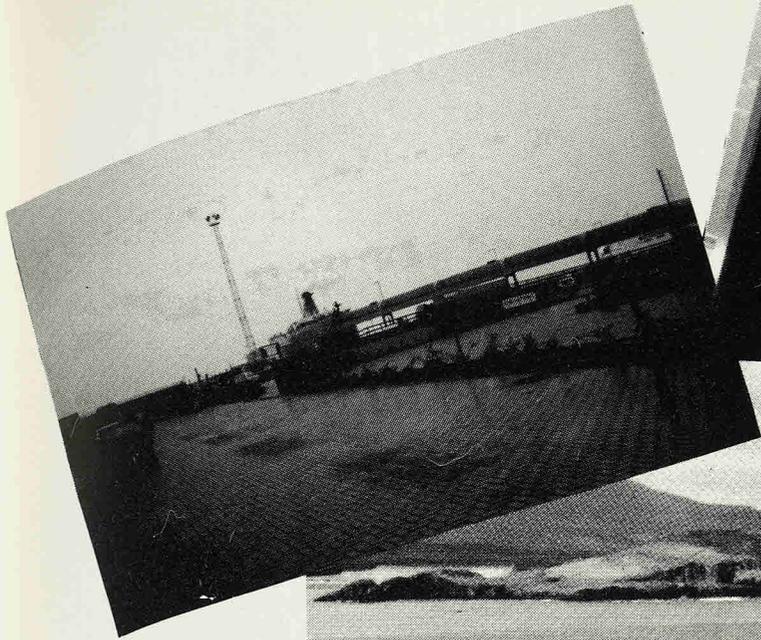
Grants	106,841.00
Trust Fund Income	27,700.00
Donations	19,265.00
Fund Raising Events	26,605.00
Fee Income	12,000.00
Interest	1,826.00
Others	11,994.00
TOTAL INCOME	206,231.00

EXPENDITURE:

Salaries & Wages	99,122.00
Direct Costs	30,625.00
Fund Raising Costs (Prizes)	5,600.00
Management Costs	6,000.00
Overheads	74,587.00
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	215,934.00



Staff preparing Christmas hampers for families in need after a successful fundraising event in November 1991



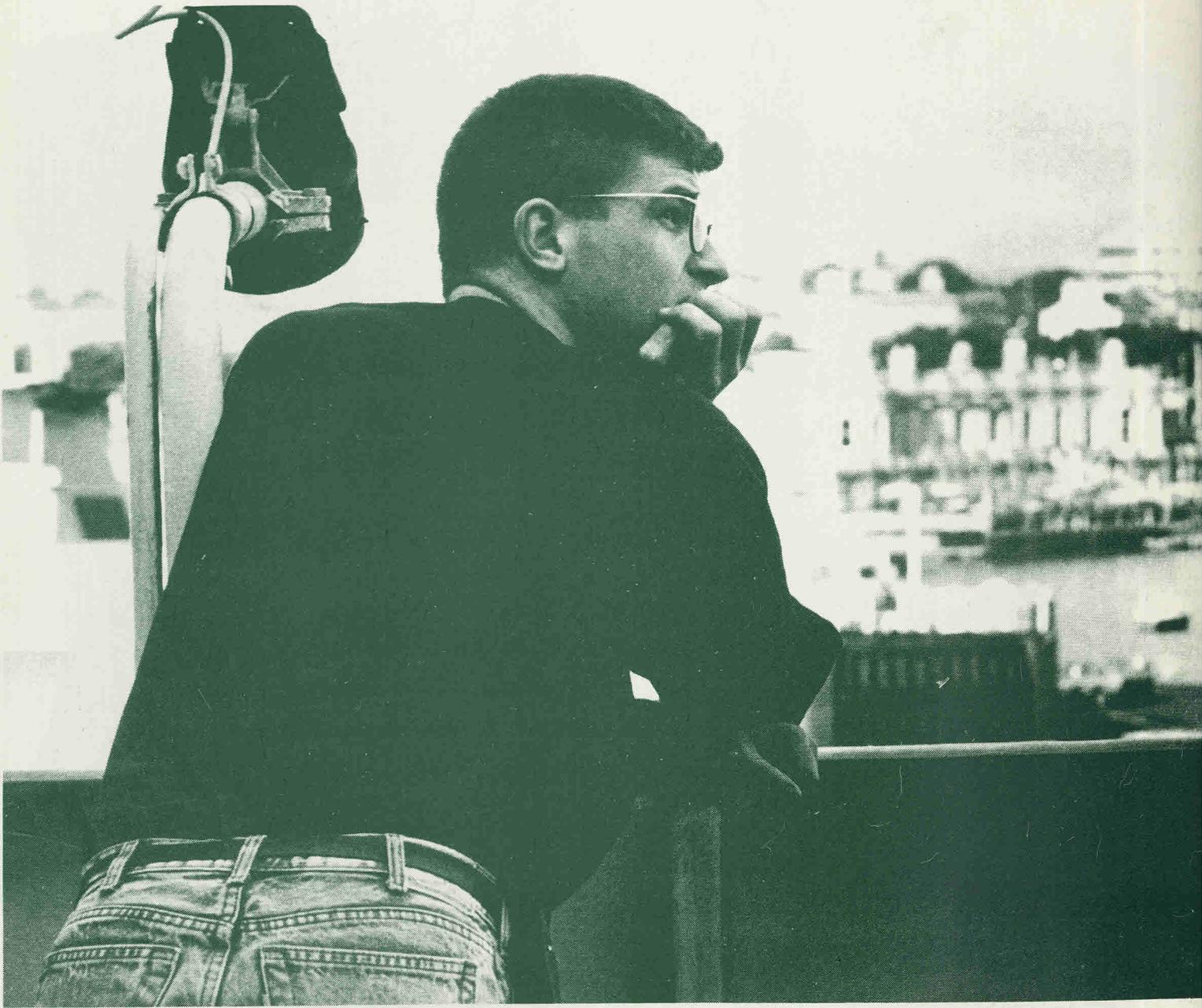


Photo by: G. Humphreys

