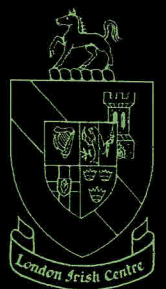




The London Irish Centre

Annual Report 1999



Director's Report

Emigration from Ireland to Britain reached a high point in the post war years. The story of Irish migration is a sad and painful story. Ireland could not support all its people and successive Irish governments were quietly happy to see its young people migrating. The migration experience was not always a happy one and for those who received a hostile reception in their new country of residence the pain and loneliness were particularly acute.

In order to address and overcome the various forms of social exclusion experienced by Irish people in London particularly in the form of bad accommodation, poorly-paid employment and lack of access to services, Fr Tom McNamara and a committee of concerned people formed and founded the London Irish Centre in 1954.

For the past forty-five years the Centre has delivered with consistency a community, welfare social and cultural service to the Irish community in London. Many thousands of Irish people were directed to their first job or were referred to their first flat or hostel through the services of the Irish Centre. Down through the years the Centre and its facilities have enabled people to celebrate special and key moments in their lives as well as providing a range of support services for people at their most critical and vulnerable moments.

Just as the pattern of Irish migration has changed, so has the Irish Centre. The Centre is now a centre of service and culture for all Irish people of various generations which works in collaboration with a number of Irish agencies in providing a holistic and inclusive range of cultural and community services.

The year 1999 was an important year in the history of the London Irish Centre. During this year we enhanced the range of services provided in the

Welfare and Community Services Department. The key areas of development in this Department were

1. Receiving funding from Camden & Islington Health Authority to fund the post of a Mental Health Outreach Worker.
2. Receiving a Health Action Zone grant to provide a sessional worker for our High & Dry Club.
3. The Centre received additional funding to extend an Alcohol Assessment service.
4. The Centre received funding from an Oblate Trust Fund to continue to develop our Volunteer programme.

All of the above projects were highlighted in our 1998/99 Development Plan. The Centre set itself very achievable and realistic targets for 1999 and it has been able to realise all its targets. The London Irish Centre continues to be the foremost agency in the delivery of frontline service to the Irish community. We congratulate our dedicated team of frontline workers.

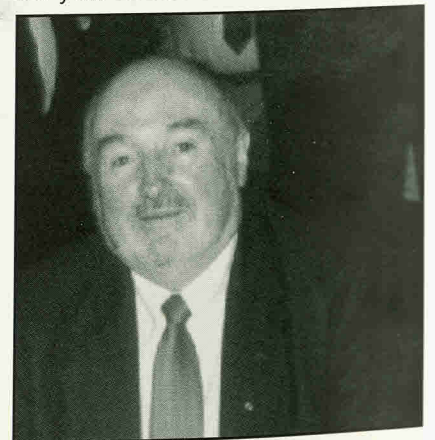
The Centre is going through an extensive programme of refurbishment at the present time. A key item in the Centre's development plan has been the decision to carry out extensive refurbishment in the Centre. During the past year the Centre received two very substantial grants that made this possible. The grants came from the National Lotteries Charities Board and from the Irish government. Through the Soldiers & Sailors Fund, with funding from the Centre and from the grants, the Centre was able to develop additional office accommodation as well as space for new projects. As well as many structural repair issues being addressed, an extensive painting and redesigning project was implemented.

Apart from the community, social and cultural services and programmes developed by the Centre itself, also located in the Centre are the Federation of Irish Societies, Solas

Anois (domestic violence project), Irish Centre Housing, Job Powerhouse, Camden Elderly Irish Support Network, the Irish Chaplaincy, the Irish Commission for Prisoner's Overseas, London Irish Elders Forum and the Irish Employment & Training Consortium. Having such an extensive range of services based at the centre enables the Centre and the other organisations based here to network in an effective manner and deliver an inclusive range of services to the Irish community.

Because of the developments which took place in the Centre in 1999, it has been a significant year in the history of the London Irish Centre. I am deeply grateful to our trustees and committees, to the staff in the various departments of the Centre and to our Funders - the Dion Committee, Irish Youth Foundation, Camden Council, Camden Social Services, Camden & Islington Health Authority, Bridge House Estates Trust, Ireland Fund in Great Britain, the Oblate Trust Fund, the Benevolent Society of St Patrick, the Soldiers & Sailors Trust Fund, the Irish World and Allied Irish Bank.

In order to further enhance the developments of the past year the Centre will again be setting itself a new set of ambitious but achievable targets for the year 2000/2001



Jerry Kivlehan, OMI - Director

"The festival of Irish music, song and dance was a wonderful week - a key event - not to be missed."

Co-ordinator's Report

My first year as the Community Services Co-ordinator at the London Irish Centre has been an active one. The Centre has a vibrant atmosphere, which has to be attributed to the staff and dedicated approach to working with their community.

The Advice Service is thriving, and we continue to be inundated with people seeking help. We saw a total of 3,971 people face to face last year, in the advice centre alone, and we dealt with over 13,000 queries over the telephone.

The Youth Resettlement and Older Persons projects are developing well, and they receive a large number of referrals from the advice service. These projects specialise in providing ongoing support to their client groups, and are very valuable in providing pathways out of social exclusion for vulnerable Irish people.

Several new projects are being

developed. They include a Mental Health project, which will start in January. This project bridges a gap in our service provision, and will be a very important addition to the range of services that we can offer our clients.

We have also received funding for an abstinence group, The High and Dry Club, which is a social club for people who are abstaining from drugs or alcohol. This is an innovative project, which is extremely successful, and a life-line for it's members.

This year, we facilitated a seminar which was organised by the Department of Social, Community & Family Affairs, in Ireland, and was attended by delegates from a range of British and Irish voluntary and statutory organisations. It was very informative, and we found that the contacts we made were invaluable in our day-to-day work.

We co-hosted a conference in

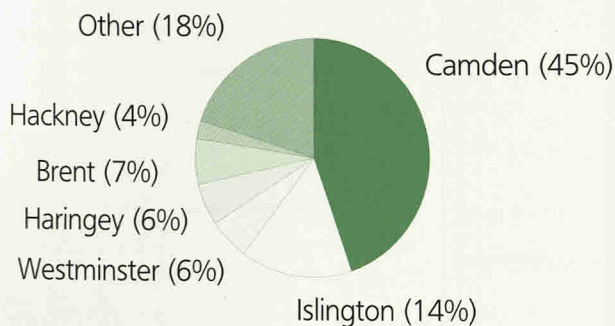
November with Camden Social Services on Substance Misuse in the Irish Community in North-West London. We are hoping that this will provide us with the opportunity to strengthen our links and improve our working relationship with mainstream statutory services. We also hope to be able to influence service provision in North-West London.

So, despite the influence of the Celtic Tiger, our community welfare service is still an important part of Irish life in London. We look forward to the challenges of the year ahead, and we will continue to work towards improving the quality of life for Irish people who live here.

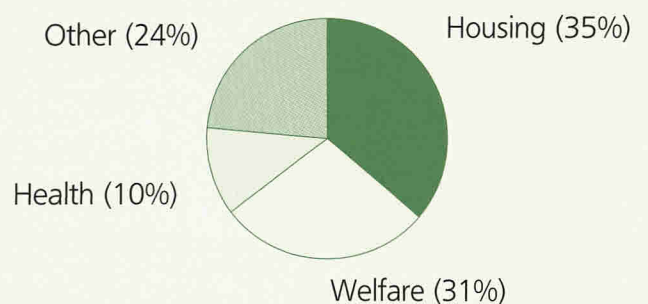
"The missing persons service located my son. The day we were re-united was the happiest day of my life."

The missing persons service located 45 persons in 1999

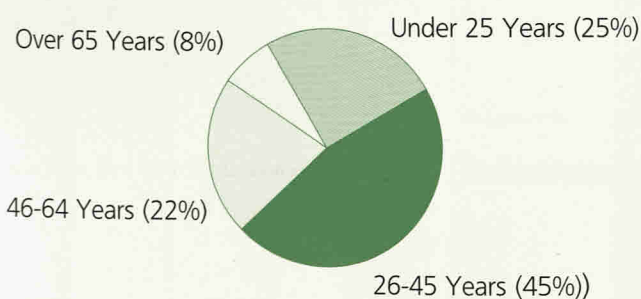
Borough of residence of service users



Categories of advice



Age of advice centre service users



Client contacts with welfare services



Advice Service Report

The advice service has been in existence as long as the Centre and remains a core function of the welfare services. The advice team provide front line help to clients in need. Clients vary in their age and circumstances. They span from young, first time arrivals to isolated elderly who have spent much of their adult lives here. The range of issues of recourse is immense but are nonetheless dominated by those which play the most important roles in people's lives such as housing, establishing a basic income and health.

The service has striven successfully to maintain a policy of maximal accessibility by means of long opening hours and a refusal to insist on an appointments system. This policy is born of obvious client need. This need is evident not only in terms of the very high number of callers but also their manifest wish to be attended to in a culturally sensitive way. Despite the reduction by a third in the size of the team because of funding cutbacks by the Irish government, the service has maintained provision at previous levels. This has been achieved by dint of the extraordinary effort of all concerned. The service has been busier than ever this year with very high number of clients to be seen and moreover often with very difficult problems to be

addressed, often instantly. Much has been made of Ireland's recent economic improvement. This had had no appreciable effect on the service. Experience has shown no resultant downturn in demand, rather the opposite.

Case history

Stewart had been the victim of a vicious punishment shooting by Loyalist paramilitaries when he was shot 7 times. He had to be hospitalised for almost 3 months as a result. As the time approached to leave the hospital he despaired as he knew he could not return home for fear of his life. He sought the advice of Base 2, the organisation who endeavour to assist in such cases. So serious was the risk to him that they suggested that he come to London and seek a fresh start here. Because of time pressures he was forced to depart for London still injured, without contacts and with very little funds. Shortly after arrival he called to the advice team who were able to arrange emergency accommodation through the local council as well as ensuring that his benefits claim was initiated immediately. He settled well in London and continues to make a good recovery.

Youth Resettlement Testimony

The client in question heard about the London Irish Centre through "The London Connection", another advice centre. At first he was reluctant to get in touch, because of the image of the Irish community in general, and people had advised him to stay away. After a while, he found himself in an unsuitable hostel and he felt that he had nothing to lose by going to the Irish Centre where, he had heard, the youth resettlement service was successful.

He rang the London Irish Centre from London Connection and was able to get an appointment the same afternoon. He found the Centre very welcoming. He was told about the services available in the Centre, such as Drop-in and travel refund facilities.

He enjoyed the atmosphere in the Centre which helped him to feel comfortable. When he first arrived, he was concerned about homophobia, but when he saw the literature and newspapers in the Centre, especially those which dealt with issues of particular interest to him, he began to relax. The fact that he was able to avail of the services before he got to see the Youth Worker helped him to express himself confidently when he did meet her.

The youth worker made referrals for the client to other hostels which were more appropriate for his needs. Because she was able to get something in motion very quickly this enabled him to gain trust.

The regular support that she gave him has been invaluable in enabling him to move on, and to live an independent lifestyle and gave him the confidence to tackle previously difficult situations.

The fact that the Youth Worker took a holistic approach to her client by helping, encouraging and supporting him, enabled him to deal with the issues that were causing him difficulty, therefore allowing him to live an independent lifestyle and this continues to be the case.



Opening night of the "Return to Camden Town" festival.

Older Persons Outreach Report

Since the creation of the Older Persons Outreach post, facilitated by Bridge Housing Estates Trust, much work has been done to consolidate and build on the initial groundwork of the first year. The project now has an active register of 85 people and a mailing list of over 100. Much of the projects time resources are put into servicing the needs of people on the register.

One of the projects main developmental priorities has been to understand and to react to the observed low take-up rates of some formal services by older Irish people by aiming to make these services more accessible, while delivering them in a culturally sensitive manner. This has also meant actively promoting a client-led service which could respond to the voiced needs of older Irish people.

The Older Persons Outreach project has been fortunate to avail of the ever expanding in-house services which the London Irish Centre has to offer. Clients who have been socially isolated have been made aware of the existence of such services as the advice & advocacy service, legal surgeries, luncheon club and day centre facilities. This project has been actively involved in the Day Centre and Luncheon Club, in particular with the initiation of a Committee of service users, thus giving them a voice in deciding the services

that they would like in the future.

During the course of the year a number of beneficial in-house talks were given by external agencies eg the Camden Mediation Service, the Mobile Repairs Team and Victim Support.

The Older Persons Outreach Worker has actively sought information on Camden's mainstream groups and enabled people to participate in meetings and groups that promoted the social inclusion of elders eg Camden Elderly Person's Liaison Group.

Elders from the London Irish Centre participated in the formation of the London Irish Elders Forum (LIEF), a London-wide lobby group for older Irish people. The London Irish Elders Forum was formally launched at the London Irish Centre by the Irish Ambassador, Mr Ted Barrington.

The development of a mental health outreach service at the London Irish Centre also means that we are positively reacting to the expressed mental health of older Irish people. The Older Persons Outreach project is one of the fifteen "Good Neighbourhood" schemes in the borough of Camden. Befrienders are recruited through local newspapers, parish newsletters and through friends of the Irish Centre. Befrienders provide a valuable service to those who are housebound by reducing social isolation and combating potential loneliness.

Cultural Activities

The London Irish Centre continues to provide a comprehensive range of Irish cultural activities. Our programme for 1999 was as follows:

Monday

Irish music classes (fiddle, whistle, flute, banjo, etc). These excellent classes were coordinated in a superb manner by Karen Ryan and Kathy Walton.

Tuesday

Set Dancing night. The classes are coordinated by Geoff Holland and the Tuesday night sets are a key part of the life of the Irish Centre.

Thursday

Thursday night is music night. The sound of the uilleann pipes is central to our culture and each week a group of pipers meet together at the Centre. Also, following the success of a Festival of music, song and dance in October, a group of musicians join together for a traditional session each week in the bar.

Friday

A weekly social dance with a different band each week.

Saturday

Step dancing classes under the leadership of Marie Halpin. Irish language classes coordinated by Mairead Holt.

Sunday

A weekly dance combining ceili, old-time and sets organised and led by Anton Coyle.

On Friday evenings the members of Conradh na nGeilige and Comhlúadar Uí Neill meet in the Centre.

One of the highlights of the past year was our Festival Week - Return to Camden Town. This was a memorable celebration of Irish culture which enabled Irish people in Camden to experience the very best of Irish music, song and dance. Preparations are already in place for the Return to Camden Town 2000.



Staff Team

J Kivlehan- OMI Director
P Scanlon- Co-ordinator
M Whelehan- Manager
M Cooke- Administrator
M Savage- Secretary
J Twomey- Social Advice Worker
K Devine- Social Advice Worker
D Keegan- Elders Outreach Worker
B Folan- Elders Outreach Worker
T Edwards- Mental Health Worker
J Neville- Social Advice Worker
K Dinner- Youth Resettlement Worker
M Heath- Social/Day Centre
M McCrory- Volunteer Co-ordinator

Welfare Committee

A Finan T Gallagher
F Thornton A Watson
J Coote K Glynn
T Ganley M Lyons

Cultural Services and Activities

Karen Ryan- Irish music
Kathy Walton- Irish music
Geoff Holland- set dancing
Marie Halpin- step dancing
Anton Coyle- ceili & social
Mairead Holt- Irish language
Mary O'Brien- Social Club
Molly Ormonde- Tea dance
Jim Myers- Comhaltas Ceoltori Eireann
John Connolly- Council of Irish Counties

Social and Cultural Committee

T McAsey M Fitzsimons
P Hynes M Kenny
M Sills D Kelleher
M O Brien P O Brien
J Donohue J O Brien

Organisations Based at the Centre

Irish Centre Housing
Tel: 020-7485-8889
Job Powerhouse
Tel: 020-7916-9191
Federation of Irish Societies
Tel: 020-7916-2725
Solas Anois
Tel: 020-8664-6289
Irish Chaplaincy in Britain
Tel: 020-7482-5528
Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas
Tel: 020-7482-4148
Camden Irish Elders Network
Tel: 020-7428-0471
London Irish Elders Forum
Tel: 020-7813-1478
Irish Employment & Training Consortium
Tel: 020-7681-9979
Travellers Chaplaincy
Tel: 020-7482-5525

Auditor

Allen Tully & Co
156 Harcourt Avenue
Sidcup, Kent DA15 9LW

Solicitor

Prince Evans
77 Uxbridge Rd
London W5 5ST

Volunteers and additional services

B Duggan/A Slavin- Missing Persons
J Ellis- Elders Keep Fit
C Nolan- Elders Keep Fit
D Long and F Farrell- Legal Advice
K Durant- High & Dry Club
M Kenny- Volunteer

Trustees

Rt Hon Lord Farnham
V Rev Fr P Byrne, OMI
Mr J Higgins,
Mr P Fitzpatrick

Bankers

Bank of Ireland
43-45 Seven Sisters Rd
London N7 6BA
Allied Irish Bank
629 Holloway Rd
London N19 5SU

ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 1999

	1999	1998
Fixed Assets	1,774,970	1,760,936
Current Assets	166,973	177,322
Creditors	(76,287)	(77,272)
Net Assets	90,686	100,050
Total Assets	1,865,656	1,860,986

FUNDS

Unrestricted	1,827,335	1,822,665
Restricted	38,321	38,321
	1,865,656	1,860,986

There are a number of simple ways that you can support the Welfare and Cultural services of the London Irish Centre:

1. By making a personal or company covenant in favour of the Centre.
 2. Through payroll giving. For every £1 that you give to the Irish Centre through payroll giving, the Chancellor of the Exchequer will give us an additional 50p.
 3. By making your will in favour of the Irish Centre.
- Should you or your company wish to support the Centre in any of these ways, or would like more information, please contact us on 0207-916-2222.

The London Irish Centre

52 Camden Square, London, NW1 9XB
Telephone: 020 7916 2222 / 020 7916 7272
Email: irishcen@hostels.org.uk, www.irishcentre.co.uk

Photos courtesy of Mel McNally and Sean Corrigan.

We are grateful to the Allied Irish Bank for the funding of this Report.