

AGIY-FIS Project to Start

The Action Group for Irish Youth (AGIY) and the Federation of Irish Societies (FIS) are about to embark on a feasibility study which will examine the possibility of establishing a centralised data collection system which will provide information on an ongoing basis about the numbers of Irish people across Britain using advice/welfare centres, identify the nature of problems presented and assist agencies respond to emerging or changing patterns of need.

The project organisers believe that such a centralised system will enable agencies to meet their own management information needs; contribute to service evaluation and the development of agencies' services in both Britain and Ireland and produce data that can be used for informing both statutory and voluntary services policy makers in both Britain and Ireland about the emigration experience of Irish people.

AGIY and FIS have established a steering group which has been attempting to identify ways in which a more complete picture of the needs of Irish emigrants in Britain could be obtained. Following the receipt of grant aid from the Irish Government and other charitable bodies, AGIY and FIS have commissioned Charities Evaluation Services (CES) to carry out a feasibility study to establish a common data collection system across a range of welfare agencies providing services to Irish people in Britain. CES is a national charity which provides a support network and evaluation and consultancy services to voluntary sector organisations.

The study is due to begin this month and is scheduled to be completed by December and a final report of the results of the feasibility study will be published in January 1994. In addition to identifying the present system of data collection on clients and services required from agencies, the study will also look at the relationship between the organisation's objectives and data

obtained from clients and establish the information needs of the agencies for effective operation.

It is proposed that the feasibility study will be carried out with 25 Irish welfare agencies. All data collected in connection with the study will be strictly confidential and will not identify individual agencies' client profile or numbers.

By establishing a system that will be able to establish the nature of needs presented across a range of agencies the project organisers believe that this will assist Irish people secure proper access to statutory and voluntary resources in Britain.

Patron for AGIY

We are pleased to announce that one of Ireland's premier poets, Seamus Heaney, has agreed to become Patron of the Action Group for Irish Youth. In accepting AGIY's invitation Mr Heaney said that the commitments and endeavours of the organisation are admirable and that he was *"very happy to ... become a patron of the Group."* AGIY are presently considering approaching other distinguished Irish people to become patrons and it is hoped that in the not-so-distant future an event involving our patrons will be organised. Commitments permitting, Seamus Heaney will read from his work at any such event. Mr Heaney combines his writing and publishing with lectures at both Harvard and Oxford Universities.

An Teach's Funding Cut

An Teach Irish Housing Association in London has received a funding cut in 1993/4 of £4,000 from the London Boroughs Grants Scheme (LBGS) which equals 25% of its annual grant from the LBGS. The LBGS is made up of London Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat Councillors.

ISSUES AFFECTING IRISH LESBIANS AND IRISH GAY MEN

Irish Lesbians
by
Brid Boland
London Irish Women's
Centre.

There is no legal protection for lesbians from discrimination on the grounds of their sexuality, either in employment, housing or anything else.

Although some local authorities mention sexuality in their anti-discrimination employment statements there is no government legislation against discrimination on the grounds of sexuality. Lesbians are usually considered by the courts to be unsuitable to be awarded custody of their children and their rights as mothers are devalued or completely removed by reasons of their sexuality.

Clause 28 of the Local Government bill which became law in June 1988 states "*A local authority shall not (a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality (b) promote the teaching of any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship*".

The Government also slipped through a "*morality clause*" which threatens local authorities in ways similar to Clause 28.

The clause, part of the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity, states that "*publicity should not attack, nor appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards*".

It is not illegal to be a lesbian in this country and it has never been the subject of any specific criminal law.

However this does not mean that Lesbians and heterosexual women are equal before the law.

If Lesbians are over 16 their relationship is "legal". If one is over 16 and the other under 16 it is possible that the older woman in the relationship could be charged with indecent assault.

There appears to be very little research on Lesbians as a group. What little there is has been done by the Lesbian community itself. Research on Irish Lesbians as a specific group is non-existent.

From the limited research documentation available it would seem that young Lesbians are particularly vulnerable to distress which is a direct result of social oppression at all levels of society.

Is the picture any different for Lesbians of other age groups? for Irish Lesbians?

The most visible Irish lesbians are in the 25-40 age group, with others between ages 40-50.

Older Irish lesbians are an invisible section of the population. Yet Irish lesbians, according to statistics of the average, make up 5% of the Irish women's community.

All lesbians find themselves the subject of stereotyping and generalisation - and these are numerous. Lesbians look like boys; lesbians don't have children; lesbians wear men clothes ... Stereotypes dehumanise their objects and breed violence. Lesbians suffer as a result of these stereotypes because they intensify the experience of isolation.

What Irish lesbians need - like all other human beings - is to be accepted and acknowledged as equal persons in society.

Mainstream society rejects the homosexual identity; lesbians are outsiders.

Lesbians are stripped of rights, of credibility and of recognition. They have no historical continuity, there are no images; there is no identity.

Irish Lesbians struggle to retain the integrity of an Irish identity whilst simultaneously embracing a sexual identity condemned by mainstream society.

**Irish Gay Men
by
Micheal O Ruirc
Irish Gay Helpline.**

For many young Irish gay men, the only choice open to them in Ireland is to try to conform or leave.

Many of the issues facing Irish society are not openly examined and as a result, those who cannot or will not conform to a perceived shared set of values leave the island to build a life somewhere else.

Institutionalised religion has its part to play in the alienation of many, whether it be Roman Catholic, Presbyterian or whatever.

Sexual activity is presented as only being morally acceptable in the context of procreation within marriage putting all other forms of sexual practice outside the arena of discussion and debate.

And so it is that many lesbians and gays feel they have little choice but to emigrate.

Many young Irish gay men come to London with high expectations of what the gay community has to offer.

As with all emigrants, Irish gay men often experience culture shock and isolation.

People can experience anti-Irish racism within the gay community as well as in the larger community.

Irish gay men who feel isolated are often vulnerable to inappropriate relationships

and/or HIV infection because of lack of confidence in their identity, and subsequently an inability to take full control of their lives.

Having a gay identity can be difficult within the Irish community - for some, this leads to divided loyalties.

To assert one's sexuality can mean being unable to assert one's Irishness; to assert one's Irishness may mean not revealing one's sexuality.

In recent years however, it seems that prejudices are waning and the Irish lesbian and gay community has claimed some space within the larger Irish community.

Housing is an area of great concern to every Irish emigrant.

For gay men there are particular areas of concern; the justified fear of exposure of sexuality in hostel accommodation; the necessity to share accommodation with people who may not be accepting of one's sexuality and intolerant landlords.

These experiences lead people to find it necessary to hide their true sexual identities from others.

Other issues of concern are employment and emigration itself.

Irish gay men face the same discrimination in the workplace as other gay men.

Equal opportunities policies are not universal by any means and

often do not work properly in practice.

With regard to emigration, Irish Gay men whose partners are not from EC countries can often find themselves separated because the relationship will not be recognised by the State and residency will not be granted on that basis.

More positively however, the Irish gay community in Britain is growing in strength and confidence and finding its place in both the larger gay and Irish communities here.

The Irish Gay Men's Network has been providing support and befriending to Irish gay men for many years now.

The Irish Gay Helpline is in operation since 1991.

The Helpline is run by Irish Gay men for Irish Gay men.

Such initiatives show that Irish Gay men have forged a place within this society and this can be built on in the future.

The Irish Gay Helpline is open Mondays 7.30 p.m - 10.00 p.m. (Ansaphone at other times)

It provides a confidential and anonymous information, support and listening service for Irish Gay men and those unsure about their sexuality. It also aims to help friends, family and other agencies in both the Irish and gay communities.

The Helpline can be contacted on:

Tel. 081 983 4111.

Criminal Justice Research

Following on from issues raised at our AGM in December (see *AGIY/INFO*, Issue 30) AGIY, together with the National Association of Probation Officers (NAPO) and the Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas, are looking at the possibility of commissioning a comprehensive research project into the extent of anti-Irish discrimination in the criminal justice system.

The first step in this project is to collate, on a national basis, anecdotal evidence/case-studies of discrimination against Irish people in the criminal justice system. These case-studies, while protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of the victims of discrimination/injustice, will form the basis of briefing papers for those interested in the issue.

They will also be used to attract and convince potential funders of the need for comprehensive research into the Irish experience in the criminal justice system.

AGIY are hoping to gather information on cases which involve Irish people in any aspect of the criminal justice system from arrest to trial, including any sentence. The areas of concern are as follows:

- Caution - informal and formal
- Decision to Prosecute
- Charge Laid
- Plea
- Remand/Bail
- Sentence
- Recommendation - that contained in Social Enquiry Reports by Probation or Social Services and how this compares to sentence.

Agencies and individuals who have information which would be useful for this project are asked to contact AGIY.

AGIY wish to emphasize that any evidence or case-studies will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and no reference will be made to any individual's name or address in any briefing or other document published in relation to this project.

London Irish Youth Forum (LIYF)

The date of the next Forum meeting is:

Thursday 20th May 1993

at 2.30 p.m. in

The London Irish Centre,

50 Camden Square,

London. NW1.

The main agenda item will be:

A Training Seminar on the Children Act and Young Irish People.

Facilitator:

Paul Oliver

Children Act Specialist

the Advocacy Project

Alone in London Service.

"AGIY-INFO" is produced bi-monthly by the Action Group for Irish Youth (AGIY). AGIY is funded by the LBGS, the Irish Government and the City Parochial Foundation

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