

# AGIY INFO

AGIY IS A REGISTERED CHARITY WHICH AIMS TO PROMOTE THE INTEREST AND WELFARE OF EMIGRANT IRISH YOUTH IN LONDON

## Irish Community Services *Meeting Diverse Needs*

**A SIS report written by Ute Kowarzik - commissioned by AGIY and FIS**

The Action Group for Irish Youth (AGIY) and the Federation of Irish Societies (FIS) have published their most recent review of the Standardised Information System (SIS): *Irish Community Services - Meeting Diverse Needs*.

This unique database for Irish service providers was conceived in 1992 by AGIY and FIS in order to access the service needs of Irish people living in Britain. The SIS programme enables each individual agency to collect data for its own monitoring purposes while also feeding into a collective database - providing a very accurate national picture of user groups and the areas of need within the Irish community. The report highlights the development of the Irish voluntary sector and its success in addressing community need. The dataset indicates that there are two main groups of service users;

- ◆ a large group of middle aged to older Irish people, settled in Britain for more than ten years, who are socially and economically marginalised.
- ◆ a group of young people under 25 years, who have recently arrived in Britain and are in need of support in seeking accommodation and employment.

The report launch was chaired by Joan Kane (Chair Community Care Committee - FIS) and speakers were; Christina McElwaine (Irish Embassy), Breege Mc Daid (Liverpool Irish Community Care), Seamus Taylor (Action Group for Irish Youth) and Simon Stewart (Haringey Irish Community Care) who introduced SIS by outlining the practical applications of the system. In particular Simon emphasised how collated data was used for funding applications and to show the extent of agency service delivery.

Commenting on the report Seamus Taylor said: "SIS provides continuously updated data of expressed social need to Irish welfare agencies in Britain. It is not a profile of the characteristics of the Irish population in general, and in significant ways, it differs from the overall Irish population in terms of unemployment, age, profile and housing status. However, it is probably the best barometer of welfare need on the Irish community in contemporary Britain".

He noted that the recent CRE report (Hickman and Walter 1997) acknowledges the part played by SIS in monitoring the Irish community's need: "...in the absence of wide scale monitoring of Irish needs by local authorities or voluntary agencies the SIS information is the only systematic data that exists about the service needs of the Irish community".

Seamus pointed out that while recent service attention concentrated on services to older and young people there is significant social need amongst "a large middle group" who migrated in the 50s and 60s. "Alongside this, is a significant group of young people under 25 potentially excluded and with a range of needs in respect of employment, accommodation and advice". He continued, "I would hazard a guess that there is a connection between these two groups. In 25 years time if SIS were still running, will the under 25's of today comprise the middle aged of the year 2035 in the dataset? Will they merely grow old or remain disadvantaged?"

In a sense herein lies the challenge for welfare agencies to intervene in appropriate ways with the younger age group to avoid reproducing the disadvantage of previous generations".

Seamus went on to highlight the social issues that need to be addressed; "There appears to be a significant problem of domestic violence being expressed to Irish welfare agencies. Domestic violence may well be a problem for our community as it is in some other larger ethnic communities. In a sense the existence of this dataset, together with the emergence of agencies like Solas Anois (Irish women's refugee) and the work of the London Irish Women's Centre has created the space within which the previously hidden issues like domestic violence can move out of 'private hells' to become real service needs recorded and policy issues. I think the same applies in relation to racial harassment and homophobia. I would guess that ten years ago very few annual reports of Irish welfare agencies mentioned domestic violence, racial harassment or homophobia. SIS therefore provides a valuable function in both enabling the expression of diverse need and in supporting an increasing diversity in the community".

The importance of monitoring was emphasised by Christina Mc Elwaine who spoke of the Irish government's (Dion) support for the system. Dion actively encourages the organisations they fund to participate in SIS. Further reasons for Dion's support includes:

- ◆ SIS generates statistics which are credible because of the number and diversity of the organisations involved.
- ◆ statistics also highlight areas of particular need and gives a profile of the users of the services. Of particular interest is that a majority of the users are in the 25-44 age bracket and that over half of the service users have been in Britain for ten years or more.

Christina noted: "It is often inferred from the low net migration figures between Ireland and Britain that demand for services should be declining. I think that the analysis of the results of the study which show that over half the users of the services have lived in Britain for ten years or more is an important one. Also, the fact that two thirds of those are under 25 have lived in Britain for less than a year shows clearly that young people are still coming to Britain and need assistance to find housing, employment and training opportunities".

Christina praised the development of the Irish voluntary sector and commented: "Participation in SIS I believe also encourages best practice amongst participating organisations. I know that the agencies involved are amongst the most professional which we have and I think the fact that they take part in SIS has helped them achieve their development".

Breege Mc Daid outlined how; "...the introduction of the Standardised Information System has given us for the first-time ever concrete, tangible, and easily accessible information about the position of Irish people who approach our agencies. She explained how analysis of SIS information has enabled participating agencies to move forward and develop in a strategic manner, becoming much more proactive in developing appropriate client services.

Breege demonstrated how agencies may use the SIS data:

- ◆ to monitor and evaluate their services.
- ◆ to observe specific trends and to look at the gaps in their own service provision and take steps to bridge these gaps.
- ◆ to further develop existing services and to ensure the most effective use of limited resources.
- ◆ to network on behalf of the Irish community;
  - to raise awareness of the need for culturally sensitivity in service provision.
  - to feed into community care/health plans
  - to ensure an Irish dimension to equal opportunities, anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice.
  - to ensure that Irish people are included in all monitoring procedures of service providers.

Breege emphasized the importance of an Irish category in Census 2001. She says: "If the SIS data can yield so much information, the potential yield of the next census will be phenomenal. This crucial information is required by service providers so that they can effectively serve their communities".

**SIS Key Findings**

**In the 15 month period described in the report almost 4,000 people approached the participating agencies.**

**63% related to advice services, 28% to support services, 8% relate to material support.**

**45% of Irish users have lived in Britain for over 10 years, 25% for less than a year.**

**over one third of service users report some form of health problem.**

**over half of service users (54%) are described as unemployed.**

**homelessness is faced by one in five of service users. 55% of 25-44 age group were homeless.**

**7% of users experienced racial harassment.**

**14% of Irish women experience domestic violence - increasing to 24% for women with children.**

***For young people under 25***

**78% of young people were unemployed - rising to 87% for young men.**

**35% of young people under 25 were homeless, this increases to 40% for young men.**

**Accommodation and employment, as well as advice on benefits are the most areas of advice. Assistance with identification and repatriation are amongst the support services most required - more young people are making use of counselling services.**

Copies available from AGIY/FIS: Price £5.

**IRISH EQUALITIES WORKING GROUP**

Following the publication of the CRE's report *Discrimination and the Irish Community in Britain* (Hickman and Walter 1997) an Irish Equalities Working Group continue to address and develop the Irish community agenda. The overall aim of the working group is to achieve equal opportunities in service delivery and employment for the Irish community in Britain. Membership of the forum is open to :

Irish community organisations (funded)

Irish community organisations (unfunded)

Specialist Irish projects and/or Irish staff within voluntary and public bodies with a brief to address equality of opportunity for Irish people.

Next Meeting - 2.00 pm 4 March 1998 at the CRE, 10/12 Allington St., London, SW1. For further information contact Caroline O'Neill, Cara Irish Housing Association, 339 Seven Sisters Rd, N15 6RD. Tel: 0181 800 2744.

**NAPO****Combating Anti-Irish Discrimination**

NAPO, (National Association of Probation Officers) at their recent AGM officially recognised the widespread discrimination against Irish people within the British criminal justice system. A motion was passed specifically calling on the Home Office and probation services to include Irish people in all equal opportunity monitoring programmes and in all anti-discriminatory policies.

Pat Murphy - proposer of the motion to combat anti-Irish discrimination - said; "Irish people are extremely vulnerable in the criminal justice system. Up to now the needs of the Irish people have been ignored as they have been subsumed into the majority white population. NAPO now recognises that this policy discriminates against Irish people and is taking measures to include an Irish dimension in all its policies".

A delegation from AGIY, Bourne Trust, FIS, the Irish Commission for Prisoners and NAPO are to meet with Home Office minister Mike O'Brien to discuss issues of discrimination and the recommendations of their report : *The Irish Community : Discrimination and the Criminal Justice System.*

# Youthaid

**WORKING FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT**

366 St John St., London, EC1 Tel: 0171 833 1111

**Youthaid** was launched in 1977 as a national charity for unemployed young people. It provides information on unemployment, benefits, training and employment. Through its publications Youthaid keeps those working with young people, and young people themselves, up-to-date on developments in government legislation and opportunities for training and study.

Through research Youthaid identifies good practice in the training, education and employment of young people. It makes public issues of concern, develops alternative policies to tackle the problems and advocates change where it is needed.

Youthaid aims to:

√ provide information to young people and their advisers on opportunities and rights in training, employment and unemployment.

√ establish a clear public understanding of the real scale of youth unemployment through the identification and definition of accurate statistical measurements.

√ heighten awareness of the problems facing young people without work, training or benefits, particularly those confronted by discrimination in the labour market and in training.

√ research into the quality of the training provided for young people, particularly those at most disadvantage in the labour market.

√ contribute to the development of policies designed to ensure that all unemployed young people, who are looking for work or training, have an income.

## LONDON IRISH YOUTH FORUM

### The New Deal

The long-term unemployed and 18-24 year olds face benefit cuts unless they join the environmental taskforce, enter full-time education or training or take a subsidised job in the private or voluntary sector.

It is important that the effects on the more vulnerable sections of the Irish community are monitored and that advisory services are well informed on the opportunities and implications that New Deal proposes.

### Next Meeting

FRIDAY 20 FEBRUARY

2.00PM

AT

LONDON VOLUNTARY SECTOR RESOURCE CENTRE,  
356 HOLLOWAY ROAD  
LONDON, N7 6 PA

NEAREST TUBE - HOLLOWAY ROAD  
(PICCADILLY LINE)

*YOUNG IRISH PEOPLE - EMPLOYMENT & WELFARE*

THE MEETING WILL ADDRESS:

*New Deal for 18-24 year olds*

*Target 2000 16-18 Olds*

*Changes to Student Funding*

GUEST SPEAKER: JACKI MC MANUS  
YOUTH AID RESEARCHER

PLEASE NOTIFY AGIY'S OFFICE OF YOUR  
ATTENDANCE A.S.A.P. TEL: 0171 700 8137

### AGIY Staff Team

Brian McCarthy - Co-ordinator  
Donal McKinney - Policy, Information  
& Administrator

AGIY IS FUNDED BY - DION COMMITTEE, CITY PAROCHIAL FOUNDATION, NATIONAL LOTTERY CHARITIES BOARD, AND LONDON BOROUGH GRANTS.