

CHANGING IRELAND

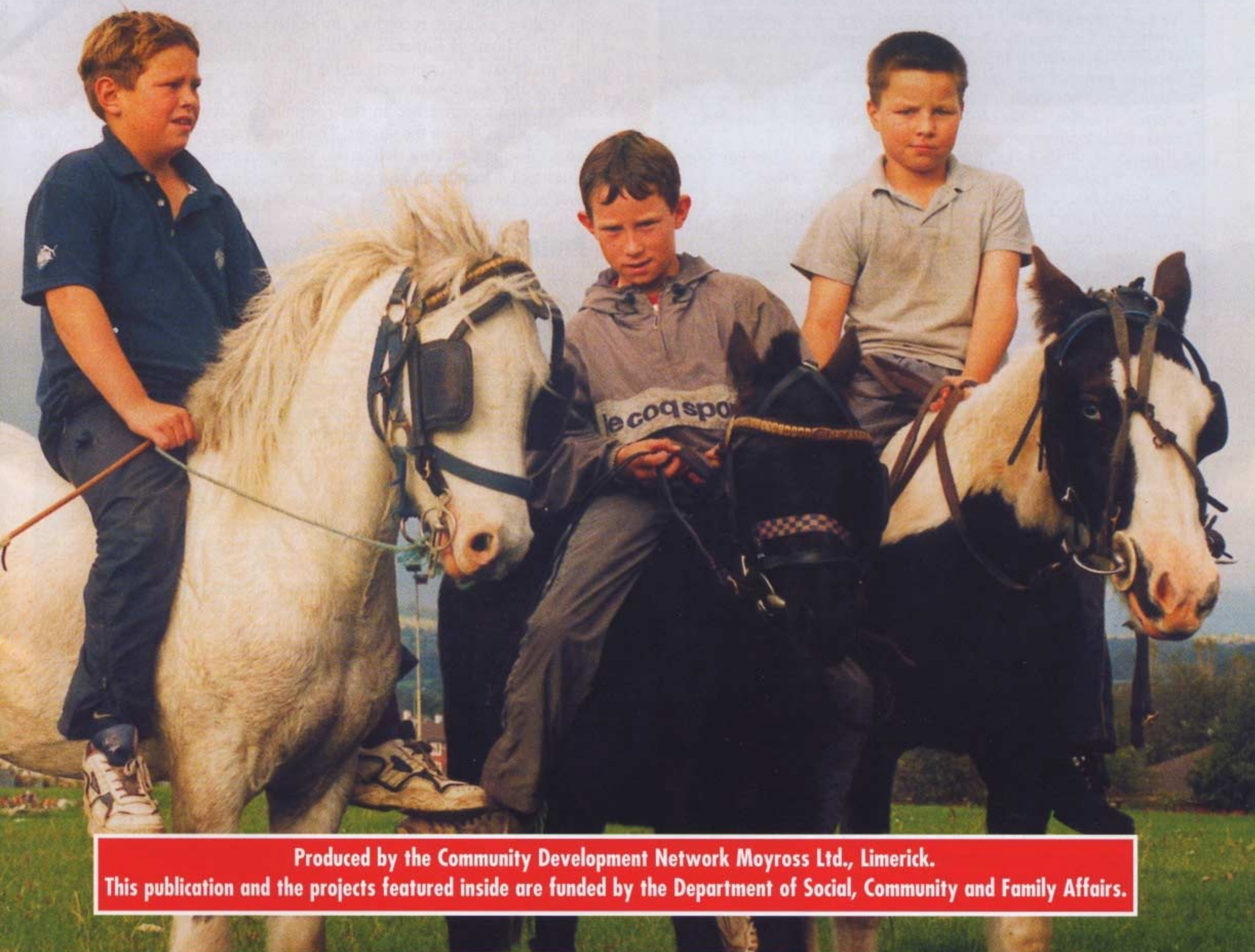
ISSUE 3

The National Newsletter of the Community Development Support Programmes

SPRING '02

HORSE-POWER:

*Young snappers portray
a positive side of life*



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becomes
law

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Debate on family bill - in a nutshell

The Family Support Agency Bill reached its final stage in Dail Eireann on December 22nd last and only needed approval from the Seanad (a formality) to become law. While the Bill's contents were largely approved of by the Opposition, strong amendments were proposed as a result of reservations held by Family Resource Centre staff and management committees throughout the country. There were a number of grounds for objection, including briefly:

- that FRCs wanted a commitment to community development principles written into the bill and given central importance;
- that FRCs should have the option of joining or not joining the new Family Support Agency;
- that FRC management committees should have to give consent before the way their centre operates could be changed;
- that the new agency's strategic plan should be prepared in full consultation with FRCs.

None of these amendments were accepted and Minister Ahern laid emphasis on his reasons for publishing the bill without them. He was "optimistic" that problems would not arise and gave assurances to the Opposition that the fears of people involved in FRC work were unfounded.

A report on the debate is published in this issue of 'Changing Ireland'. The report should be of special interest to volunteers and staff of projects and agencies operating under the Community Development Support Programmes (CDSPs) umbrella. It highlights how lobbying can pay off, at least in terms of generating debate publicly, in this case with the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs. It also proves the worth of strategic planning and of speaking and campaigning with one voice.

The report, while long, is a must-read if you want to keep up on what is happening with Family Resource Centres. Don't think that because you are in a Community Development Project or core-funded project that it doesn't have to do with you! The programmes and how they are administered, as the Family Support Agency story shows, are not cast in iron. The Bill, in legal terms, was enacted "to establish a body to be known as the Family Support Agency, to define its functions and to provide for connected matters."

We now look forward to seeing how the new Family Support Agency develops. There will obviously be benefits from uniting the various elements involved in improving family life in Ireland and we know that Minister Ahern expects the best from the new agency. It is hoped of course that the new agency's work will complement work of Community Development Projects and others in the sector and that the agency will nurture the commitment many Family Resource Centres have made to community development work.

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Young snappers put positive focus on maligned area

By Allen Meagher

THE front page photograph in this issue was shot by Barbara Falvey, a Junior Cert student from Moyross, Limerick. It was one of over 2000 photographs taken in the district as part of a project to teach photography skills to young adults. The teenagers focussed positively on their community and the results – a fully-professional calendar and a photography exhibition – put a lie to the image promoted of the area by tabloid press.

"The boys looked good for a picture," said Barbara. "It reminded me of the film 'Into The West'. I asked them and they said 'no bother'. It turned out to be a great picture. When the boys found out they were in the January page of our calendar, they wanted to know was there a prize!"

In the picture are Patrick, William and Michael Faulkner.

Shortly before the calendar was launched, a Sunday World 'special' had maligned Moyross with a two-page banner headline, 'We go on streets of fear with the boys in blue'. The image portrayed was, not surprisingly, negative.

Meanwhile, the Moyross youths who took part in the photography course – people who live on the so-called "streets of fear" – strolled around for weeks without incident, recording life in the housing estate in the way they saw it. The Mayor of Limerick, Dick Sadlier, attended the calendar launch which was titled 'A Community In Focus'.

Each of the eight participants gave 40 hours of their time, over five weeks, to documenting life in the community, taking cameras into their homes as well as out on the streets. The photographers snapped children on bicycles, postmen making deliveries, shoppers returning from town, club activities and a local man singing in the rain. The calendar they produced sold out and this will pay to have the best photographs framed.

Professional ambitions

Barbara said she enjoyed the course so much that she would like to become a professional photographer.

"We learnt how to load a film, clean a camera and how to take a proper photograph," she said.

The course was organised as part of the Bronze Gaisce Awards for which participants also climb mountains, lead youth clubs and learn kung-fu.

Two participants, Barry Purcell and Colm Kelly, now plan to photograph school matches and games featuring Moyross United.

"It was a good opportunity for anyone wanting to get a job in journalism," noted Colm. "You could say you have done a photography course."

Andrew O'Byrne of the Corpus Christi Youth Development Group and documentary photographer Eileen O'Leary from Kerry organised the project with funding support from the Community Development Network (CDN) Moyross Ltd. Half the participants also produced reports for an issue of 'Moywrites', the local magazine, produced by the CDN. Journalism training was provided through the 'Changing Ireland' project, which is based in the community and is part of the CDN.

"The idea of the courses, the exhibition and the calendar," said Mr. O'Byrne, "was to do something different and at the same time something meaningful for the participants. The community were our inspiration."

The photography course will be repeated in the New Year.

Thanks to...

'Changing Ireland' wishes to thank the following for their input: our Regional Reporters, Editorial Team, layout artist (Liam O'Connor), cartoonist (Austin Creaven), the Department, CDN Moyross and the various other people who wrote articles for this issue. We wish to thank all who are involved in this project for their input, advice and support. Note: Stories not printed in this issue, due to pressure on space, have been held over for the May issue.

Traveller experiences other side of racism in S.A.

Maureen Ward in profile:

By Allen Meagher

TRAVELLERS are now an internationally recognised distinct ethnic group, having been recognised by the United Nations World Conference Against Racism, held in South Africa last September. Maureen Ward, living in a halting site in Tullamore, studying at Maynooth and a member of the Galway Travellers Support Group, was there to make sure they got recognition.

Maureen – chairperson of the Irish Travellers Movement – flew from Ireland with other Travellers and over a dozen human rights advocates from the settled community.

The Conference concluded with an agreed Declaration and a Programme of Action. For the Irish contingent, it was hard work in both the NGO Forum and the Governmental Forum.

“I knew we were going out to get Traveller mentioned in the document and in the Declaration of Action. I also wanted to meet as many people as I could... and let people know what Travellers were experiencing, but I actually got a shock when other people started telling me their experiences.

“Things are bad enough for Travellers in Ireland, but in some of the other countries – I just found that talking to some of the black people I met in South Africa, they couldn't understand why Travellers were getting discriminated against because Travellers are

‘whities’.

“‘Twas hard to explain to them that we knew exactly how they were feeling. I explained the type of accommodation I live in and explained a bit about the culture and that our way of life is different to the wider community and they were saying that even within the black community they have groups that are different as well, but because they are all the same skin colour they were ok with one another. But the white community looked down on them.

■ Black people treated Travellers as superior

“It was an experience and a half for people to be treating me superior to them – black people were treating us like we were important and they weren't important. It was hard,” she said. During the trip, Maureen became friends with a Nigerian group and enjoyed annoying local racists by leading the Nigerians into an elite pool-hall.

So, what got Maureen involved at such a high campaigning level?

“Way back, I wasn't mixing as much and I would have stayed within the Traveller community and mixed very little with the settled community. I suppose it came to a head when I moved to Tullamore eight to ten years ago. In Tullamore, Travellers used to be put into special classes and I had thought all that was done away with. So I got involved with

Tullamore Travellers Movement and helped to support the Traveller mothers in getting rid of the special classes, which they did. ...So, the more I was meeting people, the more interested I got. I got a buzz out of just getting in people's faces and getting changes done, rather than standing back and not doing a thing. I was six years a volunteer with TTM (before becoming a paid worker).

“Some Travellers who wouldn't be aware of what's happening (in the fight for Traveller's rights) would just say ‘Ah, she has her face in the paper again – what lies is she telling this time?’ I just say to them that I love getting my face in the paper. Then I'd say ‘Read what's in the paper, don't mind looking at my picture’. I've gotten to the stage now that I just don't care what I say because it might make a little difference.

At the conference, Maureen was proud of her heritage.

“I do be really proud when Travellers identify themselves and say, ‘I'm a Traveller’. And it felt really great when you were introducing yourself to people (at the conference) that you held your head up high and said, ‘I'm an Irish Traveller’. Even it was great to be able to walk into places and know that you weren't going to be turned out. I even felt at one stage, ‘I could live over here’, but then when I was seeing the way the blacks were being treated I said ‘no’ that I couldn't live there. It didn't matter that I was a Traveller, but it did matter that I was white.”

■ One complaint!

“I didn't get no sun-tan at all. I got to lay down in the sunshine only one afternoon. It was Sunday and I said I was taking off for a couple of hours. I needed to get my head around stuff because there's no point carrying on if you are over-tired, because you're not focussing right. I felt under pressure. The timetable was set and sometimes I felt I had to be in two places at the one time.

The Travellers in the Irish group gave a presentation on education to a large international group: “It felt really great, here we were, a group of Travellers, doing it for ourselves and there wasn't a settled Irish person in sight (and I don't mean that in a bad way). We felt so powerful, doing it all by ourselves. ... Most people know why it was important that Travellers went to the conference – that it's about time Travellers do their own talking,” said Maureen.

Now that Travellers are recognised at global level, Maureen asks, “If the United Nations can recognise us, why can't local people?”

Currently, Maureen is studying at NUI Maynooth for a diploma in community development. She should do well!



● Maureen Ward (extreme right) pictured with Irish and international friends at the United Nations conference in Durban, South Africa.

Voluntary & Community Services Section (VCS)

– Departmental Contacts and changes in personnel

By Sean Dooley

WE understand that the number of changes in personnel in recent times within Voluntary and Community Services (VCS) Section has led to concern in some quarters as to the Department's commitment to the Programmes.

We would like to point out, however, that staff mobility is a fact of life in all Departments and in most cases, is not an issue over which individual sections or staff members themselves have control. It has more to do with how the Civil Service as an organisation is structured. As a result, regular turnover of staff is not unusual. The VCS Section makes every effort to ensure that the service provided to projects and programmes is of a consistently high standard. This service is greatly augmented by the Support Agency structure to which the majority of Projects now have access and the Department's Regional management teams around the country are also available as a point of contact and advice.

The VCS Section continue to have designated contact persons available to all Projects to help and advise where necessary. The current list of contacts (with geographic areas of responsibility) is as follows:

* **Donal Ryan and Jeanette Young** - Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Clare, Limerick, Tipperary North, Dublin District Numbers 8 & 15.
Tel. 01-7043151 for Donal or Jeanette.

* **Rita Fitzsimons and Marie Eardley** - Cavan, Louth, Meath, Monaghan, Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary South, Waterford, Wexford, Dublin District Numbers 12, 14, 22, 24 and South Co. Dublin.
Tel. 01-7043864 for Rita or Marie



● **Sean Dooley, VCS staff member.**

* **Shane Reynolds and Yvonne O'Roarke** - Galway, Mayo, Laois, Longford, Offaly, Roscommon, Westmeath, Dublin District Numbers 5, 7, 9, 11, 13 & 17.
Tel. 01-7043039 for Shane or Yvonne.

* **Sean Dooley and Claire Walsh** - Cork, Kerry, Dublin District Numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 6W, 10 & 20.
Tel. 01-7043722 for Sean or Claire.

New SW85 booklets

A 2002 version of the SW85 booklet, Supports for Community Development and Family Support Groups is now available from the Department's Regional Headquarters around the country or by contacting VCS section (see contact details above). Many of you involved in local projects will be familiar with this booklet which outlines the supports available both through the once-off grant scheme for those voluntary organisations operating outside the core-funded Programmes and also the Core-funded Programmes themselves. This is a booklet which we in VCS refer to time and again due to the detail included on all aspects of the Programme. Hopefully you will find it very useful as a reference point.

Advisory Committee Meeting

THE National Advisory Committee which was set up to assist in formulating policy in relation to the Community Development Programme is representative of local projects and also includes reps from the Combat Poverty Agency, the Regional Support Agencies, the Community Workers Co-operative, ADM and VCS Section. Initially the committee represented only CDPs but has since expanded to include reps from the FRC and CFG Programmes. Following some delays in reconvening the committee following the last meeting in June of last year, the next meeting of the Advisory Committee was scheduled for February 11.

Strategic Planning Process

AS many of you will be aware, a group representing the various stakeholders in the Programmes was set up in late 2000 charged with the task of formulating a strategic plan for the future of the Programmes or, in other words, devising a structure for the Programmes that would give a voice to the Programmes at national level. The aim is to come up with a plan that will strengthen the impact of the Programmes regionally and nationally and result in the Programmes having a much greater influence on policy making at the highest levels. The overall goal, of course, is to combat poverty and disadvantage at all levels of society but in order to do this effectively, we need to harness our energies and use a co-ordinated approach to achieve our aims. Hence the need for a Strategic Plan.

So what has been happening? Well, in order to gather the views of all those involved in the CDSPs, it was decided to organise seminars in all regions to get ideas on how best the Programme might organise itself to take on this challenge. To date, four seminars have been held in Kilkenny, Westport, Donegal and Nenagh. All have been extremely well attended and delegates have, generally been very enthusiastic about this initiative and the possibilities it may afford for the future of the Programme. The welcome opportunity which the seminars afforded individual projects to network with other projects in their region was a benefit commented on by a number of those attending, particularly newer projects who learned a great deal from the experience.

A report is currently being drawn up on the basis of notes taken at all of the seminars to date and it is expected that this report will shortly be completed. In the meantime further seminars will be organised in the regions yet to be consulted ie. Eastern region, North Eastern region and Southern region. The Strategic Planning Group hope to have all seminars completed by mid Summer. The Group is extremely grateful to all those who have assisted in the success of the seminars held to date particularly the Regional Organising Committees (ROC's) and the Projects who took on the administration tasks necessary on each occasion.

Further news on progress in next issue (May).

Island-wide support for a National Men's Forum

By Lorcan Brennan

2002 could well be an historic year for the men's movement in Ireland, as moves are afoot to set up a National Men's Forum. Work began in November of last year when Co-Operation Ireland held an inaugural meeting of the North-South Men's Forum at Bellenteer House, Navan, Co Meath.

The meeting involved a lively debate with some representatives being very issue-driven and as a result a meeting was due to be held in late January to decide on what issues the proposed Forum might concentrate on.

Others attending had a broad interest in men's experience of life generally in the new millennium. For example, men need to learn a new type of language so they can express themselves more. While the average man meets others in a pub and chats about politics, work, cars and sports, he is often lost for conversation after that. Men's movements give members the opportunity to talk for the first time in their lives on subjects such as grief and loss, family relationships and so on, without feeling uncomfortable.

John from Carlow, reflecting on the pre-Forum meeting in Navan, said, "I'm delighted I made the journey, just to listen to men's stories and the challenges involved in men's work was really revealing. I think what has happened here this weekend for all of us is the beginnings of something vital for men and society at large."

■ Commitment to men's work

The weekend meeting, open to men's groups and organisations throughout the island brought together dozens of active men from all corners of the country. At the meeting, those present re-stated their future commitment to the development of men's work throughout Ireland and internationally.

Co-operation Ireland, who hosted the weekend with the combined support of two



■ Participants at the North-South Men's Forum at Bellenteer House, Co. Meath.

charity organisations who wish to remain anonymous, did so because of increasing number of requests received from men's groups throughout the island looking for support for exchanges, conferences, workshops and other linkages. It was felt that these linkages could be strengthened and broadened in their scope by the establishment of a national forum through which men's groups and other organisations concerned with men's issues could share experiences and learning.

■ Participants from far and wide

With this in mind participants arrived from a diverse range of groups and organisations throughout the country. While many of the groups were local, representatives from regional and national organisations were also present.

Invitations had been extended to a number of other groups who were unable to attend but who supported the establishment of the forum. The wide geographical spread extended from Clare to Belfast, Waterford to Derry.

■ Sharing Stories

The weekend provided an excellent opportunity for men to get to know one another better, share experiences affecting, shaping and challenging their lives and highlight the challenges involved in working for and with men. Through open sessions and working within small groups men were granted time and space to identify some of the key issues and challenges facing men in today's society ranging from family law to health, education and many more. Even after long hours of discussion it was acknowledged the list of challenges arrived at was not conclusive.

■ A way forward

Much of the weekend discussion explored issues affecting men's lives and the importance of the Forum For Men keeping task and process in balance as it develops into the future. It is hoped that the work achieved through the Forum will give voice and shape the lives of men of all backgrounds in practical hopeful ways. The weekend concluded with the selecting of a planning group committed to carrying out some focused work on behalf of the larger group before meeting again later in 2002.

■ A vast step for mankind

Concluding the weekend with last discussions and farewells on the steps of Bellenteer House, all were in agreement that through taking the first steps towards starting a National Men's Forum an important event had taken place which could lead to positive new developments in the lives of men through out the entire island. It was also felt these developments could have a positive impact on the lives of women and children and the community at large.

• For more information, contact:
Joe Kelly, Project Officer,
Co-operation Ireland,
37 Upper Fitzwilliam St.,
Dublin 2.
Tel: 01-6610588. Fax: 01-6618456.
E-mail: jkelly@cooperationireland.org

Your life from a global perspective

This article is based on a message that has travelled the world by e-mail, bringing a fresh perspective to people's daily routine. The idea is to imagine that we could shrink the earth's population to a village of precisely 100 people, with all the existing human ratios remaining the same. If so, it would look something like the following. There would be:

- 57 Asians;
- 21 Europeans;
- 14 Americans (north and south);
- 8 Africans;
- 6 people would possess 59% of the entire world's wealth and all 6 would be from the U.S.;
- 80 would live in sub-standard housing;
- 70 would be unable to read;
- 50 would suffer from malnutrition;
- 1 (yes, only 1) would have a college education;
- 1 would own a computer.

When one considers our world from such a compressed perspective, the need for acceptance, understanding and education becomes glaringly apparent.

The following is also something to ponder:

If you woke up this morning with more health than

illness... you are more blessed than the million who will not survive this week. If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation... you are ahead of 500 million people in the world. If you can attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture or death... you are more blessed than three billion people in the world. If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep... you are richer than 75% of this world. If you have money in the bank, in your wallet and spare change in a dish somewhere... you are among the top 85 of the world's wealthy. If your parents are still alive and still married... you are very rare indeed. If you can read this message, you are more blessed than over two billion people in the world who cannot read at all.

So!

So work like you don't need the money.

Love like you've never been hurt.

Dance like no-one's watching.

Sing like no-one's listening.

Live like it's Heaven on Earth!

Deserted wife helped set up Tralee Women's Centre

By Martine Brennan

"IF we only help one woman in a year then it's a job well done," says Josephine Hassett, a founder member of the Tralee Women's Resource Centre. Josephine is a vibrant and straight-talking woman, a community activist who recently clocked up ten years as a volunteer.

Josephine's life was abruptly shattered in 1986 when she and her three children were deserted by her former husband.

"I was the first woman in my estate to be deserted by her husband and people were very hard on me," said Josephine. "I felt like running away but in the end I decided I had as much right to be there as anybody else. After a while I found my way to the Aishling Women's Group, a locally based group where my big adventure began."

At that time Aontas were bringing a pilot of the 'New Opportunities for Women Programme', to Tralee. A year and a half later, Josephine and 17 other women received their certificates for studying 'Women in the Community'.

"The graduation day was one of the proudest moments of my life," recalled Josephine.

Not long afterwards, Josephine, Hilary Scanlon, Mary Conway, Patricia Meagher and Noreen White talked about the need for "a place just for women in Tralee." They applied to the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and were granted core funding to open the Tralee Women's Resource Centre.

"We started with a part-time co-ordinator, myself and one other volunteer and opened up two mornings a week. It was never a bother to come to work," said Josephine. "Helping the women is so fulfilling. People had helped me when I needed it and when I was able I wanted to give back."

"Ten years later everything has changed, the Centre now has a part-time co-ordinator, a part-time support worker and four women on Community Employment schemes. I have my Diploma in Women in the Community. Deserted wives now qualify for C.E. schemes. The Centre is open five mornings a week, nine-thirty to two-thirty. Two of my children have gone to college. **And it all started in a locally based women's group!"**

Contact: Tralee Women's Resource Centre, 35 Ashe Street, Tralee. Tel: 066-7120622.



● **Josephine Hassett with Minister of State at the Dept. of Education and Science, Willie O'Dea.**

Integrating asylum-seekers not a problem in Limerick

By Majella O'Connor, co-ordinator

One often hears within the community sector the importance of training before undertaking any form of work with specific interest groups, for example, women's groups, men's groups, Traveller groups, etc. If this was a golden rule adhered to in the strictest sense of the word, we in St Mary's Community Development Project would still be at preparation stage in our work with asylum-seekers living in the area.

In the early stages, St Mary's CDP discussed how we could incorporate the needs of asylum-seekers within our existing work programme. So, when we placed locals and asylum-seekers together for a computer course, we could begin a process of awareness-raising and create an understanding around the concept of difference. The integrated computer workshop has been an enlightening concept where lively discussion on social and political issues takes place informally over the proverbial cup of tea.

As part of the Christmas season, the CDP supported the people attending the integrated computer workshop in planning, organising and promoting an inter-cultural evening using the



● **Geraldine Reidy of St Mary's CDP.**

theme of food and music from Africa, Eastern Europe and Western Europe. The food was cooked by the asylum seekers within their respective accommodation, some even

travelling to African shops in Dublin for specific ingredients. The event was a very good example of co-operation by the planning group and was appreciated by the wider community who got a Christmas party with a difference!

Presently members of the Reformed Church of Jesus Christ, initiated by a Nigerian pastor, are meeting twice weekly in the local community centre, one night for bible and prayer study and Sunday mornings for worship. It has become quite 'normal' for local residents living near the community centre to be woken to the sound of hymns and prayers.

The asylum-seekers have been part of our community for the past two years. The ethos and principles of community development, valuing difference, respect, and encouraging participation has enabled people to meet each other as human beings, facing similar issues and having the same emotional needs.

*** Majella O'Connor is Project Co-ordinator with St. Mary's Community Development Project, Limerick, a project funded under the Community Development Support Programmes.**

Changing Ireland - what's in the title?

Dozens of entries were received to our plea in early 2001 for project workers and volunteers to come up with an apt title for this newsletter. The eventual title chosen – 'Changing Ireland' – was selected because it was both apt and catchy. What was behind the idea? The word 'Changing' can be read as both verb and adjective. In other words, Ireland is indeed changing,

yet community development workers and volunteers are doing their absolute best to effect positive change – by challenging the structures that cause poverty and exclusion.

Since 'Changing Ireland' has been published, many community development workers and volunteers have phoned, e-mailed, written and spoken with the

various people involved in 'Changing Ireland' to issue congratulations. The Community Development Network Moyross, the editor, reporters, editorial team and layout artist are grateful for the support. Comments are always welcome – whether congratulatory or critical.

Disability pilot project on CD-ROM

A leading disability organisation has produced a new CD-ROM so that projects nationwide can benefit from the learning the group experienced in researching the nature and extent of disability in the locality. The project was called 'Visualising Inclusion'.

Jacqui Browne, Chairperson of the Kerry Network of People with Disabilities (KNPD) said her organisation, "firmly believes that both the model and process we used for designing and doing the research will encourage other Networks and organisations to actively involve people with disabilities and build their capacity to assess their own needs and develop their own appropriate responses."

Over the last five years, the KNPD – a Core-Funded Group – found there was a lack of real data and information about the needs and concerns of people with disabilities locally. This hindered progress in terms of local development and participation by and for people with disabilities and the Network realised that this experience was not unique to Kerry.

■ NEXUS involved

Together with Brian Dillon (Research Director, Nexus Research Co-operative) the KNPD built the capacity of the Network itself to design the research, to undertake the needs assessment, input and interpret the data collected and, most importantly, to develop the recommendations for future action. A number of Network members received training and were centrally involved in the field-work, analysis and interpretation of the research results.

The Kerry Network now looks forward to developing real equal opportunities for people with disabilities locally. They will



● **Cormac Daly,**
a staff-
member of
the Kerry
Network of
People with
Disabilities

do so by continuing their work, this time on an informed basis, with the local statutory, community, voluntary and development agencies.

The CD Rom is the result of a year-long collaboration between members of the Kerry Network of People with Disabilities and Nexus Research personnel. It was financially supported by FAS together with local Partnership companies, and the Southern Health Board.

■ Share the model

This CD, which is for sale from the Network, outlines the entire 'Visualising Inclusion' process of undertaking the research. The idea is to share the model or approach used with other Networks and organisations of people with disabilities and indeed any groups who share the Kerry Network and Nexus approach.

It covers each of nine elements of the research process in a style that allows an insight into how each phase actually worked in practice. Questions are asked in relation to:

- What helped or facilitated the work at each stage?

- What could have been a barrier to success during each stage?
- What significant achievements were taken away from each stage?
- What lessons were learnt for the future?
- What was produced at each stage?

The Kerry Network of People with Disabilities is one of 30 Networks of People with Disabilities in Ireland. One of the unique features of these networks is that they comprise people with different kinds of impairment and disabilities working together promoting a range of common interests.

Nexus Research is a not-for-profit research co-operative based in Dublin.

For a copy of the CD or for more information contact:

- (a) The Kerry Network of People with Disabilities, James St., Tralee, Co. Kerry. Tel/Fax: 066-7180611; E-mail: kerry@pwdi.org
- (b) Nexus Research: www.iol.ie/nexus

Note: The 'Sex With A Difference' article published in the last issue of 'Changing Ireland' was originally published in the KNPD Newsletter.

A Dublin community worker in the making

By Allen Meagher

WHEN Graham Mooney decided to sit the Leaving Certificate, he didn't realise he was going to make history. Graham achieved a personal triumph in passing the exam, but the local community also celebrated because he was the first person from his area to get the Leaving.

Encouraged by parents Breda and Paul (since deceased) and homework club workers alike, Graham put his mind to the task and emerged with an 86% grade in the Leaving Cert Applied, making him the first ever person from Thomas Court Bawn flats complex in the Liberties of Dublin to go so far academically. He attended James Street CBS.

"I didn't think anything big of it at the time," said Graham, "but then I found out that I was the only one in the complex to do the Leaving Cert and I felt good about it. It's something you'll always regret if you don't have."

While students from middle-class backgrounds merely regard the Leaving Cert as a stepping stone to further education, in Graham's world the norm is to leave of school early. He felt the pressure from his peers, but persevered: "At first I wanted to be out on the town with everybody, but decided there was no point in doing that when you could get a good job if you have the Leaving Cert. My parents were always pushing me to stick at school."

Just 17, Graham was recently promoted to assistant manager of Byrne's Bar in Meath Street, proving his point that getting the Leaving and a good job go together. Graham



● **Graham Mooney outside Byrne's Bar, Meath St., Dublin, where he works as assistant manager.**

hopes to eventually work in community development, having been involved in various voluntary projects since his early teens.

"Some lads get caught up with the wrong things and get into trouble," said Graham, who appreciates the support he received at home and from staff of School Street Family Resource Centre.

"I kept wanting to drop out of school, so I joined a homework club and Leo (School Street FRC's project co-ordinator) told me to just get on with it. And my Da was always the one to chastise me. For me, I always wanted to have the Leaving Cert going looking for a job. Now I've done it."

Graham's favourite subjects were Office Skills and Retail Distribution, and Mathematics, which means he is well suited to bar management.

"I started here three and a half years ago as a lounge-boy and I've been behind the bar now for the last two years," he said.

But, Graham wants to go to college now to study community development and childcare and get work in the area.

"I am still very active in the flats complex," he noted. "I'm always involved in swimming, canoeing and rock-climbing. Three years ago, I was selected as the Dublin representative for a youth conference held in Cork. The year before that, I got an award for doing voluntary work after I worked as a junior youth leader for local clubs."

Graham has also worked as a volunteer at Sunshine House, a holiday destination for disadvantaged children. His mother, Breda, is proud of him and staff at the local Family Resource Centre hope that other teenagers might now be encouraged to continue on and not drop out of school early.

Mid-West volunteers voice their concerns

By Veronica McNamara

2001 was the international year of the Volunteer and it is important that volunteers across Ireland continue to be given recognition for the time and energy they give to the groups and communities in which they volunteer. Although recognition and appreciation are extremely important aspects of volunteering, they should not stand apart from strategies or legislation that may improve the current situation for volunteers in Ireland.

The changing nature of volunteering over the past number of years has meant that with volunteering comes numerous responsibilities which in turn require the volunteer to devote significant time to the group or community in which they are involved. This might not be true for all volunteers but it is certainly the experience of many volunteers in the mid-west region who for a variety of different reasons have become involved in the Community Development Support Programmes.

As part of the International Year of the Volunteer, the government established a

National Committee on Volunteering who were charged with developing strategies that will support and develop Volunteering in Ireland. This committee established a number of sub-committees, including a 'Sub-committee for Awareness and Support of Volunteering'. This sub-committee must report to the National Committee on:

- * Measures to widen the pool of volunteers, and;
- * The range of supports needed in order to promote, sustain and develop volunteering.

In order to report back to the National Committee on Volunteering, this sub-committee called for submissions from all individuals and organisations that wished to convey their views and concerns on this topic.

A number of Community Development Projects and Family Resource Centres in the mid-west region, facilitated by the two policy workers at the Mid-West Community Development Support Agency, came together in October 2001. The aim was to make a submission to the National Committee on Volunteering. A total of ten projects participated in a workshop and the submission that resulted included a number of notable

recommendations focussing on the following subjects:

1. Lack of Volunteers
2. Contribution of Volunteers
3. Changes in society
4. Responsibilities of Volunteers
5. Real recognition of Volunteers by the Government
6. The Community Development Support Programmes.

Receipt of the submission has been acknowledged by the National Committee on Volunteering and the submission will be followed up by those involved in its development to ensure that it is considered in the devising of any strategies that might affect, support or develop Volunteering in Ireland.

A copy of the submission may be obtained from the Mid-West Community Development Support Agency. Tel: 061-225711; E-mail: mwcdsa@iol.ie

*** Veronica McNamara is a policy worker with the Mid-West Community Development Support Agency.**

Combat Poverty has grants for policy work

THE Combat Poverty Agency have announced a 'Working Against Poverty Grants Scheme' for the period 2002-2004 to support community and voluntary groups to influence policy.

The scheme offers groups the opportunity to carry out once-off pieces of work to influence policy. One of the selection criteria is that the work proposed would not normally receive grant-support from a core-funding source.

Many projects may find the grant scheme suits their purposes. It is aimed at

community and voluntary groups working to tackle poverty or the effects of poverty.

The scheme aims to support groups to effectively influence policy at local, regional, or national levels in a number of ways: training in how to influence policy; carrying out and publishing research; evaluating the impact of actions, running seminars and conferences which engage policy makers; contributing to consultation processes, analysing policies and making submissions.

This year, there are two deadlines for

the receipt of applications, March 27th and September 18th.

• For more information, brochures and application forms regarding the 'Working Against Poverty Grants' contact either of the following at the Combat Poverty Agency (Bridgewater Centre, Conyngham Road, Islandbridge, Dublin 8):

Annmarie Wallace, Tel. 01-6026623, Email - wallacea@cpa.ie or Anne Bride, Tel. 01-6026629; Email - bridea@cpa.ie

Story-telling heritage revived in Wexford country cottage

By Lorcan Brennan

IN an age when we're fast supposed to becoming I.T. whiz kids, (age six to sixty) an initiative with a difference is working consistently beneath a County Wexford hillside, cultivating the art of storytelling as a way to discovering the rich heritage around and within us.

'Ar mBreacha' (Our Roots) is a restored, thatched 17th-century farmhouse situated near Ballyduff under the shadow of Sliabh Bhui. Established in 1991 the house is dedicated to creating an atmosphere, which brings alive the home of the past with 'candle and lantern' talk in modern Ireland.

The house helps people of all ages and backgrounds keep in touch with their past while making progress into the future. This is achieved through gathering in candlelight to sing, dance, play music, recite poetry and tell stories.

The house is available for use by project groups. The FAB (Ferndale, Ashfield and Belvedere) CDP in Co. Wexford have used the premises for training sessions with youth groups.

Jim Finn, a priest of Ferns Diocese and founder of the house, is delighted that what was once "a pile of tumbling rubble is now restored to celebrate the oral traditions of singing, poetry and storytelling as a way of celebrating who we are and where we came from no matter what part of the county, country or world."

Positive influences

Jim is also aware the house can have other positive influences, "At a time in our country's history when we know from statistics that large numbers of people struggle with the challenge of writing and reading, developing the art of the vocal through storytelling can be a first vital step for introducing people to a new way of exploring and expressing who they are."

An innovative priest, Jim is never short of ideas. In the early '90s he took to the road for a week, without his collar, to live as a homeless person and see for himself how generous or not



● A group perform a play at 'Ar mBreacha', Wexford

the Irish really are. He spent at least one night sleeping outdoors on a bench in a schoolyard.

Regarding 'Ar mBreacha', he believes that introducing people to links with their local heritage can mark the beginnings of a fresh interest in improving reading and writing skills so as to interact and celebrate in a livelier and better way with their rich past.

Many people who pass through the house become committed to its ethos to the point of not being satisfied simply with developing story-telling techniques and reciting poetry, but have taken to writing poems, stories and plays that have been produced and performed before large appreciative audiences.

For an initiative that started from a tumbled-down house, this project has blossomed through the support of a focused, committed working group. It is now a thatched house with a vocal ethos that has much to teach all of us who struggle to communicate better whether through poetry, song, writing or I.T.

There is no doubt that the success of Ar

Mbreacha will continue in 2002 and for many years to come as interest and attendance seems to grow with the passage of time. For people wishing to celebrate their heritage but who struggle with the challenge of reading and writing (literacy) as a barrier to living a fuller life, perhaps an introduction to the art of storytelling, song and poetry might be enough to whet their appetite to move onto bigger and better things. Then they can develop their communication skills in a host of different ways.

More information: Should your project want to use the house or if you need more information, contact Jim Finn (054-44148) or Con Rooney (054-83256).

Meetings take place every Tuesday, from 8pm - 10.30pm, during the months of July and August. For the rest of the year, meetings are held on the first Tuesday of every month. All are welcome and there is no admission fee.

CWC conference 'dragged' into controversy

By Allen Meagher

THE greatest cause for debate at the Community Workers Co-op two-day conference held in Kilkenny, in December, came – not from workshops or lectures – but from events that unfolded once the entertainment for the night swung into gear.

A drag artist appeared as part of the hired Karaoke act, dancing to the tune 'It's Raining Men', and was stopped mid-act by a leading CWC member. Stasia Crickley halted the man in a skirt, saying the act was sexist and offensive.

With the offending drag artist put to flight, the organising committee, who had not expected drag, hoped the Karaoke could continue as planned. However, the D.J., upset that his drag colleague was not allowed to continue, quit.

Many CWC members also walked out, in impromptu protest. Ironically, most seemed upset at the protest against the drag act, or more particularly against the form it took. Rather than argue over the matter, they voted with their feet.

Lively debate quickly opened on a variety of subjects. Was the act sexist? Had the performer set out to offend? Perhaps it was part of his/her sexuality? Was Ms. Crickley's intervention an act of exclusion in itself? Or was it the work of a radical with a true sense of social justice who believed in acting on principles? Opinion varied wildly. There were some claims that a clique was operating in the Co-op and that dissension from the clique's outlook was not welcome.

The debate was useful in that it focused on principles at the core of community work. This was something Siobhan O'Donohue, CWC co-ordinator, noted the following day when workshop time was given over to the events of the night before. She referred to the core issues of inequality, power and wealth, acknowledging that the events of the previous night inadvertently brought such issues up for discussion.

However, there was much dissatisfaction at Ms. Crickley's protest.

One irate member directed her complaints towards the organisers: "You have to take responsibility if you book entertainment. You didn't take that responsibility – you embarrassed the drag artist and you embarrassed me as your paying guest."

Another said, "The way it (the protest

against the drag act) was handled left an awful lot of discomfort. It was disempowering the way it was handled, and it really ruined a good evening."

Ms. Crickley explained her viewpoint: "I found it offensive and I do feel if we find things offensive that we do have a right to respond. And there is far too much silence when we find things offensive, when we find things sexist. I did what I did on my own behalf and nobody else's."

CWC chairperson, Helen Landers, backed Ms. Crickley on behalf of the management committee: "I supported Stasia in the stance she took because I also found it very offensive."

Another member expressed concern that "after a hard day talking about diversity and celebrating diversity - if that man who is a drag queen is exploring his sexuality, then I think we made a huge mistake. We excluded him."

Another member admired Ms. Crickley "for taking a stance" when she felt offended.

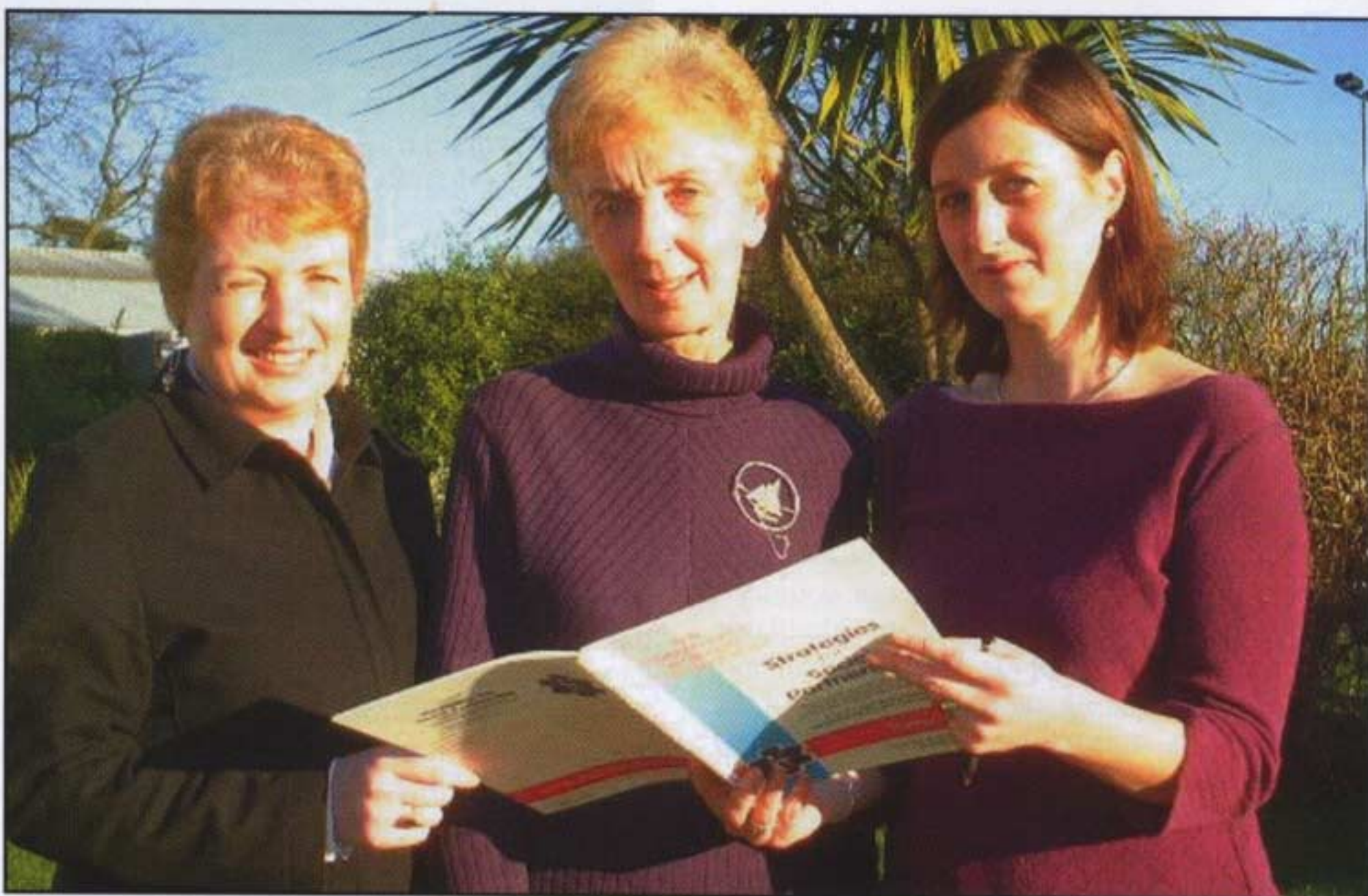
Efforts to track down the Karaoke duo afterwards, to give them the opportunity to comment, were unsuccessful. The hotel manager did not know the duo and the CWC organisers found themselves unable to provide a contact number.

Donegal CWC attracts big membership

Donegal CWC was formed in 1994 and has since grown from a membership of 5 to over 70. Through funding provided through the Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, the Co-op has established an office in Letterkenny and employs two workers - Tim Spalding, staff project worker and Angela Holohan, information and administration worker. The Donegal CWC is managed by a co-ordinating group.

The office includes a well-stocked reference and lending library with books, publications and reports relating to all aspects of community development, social inclusion and anti-poverty work. Donegal CWC happens to have a strong interest in media work and the Co-op publishes magazines and, occasionally, booklets, including the following: 'Donegal Community News' - published quarterly; 'Communit-E Bulletin' - published bi-weekly via email; 'Planning, A Guide for Communities in Donegal' (1999) by Susanna Friel; 'How to Produce a Community Newsletter' (1999) by Susanna Friel; 'The Media and Public Relations' (2000) by Tim Spalding (the latter booklet is in short supply).

• Contact: Donegal Community Workers Co-op, 18 Celtic Apartments, Pearse Road, Letterkenny, Co Donegal. Tel. 074-28792; Fax: 074-29067; Email: cwcdl@eircom.net



● Attending the Community Workers Conference in Kilkenny (from left to right): Helen Landers, Stasia Crickley and Siobhan O'Donohue.

Workers Co-op is 21 this year

THE Community Workers Co-operative (CWC) has its headquarters in Galway City and was set up in 1981 as a national network of those active at a community level and working for social change. It seeks "to be an independent voice and to campaign on issues that affect the lives of those who are most disadvantaged."

Ireland is changing and the context in which the CWC and its members work has changed considerably since the early 1980s. However, the work is still fundamentally about enabling those who are disadvantaged to address the root causes of inequality, injustice, oppression and poverty.

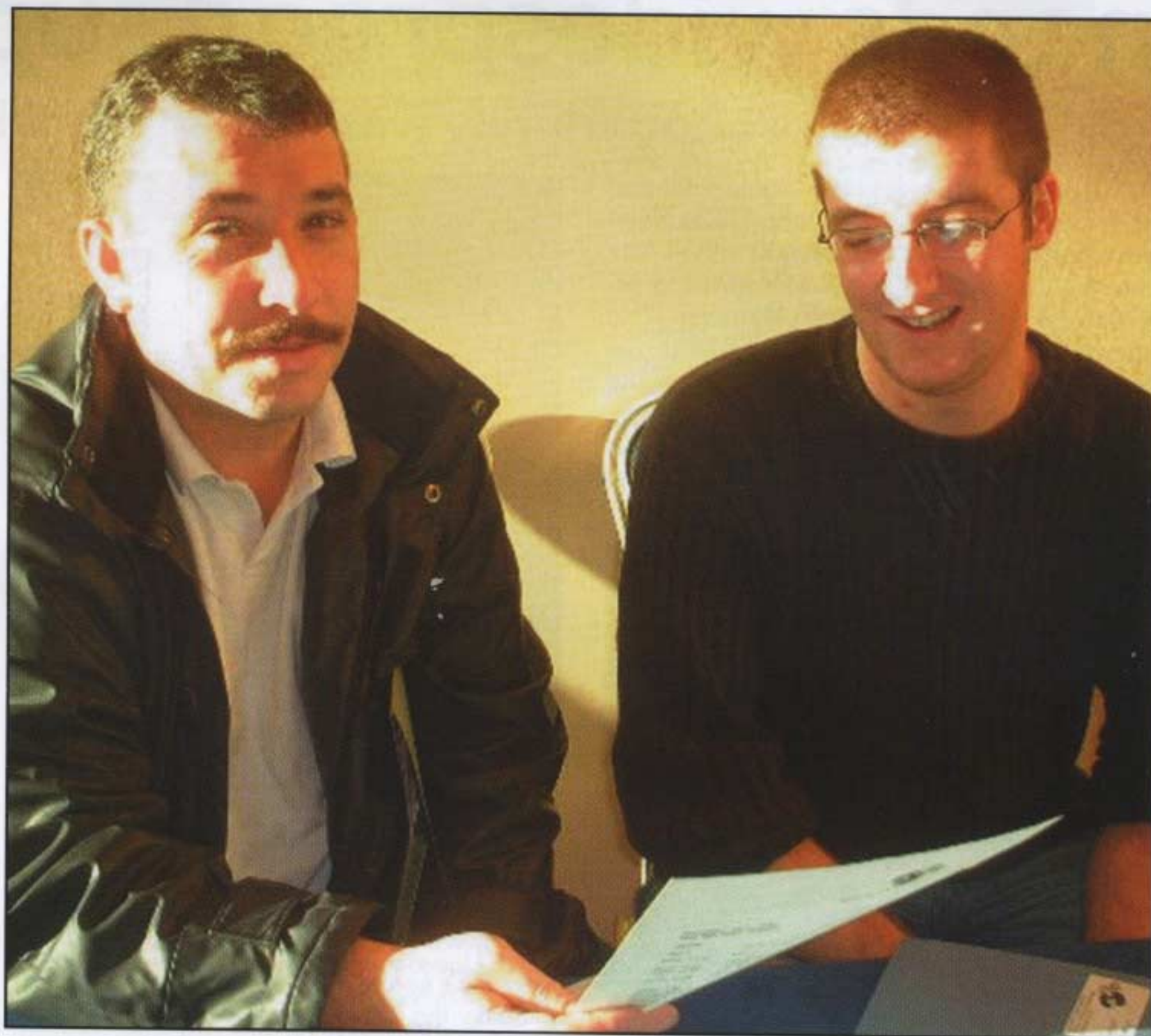
Membership of the CWC is open to all those who support the Co-op's aims and objectives and who would like to get involved in a movement for radical social change, for justice and equality. An on-line membership form can be filled out at www.cwc.ie. Through participation in CWC activities, members contribute to developing policies based on an analysis of how best to tackle poverty and inequality. Members hold regular meetings throughout the country.

The CWC aims to: provide a forum for debate on economic, political, social and cultural issues in Ireland and worldwide. The Co-op believes that equality and justice can only be achieved if those whose lives are most affected play a central role in shaping local and national government policies.

The Co-op works with its members to empower communities to achieve change. At both local and national levels, the CWC has been an active participant in social partnership. The main decision-making body of the Co-op is the agm at which an 'Central Group' is selected.

The Community Workers Co-operative has a range of specific objectives (which govern the day-to-day work of staff) including to:

- Contribute to the creation of a more just and equal society through promoting a policy



● **Thomas McDonagh, Tullamore Travellers Movement, and Liam Hanrahan, Limerick Travellers Support Group, enjoying the CWC conference.**

agenda drawn from local action and experience.

- Influence the economic and social development policies of the Government, European Union, state agencies, statutory, voluntary and community bodies.
- Support the development of models and institutions of participatory democracy.
- Secure the recognition and inclusion of the

community sector as a social partner.

- Develop partnership and co-operation within the community sector.
- Ensure that adequate resources are made available to the community sector.
- Provide community based organisations and activists with access to information and opportunities for capacity building.
- Promote anti-oppressive, anti-sexist and anti-racist community work, with a particular emphasis on the inclusion of women.
- Promote a global perspective on justice issues and seek to make constructive links with the sector and development issues in the 'Third World'.

As part of its work, the CWC has active sub-groups that focus on the following policy issues: education, health, local government, women/equality, rural poverty and the community sector. The CWC offices hold an archive of articles, interviews and features from the Co-op's newspaper, 'News & Views', while the monthly bulletin 'News Bites' is available on-line. Publications on a variety of development issues may be ordered by calling the office, or through the website.

For information, contact: CWC, Unit 4, Tuam Road, Galway; Tel. 091-779030; Fax. 091-779033; E-mail – info@cwc.ie

Keynote speakers

The CWC conference was titled 'Wealth, Power, Inequality - Challenges for Community Work in a New Era' and was held on December 10th - 11th, at the Newpark Hotel, Kilkenny.

The conference aimed to "provide a context for critical dialogue and discussion on issues of wealth, power and inequality in Ireland today with a view to building a renewed focus and agenda for community work."

Among the keynote speakers at the CWC conference were Andy Storey, from Afri and the Development Studies Centre at Kimmage Manor. He provided 'A global view on wealth, power and inequality'. Mary Murphy, St. Vincent de Paul, gave 'An Irish perspective, including critique of social partnership'. Fintan Farrell, Community Platform, looked at 'The role of the community sector in bringing about social change', while Stasia Crickley from the Department of Applied Social Studies at NUI Maynooth, spoke about 'Working in a changed environment - challenges facing community work'.

Excerpts from these speeches will appear in the next issue of 'Changing Ireland'.

Sustainable Development model needs widespread support

– ‘There are more community workers, yet nothing is changing’

“THIS conference is taking place in a context of frustration about continuing inequality, poverty and social exclusion while the country is richer than ever,” stated Sean Regan at the Community Workers Co-operative (CWC) conference held in Kilkenny in December. In an address on the topic, ‘Sustainable Ireland’, Mr. Regan (a CWC staff member) noted that there were more community workers than ever on the ground, “yet nothing is changing”,

This begged the question: “If community work is about changing society, why has so little changed? It seems that most of this energy is going to managing inequality and poverty while the structure that causes the problems lingers on. We (rightly) focus on the socially excluded, but too often not on the mechanisms that cause this exclusion... We are busy, but to what extent are we busy managing social exclusion and attending meetings, rather than challenging the causes?”

In his speech, he provided background information to place Ireland’s situation in a global context and he referred to the many reports that show how Irish society is polarised, mentioning as an example the link between astronomical house prices, longer housing lists and increased homelessness.

He challenged the neo-liberal model of development adopted by Irish governments, saying there is an almost unquestioning acceptance that this is the only way for Ireland to progress.

“Any negative fallout (from this model) – such as poverty, homelessness or rural decline – is unfortunate and needs to be dealt with, but does not call the model of development into question.”

This model of development actually needs inequality to function. Yet, as far as economists are concerned the big debate is over, he said, quoting from Fukuyama – ‘All the big questions have been answered.’

Mr. Regan spoke of a feeling of “helplessness” and “voicelessness” among people in Ireland at what is happening in our country and in the world at large. He lamented the lack of alternatives on offer or leadership to find alternatives. Even the protesters at G8 summits, such as the infamous Genoa summit last year, were a diverse group “without a clearly articulated vision of the alternative.”

Looking to the positive, Mr. Regan said there had been “some gains”, noting that social inclusion is now an objective of the National Development Plan and there is a commitment to poverty-proofing and equality-proofing. He quoted a common definition of Sustainable Development (by Brundtland) – “development that meets the needs of today, without undermining the ability of future generations to



● **Sean Regan, CWC staff member, was among the main speakers who addressed the Co-op’s conference in Kilkenny recently.**

meet their needs.”

Since the UN Conference in Rio in ’92, “Sustainable Development entails a strong anti-poverty, equality focus and sees participatory democracy as fundamental,” continued Mr. Regan. Ireland’s current model of development is unsustainable on three core fronts – socially, environmentally and economically.

“Eliminating poverty, promoting equality,

redistributing wealth and protecting the environment are all at odds with the neo-liberal, short-term, profits-at-all-costs approach,” he said.

Certain global initiatives do, however, provide opportunities to promote an alternative – the Earth Summit in ’92, the Kyoto Protocol, the recent World Conference Against Racism, and so on. In suggesting ways forward, Mr. Regan noted that those who challenge the consensus are often dismissed as “creeping Jesus” and pinko-lefties”.

“Nonetheless,” he said, “with no mainstream political party deviating from the consensus to show leadership, there has never been a greater need for a strong, independent community sector to articulate these issues.”

He suggested the following approaches, many of which had been discussed in earlier workshops and lectures:

- Strengthen our focus on processes and structures that cause exclusion;
- Develop a better analysis of the current model of development;
- Make this analysis accessible to community workers and the public;
- Become more strategic;
- Build alliances with other sectors who share our concerns – international, legal, political, trade unions, environmental sectors.

“If we can collectively articulate and develop our analysis and build alliances maybe we will slowly but ultimately transform society,” he concluded.



● **Tea or coffee?**

Become a 'C.I.' team member!

New members are wanted for the 'Changing Ireland' Editorial Team. At present, those on the team have combined experience in CDPs, a Support Agency, the DSCFA, the wider media world and Regional Reporting for 'Changing Ireland'.

More members are wanted – ideally people working in the north, midlands or west who have experience of Core-Funded Group work, Family Resource Centre work or otherwise. They should either work as a staff-member or as a voluntary management committee member of a project and should have the backing of their project in becoming a member of the Editorial Team.

Your contribution will be highly appreciated. The work is important as the newsletter seeks to highlight our work to combat poverty and social exclusion.

For more details, contact the Editor.

Have you a story?

The next issue of 'Changing Ireland' is due out in May and the closing date for submissions is April 15th:

Have you interesting work on at the moment? If you have a story idea, then call the Editor (see page 2 for contact details).

Reporters sought for Dublin, East and North-West

Is your region not getting enough coverage in 'Changing Ireland'? Join the reporting team and write for us! If you work for a CDP, FRC or a Core-Funded Group, now is your chance!

'Changing Ireland' is written by and for community development workers, volunteers and those connected under the umbrella of the Community Development Support Programmes (CDSPs).

Since 'Changing Ireland' is a new magazine, some vacancies for Regional Reporter remain to be filled.

Currently, there are vacancies in the following regions: Dublin (2); Eastern (1); Midlands (1); North-West (1).

The work is part-time, training is provided and there is a reasonable payment rate for stories.

Applicants should work (salaried or volunteer) in projects funded or supported under the CDSPs. They should have a strong interest in community development issues, have some experience in writing or media-work and should have an eye for a story.

The experience will particularly benefit those who already produce their own newsletter or wish to improve their relationship with the local media. Or if you are passionate in the fight against poverty and exclusion!

Aspiring reporters should contact the Editor (see page 2 for contact details).

Galway Travellers use media to resist bullying

After 20 years waiting in a "temporary" halting site at Hillside Camp, Galway, half the 16 families living there were provided late last year with housing. However, a day that should have been a cause for celebration for Travellers in Galway city turned to dismay and disgust when the Corporation issued an order giving everybody 24 hours to be gone from the site. Those who were allocated houses had to move in without furniture, while the eight remaining families were ordered to leave the site immediately. For where? All local authorities are obliged to provide sites to cater for the nomadic lifestyle of Travellers.

The Galway Travellers Support Group issued press releases, one stating that the Corporation had "betrayed" the partnership approach. Upset at the treatment, the GTSG launched a full-scale media campaign. Resulting headlines included the following: "Outrage at closure of Galway halting site" (Irish Times); "TD slams conditions at Galway halting site as 'disgraceful'" and "Anger over eviction of Travellers" (City Tribune). Now the GTSG have devised a proper media strategy should future incidents occur. Here, project co-ordinator, Margaret O'Riada, tells how it worked out during the fortnight.

By Margaret O'Riada

IN response [to the eviction order] committed workers and volunteers from the Galway Travellers Support Group dropped tools and went on a fortnight's full-time media offensive. We had two reasons for doing so – not to let those responsible away with it and to have the accommodation issue for Travellers in Galway debated in public. Also, the Partnership process had failed us.

Once again the Traveller community, a generally voiceless and powerless people, were expected to put up with being treated as second-class citizens in Galway city. Personally I believe that the way the unofficial Traveller site in Hillside was closed down was the worst, institutional abuse of the Traveller Community I have seen in my time working with Travellers.

The event and the circumstances meant that the GTSG management and staff team had to respond immediately. It was decided that the lack of respect and dignity shown to Travellers on the day needed to be debated in the media and that people needed to be held accountable for their actions and blatant disregard for the Traveller Community.

A media campaign was planned in response to the appalling treatment so it was all hands on deck, the facts had to be gathered and recorded and the campaign planned.

It was also felt that it was timely to challenge the partnership arrangement between the Galway Traveller Support Group and the Local Authority. Prior to the incident in Hillside we, as a project (our vision is "to achieve full equality for Travellers in all aspects of their lives") had spent two years bringing the issues in relation to Traveller Accommodation to the table, talking about shared agendas and meaningful consultation. It now looked like we had wasted our valuable time. Our advice, expertise and recommendations were ignored.

What the institutional bullying has highlighted for the project is the need to choose carefully who we build alliances with. It also showed us that while engaging in partnership arrangements is one way forward it is not the only option. There is nothing more frustrating than going to meeting after meeting with no



● Margaret O'Riada, project co-ordinator with the Galway Travellers Support Group.

measurable change on the ground for Travellers coming from the talks.

Handling the media campaign meant a full-time investment of time by staff and management over a two-week period. The type of work included strategically planning the steps that needed to be taken, consulting with the Travellers involved, writing press releases, contacting key journalists, following up with journalists, doing interviews, lobbying local councillors, getting in touch with the relevant departments, and making key links with the relevant health authorities.

As a result, the issue got great coverage at local and national level both on radio and in the newspapers. While not all of this was positive it strengthened the resolve of the GTSG in its belief that projects need to build strong relationships with their local, regional and national media and be proactive in getting their side of the story told.

This type of collective action can make it difficult to deal with existing workloads. However, there was complete consensus that the time invested was necessary. Challenging injustice in this fashion gave everyone involved renewed energy.

* Galway Travellers Support Group is a Community Development Project funded under the Community Development Support Programmes. Contact details: GTSG, 78 Prospect Hill, Galway; Tel. 091-562530; Fax 091-561857; E-mail – gtsg@iol.ie

Minister Ahern's Family Support

—without FRCs favoured amendments

Summary of debate

A summary introduction to these pages is given in the Editorial on page 2. There, the amendments proposed by the opposition to the Bill are explained in brief and a summary is given of how the debate unfolded. It is certainly worthwhile to take five minutes and read the following report on the Dail debate as the Minister Dermot Ahern's Bill passed through the Dail.

The deputies who took part in the debate with the Minister were amendment proposers Frances Fitzgerald (Fine Gael) and Thomas Broughan (Labour). They were joined briefly by Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (Sinn Féin). Other deputies were involved in debating the Bill at the earlier committee stage.

- Editor

P.S. If you are a diehard Dail fan and wish to read the full debate – twice the length of this article – go to: www.irlgov.ie/bills28/bills/2001/4201/default.htm.

Family Support Agency Bill, 2001: Dáil Éireann, Report Stage (Resumed), 21/12'01

Deputy Thomas Broughan proposed amendment No. 3 which proposed on page 5, to delete lines 11 to 13 and substitute the following: "(e) to support, promote and develop those projects in the Family and Community Services Resource Centres programme which elect to transfer to the Agency."

Said **Deputy Broughan**, "These amendments and some similar amendments in the name of Deputy Fitzgerald are at the core of the problem - perhaps the only major problem the Opposition has had with this Bill. The Family Affairs Unit is widely respected by community workers and those who work with families. When this Bill was first mooted, there was grave concern among a significant number of existing Family Resource Centres (FRCs) whose primary function, as they saw it, related to social inclusion measures rather than the family mediation service. Against that background, many of the agencies concerned - the Community Action Network, the Resource Centre Forum, the regional and specialist support agencies and the community development national representatives - felt that the Minister did not engage in sufficiently wide consultation.

"In his Second Stage speech, the Minister said he engaged in a wide series of family fora at which 1,000 people attended. Deputy Fitzgerald and I attended those fora. Some of the older family resource centres, in particular, were concerned about a lack of consultation as to how the new Family Support Agency would operate. I had many presentations in that regard from FRCs around the country who felt that, to some extent, they were being put in a corner by the Minister and that, irrespective of whether they wanted to transfer to the agency, they had to do so. That is the essence of amendment No. 3. With regard to amendment No. 5, many of those centres felt it would be more appropriate for them, while working closely with the agency, to continue independently under the Community Development Support Programmes

of the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. That is the nub of the problem.

"One of the key points to emerge from our consultations was that there has been an absence of an open and transparent consultation process with the key stakeholders of the CDSPs, including the National Advisory Committee, the Community Development Projects, the FRCs, Core-Funded Groups and regional and specialist support agencies, and that this has serious implications for the future operation of these programmes.

"It is felt the strategic planning process which takes place nationally in this area will be undermined by the way the Bill was brought forward. The first principle of community development is that one should consult the community concerned but this has not been undertaken sufficiently by the Minister. Without information, choice or consultation, structures such as FRCs are being moved into the new agency. They should have the fundamental right of self selection.

"The way in which the Minister made this decision is in stark contradiction to the Government's commitment to consultation and partnership with the community and voluntary sectors, as detailed in the NDP, PPF, NAPS, the NAPS submitted to Brussels and, above all, in the White Paper on voluntary activity which was discussed at length in the House last year. It was generally felt that the lack of consultation and the dictat approach of telling certain resource centres where they had to go are a potential erosion of the social inclusion commitments in the national development plan. It fundamentally weakens the process of community development nationally by the transfer of neighbourhood projects from the explicitly anti-poverty context of the CDSPs to the mediation and counselling context of the family support agency."

Deputy Broughan, in his speech, accorded great credit to the Minister for his involvement over the years in developing the mediation service beyond the Dublin region when he was a Minister in the early 1990s.

"However, there were concerns that people without qualifications would have to be involved in the specialist and demanding role of

family mediation.

Deputy Broughan referred to family resource centres he was familiar with in Dublin who were involved in: breakfast clubs for children of low income backgrounds, the anti-joyriding campaign, the anti-drugs campaign and the drugs task force: "They try to deal with the severe exclusion problems that face families in certain deprived areas of society."

Deputy Fitzgerald said, "There has been a huge amount of lobbying by resource centres, which is an expression of their concern about the structures of the agency... the FRCs felt a real anxiety, which is reflected in the amendments, at the beginning of the process of establishing the FSA. I hope that has been dealt with because it is important they have confidence in the new agency.

"The Minister also reassured us on Committee Stage that the work of the FRCs would continue and, hopefully, develop in the future but that the community development ethos and the goal of social inclusion would continue under the agency....

"I hope these anxieties have been dealt with. It is important that the energy in the FRCs is brought into the new agency and that the initial difficulties around the establishment of the agency do not restrict the enthusiasm, commitment and expertise of the centres from reaching its full potential in the new agency. The Minister felt he could not accept the amendments on Committee Stage. He believed he could not include them in legislation because some of the concepts, such as community development, were too vague. However, he did reassure both Members and the agencies concerned that the ethos and type of work in which the three different groups have been involved will continue in the new agency."

Minister Dermot Ahern replied: "I thank the Deputies for their remarks. In relation to these amendments I must say that I have a much more optimistic view of life than they might perhaps have in relation to this aspect. I travelled the country with my officials and held family fora in at least eight different locations where over 1,000 people attended. All the issues in relation to the family policy area were thrashed out. All the partners in the voluntary

Agency Bill approved in Dáil

community activity in the country were invited and most of them attended. The Family Mediation Service also attended to discuss the issues of family mediation.

"...Ten FRC projects were up and running in 1997. We stated in our programme for Government that we would increase the numbers dramatically - up to 100 over the term of this Government. There are already 80 up and running and there are proposals for more.

The view was - and I know the Deputies do not disagree with this - that we should have a separate, dedicated agency with expertise on the board that was not available to us in the Department, in order to further expand those three main core areas and to look at new areas of family policy. That is why we decided to set up the agency.

"It was acknowledged in the discussions that it would be somewhat ludicrous to have a family support agency and at the same time have family resource centres outside the agency. It would not be possible. It was the strong view of Government that family resource centres would have to be included in the family support agency when it was established. The family resource centres could then go from strength to strength doing exactly what they have been doing. It is not correct for Deputy Broughan to say that they will change the focus or that the focus will be changed because of this change. Built into the legislation is an onus on the agency and on the family resource centres to continue in the role of examining social inclusion in the communities where they operate.

"Since Committee Stage we had a meeting with the support agencies... I met the FRCs staff at the launch of the forum in the Mansion House. The forum represents about 40 of the 80 resource centres. There is a logic - and I do not understand why people say otherwise - in having the resource centres as part of the support agencies. To allow one to elect to remain outside the Family Support Agency would in my view lead to a dissipation of the core issues. If FRCs were allowed to remain outside while some chose to stay in, ultimately the centres which chose to stay outside would not really have the core principle of what FRCs are about - assisting families in the locality. That is not to say that they would not continue to have the whole idea of developing their local



● Minister Dermot Ahern

community. ... The FRCs engage with the local communities; they work with the local communities particularly in the area of preservation of family relationships.

"I can assure the Deputies that ... the FRCs when part of the support agency will not only continue to do their work as carried out over the years but they will be able to develop in a co-ordinated fashion with better expertise. I say that with due respect to the people in my Department over the years. I ask the Deputies not to take a negative view. I do not mean that as a criticism because I know they must accept the representations. I am somewhat surprised that people have such a negative view of what is being suggested. This is an extremely positive development that will assist FRCs around the country."

Deputy Broughan acknowledged that the Minister made a cogent argument but repeated the point that a number of centres are still concerned that the social inclusion function will not be sufficiently highlighted. The amendment

was put and declared lost.

Deputy Fitzgerald proposed amendment No. 4: In page 5, between lines 13 and 14, to insert the following: "(f) to support and develop Family Resource Centres according to principles of community development and to promote social inclusion,".

This amendment concerned much that had just been discussed.

Deputy Fitzgerald began: "We are asking the Minister to write into the legislation that the work in which the FRCs have been involved, such as community development and inclusion, will continue in the work of the new Family Support Agency. The Minister has said that will happen but the workers would prefer to see it written into the legislation in order to be reassured about it."

"The Minister expressed surprise at what he perceives as the negative attitude of some people, but I incline more towards the view that they have concerns in regard to the priority that this work would get under the new agency. For whatever reason these concerns arose and have been expressed to many TDs in the House from a variety of resource centres throughout the country. There can be no doubt that this is a real issue for them," she added.

Deputy Broughan noted that "in some respects we are putting the same argument again... In section 4 (2), the Minister states that the agency in performing the functions conferred on it shall have regard to Government policy, in particular social inclusion policy. The Minister mentions social inclusion but what we are proposing is a far stronger approach in regard to social inclusion by making it a *raison d'être* of the new agency.

"...It was for this reason that community activists, professionals and board members came to see us in this House. It was their concern that the brilliant work that has been done in recent decades - and accelerated through the partnership process in 1987 and onwards through four of five programmes - could be lost through slippage because it is not at the heart of the remit of the new Family Support Agency."

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin spoke in support of the amendment as presented by Deputies Fitzgerald and Broughan. He acknowledged the Minister's words of reassurance, yet noted that the issue had been referred to by other Deputies: "There is a great concern, which is not contrived, that this should be reflected in the legislation... as it will help relieve some of the concerns people have and recognise that FRCs fear the principles under which they have operated may be changed to a counselling and mediation focus."

He drew attention to the lobbying of Deputies in various constituencies and

No FRC in Louth, yet . . .

County Louth might have a Family Resource Centre soon, if Minister Ahern's hopes are realised. In a snippet from the Dail Debate during the final stages of the Family Support Agency Bill on December 21, the Minister recalled that Deputy Ó Caoláin had mentioned that there were four FRCs in the north-east, two in Meath and two in Monaghan.

"I cannot be accused of favouritism," said Minister Ahern, "because there is none in Louth, which is a source of regret. Perhaps before the Government leaves office." Fingers crossed!

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commented: "In part, this is indicative of a recognition on their part and that of the wider community that there is a breakdown in the traditional support network provided by the extended family and the wider local community has a critical role to play."

"As the Minister will be aware, this has been exemplified in the work the FRCs have undertaken. The role of the community-focused FRCs has been critical in helping to fill a vacuum not only of advice and support but the many social needs of those in greatest need to combat their isolation and sense of marginalisation."

Minister Ahern thanked the Deputies for their contributions and in his reply gave further assurances to allay the fears of workers in FRCs.

He said, "I fully understand why FRCs have adopted a community development approach and I empathise with their desire to maintain that. It is my wish that that would be the case. There seems to be some misunderstanding as to whether FRCs will be forced to accommodate mediation and marriage counselling services. Nothing could be further from the truth and that is not envisaged in the legislation. It is probably not prohibited in the legislation but it could not happen, particularly in regard to mediation and marriage counselling. Professional bodies are involved in these areas which would not allow counselling or mediation to take place if those providing the services were not fully qualified. At the same time it might be possible for some of the larger FRCs to contract in these services and, while that may well happen, by not including or excluding these services FRCs will be allowed to develop in their own way."

"Similarly, the mediation service has a particular ethos. We are not limiting or confirming this ethos in the legislation or the principles under which the service operates because it would be impossible to define such principles or the professional ethic of mediators. The more that is provided for in the legislation in that respect, the greater the restrictions on the services. [He gave an example from his experience]."

"I caution Members. They must accept that the issue of community development has been at the core of FRCs and it is not envisaged that that will change following the passage of the legislation. The legislation specifically refers to social inclusion and the agency must bear that

Community Development concept "too vague"

DEPUTY Thomas Broughan, during the final stage of debate over the Family Support Agency Bill, noted: "The Minister felt he could not accept the amendments [arising from lobbying by Family Resource Centres and other projects] on Committee Stage. He believed he could not include them in legislation because some of the concepts, such as community development, were too vague."

Interestingly, Minister Ahern pointed out, later in the debate, that... "Similarly, the mediation service has a particular ethos. We are not limiting or confirming this ethos in the legislation or the principles under which the service operates because it would be impossible to define such principles or the professional ethic of mediators. The more that is provided for in the legislation in that respect, the greater the restrictions on the services."

And he gave an example from his experience relating to mediation work to back up his point.

For the record, the concept of Community Development, as defined

in the 'Community Development Programme National Handbook' is as follows:

"Community Development is about promoting positive change in society in favour of those who usually benefit least. However, it is not just about making concrete changes in the quality of people's lives. It is also about how this is done, i.e. both the task and the process are important."

"Community Development seeks to challenge the causes of disadvantage/poverty and to offer new opportunities for those lacking choice, power and resources. Community development involves people, most especially the disadvantaged in making changes they identify to be important and which put to use and develop their skills, knowledge and experience."

Much of the debate that unfolded in Dail Eireann during the passing into law of the Family Support Agency Bill surrounded the issue of including at the heart of the new agency's task a focus on community development principles.

in mind as it deals with resource centres from now on."

The amendment was put to a vote and was rejected by a majority of 73 to 65. Amendment No. 5 was not moved and discussion moved onto Amendment No. 6, proposed by Deputy Fitzgerald was by leave, withdrawn. Amendment No. 7 was not moved.

Deputy Broughan proposed amendment No. 8 which stated: In page 6, between lines 28 and 29, to insert the following - "(2) No action of the Agency under subsection (1) shall alter the existing criteria for the operation of a Family Resource Centre without the prior consent of the centre concerned."

This amendment too was by leave, withdrawn after **Minister Ahern** formally opposed it. Amendments Nos. 9 and 10 were

not moved.

Amendment No. 11 was proposed by **Deputy Fitzgerald**: In page 7, between lines 15 and 16, to insert the following: "(b) be prepared in full and open consultation with Family Resource Centres and other voluntary and community organisations which fall within the remit of the work of the Agency,"

"The purpose of this amendment," she explained, "is to ensure that in drawing up the strategic plan for the work of the Family Support Agency there will be full and open consultation with the various stakeholders, the family resource centres, family mediation services and the counselling services. This is to ensure the strategic plan gets the benefit of their experience and that they will be involved and form part of the discussions which lead to the final draft of the plan which will be adopted by the support agency."

Deputy Broughan argued in support: "It is clearly important that in the strategic plan, there will be the fullest possible consultation particularly in light of our earlier discussion about there not having been any consultation."

At that point, the **Ceann Comhairle** had to interrupt, since time had run out: "I am required to put the following question in accordance with an order of the Dail this day: "That the amendments set down by the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs and not disposed of are hereby made to the Bill, Fourth Stage is hereby completed and the Bill is hereby passed".

The Family Support Agency Bill was signed into law the following day. History.



Western Regional CDSPs Networks

By Caitriona Ní Mhuiris and Bernie Costello

■ CDSPs Networking

Networking can be defined as building links with other groups or organisations in order to achieve common objectives. Against the backdrop of the diverse work which is being undertaken by the CDSPs and the complex map of key implementing and policy making bodies, Networks have the potential for timely, sharp and focused interventions on behalf of the broader anti-poverty agenda. The main purpose of the CDSPs Networks is to share information, ideas and support. The established CDSPs Networks in the Western Region also provide a forum in which to debate and reflect on new areas of policy or legislation which may impact on Network members. CDSPs have derived clear benefits to date from meeting regularly and on a formal basis.

■ Western Regional Childcare Network

The Western Regional Childcare Network was informally established in 1998. The initial aim of the Network was to support Projects directly involved with childcare provision and family support and also to seek to create a forum in which to place Childcare on the agenda. In planning and implementing strategies and actions, the Network's ethos is based on the principles of equality of access and participation, inclusion, valuing diversity and targeting resources towards tackling disadvantage.

The current membership of the Network comprises all CDSP projects from Galway and Mayo, one core funded group and a member of West Training and Development Ltd., the regional support agency.

Since its establishment the Network has facilitated the creation of a forum in order:

- to highlight and clarify the position of the CDSP in the area of childcare;
- to bring together projects concerned with childcare provision and family support services in their communities;
- to assist these projects to develop integrated responses locally to address childcare provision and family support needs.

Over the latter half of 2001 the Network plan a consultation process in order to gather the views on:

- How the Network can be effective in progressing childcare and family support policy issues across the region;
- The relevance of the Network to local community and voluntary organisations and why they should get involved;

The Network plans:

- To research and publish a comprehensive review of services, and
- To publish a brochure which will include a directory and a position document.

The Network have agreed a series of policy positions with regard to childcare and family support services which can be carried forward to local, regional and national policy arenas. From its conception to its present stage of development it has become evident that the Network will play a leading role in supporting further growth of childcare and family support services within the CDSPs in the Western Region and beyond the Programmes.

• **Caitriona Ni Mhuiris, Ballybane Community Development Project, and Bernie Costello, Tuam Community Development Resource Centre.**

Mammy, what's community development?

IT'S no surprise that community development workers have difficulty explaining what their work is to their children. It is even difficult to explain to adults - as one project co-ordinator in the mid-west admits, "My mother still doesn't understand what I do."

However, for Kathi Dillon, a mother and a worker with Westside Resource Centre in Galway, the problem was solved when she opened the first issue of 'Changing Ireland'.

Writing to the editorial team to thank them

for helping her, she said: "Just to tell you how important your work is, I was able to bring the magazine home to my son aged 12 who is an avid skateboarder. We want a skateboard park in our local area and I showed him the article 'My Job: Campaign for a Skatepark'. Finally, for the first time ever, I had the chance to show him what I do at work and what we might do together. And for the first time ever, I think he understood."

All Kathi has to do now is get him the skatepark

Mishaps fail to puncture Willie's resolve

A Tuam man has shown how dedicated volunteers really are. On his way to a seminar, Willie McDonagh, got three punctures on the road, but still made it to his final destination.

Calm after a morning that would drive others to madness, Mr. McDonagh recounted his story over lunch at the West Regional Seminar for the Community Development Support Programmes, held in Westport.

"I didn't think anything of the first puncture. I'm driving a Citroen Berlingo and it's only six months old. But, when I got the second puncture, a mile from Castlebar, I got worried that I was going to be stranded," said Mr. McDonagh, a voluntary management committee member with the Tuam Resource Centre.

He was genuinely looking forward to attending the CDSPs Seminar and left Tuam in good time, but got a puncture two miles from Balla. He changed the wheel and continued on. Until he got a second puncture a mile from Castlebar. Not easy when you have already used your spare. Nevertheless, Mr. McDonagh made his way to Castlebar, had both punctures repaired and got back on the road.

But they say bad luck comes in threes and Willie's 'never-say-die' attitude was to be tested one more time. Fortunately, the third puncture occurred while he was still in Castlebar.

Having made it so far, to within ten miles of Westport, it seemed best to continue on and hope for the best. His reward - he made it and in the process showed us the stuff that dedicated volunteers are made of.

"At one point, I was considering taking a half-day to be honest, but I wanted to come down and see what was happening with the CDSPs, to meet other people and to share views," he said, smiling.

Project impacts are "incredible" – Nexus

Nexus Research is a not-for-profit research co-operative based in Dublin. Founded in 1990 by a group of social scientists and consultants, and relying solely on contract research for its income, Nexus has developed extensive expertise in a number of areas. In 2001, Nexus carried out research to evaluate the level of impact and appreciation of the Community Development Programme. The research findings were, as previously reported, extremely positive. However, the Programme needs profile, as does the Family Resource Centres Programme and the Core-Funded Groups Programme. Brian Dillon of Nexus was in Westport for the CDSPs Seminar and presented his ideas.

“IN terms of value for money, the impacts are incredible really,” he said.

“This is because in many instances there are aid programmes that spend huge amounts of money to generate or initiate development in socially-excluded areas and here you had very little money (the input used to be £7m to £8m annually) but all across the country this investment led to initiatives that were generating further activity.

“We were able to demonstrate very positive impacts inside communities, by and large. As a result of community development projects’ work, a huge number of other (projects, initiatives and resources) are being established in communities (usually when a CDP is established for 3-5 years).

“It was also significant that the organisational infrastructure set up by CDPs became the delivery mechanism for later programmes (eg Leader, health board programmes, etc). These were very positive findings.

“At programme level (projects fed back to us that they liked) that there was the flexibility around funding - I think people forget that in

1980 there was no such thing as community development - probably everybody was doing it, but you had to pretend you were doing something else. So you got money, for example, from FAS under SES and you were doing community development but you couldn’t admit it. So, with the advent of the Community Development Programme that capacity to be flexible and be open and say that community development was a legitimate activity - that was extremely important. The involvement of projects at different layers of decision-making was extremely important too.

“One point was emphasised by every single stakeholder in the evaluation - projects, support agencies, the department and also people we interviewed from outside the programme (such as partnerships and MABS) - the programme doesn’t have a profile. So we were looking at this very successful programme operating on the ground that nationally didn’t have teeth.

“It’s always the poor cousin if you are dealing with anybody else in the development business (such as local enterprise development, agricultural and rural development, etc - all have well recognised and accepted programmes nationally. The Community Development

Programme can be too easily dismissed - when it is not profiled nationally and when it is not demonstrated what it is, what it does and why it is important. And it is frequently very easily dismissed as something that’s just a process, that anybody can do it.

“That was top of the list - the need to promote the programme. So, the very first thing with this evaluation is to use it to demonstrate the positive results of the Community Development Programme, though not just at national level, but also at project level because very often people are struggling inside projects, not knowing are we actually achieving anything and whether or not it’s actually going anywhere. Then projects could feed back the positive results to their own communities first. Then nationally, make that known.

“But we cannot have a national profile without having a strategic vision. This programme has gone ten years - where does it want to be in the next five years?” he asked.

• **Contact Nexus Research at:**
www.iol.ie/nexus

Unity means strength for Turk, Boffin and Clare islands

By Joanne Elliott

FOR many years, the Community Development Workers on the English speaking islands have envied their counterparts in the Gaeltacht. Irish speakers, it seemed, were able to get the kind of backing that their English speaking colleagues could only dream of. Now, those dreams might really come true. The three Western islands, Inishbofin, Inishturk and Clare Island are to work together on joint projects in the future.

Staff doing similar jobs could consult together, plan future strategies, network and learn from each other. As Donal O’Shea, Community Development Officer in Clare Island said, “It should no longer be necessary to reinvent the wheel.”

Equally important, their united efforts should attract enhanced-funding.

Initiated at a Seminar on Strategic

Planning held in Westport, Co. Mayo recently, the prospect has opened new avenues. One idea discussed is that the three islands together might be able to access the services of a full-time Community Arts Animator. Such a person could not only run an annual Arts Festival on each island but could develop art, music and drama events and training for children and adults throughout the year.

Another idea, the brainchild of Danny Kirrane, Development Officer in Inishturk, is that by pooling their resources, the islands might be able to employ an IT expert to teach advanced computer skills and develop e-business. E-business is more than just a buzzword these days. It is a means of creating viable employment in remote areas.

There are many other potential areas of cooperation. Health promotion, fire services, transport and education could

benefit from a joint effort. Areas with very small populations could strengthen their positions in regard to resources if combined with others.

These ideas are still in an early stage. No face-to-face meetings have taken place yet but the three Development Workers agreed, in principle, that working together would be more fruitful than working alone. The three islands have much in common. Many families have intermarried and almost all have relations on the neighbouring islands. Island problems are similar. All want to see improved transport, job opportunities and a better future for their children. All have been decimated by emigration and have seen traditional fishing and farming decline and tourism, a wilful and unreliable mistress, take their place.

* Joanne Elliott is a FAS-worker and a writer living on Inishbofin.

Three programmes have much in common – Dept. rep

TINA Stallord of the DSCFA was in Westport for the Community Development Support Programmes (CDSPs) Seminar. She spoke about the core principles underpinning the programmes.

"The strategic planning process is something that has come about after a long time, a lot of discussion and a lot of heartache as well. [Regarding] what principles underpin the CDSPs: When we looked at the idea of bringing people from different programmes together we knew people would have questions about why come together. (You could argue that) we're different programmes, we do different things, we don't have anything in common and we are quite happy working away on our own doing what we do. And why would Family Resource Centres, Community Development Projects and Core-Funded Groups want and need to come together? However, there are things that are common to all the programmes - we are all working with an anti-poverty focus to address social exclusion and that's what the programmes have in common, regardless of the fact that we

may be doing slightly different things. We have to look at how we harness that so that we can build a stronger voice for communities and ensure that the work that is happening at a local level is recognised at national level.

"The programmes are there not just to address the effects of poverty and social exclusion, but to address the causes too - and to question what policies bring about those causes and how can you start to change those policies. The programmes offer opportunities to people who lack choices, lack power and lack resource. The programmes are all about participation, involving people who themselves have experience of disadvantage, involving them not just in participating and benefiting from programmes, but actually identifying what's needed when the decisions are made and what they would like to see happen to address the causes. The programmes are about supporting people to draw on their own knowledge and skills, rather than having somebody else coming in with a magic prescription, telling people what will solve their

problems. The programmes look at developing alternative methods and models of working which seek to directly involve people and empowering individuals within their communities. If they want to have an impact on what is going to happen in the future, they need to be strong, they need to be supported and they need to be empowered.

"The programmes look at improving the quality of life for the communities and that's probably the starting point for most people getting involved in the programmes.

"The programmes encourage greater participation in decision-taking. The strategic planning initiative began (so communities) could have an impact on policy and so we could achieve our aims. ... And it's never been more important, when there are developments at national level that we need to have an impact on. It's never been more important to be organised and structured and to know what it is we want to achieve and to achieve effectively," concluded Ms. Stallord.

Two choices - sit back or get strategic!

Allen Meagher reports

CECILIA Forrestal, of the CAN Support Agency, addressed the CDSPs Seminar held in Westport on the need for strategic planning. She was determined to impress on her audience the need for strategic planning.

She began by reminding the audience that there had been "a lot of campaigning and lobbying - objections, anger and frustration being voiced in relation to [the Minister's] decision" to establish a Family Support Agency without full consultation with centres.

"So, if this is the way some decisions are made, then why do strategic planning at all, if at the end of the day the Minister can make a decision and disrupt whatever it is we are attempting?" she asked. "It also raises serious questions - for all the talk of partnership, how is power actually exercised?"

"We had two choices. On the one hand, we

can accept a situation where the Minister tells us what to do, or where politicians or ministers make decisions and we agree. And in many ways, that's the way things have been done for many years. And when you accept that, then you know that's the world you operate in and you accept that's the arena in which decisions are made. [What happened] Family Resource Centres is just one example of how that kind of decision can change our lives.

"So, one programme is going to be shunted and that changes it for the rest of us and it changes what we were dreaming of six months ago [the CDSPs umbrella for three programmes]. But if we accept that's the way decisions will be made...Who's to say the Community Development Programme can't be moved somewhere else, or there will be other changes, whatever it is? That's one choice.

"The other choice is a bit more challenging. And that's partnership and action. It is a huge challenge to bring together different shapes and different structures and to find a way of going forward together. That's our other choice - to

say 'Hold on a minute, if partnership is to have real meaning then we need to get organised and to know where we are going, and to have a voice.' And make sure when decisions are being made in the future that we know how to articulate our objections and that we are a force to be reckoned with.

"If we want what we do in our local project to link up with what others do in other parts of the country in their local projects - to seriously challenge the causes of poverty and exclusion, then we are going to have to get working together and get organised. That is the context in which this meeting is taking place. I want to leave you with a question - if we are serious about social change, if we mean the words we say and the visions we have for our projects, then we have got to ask ourselves, 'How can we fully and powerfully be partners for change?' 'How do we do that in this region?' 'How do we work so we have the strength and the clout that will help us to really challenge the causes of poverty?'"

The Diary of Horace McDermot

(Community Development student and former faceless bureaucrat)

Saturday 8.30pm:

I'm still getting used to the community and voluntary sector but I'm really enjoying the course and looking forward to the work placement.

I saw on the news where Pat Cox was elected President (I didn't know that Mary McAleese had retired). So now we have Mary Robinson as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Brian Cowen and the boys are on the UN Security Council and now President Pat has taken over Europe as well. The next thing is the Americans will be asking Ann Doyle on Crimeline to find Osama Bin Laden.

Sunday 11.00pm:

I just wrote a letter to our new President about the ignorance around the Euro. I tried to get on the bus today and it says -Please Have the Exact Fare Ready! Well the fare was 80p or €1.01. I asked the bus driver to check how much 20cent was. He confirmed it was 16p. So I then gave him five 20 cent pieces which, if you multiply 16p by 5, equals 80p. He still wanted the 1cent but I pointed out that €1 is just under 79p according to Miley and therefore €1.01 is approximately under 80p where as five 20c coins was exactly 80p. The driver got thick and wouldn't let me on the bus which wasn't exactly fair.

Monday 3.30pm:

Started my student work placement today in Carrickstown CDP and I hope it goes better than my essay on "George W Bush - a model of Community Development". The mark was poor even though the comments were very positive - "Highlights a warped level of understanding". I mean in Star Trek, Warp Factor 7 refers to high speed space travel which proves how quick I'm picking things up.

Tuesday 12.00pm:

Hannah Finnegan is the chain smoking chairperson of Carrickstown CDP. She's trying to get an equality campaign for smokers as one of the priorities in their workplan. She wants me to work with her to put a case to the Equality Authority that she, as a smoker, is discriminated against on the grounds of a disability ie. Hannah is not able to give up cigarettes. I have to check the definition but a disability must mean not able to do something so I reckon she's right.

Wednesday 10.30pm:

Attended a City Community Forum meeting to discuss the City Development Plan. Similiar to the aptly named National Disaster Plan, this plan was not available yet but would be available soon. It was stressed that a huge amount of work had gone into the plan. I felt I was at a spy convention with everyone talking in code. The aim seemed to be to speak for as long as possible without giving out any actual information or making any sense. The only concrete message that I deciphered was that the final draft of the Strategic Plan would be ready for consultation and comment on next Tuesday and that the deadline for submissions was Wednesday at 11.00am.

Thursday 6.45pm:

Rang Martin Luther Keane from Mayo, who is doing his placement in a multi-deprivalational area in Glasgow. He's working with two youth groups. One are Celtic supporters and the other Rangers. Martin knows nothing about soccer so has few preconceptions going in. He hopes that they can talk and play together with equal respect. Dream on Martin!

Friday 4.23pm:

The Vintners went mad about the Equality Authority's ruling on children in pubs. The big fear was that the local thug and drug dealer might bring in his 8-month-old baby at 12.30 and he must be served. They didn't seem worried that he'd arrive with his wife and couldn't be refused on gender grounds either.

I mean the publicans are right - the traditional Irish pub is no place for children and I'm sure they will get a lot of support from men. At present men have to put up with bringing their wives with them every so often and have to try to watch the match on TV over the cackle of conversation. Now they won't have any excuse to leave their children behind or their wives to mind them. It will cost a fortune in Coke and Crisps to try and keep the kids quiet not to mention vodka and tonic.

Saturday 1.08am:

Went home for a visit and my mother was in foul form. It seems my father asked her what she'd like for her birthday. She replied "A passionate weekend in Paris". So he went down to Lansdowne Road and booked two tickets for the rugby international against France. Women are like the voluntary sector it's hard to know what pleases them.

Sunday 8.00pm:

Popstars is just over. I loved it even

though they didn't show my audition in any of the four venues. Like so many things, the world and Louis Walsh are not ready for my version of "It's Raining Men". Watching, it was heartening to see the way young people have actually listened to our political leaders and followed them as role models:

"Aye I'd tell you if I wasn't 18. Wait till I look for me passport" - Nadine

"I did not have sex with that woman" - Bill Clinton

"I did not ring the President on that night" - Brian Lenihan

Oh mature reflection is a great thing.

Monday 9.43am:

I miss the people in the class especially Carol Marks the communist feminist. A lot of us have overseas experience. Paul O'Freery and Gussie Bowell both cycled around Brazil and always refer to some book called Pedalling on the Oppressed. Edel Castrow and Shay O'Gara are in the Cuban Solidarity Group and Mandy Nelson was very involved in the Anti-Apartheid Campaign. Then there's myself and Gayle Gore, a fluent Irish speaker who've both been overseas to the Aran Islands. She's big into culture and heritage but hates Riverdance and says if Irish dancing was meant to be sexy we wouldn't have invented it. They're all doing OK so far.

Tuesday 10.37pm:

Attended the consultative meeting on the City Development Plan. It was so exciting, real 007 spy stuff. There is no doubt that it must be an important 184 page document because we were split into interest groups and each given a section. Well not so much a section as a page or two for us to comment and submit amendments on. Some people were annoyed and felt they couldn't because they had no overall context or sense of how one section related to the others. They so missed the point. This 10 year Strategic Plan is so important it can't be allowed to fall into the wrong hands. If any of us present at the meeting were to be captured by terrorists bent on sabotaging the plan they would only get a small piece that would mean nothing. Before leaving I made sure to eat the page I was given and tried to forget as much of it as possible so that even under torture I wouldn't be able to give away any important information. I don't remember doing this training when I was in the Department but I must have done.

Single parents survey dismisses the myths

By Martine Brennan

NEW research has dismissed myths such as the idea that single parents do not want to work and all live in council housing. There are 800 families in receipt of the One Parent Family Allowance in the Greater Tralee area in Co. Kerry and now a survey conducted by the local Single Parents Initiative in Community and Equality (SPICE) has shown how single-parents really live and highlighted their needs.

The survey found that 70% of respondents work outside the home and just 30% live in local authority housing.

Education levels among single-parents vary considerably – for every one with a third-level qualification, two more have a Junior Cert or no qualifications.

Single parents live in greater poverty than the average person, with three-quarters of the 141 respondents saying they are raising families on an annual income of €12,700 (£10,000) or less.

The SPICE research – based on 141 returned questionnaires* and 25 in-depth interviews – has already proved its worth because the group responsible are now getting more of a say in local developments and have more opportunity to debate issues in public. Also, another half-dozen people have joined the group.

The survey and recommendations titled 'Local Needs-Local Action', was supported by Partnership Tra Lí and the Tralee Community Development Project and was launched in November.

As one SPICE member said, "Our group has been going for ten years and finally we are being taken seriously. The research dispels many of the myths about lone parents. We are learning to be proud of how well we have reared our children in spite of the many obstacles we have faced. We want to make a better life for our children... we are no different to all parents in this. This research is helping us to be heard,

helping to bring about changes for the better."

Since the launch, much has happened as a result.

Following the launch a lively debate began in the letters page of the Kerryman newspaper. Since then, SPICE has been consulted by the Kerry County Development Board in relation to its 10-year plan for the county. Meanwhile, a return-to-work scheme called 'Engage 2001' was organised by SPICE in conjunction with FAS and Tralee Community Development Project which offers childcare and takes school times into consideration.

*The 141 postal questionnaires that were returned gave a response rate of 21%. The questionnaire element of the research was followed up through in-depth interviews with 25 lone parents.

The research outcomes and recommendations were as follows:

■ Outcomes

Income and Poverty

Nearly 25% of respondents are raising their families on an annual income of €6,350 (£5,000) or less. Over 75% are raising families on an annual income of €12,700 (£10,000) or less.

Employment

Only 2% of respondents were never employed. 70% of respondent's work outside the home but their incomes remain inadequate.

Housing

Over one fifth of one parent families do not have their own homes and live with parents, relatives and friends. 30% live in Local Authority Housing.

Education

43% of all respondents have no formal qualifications or a Junior Certificate only. 22% of respondents have a third level qualification.

Transport

65% of One-Parent Families do not own a car.

Childcare

Over half of the respondents do not use any form of childcare.

■ Recommendations

Income and Poverty

1. Social Welfare payments should ensure that recipients do not live in poverty.
2. A lone parent can work and earn up to £115.38 and still receive a One Parent Family Payment on a sliding scale. However, the cut off point has not been adjusted since 1997. This needs to be addressed immediately.
3. Pursuit of non-payment of a maintenance

order is a stressful and costly burden on a lone parent. The inadequacy of this system needs to be addressed. Maintenance should not be counted as means in assessments of welfare payments.

Employment

1. Lobby at national level to address the issue of loss of secondary benefits, which are key disincentives to employment.

Housing

1. Local Authority Housing stock needs to be increased so as to reduce waiting lists.
2. Income thresholds for local authority housing should be expanded. Rent increases can quickly swallow up any small increase in a parent's disposable income.
3. There is a need for more three-bedroom houses so those children of different genders can have rooms of their own.
4. Rent to buy schemes should be introduced.

Childcare

1. Incentives need to be put in place to encourage on-site childcare in education, training and employment settings.

For more information, contact: SPICE, c/o Tralee Community Development Project, Rock Street, Tralee. Tel: 066-7120877.

Lone parents total tops 90,000

THROUGHOUT the state, there are a total of 90,566 lone parents, according to government statistics (88,750 females and 1,816 males). A third - 33,886 lone parents - live in Dublin. These figures were compiled (by the Pension Services Office of the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs) for the end of October, 2001.

Hot community newsletter website

www.activelink.ie is the website for the popular Community Exchange Newsletter (Ireland). Newcomers are welcome to subscribe for free and will receive regular e-mailed updates on community development topics. The electronic newsletter informs readers on events, campaigns, news, training courses, workshops, job opportunities and volunteering. Highly recommended!



First Aid saves lives

By Lorcan Brennan

A Wexford man has called on staff and members of Community Development Projects and Family Resource Centres to learn First Aid. Christy Lynch, the trainer concerned, has saved two lives to date, proving his point. As he says himself, the knowledge can provide the power to save lives.

For the last 11 years, Mr. Lynch from Wolfe Tone Villas, Wexford, has proven his voluntary commitment to the wider regional community through involvement with the Order of Malta. Now through his experience of dealing with accident victims he has dedicated himself to promoting the importance of getting everyone to know First Aid.

Christy came in contact with First Aid by completing a certified training programme run over eight weeks by the local Wolf Tone Community House. After its completion he decided to stay involved and has since worked with numerous voluntary and community groups highlighting the fact that knowledge of First Aid can save lives.

"You never know when you're going to come across an accident," says Christy "and with First Aid you will know what to do and not to do. You might even save a life. In my own case I know I have saved two."

As Winter turns to Spring and then to Summer Christy points out that we are moving towards the time of year when people become more active in all kinds of ways.



● **Christy Lynch wants projects to learn First Aid.**

More activity can unfortunately lead to more accidents some that may be preventable. In the event where an accident has taken place, especially with potentially serious consequences, knowing First Aid can make all the difference.

"It's nice to be able to do something for a person before the ambulance arrives," says Christy.

Christy believes this time of year is ideal for all groups within the Community Development Support Programmes to look again at the prospect of organising First Aid training for all their members or at

least for those interested. At a time when many projects are planning outdoor spring and summer activities, "knowing First Aid is essential and makes for safer more relaxed sense of fun for all."

The other well-known fact he cites is that most accidents happen in or near home so just being a family member means you could be presented with an opportunity to help someone close. "First Aid is good for family members to know as accidents do happen at home and often with children".

When asked about the

importance of making young people more aware of First Aid he proudly pointed out that training courses for youngsters are presently running in Wexford.

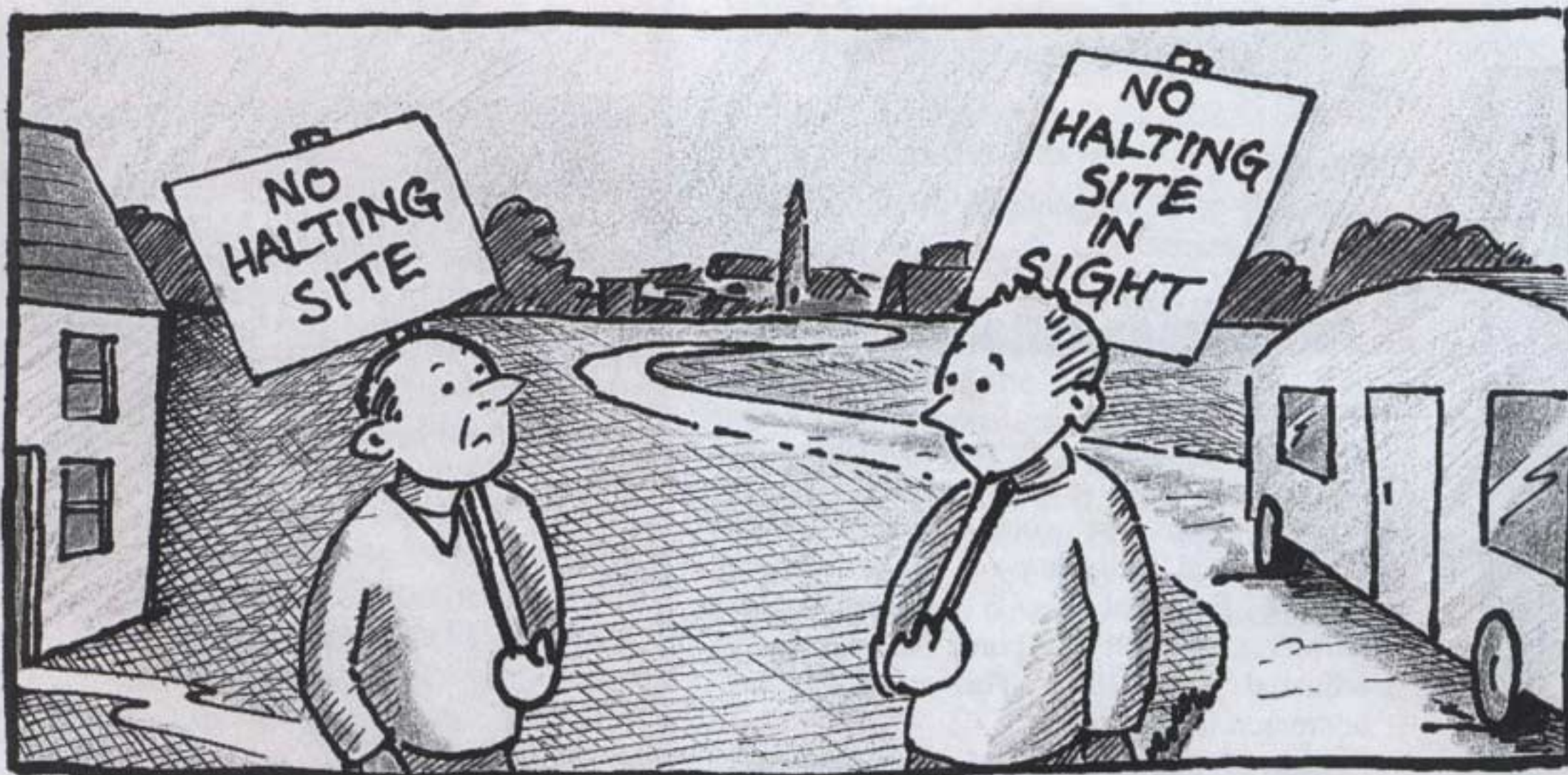
"We have training for 10-to-16 year olds on Tuesday nights. It's an eight-week course but we know from experience that after it's finished many stay with us. After training they know exactly what to do in the event of an accident and they're brilliant," he declared.

Having talked passionately about why he feels it is so important to spread the good news about the need to know First Aid, Christy is fast to point out there are more than one reason why he stayed involved with the voluntary work for the last 11 years. The group of people he has come to know through the Order of Malta are also now his friends who have supported him through thick and thin. Being a member has also granted him the privilege and experience of travelling throughout Ireland and abroad.

The last thing Christy reminds me is that First Aid training is for everyone and working with young people is all-important. "It's a vital part of training that every community and voluntary group should take seriously within their planning programme" and who could disagree when knowledge is power that can save lives.

More Information: Most introductory First Aid Courses teach the basic skills necessary to save life and maintain the patient's condition until they receive medical aid. The course can cover everything from how to approach the scene of an accident to the management of bleeding, choking, people who have stopped breathing, the unconscious casualty, the shocked casualty, cuts, bruises, bites, strains, and burns.

• **For more information:** contact your local branch of the Order of Malta – the number is in your local phone directory or contact the head office of the Order of Malta at St. John's House, 32 Clyde Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4. Tel: 01-6684891. Website: www.orderofmalta.ie



Cork project publishes volunteers' booklet

By Sharon Browne

VOLUNTEERS from the Mayfield area of Cork city tell their stories and experiences in a booklet produced with a grant from the National Committee on Volunteering. We have reprinted one story, by Dan Sexton, in this edition of 'Changing Ireland' because it reflects so many of the common themes.

Dan's story is typical of the volunteer from the 1980's and early 90's, when so many people got involved in volunteering due to unemployment.

Today projects and communities are living in

a very different economic context, where people are busy working and materialism is rampant. While it is widely recognised that there is a crisis in volunteerism, this publication demonstrates that people can be coaxed into contributing to the development of their locality. It usually starts in a small way. Story titles, such as 'Knocking on Doors' and 'That First Phone Call' are a testimony to this. Then they get sucked in!

Many of the volunteers got involved because they wanted to do something for their children. It is also interesting to note that in some of the stories volunteerism is inter-generational. So the chances are if you get involved, so too will your children. Sports clubs, church

organisations, and literacy groups seem to be the most common avenues to volunteering in the booklet.

The main reasons people stay involved are: making new friends, learning new things, going on to further study and the simple pleasure of knowing you are part of building the future in your own area.

'Have You Two Hours To Spare?' is produced by Mayfield Community Integrated Development Project (CDP). It was put together to show appreciation to volunteers by allowing them the opportunity to tell their experiences and have their voices heard and documented. It also aims to be a resource that will encourage others to get involved in volunteer work.

Who wants to be a volunteer

By Dan Sexton

FRIDAY, 30th September, 1983, was a bad day for Cork. Dunlops closed its gates and 700 workers including myself became victims of redundancy. To lose one's job was one thing, but to lose one's friends and colleagues of 30 years was shattering.

I suddenly found myself joining the queues of men outside the old Labour Exchange at White St., unsure of the future, which looked very bleak at that stage. Fortunately I wasn't long idle, but the daily craic with my friends was missing. To save myself from becoming a TV addict, and feeling sorry for myself, I considered doing everything from going back to school to playing ping-pong.

A colleague of mine Robert Mc Donald suggested I might find a niche for myself in Community activities (whatever that was) and soon I found myself being introduced to the Executive Committee of St. Joseph's Community Association. My career as a volunteer had begun. Suddenly I was meeting new people, attending meetings and helping to organise events. I was learning the ropes - without hanging myself - it was great fun. In due course I became a committee member, then Chairperson and currently Hon. Secretary, with my three-year term as secretary ending in the near future. I have concluded my training as a volunteer and am now the finished product.

In recent years the whole concept of the voluntary organisation has changed. We are now looking outside of ourselves, I found myself networking with like-minded groups sitting on committees dealing with matters of common interest. By virtue of my volunteer status I am now on first name terms with politicians, clergy and Corporation officials which often helps to resolve a problem more quickly and from being a nobody in the community I am reasonably well known.

Being a voluntary worker broadens your way of thinking, it can also be a love-hate situation at times, especially if Manchester United are playing and you have a meeting to attend. I found it very important to establish a balance between my own and community interests, otherwise my time as a volunteer would be short.

On that eventful day 16 years ago when I became a volunteer, I had no idea of the way it would enrich my life, not in any financial way let me hasten to say. Occasionally I am told that I must be mad or alternatively I am getting well paid for the work I do on behalf of the Community. There is an element of truth in both statements, anyone can become a voluntary worker, and I recommend it to all to try it if only for a short time, but it takes a stubborn breed to stick with it. Also friends I have made and the satisfaction gained of trying to help others by doing your bit is of more value to me than any financial reward.

Women's Aid phones fixed

THE Women's Aid Helpline, which ran into technical and staffing difficulties in the run-up to Christmas, is now hoped to be functioning properly.

In November and early December, 'Changing Ireland' encountered difficulties getting through to any of the office numbers and, more alarmingly, to the Helpline intended for victims of domestic violence. The Helpline which operates from 10am to 10pm daily was monitored over a number of days and concerns expressed.

Denise Charlton, said the technical problems were related to the fact that they had moved premises, and there was also a temporary shortage of volunteers to take calls. Normally, three volunteers are on duty to staff the Helpline.

Eircom engineers worked on the phone-lines for weeks and, in January, more volunteers were recruited.

Women's Aid, a specialist support agency, was featured in the winter issue of 'Changing Ireland' and Ms. Charlton said "a considerable number" of readers called the agency as a result. If you tried, but were unlucky, try again.

Correction

At the launch of the Family Resource Centre National Forum launch, both Bernie Broderick from Kerry and Dick Hickey from Waterford addressed the gathering. The launch was the subject of a report in the last edition (pages 22/23). However, a speech attributed to Bernie Broderick was actually made by Dick Hickey from Waterford who chaired the meeting.

5,000 Irish people have literacy difficulties

500,000 Irish people, from a wide variety of backgrounds, have very low levels of literacy. Some people have difficulty with fairly straightforward tasks like reading the label on a medicine bottle, helping their children with homework or filling in forms. Literacy awareness training is provided by National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and is about equipping management and staff to respond effectively to people who have literacy difficulties.

NALA defines literacy as, "integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing and numeracy. It also encompasses aspects of personal development – social, economic, emotional – and is concerned with improving self-esteem and building confidence. This goes far beyond mere technical skills of communication".

■ Why be aware of literacy issues

There are many good reasons why you should be aware of literacy issues, including:

- *It will be easier to identify and support people with poor literacy skills.
- *Develop an understanding of the considerable problems of living with literacy difficulties.
- *Communications with adults who have literacy difficulties will be improved.
- *It will foster greater sensitivity towards adults with literacy difficulties.
- *You will be in a position to assess policies and programmes in relation to literacy.
- *Higher levels of literacy skill are linked to better health and self-esteem.

■ Training day is very popular

Many organisations have already recognised the importance of literacy awareness and have participated in one-day literacy awareness workshops organised by NALA. These workshops give staff and management an understanding of the causes and effects of literacy difficulties and help to identify how best they can respond. Among those who have taken part are: Aer Lingus, ESB, Local Authorities, Government Departments, FAS and Teagasc. The training day is highly recommended for projects and centres involved in community development.

NALA is an independent agency, which is funded for the most part by Government and has been in operation for over twenty years. It is a membership organization with voluntary status, concerned with national co-ordination, training and policy development in adult literacy work in Ireland. The agency's mission is to ensure that all adults with reading and writing difficulties have access to high quality literacy provision. The local literacy service is provided by the 33 Vocational Educational Committees.

NALA was responsible for the 'Read Write Now' television series broadcast by RTE last year. The agency's latest initiative focuses on health and literacy.

Contact NALA: 76 Lower Gardiner Street, Dublin 1; Tel. 01-8554332; E-mail – literacy@nala.ie; Website – www.nala.ie

Literacy an issue for projects

IN Ireland, the problem of poor literacy skills is particularly acute in marginalised communities, limiting people's ability to get out of a poverty trap and improve their life.

Many Community Development Projects and Family Resource Centres have literacy programmes, showing that while low literacy levels is a major issue, it is one that projects can take practical steps to improve.

The Lourdes Youth and Community Services project, a CDP in the Sean McDermott Street area of Dublin, runs an adult programme which involves training and education in literacy. The project also runs a crèche, a training workshop, and targets early school leavers with literacy training. A literacy tutor is attached to the project.

There is sometimes a stigma attached to

attending literacy classes. One adult student from Tallaght, Dublin, now gives presentations around the country and explains that when people used to ask her why she was attending the community centre (for literacy classes) she said she was attending Alcoholic Anonymous. Many people are fearful of admitting they have problems reading or writing.

According to Tommy Byrne, P.R.O. of the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), "Projects and centres can for example take part in Literacy Awareness Training or Integrating Literacy Training provided by NALA. Both courses are about embedding literacy into projects' everyday work. NALA employ a full-time Integrating Literacy worker, Blathnaid Ni Chinneide, and she has worked with a number of projects."

2002 Metro Eireann Multicultural Awards

'Metro Eireann', Ireland's first multi-cultural newspaper, has issued an invitation for entries for the first annual 'Metro Eireann Media and Multicultural Awards'. The awards will recognise and celebrate outstanding contributions by individuals and groups to creating cross-cultural understanding and cooperation in Ireland.

Multicultural Awards will be awarded to those who have excelled in the promotion and celebration of diversity. Non-media organisations and companies can submit entries based on their work. The entries should include details of programmes and projects which the individual or group organised.

In the Media Awards section, awards will be given in the print, radio, photojournalism and broadcasting categories.

The closing date for entries is 10th March 2002. Entry forms are available on the Metro Eireann website www.metroeireann.com/awards.htm and should be sent to: Metro Eireann, 213 North Circular Road, Dublin 7.

For more information: Tel. 01-8690670; Fax 01-8689142; E-mail: awards@metroeireann.com

AFri conference

This year's AFri Feile Bride Conference explored the dual themes of immigration and militarisation through a combination of discussion, theatre, poetry and music. Held in Kildare in late January, the weekend conference was entitled "Shelter from the Storm" and focussed in particular on Ireland's treatment of asylum seekers, both now and in the past.

The existence of an asylum seekers' 'dispersal centre' in the grounds of the Kildare Barracks gave a local focus to the national and global challenge to ensure dignified and permanent shelter from the storm to those who need it. Afri's website explains more: www.afri.buz.org

www.solo.ie is top site

AN exceptionally user-friendly Irish-origin website for single-parents has won a 'Golden Web Award'. The site, www.solo.ie, boasts 1,500 or so pages on a variety of topics – from tax, budgeting and family law to social welfare and housing entitlements. It was set up by James O'Neill, from Dundalk, in December '99.