

CHANGING IRELAND

ISSUE 5

The National Newsletter of the Community Development Support Programmes

AUTUMN '02

*I
have
a
dream:*

MINISTER Ó CUIV

ALSO INSIDE

- Psychological effects of unemployment
- Network supports Republican ex-prisoners
- Women's Aid object to Dell advert

This publication and most projects featured inside are funded by the Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs.

Produced by the Community Development Network Moyross Ltd., Limerick.

A new opportunity

A new department. A new minister. A new economic reality. 'Changing Ireland' is certainly caught up in the midst of change in Ireland. In his interview – and Mr. Ó Cuiv spoke in an upfront manner, answering every question – he outlines his views stating the need to avoid overlap, duplication and making it simpler for communities to access resources and carry out the work they need to do. This is to be applauded. The Minister has vision and energy for his work and, very importantly, as he says, "I always listen to what people have to say before making decisions". Projects should be delighted to work with a Minister who is only a phone-call away. And the strategic plan being formulated after long consultations with the CDSPs on the ground will hopefully inform him in his decisions.

It is interesting to note that the need for capacity building and the notion of empowerment are things the Minister feels unnecessary as he believes the capacity and power is already present particularly in rural communities. If only it were so! There is no doubt there are individuals in every community with leadership qualities and the ability to get things done. But certainly in areas of significant marginalisation and exclusion, be they urban or rural, the capacity for the majority of people to participate in local development and benefit as a result is open to serious question.

In certain struggling communities, the experience of projects and support agencies in involving local people on management committees and supporting community reps on local government structures would indicate that quite a bit of preparatory work is required – before groups and communities can be collectively effective.

Without ongoing capacity building (an awkward though useful term) a person, project or programme is destined to burn-out eventually (See Lorcan's article on 'Burn-out' on page 20).

Further details on the Minister's ideas will be eagerly awaited by projects and support agencies. They will, no doubt, be glad to take up the Minister's offer to listen to what they have to say.

This issue also profiles an initiative with Republican ex-prisoners. Their experiences are telling and could help inform the debate in relation to the widening of the grounds in the Equal Status Legislation (to bar discrimination on the basis of jail sentences served). There is extreme prejudice in society towards people who have spent time in prison, and especially against those who are viewed as 'terrorists'. To continue to ignore or actively exclude them from employment and community activities is to convict such people a second time. It also denies the contribution they have to make and stunts their prospects of rehabilitation.

In this context, the support for Coiste na n-Iarchimí through the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs has to be applauded.

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Do you produce a local newsletter?

If your project produces a local newsletter, 'Changing Ireland' would like to hear from you. We would like if you could place the editor on your mailing list – to keep us in touch with what is happening in your area and with your project. Additionally, the editor is available to run workshops in 'Newsletter Training'. One workshop has already been held in the North-East and another is being held in the Mid-West this month. If sufficient numbers from a region are interested, then please contact the editor. A workshop on producing newsletters, as well as being a place to learn new skills, is an ideal opportunity to meet with other projects producing newsletters and to swap ideas. Thank You! – Ed.

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DISCLAIMER

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When spiders' webs unite . . .



By Sharon Browne

"When spiders webs unite they can tie up a lion". This was the image Cecelia Forrestal put to the large audience who gathered for the final Regional Strategic Planning Day which was held in Tralee at the end of June.

Encouraging all four strands in the South Western Region to come together to take their power, Forrestal, of the CAN Support Agency, said, "There have never been so many opportunities on paper to work with statutory agencies on community development. And there has never been so much talk of partnership. This means we have to be organised so that decisions aren't made without us".

In acknowledging the lack of consultation on certain key matters – such as the Family Resource Centres move to the new agency, RAPID and moving the Community & Voluntary Services Section to the new Department of Rural, Community and Gaelteacht Affairs she suggested that projects focus on priorities, plans and structures. "Then we have to tap into our energy to work in the political system and take our power. Because nobody is going to give it to us."

The Strategic Planning event provided a constructive opportunity for CDPs, FRCs and CFGs (Community Development Projects, Family Resource Centres and Core-Funded Groups) to come together, along with the Department and 'Teamworks', the Support Agency in the region. Participants said the networking alone was a really positive experience, not surprisingly and most particularly for core-funded groups who have no network of their own.

It was widely acknowledged that planning for issues of common concern is a key to effective co-ordinated change. Viv Sadd, Mahon

CDP co-ordinator, outlined some of these common issues in the South West Region.

In line with national experience, the need to recruit and support volunteers, who are the foundation of all strands of the national Community Development Support Programmes (CDSPs) was a priority. This is now becoming critical as so many project find that the same pool of volunteers are now stretched with the amount of time required to sustain participation in RAPID and City / County Development Boards.

Serious concerns about resources were highlighted, not surprisingly as many projects had just been notified of CE cutbacks, government department were just told that they would have to live within their original budgetary limits and no guarantees were on the horizon about enhanced funding either.

Like elsewhere in the country the need to increase the profile of the national Programme and heighten media awareness of community development work was stated. The recently published Evaluation of the CDSPs and the successful first year of the programme's national newsletter 'Changing Ireland' were both cited as first steps in this direction.

In the area of policy work, the appointment of Policy Workers was obviously seen as a positive step, but it was also said that groups lack the necessary resources to develop their capacity in this area.

Naturally the recent announcement about the CDSPs move to the new government Department was an issue of concern. Over time the change from the Department of Social Welfare, to Social, Community & Family Affairs, and now Rural, Community & Gaelteacht Affairs has led to a feeling that there is no clarity about what the future will hold for the Programme.

What's the CDSPs again then?

CDSPs = Community Development Support Programmes, an umbrella name for the gathering together of people involved in three programme types, incorporating volunteer managers and paid workers from 250 community groups in the state. The groups all share a common approach to tackling poverty and disadvantage. Together, activists in the three programmes have linked up to develop a common strategic approach to community development nationally and to have their voice heard. Hitherto, these groups only worked together informally, if at all. Now, the groups have linked at regional level and, to a lesser degree, national level. The CDSPs umbrella, at national level, has been holed by the move of one programme – containing the family projects – to a new agency. The CDSPs is now administered by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaelteacht Affairs.

CDPs = Community Development Projects,

of which there are over 130 nationwide, operating as part of the Community Development Programme that was established by government in 1990.

CFGs = Core-Funded Groups, of which there are 50 nationwide since the programme for these groups was set up in 1994. They are often single-issue focused groups, eg women's groups. Sometimes, a community will have both a CDP and a FRC, even perhaps a CFG, in the local area. All three project types are managed by local volunteers.

FRCs = Family Resource Centres, of which there are around 80 in the state funded through the Family Resource Centre Programme which is going strong since 1994. This programme is now administered by a new statutory agency, the Family Support Agency, under the remit of the Department of Social and Family Affairs (as referred to in the CDSPs section).

South-West moves 'Beyond Abuse'

By Martine Brennan

A ground-breaking workshop presented by an expert on domestic violence is expected to draw a large attendance when it takes place in the South-West in October. Kathryn Clarke of Cavan and Chicago has worked with groups in Cork and Kerry and will present her workshop titled 'Beyond Abuse' at the Abbeygate Hotel, Tralee, on Saturday, October 19.

Ms. Clarke, herself a former victim, has undertaken substantial work as a trainer in with Health Board professionals and with core-funded projects such as the Tralee Women's Resource Centre and also with ADAPT Women's Refuge in Tralee, Mná Feasa in Cork and the Westgate Foundation in Ballincollig, Co. Cork. She brings clarity and realism to the issue of domestic violence by dealing with both male and female violence in intimate relationships.

Ms. Clarke has worked in the criminal justice system in Chicago for many years, training police officers, lawyers, judges, counsellors, social workers and health care professionals. She has also compiled a programme for students in schools and colleges called 'The Breakable Vow' based on her novel of the same name. The workshop in Tralee addressed:

- Why we left, examining obstacles we have overcome.
- Warning signals that we ignored.
- Identifying the stages of grief.
- How to handle thoughts of reconciliation.
- Coping with Loneliness.
- Children in the middle, coping with custody and access.
- Recapturing Dreams, who were you before the abuse.
- Developing new relationships, avoiding old patterns.
- Trauma Issues, issues for counselling.
- Career Development.

It is worth recalling that, in Ireland, since 1995, one hundred women have died as a result of domestic violence and it is estimated by the Specialist Support Agency, Women's Aid, that one-in-four Irish women will experience violence in intimate relationships at some time in their life.

Violence against women affects every one in our community, if not directly, then indirectly. This was brought home when the 'Once is Too Much' exhibition came to Siamsa Tire in Tralee in Spring of this year, courtesy of St. Michael's FRC in Inchicore, Dublin. Now it is time to move beyond merely naming the problem - it is time for us to move 'Beyond Abuse'.

For further information and booking forms contact Kevin Mc Cann, Counsellor, on 087-9272348 or Martine Brennan, Counsellor and Regional Reporter for 'Changing Ireland' on 086-8385345.

DUBLIN

Women's Aid object to multi-national's advert

A television commercial for Dell Computers has been withdrawn following a complaint by Women's Aid to the Advertising Standards Authority of Ireland.

Women's Aid, which was established 26 years ago, is one of six Specialist Support Agencies working with projects operating under the Community Development Support Programmes.

The agency complained that the ad depicted "threatening behaviour" towards women.

The ad showed a man listening to a woman's telephone call from a hallway. When she hangs

up, he asks who she was calling and is told it was Dell. He uses the redial button to check her explanation.

Women's Aid complained that the ad "depicted a pattern of behaviour that is part of a control pattern often used by abusive men to keep their wives or girlfriends in line. The ad attempted to normalise behaviour which can also be associated with violence."

Dell withdrew the commercial, saying no offence was intended.

To contact Women's Aid: Tel. 01-874-5026. E-mail: projects@womensaid.ie

Tosach website goes on-line

The new website for Tosach Support Agency is now on-line at www.tosach.ie. The 'Advice centre' section contains information on selection and recruitment procedures; labour law; voluntary management committees and pensions. The website also lists

upcoming training events and seminars. There's also a report on the recent intercultural 'training for trainers' programme held in Bergen, Holland with photos which show absolutely everything, apparently!

CAN support agency courses

In January 2003, Community Action Network is running two courses in Community Development: (1) Community Development Leadership and (2) Project Co-Ordination and Leadership.

The Community Development Leadership training course is for community activists and is

accredited with FETAC level 2. The Project Co-Ordination and Leadership training course is for those who are or who wish to become project co-ordinators and it is accredited with FETAC level 3.

For further information, ring CAN on 01-878-8005.

Drugs awareness weekend in November

Community Awareness of Drugs, a small voluntary organization, is once again holding a series of training events aimed at community workers. The next is a residential weekend on Sat/Sun, November 2nd/3rd, at All Hallows College in Dublin. Two top keynote speakers will address the participants and there will also be an opportunity to speak with young people in recovery and representatives of family support groups about the impact of drugs on family life. The weekend costs, which include accommodation and meals are €120 for the voluntary/community sector and €150 for the public/statutory sector.

Contact: CAD, 31/31a Central Hotel Chambers, Dame Court, Dublin 2.

Tel. 01-679-2681.

E-mail: communityawareness@eircom.net

Autumn training courses in Dun Laoighaire

The Local Development Training Institute's (LDTI) autumn programme is now available. Courses include: Time Management; Responding to Challenging Behaviour; Simple Steps in the Evaluation Process; Jest N'Stress; Understanding & Working with Cultural Diversity; Dancing the Rainbow: A Day of Colour, Dance & Movement; Make Life Changes: A Day Out to Plan Your Life; Web Design.

All the above workshops will be run in the Dun Laoighaire area.

For more information: Tel. 01 - 230 0640 or email: mailto:info@ldti.ie

SOUTH-WEST

News from Cork and Kerry

- by MARTINE BRENNAN

Congratulations to the **Bantry Community Resource Centre** who have brought the Diploma in Youth and Community Work from UCC to West Cork, in partnership with the Bantry Integrated Development Group. Twenty-two names have been submitted to UCC and the course begins in October 2002. Bantry Community Resource Centre has also negotiated part funding for some of the new students from a variety of sources. There are already twelve people on the waiting list for the October 2003 group. This initiative has overcome the problem of rural isolation resulting in education being inaccessible and it is great to hear of a group who have tackled the problem head on and been successful. Well done folks!

Tralee CDP are returning to their old address in Rock Street, Tralee but to a completely new building. Congratulations to all the staff and management who are currently up to their eyeballs in boxes whilst keeping the service up and running.

Mayfield Integrated CDSP will be at 328 Old Youghal Road, Mayfield, Cork City from January 2003. They have had the use of rooms at the Family Centre but at the new premises will have four offices, training rooms and access for people with disabilities.

Tralee Women's Resource Centre's pilot group "Women in Separation" is now a regular feature of Tuesday mornings. The group is modelled on the work of the Mna Feasa group in Cork City and is particularly suited to women who have experienced abuse in intimate relationships. The group is always open to new members and has drawn up it's own mission statement.

Mahon Community Development Project has presented an Equality Awareness Program to adult and youth groups and is now taking the programme into primary and secondary schools. This work is innovative and we hope to hear a lot more about it in the next edition of Changing Ireland.

The **Open Door Network**, Kerry's response to violence against women and children, has secured funding from Partnership Tra Li to provide listening and referral training on the issue of violence against women to community workers in the region. This training will be free of charge and funding will also be available for elder/child-care and travel expenses. Workers can contact Catherine Casey on 087-6169704.

Apologies to Noreen O' Regan of **We The People, Knocknaheeny/Hollyhill CDSP, Cork**, your e-mail never reached me but we hope your group have a wonderful graduation celebration.

My thanks to Noreen, Sharon, Anna, Viv, Brenda and Catherine who gave up some time from their busy schedules to pass on their news to us.

We are hoping to make this space a regular feature of Changing Ireland so if you have new projects to launch or a success to celebrate contact

Martine Brennan on 086-8385345

MID-WEST

Support Agency moves

THE Mid-West Support Agency has moved to a more-spacious new premises located on the Dock Road, Limerick. The new address is: Block 1, Floor 2, Ashbourne Business Park, Dock Road, Limerick. Phone numbers remain the same as before. No plans yet for an office-warming party, but Christmas is coming!

■ LAUNCH OF DOMESTIC ABUSE BROCHURE

Southill Community Development Project launched a comprehensive new brochure which provides local women with information, advice and contact numbers for women who are victims of domestic abuse. Ashling O'Neill and Hilda Faye better known as Carol and Tracey from Fair City attended the launch, held in July.

Before the brochure was published, almost 100 people took part in research groups throughout Southill. One of the findings was that people encountered obstacles in finding out where to go and what to do when they became the victims of domestic abuse. Startlingly, some women felt that involving service providers could effect their safety.

The Southill Domestic Abuse Project is now working on these issues – providing (a) practical help, (b) emotional help and (c) education and training.

For further information contact: Mary McGrath, Southill Domestic Abuse Project Working Group (set up through the CDP), 266 Avondale Court, O'Malley Park, Limerick. Tel. 061-313025. E-mail: scdp@eircom.net

■ TRAVELLERS CDP SET UP WEBSITE

The Limerick Travellers Development Group has moved from their somewhat cramped premises at John Street to more appropriate accommodation at: 39-40 Edward St., Limerick. Their phone number remains as before: 061-418912.

In another development, LTDG are to launch their own website in October.

■ CITY WOMEN GET LOCAL VOICE

As a result of research carried out by the PAUL Partnership into the unmet needs of Women on low incomes in Limerick, a city-wide local women's network has been set up. The network is seen as vital in responding to the need to give women a local voice.

"The research showed that women felt a sense of powerlessness over their own lives. Many women spoke of a lack of structured support from other women and of not having a voice at community level. They also felt they had never been consulted and that they needed to take control of their lives by using women's collective power to bring about change" said Geraldine Clohessy, a member of the steering committee.

Two information sessions were held in June to update women on what stage of development the Network is at and the process is continuing.

For further information contact: Geraldine Clohessy at 061-326057.

NORTH-WEST

The 'Wee Jobs Initiative'

The Wee Jobs Initiative is a new small business currently being established by a partnership of community development and voluntary organisations.

Based in North Leitrim the business will provide a 'handy-man', 'odd jobs' and small essential repairs service. Its purpose is to provide a professional repairs and maintenance service to older and more vulnerable members of the community.

The Management Committee of Community Connections, the local CDP, were involved in securing funding to appoint a full-time manager, four building and repair workers and an administrator. The Workers' and Administrator posts are funded under the Social Economy Programme.

Contact: The Wee Jobs Initiative, Community Connections, Killycarney, Blacklion, Co. Cavan. Tel: 072 53321

NOTE:

NEWS FROM THE OTHER CDSPs REGIONS WILL BE INCLUDED IN THE NEXT ISSUE: NORTH-EAST, MIDLANDS, SOUTH-EAST, EAST and WEST.

NATIONAL

Minimum Wage rises to €6.35/hour

THE Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Mary Harney, on September 13th, announced that as and from 1 October, 2002 the National Minimum Wage is to increase from its present rate of €5.97 per hour to €6.35 per hour.

"The Labour Inspectorate of my Department will be visiting employments to ensure compliance with the increased rate," she said.

The sub-minimum rates which may be paid to certain categories of employee, for instance to persons under the age of 18, to first time job entrants or to those engaged in structured training or study will also increase from this date.

Anybody seeking further information on the increase in the national minimum wage can telephone the Employment Rights Information Unit at 01-631-3131 or lo-call: 1890-201-615. Full details of the sub-minimum rates are contained in the "Detailed Guide to the National Minimum Wage Act, 2000" which is available on the Department's website www.entemp.ie

■ €200,000 EU GRANTS PER PROJECT

Léargas manages a range of European and bilateral co-operation programmes in the human resource, education, training and youth sectors, including the Leonards da Vinci Programme.

Up to €200,000 per project per year of European Community funding may be applied for under the Leonardo programme (2000 – 2006) for the following types of innovative vocational training projects (max. duration 3 years): Language competencies, mobility, networks, reference materials and pilot projects.

Information workshops were held in September in Dublin, Cork and Limerick, but it is never too late to become involved, though the application process involves serious preparation and applicants are expected to make links with similar projects in Europe. The next deadline for applications is 4 November 2002 (for mobility projects, 14 February 2003).

For full details, contact: the Leonardo da Vinci National Agency at Léargas. Tel. 01-873-

1411 or by e-mail at leonardo@leargas.ie
Website: www.leonardo-ireland.com

■ DEBTH AND DEVELOPMENT ON THE AGENDA

The Debt and Development Coalition Ireland held three workshops during September in Dublin, Cork and Sligo. The aim was to ensure that people had an opportunity to have their voice heard before the Minister for Finance, Charlie McCreevey, attended the IMF/World Bank Autumn meetings in Washington. In its recently published Debt Policy, the Government came out in support of total debt cancellation as a principled position.

"It is vital that we ensure that the Government put action to their words," said a Debt and Development Coalition spokesperson.

For more information: Debt and Development Coalition Ireland, All Hallows, Grace Park Road, Drumcondra, Dublin 9. Ph/Fax: 01-857-1828 E-mail: ddc@connect.ie Website: www.debtireland.org

'Changing Ireland' looks in this issue at people who experience hidden marginalisation - Republican ex-prisoners, of whom there are estimated to be 50,000. If we add the family numbers to that estimate then we can begin to see the scale of the challenge.

Coiste na n-larchimí is the national network for Republican ex-prisoners. Coiste receives core-funding through the Voluntary and Community Services Section of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs to support its community development work in the South.

According to Coiste's director, Mike Ritchie, "As part of the preparation to move the new political dispensation forward, there are skills which are needed, all new to most republicans, skills like running organisations, employing staff, managing budgets, developing programmes, research, making funding applications.... We are getting there."

In all, Coiste supports 24 locally-based groups throughout Ireland and one of these is Fáilte Abhaile in Dundalk. North-eastern regional reporter, Maurice McConville, reports on the work of Fáilte Abhaile.

A duty to include Republican ex-prisoners

- Maurice McConville reports

"The Governments continue to recognise the importance of measures to facilitate the reintegration of prisoners into the community by providing support both prior to and after release, including assistance directed towards availing of employment opportunities, re-training and/or re-skilling, and further education."

- Good Friday Agreement 1998

The Good Friday Agreement was endorsed by the vast majority of the people of Ireland (94% in the Republic of Ireland and 71% in the North). Large numbers of prisoners were released back into the community. The initial media coverage has long since died away. The ex-prisoners and their families have been left to get on with their lives.

Fáilte Abhaile is a group for Republican ex-prisoners in Dundalk. Kevin Mulgrew, project co-ordinator, estimates there are 150 ex-prisoners and their families in the Dundalk area, plus 250 - 300 displaced families, which means around 1500 people who can and do avail of

Fáilte's services.

Mr. Mulgrew and two workers oversee those services and activities, which include: a Drop In Centre, Training and Education Courses, Counselling and Emotional Support, and Community Development. The organisation also organises a wide variety of courses such as Computers, Basic English and Maths, Booking Keeping, Irish, etc.

"The Counselling Service," Mr. Mulgrew explains, "is part of a broader Tacaíocht Service (meaning support of a person) which is specifically designed to give support and develop self-help programmes for groups and individuals."

"Coming out of conflict, they have lost relatives and friends. Emotional and psychological problems like post-traumatic stress disorder.. People who never visited family gatherings and missed weddings, funerals, christenings..."

Fáilte Abhaile has a major involvement in the community with members actively involved in over 30 local groups in Dundalk. The group is also concerned with the effects of the conflict on young people and has recently secured funding to employ youth workers to work in the Dundalk area with the families of ex-prisoners.

Yet, Fáilte Abhaile experience difficulties dealing with the agencies who are obliged to

support them, despite the commitment to ex-prisoners under the Good Friday Agreement.

"We have problems engaging with the Statutory Agencies," said Mr. Mulgrew. "They are invited to events but do not come. They blame republicans for the conflict. It is easier to blame an element of society than to try and address the issues that cause the conflict."

"There are large numbers in society who are in danger of being excluded for a long time. They need people to champion their cause and to speak up for them in the policy arena," he said.

He highlighted the main problems faced by ex-prisoners trying to integrate into society:

- The majority of ex-prisoners are from disadvantaged areas.
- Ex-prisoners (political) are treated as criminals with criminal records. This means they are restricted in what they can do in employment and other areas of life e.g. they cannot drive taxis, adopt children, and travel is restricted, etc.
- 40% of ex-prisoners are unemployed with many having no qualifications or skills (access to training and education was denied to prisoner before the "blanket protest"). They also face discrimination in employment because of their past.
- Children of ex-prisoners suffer prejudice because of their parents' past. They also experience a lack of identity because the family have had to move.
- Agencies are reluctant to engage with ex-prisoners because of negative perception of them.
- "Harrassment" continues of ex-prisoners by Garda Special Branch.

The issue of ex-prisoners is controversial and many of us may want to forget about it altogether. However the effect of the 30 years of conflict is still ongoing for many ex-prisoners and their families. The vast majority of us voted for The Good Friday Agreement and therefore we have a duty to ensure the social inclusion of this group. This is one of the many challenges emanating from the peace process that needs to be faced.



• Dundalk youths on a day out with Fáilte Abhaile. All are the children of ex-prisoners or their friends: Conall Mulvenney, Niall O'Rourke, Brendan Hughes and Dultagh Donnelly at an outdoor pursuit centre at Lock Melvin, Co. Fermanagh.

A hidden 'community resource'

By Maurice McConville

DO you see ex-prisoners in your community as a resource? Do you wish they would just disappear as a community development issue? They are not going anywhere until attitudes change.

In the past, Coiste na n-Iarchimí, the national network for ex-republican prisoners, has organised seminars to raise awareness of ex-prisoners issues. The seminars were held to encourage dialogue between Republican former prisoners and external organisations in line with the Good Friday Agreement which emphasises the importance of re-integration. Taking part were Republican ex-prisoners, relatives, and officials of Coiste, statutory and voluntary agencies and representatives of support organisations working for ex-prisoners throughout the island.

Paddy McGinn of ADM/ Combat Poverty Agency spoke at the time of research carried out to consider the needs of the ex-prisoners and their families and stressed the need for ex-prisoners to apply their skills. He also stressed the importance of sustainability. Mr. McGinn talked about the lack of mutual trust between the Republican ex-prisoner community and agencies and the challenge in gaining trust. He

referred to ex-prisoners as a resource to the community.

Mike Ritchie, the director of Coiste, said Coiste had also set up a counselling service and a youth programme among other activities.

In workshops participants discussed the barriers between ex-prisoners and the wider community – the following are some quotes from the discussions:

- "Many children of displaced people have somehow lost their roots and find themselves estranged from both their local community and from their roots. They are in some sense outside both communities."
- "Ex-prisoner were easily labelled and not seen as people. It is important to realise that it was only through the conflict that ex-prisoners were in jail."
- "We're talking about the need for legislation where it becomes illegal to discriminate on grounds of political conviction. A recognition that a prison record does not equal a criminal record. Prison records need to be expunged. In a way we have to work to put ourselves out of business so that, with the destruction of criminal records ex-prisoners cease to be ex-prisoners."
- "The stated aims of inclusion, which recog-

nised the need to address the needs of the ex-prisoners community, have not reached all people working in agencies or departments especially in the South."

- "Finally, we need to begin working hard to lobby for legislative change...It is up to us to take a lead in terms of providing possible solution and then to negotiate around them."

For more information, contact: Mike Ritchie at Coiste na n-Iarchimí's head office in Belfast (Tel. 048-90200770); or Anne Sullivan in the Dublin office (Tel. 01-8733-199).

Hasn't had 'a decent job' since 1974

The following is a testimony given by former political prisoner Gerry Bradley. He currently works for Fáilte Abhaile in Dundalk:

"What has happened to me since I was imprisoned has been the dole queue or schemes. I got various jobs in pubs, in take-aways, in shops, part-time jobs in petrol stations – things like that.

"Most of the time the reason for not getting the job was that people were afraid of unnecessary attention from the Special Branch. It came down to scheme or no scheme, and that is what happened since 1985.

"At one stage the situation put terrible pressure on my family. Myself and my wife split up for a while. I went to work in the

North. My wife was on her own. I came back to Dundalk because I wanted to come back. Why should I have to leave my native environment?

"I still suffer effects of imprisonment. For example, I have three children. Myself and my wife often say we would like to adopt children. I am not allowed to adopt children. I have a criminal record. I can't get a taxi-driver's licence. I've never gone on a holiday in my life. I have a sister in Canada, working as a consultant. Yet my wife and I were told that if we visited, I could be arrested. So I can't travel there. There are a lot of places in the world I would like to travel to, but I can't go.

"I haven't had a decent job since 1974. That is a long time."

Irish refugees in 2002

As project co-ordinator with Fáilte Abhaile, Kevin Mulgrew also works with "displaced people."

These include people still "on the run" and those who have had to move out of their homes because of the conflict. This is still happening in parts of Belfast and specific locations throughout the North as the ongoing "territorial conflict" continues. They are effectively refugees fleeing violence and seeking sanctuary outside the state they grew up in.

Fáilte Abhaile also works with refugees from outside Ireland. Romanians in Dundalk use the services they provide.

Fáilte abhaile mission statement

"To develop an inclusive, sustainable local community infrastructure to support republican ex-prisoners, displaced people and their families, and enable them to fulfill their potential and participate in the regeneration of the community, increasing their educational and employability levels and status."



• Dundalk's Fáilte Abhaile men's group: Kevin Mulgrew is on the right hand side, second in from the front. Gerry Bradley is sitting in the centre-back wearing a striped shirt.

CDSPS EXTERNAL SEMINAR ATTRACTS 100 PEOPLE

SEOAN Dooley from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, opened the last in a series of country-wide CDSPs consultation seminars, held develop a strategy for future development. The final seminar was for external agencies who are involved in community development and it attracted around 100 participants.

Mr. Dooley began by informing participants that €27.5 million is being spent this year on projects operating under the Community Development Support Programmes.

"But it isn't possible for any of us here to exist in isolation – we have to be aware of what goes on outside our organisations," he noted.

Mr. Dooley outlined current initiatives in the community development sector – the White Paper on Voluntary Activity, RAPID, CLAR, the NDP, CDBs, NAPS, the Family Support Agency and the setting up of a new Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

"We are all are working to improve the lot of people in areas where these projects are located, so we have to work better together, and therefore the CDSPs needs a strategic plan. The plan is important, but its aims must not take away from the work on the ground with local people. It is about getting the balance right."

"The Nexus evaluation said that projects are having a very significant impact at local level, but the profile at national level is not very evident," he added.

"The CDSPs' National Advisory Committee set in motion the Strategic Planning Group that organised us to come here today to contribute to

the CDSPs Strategic Plan. If you asked the average man on the street what the CDSPs was, he'd probably 'look' at you, as might some of you here today! So why have you been invited?

We cannot work in isolation from other people and groups who work in community development.

The external views of other programmes need to be heard."

He appealed to participants to identify issues that need to be addressed, to give their views and be honest. "We can take it!" he joked.

Cecilia Forrestal, a facilitator at the seminar, invited participants to think strategically:

- how to maximise the potential of the nearly 260 locally-based projects around the country.
- how to work collaboratively at local and regional level linking within and without the CDSPs.
- how to build a momentum for change.

"We need a plan that is proactive rather than reactive. And the process must be underpinned by community development principles, with a big emphasis on participation whereby the people in the all projects are involved," she said.

"We have had seven regional seminars since May, 2001 (attended by both volunteers and paid workers in projects).

"What has emerged so far is as follows:

- people are reconnecting to the passion of community development, which is not so much about what they do at work each day, but *why* they do it.
- people are beginning to connect to the bigger picture.

- there is a huge growth in political awareness (partly influenced by the way the Family Support Agency was set up without consulting projects and also by project's involvement in the RAPID and CLAR programmes).
- all three strands of the original CDSPs are now involved in the National Advisory Committee.
- each seminar was organised by a CDSPs-style regional committee and this has built capacity at regional level.
- the language of community development has now been eroded and there is a lot of jargon in use that actually alienates people. Language has to have meaning.
- "And five goals are emerging:
- to safeguard community development principles and practices (from being watered down by government or indeed ourselves)
- to build capacity and leadership (for example, accredited leadership courses for volunteers)
- structures of networking, representation and policy need to be made clear
- the need to profile the CDSPs
- and obviously to continue to focus on anti-poverty, equality and inclusion.

"Many people at the regional seminars had never sat together before – some didn't even realise their project was part of a national programme," she added. Nonetheless, a strategic plan was emerging.

Written submissions on the CDSPs strategy are also being invited and the closing date is: October 18th, 2002.



• Claire Walsh, Rhona Broderick, Kevin Casey and Angela O'Gorman - civil servants from the Community and Voluntary Services Section of the new department.

New development book

'80:20 Development in an Unequal World' is a new comprehensive introduction to many of the major development, human rights and justice issues internationally.

It is written and designed for use in a variety of educational settings – with teachers, senior students, youth workers, community and NGO educators. It was written by an international network of experienced development educators.

80:20 includes the viewpoints of many internationally-known authors and Mary Robinson, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, wrote the Preface.

The book has cartoons, case studies, graphs, website addresses and a glossary of key terms.

It is available from: 80:20 Educating and Acting for a Better World, St. Cronan's BNS, Bray, Co. Wicklow. Tel. 01-286-0487. E-mail: mailto:info@8020.ie

Quality information doesn't come cheap, however! Cost: €22.50.

New Department for the community sector

THE new Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs was established by Government in June of this year, with some 200 staff in six locations, mainly in Dublin and Na Forbacha, Co. Galway.

The Department has specific responsibility for community and local development, including co-ordination of the:

- CDSPs
- National Drugs Strategy
- Volunteering
- Community Applications of Information Technology (CAIT) initiative;
- (RAPID);
- Leader;
- CLAR;
- Interreg;
- EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation;
- Western Development Commission.

The Community Development Support Programmes (CDSPs) has moved to the new Department from the old Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs.

Through the CDSPs, the Department provides funding for, and in some cases administers, a range of programmes of support for community development. The aim is that socially-excluded groups and local communities can be active participants in identifying and meeting their own development needs, working alongside the Statutory Agencies and others involved in local development initiatives.

The Community Development Programme aims to mobilise the capacity of disadvantaged communities to participate in mainstream local development, training and education, enterprise and employment opportunities. It also has a strong focus on influencing policy and working for change at regional and national level. It provides support for smaller scale self-help work among specific target groups that experience disadvantage – disadvantaged women and men, lone parents, Travellers, etc. This support is provided so they can articulate their point-of-view and participate in a process of personal and community development.

The Community Development Programme has been included in the National Development Plan as sub-meas-

ures in the social inclusion measures in both the South and East and the BMW Regional Operational Programmes (Ops).

Locally-based community groups and voluntary organisations are eligible to apply for funding under the CDSPs.

The new Department also retains the responsibilities previously held by the former Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands for both the Irish language and the Gaeltacht, and the development of off-shore islands.

Area Development Management (ADM) also reports to the Department, as do two cross-border implementation bodies – An Foras Teanga and Waterways Ireland.

Additionally, the new Department has lead responsibility for developing the relationship between the State and the community and voluntary sector. This involves providing the secretariat to the Implementation and Advisory Group, which was established to oversee implementation of the White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector. The White Paper was published in 2000 and is available through the Department.

The Department has responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the RAPID (Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development) Programme, which is managed by ADM Ltd. on behalf of the Department. ADM also administers the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme on behalf of the Department. Meanwhile, the National Rural Development Forum acts as a monitoring committee for the CLÁR initiative.

Funding is also provided from the Department through a total of 38 Area Partnerships and 33 Community Groups. These are not-for-profit private companies, that focus on combating disadvantage and social exclusion in their area, and whose work is supported by ADM Ltd..

Area Development Management Ltd., is an intermediary company originally established by the Irish Government, in agreement with the European Commission, to promote social inclusion, reconciliation and equality and to counter disadvantage through local social and economic development.



• Maurice McConville, regional reporter for 'Changing Ireland' for the north-east pictured with members of Le Cheile management committee. They are holding copies of 'The Four Trees', their local area newsletter.

The Diary of Horace McDermot

(Newly appointed Community Development worker and former faceless bureaucrat)

■ MONDAY 10.00 pm

Started my new job last week as Community Development Worker with Ballybog CDP. Everybody is very friendly and they take this Community Development crack very seriously. The Project Co-ordinator is Mick Savage (pronounced Mock). He talks like he's going to change the world but he looks like he wouldn't change his underpants if he could get away with it. The Administrator, Penny Pincher, is a lovely woman who informed me that my mileage is calculated at 40c a mile based on the signpost distance between two towns and an extra 5c per swerve to avoid the potholes on the road.

■ TUESDAY: 12.50 am

At the management meeting Mick and the management were going on that CDPs are catalysts for radical social change and we need to be revolutionary in our thinking. I want to make a good impression so I'm looking around for models of good practice to follow. I think Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe is one. We should encourage the dispossessed to repossess their land. Our slogan could be "Don't Just Sit There And Take It – Stand Up and Take It Back!" If you go back in history the Irish had their lands taken by every Tom, Dick and Cromwell that landed here. Forget the planning tribunals, close historical analysis will prove that all the prime development land over the years was stolen hundreds of years ago so the government can evict all the fat cat home owners and give the houses back to the poor plain people and those on local authority housing lists.

■ WEDNESDAY: 2.44 pm

I was thinking about what to do with all the evicted. Most people seem to agree we look after asylum seekers here too well with all the freebies they get. Those evicted could take the attractive option of reaping the benefits of seeking asylum in another country. When I brought it up with Mick he felt it was a wee bit over the top – so much for radical thinking.

■ THURSDAY: 9.55 pm

Watched TV and there I see that the Dublin City Council have already started a land reclamation project targeting the rich with the 20% social housing requirement on all new private developments. It is a stroke of genius to infiltrate the likes of Shrewsbury Road with a working class or Traveller family. This will create a

dynamic to repopulate rural Ireland and where better to go with their Daimlers and Mercs than to the BMW region. The people who don't want to emigrate or build in the country can stay in hotels or top class B&Bs at reduced rates thus boosting the ailing tourism industry.

■ FRIDAY: 1.00 am

Facilitated a group of early school leavers to organise a trip to the pool in Castlebar as there was some funding available. Got a shock today when I travelled with them to play pool in the Castle Bar. There is a need for facilities in this area but I support the need for a National Stadium too.

■ SATURDAY: 7.30 pm

I have a solution to the funding for the National Stadium. The government have given the GAA €60 million or so to build Croke Park. So all they need to do is tax the 80,000 fans going to football or hurling matches. The tax could be 10% on the normal ticket price and double the price if Dublin are playing. Why a Double Dublin Tax? One, Dubs are well used to paying over the odds for everything and two the culchies wouldn't go because it would be too dear and so the Dubs could stop complaining about getting tickets and have the place to themselves. A few extra draws and replays and you'd have the cash in no time.

■ SUNDAY: 9.27 pm

Watched the All-Ireland Final and saw Kerry Group and Avonmore sponsor the Kerry and Kilkenny teams. So why not get them and any other dairy producers to sponsor the scaled down National Stadium (which could change

from the Bertie Bowl to The Butter Dish). The marketing would be easy – "See the Cream of Irish Sport in the Butter Dish". I mean there is no point crying over spilled milk or letting relations go sour between Bertie and Mary.

■ MONDAY: 8.00 am

Just in case the GAA felt hard done by the IRFU could sell Landsdowne Road. (If one acre in Dublin 4 can fetch €9 million what would Landsdowne fetch?) The rugby boys could slip a few bob towards the Butter Dish and the land built on to provide more social housing. Lastly Mick McCarthy's book sales could be given over by the FAI as their contribution.

■ TUESDAY: 1.00 am

Met up with my buddy Martin Luther Keane (who is flabbergasted the new Minister regards him as his hero) and he gave me the suss that a cousin of his, Roy from Cork, is the guy I replaced. Seems he was got rid of for constantly giving out about the poor facilities and lack of ambition and organisation. He publicly criticised Mick as manager and accused the committee of being a bunch of amateurs before he walked out of the meeting.

An expert in Conflict Management, Humphrey Dunphy, was brought in but he only made things worse and fell out with everyone himself. Now Martin says that all kinds of courses and all kinds of men couldn't help Dunphy get it together again.

• All resemblances to persons or projects living, or dead, or half-alive and hoping for something to change, are entirely coincidental.



'CHANGING IRELAND' DEVOURED BY 40% OF READERS

A RANDOM survey* of staff in CDSPs projects has found that, since 'Changing Ireland' was launched a year ago, 43% feel more part of a national programme (as was briefly reported in the summer issue). Most encouragingly, some 40% of people surveyed read every single article published in the newsletter, which is surely some sort of record!

The first issue of the newsletter reached 260 addresses whereas the mailing list now includes over 1000 destinations. Subscriptions remain free for the time being.

A proposal to send extra copies to projects who want extras and will pay a charge is being considered by the Editorial Team. One fifth of projects already distribute 'C.I.' to groups linked to their project, and 35% of projects would like more copies. Some projects say they would ideally like up to 50 copies to distribute to affiliated groups.

The evaluation, based chiefly on the survey results, found that: Amazingly, 40% of respon-

dents read "all of it", while another 40% of those surveyed read "most of it". On the other hand, 20% of those who filled out postal questionnaires or took part in the telephone-questionnaires admitted they had never read the newsletter, most saying they were "too busy".

Nearly half of all respondents had linked with other projects directly because of articles they read in 'C.I.'

The magazine's diversity in terms of content is part of its appeal, with different people liking different things. 'Horace' is very popular.

Two-thirds of people surveyed said they found 'Changing Ireland' had been a help to them in promoting their work locally and/or nationally.

In seeking comments, a couple were mildly critical, and the overwhelming reaction was positive, for example:

- Well laid out, articles not too long.
- Staff never complain about newsletter.
- Very inclusive of all, eg gay & lesbian.

- We find it really informative.
- Articles drawn from experience on the ground.
- Colourful and easy to read.
- People in the community read it when they come into the project.
- It's done in a real reader's language and is easy for people to read.
- Articles small, colourful and real-life stuff.
- More pictures please!
- Good to see what other issues are being dealt with on the ground.

The survey was selective in that only people in projects under the CDSPs umbrella or in Support Agencies were targeted. Only one volunteer was interviewed and, on this occasion, civil servants were not surveyed. However, comments, suggestions and healthy criticism are always welcomed.

* Thanks again to Margaret Casey for carrying out the survey and to everybody who took part.

Two project staff for new board

Family Resources Centre National Forum update:

PRIOR to his departure as Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs, Dermot Ahern appointed two staff members of Family Resource Centres – one in Waterford, one in Tipperary – to the new Family Support Agency board.

The Family Resource Centre National Forum (FRCNF) had campaigned for an amendment to the legislation enacting the new Agency so that one FRCNF representative would automatically have to be appointed to the board of the Agency. The campaign did not achieve the desired result, but the Minister acknowledged the pressure for representation and appointed two FRC co-ordinators to the board. They are: Claire Cashman from the Millennium Project, Slievardagh Family Resource Centre, Co Tipperary and Dick Hickey of St Brigid's Family Resource Centre, Waterford. Such appointments remain at the discretion of the minister of the day.

Since a C.E.O. has yet to be appointed, a ministerial order turning over control of the Agency's budget to the board has yet to be signed. In real terms, at national level the FRC programme has become an external partner of the other two programmes in the CDSPs. Of course, on the ground, projects continue to co-operate and work together under the CDSPs umbrella when and where it makes sense to do so.

So the CDSPs, if thought of as a shamrock, has 'lost' one leaf!



• Leo Scales, a member of the Family Resource Centres National Forum.

Minister Ó Cuiv wants 'a

- as he explains in an in

A LLEN Meagher: You said in an interview recently with the Farmers Journal that you intend on a 'major rationalisation' of the programmes being administered under your Department. What do the projects under the umbrella of the Community Development Support Programmes (CDSPs) have to fear?

Minister Éamon Ó Cuiv: Nothing really. I think that people involved in this work, and that includes me as a politician, should always be willing to put the good of the people we serve first. In other words, one of the things we have to absolutely avoid in this country is making the purpose of the organisation the objective rather than the good of the people the organisation serves. And I had to in my time as a co-op manager make very hard decisions to let things go, to let them move on, because it was the good of the people we serve that would benefit from making those hard decisions.

Now, what I'm doing at the moment. Obviously, the CDSPs on a day-to-day basis come under Minister of State, Noel Ahern(e?). I have responsibility for the Partnerships and RAPID. We also have a designation called 'Urban', and other designations [such as] na Gaeltachta, the islands, LEADER... I sat down one day [after touring the country before the launch of the CLAR programme] and found that nine agencies of the state, or semi-state, all funded by the exchequer [were working with communities] and all were over-lapping. Eight of them fall within the remit of this department...so I said to myself - 'There has to be a better way of doing it'.

So I started as a first step in asking them to map out their areas. Some totally overlap, some a quarter overlap, some two-thirds overlap, but

"There is a cry from the heart, and I get it everywhere I go . . . 'Will you please make it simpler?' "

we are building up endless bureaucracies, endless complications for those on the ground involved in community development work. And I think there is a cry from the heart, and I get it everywhere I go in the country - 'Will you please make it simpler? Will you please let us know exactly what agencies work in our area, what their boundaries are and will you please make those boundaries intelligible to ordinary people?

Now, the danger is for those in the organisations - they are so busy, they are doing such good work, they mightn't see that these problems exist. But more and more, what we want to do is see can we get the job done - better, simpler, better for those who provide the services



and better for those who avail of the services. And that we waste less resources on duplication and unnecessary bureaucracy.

A.M.: People naturally have the fear that, with the power you have as Minister, you could use that power and, I suppose, strip more than the skin off the chicken - you could take some meat with you as well.

É. Ó C.: I spent 25 years as a co-op manager on the ground. All of my background is from community development work and I want to make sure that we develop communities, be they inner-city communities that have suffered huge deprivation or rural communities that are declining from a population point of view. That's my total focus.

I tend to be upfront about what I do. I also feel it's more honest for those for whom change is coming to know it is coming. I have always worked an open-door policy, I'm always willing to listen to the other side and I would hope that I would bring most people around to my way of thinking - that we do need to look at change and that this thing has grown up hotch-potch.

For example, a lot of the schemes we operate in rural areas were designed for urban areas. And whereas they are very suitable for the urban areas they serve, they do not actually in lots of cases deal with the realities on the ground in rural areas. Again we sometimes get a dichotomy and this became the focus of a major problem with the Community Employment Schemes. You get a difference between the way the scheme operates as in the book and the way it operates on the ground. But, if somebody hauls you back to the original written-down conditions, you suddenly find [the schemes] are in difficulty. So I much prefer if the rules as they are written reflect what actually happens on the ground. Rather than that we allow anomalies grow up.

Looking at the schemes, and again it is an

interesting comparison: You've got CDSPs schemes on the non-Gaeltacht islands, you have Gaeltacht co-ops on the Gaeltacht islands. They are very different, particularly their whole *raison d'être*. [Yet] the only difference in the islands is that one island speaks Irish and the other speaks English.

Now, it would be hard to imagine that both models are perfect; therefore, maybe the Gaeltacht model isn't right and the CDSPs one is right [or vice-versa]. And maybe it's halfway between the both. I don't know what way it is, but it would be a very reasonable and rational thing to look at them and decide which model is the best model. And say that is what [model] we will have on the islands, and if that is different from what we have in Coolock - well, you know an island in the Atlantic is different. So it leaves much more to local modelling.

A.M.: The co-ordinators of School Street Family Resource Centre and Duagh CDP in Kerry, for example, believe they are doing the very same work because they are working from the same principles of empowering

"Empowerment, capacity building and so on - it sounds very foreign where I live"

people and leaving them decide what they would like to see happen in their areas. And those community development principles are held very dearly, like sacred beliefs, by the majority of people working in these projects. Would you see cause to dilute those?

É. Ó C.: In fact [community development lingo] was a foreign language to me, even though I'd been involved in community development for 25 years, all this thing about empowerment, capacity building and so on - it sounds very foreign where I live.

...The reality in a lot of rural areas is that there already is and always has been a huge ability to get things done. It's built into the whole structure of society.

...To those who say there is a great need for capacity building in rural Ireland, and there are people who need a huge amount of support and help - I'd say this: Daniel O'Connell set up the Catholic Association in the 1820s, the worst tragedy that ever befell this country no doubt was the Famine, but he had built up capacity if you want to call it that within the rural people. Within 50 years of the Famine, those who had emigrated had taken over the whole political system of America and those who had stayed at home had set up the organisations like Conradh na Gaelige and the GAA and they were set up by ordinary people. So I think there is a great native inherent ability within communities in Ireland, if we bring it forward and we stimulate

better way of doing it'

Interview with Allen Meagher, Editor

it within the communities in this regard.

A.M.: In theory, the way it is intended to work is that the communities go to the Department seeking funding to back their local project and they have to sign up to community development principles and, in general, they seem happy with that.

É. Ó C.: Aw, well, there are always people who will sign up to whatever you give them to sign up to and appear grateful. But if you don't have skills within a community, you have to buy the skills in or give the skills. In a lot of urban communities, because of social segregation, there isn't the same mix of skills within the communities as there is in rural areas.

What I found strange – and I'm talking now from my community development background – was this idea that we always had to be importing these skills from outside into rural areas.

A.M.: From what I have seen visiting projects, they are not bringing skills in from outside. A lot of development workers and co-ordinators are people who come from the communities they serve.

É. Ó C.: Ah, one of the great things about the co-ordinators is that they come from the community, or like I did, they become part of the community so that after a while they were no different from anyone else. But I just think that most rural communities that come to me just want things done, they actually believe that they have this capacity and they have the empowerment – they don't feel this great sense of alienation from the state, or they don't believe that they don't have access.

A.M.: Maybe not in rural areas, but..

É. Ó C.: But, this is what I am trying to emphasise – [is it wise] using the same model for a rural area where, for example, 50%, 60% or 70% of the young people go on to third-level education – and using that same model in an urban area where 1% of the people get to third-level education and there isn't the same level of access to skills and so on? – this is something that I have to look at as Minister.

A.M.: Has the Minister a rural bias?

É. Ó C.: No. The Minister is from Dublin 4.

A.M.: There would not be too many projects there.

É. Ó C.: Ringsend! ...I was brought up within a half-mile of this particular building here (on Mespil Road) and there are pockets of social deprivation around this area, there is also great affluence, but I know Dublin, I'm from Dublin and I'm very very conscious of the hidden Dublin that a lot of middle-class commentators in the newspapers seem to ignore. I am more than conscious of it and I am absolutely determined that that Dublin is going to get a fair day in the sun under my ministry. I know where I am going on rural development and I have my targets, I have articulated my views on that and the same thing with the Gaeltacht and the islands, but what I would like to leave as a major legacy after me in this Department is a

major impact on urban areas of social disadvantage.

A.M.: Do you have a master-plan or are you feeling your way, and happy to hear what people have to say before you make your decisions?

É. Ó C.: I always listen to what people have to say before making decisions. The way I tend to work is quite simple – I tend to have in my mind a clear view of where I want to go and then I break it down to the small segments, like you break up a jigsaw. But I hope by the time I am finished that the parts of the big jigsaw

"I always listen to what people have to say before making decisions"

make for a coherent picture. Writing down a plan in a very formalised fashion has the danger of taking away the flexibility you need to achieve things.

But I have quite a clear vision of where I want to go. I am now actually trying to work out exactly by what method I get there. And it is one about balanced development and one where everyone gets a fair share of opportunity.

And I would also hope to bring one other thing – and that is that we just work together and stop patronising people with disadvantage. I hate a patronising attitude. I sincerely believe that all people are equal, some people maybe need more assistance than others, but the first thing I always seek to create – and the greatest legacy I brought to the Joyce Country in my time there was that I convinced an area that quite frankly used to see themselves as an area of losers – I think they now believe that there are few places that would outsmart them now.

And I think they now believe that anything they put their mind at they can achieve.

That I think is the biggest legacy I left behind there. If I could leave behind the same legacy in the areas I have particular responsibility for in this ministry, that would make me very happy.

A.M.: Last question – Out of all the departments, this is an unusual one in that the power structure is set up where you have participative democracy at the ground level while you are here as Minister because of the representative democracy that operates in this country. You talked about balance and so on. The CDSPs have been meeting for the last couple of years, in different parts of the country, asking each other 'What will we do?', 'What is our strategy for gaining a voice nationally?' and they are going to come to you with a plan around Christmas time. The plan is two years in the making, everybody has been consulted, 800 people went to the meetings – more than half of them were volunteers. Are you somebody who believes in such consultation?

É. Ó C.: Consultation – ring me up tomorrow. Anybody. But one thing I would have to say is that, while there has to be formal consultations, I equally feel that it is any citizens right, even if they are not part of all these structures, to put their penny'sworth in and I have never refused to listen to anybody who chooses at any occasion to make a point to me, and if it's a good point I will take it equally on board.*

*** If you have a point to make and wish to call Minister Éamon Ó Cuiv, phone the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs on: 01-647-3000. If you have difficulty in reaching the Minister's ear, ask for his press secretary, Éadaoin Ní Mhongaile. The Department's address is: 43-49 Mespil Road, Dublin 4.**



● Staff from the Community and Voluntary Section of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, pictured with their new minister, Éamon Ó Cuiv, at a social gathering. Pictured standing (l.to.r.): Claire Walsh, Rhona Broderick, Paul Heaney, Sean Dooley, Minister Éamon Ó Cuiv, Jeanette Young, Donal Ryan, Orla de Burca (the Minister's private secretary), Kevin Casey and Angela O'Gorman. Kneeling: Shane Reynolds and Susan Scally.

Éamon always in trouble at school

- the new Minister deals with some personal questions

Allen Meagher: Were you ever in trouble in school?

Minister Éamon Ó Cuiv: Never out of trouble! Not in any serious trouble but I certainly would never have been the star pupil. I got through school alright, got through university but I always reckoned that if somebody was going to be in trouble, I'd be the one.

A.M.: Have you lost that habit since you left college?

É. Ó C.: (Laughs) I dunno. I always was fairly strong-willed and strong-minded and you need to be that in politics. And I have at times been known to express my view in a forthright manner and attract a certain amount of criticism for doing so. But I think it's a good thing. One of the things that I bring to politics is that I very, very firmly believe in what I am doing and, you know, I've committed a lifetime to it. But I also hope I have the sense of humour to also recognise that I'm not always right and I sometimes get it wrong.

A.M.: If the teacher was in the wrong, would you cause a stir in the class?

É. Ó C.: I wouldn't be one of these people who thought I knew better than the Taois.. ah, better than the teacher. And even if I did think so, when I went to school in the '60s you didn't articulate such views. In those ways, I wouldn't have answered back.

A.M.: Do you smoke?

É. Ó C.: No!

A.M.: Did you ever?

É. Ó C.: I did. I smoked the odd pack, but I was lucky never to get into the habit.

A.M.: I saw a programme on tv on Sunday about the 'special relationship' between the U.S. and Britain, and after their first meeting, Bush and Blair were asked did they really have anything in common? And they replied that they both, funnily enough, use Colgate toothpaste. And I was wondering...

É. Ó C.: ...what kind of toothpaste I use!/? Whatever package comes handy, whatever's there.

A.M.: You're not a Fiacla..

É. Ó C.: Oh, I have used it, I have used many kinds of brands. But I am one of these people who, if I go to buy it in a shop, I just buy it. If it's in the house, I use the nearest to hand. But the one thing I notice in my house, the one thing I never seem to be able to keep is a supply of socks. Endless purchases, but as soon as I turn around they seem to have disappeared. I don't know how it happens, but having four children, I have my suspicions.

A.M.: What was your favourite movie this year? Did you see one this year?

É. Ó C.: I did, but don't ask what it was! [It



● *Contrary to popular belief, the new Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs does indeed have a sense of humour. He is pictured here presenting Sile De Valera with a bunny rabbit, a cuddly sheep and a toy bus in case anyone needed a lift.*

was a subtitled film seen on family hols in the Czech Republic].

A.M.: Your non-Irish heroes/heroines?

É. Ó C.: I've a lot of people I admire. In historical terms, I've great time for Sir Thomas Moore. Also for Martin Luther King. They dedicated themselves to their causes and both used their great minds to grapple with problems and to articulate them and to make their case.

A.M.: Favourite music or band?

É. Ó C.: I'd listen to everything from Sean Nos to Ceili to Abba, Elvis...

A.M.: Would there be anything on the radio that would make you turn it off?

É. Ó C.: I'll put it this way - I don't turn on the pop stations.

A.M.: Your favourite comedian?

É. Ó C.: My favourite is the small guy in See You Byrne on TG4. To those who haven't seen it, they'd say 'Ah, typical, he's picked an Irish-language comedian.' I think if they actually saw the two series, they'd have seen that everything he did was incredibly funny. I just can't think of his name. ...My children recently bought copies of 'Yes, Minister' and 'Yes, Prime Minister' for my wife (and though I'd seen them before), now we get endless laughs looking at them.

There are grains of truth every now and again there and there are great lines in it. It's an exaggeration with a grain of truth and I like that kind of comedy. It's near enough to the truth to be credible and it's enough of an exaggeration to highlight the foibles of life.

A.M.: Any hidden talents?

É. Ó C.: No! I would not class myself as a great sport-person. I certainly can't draw. I certainly can't play music. I actually figure the only thing I'm any good at is the thing I'm at and that's politics.

A.M.: Do you do any sports or physical activity nowadays?

É. Ó C.: I would have up to this year - kicking football. My pastime now is going to the matches and watching them. I'm an avid follower of football and hurling but particularly football because it is the local game in our parish. That's what I spend my Sundays at.

A.M.: So how do you figure Galway will do in the All-Ireland Under-21s Football Final?

É. Ó C.: Well, I have a personal interest in that match because my younger son is a sub, but Dublin won't be an easy task... so I'm having to cheer for Galway against Dublin even though I'm a Dublin man.

The man who put photos on ballot papers

The stigma of being unable to read or write leads many people to become expert at hiding their embarrassing secret, even from their immediate family. Someone who knows first hand is Ernie Sweeney, a man now eagerly poised to take up third level education.

In a country where hundreds of thousands of adults are mortified by their lack of literacy skills, Ernie looms large as someone who faced his difficulties and overcame them. Summing up secretive lunchtime lessons during his late teens and early twenties, Ernie proudly describes how he made it "from the basics to the classics, from a broom cupboard to university."

He quotes from Benjamin Franklin and reveals an unending series of facts about the heritage and folklore of Castlebar, his hometown, including how he discovered an archaeological site which 'could be of huge national and international importance.' He now reads the very ground he walks upon!

Ernie is a veteran of the adult literacy struggle and taking the first step some thirty years ago left him "feeling like a teenager asking a girl out at a dance, only a million times worse."

He has been actively involved with NALA since its establishment in 1980, and even featured in the agency's TV programmes. His finest hour, "to date" he cryptically points out, was agitating for the change in our electoral system that resulted in candidates' photographs and party logos gracing ballot papers for the first time. The inspiration was a TV programme he watched about India, where each political party was represented by a symbol - the sun, or a tree, or an animal - to allow everyone, whether literate or not, to distinguish between the parties.

To appreciate what it would be to wake up without your literacy skills, go through an average day and see how many times you rely on your literacy skills, and think how you take them for granted. Then put yourself in those same situations, where you're unable to make sense of that jumbled mass of printed words, and try to imagine how that must feel. When 500,000 Irish people experience this daily to a greater or lesser extent, it's worth developing an empathy for their situation.

Rural and urban projects help spread literacy

- from Pléaraca Teo in Connemara to Lourdes in Dublin

By Declan Weir

Fact: Every fourth or fifth adult you meet will have some degree of difficulty with reading and writing. That's according to a recently published UN Human Development report which revealed that almost 23% of the Irish population is 'functionally illiterate'. In the words of NALA - the **National Adult Literacy Agency** - that means, in practical terms, "that half a million adults have difficulties reading the instructions on an aspirin packet, doing homework with their kids or filling in forms".

The aim of this year's **National Literacy Awareness Week** in September was to highlight the size and complexity of Ireland's adult literacy problem, reduce the stigma attached to having literacy difficulties, and encourage people to come forward for help with reading and writing. This year's theme focused specifically on Health and Literacy, and the difficulties people have filling in medical forms, reading medicine bottles or following directions in their local hospital or health centre.

NALA train and support literacy tutors throughout the country and run a soap-like television series to assist people in improving their literacy skills. The agency also work with government bodies, employers and local groups.

The nature of many of the country's **Community Development Projects** enables them to reach the people most in need of help, and encourage them to follow in the footsteps of thousands before them, to overcome the stigma, to enhance their lives. Tommy Byrne, NALA's Public Relations Officer, sees the issue of literacy training and awareness as "an ongoing process for many CDPs around the country, with NALA and the local VECs acting as support". From **south Connemara - where local CDP Pléaraca Teo** included both literacy and numeracy as part of the training for CE scheme participants - to **Lourdes Youth and Community Services in Inner City Dublin**, CDPs nationally are working with NALA. The work raises awareness and encourages adults with literacy difficulties to take the first step



● Declan Weir, regional reporter for the West.

towards dealing with those difficulties. As part of its work in the north inner city, Lourdes ensures that literacy training permeates everything to become an integral part of all their training programmes. Then people can see how relevant, and useful, improved literacy skills are to everyday situations, whether checking a mechanic's quote or a supermarket till receipt or reading their children a bedtime story.

Day-to-day adult literacy tuition is provided at a local level around the country, varying hugely from county to county. **West Mayo's Adult Literacy Organiser** Phylis Carney is delighted to have more tutors than students for the first time ever, and proud to reveal the improved facilities at Castlebar. Comfortable surroundings might not seem such a major issue, but it's a positive move away from the days of skulking around and encourages people to come forward for help, one of the key tasks for Phylis and others working in adult literacy. Like Ernie Sweeney (featured in the accompanying report) many adults who come forward have already been labelled as failures, and are painfully aware that literacy difficulties are often seen as a sign of incompetence or low intelligence, so it is important to provide surroundings in which people can hold their heads up while working to resolve those difficulties.

Finally - according to the experts - those of us fortunate enough to enjoy the ability to read and write shouldn't get too smug just yet, as literacy is a skill we should practice regularly, or risk losing. Simple things will do the trick; like reading a book instead of watching TV, learning a new word or two every day for a week or a month or a year, visiting a bookshop and a library more often, or even volunteering to train as a literacy tutor.

For further information on NALA, contact Tommy Byrne, NALA, 76 Lower Gardiner Street, Dublin 1. Tel: 01-809-9195. E-mail: tbyrne@nala.ie

For information on becoming a Literacy Tutor contact NALA on 01-855-4332, e-mail: literacy@nala.ie or your local VEC Literacy Scheme, which can be found in the 'Schemes Directory' on NALA's website (www.nala.ie) or in your local telephone book.



CORK CITY RUNS 9 LITERACY SCHEMES

Just as an example, Cork city has nine literacy schemes available. The county has 21 more schemes run through Vocational Education Committees with NALA support. To find out more, a county-by-county map of the country on NALA's website provides all the details. Cork city's schemes are as follows:

- ALTRUSA/V.E.C. Literacy Scheme.
- ABLES Adult Literacy Scheme.
- Ballyphenane - Read Write Now.
- Bishopstown Adult Literacy Scheme.
- Cork Traveller Adult Literacy.
- Farranree Literacy Scheme.
- Mahon Adult Literacy Scheme.
- Mayfield - Write On.
- Write Together-Cork Northside Adult Literacy Scheme.

NALA's mission is to ensure all adults with reading and writing difficulties have access to high quality literacy provision. The agency has a lot of work to do - a recent study found that only 4% of the half million adults who require literacy tuition are receiving it.

FORUM, based in Letterfrack in North-West Connemara, is one of the longest-established of the 130-plus projects administered through the Community Development Programme. It has received funding from the programme and from other statutory agencies since 1994. FORUM covers a huge area of almost 800 square kilometres and FORUM is considered a model of success. 'Changing Ireland' reporter for the West Region, Declan Weir, paid a visit.

FORUM – 11 years on from 'bleakest poverty' report

By Declan Weir

THE vibrant buzz among community groups in Connemara today is a far cry from April 1991 when FORUM first published 'North-West Connemara: A Baseline Study of Poverty'. The study revealed "a bleak picture of the social and economic marginalisation of North West Connemara and its impact on the lives of the most disadvantaged households and groups" and concluding that the region was "on virtually every key variable, in a much worse position than the rest of Ireland."

■ FOUR PRIORITIES

To tackle this disadvantage and exclusion, FORUM set targets and went to work, focusing on four priorities: unemployed and underemployed people; older people; women; and education and training. FORUM's aim was, *and still is*, to develop local initiatives to improve the lives of the people of North West Connemara, especially those who are most disadvantaged. Also in its sights are the problems associated with rural poverty, the integration of socially excluded groups into social, economic and political life, and bringing together communities, voluntary organisations and public agencies into working partnerships. Not too different from most other Community Development Projects, just that FORUM had a head-start on other parts of the country, being one of the longest-established projects.

■ CE CUTBACKS THREAT

Nonetheless, the imminent national changes in Community Employment Schemes could have a major, negative impact on the



● *Young and not-so-young sharing time together.*



● *Nancy Taylor of Ballinakill Active Age Group teaching lace-work to an eager Cleggan National School pupil.*

work carried out by FORUM. Director Johnny Coyne points to a possible loss of 13 places across the 3 CE schemes administered by the programme, but hopes are high that the enormous benefits to the communities of North West Connemara will be taken into account by the powers that be before any definite decisions are made.

■ ENVIABLE REPUTATION

Originally set up as one of 27 model action projects under the Third EC Poverty Programme that spanned the late 1980s and early 1990s, FORUM went on to build itself an enviable reputation in intervening years. By ensuring that it actually works *for* and *with* local people, and in helping their community groups with funding and planning, FORUM has indelibly left its mark as a successful CDP.

Census figures from 1996 (the corresponding details of Census 2002 are not yet available) revealed that the proportion of persons aged 65 or over in North West Connemara was 16% of the total population, which was significantly higher than the national figure of 11%.

Taking this into account, work with the elderly makes up a sizeable portion of FORUM's work, and one of the best examples of this work is the Social Care programme, operating since December 1997. This provides a much needed support network to the elderly – meals on wheels, care companions, laundry, lunch clubs,

housing repairs. It is simultaneously a source of important and highly valued work to those taking part in the delivery of the services, thus ensuring that Community Development principles are used to create employment.

■ FORUM BROADCASTS

Other priority work in recent years has seen FORUM providing support to people with disabilities & their carers through partnership with the Western Health Board, Galway Rural Development and Comhairle. To get its message across it publishes a quarterly magazine and produces and presents weekly programmes on the local community radio station – Connemara Community Radio, also situated in the village of Letterfrack.

Ongoing and future plans include the provision of social housing, recreational facilities* and enterprise units; CERT training courses focusing on food service, bar food cookery and reception skills; security systems for older people, and co-ordination of the transport service for Clifden Daycare, again in partnership, this time with FÁS and the Western Health Board.

Contact: FORUM – the North-West Connemara Rural Development Project, Letterfrack, Connemara, Co. Galway. Tel: 095-41116/41117. Fax: 095-41198.



● *Mary Nee, Cashel, Co. Galway shows a young student how to knit cottages*



● Two participants in the Inter-Generational Festival receiving certificates from John Coyne, Forum director, and Kathleen Aspel Mortimer, festival coordinator.

800 Connemara people crack the age divide

By Declan Weir

IT'S a common misconception that the young and the not so young (or the old and the not so old, depending on your viewpoint) have very little in common. And it's about time that this misconception - like many tried, tested and totally incorrect notions - was finally and firmly knocked on the head. At least that's what the general consensus was during the summer of 2001 in Connemara, when members of Ballinakill Active Age Club, with the help of FORUM - the local Community Development Programme - decided to take matters into their own hands.

Traditions and handiwork that were once an integral part of everyday Irish life were being consigned to a future as part of interactive museum displays, yet many of the practitioners of such handiwork were still alive and well and living in the community. Forty of them got together with twice as many schoolchildren from the area with a view to transferring the skills they'd carried through life to a younger generation, in order to keep those skills local, and more importantly, alive.

As a result, the inaugural Intergenerational Festival was born during summer 2001, and

was such a success that they decided to do it all over again this year. Despite record rainfall, dismal skies and a noticeable lack of sunshine, Ballinakill Active Age Club members - this time their numbers bolstered by many of their contemporaries from other local villages and parishes - once again took to the highways and boreens that skirt Galway's Atlantic coast.

The summer months of 2002 saw a flurry of visits to local national schools, where they delivered more than a dozen demonstrations of basket-making, spinning, knitting, crochet, lace-making and patchwork. Their young hosts and hostesses then repaid the favour with music, dance, stories and drama. Most importantly, everyone was allowed the time and the opportunity to get to know each other.

For the second year in succession, the Intergenerational Festival was a key feature of North West Connemara's summer's calendar, and this year it coincided with Bealtaine - a national month-long celebration of creativity in older age. With all the parents and others who helped to organise the events, the project involved a total of 800 people - a hugely impressive number when you consider the area's population is less than 10,000 - and culminated in a huge party in June at the Alcock and Brown Hotel in Clifden.



● The Minister Éamon Ó Cuív with members of the Ballinakill Active Age Group at the launch of the first Inter-Generational Festival.



● Mary Keane, encouraging boys to take up knitting.

Outreach worker helped 'bridge the gap'

All the signs suggest that the Intergenerational Festival in Connemara will become a regular celebration of just how much the generations actually have in common. This development is greatly welcomed by Kathleen Aspel Mortimer, co-ordinator of the Intergenerational Project and FORUM's Outreach Social Care Worker.

Many of the elderly people of North West Connemara have come to see Kathleen as a real friend, someone who genuinely has their interests and their concerns very much at heart - this revealed itself during the party, with a constant stream of people greeting her and congratulating her on a job well done.

In between pressing the flesh and having photos taken Kathleen remarked on "the huge amount of work involved in bringing it all together." She played down her own role, saying, "I hope the communities themselves will get even more involved in organising future events, and draw on the resources of the elderly who live in their own village."

For Kathleen, the best aspect of the Intergenerational Festival was the effect it had on the sometimes poor perceptions each generation had of the other. "That," she said, before disappearing into the crowd, "is certainly something worth building on."

'Bridging the Gap' was the rather apt name chosen for the Intergenerational festival. It could just as easily be adopted as FORUM's own mission statement as the CDP continues to work to bring together the elderly and the young - and those in between - as well as strengthening the connections between a scattered network of isolated, but often interdependent rural communities.



● Concentrating on new skills.

'Changing Ireland' editor, Allen Meagher, visited the Philippines earlier this year. As well as being a holiday, he used the opportunity to talk to two Irish people working on separate 'missions' to improve people's lives – one a community development worker a year into his job and the second a Catholic missionary priest there 34 years. Allen first met Peter O'Hara, from Limavady, Co. Derry, while the pair were volunteer development workers in The Gambia, West Africa. Fr. Allen O'Brien is his uncle and left Ireland 'for the missions' when the author was only a few months old. Also featured is an interview with Marie Hainsworth who works for Holywell Support Agency. She previously worked as a volunteer in The Gambia and in Uzbekistan and she compares her experience of working in community development in Ireland with overseas.

If 'developed' was defined by happiness instead of economics

- then the Philippines would be the richest country in the world

PETER O'Hara, a community forestry worker, has lived outside Ireland for most of his working life. Like many community development workers in Ireland, he worked as a volunteer in the 'South' or Developing world. And he's still there – currently working in the Philippines – sometimes working out of a modern office, and at other times working in remote villages in the forests.

Peter aspires to come back to work in Ireland eventually as he believes the source of the most serious developmental problems facing the 'South' come from the West. He is engaged in the type of career that often leads back to a job working with projects operating under the Community Development Support Programmes umbrella. Here he answers questions on his current role.

How do you work with communities – use community development principles, etc?

In my line of work, what is becoming increasingly ridiculous to me is the idea that – because you spend 5 years at University in Europe you would suddenly have something to 'teach' villagers. Because they sometimes have *hundreds* of years of accumulated experience of looking after their natural resources.

As a foreigner though, the crazy thing is that I can open more doors than a poor local villager, so I use that advantage pragmatically, trying to enable the voiceless to have a voice in forest policy. Often forest policy in countries such as the Philippines is a legacy of the colonial past. So the state often has centralised rights over the forest in order 'to protect the trees from the people'. This took community rights over the forests away and with it went the motivation and rationale for the community to invest in forest management.

This policy has enabled some of those in power to become very public protectors of the forest and at the same time very private exploiters. This 'protect the trees from the (poor) people' policy worldwide has been disastrous for forests and communities and has resulted in much local wisdom on forest management being devalued or lost. Community forestry work today is trying to enable communities to have rights again, in a way going back to the future. Sadly though, there is often no forest left to return to.



● Peter O'Hara with Allen Meagher in the Philippines.

What motivated you to get into international community forestry?

The motivation to work with community forestry I think is a red thread going all the way back to my childhood, the feeling of the importance of a connection between people and nature.

From very early on I always felt that a disconnection between people and nature was very unhealthy. Growing up in Limavady in Co. Derry we have a wonderful forest park, the Roe Valley Country Park. To us it was a wonderful wilderness playground.

I later studied forestry and I worked a little in N. Ireland in forestry (in the worst case, one man digging a hole, 2 men watching and one making the tea) and it wasn't long before I was dreaming of foreign lands. Since then I've worked in Gambia, Sweden and now here in the Philippines.

What is it about forests that are important to communities?

Communities in many parts of the world still live very sustainable lifestyles and see the importance of living within their means and of co-existing with nature. Over many generations, they have built up complex management systems and traditions to maintain that harmony. They respect the forest as the essential centre of their world which provides food, fuel, clean water, shelter, medicine, spiritual needs as

well as an income.

The gap between what you set out to achieve and what you actually achieve?

I set out I think with a hunger to find out what development work was all about. I think now I have many more questions rather than answers concerning development work.

'Development?' is probably the biggest question I have. Wouldn't a ranking list of 'developed' countries look a bit different if instead of using GNP or whatever as the indicator, it was based on something like a 'resource use/happiness' ratio? Then I may suddenly find that being in the Philippines, I'm in one of the most developed countries in the world!

To be cynical it seems that western governments are very public, yet modest, assistants of poor people by way of development assistance. At the same time, they are impoverishing them through privately supporting unfair and undemocratic trading regimes.

How many hours a week do you work on average?

Maybe 40-60+. Development work is a bit of a curse in some ways, it becomes so interwoven with ethics, personality etc. it is hard to leave it behind after work.

What are the rewarding aspects of the work?

Spontaneity, interest etc., work feels fresh because you never know what is around the corner.

Greatest success to date, or ambition if you like?

I'm the wrong person to ask what I've achieved. My ambition would be to work in 'development' work in the West, as I think that is where many of the causes of the world's problems lie. Maybe a dream, but one day I like to think that we could have community forestry in Ireland. That would be nice, having community owned, managed and used forests at the core of a more sustainable and connected 'changing Ireland'.

• Contact: I.I.R.R., Y.C. James Yen Center, Silang, Cavite 4118, Philippines.
Tel. 0063-46-414-2417.
E-mail: Peter.OHara@iirr.org

Filipino responsibilities

Fr. Allen O'Brien, a native of Midleton, Co. Cork, went to the Philippines as a missionary with the Redemptorists in 1968 and has worked there since.

"The thrust of the Catholic Church's work in the Philippines is towards building basic Christian communities," he explained. "The way the church sees its mission is in terms of building up communities, beginning at local level."

Community development, he added, was one way of offsetting the negative impacts of globalisation.

"If people keep their own culture and traditions alive, then this gives people a way of supporting one another. But there is a need for structure and organisation and the church helps there."

In the southern Philippines city of Davao, where Fr. O'Brien is currently based, the Redemptorists support an elderly day-care project, income-generating projects, youth projects and a credit union styled association where members of the community "shoulder the responsibility".

"Our motivation is to have people fully alive. According to St. John, chapter 10, verse 10: 'I have come that you may have life, life in all its fullness'. It is not just about life-after-death – the church's mission is also to help people to live a full life. This has always been the church's approach, but it has tended to be very institutionalised in its approach, for example, with hospitals and schools. Community development is closer to the needs of the people and they are the ones who take responsibility for the projects. It is a more participative approach," noted Fr. O'Brien.

Fr. O'Brien's personal motivation for staying at his work as a priest in a country far from where he was born and reared is: "the Gospel in terms of Jesus going around doing good. His mission was to help people to live life to the full. I'd see myself with the same kind of mission. Other motivations are that you see the real needs of the people and are able to respond in some way."

"There is a lot of poverty, a lot of unemployment and under-employment in the Philippines. The education system doesn't seem to prepare people for developing a just way of life. While it is easy to blame the politicians, the church itself too needs to be more aware and to become a church of the poor. In name it is, but it needs to become more so in reality."



● Fisherwomen and fishermen taking in the nets at 7am on a beach on Luzon Island, the Philippines.

From Uzbekistan to Holywell Support Agency

Marie Hainsworth works in as a policy worker with Holywell Support Agency in the North-West. Based in Donegal, Marie spent years as a volunteer development worker in The Gambia, West Africa, and later in Uzbekistan in Central Asia. Yet, development work in Ireland "is not too much different" to in developing countries, she believes.

"I would have thought that Ireland could not have the same problems, being in the rich West, but poverty here, though it is 'relative poverty', is as bad in terms of poverty of opportunities. There is as much need for community development here as overseas. There is a huge amount of work that needs to be done here. You don't look at your own country with the same critical eye until you come back from being immersed in community development work in another country."

"A lot of the political decisions made by the West, as well as being hard on developing countries, also effect Ireland detrimentally. And internal political decisions in Ireland are also often hard on people."

"Community development in Ireland compared to overseas is very similar in terms of the restrictions on the work local groups can do because of the structures that they have to work through. The local bureaucracy can make it very difficult to get anything done – be in Donegal or Uzbekistan."

"Community groups here, for example, are stuck with an inflexible system. It is a big problem here because groups are not able to access

basic funding because of the structures they have to deal with – the local health boards, county councils and other local authorities, regional committees, partnerships and so on – all of them basically. "Unfortunately, community groups here are not interacting with the original bodies who initiated funding programmes because the programmes are administered by people who don't understand or who don't have the vision that the initiators did."

"On the plus side, one similarity between development work in Ireland and in The Gambia is that with both being small countries, there is good access to T.D.s and government departments. Access to information is therefore easier and the system is a bit more informal. You'd never have that in a bigger country like England."

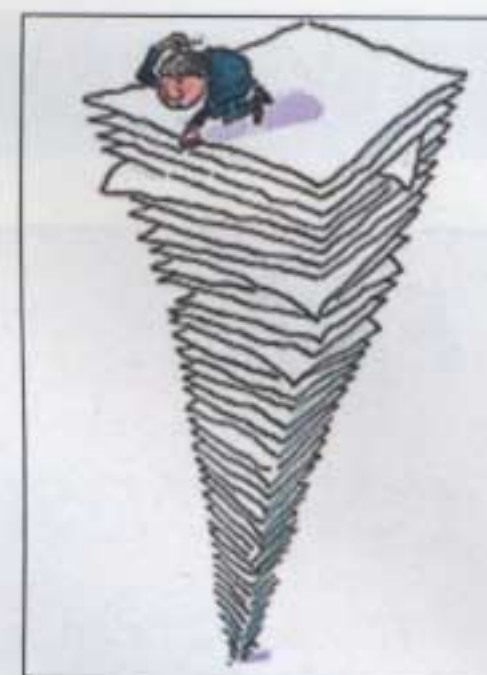
"The CDSPs is a brilliant programme because development requires community groups who dedicate themselves to looking at specific issues in their area – and the CDSPs supports that," said Ms. Hainsworth.

If she had a criticism of the CDSPs, it would be that there is a gap between carrying out consultations with people and following up with the necessary actions. In Africa, she explained, there is often more of a willingness to take ownership of projects.

She is glad she went overseas and would consider returning – perhaps on retirement. Obviously, she does not imagine that the need for community development is likely to disappear.

Burn-out among community workers

Lorcan Brennan investigates stress levels in development work



FOR community workers everywhere, voluntary or paid, starting back into another active season can be a daunting task. September can be a bitter month. Memories of summer months fast become a blur, replaced by endless catch-up meetings and soaring commitments. Unfortunately for some, the coming months will turn out to be much more than just tiring.

Within a short time of returning to work, they may find enthusiasm for important causes draining away, difficulty with concentrating and with communicating their thoughts. They might experience headaches, stomach problems, and other symptoms rising up to the surface of their daily lives. If so, it will certainly be time to stop and take important stock or worse could be down the line. There are solutions!

BURNED OUT

More people have burned out than are willing to talk publicly about it. For development worker Peter (not his real name) all the above signs and more began to plague his life after returning to work for a fourth season in community development.

"Driving to work those first days and weeks of holiday was a nightmare. My stomach was in knots and I felt exhausted from sleeping fretfully," he said. "No matter how much I washed my face during the day the tiredness seeped back into my skin within minutes."

Peter had always loved community work and, being outgoing and a people-person, he found it confusing: "I had a work environment that had

become "home from home, working with people I had grown to respect and love, yet still I could feel so frustrated and so agitated."

With hindsight, three years on, he can now see his frustration and anxiety came from a combination of over-work, personal upsets not being dealt with and *not caring for self* through support and leisure.

FULFILLING WORK

"I loved the work in community development. The excitement and challenge of working with people who were taking charge of their lives and community was amazing. What work could be more fulfilling?" asked Peter. "Unfortunately for me hard things were happening personally and my not slowing down to deal with them really overstretched me mentally and emotionally."

In Peter's case, when he eventually stopped to examine his work and lifestyle, it meant some big changes had to be made. With support around making his decision he moved jobs and began building in better time-management, support structures and leisure into his new lifestyle.

Unfortunately Peter's story, showing many of the signs associated with what has come to be termed "burnout" is not exceptional in the field of community work. Across hundreds of communities, workers find themselves at some stage in, or close to, Peter's situation.

Katrina Shields in her excellent book, 'In The Tiger's Mouth: An Empowerment Guide For Social Action' writes:

"Burnout is a downward spiral. When we cut ourselves off from sources of nourishment, be they the natural environment, loved ones or from inner spiritual sources of renewal and inspiration, the problems compound. Burnout is kindled by taking on too much, too intensely, for too long"

Anyone working at the coalface of community development knows how easy it is to forget self through taking on *too much, too intensely for too long*. It seems to be an occupational hazard associated with community involvement and one needing to be checked at all times through ongoing support and where possible, supervision. If not unfortunately, many good people will continually be lost from community involvement for life, through sheer exhaustion.

STRESS AUDIT

Unfortunately burnout doesn't just happen to individuals but can also happen within groups. Anna O' Kelly, of Stress Management Ireland, writes:

"People are finding that they can no longer ignore the impact of stress on their physical and mental well being. Through Stress Management Training they are realizing their true potential without the hassle". Anna goes on to say that groups who use her service often discover a range of issues arise as a result of stress audit and stress risk analyses. "These include bullying in the workplace, assertiveness issues, unrealistic deadlines and personality clashes. When not addressed these have led to burnout, absenteeism and various illnesses."

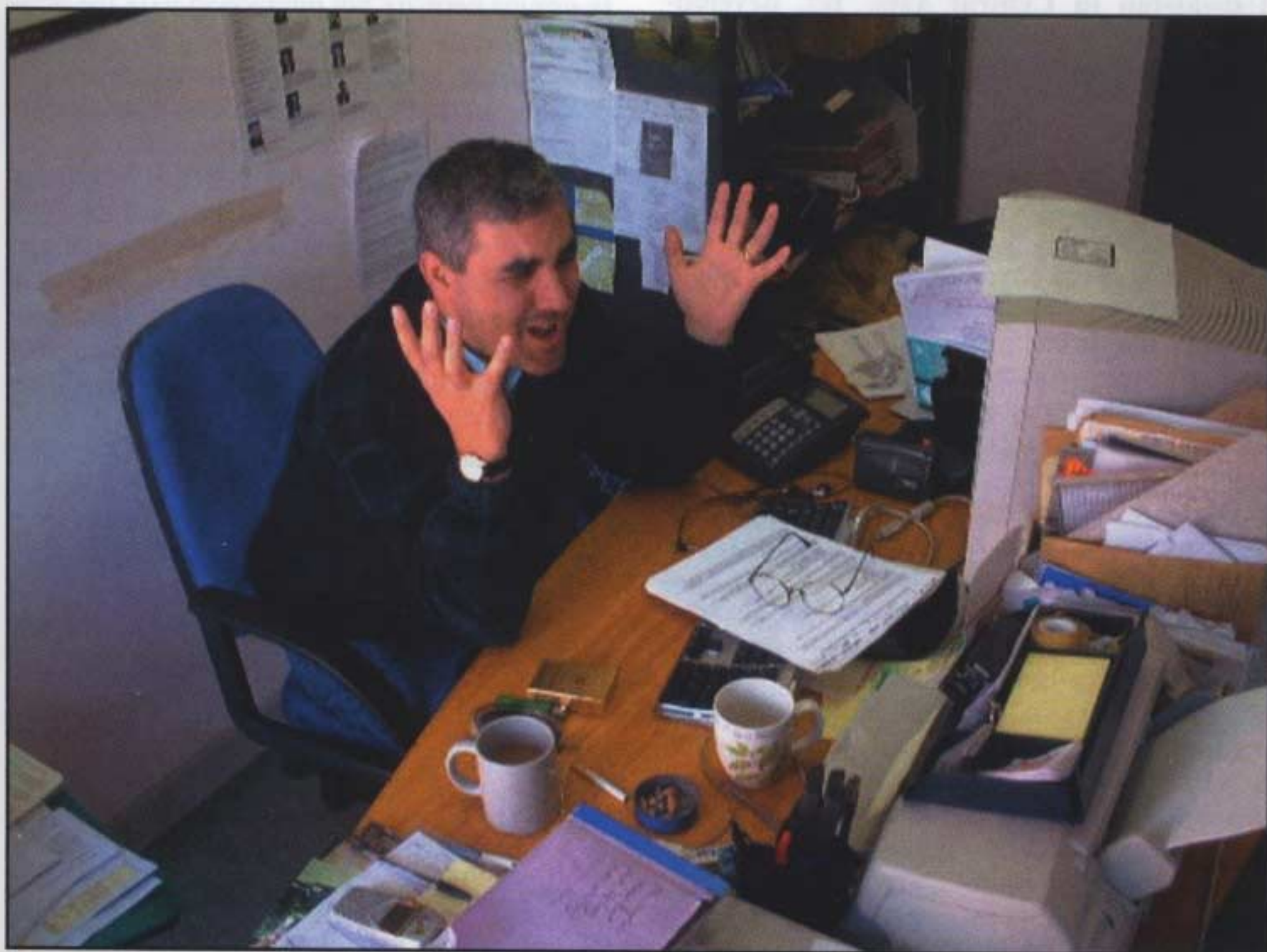
While starting a new season working in community development, it is probably a good idea to examine the stress factors at work in the hope of shaving back stress factors and building in tangible ways of caring for groups and individuals within our working practise.

Evonne Rand, quoted in 'In The Tiger's Mouth' puts it well and is hard-hitting around the need to care for self.

"I am struck repeatedly by the degree to which people who are committed to 'good work' to make the world a better place to live in, do not include themselves as valid environmental concern. If you are saving the world and killing yourself (even passively by self neglect) you will not be effective in your work."

Finally, when starting work this season, if within a short time you are feeling overtaxed emotionally, physically exhausted or unable to cope well with everyday situations. Don't let it go. Instead, stop. Take time, and action.

For More Information: Stress Management Ireland, 10 Royal Terrace East, Dun Laoghaire, Dublin. Phone/Fax: 01 280 8449. Or visit your local library for information.



● 'What am I doing in this place!?'

SOME BETTER WAYS OF SELF CARING:

- **Make Space:** Go somewhere quiet, take pen and paper and list your worries and anxieties. Write out all your present commitments and responsibilities. Try to identify things most responsible for your present state and ask which are most in need of drastic change. Write also your strengths, skills and resources that have come to your aid in the past. Use them.
- **Cut Back:** Decide on things that you can let go of from your present cluttered state. Making more space is important for you and will create inner space to make more important decisions, if need be.
- **Pass The Work:** Learn to say NO and share out the work that you may not necessarily need to do. Sometimes we convince ourselves that unless we do it, it won't be done right. This inner philosophy makes our world a busy place and certainly leads to feelings of over-work and isolation. So pass it on and trust it will be done well.
- **Care For Self:** If you had a physical illness you would care for self. Well the needs are the same, good food, good friends, family support and relaxation with an interesting book or video (not work related).

For Peter, caring for self was the first step in the right direction and knowing when and where to ask for support was vital in that process.

"In my case I almost let it go too long, the exhaustion was very deep, so deep I really wasn't sure where to start," he said. "A friend I trusted suggested some outside support might be helpful, a place to go to talk everything through, to find out how I really felt about things. I took his advice and it made all the difference. What I learned was that asking for and accepting help can really put frustration, anxiety, exhaustion and even loneliness in their proper little place – the past."

A volunteer without time for lunch-breaks

MARGARET Casey recently took maternity leave, but no doubt she looks forward to returning to the fray. Ms. Casey works both as a part-time paid worker and a volunteer with the Limerick Travellers Development Group (a CDP). From 9.30am to 2pm she is a paid worker and from 2 to 6pm and sometimes at night, she works as a volunteer. In effect, she is being paid half-wages for working a 40+ hour week. Indeed, many community workers are in a similar situation to her – where the paid and the volunteer work merges and blurs.

She was at her desk at 4pm when 'Changing Ireland' called to interview her.

Asked had she taken a lunch break, she smiled like someone caught doing something wrong.

"No! I had a number of phone calls to make. I got the girls to bring me up a sandwich. I just had a lot of things to do."

"I live for this kind of work," explained Ms. Casey. "It's like nourishing a plant, it keeps me going and I get a lot of joy from it," she said.

But the work does stress her.

"I like the challenge, right, and I think it's great to work with your own community, but not to live with them (at the same time)," she urged. "Whether you are a Traveller or settled – if you live and work in your own community you are up against a lot of challenges."

"In my role as a women's development worker, a lot of people would call to my door at night-time and you need to draw the line between social time and community development work. You need to be straight with people and say that to them."

"Before I would have picked up the phone and rang help-lines when individual women called with problems. But now I am able to say to the women that I can't make the phone call for them (though I'd direct them)."

"You get a lot of hassle for that. People say to you 'You're the worst worker I've ever seen in my life' or 'You were grand till you went to college and now you're out with your big ideas' or 'You're getting a big wage for doing nothing.' A lot of people would think I'm on a very big wage and wouldn't believe that I do half or more of it voluntary."

"I think that working with your own

community can be one of the most satisfying, one of the most challenging and one of the most difficult jobs that you could ever do," she stated.

Ms. Casey used to be very angry at the discrimination by settled people against Travellers. She wanted to "right the world" by herself, but she developed a healthier approach over her nine years working with the Limerick project and especially through completing a three-year, part-time Diploma in Youth and Community Development (at Maynooth).

"You have to understand that what you are doing is about collective action, it's about fighting to achieve things with a group of people, it's not about you doing it all as a community worker."

"The course helped me to understand what community work was about. It wasn't about me doing stuff for people, it is about me empowering people to do stuff for themselves and challenging statutory agencies with the community. Before I did the course, I would have thought differently," she added.

As part of the course, Ms. Casey did a placement with the community development project in Moyross, Limerick. "I felt very relaxed because it was just a job for me – the way work should be. It was the first time I had a job outside a Traveller project."

"I was the first Traveller to work as women's development worker with the Limerick Travellers (where she started nine years ago). I broke the mould. And Travellers thought I wouldn't be able to do it. Looking back now, I realise, they had never before seen a Traveller in a position like that. It used to be all settled people held those positions – as development workers, support workers, etc. I was the first. It's like being the first man in a community to mind a child."

"If I was doing it all again, I would still start off again working with my own community. As for the future, I would prefer be a woman's development worker or work on domestic violence issues outside the project."

She wants to work with women as an excluded group in their own right. And when she returns from maternity leave, the world awaits her! Whether or not it pays her in cash for all her work is a question for another day.

'Community Connections' heads for the hills

- as management committees meet up

By Sandy Holland and Martin Reading

IN June of this year the management committee of 'Community Connections' Community Development Project (CDP) headed off on a Networking weekend to visit two other CDPs in the Northwest. Based in Blacklion in the western tip of Cavan, Community Connections is involved in a number of initiatives in the Cavan, Leitrim and Fermanagh border area including Carers' groups, Active Age groups, Rural Transport and Information Development. The project has been in existence for just over 11 years now.

Over the years the management committee at Community Connections has placed a high value on working at a practical level with the manage-

Just as well since Japanese style workshops haven't come into fashion yet in CDSPs circles!

ment committees of other projects and this has been reflected in the work the project has done in this respect in the Northwest region. Positions are held at regional and at national level under the Community Development Support Programmes.

After some background work had been done, checking out the most appropriate projects to visit, the weekend was arranged and accommodation booked. Two members of staff accompanied the committee, most of whom were able to find the time to make the trip.

The first project they visited was the South West Donegal Communities Partnership, based in Killybegs, a CDP covering - you guessed it - South West Donegal. The project is focusing its efforts on transport difficulties, information services and, in the longer-term, the development of resource and training centres.

The visit took the form of two sessions, an informal social evening on the Friday night and a more structured workshop on the Saturday morning. The social evening on the Friday night was a nice opportunity for the groups to get to know each other socially as well as discussing the experience of being involved in a CDP and the common areas of work. However, when evaluating the weekend, it was found that a short, more formal meeting sharing information from the two projects would have been a more useful way to kick off the exchange - we'll bear that in mind for future visits.

The Saturday morning workshop consisted of an exchange of information on the common areas of work between the two projects and revolved mainly around transport, the trials and tribulations of developing a social economy project and the sometimes confusing local government structures that exist in Donegal.

After lunch with the South West Donegal group it was back on the road again and a journey over the hills, with some stunning scenery, to Dungloe to meet with The Rosses CDP management committee. This CDP covers a wide and rural area in the west of the county including the island of Aranmore with its population of around 700. The committee has been in existence for around 3 years and members are at the stage of finalising funding arrangements and recruiting workers. Although they now have an office space secured, the committee had to borrow the chairs so we could hold the workshop - just as well since Japanese style workshops haven't



● Pictured during their recent networking weekend in Killybegs are members of the management committees and staff of Community Connections CDP and South West Donegal Communities Partnership CDP (L to R): Michael Lyon; Sarah Maguire; Clarrie Pringle; Tomas MagSamhrain; Michael McLoughlin; Sandy Holland; Rosemary Kerrigan and Gearoid MacEochaidh.

come into fashion yet in CDSPs circles!

The exchange took the form of a fairly informal workshop looking at the experience of being part of a CDP management committee. The workshop was particularly refreshing as it was characterised by openness and frankness about the difficulties of being part of a CDP committee as well

Focusing on: "The trials and tribulations of developing a social economy project and the sometimes confusing local government structures that exist in Donegal"

as the good aspects to the work. After a fruitful discussion the groups went for a meal, which was a lovely way to continue the discussion they had had in the workshop in a more social setting.

On the Sunday morning, the management committee from Community Connections held a workshop to document some of the learning from the weekend and to look at how the weekend had gone. This was a very useful exercise and helped to keep the visit focused. One of the positive aspects identified was the amount of time spent 'talking' to people about their projects, the difficulties, the good points and the practicalities concerning the work. Very often you can fall into the way of visiting 'things', whether it's offices, resource centres, community centres or the scenery of the project area. There was a real value in having the space and the time to 'talk' to other people working in the same field as ourselves.

Overall, the weekend was a constructive visit and for the most part the format worked very well. The weekend was also an opportunity to re-emphasise the value and importance of recognising the voluntary contributions that management committee members make to projects. There was the opportunity for a real exchange of information and experience and a rekindled appetite for project-to-project exchanges and collaborative working.

Contact: Community Connections, Killycarney, Blacklion, Co.Cavan. Tel: 072 53321. Fax: 072 53320.
E-mail: info@communityconnections.ie

Take a break

August is the holiday season for most volunteers and workers involved in community work. 'Changing Ireland' regional reporter **Lorcan Brennan** realised a life-time dream this year when he and his wife bought a caravan and headed to France. He wasn't the only one - Kilkenny Butt's Men's Group also organised a camping holiday. Caravan or camping holidays, argues Lorcan, a development worker with the South East Men's Network, is the only way to go for community activists!

I'VE been reading about them for years, wishing I could be there. 'A family-run, long-established site overlooking the lower lake, set in wooded background making a perfect holiday location' or again 'A quiet site on the banks of the river and on the edge of the mountains, an ideal touring base, close to town, with on-site trout fishing and much to do'. The brochures are small and compact, filled with photographs, always situated in or close to lovely places that promise relaxation and outdoor fun. For years I've read about them, promising myself, half-heartily that someday soon I would head away caravanning.

The opportunity did come. In a round about way, I not only ended up visiting these wonderful places, I even bought a caravan, for a bargain. By accident, I heard of a caravan for sale. *Hand on my heart I bought it for £500.* Needing some work to be sure but a caravan nonetheless, and there my adventures really took off. Adventures in the great outdoors, where time was forgotten and long relaxing days away didn't mean costing heaven.

Ironically, for many people, especially with young families holidays can be a problem. The PRICE problem I mean. Lets face it. Not all



● "With camping and caravanning you're never far from the great outdoors" as shown by members of Gorey Youth Needs, Co. Wexford, seen here on caravan exchange holiday in Scotland.

boats were lifted by the rising tide of the Celtic Tiger and we all know people, including ourselves, where it's still just not practical or affordable to pass through an airport, family in hand, to reach relaxation in sunnier climes. The fact that we can't go where the big brochures point should not leave us discouraged for beneath our very nose is a better way.

Having bought and restored our own caravan over winter months my wife and I were eager for the road when summer sniffed around. We packed our belongings, hooked up and headed

for wide-open spaces. And it was fantastic. Would it be true to say, HOLIDAY OF A LIFETIME? Sure thing! Everything I had dreamed about browsing through the yearly caravanning brochure came true. Even the misty morning of our last day couldn't dampen the thrill of being parked at the heart of nature yet close to the essentials of civilization.

So as a fully paid-up convert to a new way of holidaying I'm telling you now. *Start saving now, and not for Christmas, and never again say, "We couldn't afford to go" because camping and caravanning needn't cost an arm and a leg.*

For more information contact: Irish Caravan & Camping Council, PO Box 4443, Dublin 2 Fax: 00 353 98 28237. Email: info@camping-ireland.ie Website: www.camping-ireland.ie To buy or rent a motorhome (car and caravan in one) check www.motorhome-irl.co.uk (source of photo on this page).

Lorcan's Camper Tips:

- Don't go to far for your first trip in case you forget essentials, something goes wrong or you discover you hate the great outdoors.
- When you don't want to wash up after breakfast, buy those little boxes of cereals and pour the milk into the waxy wrapping (it doesn't leak) then you can eat straight from the box without having to use a dish.
- To keep your beer cool when camping, make sure you drink it all before it gets warm. (Hmm, so Lorcan didn't exactly follow the example of the Butt's Men's Group! - Ed.)



● Caravanning can be a cheap and cheeful way to spend holidays.

Kilkenny Men dry and happy in tents

The Butts Men's Community Group in Kilkenny are ingenious. On a number of occasions recently the group have organised successful camping away trips, not only for themselves but also for their partners and children from the surrounding community. Long time voluntary community activists, **Paul Clifford, Jimmy Long and Kieran Phelan**, planned the camping expeditions with help from other members of the group. Tents were hired and bought, ground rules and ground sheets put in place and the rest was just fabulous fun. According to Jimmy, "The idea just came from chatting together about how we might have a holiday without costing the sky and where the kids and partners could have a relaxing time."

"Through chatting it over and drawing up a fairly detailed approach to going away, everything was put in place to guarantee, a safe, great break.

"Going away as a larger group made us sure to put in rules that would support and keep us all safe so as a precaution we

had a no-drinking rule." says Paul. "It was hard but it worked well and meant that everybody spent more time together as family and community playing with the children. We really had a great time and to see the kids so happy, it was worth it all."

Paul, Jimmy and Kieran are not the only ones singing from the same hymn sheet. Men's Development Worker, **Liam Bolger** from Waterford can't say enough good things about caravanning and camping as ideal for family breaks.

"After years of camping, when the children came along we had a look at the caravan end of things" he says, "What attracted us was that the children loved the idea of being out and about, not having lunch or dinner at set times. Also being able to play in well-resourced, safe sites where they could make lots of new friends was a big attraction. And of course it was always excellent value."

So, next time you are passing your local tourist office, drop in and buy, for a small price the latest Caravan & Camping Book.

The rest is up to you!

Psychological effects of unemployment

Allen Meagher reports

SUPPORTING Unemployed in Laois (Suil) is a newly-established group based in Portlaoise which grew out of a local jobs club and is supported through Area Development Management. Suil aims to work with individuals, communities, state agencies and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht affairs to further the cause of the unemployed in the area. A volunteer from Suil, Rotimi Adebare, travelled to Limerick to visit the 'Changing Ireland' office and invited us to cover a talk organized by his group on 'The Psychological Effects of Unemployment' – an issue that continues to effect thousands of people in communities throughout the country, regardless of the 'success' of the Celtic Tiger.

Anne Cass is the Chairperson of 'Aware' and has worked as a nursing officer in the community Mental Health Centre in Portlaoise since it opened in '95. She led the workshop. Afterwards, 'Changing Ireland' contacted project workers for their opinions on the subject.

"I work from Monday to Friday meeting depression," began Ms. Cass. "But any poster advertising a talk on depression always draws a disastrously small crowd, which was why the wording for this workshop was not direct!"

Without a doubt, she explained, quoting various studies, "there is a direct relationship between mental ill-health and the unemployed. In fact, the psychological aspects of unemployment are very similar to any bereavement. After someone loses a job, they go through different stages: Firstly, shock and disbelief; secondly, denial; then, thirdly, anger (and anxiety, apathy and feelings of depression); and lastly, acceptance.

"One study of the social origins of depression found there was a definite link to the lack of work outside the home. Another study found that high rates of suicide and unemployment correlate.

"The acute and long-term financial worries of being out of work effect people. The decline of social status associated with unemployment compounds the problem, leading to a drop in self-respect. So you get a lack of self-esteem

and confidence. Family relationships can be corroded as people withdraw from others including their spouse and family members.

"One's social network suffers because people need money to socialise. The social isolation places people at greater risks of depression. Unemployment leads to decreased life satisfaction. It can be bleak.

"But unemployment need not be all bad, if people develop their social skills, and they maintain a routine to their day. Staying in bed just feeds depression, while having specific goals to pursue gives back to people a purpose in life – for example, if people become involved outside the home in a voluntary group or organisation. These are often the same people who were active in the local community prior to unemployment. Voluntary work fulfills the need to feel part of the larger world out there.

"The three main causes of depression are: (1) alcohol abuse; (2) marital disharmony; (3) financial problems," said Ms. Cass.

Unemployment can lead to any or all of these.

"People feeling depressed turn to alcohol to avoid being depressed in the short-term, but this leads to longer-term problems," continued the speaker.

And women are three-to-four times more likely to suffer from depression than men, though more men commit suicide.

Ms. Cass: "It is the very simple everyday things in life that matter and that keep people on the straight and narrow. It's a fine line between mental health and mental ill-health."

"Depression effects peoples thinking, feeling and behaviour, and often the explanation can be straightforward. People need to be physically, mentally and socially (including spiritually) healthy and if one of those is missing, the whole person is vulnerable to depression.

"Even after a very bad flu, you can suffer from depression," Ms. Cass informed the gathering. After her talk, the workshop opened up for a general discussion.

Contact: Suil (Supporting Unemployed In Laois), C/o PCAP, Railway Street, Portlaoise, Co. Laois. Tel. 0502-62732. Ask for David Finane, Rotimi Adebare or Carmel O'Connor.



● Anne Cass (top right) giving a talk to members of the Supporting Unemployed in Laois

Noel painted his way off the dole

Noel Kent became unemployed when the North Infirmary Hospital in Cork closed down in '87 and faced into what was to become a decade of unemployment.

With the support and encouragement of Mahon Community Development Project, he established a men's art group. What started as a voluntary position has led to paid VEC work as an art tutor to groups in Mahon and Knocknaheeny in the city.

"Being unemployed was very depressing though. I survived miserably. Even if I wanted to, I wasn't able to turn to drink because the money wasn't there. It stymied my social life. You end up with a lack of self-worth – that's the main thing about it.

"You'd be lying in bed and going out trying to find a few bob for a couple of drinks. That's what the day revolved around," recalled Mr. Kent. "You're only half-living, not getting up and you feel a terrible hopelessness. When you are working you look forward to the weekend, or holidays or some goal. But when you have no goal, it is depressing. You are living in a half-world, and you get used to being down, to limping along.

"But I've had a 100% turnaround. I am bouncing now. My interest in painting was what kept me going, though I only had the garage at home to paint in. Then I was down in the local pub having a pint and moaning about being stuck in the garage – and someone said I should drop into the CDP. I didn't even know then what the abbreviation stood for.

"I met the co-ordinator and he said he would find me a premises if I could get a few lads together to start a men's art group for unemployed. Four of us started. They are all working now, but they keep up the painting. We have a great camaraderie in the group. The art thing gave us all a great lift. They're all ages that join now. I'm in my 50s and the youngest regular is a fella about 23. The idea of art for men is becoming more and more accepted.

"And there are kids now involved. Kids follow me around like the piper, asking 'When are we starting?' They're asking for the art classes more than they'd be asking to play soccer and that makes me feel very proud," added Mr. Kent.

Mr. Kent and his groups' next goal is to take part in an art exhibition at Christmas.

"That'll be another great boost for us all," said the man whose life is obviously now full to the brim.