

agi y i n f o r m a t i o n



Edna O'Brien and Ronan Bennet at Field of Vision event on St Patrick's Day

Field of Vision

Seamus Heaney lines up literary greats for charity

Seamus Heaney brought together several of his contemporaries from the arena of letters for Field of Vision, an evening of literary readings at the Union Chapel in Islington on St Patrick's Night. The event was staged by Heaney for the Action Group for Irish Youth of which he is patron.

The formidable line-up included **Edna O'Brien** who read from her latest novel, *House of Splendid Isolation*. **Marie Heaney** recounted ancient myths from her work, *Over Nine Waves*. Poet and literary critic, **Tom Paulin** and **Ronan Bennet**, screen writer, novelist and journalist joined **Emma Donoghue**, novelist and playwright to complete the prestigious bill.

After the readings Mick Molloy and

Martin Brown played traditional Irish music and there was a late bar. All proceeds from the event went to AGIY to assist the organisation in providing essential information to young Irish emigrants in London.

Seamus Heaney said, "It was an honour to have been made patron of the Action Group for Irish Youth and it is a privilege to be associated with the special benefit reading. The other readers who appear on St. Patrick's night give their services readily and generously and in doing so the act on behalf of all Irish writers in both languages, who have been concerned to express in their work the predicament of the emigrant Irish. The cultural, political and personal consequences of displacement have

been perennial themes in Irish literature and recently they have also engaged the imagination of President Mary Robinson who constantly and admirably includes the Irish abroad in her constituency of care. My fellow readers and I are proud to share in this new spirit of solidarity".

Seamus Taylor, AGIY chair, "We are indebted to Seamus Heaney for his considerable efforts in putting together this unique event in which some of Ireland's most accomplished writers will read for and connect with the voiceless in their community. These writers acknowledge that every Irish family is touched by emigration and we applaud their generosity in their determination to contribute so constructively to the needs of young emigrants living here."

Developing a local authority response



Lisa Murphy, AGIY, John McDonnell, Secretary, ALA, Gurbux Singh, Chief Executive LB Haringey, Joan Kane, FIS, Bernie Grant MP

A conference

took place on 23rd March 1995 to consider the findings and recommendations of **Developing a Community Response: The Service Needs of the Irish Community** - the most up to date report on the Irish community in Britain.

The purpose of the conference was to explore and examine how local authorities and related agencies can take **practical steps** to address Irish concerns in the areas of service delivery, equitable access to resources, homelessness provision, community care planning and health strategies. The conference was organised by the **Association of London Authorities (ALA)** in association with the **Action Group for Irish Youth (AGIY)** and **Federation of Irish Societies (FIS)**.

The target audience was members of **London local authorities, local authority officers (service managers, policy managers, equalities officers, directors), Health Authority staff, London wide and National policy making and development bodies and Irish community organisations**. The conference was very well attended with over sixty delegates from a variety of

statutory and voluntary agencies. Bernie Grant MP and Paul Murphy MP also attended.

Keynote speakers were: ALA Chair Toby Harris, Herman Ouseley, Director of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), Lisa Murphy, Director Action Group for Irish Youth, Joan Kane, Community Care Officer, Federation of Irish Societies and Gurbux Singh, Chief Executive, London Borough of Haringey.

Workshops were held on a number of issues raised in the report: Equalities Monitoring, Housing, Health and Social Services and Women and Domestic Violence.

The following recommendations for service providers were agreed by the conference:

This conference calls upon all Local authorities and other service providers in the areas of Health, Housing, and Social Care to:

* Undertake **ethnic monitoring** of the Irish community in both **service delivery and employment** in recognition both of their obligations under the Race Relations Act and the CRE's guidance on this issue.

* **Consult and liaise** with Irish voluntary sector and Irish Community

organisations to include an Irish dimension in their equalities strategy.

* **Support the inclusion of an Irish category** in the Ethnic Group question in the census in 2001 in order that comprehensive data on the social situation of the Irish in Britain can be made available.

In summing up John Mc Donnell, Secretary of the ALA, said he would liaise with representatives of AGIY and FIS to develop this initiative and organise future seminars and conferences. He identified the need to specifically highlight **the data around physical and mental health issues and to ensure the increased participation of Health Authorities in future conferences**.

ALA Chair Toby Harris said: "The last census recorded over a quarter of a million Irish-born people in London and that was a significant undercount, due to the absence of an Irish category on the census questionnaire. This seminar draws upon a unique report which goes far beyond census data in profiling Irish welfare needs in London, in the areas of housing, health and community care. It has provided a valuable opportunity to address Irish concerns over policy planning, service delivery and fair access to resources."

Young Irish drug users

AGIY has decided to focus on Drug/ Substance misuse for its next meeting of the London Irish Forum on **Friday 5th May 1995**. This meeting will look at the relaunching of an Irish Drugs Forum, under the umbrella of the London Irish Youth Forum. Terms of Reference and specific work that could be undertaken in the near future will be discussed. AGIY is aware that frontline agencies often have problems releasing workers to attend meetings and the aim will be to create a structure that will enable maximum involvement without duplicating existing networks of information.

Several frontline Irish advice agencies have reported a recent marked increase in the numbers of young Irish people with drug problems approaching them for a range of services. In addition, mainstream agencies in some areas are also seeing increasing numbers of young Irish drug users who appear to be exhibiting a particular pattern of drug use and which has thrown up particular service needs, for example high care supported housing. AGIY is currently collating such information which will be available for distribution but will be asking agencies for their experiences.

The Irish Drugs Forum would be targeted at both Irish and non-Irish agencies who work with or aim to provide services to young Irish drug users in London.

London Irish Youth Forum

the next LIYF meeting is

Friday 5th May

2:30pm

London Voluntary

Sector Resource Centre

356 Holloway Road London N7

nearest tube Holloway Rd

Topic

**Drugs and the
Irish
community**

Its primary functions would be to:-

- * Identify needs in relation to advice/ information/policy development for Irish drug users in London
- * To provide updated accurate information on the nature and extent of drug use amongst young Irish people in London
- * To inform mainstream health agencies on the specific needs of Irish drug users
- * To share information/ideas resources between agencies on good practice/policies that affect young Irish drug users
- * To obtain resources from health agencies to provide accessible and appropriate information for Irish drug users and to undertake comprehensive needs assessment in their localities
- * To consult with Irish drug users on what they consider to be problems and solutions
- * To look at issues of presentation and criminalisation
- * To identify and provide appropriate training for Irish and non-Irish agencies with the aim of improving services to Irish drug users

Limited Opportunities

Cara Irish Housing Association launched its latest research report, '**Limited Opportunities: Economic Disadvantage and Access to Housing for Single Irish Women**', on St Patricks Day, at its central offices.

The report looks at the effects of low pay and casual labour on Irish women with a particular focus on West London. Forty in-depth interviews were conducted in 1994 with women from a range of backgrounds and in various forms of accommodation.

This research report follows on from Cara's recent survey of London's boroughs and their monitoring of Irish applicants for housing. It highlights the particular problems faced by Irish women in gaining access to secure, decent, housing in London and the need for a response from local authorities, mainstream Housing Associations and the Housing Corporation.

Both reports are available from Cara, 339 Seven Sisters Rd, London N15

Standardised Information System

The Quarterly report for October to December 1994 of the Standardised Information System for Irish Service Providers has now been produced. This report summarises the results of the collective data set for the period October to December 1994. The data brings together information collected by 9 of the participating agencies.

This is the first report after installing the SIS for the long-term use by Irish service providers following the successful piloting of the SIS in the autumn of 1993. A few agencies still encountered problems with the system and some amendments had to be made to the collective data to ensure accuracy in the data analysis.

As the data covers a three month period only, it is too early to talk about trends. However, comparing this data with the pilot data there are a few differences, which might be of interest.

For example, the users in this data set were less likely to be unemployed, reported more frequently having some health problems, experienced more police harassment, although racial harassment was reported less, and there was a marked increase in material support services.

The whole data set relates to 1349 users approaching the agencies for advice, support and services in the periods beginning October and December 1994. Overall they received over 5000 different services in the last quarter of the year, ranging from advice to support services and actual material support. Half of the visits were repeat visits

We are now approaching the end of the second quarter and participating agencies will be returning their discs for analysis. AGIY/FIS will be producing a report on this data and it should provide the opportunity to begin to identify trends in service needs.

Currently, there are nine agencies operating the SIS. During 1995, there will be an opportunity for additional agencies to become involved in the project. There will be further information on this in a future edition of AGIY/INFO. Any Agency interested in participating please contact AGIY or Sean Hutton at the Federation of Irish Societies..



The Job Powerhouse

Irish Centre Hostels' Employment and Housing initiative

This training project in Camden is designed especially for those who are young and homeless, aged between 16 and 25, either living in a hostel, in other supported housing or without a permanent address in London. It will provide assistance to find a job or further education place. It consists of 25 weeks of training followed by 20 weeks of further support and work experience of own choosing.

Together with other young people it provides the opportunity to

- * Prepare a CV
- * Practice telephone techniques
- * Practice interviews
- * Practice problem solving
- * Prepare Action Plans
- * Get up to date references
- * Go on work placement
- * Attend college

Participants receive

- * A dedicated trainer and placement officer
- * Advice, practical help and support
- * An environment dedicated to helping you to help yourself
- * Direct contact with employers and colleges
- * Travel money and lunch

Attendance on the course will not affect eligibility for DSS payments. Everyone sent on placement has regular visits. Trainees will only be sent to employers who conform to good employment practice. Course attendees will be recruited directly from hostels or housing associations. A presentation can be given to hostel residents. The Job Powerhouse course contents, along with work experience elements leading to employment and educational opportunities, have been devised and created by Access Project Management and Training.

The Job Powerhouse is sponsored by Irish Youth Foundation, Dion and European Social Fund. If you would like more information please contact
Derek Hanway 0171 916 2222

Police Training Initiative

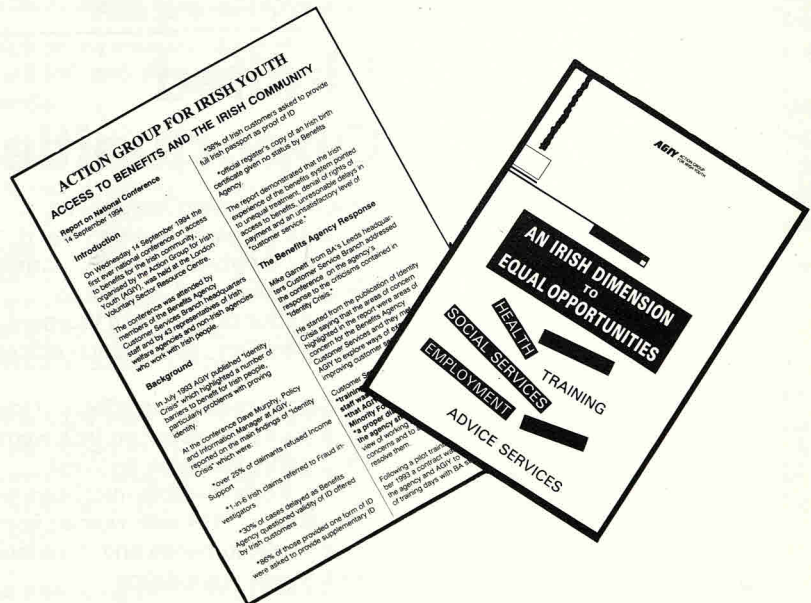
Following the launch of the report "Consulting, Not Confronting" by the Islington Police and Irish Community Consultative Group, on St. Patrick's Day, AGIY are to undertake a pilot training session with senior police officers in Islington together with senior council officers. Irish awareness training for police officers is one of the recommendations of the report and if the pilot proves successful it is hoped that the training will be extended. The

provision of the training is seen as crucial in improving relations between the police and the local Irish community and AGIY's record of providing training to organisations such as Probation Services, local authorities and the Benefits Agency with desired outcome of improving service delivery to Irish people ensures that the training will not only address prejudice, stereotyping and racism but will also look at practical action plans for improving policing of Irish people.

Benefits Agency

The Benefits Agency and AGIY have recently finalised a new contract for training of frontline staff and managers with the view of removing barriers to benefit for Irish people and thereby improving customer service to Irish customers. As most of the previous training undertaken with the agency was held in London this new contract will see the training extended to other parts of Britain. Training days have been

confirmed for Derby, Liverpool, Redditch, Edinburgh, Glasgow and another to be scheduled for officers in Wales. Staying with benefits the report on the National Conference on Access to Benefits and the Irish Community organised by AGIY is included as a special supplement to this newsletter and covers the main contributions and recommendations from the conference workshop which AGIY are pursuing with the Benefits Agency.



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