



SUPPORTING IRISH ABROAD



SIA – ‘Supporting Irish Abroad’ – is the Irish Episcopal Commission for Emigrants (IECE) campaign. Support the Irish Abroad by contributing what you can, by keeping emigrants in your thoughts & by taking action to support the generations of Irish people who have emigrated.

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www.catholiccommunications.ie/sia

A WORD FROM BISHOP SEAMUS HEGARTY,
BISHOP OF DERRY, CHAIRMAN OF IECE

INTRODUCTION

On behalf of all of the beneficiaries of your generosity in the 2004 and 2005 SIA campaigns, I say a very genuine *thank you* for your interest and support.

These campaigns have highlighted the duty we have towards Irish people abroad. The campaign in 2004 focused on our elderly in the UK, particularly those who have fallen on hard times. Many of the agencies that are trying to meet the needs of these people now have greater resources at their disposal. It is always a challenge to ensure that the extra resources have the desired effect of increasing the well being of those most in need. I can assure you that the contributions you have made have realised this objective as you will see when you read the summaries in this newsletter.

SIA 2006

The SIA Campaign for 2006 is focusing on developing stronger links with dioceses and parishes as we try to reach out to elderly people who may be living alone. I thank those priests, sisters and parishioners who are involved in the care of elderly Irish people. We are well aware that the voluntary sector is very effective and it is only right that such people should be supported in their valuable work. Often times the pain they find in the people they visit is not financial, it is the pain of loneliness and isolation. A volunteer programme to enhance contact with the lonely and deprived is currently being expanded by the London Irish Centre.

This year I encourage you to make contact with your elderly relatives who are living abroad. The age profile of these people suggests that they may be more in need than ever before. It was often brothers and sisters that maintained contact with loved ones. However, they themselves are elderly now and may not be able to travel as much as they used to. We invite the extended family to support the outreach to these family members who may have been the main financial support to families in the past. When I was visiting in the UK recently, one man said to me, ‘there is one thing worse than dying’, he said, ‘it’s being forgotten!’ SIA – Supporting Irish Abroad – is the Gaelic word for longer and farther. The objective of this campaign is to make people feel

nearer and more connected. Any small effort to reduce the sense of exile or isolation is to be lauded.

SIA 2005

The 2005 SIA campaign focused on the undocumented Irish in the US. They are numbered among the ten to twelve million who live uncertain lives. As I write we await the response of the American legislature to this issue. The early indications are not hopeful. We will continue to work closely with the US bishops on their justice for immigrants campaign (www.justiceforimmigrants.org) as they request comprehensive immigration reform that takes account of those who live with great uncertainty. This campaign has highlighted for me the need to have just immigration laws in Ireland as we welcome so many to our shores. Legislation based on labour market needs alone, that do not take consideration of the wider issues of an opportunity for citizenship and family reunification, will leave us with untold problems in the future.

IECE

In thanking the members of the Board of the Irish Episcopal Commission for Emigrants (IECE) for their support and dedication. I also thank and express my admiration for all those involved in caring for Irish people abroad. My particular thanks go to the collaborators in the Maynooth office who have co-ordinated the SIA campaigns over the last number of years. May I take this opportunity to thank all those who have been involved in ministry to Irish Emigrants since the inception of our Commission. I am proud to be associated with IECE as we look forward to our 50th anniversary in 2007. Even though the numbers of people leaving our shores may not be as high as in the past, we still have a mission to those Irish people who live abroad. This mission is primarily to those who find themselves in marginalised groups and who have no one to represent and support



(LEFT TO RIGHT) BISHOP SEAMUS HEGARTY, BISHOP OF DERRY, ACKNOWLEDGING THE CONTRIBUTION OF BISHOP RAY BOLAND, PATRON OF THE IRISH APOSTOLATE USA (IAUSA), ON HIS RETIREMENT & MINISTER OF STATE FOR LABOUR AFFAIRS, TONY KILLEEN, AT THE AGM OF THE IAUSA.

them. This year we marked twenty years of commitment to Irish prisoners overseas. Our celebrations to mark the event highlighted the importance of our mission to those most marginalised in our society.

DUTY TO IMMIGRANTS

Our outreach to emigrants from Ireland prompts us to address the plight of the growing number of immigrants to our own shores. The overall objective of our work is expressed in the Pontifical Document *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*; which states, *“it is important to reaffirm that such care also requires openness to a new world and a sincere effort to find one's place in it, the final goal being the full participation of the migrants in the life of the diocese”*.¹

CONCLUSION

In conclusion I wish to acknowledge the outstanding response from you, the people of Ireland, to the SIA campaigns. I wish to thank the priests who have brought the plight of our Irish emigrants to your attention. I wish also to thank my brother Bishops for their assistance and support in this integral aspect of the mission of the Irish Church. I welcome the positive and the active engagement of the Oireachtas expressed in substantial grant aid. By establishing the designated Unit for the Irish Abroad in the Department of Foreign Affairs the Government and the Episcopal Commission for Emigrants now collaborate very effectively in discharging a shared responsibility in their outreach to the Irish abroad. Other political parties are also most supportive. The welfare of emigrants has taken priority over party-political interests.

“May the Virgin Mother, who together with her Blessed Son knew the pain of emigration and exile, help us to understand the experience, and very often the drama, of those who are compelled to live far from their homeland, and teach us to serve them in their necessities, truly accepting them as brothers and sisters, so that today's migrations may be considered a call, albeit a mysterious one, to the Kingdom of God, which is already present in His Church, its beginning (cf. LG 9)², and instrument of Providence to further the unity of the human family and peace.”³

† SEAMUS HEGARTY
BISHOP OF DERRY & CHAIRMAN OF IECE

1. 'Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi' Vatican City 2004, Paragraph 77
2. Vatican Council II, Lumen Gentium, Paragraph 9
3. 'Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi' Vatican City 2004, Paragraph 104

Irish Chaplaincy in Britain

BY FR. NIGEL CHARLES, CO-ORDINATOR OF THE ELDERLY IRISH BEFRIENDING PROGRAMME

In the summer of 1988, I had just completed my first year in St Patrick's College, Maynooth, Co Kildare. Like most students, the summer holidays provided an important opportunity to make a few pounds in order to support myself in college the following year. I was advised to go to England and to work on the buildings as the work was plentiful and the money was good. I was lucky that I had a lot of family in England. My Uncle Seamus got me the start and the two of us travelled together to London. It was my first time in London; my first time on a building site and my first full time job, even if it was only for the summer. That summer I met a lot of young Irish in London who like myself, were students over to make a few pounds.

It's hard to believe how much has changed since then. Very few young Irish are coming over here to London now, because the Irish economy is doing so well. In 1988 there was a big difference between the standard of living in England and the standard of living in Ireland. Today there is very little difference, indeed and a lot of people would say Ireland is a much better country to live in today. I was appointed to the Irish Chaplaincy in Britain in September 2005. I am based at the Irish Centre in Camden Town, London. I have been asked to start an *Elders Befriending Programme*. The issue we are trying to address is loneliness. Some might ask, considering that there are over seven million people living in London how could a person be lonely? Most elderly Irish that I have met are very happy here. But if your health is failing, if you have no family near you and you have lost contact with your family back home then London or any big city can be a very lonely place.

The Irish who came here in the forties, fifties and the sixties came here because they had to. A lot of them had very little education and limited skills. As a community they made a great contribution to this country by working hard and supporting each other. They never forgot where they came from and every community back home has benefited from the generosity and the loyalty of the Irish community in Britain. In the seventies and eighties when family members would visit us from England, it was easy to get the impression that life was so good over there and that money grew on the trees. Whatever the Irish community has achieved here, they have achieved through hard work.

One thing that has struck me since I started working for the Irish Chaplaincy is how loyal and supportive the Irish community are to each other. Here in the Irish Centre in Camden Town, there are a number of groups who offer great services to the Irish community. If a person wants to find out what they are entitled to, if they want to get information about returning home or if they want to have a chat with someone there is some organisation who will try and respond to their needs. Church communities, County associations, the GAA, etc have and continue to give people a sense of belonging and support. But like all caring communities a lot of good work is being done which, does not get the attention or recognition it

deserves. Whether it's visiting an elderly person, helping a family when there's a bereavement or being a kind and caring neighbour and friend, the Irish community here have not forgotten that important Christian value of helping those less fortunate.

The Irish Chaplaincy in Britain was set up by the Irish Catholic Bishops nearly fifty years ago, to try and provide support to the young Irish who were coming over here to live and to work. In September 2005 the Chaplaincy started an *Elders Befriending Programme*. The aim is to reach out to elderly Irish living here who have very little family support. People like Bridget from Co. Clare, who has lived in London since 1953. Bridget's husband died twenty years ago and now she is very ill and has no family near her. She receives a visit from the Chaplaincy every week. Some people have contacted the Chaplaincy directly. Others have been referred by concerned groups, concerned individuals or by social services. If the person lives in the London area we will visit them. If they live outside London we communicate with them by letter or by phone. We try and help them in whatever way we can, whether that's making them a cup of tea, having a chat, getting a newspaper, praying with them, etc. This programme will only reach a small percentage of the elderly Irish community living in Britain. But through our humble efforts the message the Irish Chaplaincy on behalf of the Irish Church would like to give to the Irish community here is "we have not forgotten you."



† FR. NIGEL CHARLES
CO-ORDINATOR OF THE
ELDERS BEFRIENDING
PROGRAMME

Community Welfare Services Co-ordinator, London Irish Centre

ARTICLE BY JOHN TWOMEY, COMMUNITY WELFARE SERVICES CO-ORDINATOR

The size of the Irish population in the UK is not commonly realised. Census data indicates that perhaps 15% of all Irish people live in the UK. This reflects the immense movement of people here during the key post-war periods. Not surprisingly, the number of Irish elders is huge. They are present in all communities across the UK but in the major cities they are to be seen in great numbers.

NEEDS OF IRISH ELDERS POPULATION

Irish elders are disproportionately high in number when compared with the general Irish population in Britain. They are disproportionately likely to be living alone and suffering from a long term debilitating illness or disability. They are significantly over-represented in regard to depression, certain cancers and heart disease. They are also disproportionately likely to be living in an inner city area with a high socially deprivation profile. They are likely to be reliant on means-tested state benefits for their basic subsistence. Alcohol problems are present in an unignorable minority. Uniquely among all immigrant populations, the life expectancy of an older Irish person is reduced by 5% consequent to emigration to the UK, a very stark fact. The "Prime Time" programme that highlighted the plight of many older Irish people was redolent of these negative statistics. It was very right therefore that the Irish Episcopal Commission for Emigrants' adopted the needs of elders as a key theme in its SIA assistance programme.

SUCCESS OF SIA'S ENGAGEMENT WITH AGENCIES FLEXIBILITY ETC.

The SIA campaign was uniquely well placed to engage with the Irish community in the UK. Its well-established contacts with Irish agencies and parishes through the Irish Chaplaincy meant that it could quickly discern where the needs lay and identify the quickest means of meeting them. Irish agencies welcomed the speed and purpose of the SIA approach. SIA also recognised the imperative of providing services that were culturally sensitive. Older Irish people are known for their reluctance to engage with services where staff may not necessarily have the fullest understanding of their life experiences.

The areas of endeavour supported by SIA include the following:

ELDERS OUTREACH CASEWORK

The SIA campaign supported one to one casework services whereby vulnerable older Irish people benefited from rapid intervention by an experienced caseworker to ensure that their basic dignities of life were protected and promoted. In practical terms this has meant such things as arranging good quality accommodation, helping with pensions and other benefits, liaising with GP's and hospitals and linking with educational activities. Take-up for these services was continually high. This is reflective of the size of the client group.

CASE HISTORY

Joe was a manual worker who had lived in lodgings all his adult life. His health deteriorated to such an extent that he had to give up work at the age of 55. Soon after, he was given notice to quit. He had insufficient savings to secure accommodation for himself. He faced homelessness at a time when he was at his most vulnerable. The caseworker made a case to his local Housing Department, explaining his severe mobility and medical problems. Short-term accommodation was immediately provided. Thereafter Joe was allocated a well-appointed flat in a sheltered housing scheme. He was helped with a grant to furnish his new home. His housing benefit and personal benefits claims were then set up. Moving to safe secure affordable accommodation has proved a very positive life experience for Joe.

BEFRIENDING

The SIA campaign supported befriending schemes that assisted very isolated clients whose social networks were minimal or in many cases non-existent. Typically schemes would ensure that trained and supervised volunteers visited elders in their homes, making regular contact to lessen their isolation, increase their activity and general social engagement levels. The dividend from a sympathetic visit to an isolated person is not to be underestimated. It generally has the effect of prompting the isolated person to be more participative in local life. It gives them courage to consider taking up activities and entitlements that they otherwise would not. Moreover a

“ Michael feels the benefit of the volunteer's input immensely as it has given him the opportunity to participate in life opportunities that he thought he had lost forever. ”

well-trained volunteer is always in a position to observe and where necessary report on any issues giving concern that may arise on a visit. Thus a role of guardian is achieved in a way that is not burdensome.

CASE HISTORY, ELDERS BEFRIENDING

Michael, in his late sixties, lived on his own in a small sheltered flat in inner London. His arthritis was so severe that he was confined to a wheelchair. He had not been outside the flat for six years. His only relative was a sister who was restricted in her ability to keep in contact as she suffered from Parkinson's disease. Michael was referred to the London Irish Centre as a very needy case.

He was assigned a volunteer who commenced calling to see him on a Sunday. A cordial link was formed. The volunteer now takes Michael to church regularly. He also enables him to socially engage. When Michael's sister passed away earlier this year, the volunteer was able to take Michael to the funeral. The volunteer also helps with some small tasks around Michael's flat. Michael feels the benefit of the volunteer's input immensely as it has given him the opportunity to participate in life opportunities that he thought he had lost forever.

The volunteer has found it fulfilling to play a part in reducing the isolation and loneliness of an older Irish person. He feels it has enhanced his own integration in London life. He has enjoyed belonging to the Volunteer programme where he has made friends with fellow volunteers. He has also received training, which, he feels, has helped him get work in London.

TARGETED SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

The SIA campaign supported many elders' activities that brought genuine and enduring social opportunity to isolated elders. SIA support for lunch clubs is an example of this. Participation in these events yields a dividend in confidence and knowledge among the isolated. It created a sense of dignity and care.

WELFARE FUND

SIA has run a welfare fund with the assistance of Irish agencies to ensure that individuals in need could receive modest levels of assistance. The benefit from providing a

small grant in a timely way is very considerable. For example, clients who moved from poor quality private rented accommodation into proper sheltered housing were helped with household set-up costs such as the purchase of a cooker, fridge and bedding. In many cases, clients were on a means-tested benefit that covered basic living costs only. These were as little as £55 per week. Such clients could not afford major items; hence the SIA support was critical.

ALCOHOL PROJECTS

The SIA campaign supported an Alcohol and Drug Free Social Club that endeavours to provide a safe and meaningful opportunity to socialise for those with alcohol issues. The Club operates twice weekly at the Centre. It offers a café atmosphere. Pool, darts, table football, cards and other games are played. A hot meal is served, prepared on a rota basis by club members. There are also organised events within and outside the club. There is plainly great demand for this type of service, that counteracts in a practical way the debilitating loneliness that those in recovery must contend with. Such isolation acts as a negative “trigger” towards relapse. SIA supported the start-up of a new activities program for club members involving trips and outings, generally with an educative element.

IMPACT AT MACRO LEVEL

Overall the SIA campaign has facilitated a whole new service infusion towards older Irish people in need in the UK. It has done so in an efficient way by using the valuable links available to it. Agencies who had partnered with the SIA campaign have been able to commence new projects and fortify existing ones. The value of this cannot be underestimated. Quite apart from the financial benefits, the SIA scheme has had a morale boosting effect for agencies. The recognition of their endeavours through tangible support has caused a wave of encouragement. Life at the frontline has many challenges and it is always welcome when these are credibly acknowledged in the way the SIA campaign has done. We are very grateful to the SIA campaign and of course its donors, the people of Ireland. *Go raibh mile maith agaibh!*

JOHN TWOMEY

COMMUNITY WELFARE SERVICES CO-ORDINATOR

Three Months & Getting There

BY FR. JOHN MC CARTHY, IRISH CHAPLAIN TO THE IRISH PASTORAL CENTRE, BOSTON

I am ordained ten years and I spent the first nine in a parish in Limerick city. After doing a Renewal for Ministry course - I thought what next? I spoke to Fr. Alan Hilliard, Director of the Irish Episcopal Commission for Emigrants (IECE) and I decided to apply for chaplaincy in one of the offices in the United States.

In July 2005, I headed to Boston, to meet all the people involved with the Irish Pastoral Centre. My initial shock at the airport was the heat and the humidity that Boston encounters during the summer months. I was greeted by Mary and Marty Carr, a married couple from Galway who emigrated to Boston over 30 years ago.

I met with Fr. Dan Finn who was one of the founders of the Irish Pastoral Centre which has been in existence for 18 years. Over the course of the week I met with practically all the people and staff involved in the running of the Irish Pastoral Centre.

More importantly this initial meeting gave me the chance to meet various undocumented Irish immigrants living in Boston. Most of the undocumented I met were nannies, caregivers to the elderly, painters, plasterers or in some sort of construction work. Although from different counties and different backgrounds they all had the same underlying fear of being undocumented in America. Meeting these immigrants also made me realize that YES there was a need for a Chaplain in the Boston area.

I was overwhelmed by entering a “parish without boundaries”, as well as fitting into an organization that had been established 18 years earlier. Another fear was “Would I settle in America?” as well as the thought of leaving my family behind.

However, the positives of going to an area with such a large Irish community, where hurling and football are in abundance proved a strong pull. The great sense of welcome I received made the decision a little easier.

After deliberating for a few weeks, I decided to take the plunge like thousands before me and on October 19th 2005, I was Boston-Bound.

Within a few weeks I realized that I was to be kept very busy with the upcoming Christmas events. Because I was new it was decided that I should attend as many fundraiser dinners as possible to get my name out to the Irish Community. I attended the Solas Awards, the Railway Cup Banquet, the Irish Cultural Centre's Annual Ball and the Annual GAA All-Star awards to name a few. While feeling exhausted I realized that attending these functions was a vital way of making connections with prominent members of the Irish business community as well as all those undocumented Irish living in Boston.

As word got out that there was an “Irish priest in town” my general workload also started to increase. I started ministering to the Irish Community including Memorial Masses, weddings and christenings. All these functions made me realize how difficult it is for the undocumented Irish in Boston who can't hop on a plane like I can, to attend a funeral, wedding or other function. The realization here in Boston is that many are stuck in a “limbo”. The decision to go home for a funeral of a loved one and leave all they have worked for behind, or stay and miss yet another occasion either joyful or sad is a difficult one. On the other side of this is the resilience and the positive attitude of these undocumented people.

Together with Fr. Finn and Sr. Marguerite it was realized that there were new needs that could now be addressed by having an extra person on board.

One of the biggest needs was the Elderly Irish Community in the Boston area. At present along with Sr. Marguerite the Irish Pastoral Centre is identifying the older Irish, particularly those Irish living on their own. Though in the initial stage of collecting information, having meetings with relevant organizations that deal with the elderly, I definitely feel there is a huge need for a service where these older Irish can meet, socialize, get relevant help or information about problems, they may have. By the end of 2006 we hope to have this outreach program established and fully operational.



SIA POSTER CAMPAIGN 2005.

JUSTICE FOR IMMIGRANTS CAMPAIGN

IECE is continuing to work on behalf of Irish Undocumented in the U.S. This was the focus of our campaign in 2005. We work with the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops. We support their Justice for Immigrants campaign. The purpose of this is to educate the public and also to create political will for immigration reform and when it comes about to ensure efficient concise and accurate delivery of information to enable those who are undocumented regularize their position. The Irish Apostolate publish a monthly newsletter and if you are interested in being on their mailing list please contact our administrator directly at administrator@usairish.org

Another new and rewarding experience was the prison ministry which I undertook with Irish prisoners. For many of these prisoners the Irish Pastoral Centre is the only contact they have with the outside world, and especially with their family members at home in Ireland. Not only do I visit the prisoners, I also got the opportunity to meet with their families and offer them support when I returned to Ireland at Christmas.

One of the newer groups I have become involved with is the Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform. I had the fortunate experience of being able to attend the inaugural meeting of this group, which is lobbying for positive immigration reform in the US that could help many undocumented Irish get legal status. Being involved with such a group has educated me greatly on immigration law and allows me to have greater empathy towards those who have fallen out of legal status.

While the first three months have gone by quickly, I feel that I have established myself well in Boston, and have identified some clear goals for myself and the organization over the course of the next 3 years.

While my first priority would be the Pastoral and Spiritual well being of all the Irish community, I also hope that we will be successful in our Elderly Outreach Program and through time this project could be expanded throughout Boston and the state of Massachusetts.

Though I have made strong connections in my short time here, I hope in the coming months that I will be known in the Irish community as their priest who is available for any pastoral or spiritual needs they may have.

FR. JOHN MCCARTHY
CHAPLAIN, IRISH PASTORAL CENTRE BOSTON

Hammersmith Irish Support & Advice Service

BY MIKE MCGING, CO-ORDINATOR, HAMMERSMITH IRISH SUPPORT & ADVICE SERVICE

I arrived at the Hammersmith Irish Support and Advice Service in September 2003 and became aware that funding had reached a critical point and hard decisions were needed to be made to reduce overheads (staff) drastically. This included reducing the staff team from four to two, payment of rent was stopped for the offices and other costs were cut to try and save the project from going under.

The service operated on a month to month basis, continuing to fundraise small amounts to keep going. Letters from the taxman arrived regularly, threatening action for unpaid tax and all the time the service was open, continuing to support and assist a large volume of very vulnerable people. This was a very hard and demoralising time with no positive end in sight and plans were made to wind down. During this period the service had over 1300 client visits. Most of the clients we assist are between the ages of 60 and 80, people who emigrated from the 1940's onwards, and it was clear that if the service went under it would never resurrect itself again.

The support of the Management Committee and the calming influence of the Chair at that time (Fr. Jerry Kivlehan) were essential to keep the project going for a critical 10 months fire fighting. The critical finances were in part due to the withdrawal of funding by the local authority to our service, and potential eviction of our service for non payment of rent was on the cards. Even so, the service had finally run out of money, if it were not for the intervention of Dion (Irish Government) this charity would have disappeared.

With the good fortune of the intervention by Dion, came more good news with contact from Fr. Alan Hilliard of the Irish Episcopal Commission for Emigrants, along with critical help with funding from the SIA Emigrant Appeal and the Irish Chaplaincy. This financial support has been essential as a few years ago the Irish Support and Advice Service (ISAS) operated with five/six staff, which went down to one during this critical period; however increased funding has enabled ISAS to recruit a new advice worker. The ISAS had over 900 client visits



HAMMERSMITH IRISH SUPPORT & ADVICE SERVICE
STAFF & CLIENTS



HAMMERSMITH IRISH SUPPORT & ADVICE SERVICE
STAFF & CLIENTS

and generated over £100,000 of extra welfare benefits income for clients.

I felt very strongly about the service started by Fr. Brian Lawlor as it had been in existence for over 35 years meeting the needs of the vulnerable, isolated Irish people in West London. I view my role as a temporary guardian of the charity and have a strong sense of duty towards it as both my parents emigrated and experienced the same issues as many other Irish people in the 60's.

“ Mr X approached ISAS in a very distressed state, but within a month we had sorted out his pension credit and got him a one bedroom sheltered accommodation property and some money towards furniture from a small Irish charity. ”

The ISAS deals with all sorts of enquiries and had some excellent results in terms of assisting clients last year. One case we had here at the ISAS that we are particularly proud of handling is that of a gentleman who, having worked all his life, found himself with no money and sleeping in a car. Mr X had turned 60 and had to give up work due to ill health. Mr X approached ISAS in a very distressed state, but within a month we had sorted out his pension credit and got him a one bedroom sheltered accommodation property and some money towards furniture from a small Irish charity. Mr X's quality of life has completely changed and improved because of his involvement with ISAS. We are all very proud of this and feel that clients such as Mr X are the reason why our service is so crucial.

Another case I would like to tell you about is that of Mr B who had been living in a small studio room for about 15 years, the room was crumbling with damp, he had no access to a bathroom as the landlord had filled the bathroom with rubbish. The room was extremely dark as it was in a basement, and had a tiny stove, small sink and

a foldaway bed on the floor. Following a visit to Mr B in his home ISAS made an application for sheltered housing and submitted with this application a very strong letter of support.

Following a visit from the sheltered housing officer, Mr B received the offer of a new flat within a matter of weeks. ISAS also assisted Mr B with grant applications to get new furniture as most of his belongings had been ruined by damp over the years. Mr B is so happy in his new flat and regularly pops in to see us to say thank you and to let us know how he is getting on.

The ISAS continues to implement a restructuring of the service during 2005 and both financial and human resources continue to be quite limited within ISAS. Increased funding is required to ensure that ISAS will be able to reach out to many more people in similar situations and offer assistance and support to them.

MIKE MCGING
CO-ORDINATOR

6TH JANUARY 2006

The Irish Support and Advice Service is part of the Irish Charitable Trust.

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Quotes from Prisoners and Families of Prisoners in Letters to the Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas

[The] Prison visits became a way of counting down the sentence that there were 22 visits left, 21 etc., Overall, it has been hard work, but it has been worth it. It would have been helpful to have a support group meeting, especially during the first year and waiting for the end of the sentence. I do not think enough people know about the ICPO.

J., Wife of Prisoner

One of the worst things is that often the rest of your family don't want to know. Friends can be great, because what you really need at a time like this is to be able to talk to other people who are in the same situation because really they are the only ones who could possibly understand the way you are feeling. Just to be able to say to people: 'do you feel like this sometimes' or 'what would you do?...' There are places for illnesses like alcoholism and their families so I don't see why we can't have the same. Some peoples attitude is, well they are in prison for a reason but people like me are still left with nobody. The only type of friendship we got was from ICPO as someone to listen and give us advice and I know my brother got such a lift when he would get his [ICPO] newsletter.

L., Sister of Prisoner

Since you [ICPO] helped me to make contact with my sister, I've been phoning regularly and she keeps me up to date with the whole gang. Its good to have her support and news on the rest of the family. It's helping to build bridges and release worry... Thanks for all the help and if I'm ever in trouble knowing the ICPO rids me of most worries.

J., Prisoner, UK

Time stands still when you are in places like this. While the rest of the world moves on, life is so slow in places like this and we are not kept up to speed with all the new things in the world such as computers and the Internet, mobile phones etc. I personally would not know how to use them. Yes I've seen them on TV etc. but I've never held a phone or accessed the internet. Things that are important to other people's lives. I understand that people are so insecure and without things like that, yet people like me have to get by without and we are given no training in the use of such things. It really frightens me to know one day I will be out of this place. I will be like a person from another planet not knowing how to use money, phones, etc.

M., Prisoner

On the Road

BY SHELDON SMITH

Billie on the boil
Tea in the pot
Horse hitched to the van
On the road once again.
Day breaking beautifully
People in traps and carts
Chestnuts, dapples, whites and greys
Horses like family along our way.
The trees, hedges and fields
Imprinted in our hearts
Banter with passers by
Some miles travelled
A new patch of land
Working without demands
A future for us and nature
To hold hands.



(LEFT TO RIGHT)
REV. GERRY McFLYNN, EILISH WREN, SHELDON SMITH,
JOANNE KEANE O'FLYNN & JOHN GOODMAN

This poem won the 2005 Poetry Award in the Prison Writing Section of the Listowel Writers' Festival.

The Australian Irish Welfare Bureau (Illawarra)

BY BARBARA RYAN, CO-ORDINATOR OF THE AUSTRALIAN IRISH WELFARE BUREAU, ILLAWARRA, NSW

January 25th 2006

The Australian Irish Welfare Bureau (Illawarra) gratefully received funding from SIA 2005.

The Illawarra branch of the Welfare Bureau was established 11 years ago to assist local residents of Irish descent, plus Irish tourists. The Bureau has previously assisted backpackers in the Illawarra and will assist tourists who are in trouble in Southern N.S.W.

Welfare Bureau representatives visit members who are in hospital, ill at home or who are unable to attend the fortnightly drop in as they are too frail. They also assist members with transport to doctor's appointments, weekly shopping or by just joining them for a cuppa. Currently their activities are funded by a grant from the Irish Government, a monthly sausage sizzle at a local shopping centre, selling St Patrick's Day merchandise, which they have made, at local venues and hotels and of course SIA.

The fortnightly drop in provides a venue for social support, music and sing along with an Irish/Folk/Country band, plus light refreshments. It gives members an opportunity to see their friends, talk about what is important to them and give assistance to each other in times of need or loss of a partner. The drop in is usually attended by people over 60 years of age.

The Welfare also organise a Christmas Tree for Members grandchildren. Their goal in organising this event is to increase the children's awareness of their Irish heritage. My role is to assist the committee to conduct their activities however possible including preparing the Monthly Newsletter. By attending the various activities organised for the members, I am establishing a rapport with the group so that they feel comfortable seeking my assistance. Understanding that use of existing services is their right as a citizen of this Country and that they are not "accepting charity".

Next Month (Feb 5, 2006) the Annual Memorial Mass will be held in memory of the deceased members of the Australian Irish Welfare Bureau. This is an important event in their Annual Calendar as it demonstrates to the families of the deceased how important the person was to others in the community and honours their memory. The Australian Irish Welfare Bureau (Illawarra) is managed by volunteers.

It is thanks to your generosity that they have been able to employ me to assist them to enable such a valuable resource be available for many years to come.

BARBARA RYAN
CO-ORDINATOR, AUSTRALIAN IRISH WELFARE BUREAU

Photographs show scenes from the Irish Backpackers Christmas Mass at St. Patrick's Church on Wellington street Bondi. Mass was celebrated by Fr. Tom Devereux and Bishop David Cremin. Afterwards they joked with, had pictures taken with and talked to some parents in Ireland via mobile phone with those who attended.

Photographs by Dean Sewell, S.M.H. News. Taken on the 25th December 2005.



Message from the President of Ireland to the Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas on the occasion of their 20th Anniversary in November 2005

I am very pleased to convey my very best wishes to the Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas, on your 20th Anniversary.

Your practical concern for the humanity of prisoners abroad represents an expression of the compassion and mercy which can bring hope to Irish people who are great distances from their families and in very trying circumstances. The work you have done to vindicate the rights and dignity of prisoners comes from a sincere calling and concern for their plight, and the plight of their loved ones at home.

I wish the Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas every success in the future.

MARY McALEESE
PRESIDENT OF IRELAND

Projects that are benefitting from SIA 2004 Funding

The SIA Campaign's main objective is the relief of isolation of elderly Irish emigrants.

Befriending Project Cricklewood	€29,722.21
Birmingham Irish Welfare Centre	€37,151.54
Care for the Irish Elderly in Derby	€748.16
Care for the Irish Elderly in Euston	€7,441.60
Emigrant Advice	€2,000.00
Hammersmith Irish Support Centre	€22,315.91
Immigrant Counselling and Psychotherapy	€29,722.12
Irish Apostolate USA	€56,956.00
Irish Australian Welfare Bureaus in Woolongong, Victoria and Sydney	€22,608.00
Irish Chaplaincy in Britain Befriending Project	€158,000.00
Irish Chaplaincy New York	€10,000.00
Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas Maynooth	€16,650.00
Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas Outreach	€43,258.00
Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas Volunteer Scheme	€8,651.00
Islington Project - Care for the Elderly Irish	€1,491.87
London Irish Centre	€44,580.96
Pastoral Outreach for the Irish Traveller Community, England	€36,000.00

**DONATIONS CAN BE MADE BY DRAFT OR CHEQUE
TO THE FOLLOWING ADDRESS:**

SIA Campaign
c/o Irish Episcopal Commission for Emigrants
Columba Centre
Maynooth
Co. Kildare

If you would like a receipt please tick box

Name and address to which receipt will be sent:

