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Need for social policy to recognise that people are excluded when they cannot afford to give their children a holiday

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ACTION ON POVERTY TODAY



- New study shows impact of debt on women's health
- Homework clubs – a lifeline for improved literacy
- Social tourism – the benefits of holidays for poor children

Injustice or laziness? Poll compares Irish and European attitudes on poverty

Who is poor and who thinks they are? An EU poll compares opinions with reality.

What do people think about poverty? This autumn the European Commission published details of a Europe-wide scientific poll on popular attitudes to poverty. First, why do people think there is poverty?

	EU27 ¹	Ireland
Bad luck	19%	26%
Laziness or lack of willpower	20%	16%
Injustice in our society	37%	30%
An inevitable part of progress	13%	11%

'Injustice' is the most popular reason given for poverty, both in Europe and Ireland. In Ireland a higher proportion of people attribute poverty to bad luck than to laziness or lack of willpower.

But what is poverty? Here, some interesting findings emerge if we compare the *actual* level of poverty (*objective poverty*, as measured by the poverty line) with the proportion of people who consider themselves to be living in poverty (*subjective poverty*) and add in those who consider that they experience financial difficulties.

	EU15 ²	Ireland
Objective poverty: Below the relative poverty line	16%	20%
Consider that they live in poverty (subjective poverty)	30%	19%
Consider that they have financial difficulties	21%	17%

Here, the gap between objective poverty (20%) and the proportion who consider themselves to be poor (19%) is very small in Ireland, but, by contrast, twice as many Europeans consider themselves to live in poverty than actually do so when measured objectively.

There has been a big debate in Ireland in recent years about the definition of poverty. Apart from using the poverty line as a measurement, another approach is to look at what are the necessities of life. Being unable to afford them is defined as poverty. Here, Europeans were asked what they considered to be the necessities of life, under numerous headings.

	EU27	Ireland
Medical care when needed	77%	63%
Medicine when needed	74%	64%
Medical equipment	66%	60%
A warm winter coat	65%	64%
Regular medical and dental check-ups	62%	58%
Two pairs of shoes suited to climate	58%	61%
Fruit and vegetables each day	49%	58%
Chicken, fish, meat every other day	43%	56%
Access to local public transport	38%	42%
Some new clothes	30%	45%
Banking	29%	36%
Smart clothes for work	24%	43%
Hair cuts	11%	19%

Generally, Irish people have higher expectations of what should be the necessities of life but not when it comes to medical services. This was also evident when Europeans were asked about what they thought was absolutely necessary for children.

	EU27	Ireland
Medical care when needed	81%	63%
Medicines and vitamins when needed	76%	65%
Regular medical check-ups	75%	61%
Meet educational expenses	60%	51%
Access to pre-school education	52%	28%
Regular pocket money	17%	22%

Here, Irish expectations are lower when it comes to medical services and access to pre-school. Does this mean that Irish parents are less concerned that children get access to medical care or pre-school education? Unlikely. Is it that such services have been so difficult to access that they are not taken for granted as a 'necessity' or a 'norm'?

The poll included a special module on attitudes to homelessness. When asked did they help homeless people, 36 per cent said they gave money to charities, 29 per cent gave money to people sleeping on the streets, while 16 per cent bought street newspapers. The proportion not prepared to help was lowest in Ireland, at only 2 per cent, with 74 per cent of Irish people giving to charities, the highest rate in the EU after Malta.

BRIAN HARVEY is an Independent Research Consultant.

¹ The present 27 member states

² The 15 old member states before the accession of 12 new states

VIEWPOINT

Review to launch Combat Poverty on third phase



Since Combat Poverty's establishment just over twenty years ago, its role has continuously evolved in response to changing external priorities. At the outset, the focus was on gathering data to understand the extent and nature of poverty, and on building the community infrastructure. With the adoption of the NAPS in 1997, the priority shifted to providing advice on the direction and development of public policies, at local, national and EU levels.

Over the past eighteen months, a number of important national policies have emerged which underpin the Government's target to eliminate poverty over the next ten years. The challenge today is to ensure that these policies are effectively implemented.

Combat Poverty is well positioned to support this process. For example, we can provide technical assistance in areas such as target setting, monitoring and mainstreaming social inclusion. Through our research and our work with community and voluntary organisations, we can identify barriers to implementation at local and national levels, and can advise on new ways to operationalise national policies across all life stages.

In this context, the board and staff welcome the review of the role of Combat Poverty which is currently underway. We believe that it provides an opportunity to highlight how our knowledge, skills and expertise can contribute to poverty reduction targets over the next decade. It is also an opportune time to review our relationship with other organisations to identify synergies, so that with others Combat Poverty can fully contribute to bringing about a poverty-free Ireland.

On behalf of the staff of Combat Poverty I would like to wish all our readers and colleagues we have worked with throughout the year a very happy Christmas and every success in 2008.

KEVIN P. O'KELLY *is Acting Director of the Combat Poverty Agency.*

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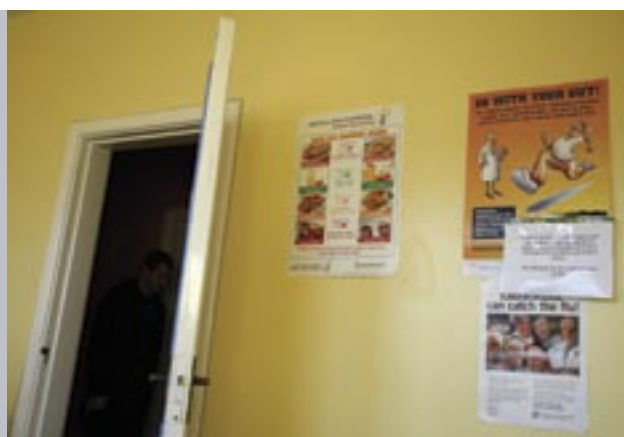
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Women need help to escape debt trap

Low income and bad health can push women into debt and debt can damage a woman's health. Tackling debt and improving health go hand in hand

Being in debt is both a major cause and an effect of bad health among women. When the Women's Health Council¹ and MABS² came together to investigate the internationally recognised link between debt and ill-health, their research confirmed this link for women in Ireland and highlighted its complex nature.

The study focused on 97 women who were clients at nine MABS offices throughout the country. The 'typical'³ woman who took part in the study was aged 40, described herself as 'single', had two financially dependent children and lived in local authority rented housing. She had a medical card and her main source of income was a weekly social welfare payment of between €201 and €300. She identified utility arrears as her main debt issues and also three other areas of debt – rent or mortgage arrears, bank loans and credit union loans.

Low income

'Living on a low income' was the most common cause of debt for the MABS clients. Eight-five per cent were living on considerably less than the average industrial wage for women. Given the proven link between poverty and ill-health, women in this position are a particularly vulnerable group in terms of their mental and physical health.

During her consultation with her MABS money advisor, the 'typical woman' mentioned having an emotional health problem but not a physical health one. In particular, she suffered from stress. She specifically

mentioned that her financial difficulties had had an effect on her health but not on the health of her family members.

These are the main findings of the report:

- 81 per cent of women mentioned health during the MABS consultation
- 81 per cent discussed a mental or emotional health problem, most commonly mentioning stress, depression and anxiety
- 40 per cent discussed a physical health problem, usually general aches and pains, extreme tiredness and respiratory problems
- 68 per cent reported that their debt affected their health
- 27 per cent reported that their debt affected the health of their family members
- almost one-sixth said ill-health or disability were the 'main' causes of their debt; a further 26 per cent said they were among the factors that contributed to the debt
- 15 per cent reported having a disability and 71 per cent of these identified ill-health or disability as contributing to their debt.

Sixty-eight per cent of the women were parenting alone, meaning that a large number of MABS clients are part of a group at high risk of persistent poverty and the effects this has on health.

The proportion of women with a disability using MABS



(15%) is much higher than the national figure for women with a disability (8.7%). Further, 71 per cent identified ill-health or disability as contributing to their debt. This suggests that this group is particularly vulnerable to debt and the bad effects it has on health. Further research into the relationship between disability and debt is needed, for example, to investigate if disability contributes to the debt directly through medical costs, indirectly through not being able to participate in the labour market, or both.

Twelve per cent of the women did not have a medical or GP visit card and 10 per cent of social welfare recipients had neither card. This suggests that their ability to access primary health care may be restricted.

Lastly, 5 per cent of women reported literacy problems, which had caused them difficulties in knowing about and getting their social welfare entitlements. This would have implications for the successful uptake of any actions or policies devised to ease the problem of debt and ill-health.

Debt policy

Debt is complex. Most women reported having a number of sources of debt and multiple contributory factors to that debt. The nature of the debt also differed according to income source and employment status. Any policies devised to tackle this problem must acknowledge this complexity.

The importance of enabling people to build an asset base to ensure they remain out of debt and poverty is widely accepted. These assets can be educational, training, employment, financial, etc. The study of MABS clients highlighted the very low income levels at which some women are surviving, giving them no chance to enhance their asset base and leaving them at constant risk of debt and its effects on health.

Employment is consistently identified as a way of preventing and escaping from poverty. A number of factors are blocking women from taking up the increased number of jobs available in Ireland today. These include a lack of quality, affordable childcare options; disabilities; difficulties in getting training and education; literacy problems; and caring responsibilities.

The Women's Health Council and MABS recommended:

- Income policies to support those surviving on the lowest incomes and thus reduce the incidence of debt
- Multi-sectoral policies to enable women to invest in their asset bases and take up employment
- Continued government support for agencies providing services and information to those parenting alone, with better and systematic co-ordination between MABS and these agencies
- Debt prevention and alleviation measures that take account of the complex nature of debt
- A debt scheme to enable people to get affordable credit
- More independent advice on financial products and services, perhaps delivered through adult education channels
- Information on family and women's health issues to be made available in MABS offices
- Better promotion of MABS services in healthcare access points
- Additional training on health issues for MABS staff
- Specific policies on debt assistance and income for women with disabilities who are in debt
- Examination of the eligibility criteria and levels of awareness of the medical and GP visit card schemes.

Overall, the study found that women in debt believe their debt affects their health. Because ill-health is a cause and a result of debt, helping women to get out of debt will help them to achieve their health potential and vice versa. The implementation of the report's recommendations is the place to start.

Copies of the report are available at www.whc.ie.

The WHC and MABS would like to thank the women and the MABS officers who participated so generously in this research and whose contributions resulted in this important and informative report.

¹ The Women's Health Council is a statutory body set up in 1997 to advise the Minister for Health and Children on all aspects of women's health. Its mission is to inform and influence the development of health policy to ensure the maximum health and social gain for women in Ireland.

² The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS), funded by the Department of Social and Family Affairs, is a free, confidential, independent, non-judgemental and non-profit making service for people in debt or at risk of getting into debt.

³ The profile of the 'typical' study participant is constructed using mean and modal values.

Poor reading skills mean poor life chances: Unique study shows what children think

When gathering evidence about children's lives, the voice of the child is often overlooked. Child researchers carried out a study into poverty and literacy which shows that homework clubs are a lifeline for poorer children.

Poor literacy skills among children can result in future exclusion in adulthood. There is much evidence linking poverty to poor educational achievement. One of the main issues within this debate is the 'literacy achievement gap' for children from poorer backgrounds. Understanding the links between poverty and literacy opportunities can inform policy development and ultimately help to address the 'literacy poverty gap'. A research study designed and carried out by children¹ allows literacy opportunities to be seen through their eyes and from their perspectives.

Two groups of six children, aged 11 years, in two UK primary schools were trained in research and supported to carry out their own research into aspects of literacy that interested or concerned them. One group was in an affluent area and one in an area of disadvantage. The extent to which poverty could be identified as an inhibiting factor was addressed through adult analysis of the children's studies. The two groups of children worked independently and subsequently gave their informed consent for adult researchers to compare and analyse their individual research studies. This was done to avoid causing any distress or stigma to the children through being labelled, or labelling themselves, as 'in poverty'. An advisory group supported the project throughout.

Six research studies were carried out by the children.

- How confidence affects literacy at our school
- Children's attitudes to literacy homework in our school
- What do children think and feel about TV and literacy?
- Do you have any difficulties with your homework?
- What environments do children like doing their homework in?
- Children and spelling.

The research studies were spontaneously designed by the children themselves. They gave rich descriptions of

children's own literacy experiences and produced data not easily reached by adults. The studies gave voice to the children's own perspectives and opened windows into their literacy worlds. The simplicity of the children's questions and of the language in their questionnaires and interviews drew out open and honest responses from their peers. The absence of power relations in the collection of data from children by a child researcher ensured that children's responses were not skewed by efforts to 'please the adult'.

The pictures painted through the 11-year-old researchers' projects were of children from affluent backgrounds exuding literacy confidence gained from a variety of opportunities: routine support for homework, parents acting as role models in speaking and listening, favourable environments for reading and writing, absence of distractions and opportunities to talk about literacy. By contrast, children from poorer backgrounds had few, if any, of these opportunities. For them, homework clubs were a lifeline.

The children's reports² revealed that being able to 'practise your private confidence' before you could develop 'public confidence' was an important strategy in self-development. Children identified reading aloud



and writing as activities requiring 'public confidence' and needing a lot of 'private' practice. A striking characteristic of children from affluent backgrounds was how easy it was for them to have opportunities to build 'private confidence', whereas children from low-income backgrounds had little, if any, chance of doing this.

Homework club

There were two main findings from this research. The first shows homework clubs to be an essential resource for children in poverty and an important means of developing literacy proficiency. The second indicates that children in poverty do not have opportunities to build literacy confidence compared to better-off children.

These findings can be mapped onto current policy initiatives, allowing us to identify where emphasis and direction might bring about positive outcomes. In the UK, integrated children's services and multi-agency working are current drivers in the Every Child Matters agenda. Raising standards and improving outcomes for children are being delivered through an ambitious programme of Extended Schools and Children's Centres. This represents a real opportunity to break entrenched patterns of deprivation and narrow the achievement and social mobility gaps. Clearly, homework clubs could be offered more widely within the scope of extended school services.

The children's data also highlighted the importance of having access to adult skills and raised issues about reading opportunities that promote private confidence-building and enjoyment. This cannot be achieved by cutting corners on cost. Setting up homework clubs with childcare staff rather than teaching staff and not taking on board that children see the need for skilled adults to help discussion about books risk squandering the opportunities offered by the programme.

Quality reading space

Equally, there is a need to offer quality reading experiences with good books and quiet, comfortable reading areas that give children the chance to practise private reading and private confidence-building. It is this need that raises some concerns about extended schools, not least that they will simply lengthen school hours and school curriculum – more of the same diet for children in power-laden settings with limited personal space and personal autonomy.

In summary, there are a number of approaches that may increase literacy opportunities for children living in poverty:

- Creating environments in classrooms where children have opportunities to build their literacy confidence 'privately'. This could be done in a number of ways including:
 - Providing opportunities for children to read quietly or read to younger pupils in non-threatening environments
 - Facilitating 'private' writing opportunities for children
- Providing homework clubs and ensuring they are accessible to the children who need them the most
- Offering help and training to parents to support their children with literacy
- Using core provision services of Extended Schools to bridge some of the gaps both at child and parent level.

MARY KELLETT is Director of the Children's Research Centre at the Open University, website: <http://childrens-research-centre.open.ac.uk>.

¹ This research was funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

² The full report can be found on the Joseph Rowntree Foundation website, <http://www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/2094-literacy-poverty-children.pdf>.



It's time to listen when Deaf people say they are excluded from health services

A survey shows that many Deaf people don't attend health services because of communication barriers. The Irish Deaf Society says services can be made accessible in nine easy steps.

Since 2004, an Irish Deaf Society project has been receiving funding from Combat Poverty's Building Healthy Communities programme. The project undertook an analytical study, which found that health services were generally inaccessible to the Deaf, that many Deaf people did not attend health services out of fear of communication barriers and that medical professionals can be both belittling and oppressive when dealing with Deaf people.

It also found that medical professionals and health officials need training and more awareness; that interpreters in Irish Sign Language (ISL) should be provided; and that the cost of providing ISL interpreters needs to be addressed.

Nine steps

Nine simple steps to make health services more accessible to the Deaf were suggested.

These are:

- Ask how the patient or Deaf visitors would like to be alerted when it's time for their appointment
- Remember that every patient needs privacy and confidentiality and Deaf patients may not wish family members or their children to interpret for them; they may need a professional interpreter
- Some patients may wish the words 'Deaf patient' to be labelled on the outside of their file for future use
- Make eye contact with the patient before you speak and ensure that light is shining on your face and not on the patient's
- Speak clearly but not too slowly and do not shout
- If there is no sign language interpreter, write things down in plain English and clear handwriting

- Use diagrams, drawings or photography during conversation; excellent medical graphics programs can be easily installed on computers
- Be prepared to repeat and re-phrase information differently
- Make sure the patient understands what you have said and how to take any medication you have prescribed.

The Irish Deaf Society produced three health awareness aids. These were:

- Advice on improving access to, and use of, health services by Deaf people
- A guide for all medical institutions on common medical sign language for patient care
- An information DVD on men's cancer.

A further project is working on maternity care for Deaf women in partnership with the Irish Deaf Women's Group and is due for completion at the end of the year.

The Irish Deaf Society is expanding its scope in 2008 as part of its new Strategic Plan 2008–2018. It has been engaging with the Health Service Executive (HSE) on the contractual arrangement for services under Sectoral Plan Part 2 in the Disability Act 2005. Through this, it hopes to receive HSE funding to allow it to develop its capacity to serve the Deaf community through this partnership under its Strategic Plan.

KEVIN STANLEY is Programme Development Manager with the Irish Deaf Society.



Government prepares to report to UN as recognition grows that defending human rights will tackle poverty

In early 2008, the Government will report on how it is meeting its obligations under the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights. Old issues persist and new human rights challenges have emerged.



A human-rights approach to combating poverty is being increasingly recognised internationally because it 'links poverty reduction to questions of obligation, rather than welfare or charity'.¹ It is rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and treaties such as the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which Ireland signed in 1973 and ratified sixteen years later.

Since ratification in 1989, Ireland has submitted two reports, in 1999 and 2001, to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which monitors states' compliance with the treaty. Civil society organisations may also submit 'shadow' reports, giving their perspective on Ireland's progress on meeting treaty commitments.

Committee response

In 2002, the committee welcomed Ireland's ratification of the revised European Social Charter. However, it expressed concern that the covenant was not incorporated into, or reflected in, Irish law. It also regretted that a human-rights approach had not been built into the Disability Bill, the NAPS or the National Health Strategy. Concern was also expressed at the persistent discrimination against people with physical and mental disabilities in the areas of employment, social security, education, and health, and the committee considered the level of welfare payments and the then minimum wage inadequate.

Human rights

The committee recommended that human rights be incorporated into the Constitution and other legislation,

and that the NAPS and disability legislation be made rights-based. It called for measures to enable people with disabilities to work with full employment status and to retain the right to free medical care. It urged strong action on domestic violence, the acceleration of the social housing programme and the provision of accurate information on measures taken to provide adequate accommodation for Traveller families.

The committee valued the work of the Combat Poverty Agency and recommended that it should be well resourced and be able to fulfil its statutory advisory function in an effective manner.

In 2008 community and voluntary organisations and statutory bodies will have an opportunity to comment on Ireland's next report. Organisations may also come together to draft joint 'shadow reports' giving their judgement on how Ireland has progressed.

For further information on the consultation on Ireland's report on its compliance with the ICESCR contact Tara Murphy at the Department of Foreign Affairs. Email: tara.murphy@dfa.ie.

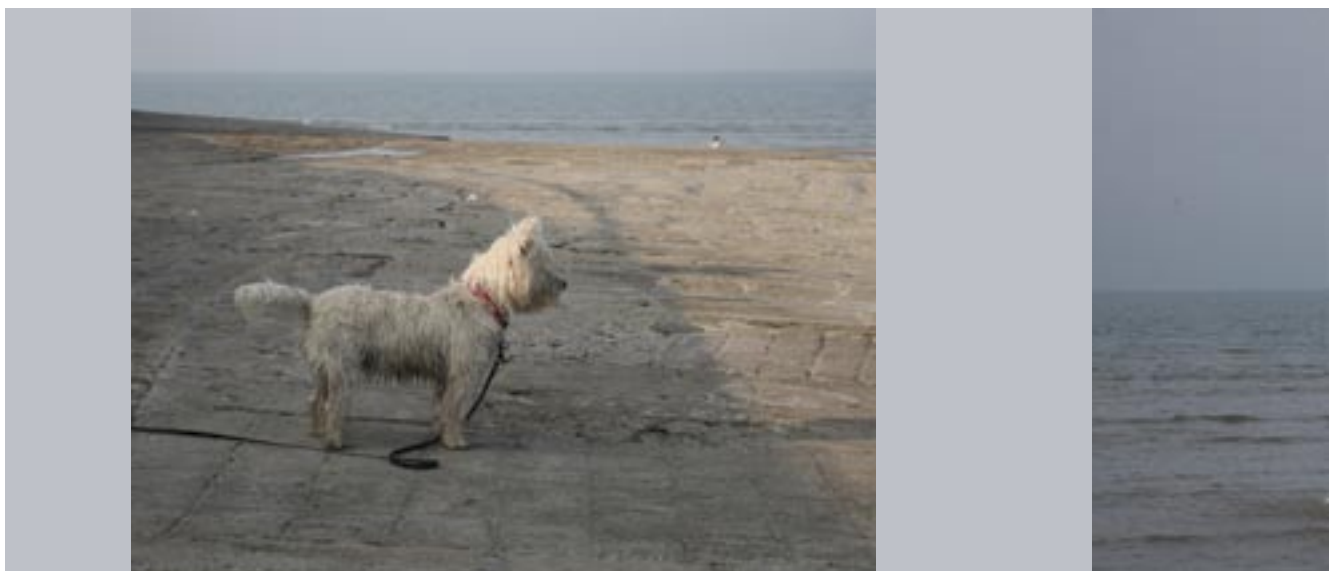
FIDELMA JOYCE is Senior Human Rights Awareness Officer, Irish Human Rights Commission.

For 2002 Concluding Comments see [http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/E.C.12.1.Add.79.En?Opendocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/E.C.12.1.Add.79.En?Opendocument).

For information on reporting by NGOs to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights see <http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/NGOs.htm>

For information on links between human rights and poverty see <http://www.ohchr.org/english/issues/poverty/index.htm>

¹ OHCHR (2004) *Human Rights and Poverty Reduction – A Conceptual Framework*. p. iii. <http://www.ohchr.org/english/issues/poverty/index.htm>



Need for social policy to recognise that people are excluded when they cannot afford to give their children a holiday

Although holidaying is now a standard lifestyle practice for most Irish people, nearly one-quarter of Irish citizens still cannot afford to take an annual holiday for financial reasons.¹

Statistics (CSO, 2007) show that the combined number of domestic and international holiday trips taken by Irish residents rose from 10.9 million in 2002 to 14.2 million in 2006. Research² recently conducted at the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) suggests that holidaying is a socially exclusionist³ practice. It argues that to be unable to have an annual holiday is to experience a form of social exclusion and it aims to make a case for developing government policy in the area of social tourism. Social tourism is about extending the benefits of holidays to economically marginal groups, including the unemployed, single-parent families and pensioners. The research identified that social tourism provision in Ireland is significantly out of step with EU best practice, where policies founded on models of public, private and NGO partnership are well established.

The research investigated how access to an annual holiday can benefit children living in poverty and their families. It studied children who had the opportunity to avail of a child-centred, structured group holiday provided by three NGOs. Study participants were drawn from a cross-section of disadvantaged areas in Dublin,

comprising two inner-city and four suburban areas. Data collection involved 75 children and 35 guardians in the first stage, and 27 children and 16 guardians in subsequent stages. In total, 16 families participated in all stages of the research process, which used qualitative methods, including focus groups, in-depth interviews and observation.

Benefits of holidaying

The research found that the children studied clearly benefited from the opportunity to go on holiday. The most obvious benefit lay in being able to get a break from the routine home environment. The break has many effects: it is restorative and it creates opportunities to rest and relax, to be at ease and to harness renewed energies to meet the challenges routinely felt at home. This finding points to the extremely poor quality of the home environments in which the families who took part in the study live.

During their break away from home, children were exposed to a series of opportunities to develop socially and make new friends, acquire confidence and develop



personally, build self-esteem and learn new skills. An important finding was that children relished the opportunity to divest themselves of the responsibilities normally faced at home, often in having to care for siblings or act out certain roles expected of them by their peers. On holiday, the children were allowed to relax, feel safe, have fun and, in effect, to be children.

Longer-term benefits

An annual holiday contributes to children's *well-being* as opposed to *well-becoming*. The NGOs that provided the holiday do not aspire to produce long-term behavioural change; they simply want to give the children a holiday. Nevertheless, a number of benefits extending well beyond the actual duration of the holiday were identified. Anticipation before and memories after the holiday greatly enhanced the children's sense of well-being. This finding was reported by children and, to a greater extent, by guardians and key informants, who reported how children awaited the holiday excitedly and afterwards prized their trophies, medals and photos, and recounted stories about the holiday.

Furthermore, the holiday was a time when children were routinely introduced to a set of ideas that challenged the behaviour patterns prevailing in their home environments. They were proactively exposed to ideas about positive human interaction, respect, self-reliance and leadership.

The study further found that benefits trickled out into the wider family. The guardians benefited in that they had a reduced workload, more time for themselves and more time to devote to other responsibilities. In addition, the availability of the holiday was generally seen as a welcome support and as a sharing of responsibility in

rearing the children in their care. It supplemented their efforts to raise their children and reduced the sense of inadequacy that some of them felt for being unable to give their children what they would wish to give them.

The wider family was also found to benefit from the absence of one or more children because of the reduction of chaos that was found sometimes in these families' lives. Meanwhile, the children's return was associated with a re-invigoration of the family unit, with improved two-way communication between children and guardians, an increase in mutual appreciation of the two parties and a reduction in the negativity that can prevail in routine relationships within families.

Social tourism policy

Promoting participation in annual holidaying has a valid role to play in helping children and their families to cope with the difficulties associated with poverty and disadvantage. Currently, this assertion is not part of the prevailing thinking on social welfare in Ireland and changing thinking will bring challenges. Advancing policy development in the area requires the following:

- Recognising that holidaying excludes certain people and developing awareness of the concept of social tourism
- Acknowledging that being unable to take an annual holiday is a meaningful indicator of deprivation
- Recognising the value of holidaying in furthering social welfare, education, health and the economic agenda
- Generating awareness of existing social tourism provision in Ireland; this provision relies heavily on the NGO sector but with an array of ad hoc, often informal, public sector supports
- Developing a partnership model based on the public and private sectors working in tandem with the NGO sector addressing gaps in provision, to strengthen and integrate existing services
- Promoting further research to inform policy development.

For further information contact Dr Bernadette Quinn, Department of Tourism, DIT, Cathal Brugha St, Dublin 1.

DR BERNADETTE QUINN is a *Tourism Geographer and lectures on Tourism Policy at DIT.*

¹ EU-SILC data

² This research was funded by the Combat Poverty Agency Poverty Research Initiative. *Poverty, Social Exclusion and Holidaying: Towards Developing Policy in Ireland*, Quinn, B., Griffin, K. A. and Stacey, J. will be published in full as part of Combat Poverty's Working Paper Series.

³ See Jargon Buster, p. 15

What changes, good and bad, will civil society groups face in 2025?

Civil society groups are often hard-pressed to meet daily challenges but what will they face in the future?

The scale and complexity of present-day social ills that civil society associations seek to address is vast. Child poverty, domestic violence, loneliness and care for older people are just some of the many issues civil society associations engage in. Moreover, many civil society associations play an important role in influencing those with power and holding them to account, including governments and the business sector.

Keeping up with and responding to today's problems are significant challenges. But what might the future hold for civil society in the UK and Ireland? It is this question that the Carnegie UK Trust¹ has been exploring over the past eight months in its Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK and Ireland.

The inquiry defines civil society as a goal to aim for (a 'good' civil society), describes how it might be achieved (for example, through voluntary and community organisations, trade unions or faith-based organisations) and outlines mechanisms whereby different organisations can engage with each other about ends and means.

Futures thinking

Using a technique called 'futures and scenario thinking', which is used by the business community, the inquiry hosted a series of events across the UK and Ireland to gather insights from over 400 leaders. The purpose of

these events was to explore possible future threats to, and opportunities for, civil society in 2025.

Attention was focused on the broader forces for change that are likely to affect the future nature and role of civil society. The questions of growing socio-economic divides, pressure on global resources, disengagement from formal politics, rising individualism and the visibility of the security state frequently arose in discussions. These are the sort of uncertain forces for change that present the most pressing opportunities for, or threats to, civil society.

The challenge of sustainability and the threat of climate change is a common theme in public discourse, yet the implications are largely uncertain though potentially devastating. Perhaps this threat presents an opportunity to strengthen civil society and re-engage people in formal politics? The optimists at the inquiry events wondered whether, given the scale of this challenge, local and global alliances might be strengthened between organisations that might not normally work together.

Space for debate

Findings from the inquiry's futures events also show that there is particular concern about the diminishing arenas for public deliberation, whether virtual or physical. These arenas are diminishing as a result of increasing



fragmentation of society, for example, as a result of greater economic inequality, the concentration of ownership of the traditional media and the privatisation of public space. The interpretation of laws relating to security and disorder also threatens the nature of deliberation.

Concerns were also raised about the marginalisation of dissent and its relationship with the growing isolation of the poor. At a local level, especially at the inquiry events in Ireland, concerns were expressed about marginalised voices, such as migrant communities, children, and those who have poor health or lack the stamina to engage. As noted by Michael Edwards of the Ford Foundation in his book *Civil Society*

. . . expecting people on the breadline to share, participate and co-operate as equals is unreasonable unless efforts are also made to ensure it is a safe and rational thing for them to do. Arguing about politics and holding power to account takes both energy and courage, especially when no ‘insurance’ – legal, social and financial – exists to support you when power fights back.

Dissent silenced

The marginalisation of dissent is also a grave concern at a global level. Members of the Inquiry’s International Advisory Group emphasised the critical role civil society associations in the UK and Ireland play in defending civil liberties and human rights. Changes we allow in the West can threaten civil society in other parts of the world, for example, if nation-states in Europe and America introduce stringent security legislation, these can be used in less democratic countries to clamp down on civil society activists.

So, are civil society associations prepared for the future? In the past, civil society has often been ahead of other

sectors in warning of new threats – like those from climate change – and in embracing new opportunities – like those from a wider understanding of human rights. However, there are many factors that might inhibit the ability of civil society associations to prepare for or shape the future.

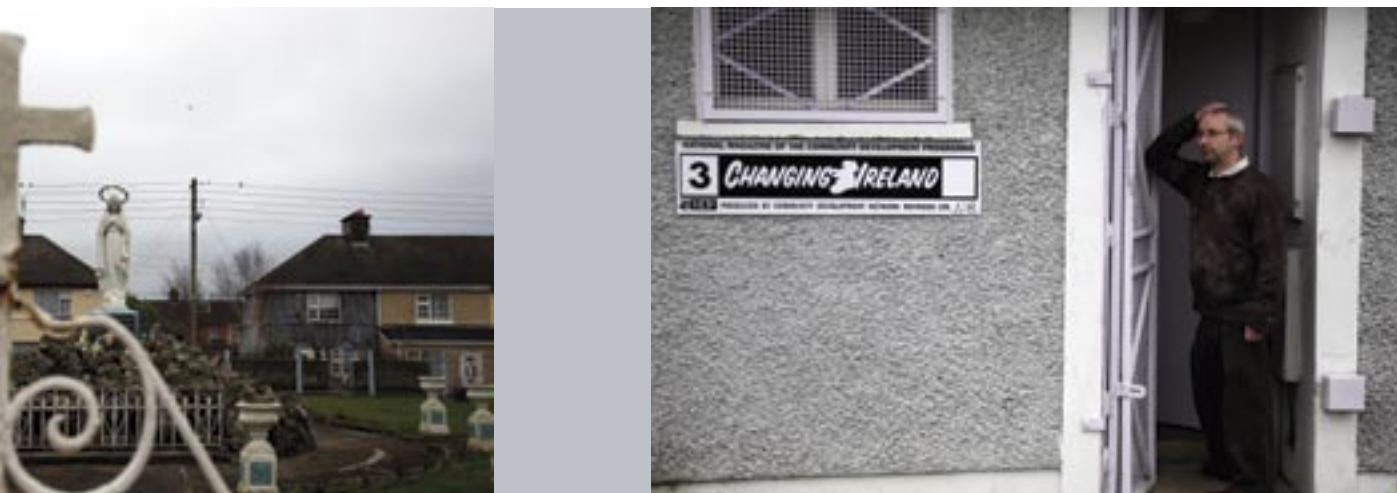
In part, this results from the short-term nature of traditional funding arrangements that do not enable long-term thinking. Participants in the inquiry events noted that they lack the space and time to ‘look up’ and connect with what is going on around them at a local and global level while they are struggling to meet present day issues and needs. Moreover, the fragmentation of civil society associations, for example, along issue or organisation lines, makes it difficult for alliances to be built that span divides and explore practical solutions that could diminish many overarching threats to the ‘good’ civil society.

The aim of the inquiry futures reports and the work in the later stages of the inquiry was to stay ahead of the game and to help civil society shape the future, rather than simply respond to events when they come.

To find out more about the inquiry and to download the inquiry’s futures reports and a toolkit that outlines how you could practically use them to inform your organisation’s strategic thinking, go to: http://democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/civil_society. Hard copies of the futures reports can also be requested by e-mailing morven@carnegieuk.org

LENKA SETKOVA is Director of the Democracy and Civil Society Programme, Carnegie UK Trust.

¹ See Jargon Buster, p. 15



Story of Fatima shows community driving change with equal power and resources

The regeneration process in Fatima Mansions, Dublin, illustrates how real, significant and meaningful change is possible through community development. *Things Can Be Different* tells the story.



In 1998¹ research showed Fatima to be a community in crisis. The most common image used by residents to describe their experience of living there was of 'doing a prison sentence'. One-third of households were actively seeking a transfer. The local project, Fatima Groups United, started a 10-year struggle to address this. A full demolition and rebuilding programme, coupled with an ambitious social regeneration scheme overseen by a legally incorporated regeneration board, were the result. *Things Can Be Different* suggests that change needs to take place at three dimensions.

Power dimension

How is decision-making organised? The establishment of a regeneration board, legally incorporated and independently chaired, gave the community fair representation in the power process.

Cultural dimension

What beliefs are held about society and who shapes those beliefs? The community challenged the image of Fatima as a ghetto by generating their own media. The co-production with RTÉ of a Pat Kenny radio programme about the estate was an example.

Economic dimension

How are resources for the community generated and who controls them? The community secured for itself equal access to resources in the context of the regeneration, including access to independent architects, consultations and staff, to develop

participative representation and an economic dividend from the regeneration to be administered by the regeneration board.

Things Can Be Different outlines an eight-stage process of change, which may be applicable to other contexts.² The following were regarded as essential in achieving change.

- Community development infrastructure is a vital resource in achieving equality for disadvantaged communities.
- Power differentials have to be recognised and evened out in negotiating change, which involves making formal arrangements guaranteeing parity and providing meaningful resources.
- Wider policy frameworks for equality need to be worked out in tandem with local change processes. Issues relating to the rundown of public land and housing stock have to be addressed at a wider policy level and not left to a single community to fight in isolation. Wider alliances are needed to push this agenda from the ground up, and a system for the State to engage with such policy issues is also required.

Things Can Be Different is available from Community Action Network, 24 Gardiner Place, Dublin 1. Tel: 01-8788005. Price €15 plus pp.

PETER DORMAN is a Staff Member with CAN.

¹ Corcoran, Mary (1998) *Making Fatima a Better Place to Live*. Maynooth: NUI.

² Based on Kotter, John (1996) *Leading Change*. USA: Harvard Business School Press.

Fettercairn spells out own health needs

With 6,500 people and no health centre, GP, dentist or pharmacy, residents of Fettercairn, Tallaght, south Dublin, believed the provision of local health services was a priority for their area and they decided to do something about it.

In 2003 and 2004 people who had attended family health days expressed an interest in improving health in the community. A management committee was set up, which secured funding for the Fettercairn Community Health Project (FCHP), a partnership of local residents, community groups and statutory agencies. Its core aim was to create an 'affordable, accessible, inclusive community-led health project for the people of Fettercairn which is friendly, warm and safe'.

A report on the project, 'Taking the first steps to a healthier Fettercairn', highlights the fact that health is affected by a person's family situation, financial means and living environment and indicates the kind of environment people regard as healthy – a community with clean streets, well-maintained houses and gardens, and in which there is less crime and anti-social behaviour.

The FCHP is now working with South Dublin County Council and the HSE to meet people's health needs and priorities in Fettercairn. It distributed the research results to people, groups and agencies both in Fettercairn and south County Dublin and the research will help shape future local health services.

The fact that the local people planned and carried out their own research and drew on residents' own knowledge and experience provides a model for other communities throughout the country that want to identify their own health priorities and seek better health services.

PEIGÍN DOYLE *is a Freelance Journalist and Editor.*

FCHP is made up of representatives of local residents, community groups and statutory agencies. Its work has been supported by the Combat Poverty Agency, HSE, Katherine Howard Foundation and RAPID. The report was carried out with support and training from Community Action Network.

Jargon Buster

Benchmarking

A term commonly used to describe a process for comparing the performance of the public sector with the private sector or for comparing systems in Ireland with those of other countries; in social inclusion discussions, it often means looking at best practice in other countries.

Carnegie UK Trust

The Carnegie UK Trust is one of many trusts worldwide that were set up by Scots-American Andrew Carnegie to support a more just, democratic, peaceful and sustainable world. Its central concern is the empowerment of all citizens to engage in society. In the UK it supports independent inquiry into issues of public interest. It currently runs four active work and research programmes on:

- supporting young people's participation in decision making
- developing and sustaining strong rural communities
- strengthening democracy and civil society
- promoting socially progressive philanthropy.

Exclusionist

The word exclusionist means something that shows or relates to a policy of excluding various types of people or things (*Collins English Dictionary*) (see pp 10–11).

NESC

The NESC is a body funded through the Department of the Taoiseach whose main role is to advise the Government on strategic issues relating to the development of the economy, the achievement of social justice and mechanisms for conducting relations and negotiating agreements between the Government and the social partners. Its board comprises representatives of the social partners, NGOs, key government departments and independent experts (see clarification below).

Clarification

In the last issue of *Action on Poverty Today*, on the topic of the Developmental Welfare State, Jargon Buster incorrectly referred to activation measures as measures aimed to encourage people to take up employment. We would like to clarify that activation measures in the context of the Developmental Welfare State refer to innovative measures in response to un-met social needs and the continual need for change in mainline supports. We apologise for any unintentional confusion that our earlier reference may have caused.

Noticeboard

Order Online

Combat Poverty publications, including research reports, resources, fact sheets and policy statements can now be ordered online from the Combat Poverty website. Free publications may be downloaded or ordered in hard copy. All other publications may be purchased by credit card. www.combatpovertypublications.ie.

Dáil Brief

Dáil Brief is a free monthly information service provided by Combat Poverty for voluntary and community organisations interested in issues of poverty and social exclusion discussed in the Oireachtas. It is circulated by email. To sign up, please email either sharon.keane@combatpoverty.ie or brharvey@iol.ie.

Community Development Survey

Community Development is central to many anti-poverty initiatives yet, in the Republic of Ireland, there is no national baseline data on the numbers, profile, employment context, work settings or experience of community development workers.

To address this, Combat Poverty is initiating a pilot survey of community development workers in one rurally defined area and one urban community in 2008. It is intended that the pilot survey will inform the methodology for a subsequent national survey of Community Development workers in Ireland. An advertisement has recently issued for a temporary researcher to undertake the pilot survey and an open round table is planned to discuss the research proposal.

An inter-agency advisory group will be established to support the work; provide technical advice on aspects of the methodology, definitions of community development, issues arising from the work; and to comment on drafts.

For further information on the pilot study, please contact Michelle Griffin michelle.griffin@combatpoverty.ie or 01 602 6630.

New Publications

Economics and Poverty – the links

Economics and Poverty – the links aims to strengthen the voices and practices of communities experiencing poverty by promoting a greater understanding of the relationship between poverty and economics. This resource was commissioned by Combat Poverty in conjunction with the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed and the National Women's Council. Available to order from the Combat Poverty website: www.combatpovertypublications.ie. Price €15

outlines the current Irish policy context that supports a dialogue between the State and groups in civil society, and offers guidance to public officials on engaging with the sector on policy design, formulation, implementation and evaluation relating to poverty and social exclusion. Available to order from the Combat Poverty website: www.combatpovertypublications.ie. Price €10

Find Your Way around the Community and Voluntary Sector

Finding Your Way Around the Community and Voluntary Sector by Hilary Curley aims to increase knowledge and understanding of the role, structure and composition of the community and voluntary sector working on issues relating to poverty, social inclusion and equality. It

Silent People and Other Stories

In Silent People and Other Stories journalist Susan McKay and photographer Derek Speirs present a rare and valuable insight into the day-to-day lives of people across the country who, despite the boom, have not prospered in modern Ireland. This book presents the human face of poverty in Ireland today and covers a range of issues, including rural isolation, discrimination, educational disadvantage and homelessness. Available to order or download free from the Combat Poverty website: www.combatpovertypublications.ie

In this issue of *Anti-Poverty Work in Action* we profile some of the projects funded by Combat Poverty that marked UN Day for the Eradication of Poverty on 17 October.

ANTI-POVERTY *Work in Action*



Sculptures express hopes of people in poverty

Sculptures express hopes of people in poverty. Adopting a human-rights approach to fighting poverty, ATD Fourth World works in partnership with people, families and communities facing long-term poverty, and with other groups and organisations also committed to improving the lives of those whose lives are hardest. It initiated the annual 17 October commemorations in Dublin which are now jointly organised by a coalition of twenty-five community, voluntary and development organisations.

To enable people living in extreme situations of poverty and exclusion to play a central role in marking the UN Day, ATD met again this year with community groups in Dublin and in surrounding counties, for the first time inviting them to take part in a creative workshop. With the help of an artist, members of the groups were invited to create metal wire sculptures expressing the difficulties and aspirations that are central to their lives.

At the 17 October commemoration in Dublin, the sculptures from fourteen groups were on display, beautifully mounted on metal supports. A number of workshop participants explained the meaning or message behind their sculpture and, for the majority, it was their first experience of speaking publicly.

Children from local schools and several after-school projects made life-size silhouettes of themselves as a symbol of the need to get to know one another better as a way of ending poverty and exclusion. The children's silhouettes have been on display in their schools and

some will now travel around Ireland and to a number of countries overseas.

The preparation of this year's UN Day, in Dublin and around the country, was supported by a new edition of the *17 October Newsletter* published by the 17 October Group and by the book *Stories of Struggle and Solidarity*, which brings together testimonies from 17 October events in Ireland and overseas, which was launched in the Mansion House in April 2007.

'To the government, we want to say they have to do a lot more for the kids and young people in places like where we live. If they want to help the kids get on with their future, they have to give more support to families and work with them to know what's best for the children.'

Parents living on a corporation housing estate who spoke at the 17 October commemoration in Dublin

Copies of *Stories of Struggle and Solidarity* are available from ATD Fourth World in Dublin.

ATD Fourth World can be contact at 01-8558191, email: atdfourthworld@eircom.net



Simon Community
 exhibition
 Radio drama
 Dundalk FM
 photographs
 Ignored
 volunteers
 Combat Poverty

Homeless experience ‘One Letter too Many’

It was ‘one letter too many’ for the characters in the twenty-minute radio drama on homelessness broadcast by Dundalk FM 100 to mark UN Day for the Eradication of Poverty. Earlier in the year, after a discussion on how to increase home-produced drama on the radio station, members of Dundalk Simon produced a ten-minute radio drama on the struggles that people experience in their lives. When Alan Byrne of Dundalk FM 100 saw Combat Poverty’s funding scheme to mark 17 October, he immediately thought of Simon and their drama on homelessness.

The radio station organised a series of workshops where Simon workers and clients collaborated in writing the script for a longer drama about a normal day in the life of a family and the stresses they experience. Simon clients and workers performed the drama, which was recorded and broadcast by Dundalk FM 100.

To coincide with the drama, the radio station also organised a photograph exhibition on the theme of

poverty, called ‘Struggle’. It provided a digital camera for Simon residents who photographed their images of poverty and struggle around the town. With advice and help in mounting the images from Dundalk Photography Society, the photographs were displayed in Louth County Library.

‘The effect of taking photographs around the town was a transformation for some of the people and they have become interested in photography. The whole project definitely created a buzz around the place.’

Alan Byrne, Manager, Dundalk FM 100

Dundalk FM 100 can be contacted at 042-9395100.
 Email: alanbyrne@dundalkfm.com’

Myths about lone parents sent packing

As a lone father with two small school-going kids you couldn’t work full time. You had to fit in around school time and childcare ... people looked at you as if you had ten heads if you turned down work.’ Joe is a lone father with two children. His comments are featured in *Everybody knows ... dispelling myths about one-parent families in Ireland* which was produced by OPEN, the organisation representing lone parent groups, to mark UN Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

The attractive, wallet-sized information pack contains descriptions of the realities of lone parents’ lives and relates the simple facts: in 2007 the maximum social

welfare entitlement for a lone parent with one child is €258 per week, while the poverty line is €280; in 2005, 27 per cent lived below the poverty line; lone parents wait longer on housing lists than other households; and although almost half are employed, 43 per cent of working claimants of the One-Parent Family Payment have an income below €150 per week.

OPEN hopes that the publication of the information pack will change the terms of debate around lone parents and do away with the stereotypes and misconceptions that surround the issue. The pack was published to coincide



with 17 October and copies were distributed at the service to mark the struggles and achievements of poor people around the world at Custom House Quay, Dublin. Demand is so strong that OPEN now plans to re-print it.

OPEN can be contacted at: 01-8148860; email: enquiries@oneparent.ie

'We are hoping for a long-term sustainable impact from the information pack. We need people to understand the realities of parenting alone at all levels of society, not just among policymakers.'
Camille Loftus, Head of Policy and Research, OPEN

Stitching new and old communities together

An intercultural quilt project originated at a consultation meeting held by Roscommon Women's Network, which wanted to encourage women from different cultures to engage with one another. When the network heard that Combat Poverty was funding projects to mark UN Day for the Eradication of Poverty, it decided to use that as a vehicle for bringing people together.

Roscommon READ (Roscommon Education Development Centre), North West Roscommon CDP and the Active Age Group then came on board and a project for Traveller Women suggested making a quilt. The quilt would symbolise the poverty that Ireland experienced in the past, when old rags were recycled to make something useful.

Led by an American artist and helped by Castle Quilters in Roscommon, twenty-six women from Ireland and

around the world came together to make the quilt, which received a lot of publicity and was displayed in many venues around the county. All the women involved want to continue the contact with each other and the group wants to include women from other nationalities who could not take part in the first scheme. Funding to continue the project is an issue but the will is there.

'We were in the background; the women were in the foreground. We were there to support but they were really empowered to make decisions themselves.'
Nora Fahy, Project co-ordinator, Roscommon Women's Network CDP

Roscommon Women's Network CDP can be contacted at 094-9621687 or 086-8099154; email: roswomensnetwork@eircom.net.



Waterford shows pictures of another life

There are people from over seventy new communities currently living in Waterford city and county and approximately 1,200 of these are living in direct provision hostels. The Information and Support Unit for New Communities, Waterford, was set up fourteen months ago after a needs assessment carried out by Presentation Brother Kevin Mascarenhas showed that they lacked support and information on their situation and rights in Ireland.

The unit, which is run from the Edmund Rice International Heritage Centre in Mount Sion, co-ordinates the work of agencies and service providers such as the Refugee Legal Service and the Refugee Information Service in a one-stop shop for new people living here. The unit organises English language classes, sports events, literacy supports, computer training and ECDL, and sewing classes.

When 17 October UN Day for the Eradication of Poverty loomed, the unit decided to mark it with an exhibition of photographs provided by its clients and overseas workers of their home countries. The exhibition went on display in Mount Sion hall and its preparation helped break down a lot of shyness between members of different communities. After Christmas it will go on

exhibition in the local library. Since it opened, people have continued to add new photographs and the show is growing all the time.

If funding can be secured the Information and Support Unit hopes to put the photographs on a website, along with information about people in Waterford's new communities, so their relatives abroad can log on and see how they are faring in their new home.

'We have started a focus group so that new communities can represent themselves and say what they need. It is called Beo Eile, another life. We tell them you don't have to leave all your old life behind when you come here, it's just the opportunity for another life.'

Anne Nolan, co-ordinator

The Information and Support Unit for New Communities, Waterford, can be contacted at: 051-852564; email: anne.nolisu@gmail.com

Wexford youth turn spotlight on drugs

Last year South West Wexford Community Development Group (CDG) marked UN Day for the Eradication of Poverty by bringing young people together to explore human rights and rural poverty, both local and global, and to present a drama around it. It was so successful that they returned to the idea of a drama again this year. One of last year's participants had suggested they look at drugs and poverty and this was chosen as the theme of this year's drama.

South West Wexford CDG organised five days of workshops at which thirty-five transition year students explored the question of drugs and poverty and its portrayal in the media. The Community Based Drugs Initiative discussed drug issues with them and then, facilitated by members of Crooked House theatre company, the students wrote a collaborative script about the role of drugs and alcohol in worsening the effects of

poverty in communities. They performed the drama in St Michael's Theatre, New Ross, on 22 October to a large audience of their fellow students.

The initiative was a great success. The CDG is hoping to organise follow-up activity through the schools, with the co-operation of teachers, and to hold another event with students early in 2008.

'The young people are very aware that drugs are not just a matter of poverty but that drugs affect all classes.'

Sharon Kennedy, project co-ordinator

South West Wexford Community Development Project can be contacted at: 051-389418, email: swwcdg@iol.ie