

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DUN LAOGHAIRE REFUGEE PROJECT-DRP

NOVEMBER 2002

In the past year, the DRP supplied the Charity Commissioners with our newly adopted Constitution with a view to incorporation under the Charities Act 1973. A Code of Conduct for Volunteers has also been agreed. So we now have parameters within which to operate and guidelines in place for work with the asylum seekers, particularly with the unaccompanied minors and refugees. Our accounts will be submitted for independent audit and certification after the year has ended.

We have used the room which we occupy by the kindness of the CYMS (Catholic Young Men's Society) - almost opposite the Old School House Asylum-Seekers Hostel in Eblana Ave. - for various meetings and for literacy and language classes for the asylum seekers/refugees. The literacy classes have been funded to-date by the Southside Partnership, a Dun Laoghaire based semi-state. With the help of some asylum seekers, we have made great improvements to the room by painting it a brighter, softer colour. It is our intention in the coming year to further improve the room, with the help of Barnardos (Barnardos Services for Children and Families) with whom we cooperate closely.

The DRP has continued with its Monday night attendances in the Old Schoolhouse Hostel. Almost every week we meet with new asylum seekers who have arrived in this country and try and make their initial transition in a strange country a little easier with practical suggestions and relevant information. We have French and Arabic speakers among our volunteers who are proving useful, particularly in the area of asylum application forms and other official procedures.

There are approximately 220 asylum seekers in the Dun Laoghaire area at this time, at two hostels - 150 in the Old Schoolhouse and 70 in Sandycove House. Some move on fairly quickly while others have been as long as two years in the same hostel. There is a very small number of refugees (i.e. those declared to be refugees under the Refugee Act) resident in our area.

As to the unaccompanied minors (i.e. asylum-seekers under 18 years of age who arrived in Ireland without a parent or legal guardian) there are two South East Regional Health Board HA project workers, (stationed at Baggot Street); one project officer responsible for each hostel. All the 70 asylum seekers in Sandycove House are unaccompanied minors. In the Old Schoolhouse, there are 70 unaccompanied minors with the remainder composed of either single adults over 18 years or family units.

With the opening of the Barnardos Old Schoolhouse Project for children, the needs of the families in the Old Schoolhouse are being catered for and Barnardos' newly refurbished room adjoining the hostel is also being used as a homework club for the school-going asylum seekers in the evenings. We are represented on the Barnardos Old Schoolhouse Project and this ensures there is no duplication of services provided. Barnardos are also using the DRP room for teaching and plan to install additional computers for supervised classes for mothers and other adults shortly.

Unaccompanied Minors: About 100 of the 140 unaccompanied minors are enrolled in some form of education. The remaining 40 are either young mothers or others, who, for various reasons have not yet been accommodated.

We are represented on the Unaccompanied Minors Task Group in the Dun Laoghaire area, the Southside Unite Partnership.

The Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown Vocational Education Committee -VEC - are planning a course for young mothers (crèche facilities will be available) and this will help approximately 5 young mothers at present in Dun Laoghaire.

We continue to liaise with the statutory bodies in the area, including Community Welfare Officers, Health Board, VEC, the community Garda ethnic officers and DLRCC.

Seminars: During the past year DRP members have attended various seminars throughout the year including the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism, "Rights and Entitlements in Education for Unaccompanied Minors" "Towards a National Action Plan to Address Racism" Consultative Conference. We are represented at bi-monthly meetings of the Churches Asylum Network and at meetings of Integrating Ireland.

Visits Received: We have been visited by representatives from the Dublin Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Irish Refugee Council, the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee and the Vincentian Refugee Centre.

Visits Made: in addition to the seminars, members have visited other NGOs working with asylum-seekers (e.g. SPIRASI, the Vincentian Refugee Centre, JVC-Jesuit Volunteers, the Killarney Asylum-Seekers Initiative Committee) for exchanges of information.

Representations: We have made representations to local politicians in the area re the living conditions in the two hostels. We have also expressed our concern re the supervision of separated children (unaccompanied minors) in the hostels. We have met with the Vincentian Centre Housing Officer, Spirasi, ERHA Psychological Service, DLRCC Arts Officer, the Pavilion Theatre Administrator etc.

Social Integration. During the past year there have been outings to the theatre, cinema, the Zoo and to Monkstown Swimming Pool. Some very enjoyable hill walks have taken place along with visits to Glencree for tea. A soccer team has been formed and has played approximately 20 matches during the year. Thanks are due to Dalkey United and Blackrock College for the use of their facilities. Asylum-seekers, also, play basketball in the Loughlinstown Leisure Centre. Picnics have been organised along with visits to the museum etc. for the younger children.

Two very enjoyable multi-cultural parties were held at Halloween and Christmas.

A month long Summer Project was organised by Barnardos with input from the DRP, culminating in a successful talent show at the Pavilion Theatre.

Education: Secondary Schools- at this time there are approx. 41 unaccompanied minors in 10 schools in the area. We work closely with the school principals and the Health Board. Attendance is regularly checked by the Health Board and any necessary follow up is done by Barnardos and the DRP.

Youthreach; There are 4 young people attending Youthreach in Rathfarnham.

Literacy/English: The DRP organised a literacy programme for 12 young people in January 2002. The three tutors were funded by a grant from Southside Partnership. The programme recommenced in September and the VEC Adult Education Section in Sallynoggin has now taken over responsibility for this and a programme started this month with 16/18 pupils enrolled. Classes are taking place three times a week.

Ballsbridge (Back to Education Initiative) and Marino VEC Colleges: New courses commenced in September and 18 young people from the two hostels are enrolled – attendance is closely monitored and the feedback is very positive.

There are approx. 16 other asylum-seekers enrolled as students in other courses run by the VECs.

Volunteer Teaching Programme:

As of November 4th, there were 5 volunteers working in the areas of literacy and English teaching. Another teacher gives Leaving Certificate poetry classes once a week which is now on its second year and is very popular with the Leaving Cert students.

The majority of these students are unaccompanied minors with literacy/language learning needs.

Housing: Families often prefer to find rented housing where there is more room for children than at the hostel. The DRP liaises with Vincentian Refugee Centre on housing.

Asylum Process and Legal Issues: when requested members of the DRP have advised on how to obtain information on the legal issues involved. During the year also when Dun Laoghaire asylum-seekers have been involved, members have attended a Refugee Applications Commission substantive Interview, visited Mountjoy Prison, and accompanied an asylum seeker to the Gardai.

Refugees: Asylum seekers when they have been officially declared to have refugee status, tend not to remain as residents in the Dun Laoghaire area, mainly because housing is expensive here. In a few cases however the DRP has given help to refugees in the search for accommodation, in advice on language and skills training and in seeking information on job possibilities from FAS and other sources.

THANKS:

Our sincere thanks to David Hicks and his staff in the Old Schoolhouse for their continuing support for the DRP and their concern for all their residents.

Our thanks also to all our generous donors including the local Churches and shops, the Pavilion Theatre and the IMC, Griffith College and Treasury Holdings and many other donors.

And finally, a big “thank you” to all our volunteers, who cheerfully give of their time and talents to help improve the stay of the asylum seekers in Dun Laoghaire.