

**DUN LAOGHAIRE REFUGEE PROJECT-DRP  
 TIONSCNAMH DHUN LAOGHAIRE UM DHIDEANAITHE-TDD  
 ANNUAL REPORT OF ACTIVITIES IN 2003  
 TUARASCÁIL BHLIANTÚIL GHNÍOMHAIREACTAÍ I 2003**

### **1. Introduction**

During the year 2003, the DRP continued its work, begun in June 2001, aimed at helping asylum seekers and refugees in the Dun Laoghaire area. Even more so than in the past, the year 2003 was marked by discontinuity and uncertainty about the future. There was a succession of changes in the composition, numbers and ages of asylum seekers.

The main concern has been to help the *unaccompanied minors* (boys and girls under 18 year of age arriving in Ireland without parents or legal guardians and claiming asylum) who have been lodged by the authorities in Dun Laoghaire. Some have come from countries where there is extreme civil strife or disorder (e.g. Angola, Burundi and Congo) and often show symptoms of disorientation or trauma. All need support.

As in the past regular contact is maintained with the asylum seeker community in Dun Laoghaire by weekly attendance on Monday evenings at the Old School House hostel. In addition, we have the use of a room in the premises of the Catholic Young Men's Society of Ireland (CYMSI), immediately opposite the Old School House, in which we organise literacy and English language classes. We are grateful to the CYMSI.

### **2. The Changing Asylum Seeker/Refugee Community in Dun Laoghaire**

*In January 2003*, there were 220 asylum seekers approximately in Dun Laoghaire, of whom

- 150 were accommodated at the Old Schoolhouse. Of this number approximately
- 70 were unaccompanied minors and the balance either single adults over 18 years or family units
- 70, all unaccompanied minors, were accommodated at Sandycove House Glasthule;
- a small number with refugee status lodged temporarily at the Old School House.

*By December 2003*,

- all two-parent family units had been transferred elsewhere early in the year and no further two parent families were assigned to the Old School House;
- in June the Sandycove Hostel was closed - the site is being developed as an apartment block - and the majority of the unaccompanied minors at that hostel were transferred to the Old School House;
- in September, single mothers were transferred to houses in Ranelagh/Rathgar and Lucan: single males were transferred to 'direct provision' in Viking Lodge, Francis Street, Dublin 8.

-in December all young people, who had reached 18 years of age, were transferred to 'direct provision' hostels mainly to Kilmarnock House, Military Road, Killiney: these numbered some 30 young 'graduates' of the Old School House at the year end. A small number received permission to live with friends in rented accommodation.

-at the end of December a further three over 18s received notice to move to Kilmarnock House in early January.

-newly arrived unaccompanied minors continue to be assigned to the Old School House, but the reduced number reflects the overall lower number of persons claiming asylum in Ireland;

-by the end of the year 2003, the number of asylum seekers (all minors under 18 years) at the Old School House had dropped to 66 persons. The future of the Old School House hostel was in some doubt as the commitment to use the premises was on a three month basis only.

-a very few of the Dun Laoghaire asylum seekers have disappeared without trace.

### 3. Official Policy

Under the new policy, in effect since 2003, any unaccompanied minor lodging in Dun Laoghaire receives an automatic notification from the Refugee Integration Agency (RIA) of the Department of Justice that, on reaching 18 years of age, he or she is no longer the responsibility of the East Coast Area Health Board (ECAHB) but comes under the RIA and so will be transferred to a 'direct provision' hostel. Direct provision means board as well as lodging with a weekly cash allowance of €19.30 to cover personal expenses. While legally adulthood may arrive with one's eighteenth birthday, the coming of age mentally, physically and from the point of view of practical needs is a far more complex process.

Kilmarnock House, where most of the over 18 years olds from Dun Laoghaire have been housed, formerly a religious retreat house, is located in an isolated part of Killiney up a dark avenue. In recent months, it has been used mainly as a place of transit for adult asylum seekers after arrival in Ireland before assignment to more permanent accommodation elsewhere. At present it accommodates over one hundred adult asylum seekers, some with babies and young children.

### 4. Concerns

The DRP has informed the ECAHB of its concern at the disruptive effect of the decision to move a large number of young people in December to 'direct provision' hostels. In these hostels they no longer have the support systems – the ECAHB Team, the OSH staff and the DRP – which were available in Dun Laoghaire.

We are also concerned at the way in which access to education is being increasingly restricted for young adult asylum seekers. Boredom and isolation are bad companions for developing young people of any nationality.

We feel that the regulations on education and training for asylum seekers, and the application of these regulations, should be made less rather than more restrictive especially in the case of those who have recently reached 18 years of age.

#### **5. Main Areas of Action by DRP**

As in the past, our activities concerning the asylum seekers have been directed mainly towards:

- (a) ensuring that their stay in Ireland, whether or not they eventually qualify as 'Convention Refugees' under the Irish Refugee Act and the UN Refugee Convention and so have the right to reside permanently in Ireland, is of benefit to themselves by seeing that they are placed in schools or other education/training courses including English language and literacy courses;
- (b) making their stay less difficult and less lonely by encouraging their participation in social, recreational and cultural activities, involving where possible the local community;
- (c) liaising with the authorities on such matters as education, welfare, health, the asylum determination process, prison visits and other legal matters;
- (d) cooperating with the governmental and non-governmental organizations and groups dealing with the issue of asylum, by attending meetings and by other contacts.

#### **6. Education and Training**

During the period August 2002 to September 2003 the DRP directly placed over 150 young people either in schools or language and literacy courses run by the VEC. When they arrive in Dun Laoghaire the project workers from the ECAHB Team for Unaccompanied Minors (based in Baggot Street hospital) referred them to the DRP. Having assessed them, contact was made with local schools (as total of 11 schools participate) for those who had previous education before arriving in Ireland. If required the DRP accompanied the minors for their interview with the relevant school principal. This form of referral/placement continues at present. Contact is maintained with school principles as the need arises and they are kept up-to-date with changes which may affect their students. Regular contact is also maintained with the ECAHB project workers.

The VEC in Ballsbridge provides courses for those who are not suited to secondary school but whose literacy and language are of a level to enable them to participate in computer, language and other classes. Approximately 30 students attended from September 2002 – June 2003, 12 of these students sat the Cambridge English Examination. This course continues to be run and contact is maintained by the DRP with the course co-coordinator.

For those who arrived in Ireland with little or no literacy and/or English language skills the DRP initially provided classes with three literacy tutors. In January 2003 students were transferred to a formal course which was set up by the VEC in Sallynoggin. In September 2003 an Education Co-Coordinator for Unaccompanied Minors was appointed

by the VEC and the intention is that this person will assess the educational needs of all newly arrived minors in the future. At present the DRP continues to be the conduit through which minors are placed in secondary schools, while those with specific language/literacy needs are channeled through the VEC Co-Coordinator and others who are involved in the VEC programme.

A small number of students attend Youthreach and also specific courses for asylum seekers in other VECs.

## **7. Social, Recreational and Cultural Activities**

### **(a) Programme of Activities**

In the last year, the Social, Recreational and Cultural Programme has involved the asylum seekers in the following main activities:

- cinema, theatre and puppet theatre attendance especially during the winter;
- hill walks from Easter through the summer months with picnics in the Dublin/Wicklow mountains;
- swimming at the Monkstown Leisure Centre and in the sea;
- team-sports including the Old School House football and basketball teams;
- encouraging a drama group ('The Bright Sparks');
- social events to mark St. Patrick's Day (a ceili), Christmas/New Year etc;
- birthday greetings for individual asylum seekers and small gifts to mark birthdays and Christmas;
- participation in Dun Laoghaire Community events (e.g. Community Day on 5 July, the International Cultural Summer Festival in August etc.);
- table quizzes, one in conjunction with Blackrock College.

### **(b) World Refugee Day Sunday 22 June 2003**

In order to mark World Refugee Day, as declared by the United Nations, the DRP, with the help of Barnardos, the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown Corporation (DLRCC) and other donors, organized a "celebration of diversity" with song, music, dance and mime performed by the Dun Laoghaire asylum seekers and other invited groups. This took place on the afternoon and evening of Sunday 22 June in the refurbished public sea-side park at Newtown Smith, just opposite the former Sandycove Hostel.

The celebration was opened by the Cathaoirleach of DLRCC, Cllr Donal Marron, by the Representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Ireland, Ms Pia Prutz-Phiri, and by the Chairperson of the DRP Mr G. Kilgallen. The event attracted a large audience - some who were invited and others simply took a Sunday afternoon stroll in the fine summer weather and got caught up with the rhythm of the music and the dance. For the individual asylum-seekers this 'celebration' was an important opportunity for them to demonstrate the many talents that they possess. It was also a way for them to express appreciation for the kindness shown to them by the people of Dun Laoghaire. The UN High Commission for Refugees organized an information tent, supplying documentation

on the plight of refugees throughout the world and the work of the UNHCR to provide humanitarian relief for refugees.

The young asylum seekers were involved in the organizing committee, in stewarding, along with young Irish volunteers on the day, and their input and suggestions contributed largely to making the day a great success.

#### **8. Liaison with the Authorities**

- (a) On-going liaison with the ECAHB Team in Baggot Street Hospital.
- (b) Meeting with David Walsh, CEO of the ECAHB who was appointed to liaise with the DRP. It is hoped to have further meetings in 2004.
- (c) Regular contact with the ECAHB psychologist for minors
- (d) Prisons Visits: members of the DRP have visited asylum seekers detained at Clover Hill Prison the designated prison in Dublin for male deportees and have had contact with Mountjoy and Limerick Women's Prisons. We are grateful for the assistance of prison staff and members of the prison chaplaincy
- (e) Liaison with the Refugee Legal Service on a number of occasions.

#### **9. Non-Governmental and Other Organisations dealing with Asylum**

The DRP is represented at bi-monthly meetings of the Churches' Asylum Network (CAN) and keeps up-to-date with what is happening around the country. The DRP is also a member of the Social Policy Sub-Committee of the Irish Refugee Council. Members attend meetings of Integrating Ireland and other groups working with asylum seekers and refugees. During the period the Barnardos support project for asylum seekers was running in the OSH, the DRP was represented on the advisory committee. The DRP also attends meetings of the Southside Partnership group representing asylum seekers. Contact is also maintained with Children's Rights Alliance.

#### **10. Information and Media Liaison**

During the year the DRP drew up an Information Leaflet, giving background details about the work of the DRP for use with the press and the public. A copy is attached.

As to contact with the media, we have actively involved representatives of the media in our public activities such as the World Refugee Day event. We have also participated in media interviews and responded with information to media queries, while at the same time pointing out that we see our main role as concentrating on helping individual asylum seekers and refugees and not as a pressure group. We have made representations in the last year to politicians and officials on aspects of the rights and welfare of the asylum-seekers in Dun Laoghaire and will continue to do so.

## **11. Legal Status of DRP Trust and DRP Association**

The DRP is made up of two legal bodies: (a) the DRP Trust and (b) the DRP Association. The Trust is the guardian of all funds and the bank account is in the name of the Trust. By way of a “Scheme of Incorporation under the Charities Act 1973”, the Trust was established as a Body Corporate by the Charities Commissioners on 14 April 2003.

## **12. Members of Trust and Association Committee/Volunteers**

The membership of the Trust was unchanged in 2003. One new member was co-opted onto the DRP Association Committee. Details are set out in the attached Information Leaflet. Two Sub-Committees, one on financial matters and the other on education service the DRP Committee. Volunteers (ordinary members of the Association who are not members of the Committee) continued to play an essential role in supporting the various activities of the DRP in 2003.

## **13. Funding and Accounts**

During the year we have received generous donations from individual members of the Dun Laoghaire community, from local business firms, some of the Churches, the Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Corporation, the Ireland Fund and Eastern Region Health Board. We are most grateful for this support.

The Revenue Commissioners (Charities Section, Nenagh) require annually a set of accounts, an annual report, details of fund-raising and other information and the Charities Commissioners require, in addition, the accounts to be audited. These requirements have been and will continue to be met.

A summary of the DRP Accounts for 2003 together with a summary of the main Donations received is attached.

## **14. Plans for 2004**

The DRP intends to continue its various activities in support of the asylum seekers and refugees in 2004. Emphasis will continue to be placed on education, language skills and literacy. The Social, Recreational and Cultural Programme will also be stressed. However, in view of the uncertainty that has become a part of the asylum seeker existence in Dun Laoghaire, we will review carefully our activities on a monthly basis. We look forward to the continued support of donors and volunteers in the year ahead.

## **15. Thanks**

In addition to our donors, particular thanks to Mr David Hicks and to his staff at the Old School House hostel who have welcomed us to the hostel and cooperated closely with the DRP. Thanks to Dun Laoghaire County Council; to Garda Paul Durkin and Garda Cian Long, Garda Ethnic Liaison Officers, Dun Laoghaire who have provided transport and other help during the year, to the Churches and to the many business firms (including Treasury Holdings and Ericsson) and private citizens who have supported our work. We

are, also, most grateful to Tunney O'Leary & Co. Solicitors, Tallaght for advice and help with legal matters.

We are grateful to the cinemas and theatres that have provided free or subsidized admission tickets, and also the Loughlinstown and Monkstown Leisure Centres, Dalkey United and Blackrock College for the use of their facilities.

We must, also, register the deep debt of gratitude that we and all asylum seekers in the Old School House owe to Barnardos for the programmes that they initiated, in particular, the most useful programmes to support mothers and children and in help with the organization of the World Refugee Day event. With the transfer of mothers and children elsewhere the Barnardos programmes have ended.

Finally, a sincere and generous thanks to all our volunteers who give so generously and unstintingly of their time, good humour and most importantly provide a listening ear to people far from the land of their birth,

**Go raibh mile maith agaibh!**

January 2004