



The Westside Red Bus Project

By Fergal McNally

This year's program for the Galway Arts Festival was full of famous names and quotes from newspapers which assure the reader that the work on show is internationally acclaimed. In the visual art section near the back you'll find something a little different: *The Westside Red Bus Project*, a collaboration between LORG, *The Westside Resource Centre* and *Youth Work Ireland, Galway*.

The Westside Resource Centre was established as a community development project in 1992 with the aim of addressing issues of poverty and social exclusion in the Westside of Galway city. There is a notice board in the reception area with "The Wall of Issues" written over it. People from the area stick up notes outlining the things which they feel their community needs. Glancing at the board you read things like "We need a multi-denominational secondary school now" and "Make the roads safer for children." This is a place which gives you an inkling of the political issues that concern ordinary people.

Youth Work Ireland, Galway is one of the community groups with an office in the centre. It is an organisation which is committed to promoting the personal, social and educational development of young people. *The Red Bus Project* came out of a collaboration between *Youth Work Ireland, Galway* and two artists from LORG, a member-based art organisation.

The two artists, Jennifer Hutton and Ursula Kelly, were interested in exploring children's creativity. They also wanted to create a work of art which would respond to the rapid cultural changes in Ireland. Marty Clare and Maria Torres from *Youth Work Ireland* organised eleven children to work with Jennifer and Ursula for four weeks. During a series of workshops the group looked at issues of *National Geographic* and worked with the images they found there, while discussing the different ways in which people live all over the world. For the final project Ursula and Jennifer took photos of all the children. They gave each child photos of the other children and helped them alter the images with paint, creating a collage of Galway faces with colours, hairstyles and jewellery from all over the world. The pictures cover the side of a Galway City bus, spread out in a colourful circle with a big red heart painted in the centre. Every child made a different letter for the multi-coloured banner on the other side of the bus, which reads "United Colours of Westside."

When the decorated bus pulled into the car park of the *Westside Resource Centre* on 26th July for the launch of the project, the atmosphere was like a school tour. The young artists were less interested in talking about their work than they were in running around and jumping on and off the bus. When Marty Clare and Maria Torres got them to pose in front of their work they cheered and gave their best Ali G "Westside" hand signs to the camera.

Afterwards, Marty Clare told me that he saw art "a creative tool to encourage kids to express themselves and through that to develop their social and personal skills. Art is involved, not passive. Kids want to be doing things, not sitting listening to grown-ups natter on." Aside from the educational benefits of the project it was impossible to be at the launch without being struck by how much fun the kids were having.

I saw the bus driving around Galway a couple of times in the weeks after the launch. It was a cheerful reminder that art is not just something which professionals create to international acclaim; it's also a boring old bus livened up by images which are as vivid and vibrant as the artists who created them.



Menlo Castle as part of a City Park By Sabina Higgins



The ruins of Menlo Castle are a special landmark on the Galway landscape.

The fields running down to the river on the Menlo side, when taken with the ruins of the old castle, constitute a ready-made park, one that has long been enjoyed as such by the people on the Menlo side, who walk there, picnic there, and sit on the banks by the pier walls under the castle.

The ruin itself has a special place in the hearts of Galway people. Its beauty is in the fact that it is a ruin with a particular history in this riverside setting. The ruins are a special landmark on the landscape to people who pass on the river or view the castle from the banks. The whole area has an atmosphere of beauty and tranquillity. On a fine summer's evening, to experience this part of the river with the sun going down and the water so still and calm reflecting the ruin and sky over head and the lush greenness of the fields and the trees in the background, is a wonderful experience. The cattle lying lazily on the river bank add a really special quality to the scene. This natural park is a beautiful place to walk in, a place to 'stop and stare' and be immersed in soft luxurious nature. Time spent there exercises the body, feeds the soul and the spirit.

Galway city of course urgently needs a park and we are lucky to have the shape of a natural park in place, comprising the banks of the Corrib on the Menlo side, the river Corrib itself, and the banks of the Corrib on the Newcastle Dangan side. While the latter are owned by NUIG and contain great sports grounds and playing fields, they provide access to a river bank walk for the public which is a wonderful source of recreation and enjoyment.

We need to sustain and develop a park such as this now more than ever when people lead such stressful lives. This is such a place as the romantic poets wrote of as necessary to allay the conditions that the Industrial Revolution had created: A place where people can become aware of and experience the sublime power of nature, where they can rest and be healed and where the imagination can soar.

In the present time where everything has to be 'developed' and privatised, it is important that we do as the romantic poets did in the time of the Industrial Revolution; that we keep a space for the imagination and the mystery. The importance of the 'ruin' for helping us experience those sensations of the spiritual was expressed by many poets, but not by those alone.

In meeting present needs and making provision for the future it is surely clear as to what we should do. The Menlo Castle ruin should be stabilized and the lands around it should be developed by the city as a much-needed city-park for the citizens of Galway.

It is understood that this ruin and some lands surrounding it in the ownership of the city and that Compulsory Purchase Orders have been issued for some further lands. The real value of the ruin of the castle to the people of Galway is the place it occupies in their imagination and in their memory as a ruin, with a particular history. It is a wonderful landmark and insofar as it part of their shared imagination it is owned by all of the people.

Stabilizing the ruin and making it safe is the modern practice in Britain and Europe and we have in the public service some of the best experts capable of doing this work of stabilization and conservation of the ruin - The Board of Works who have done such wonderful work around the country.

The castle would lose its value if it were developed primarily for private use, if it were as a public symbol and amenity. If it were to be in any way privatised, it would be stolen from the people of Galway and would become just another piece of real estate.

How splendid instead it would be for the people of Galway and visitors and the tourist industry alike to have a city park so near the centre of the city, to have a park with the river Corrib running through it.

Galway Community Forum are to be congratulated for having passed a resolution unanimously calling for such a use of the Menlo Castle ruin and appropriate surrounding lands as a City Park.

Galway 'One World' Centre By Rose Tuelo Brock

Many years ago when I first arrived in Galway, I came to know a few groups which were interested in world affairs. Apart from the members of Comhlámh (The Association of Returned Development Workers), there were members of Voluntary Service International and also a small group of lay senior Catholic members led by the late Mr John Howlet. These groups often invited me to join in discussions on topics such as world development, world debt, human rights and many similar topics. It occurred to me then that, since they were like-minded people in that they sought not only to inform themselves about these issues, but also wanted to share and create awareness, they could pool their resources and meet in one place and share expertise and experts.

The opportunity to do so came much later: In September of 1991, I enrolled to do a Diploma in Community Development in UCG (NUI, Galway). At the end of the course, we were required to present a topic for a project and see the project to its beginning. When I presented my topic for a resource centre for a coordinating body to provide discussions in such world issues, the supervisors advised that the project was too big for one person and they advised that I worked with two other people. So it was that I was joined by Rosa Pardo-Higgins and Anne Maher. Together we researched possibilities of establishing a Resource Centre and pooling names of experts who could be called upon to lead discussions. It was envisaged then that the centre would have room enough for a library, a discussion room and perhaps a drop in coffee area room. This was the beginning of Galway 'One World'.

At the end of the course, the project continued and we applied for funds. A group of like-minded people came together to be the Board of Management. They also agreed on a constitution along the lines of the objectives of the centre. The first funds came from Christian Aid, specifically for the purchase of a computer. More literature about Human Rights and Justice issues such as inequality, discrimination et al, was collected. A list of those with expertise of these topics was compiled so that it was easy to get people to lead discussions on appropriate topics. These were placed in a spare room in our house as I was the unofficial secretary-cum-coordinator then. Later, as more literature accumulated and things were getting busy,

having also secured additional funds from Trocaire, the office moved to a room upstairs in Canavan House in Nun's Island. As the Board secured regular financial support from Trocaire and the Department of Foreign Affairs, it became essential to get a coordinator. Such a position was subsequently advertised. Mary Redfern donated and made our emblem of linking hands.

Our first paid coordinator was Heike Vornhagen. She took over in 1994 whilst the office was in Canavan House. Then they moved to bigger premises in Churchyard Street. From there they moved to ground premises in the Small Crane Square, then four rooms in The Hall in Quay Street and now the Centre is the first floor in the Bridge Mills. In 2001, Heike went on sabbatical to do something else. In the interim period, the centre went through a hard time and was run, at different times by two coordinators until last year, 2006, when Heike Vornhagen came back to run it.

The centre has never had enough finances to have full time staff. It continues to rely on volunteer workers and a part time coordinator supported by three part time staff members. For some time now, financial support has been mainly from the Development Education Unit of Irish Aid with additional funds for specific projects from Trocaire, the community Foundation of Ireland and Pobal. There have been times when it has been fortunate to have one of the staff salary paid through a FAS scheme.

Its programme has included courses in development education through workshops for teachers, youth groups, school children, community groups and workers. Development education subjects include such topics as Inequality and Power, Anti-Racism, Human rights, Refuge and Asylum et al. To that end it has periodically held public discussions, demonstrations, campaigns and work shops on these issues. It has also become a coordinating centre for various bodies and provided a meeting place for other groups.

For further information contact

The Galway 'One World' Centre at 091 53090;

E-mail: info@galwayowc.org Website: www.galwayowc.org

Galway Migrant Service

By Brian McNamara

A new support facility for migrant workers in Galway has recently opened its doors for business within the Galway Peoples' Resource Centre, Canavan House, on Nun's Island. The Galway Migrant Service drop-in centre is available during office hours from Monday to Thursday to provide assistance on a wide range of issues for migrant workers and their families now resident in the city. Vernice Murray, a full-time project co-ordinator and two part-time support workers are employed there. The service came into existence in May after a needs analysis carried out by the Galway City Partnership, the Galway Peoples' Resource Centre and other local organizations found that there was a distinct need for a dedicated support facility for migrants in the area.

Vernice explains that the service initially started with three main objectives; the establishment of a drop-in centre, which is now open; the establishment of a migrant forum to provide representatives with an opportunity of regularly coming together to discuss and brainstorm topical issues that might be useful to run information sessions on; and to use data obtained from both the drop-in centre and the forum to both influence policy development and feed into existing campaigns already in place by the Migrant Rights Council and the Immigrant Council of Ireland. Vernice considers the forum to also be proficient in identifying the constantly-changing needs of migrant workers.

The Galway Migrant Service also aspires to build a healthy relationship with local employers. Vernice says, 'what we have found to date is that very often employers are not aware of what visas or work permits individuals need, or may not be aware of the procedures that need to be observed to ensure people do not become undocumented. We hope to eventually provide information sessions to local employers working with migrant workers to ensure a happy working relationship for both parties.'

The service resolves to work with all migrant workers. 'We're trying to create ourselves as a central hub in Galway for migrants. Specifically we wish to reach out to those that are most isolated and most vulnerable.'

The predominant issues affecting the communities stem from a lack of adequate English language teaching facilities. Vernice believes: 'Language is the key to integration.' Language barriers also are a major contributory factor to issues of exploitation in the workplace. Vernice then speaks of 'very skilled migrant workers coming into the country, who are unable to secure employment in their own area of expertise as a result of their language level'. In a direct response to this need, one of the service's main short-term goals is to hold an informal 'conversation circle' through which individuals can hold discussions on issues they are experiencing through the medium of English. That setting would also then double as a highly-practical language class.

Another area of concern involves individuals being unaware of their rights and entitlements, often leading to exploitation: 'The majority of migrant workers we've dealt with to date do not have any sort of work contracts or

official pay-slips, holiday pay or sick pay. I suppose they are fearful, and do not want to rock the boat with their employer, feeling they will not be able to secure employment elsewhere.' Other aspects of the work concern queries about renewal of GNIB cards, applications or renewal of work permits, and applications for habitual or long-term residency; 'but these are generally pretty straight-forward'.

While the initial aim of The Galway Migrant Service was to provide a purely information-based service for Galway migrant workers, Vernice has by now



the galway migrant service team - foley (support worker), katya (support worker) & vernice (project co-ordinator)

discovered that this alone is not sufficient: 'There is an element of advocacy work also involved. If somebody is in a vulnerable situation beyond the remit of the official services we liaise with organizations like St Vincent de Paul, The Friendship Club, The VEC, FAS, The HSE, Integrate Ireland Language and Training and Immigration on their behalf. We have also been helping people appeal situations. If a person has been refused a work permit we may find ourselves lobbying on their behalf. There are quite a few cases like that at the moment.'

As the service is still very much in its infancy stage, it is still reaching out to other organizations working in the field. 'I think the news is getting out that we now exist, and as we work with different cases, trust is starting to develop. We were finding it difficult, however, to reach certain ethnic groups.' The team feels the project will inevitably have to expand soon: 'At the moment, it's geared towards Galway City. There are, however, also large numbers of migrant workers in communities around Galway County. We have been receiving phone-calls from them, and have also been asked by the Family Resource Centres to provide outreach clinics in those areas. However, this is beyond our present manpower capabilities.'

Older Computer Students will Graduate from "Getting Started"

By Carmel Sheridan

The first group of participants in a computer training programme for older people are set to receive their certificates next month.

The students, all aged between 60 and 90, are learning the basics of word processing, email and internet usage as part of Age Action's Getting Started programme. They are among a group of 200 plus older people currently taking the free eight-week course in Galway and Dublin and the border counties. Plans are afoot to expand the course from September. Unlike other courses, Getting Started offers older people training on a one-to-one basis or within small groups of four or five members of their peers. Training takes place in trainees' homes, in local libraries or in Age Action's office in the Small Crane. Older people also provide the training in some cases, with trainers aged from 19 to 80.

The programme addresses a major need among older people - in the year 2000 just eight per cent of Irish internet users were aged over-50. Research has shown that older adults who have received computer training have enhanced self-esteem and mental ability, increased social interaction between generations, greater community involvement and independence, increased levels of self-confidence and lower levels of loneliness.

"We have had trainees who want to use their new skills to communicate with family overseas and to pursue interests such as literature, films and jazz," according to Age Action Development Officer Carmel Sheridan.

"The course has given me great confidence," said one participant. "Prior to this I would have been scared if I pressed a button that I would delete everything. This week I managed to book a holiday in France on the internet."

Age Action's Development Officer Carmel Sheridan would like to thank the Department of the Taoiseach and ESB Customer Supply for their support of this project. Over forty people volunteered as trainers and it was their input that made the project such a success. Thanks are also due to all the staff in the local library network where many of the classes have been held in recent months.

If you would like to participate in Getting Started as a volunteer or learner, please contact Annemarie Byrne at Age Action, 091527831

Take a Walk 'Back West'

By Zena Hoxtor

When a Galwegian tells you they are going 'back West' they are probably going to the area of the city around the Small Crane and Henry St. The term 'back West' may originate from the fact that this area developed outside the walls of medieval Galway, beyond the West Gate.

The following short walk around 'the West' should help you to discover some of the heritage of this corner of the city. So take a little time and open your eyes to objects you may pass every day without really seeing.

Start your walk at the junction of William Street West and Henry St. Take a right turn down colourful **Pump Lane**. As you enter the lane observe the '**jostle stones**' along the bottom of the wall. The function of these stones was to protect the walls from the wheels which would bump against them as the carriages were brought down to the forge, which was located here. One of the jostle stones was later given a secondary function when it was inscribed with a 'bench mark'- an Ordnance Survey mark used to record height above sea level.

Further along the lane on the right hand side is '**The Shoeing Stone**' which was used by the blacksmith to form the rim for the cart wheel. Almost opposite this stone is '**the Spout Mór**'. During the 19th century it was commonplace for women to wash the family clothes at a number of places along the canal. Here in Pump Lane the Spout Mór was specifically designed for this purpose. Notice the Liscannor (Moher) paving slabs surrounding this well.

From Pump Lane turn left along the bank of **the Eglinton Canal**. The black limestone which was used to build the walls of the canal came from Angliham quarries at Menlo. As you approach the lock at Parkavera, examine the machinery and you should find the inscription 'James Stephens Ironworks Galway'. James Stephens operated a foundry in the early 1800s between the Docks and Merchants Road.

Now look up and across to the wall on the opposite side of the canal. Varied colours of granite, limestone and marble are all on display. The stone may have originated from the 'Galway Granite and Marble Quarry' at Shantalla -the site of which is now covered by Maunsell Park Housing Estate. This is the only remaining wall of the **Atlantic Sawmills** founded in 1868. Can you see the letters 'ERTY & S' under the ivy that caps the wall? It is likely the full inscription reads 'Cloherty

& Semple Proprietors'. The culvert where the water entered the mill from the canal can be seen as a blocked in semi-circle edged in red brick.

Take a left turn off the Canal, crossing Henry St. to St Johns Place and onto St John's Terrace. The houses that form the Terrace and further along St Josephs Avenue were constructed in 1913. **Walter Macken**, the famous writer and actor, born in 1915 lived at Number 18 St Joseph's Avenue.

Turn left from No. 18 down the lane to the **Small Crane Square**. The crane which was used to weigh potatoes during the markets of the 19th and early 20th century is located in the centre of the Square. It was called 'the Small Crane' as opposed to the 'Big Crane' which was located at Woodquay. Surrounding the crane cobblestones within paving sets made of limestone and granite reflects the natural geology of this area. The Crane Bar is a famous landmark and a well-known traditional music venue.

Leaving the Square, turn left onto William Street West and try to spot **the butcher's hooks**. As was the practice in the 20th century butchers displayed their wares outside their shops and the hooks from which the carcasses were hung are still visible on the walls of two premises. Now take a broader look at the street. 'Silkes' of William St West and 'West Ireland Cycling' at the junction of Henry Street and Dominick Street Lower exhibit an unusual type of architectural style, which can be described as 'Art Deco' and is likely to date to early 20th century.

Returning to your starting point look out for the thatched house at No. 9 Henry St. Imagine what it was like to live here in the 19th century with a bustling market at the Small Crane, carcasses hanging on hooks outside the butcher shops, carriages visiting the forge at Pump Lane, barges moving up and down the canal and women washing their clothes at the Spout Mór. A snapshot in time revealed when we open our eyes and look carefully at what surrounds us.

The above short walk through the 'West' area of Galway City has been compiled from 'A Heritage Study of the West Area of Galway City' by Zena Hoxtor - a report commissioned by the West Residents Association.



Jostle Stones at Pump Lane

The Shoeing Stone

An Spout Mór

Atlantic Mill Wall

Art Deco Architecture

The Small Crane

Ironworks

Colourful Artwork at Pump Lane

World Music Concert in Eyre Square

By Niamh Madden



natty & the reggae vibes charm the crowd

Natty Wailer, legendary former member of Bob Marley and the Wailers, was the main act at a free multicultural music concert in Eyre Square recently. The open-air concert was presented by The Sean Agus Nua initiative, to celebrate the city's multicultural status. Natty sang old favourites, such as 'One Love' and 'No Woman, no cry,' to a buzzing crowd that danced, swayed and sang along.

The new multiethnic Galway was evident in the many races and cultures of both the audience and the performers at the concert. Natty really got the crowd going and at the end there were several fans up onstage to sing along with him and his band, which included two Irish female backing vocalists.

Other performers included The Rye, an Irish fusion band, with flavours of trad, rock and blues. Vesuwave blasted out Latin rock, while other acts included Cafe Minor and Baslowa. The concert also promoted the successful CD, Éagsúlacht, a cacophony of world music tracks. Local businesses, Ireland West, Towards A City of Equals, and Galway City Arts Office provided financial support for the event.

New Forum for Ethnic Groups

September is a busy month for Galway City Community Forum. In addition to the Steering Group reconvening and Quarterly meeting of the membership, an Intercultural Forum is being established in Galway City. Galway City Community Forum and Galway City Partnership are spearheading this initiative, the main objectives of which are to:

- Promote Interculturalism;
- Involve all nationalities and ethnic groups in the cultural, social and economic development of Galway City and
- Create a formal platform for intercultural dialogue between local communities;

There are many good reasons to participate in the Forum. It will be up to the members to decide on how the Forum organises itself but it may get involved in activities ranging from organising Intercultural Festivals to identifying specific needs of ethnic minorities in the city. Examples of issues that the Forum may wish to highlight are the provision of English language classes and a meeting space in the city centre for new community groups. Finding a meeting space that is accessible to members from all parts of the city is just one of the challenges facing new and existing community groups in Galway.

As a representative voice for the many diverse cultures now living in the city, the Forum will be in a better position to meet the needs of their community groups rather than working in isolation. As the Intercultural Forum develops it may also be in a position to elect representatives to local development groups where they can meet city councillors or officials from local state agencies.

We would also like to welcome the arrival of Alexandra Revez, Support Worker for the Intercultural Forum. On placement from the Masters in Community Development in NUI Galway, she will be with us until Christmas.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Oisín Kenny, Community Forum Co-ordinator
Tel:091 536844 /E-mail:oisin.kenny@galwaycity.ie

Alexandra Revez, Intercultural Forum Support Worker
Tel:091 536844/ Email:alexandra.revez@galwaycity.ie

Ernest Bishop,
Co-ordinator of Galway City Anti-Racism Strategy
Tel:091 773466/ E-mail:ernest@gcp.ie

Grants

Galway City Vocational Education Committee are now accepting applications for their Community Education Programme from community groups in the city. The V.E.C. provide an extensive range of advice and support to groups wishing to run education courses specific to their needs.

For further information please contact: For further information, contact: Dónal Walsh, Community Education Facilitator, City of Galway V.E.C., Island House, Cathedral Square, Galway.
Telephone: + 353 (0) 91 549 448
or e-mail donal.walsh@cgvec.ie

Bangladesh Community in Galway

By Rachel O'Toole

Bangladesh means the 'country of Bengal'. It is situated in South East Asia and surrounded by India except for one small border with Myanmar to the South East and the Bay of Bengal to the South. The country itself was formed following the partitioning of British India. This first saw it as a part of East Pakistan and later, in 1971, the country gained its independence.

The Bangladesh Community of Galway was formed in January, 2006. The Community was obviously an immediate success, shown by its initial membership of 250 Bangladeshi. This significant membership reflects the number of their nationality in Galway. "We came to Ireland in search of better careers, business and higher study," says Mr. Asad Bhuiyan Basir, the General Secretary. "In fact all the Indian restaurants in town and in Oranmore are Bangladeshi owned and managed," he added. The members also work in Galway's hospitals, factories, and fast food outlets. As further evidence of the purpose and roll of the Community, it can claim a two fifths increase in its second year, totalling at 350 this year.

Still in its infancy, the Community has many aspirations which it intends on fulfilling. However, it has already played a major role in the lives of some of its members. The Community essentially provides a close-knit 'village' for its membership in a foreign and rapidly expanding city. One of its important achievements is the Community's aptness in getting to know each other and introducing newly arrived Bangladeshi to the Irish culture. The significance of this in the lives of newly arrived members is seen in the help they receive in finding work and feeling at home.

The group meets once a month. It has a committee of twelve members who book the local community centre hall in advance. However, the date is not fixed every month as they must rely on when the hall is available. To alleviate this problem and related ones they are seeking a permanent meeting place.

While the Bangladesh Community is committed to working with all local communities in Galway, some of its aims are specific to its members: that is the Bangladeshi people. The group observes the various Bangladeshi National Days such as Victory Day, International Mother Language Day and Independence Day, among others. They celebrate their religious festivals with two main ones being observed; Eid-ul-Fitre and Eid-ul-azha. The dates of these festivals are dependent on the moon, but are celebrated some time in October and December respectively. Last year the Bangladesh Community acknowledged these by making a trip to the cliffs of Moher followed by a party in celebration of the festive occasion.

Mr. Asad Bhuiyan Basir, expressing the opinion of the Community, says that all are welcome to join in the activities of the group regardless of nationality, religion or race. Indeed one of the aspirations of the group is to promote goodwill, understanding and appreciation of the culture of Bangladesh. The Community seeks to support its senior citizens and to promote the spiritual, intellectual, physical and social welfare of people of Bangladesh origin. It further wishes to establish an Ireland-Bangladesh friendship and promote cultural exchange with any group or organisation with an interest in Bangladesh culture. In addition they wish to educate Bengali people about the local environment and social work in conjunction with other locally-based societies.



Octopus Swimming Club

By Marina Gaffney

Clarinbridge-based 'Octopus Swimming Club' was set up in 1991 by Galway woman Mary Arrigan, having discovered a new method for the teaching of swimming to people with disabilities, known as the Halliwick method. This expert technique began in England in 1952 and does not rely on the use of buoyancy aids, but requires one-to-one teaching by volunteers. It is based around the concept of offering support to swimmers as they develop breath control, balance control and relaxation in the water, not aiming ultimately to teach them to swim, but allowing them to become "water free." Emphasis is put on the dignity and the ability of the swimmer. "We look for what people can do and build on that in easy steps," says Mary Arrigan. As a consequence of this, the organisers hope to see the members instilled with a new confidence in life, a sense of achievement and a heightened state of independence. It reminds me of the huge satisfaction and relief I experienced when I learned to float during a swimming lesson, and how it is one of those skills which we all hope to master at some point in our lives.

"How people float all comes down to physics," Mary explains to me, as the terms she uses to describe the processes involved go entirely over my head! But I understand that, regardless of the disability, which is usually of a physical nature, a person can learn how to use their body to gain buoyancy. The age group catered for ranges from five to seventy years and more. They meet once a week at Kilcornan Leisure centre in Clarinbridge, which is particularly well equipped for people with disabilities. Each new member is encouraged to bring a helper along to become involved in the club. The pool has kindly been made available to the Octopus Club by the Brothers of Charity. Currently, there are up to twenty swimmers in the club with nearly fifty involved overall, and the lessons resume again in September, having broken for the summer months. Its many members come from all over the county, with the Wheelchair Association often providing the transport from various places. Mary stresses the importance of the respite the meetings provide for the families involved, in addition to the social interaction that all members of the club enjoy. "Camaraderie is huge among the swimmers, volunteers and the families," Mary explains, and I also get a sense of it being a great source of support to many of the members too. "It is great for parents to meet and discuss issues that are common to them, and share ideas," she explains. The club enjoys many social outings and events, and were extremely proud of one swimmer who went on to represent Ireland in an international swimming competition in Scotland recently. "When our swimmers are 'water free' they are encouraged to integrate with clubs providing other water sports," and so the progression is evident, as Mary informs me.

Funding however is a problem, and although the club have benefited in the past from donations provided by the National Lottery, the vision for the club is expansion and that will only happen with continuous training for volunteers. This is expensive with much of the training for volunteers occurring abroad. The long-running success as a sports club must be attributed to the dedication of all the members, both past and present, and is a valuable organisation that fundamentally envisages that all involved in this club become integrated into a community through the wonderful medium of sport.

For further information on the Octopus club or the Halliwick method of swimming therapy, please visit www.octopusswimmingclub.com or www.halliwick.org.com

ALà: Enthusiasm for the Arts

By Tina O'Rourke

Meeting up with Jim Ahern early one morning for coffee I was caught by his enthusiasm for the Arts, particularly as we discussed Macnas, community development and most importantly a project that is very close to his heart, ALà.

After being involved with two Macnas productions, *Grainne Mhaol* and *The Mysteries*, Jim explains, "that was the first time I had ever done anything on stage as such and in the process I saw the benefit that it was having, people who were so shy you couldn't hear them, then at the end, they were out on stage. At the same time my wife Marie had been interested for a number of years in starting up a drama group in Castlepark."

But at this early stage ALà was still an idea; it wasn't until Jim got involved with a production of *When Harry met Sally* that things started to fall into place. "There were a number of people in that who were very much involved in community development rather than drama, like Joan Kavanagh and Liam Heffernan, so we put our idea to them, and Julian came in as our first director, that was where it started in 2004."

Since then ALà has been involved with the St Patrick's Day parade, staged various shows and run numerous workshops in a wide range of theatre disciplines from acting to back stage production and set design, "Not everyone wants to be an actor. Some people want to be behind the scenes doing set design and all that sort of thing," Jim pragmatically acknowledges.

Director George Miller joined ALà last year with his wife Kate, "George was an actor in the States and he started off this organisation somewhat similar to ALà there, so he has a good understanding of what we are about".

Since then George and Kate have set about developing a series of drama and theatre skills workshops for ALà, which will run over fourteen weeks starting in September alongside a series of technical aspects of community theatre workshops. The workshops will take place in the Ballybane Community Centre from 7:30pm to 10pm for a session, with the technical workshops on Mondays and theatre skills on Wednesdays with an advanced theatre skills on Tuesdays.

Alongside their main workshops, ALà are also running a Community Arts for Community Development course in conjunction with Crook House Theatre Company Ltd from Newbridge in Co Kildare. This course is designed to train voluntary community workers in the techniques of theatre-based methods for group-work. Interviews for this course will take place in September and the course itself will run over ten Saturdays (10am to 5pm) between October '07 and June '08.

As will all projects, ALà continually need to raise funding for their worthy endeavors and are presently in need of funding for early next year.

ALà would like to gratefully acknowledge the support of the Galway City VEC, Galway City arts Department, Galway City Partnership, The Health Services Executive, An Pobal and the Community Foundation for Ireland. Further details are available from Jim at alagalway@gmail.com or on 086 2808258.

Bród Ireland West Festival

By Niamh Madden

There were furry boots, rainbow braces, feather boas, stripy socks and pink platforms – and the grey drizzle did little to spoil the colourful atmosphere at the Bród Ireland West Pride parade. The recent parade, part of the Bród Ireland West Festival, celebrated gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual pride in Galway city with an array of groups and societies marching through the city centre.

The crowd clapped to the sounds of horns and whistles blowing, and whoops as cowboy hats were swung around at the start of the parade, outside The Stage Door. There was a lot of excitement with media coverage from Galway Bay FM to the GMIT Film students, who were commissioned to make a documentary about the history of LGBT Pride in Galway. The parade finished up at Father Burke Parke on Father Griffin Road, where the celebrations continued with local Galway entertainers and a picnic.

The Festival itself has expanded from a four-day event to a full week-long affair, which this year included readings; an open Mic night in the Roisin Dubh; a Trad Night in Club Aras na nGael; a Games Night in the Living

Room; Speed Dating; and the creative Rose of Pride with DJs and the band Cuckoo Savante afterwards in the Black Box. The final day was more of a wind-down from parties, with a "Question and Answers" style event entitled "Tolerance vs Acceptance..."

will we take the road less travelled?" presented by the NUIG society, GiGSoc. Later, a cruise on the Corrib Princess took place, and finally a wrap-up party at Club Babylon finished up the week of entertainment. The celebration of Galway's diversity in sexual identity provided a wonderful outlet for pride, and will be just as spectacular next year. **Bród Ireland West is a voluntary organisation, made up of a diverse group of individuals who are voted in each year at an open meeting advertised around the gay scene in Galway. You can contact the committee at the following email address: brodirelandwest@gmail.com**



Awareness of Autism

By Fergal McNally

The Autism Research Institute in California uses a jigsaw piece as its symbol. It is only when you talk to somebody who has knowledge of the current thinking on autism that you realise how fitting an image that is. Autism is a puzzling, mysterious thing.

Sheila Ryan is a founder member of G.R.A., a parent's organisation and registered charity which is committed to ensuring that "the best and most appropriate support, practical help and knowledge is made available to families of all people with autism." One of the groups' aims is to raise public awareness of what autism is and isn't. Autism is not a disease; it is a syndrome. With a syndrome many things can cause the final outcome, so no two cases are the same. There has been a lot of research into the area over the past ten years, but as research develops, new possible causes emerge.

One theory states that the roots of autism may be found in the guts. The leaky guts syndrome suggests that if a person is unable to break down gluten and casein, the proteins found in milk and wheat, toxic substances enter their brain through their blood stream, resulting in an effect akin to brain poisoning. Some parents believe that the measles, mumps and rubella vaccinations which are administered to everyone in childhood may have aggravated a latent predisposition to autism in their children. There are also theories that autism can be understood genetically. The fact that so little is known about the causes of autism becomes quite troubling when we consider that one in every one hundred and sixty-six people worldwide suffers from autism.

However the fact that autism can't be explained doesn't mean that it can't be dealt with. Teaching methods like A.B.A (applied behaviour analysis) and P.E.C.S. (picture exchange communication system) have been developed to enable autistic children to learn and develop their potential. In order for these systems to work children must be given access to them at a very early age. "Early intervention is the key" is the mantra for people working to provide autism services. Sheila explains that, "If you get a child early enough you can rewire their learning abilities, teach them how to learn."

Michael Dooley, company secretary for the N.G.O. Autism West Ltd, highlighted a major problem which Galway faces if it is to try and ensure the best possible quality of life for the autistic people who live here: the lack of an assessment service. In the nineteen eighties the Western Health Board ran an assessment service in Galway but its funding was withdrawn.

If early intervention really is the key then this is surely something which needs to be dealt with. In many cases people who have autism suffer from no intellectual disabilities. If they are properly taught, their potential to develop and contribute to society is as great as anyone else's. As both Michael and Sheila pointed out, Albert Einstein suffered from a form of Autism.

ID Projects: Telling your own story

By Rachel O'Toole

ID projects is an initiative to provide access for ordinary people to audio-visual facilities. It is based on the theme identity where the participating groups are encouraged to deliver their own voice and message. The participants are the ones who decide what is to be said, they are the ones who are involved in every stage of its making. The end product is not a polished-over version of what was intended. It is the genuine voice of the community, social or voluntary group who commenced the ID documentary. ID projects facilitate ordinary people telling their own story themselves. They portray people who are working away, helping other people, and who are living and working within a community.

In selecting the groups for ID projects on a yearly basis, groups and themes "as broad and diverse" as possible are sought. Group classes documented to date include heritage, drop-in centres, voluntary groups, travellers, and the homeless. After application forms are received, aspiring groups are invited to an informal interview and the important question is put to them: "What story do you have to tell?" As the ID projects surround the theme of identity, it is the true lives and identities of the people involved and their connection with the community that is of interest.

In association with the Galway City Council, the Galway County Council and the Arts Council, the Galway Film Centre provides groups with the unique opportunity of making their own documentary. The project was set up in 2000 and was concerned with access. It initiated a move for ordinary people to get involved in audio-visual representation. Over the years it became more structured so that everyone involved got a similar experience. The groups producing their own ID documentaries were the ones who did the filming, conducted the interviews, edited the resulting film and determined what message they wanted conveyed in the documentary. The whole project per group from start to finish is allowed approximately 180 hours with a professional documentary-maker. In practice it amounts to about 16 days. The time frame is relaxed to allow the group to ascertain how, when and where they are making the film. Throughout the producing of the film the members of the group learn to film, to research, to record sound, to visually conduct interviews and to edit.

"A common experience for participants is to feel that they are not good enough and they are invariably surprised and amazed at the quality of work they produce," Tracey Geraghty of the Film Centre said but added that it is "more about the process" than the end result. She spoke of how a

member of the women in the ID project 2006 entitled 'Scéalta as Inis Oírr' participated to the amazement of the fellow members of the group. They informed Ms Geraghty that she never participated in normal team effort. It shows how people who are shy of getting involved in writing, singing and dancing are not so inhibited to play their part in Film and TV. She explained why this is so and stated that "film and TV. are in all our lives". However, she was not quick to praise the type of TV now being broadcast. She is of the opinion that present TV tends to be issue-based and not people-based. She went on to say that things which happen quietly on a day-to-day basis in our country and cities do not receive media attention. "We don't have any representation of these in our media. To whatever degree it is being represented it is edited to the interests of national media and not the people involved."

The 2000-2001 filming of the Loughrea young mothers group demonstrated the problem of representation by the national media. The documentary aimed to depict the lives of young mothers aged 13 to 16 years and how they get on with their lives and how they get positive aspects out of it. The national media wanted it to be issue-based, about alcoholism and abuse, while the producers wished to focus on the positive aspects and make it people-based. "The identity of the people has disappeared off TV," Ms Geraghty claims. "ID helps get their story out and allows them to tell it the way it is. People feel alienated by the stories being shown on TV. It does not reflect their lives. This project aims to counteract this." She went on to say that it is possible that Community TV, when it becomes more widespread, may, in a similar manner to community radio, represent the integrity of the community and the daily lives of its people. Until then ID projects represent the voice of the community, social and voluntary groups who are an integral part of our society.

For Ms Geraghty it has been a unique experience. As the manager of the Galway Film Centre she is presently working with six groups in Galway City and county, two in Clare and one in North Tipperary. "It is the most interesting filming I've ever done. It is the most pure of all the filming I've been involved in," she stressed. As a result of this experience she has started looking at documentaries in a different way. She recognises their value as a medium through which culture, heritage and community integrity may be preserved and documented. The importance of the ID projects and their faithfulness to the true lives of those it depicts is immeasurable.

Western Writers' Centre

By Niamh Madden

Writing is a solitary act. In a sense, perhaps that is why writers need a lot of group feedback and a place where they can go to be part of a community; to feel that they are not completely alone. The Western Writers' Centre, at 34 Nun's Island, is the only venue of its kind in the entire Western Region. It provides a comfortable setting for writers to gather together and gain insights into the writing process, from the beginning buds of ideas to the final proof, and lastly the nerve-wracking submission procedure. The centre has valuable literature and staff to impart information on getting published, critiquing, advice on agents, and all the practical elements of transmitting one's work from the page to the public.



Fred Johnston, manager and founder of the Centre, also established the Cuirt festival in 1986. His contribution to group participation and the initiation of workshops, readings and meetings, has been a welcome and successful venture in merging the varying minds, cultures and ideas of writers. Born in Belfast and based for a long time in Dublin, Fred has been in Galway since 1978. 'There was nothing in Galway in the 70s - at that time the Arts Festival was just a student thing,' Fred says. While in Galway, he first set up a small magazine that published local writers' poetry

and subsequently decided that a writers' Centre would be a worthwhile and necessary venture.

But the Western Writers' Centre, as the title suggests, is not just for locals. 'The idea of the arts Centre is to work for not only Galway and Galway County, but for all of the West,' Fred explains. 'We have worked in Co. Clare, Co. Mayo, outside Galway city and County. That's what we're for. If somebody rings up from Shannon tomorrow and says, "We'd like to have a poetry reading down here," we try to organise one.'

The Centre is funded by the County Council, the City Council and the Arts Council, although Fred says they could do with an awful lot more funding from all three. The Centre has just received a €10,000 Award, entitled the Touring Experiment, from the Arts Council. The Award to the Centre is for organising a project that brings a group of Irish-language writers into non-Irish-language specific areas over a period of ten months. According to Fred, it is 'a note of recognition that the Centre is aware of the need for and relevance of such work.' The money goes towards upkeep of the premises, and to provide the artistic programme for the year. However, funding is still needed as the Centre is currently seeking new premises. Members of the public can contribute by becoming a Friend of the Centre for €50.

The Centre is open to dealing with community groups, arts groups, writers' groups, and any other kind of groups who want to work with them. Recently, they collaborated with The Galway Writers' Workshop to create an exhibition in the Galway Civic Museum, where poems were framed and exhibited all around the Muse cafe. This included three Galway-based poets: previous editor of Tribe Vibes, Sandra Bunting; poet and publisher, Ciarán Parkes; and poet and painter Patricia Burke Brogan, who each paid homage to the new museum with their poems. The poetry was written as a reaction to the museum's exhibits and rooms, and the nine poems were framed and placed on the walls.

The Western Writers' Centre website, www.twwc.ie, contains valuable information for writers and readers alike - with up-to-date information on organised events, such as regular readings in the Imperial Hotel, guest poets and writers, workshops, and practical links. The Kiosk Section has reviews, news, and events. The aim of the Centre is to encourage people to write and read. 'I teach creative writing as part of the Adult Education programme in the university,' Fred elaborates. 'It's amazing how many people you meet who have stopped reading because they're professional or rearing families and they don't have the time they had before. It's a very common problem.' To encourage reading, the Centre contains a library for the writing public to call in and take out books and magazines on loan.

All writers, both aspiring and published, are encouraged to drop in and have a look at what the Centre has to offer. 'We welcome people in,' Fred says. 'As many as possible. The Centre is an established part of the Galway scene that Galway should be proud of - being the only people West of the Shannon who have a writers' centre.'

Red Light District

by Ciarán Parkes

Not the flash of light on skin
but the red glow of cigarettes from crowds
gathered in doorways, flicking ash
and cigarette butts in little meteor showers
onto this footpath, into the canal,
as I walk along, towards the all-night shops,
just killing time, there's bursts of music, light
from pubs and curtained windows, rising up
into the frigid November air and then
a pair of swans, nestling beneath
the trailing branches of some shadowy tree,
white feathers luminous, I stop
and cross the canal, unsteady on the dangerous
lockgate bridge we sat and kissed on once.



Born in Northern Ireland, Ciarán Parkes was brought up in Carlow and has lived in Galway for several years. His poems have been published in a number of magazines. He is the founding editor of the Galway literary magazine, *Crannóg*, and has recently founded *Marram Press*, to publish poets from Galway and beyond.

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND EQUALITY: BRIDGING THE GAP

The NGO Forum for the European Year of Equal Opportunities 2007 will take place in the Radisson on Monday the 1st of October from 11am to 2pm. It will feature speakers from the Equality Authority, the European Anti-Poverty Network, the Galway Traveller Movement, One Parent Network and the disability sector. RSVP to Amanda Mc Crudden at amccrudden@equality.ie or telephone Amanda at 01-4173362 by Friday 21st Sept.

Editors: Niamh Madden; Oisín Kenny

galway city
community forum
foram pobal chathair na gaillimhe

City Hall, College Road, Galway.

Contact: Oisín Kenny

Ph: 091-536844

www.galwaycityforum.ie

email: niamh.madden@gmail.com

* The views expressed in this Newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of Galway City Community Forum or the Community & Enterprise Department of Galway City Council.