

### Second Life: A Global Community By Niamh Madden



You soar through the sky, flapping your black leather wings, observing the Creations that look like colourful dots below you. In a flash, you zoom down to land beside the space-ship you've parked next to your castle.

It could be a dream, or, it could be you: your Creation in Second Life, an online game that contains in excess of five million registered users from all over the world. The virtual world is a fantasy community created by its residents, who are known as 'avatars' (online personalities). So whether you want to build a wee cottage by the sea, turn your virtual self into a leggy blonde, or perfect your dance moves in a virtual nightclub, the game will cater to your imagination.

Ina O' Murchu, who works as a Social Media consultant and Social Networking specialist, joined the game purely for research. She still spends Sundays online on Second Life however, meeting other educators and acquaintances in Second Life. "When I'm chatting on MSN I grab my friends and we go the beach and sit in lounging chairs, and there are birds everywhere and lots of conversation." Ina recently gave a public lecture on the game, discussing it as an example of Social Networking on the Internet. "You have to get stuck in there and find out what it's all about," she says. "I enjoyed it, but its work as well."

The promotional text on the Second Life website describes the game as a Utopian fantasy world, where users start by "dreaming of something one moment and bringing it to life the next." Your avatars,

or personal appearance in-world, can resemble a movie-star, a rock-chick, or what you believe to be perfect. This virtual expression corrects what, in real life, one may consider to be less than perfect. The advantage of this is that your image can be completely detached from what users term 'First Life', or non-users refer to as 'real life'. "Everybody in a way is anonymous," Ina explains. "Because they don't actually look like their avatar!" Of course, this can have its limitations when you eventually physically meet people as a non-avatar. Ina laughed when she told me that she met several people who looked nothing like their online Creations.

But what about personality? Is it possible to turn into an immoral being in Second Life? Surely if you can create anything, that includes evil too? "If you went in there and were being highly abusive you'd be kicked out, you'd be banned," Ina tells me. Guns, for example, are permitted in-world, but nobody can be killed in Second Life. Prostitution, gambling and all the hedonistic indulgences of a capitalist world are omnipresent. However it seems that you can't separate online personality completely from one's actual self. Ina says "The way people behave in real life is very similar to the way people behave in Second Life...there are some personalities that are stronger than others; you get egos that are bigger than others. You get people who think they feel very important, and when they try and express that in Second Life, they come across as bossy. Because you're typing the stuff, you're not as easily manipulated in Second Life as you are in the First Life. People can fool you with their body language and charm, but not so in Second Life." Just as in real life, people in there are often looking for your attention to use you, or fool you, or annoy you. But the difference is, these people are few and far between in Second Life.

The reason is that people want the game to function as a global community. "People in there are so helpful," Ina believes. "It's actually a bit different from real life. I've never come across so many helpful people. They want the whole idea of Second Life to work, so if everybody has that mindset. There is a strong community in Second Life. It's considered different to First Life because that kind of community effort is gone, because we've become so selfish in First Life." With this kind of helpful attitude, where knowledge is shared to empower, rather than withheld to retain power, everyone feels part of something special. "People kind of gather

together, because if you've got a group of people they organise to meet. It's a circle, you sit down in the circle and everybody's there to listen and learn," Ina says. There are various groups and forums in Second Life that you can join according to your taste - be it music, art, sports or cooking.

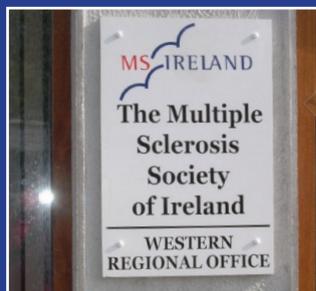
But Second Life is not Utopia. It is subject to the ways of human nature - power, wealth, control. "There's loads of greed in Second Life," Ina agrees. "People are there to make money. It's a gold-rush in there and it has been for the last two years. But people are awarded, fair enough, according to their skill in there, which is very like First Life. So the more talented a programmer you are, the more you are rewarded. But also people speculate, the way they speculate in First Life, sitting on property and waiting and waiting and waiting." One such woman who speculated and waited and became the world's first virtual millionaire is Chinese 'land baroness' Anshe Chung. Making two million in 30 months, Anshe converted Linden Dollars in-game into real wealth. She made her money through a mixture of escorting, building property, selling property, erotic services, teaching and fashion design. "She speculated and she did very well," Ina contemplates. "But also like in real life she pissed lots of people off on her way up to the top; she got harassed. Because in Second Life you can create any concept you want, they [her antagonists] created pornographic images and sent a stream of them to her." Bullying is something that occurs as much in First Life, as in virtual worlds.

Second Life: it may be a virtual one, but it does closely resemble our Western society. You have those that want indulgence, those who want property, and also, you have those that really do want to make a difference. "You can't stop free will, and that's the same in Second Life as well," Ina concludes. "It's the way the world is. You have to just avoid people you don't like."

Ina O' Murchu is a Social Media consultant and Social Networking specialist. She currently works at the Digital Enterprise Research Institute (DERI), where she completed her M.Sc by research on social networking and online communities connecting them with Semantic Web technologies. She keeps a blog at [www.inao.blogspot.com](http://www.inao.blogspot.com) and a technology column at Galway First called TechTalk.



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# Litter from Containers

By Rose Brock

## Water

Christmas has come early for the bottled water companies. I hope it does not mean that there are going to be many empties thrown about the pathways and waysides. It is a pity that recycling of empties has not caught on as much as that of bags. Walking along any street or road, one is always accosted with empties lying about.

Perhaps plastic manufacturers should take responsibility for the disposal of these containers. There are receptacles for the disposal of glass bottles which are also recyclable. However, plastic containers, unless they are big enough to be used for something else in the home, just form a mountain of containers made of a substance that does not decompose. We have been warned not to reuse them, though many of us tend to ignore that. How much poisoning are we getting from plastic used to drink from? Why are we being forced to use plastic instead of glass bottles?

If manufacturers insist on using plastic as a container for liquid then they should be prepared to make arrangements to pick up discarded containers that litter the areas. Failing that, they should be charged towards the disposal. Such a charge should not be passed on to the consumer.

## Fast food

Other discarded containers that we see littering are from fast food outlets. Take a walk through the city early in the morning and you will be accosted by large amounts of discarded, sometimes still filled with food, packages. Yes, I admit that there are not as many as there used to be in past years. Perhaps the take-aways provide large bins around their premises. However, the whole point of putting food in such packages is that the customer takes it away and eats along the way. Unfortunately, in doing so, many of their customers think nothing

of discarding the container anywhere as soon as they are done with it. Apart from those made of cardboard or some such organic material that can decompose, some of these packages are made of material that does not decompose.

All in all, the responsibility of waste management has been totally put on the shoulder of the consumer. The manufacturers still put food and drink in packages that if they are not flimsy and not reusable, they are made of a substance which, even if reusable, is said not to be safe to reuse. The Ministry of Environment ought to encourage the manufacturers to play an active part in waste disposal either by reducing the packaging or using packaging that is safe and re-useable or which can decompose and not form a waste mountain littering the city and countryside.

## Crannóg Magazine: an online literary presence

By Niamh Madden

In its fourteen issues to date, Crannóg Magazine has given both local and international writers opportunities to display their talents, in poetry and short fiction, to Galway and beyond. The magazine was set up in 2002 under the tutelage of the Galway Writers' Workshop. Crannóg recently had a stall at the 'Book Launch – Galway Presses' showcase, as part of the Cúirt International Festival of Literature.

Tony O'Dwyer, who sits on the magazine's editorial board and co-founded it, explains Crannóg's goals and interests: "We aim to encourage local writing and give local writers an outlet, but it's also equally important to attract an international audience as well. We like to see writers from Galway, the West, and all over Ireland, fit alongside international writers."

With submissions from the UK, America, Australia, Paris, amongst others, Crannóg has certainly gotten a chance to spread its wings across the world. "We're very popular in India. I think the reason is because Bibi Baskin runs a writer's centre in Kerala, in India. I think since she's started the centre, we've got more of an interest from there."

The magazine's website, [www.crannogmagazine.com](http://www.crannogmagazine.com), has been a key reason for its interest internationally. "The purpose of the website is to have a window outside of Galway," Tony says. "Without a website we'd just be known locally; you have to have an online presence." Niamh Garrigan, who is studying the MA in Literature and Publishing at NUI, Galway, is currently revamping the website, by updating its design and features.

So what has the website got to offer readers and writers? Tony updates and works on the website content so that it accurately reflects what people ought to submit to Crannóg. "I put up excerpts from each issue, to give people an idea of our style," he says. "I pick very carefully what I put on the website. What I'm trying to say is, 'This is what we're looking for'." The main page shows submission guidelines and the cover of each issue so far. A news tab displays the latest



updates associated with the magazine, and you can even subscribe to or buy issues online. There are also links to other literary websites: "I try and pick sites that would have the same kind of values as ourselves," Tony explains. "You're reaching out to the same kind of fraternity, if you like." The other publications the website links up with include: The Reader; Over the Edge; Wicklow Writers' Group; Magma; The Kenyon Review; and the Western Writers' Centre. As well as reaching out to other literary publications to attract writers, Crannóg also looks for Irish-language writers to make submissions as Gaeilge. The website promotes this, with the phrase *Tá fáilte roimh ábhar as Gaeilge*. Tony believes that Irish entries are very important. "We don't get enough Irish-language submissions. People who write in Irish tend towards Irish magazines. We usually have one Irish-language submission published each issue, but we would like to have more." Tony stresses that the magazine is primarily an English-language one, but the editorial board also welcomes European pieces in translation, which would attract an international audience.

The most recent issue of Crannóg, issue fourteen, has changed in terms of its look. "We're

publishing now with a spine," Tony says of issue fourteen and future issues to come. "It feels better, lasts longer, and overall gives a better impression." A Podcast of this latest issue, which was launched in The Crane, will be available on the website soon.

To submit stories or poetry to Crannóg, send an email to [editor@crannogmagazine.com](mailto:editor@crannogmagazine.com) with your work as an attachment and as part of the body of the email. Stories must be kept to fewer than 2000 words, and no more than three poems may be sent at once. Writers are advised to carefully read the submission guidelines on [www.crannogmagazine.com](http://www.crannogmagazine.com) before sending any pieces. The deadlines for submitting work are: January 1, May 1 and September 1.

Tony O'Dwyer has a publishing company called Wordsonthestreet, which he set up in 2005 with Geraldine Burke. The website, [www.wordsonthestreet.com](http://www.wordsonthestreet.com), gives an idea of the kind of poetry and fiction that the company publishes. Tony also runs an E-publication called WOW! – [www.wordsontheweb.net](http://www.wordsontheweb.net) – which comes out every three months and publishes reviews, poetry and longer fiction.

# More Needed for MS Sufferers

By Matti Twomey, Regional Community Worker, MS Ireland

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) is recognised as the most disabling neurological condition of young adults affecting over 6000 in Ireland of which 300 alone live in Galway. MS is a very complex condition as it presents with a wide range of difficulties which are unpredictable. This makes it unique among major disabling conditions. This unpredictability has particular implications for the development and planning of appropriate services. Services need to be age and need appropriate in their delivery and multidisciplinary and flexible in nature. The condition initially affects people in the prime of life, with a mean age of onset at age 32, when family and career decisions are being taken. The different courses of the disease mean that there can be a wide range of major disabilities ranging from impaired vision to unsteadiness (ataxia), from incontinence to fatigue to complete immobilisation and total dependency.

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Ireland was founded in 1961. It is now a limited company governed by a National Board. It operates services from 10 regions coterminous with the HSE areas. The Regional Offices of which one is based at Roxboro House, Raleigh Row, Galway, provide essential case work with people with MS and their families and developmental work aimed at the dissemination of information on MS, organising events that have educational, supportive and therapeutic purposes, developing policies on various issues affecting the MS community, representing the MS community at statutory and non statutory level in order to maximise opportunities for people with MS to live life to the full. More specifically some of these services include newly diagnosed seminars, counselling, welfare assistance, exercises and physiotherapy programmes and a national helpline. The MS Society also has a twelve bed respite facility in Bushy Park, Rathgar, Dublin. The MS Office in Galway has as its remit the population of people with MS in the Western counties: Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. There are at present only 2 regional community workers posts part funded by the HSE. Difficulty is being experienced by the staff arising out of this lack of funding. The case load is heavy and the geographical area large and infrastructure especially in the rural hinterland poor. Even in the urban

heart of Galway city access to core community care services such as home help, physiotherapy and occupational therapy needed on a daily basis by people with MS is at best delivered on a hit and miss basis. Often times those unable to advocate on their own behalf are left without assistance. To further exacerbate the issue the non-existence of joined-up thinking leads to the most absurd situations. People with disabilities under 65 are under the auspices of one department and those over 65 under another. At the age of 65, for example, somebody with MS who may have had a PA for years is no longer entitled to apply for such a service or an extension of the service. On the other hand those over 65 are now entitled to home care packages which include home help whereas those under 65 are not! At a time when we are told everyday that the country is awash with money the most vulnerable in our community remain without access to the most basic of services.

The National Disability Authority in one of its reports in 2005 outlined a picture of significant inequality between people with disabilities and others in most areas of life. In particular people with disabilities are two and a half times less likely to have a job and twice as likely to be at risk of poverty. For people with MS the situation is compounded by the fact that their disability may occur after they have engaged in life commitments such as mortgages, fulltime employment and family resulting in reduced disposable income. In short many of our clients are entrapped in poverty resulting in their dependency on many HSE related services. Increases in funding in recent times to disability services do not translate into additional service delivery for people with MS or for people with disabilities in general. Additional funding is swallowed up in benchmarking allocations and pay increases but represented disingenuously as an expansion of the service.

The long awaited Disability Act and its Sectoral Plans have in the estimation of the people it was aimed at, been a dismal failure. At best it entitles people to an "assessment" and securing services is dependent on the basis of this assessment and on available resources! As these are being done on a phased basis (the present

group being assessed are the 0-3 age group) people with MS could be waiting a long time. In any case they are mindful of their needs and do not require an assessment to state the obvious. What would have been more helpful would have been an entitlement to core services even at a limited level.

**In the debates that may take place over the following weeks the Society is urging incumbent TD's to take note of the MS Ireland agenda:**

#### Specifically we are seeking

- An increase in the number of neurologists
- The provision of staff and facilities for the delivery of approved treatment on an equitable basis throughout the country
- The introduction of a Cost of Disability payment of €40 per week for all people with MS
- A further increase in the Disabled Person's Housing Grant
- The issuing of a medical card to every person with MS
- The provision that physiotherapy services will be made available to people with MS on an equitable basis throughout the country
- A review of drivers tax concessions
- Additional personal assistants to enable people with MS and their families to participate in the community



## Galway City Community Forum Educational and Community Outreach

Galway City has a thriving Community and Voluntary sector with numerous groups working hard to raise awareness about local, national and global issues. The Community Forum has a membership of over 140 groups and its role is to:

- act as a platform for Community & Voluntary groups in the city;
- nominate representatives to several local authority bodies including the City Development Board (CDB) and the Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) of Galway City Council.
- supports those representatives;
- develop and promote policies, which feed into the work of the CDB and SPC's;
- works with other agencies and bodies where appropriate.

#### The Forum seeks to:

- encourage greater participation in public decision-making;
- develop ways of working that will involve and empower groups and individuals in the community;
- ensure its representatives are working effectively;
- act as a catalyst to develop Galway in an environmentally and socially sustainable way.

The Community Forum wishes to maintain close links and liaise with all groups in the city. To facilitate groups who wish to learn more about the Forum or increase their involvement in it, groups may arrange to meet with the Forum co-ordinator, Oisín Kenny at a mutually convenient time and location. Oisín can be contacted at 091 536844 or [communityforum@galwaycity.ie](mailto:communityforum@galwaycity.ie).

# New Road/Canal Road/Parkavera/ Henry St Residents Association



New Road, Canal Road, Parkavera and Henry Street have a longstanding history of having Residents Associations over the years. In 2000 the Residents Association wasn't active but many of the members of the previous Associations still lived in the area. New Road, Canal Road and Parkavera are amongst some of the oldest streets in Galway. Most of the houses in these areas are listed buildings with Galway Corporation. For those who don't know this area, New Road/Canal Road and Parkavera all border the Eglinton Canal. Until 1954, the Eglinton Canal provided two main functions, firstly as a navigation channel from the Claddagh Basin to Lough Corrib and secondly as a feeder channel to the various rivers and mills they powered. The Eglinton Canal is a protected structure and a "Waterway to be Preserved".

The current Residents Association was set up in 2000. It was environmental issues rather than social issues that reactivated the Residents Association. A small core of residents originally got together owing to their concerns at the amount of new developments being proposed for the area. The proposed developments were all for blocks of 2/3 bedroom

apartments. All of these proposed developments bordered and overlooked the Eglinton canal. It was felt that these developments by reason of their bulk and scale would result in serious injury to the residential and visual amenities of our properties but also the visual and recreational amenities of the Eglinton Canal towpath which is designated as a "Pedestrian and Cycle Way" in the 1999 Galway City Development Plan.

The small core group expanded and the official Residents Association was set up. It was felt by all Committee members that as set out in Galway City Development Plan the proposed developments would be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of our area. Unfortunately, in spite of this proactive Development Plan, all developments proposed for our area were granted planning permission by Planners in City Hall. Very little heed was paid to the impact involved for residents. The Residents fought a long and hard battle in one particular instance (where the entrance/exit of that particular development was onto the canal towpath) to have this stopped. Unfortunately, permission to develop was achieved (even with a decision to refuse retention by An Bord Pleanala – Planning Register Ref.No. PL 61.204367) as

Bord Pleanala's decision was overturned at a court hearing at local level. There are now three such developments bordering and overlooking the Eglinton Canal and overshadowing the houses on New Road, Henry Street and Parkavera. These developments are an eyesore. They are covered in graffiti, the balconies are a storage area for garbage and there

is no-one responsible for their upkeep. They demean and detract from the character of this established residential area. The Residents are not anti-development but are anti developments like these. The residents are still very active as a group and are still ever watchful of proposed new developments for this area.

Now, lest anyone think that the Residents are only interested in matters of planning they also actively engage in other neighbourhood activities. To this end in August 2001 a group of parents and their children decided to clean up and make safe a section of the canal (off Mill Street) as they envisaged how this natural amenity could provide a (cost-free!!) play area for their children (see City Tribune, August 31st 2001 for photographs and report). In July 2003 the residents again got together and organised clean up of a further section of the canal (off New Road/Canal Road) and on completion provided the Corporation with three truckloads of rubbish, from shopping trollies to traffic cones!!!

We are an extremely tight-knit group, and even though a lot of our members are elderly, an extremely active group! If anyone were to ask any one of us what we would most like to achieve as a Residents group, the overall answer would be that we are dedicated as a group in ensuring that we leave as much of the existing heritage in our area (our canals, towpaths, stone boundary walls, listed buildings), which we were fortunate enough to inherit from previous generations, to be enjoyed by our future generations.

Anne Mannion Chairperson,

## Sir William, Oscar Wilde's Famous Father

By Gerard Hanberry.

Oscar Wilde, resplendent in shiny bronze, sits today in the centre of Galway and that's fine but perhaps his illustrious father Sir William has a greater claim to a place on that city bench. Born near Castlerea in County Roscommon, the son of a local GP, he went on to become a famous aural and ophthalmic surgeon, an archaeologist and antiquarian of distinction, a statistician, folklorist and an author of note. His book on Lough Corrib, its Shores and Islands is still read today.

William Wilde loved the west of Ireland and even though his practice was based in Dublin he came to Connemara and Lough Corrib as often as possible especially after the railway line reached Galway on 1 August 1851. He acquired Illaunroe, a basic hunting lodge on the edge of Lough Fee near Killary Harbour and brought his wife, the poet Speranza, and his children Willie, Oscar and Isola on many pleasant holidays to this isolated spot.

A decade later he built his beloved Moytura

House, a beautifully proportioned dormer lodge, on a ridge overlooking Lough Corrib, half-way between Cross and Cong. Here he spent many happy days writing, collecting local folklore, exploring the archaeological sites and entertaining friends. Oscar and Willie came to stay when free from school and were influenced by all they encountered.

William's mother, Oscar's grandmother, was Emily Fynne from Ballymagibbon near Cong. The Fynnes were landed gentry, well connected but somewhat eccentric. Their two thousand acre estate was divided in the post famine years and William managed to acquire 170 acres. On these lands he built Moytura which still stands. Today it is in private hands; The Edge, guitarist with U2, was a recent owner.

The lives of Sir William Wilde and his flamboyant wife Lady Jane have become eclipsed by the tragedy of their famous son but they were exceptional people in their own right and their story of

great achievements and heartbreaking misfortunes is an extraordinary one. They lived through some of Ireland's most turbulent times – the Famine, Daniel O Connell, the Young Ireland rising. William and Jane experienced the heights of success at home and abroad – a knighthood, fame as a medical man and author - but also saw the deepest of sorrows – the sudden death of children, a court case involving a charge of sexual misconduct involving Sir William, and Jane unfortunately lived long enough to see her son's terrible fall from grace. The woman who once ruled in splendor over Dublin society from her Merrion Square mansion died in shame and deep poverty in the back room of a rented house in London while one son languished in jail and the other descended into alcoholism.

I have spent a number of years researching the lives of the Wildes and have just finished writing the story of this brilliant but ill-fated family from the birth of William in 1815 to the death of Oscar in Paris in 1900.

# Press Conference for Community Forum Strategic plan



Brendan Smith- Chairman of the GCCF with Tom Connell Director of Community and Enterprise in Galway City Council



Brendan Smith, Evelyn Moran and Shane Foran at the Launch



Margaret O'Riada, Derrick Hambleton, Rose Kavanagh and Denis O'Brien

Galway City Community Forum publicly launched its Strategic Plan at a press conference in the Harbour Hotel on the 16th of April. The conference was well attended by local community activists, city councillors and officials from Galway City Council. Mayor Niall O'Brólcháin congratulated the Forum on the launch and said, "the Community Forum had made a huge difference in promoting the needs of the community and voluntary sector in the city." Galway City Community Forum acts as the representative, collective voice of over 140 community and voluntary organisations in Galway City. The plan is the result of widespread consultations with its members and identifies current issues of concern for the citizens of Galway. Further examination of these issues led to the identification of what the priorities are for Galway City Community Forum in the coming years and the types of actions that will be needed to address these issues. The plan builds on the Forum's Policy Document which is available online at [www.galwaycityforum.ie](http://www.galwaycityforum.ie) Elected Forum representatives spoke about 8 key issues in the plan relating to:

- **Community Recreation Space**
- **Housing**
- **Planning Policy**
- **Law and Order**
- **Public Transport**
- **Community Development**
- **Environmental Protection**
- **Local Identity and Heritage**

Chairman, Mr. Brendan Smith highlighted the achievements of the Forum but stressed that "only meaningful consultation with the community and voluntary sector in Galway City would lead to meaningful change." Mr. Smith said that the Forum had been at the forefront of the campaign for the Western Rail corridor and proposals for light rail in the city. He criticised over-development and spoke of the fear of urban sprawl in Galway and the need for sustainable development to create a pedestrian friendly city of villages. "The City Development Board and the Forum agree on a huge range of issues," said Mr. Smith, but "communities were often frustrated at the speed of change."

Margaret O'Riada of the Galway Traveller Movement said that "the Forum cannot deliver on issues alone and is dependent on a partnership approach with local government and other sectors to bring about positive change." She said that the volunteers working in the Forum deserved a huge amount of gratitude for giving up their time for the greater good of the community but that they needed to be given the status of equal partners in local decision and policy making.

Brid Ní Chongóile of Gaillimh le Gaeilge spoke of the promotion of culture and heritage in the city and said that "my confidence in the Forum's ability to implement and influence local government decisions had grown since its establishment in 2000." The Forum had commissioned a report on bi-lingualism in Galway

through the City Development Board. Ms. Chongóile said "the image of Galway as a city of vibrant culture needed the infrastructure, such as a School of Music and Concert Hall to support that image."

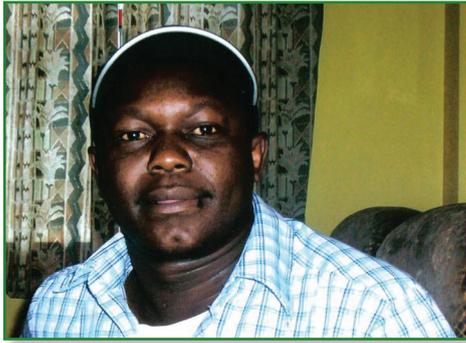
Eleanor Hough of Grattan Court Residents' Association said that there was a need for Galway to develop into a city of villages with appropriate recreation and amenity facilities within walking distance of all communities. Ms. Hough lamented the lack of city centre community meeting space and said that "the community and voluntary sector in the Galway badly needed an affordable city centre facility where community activists from all parts of the city could gather."

Chairman Brendan Smith thanked all those in attendance and the hard work of all volunteers involved including Shane Foran, the previous Forum Chairman under whose watch the Strategic Plan was finalised. Mr. Smith also thanked Galway City Council for their support and Mr. Nollaig McGuinness who did an excellent job in facilitating the consultation process and writing up the Strategic Plan.

**Copies of the Strategic Plan are available free of charge from Oisín Kenny the Community Forum Co-ordinator who can be contacted at 091 536844 or [communityforum@galwaycity.ie](mailto:communityforum@galwaycity.ie).**

# Playing soccer a problem for Asylum Seekers in Galway

By Marina Gaffney



Armani Ahmed at Great Western House

Born in Somalia in 1980, Armani Ahmed has been seeking asylum in Ireland since July 2005. Armani, like the many asylum seekers living at Great Western House in Galway, is reliant on whatever the state can offer him. On visiting Armani, you see that these men from various countries such as Afghanistan and the Congo lead a very basic and menial life here. For all in residence at Great Western House there is one pool table as a means of entertainment. So to embark on the setting up of a soccer team seemed like an obvious way for them to have an interest and to take part in a regular social activity. "What better way for this group to become integrated into Galway life than getting our own soccer team together"

says Armani. Unfortunately, problems have presented themselves in doing so that have not yet been overcome.

A full squad of players have gathered previously to train together. Not having a regular place to train or the guidance of a manager to boost the team has not allowed us to progress" says Armani. As his role of assistant manager, Armani feels that there is only so much he can do. "If we had the experience of a local manager and maybe some sponsorship, the team could do much more". Their status as asylum seekers means that they currently receive 15 euro from the state per week, and three meals per day. To expect them to buy gear and equipment, or even enough water for training a couple of times a week is certainly unrealistic.

On speaking with Jason Craughwell, Sports Officer to Galway City Council, some efforts have been made to accommodate this group, but he feels much more could be done. He has been involved in meetings between such groups as the Refugee Integration Agency, the VEC and the HSE, in an attempt to integrate the group through the medium of sport. Speaking about a recent training session he held with this group, he remarked "this is a team of great skill, fit lads who want to do something and football has that international aspect. Language is a barrier but there is no translator needed".

Although he is confident that funding will be provided, other problems stand in the way. According to FAI regulations, the lack of International clearance means that the players can not take part in a league. If this clearance was granted, the lads could play with clubs on a competitive basis and also with other nationalities. Jason and other representatives have also met with Eamon O'Cuiv to put forward a proposal to help integrate the group with sport high on the agenda. Galway United have been pro-active too in an attempt to empower the group by providing a set of jerseys for them and promoting the 'Show Racism the Red Card' initiative. The council has been able to provide a sports hall for an indoor soccer session and the use of astro-turf pitches in Westside for a game to take place, and it is hopeful that this may become on-going.

Funding for transport, equipment and refreshments was made available by Galway City Partnership so that the team could play a local county club. "That was a great experience" says Armani. "We feel very grateful to the people of Galway, they have done so much to make us feel welcome here". Unfortunately since then, without the leadership of a manager, a regular venue and equipment, the team is not playing and training on a weekly basis. Let's hope that something can be done soon to change that.

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## Hanging at the GAF

By Niamh Madden

Where did you go to hang out before you were 18? For me it was 'the pipes', a set of dirty pink tubes at the back of an industrial estate. We would jump over the wall of the Christian Brothers School, cut across the playing fields, hoping no teachers were around, and through a small hole in the chicken wire fence we would reach our destination. Whether it was sunny or raining, we sat on those pipes eating Tangle Twisters – and were looked upon by the workers at the Tanyard industrial centre as layabouts.

But where else could we go? There were the haystacks, in summer time. There was drama, but not many others I knew were interested in performing arts. What adults failed to recognise was that they, or the ones they put in power, were responsible for our loitering about on street corners, sitting around the shopping centre, avoiding the freezing old hall of the Youth Club. They provided very little to facilitate what we liked to do – hang out, chat, gossip, laugh at how seriously adults took life, and drink tea or eat cake. That was in 1998. Little has changed.

One concept however that has been very successful in Galway, for providing a warm place for young people to go (minus the parents of course), is The GAF Youth Café, on Francis Street. Several agencies collaborated to found the café, in order to get young people involved in a variety of alcohol-free activities. In effect the GAF is now run and operated entirely by young people. The publicly-funded café has proven very

popular as a spot to meet in town, have coffee and a snack, or just chill. The vibrant atmosphere inside is a lot more appealing and grown-up than the dark, musty Youth Club offered to me and my peers when I was in secondary school. The age group the café aims for is wide-ranging, from 14 to 21 years of age.

Indeed, along with the adult atmosphere in the café comes a range of facilities and services for young people that make them feel counted, not patronised. At the GAF, the customers can join groups and access support. Groups may be political or social, recreational or voluntary, and provide a medium for young people to communicate their thoughts and nurture their talents. A new LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transsexual) group is being set up in association with the GAF and The Galway Youth Federation, to provide a space for LGBT young people to meet friends and make contacts, as well as finding out information. Participants will be involved in activities like drama, cinema outings and art projects, as well as other social events. The most important aspect of the group is that it will be run for young people, by young people.

Another scheme being run by the GAF is Big Brother Big Sister – a mentoring programme for young people, which links them to a positive adult role model once a week for a year. The scheme started off in the USA almost 100 years ago. The relationship is often matched according to interests and hobbies, and the goal is that

friendship will result from informal meetings. Mentors and young people then meet together as a group, which emphasizes the important role of social confidence and positive development as the outcome of the relationship.

Local Progressive Democrats PD Noel Grealish recently said he believes more GAF-style cafés should be opened up in Galway for young people in order to prevent 'bush' drinking. According to Deputy Grealish, the underage drinking issue ought to be tackled from its root cause, rather than just enforcing harsher laws on drinking outside. 16-year-old Adam Jenkinson of Fingal Comhairle na nÓg pointed this out two years ago, saying Dáil na nÓg 2005 had revealed that 82% of delegates wanted more alcohol-free facilities. I believe the delegates' view is accurate still, as it has been for some time. In my secondary school days most of my Year was more interested in socializing than drinking to get drunk. My first experience with alcohol as a teenager arose not because I wanted to drink it, but rather because there seemed to be nothing else for my group to participate in together. Several people I know fell into this same situation, mainly because they and their peers did not have a common meeting point.

Cafes like The GAF have already been set up in Waterford, Dublin and Sligo. The GAF's success will hopefully lead to the establishment of more such cafes, which will reduce the feeling of the 'need' to drink to have something to do.

# Sandra Bunting Retires as Editor



It is my sad duty to bid farewell to Sandra Bunting, tireless editor of *Tribevibes* who is leaving for Canada soon. Sandra has been involved with the newsletter of the Community Forum for a number of years. She has fulfilled a vital role in the Forum putting a tremendous amount of time and energy into ensuring that *Tribevibes* remains fresh, interesting and attractive to the readership. The degree of professionalism she has brought to the newsletter is evident in every issue and it will be difficult to fill her shoes.

The effectiveness of the Forum depends on the active participation of its members and Sandra's commitment has been inspiring. Bon voyage.

## Groups or individuals wishing to submit articles can contact

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## The Great Edo Association

by Rachel O'Toole



The Great Edo Association is a registered community group in Galway. Its members founded the association with the aim of promoting Nigerian culture in the city. The word 'Edo' is the name of a region in Nigeria which is a stronghold of Nigerian culture. Mr. Sam Eguakun, the chairman of the association, said the group was set up to facilitate the coming together of fellow Nigerians as one. As part of promoting their cultural heritage the group keeps it alive among Nigerian nationals in Galway and raises awareness of it within the greater community.

While the association was registered as a community group just one year ago, it had been founded sometime before that. Presently there are 15 registered members who meet bimonthly. The group is waiting to be assigned a formal meeting room. The meetings consist of the members gathering together and discussing matters which concern them and which are important to them. At the meetings members are welcome to raise issues for discussion. They hope to develop the aims of the association by formulating the ideas discussed and putting them into practice. By doing this they will ultimately raise awareness of their culture. One subject that Mr. Eguakun raised was the topical issue of voting. He explained that because they do not have Irish passports they are unable to vote. He stressed that this situation leaves them without a voice and consequently an

inability to influence their own situation in society and in life in general.

The Great Edo Association has some short and long term goals. These include creating an international exchange between the Nigerians in Galway and Nigeria. This project would involve a cultural exchange similar to language exchanges organised for secondary school students between European States. Mr. Eguakun spoke of the group's hope of fostering a working relationship between the chambers of commerce of Ireland and Nigeria. Closer to home, the group wishes to create and develop links between it and other community groups in Galway and the surrounding area.

While the members of the group are Nigerians, the association welcomes membership and participation of other Africans and Irish people. In fact it hopes to expand its membership significantly following its launch on the 25th of August. This launch is hoped to create greater interest in and awareness of the group. It is intended that the launch will feature some prominent figures such as the Nigerian Ambassador, the Galway City Mayor and others involved in the community forum. A venue and details for this launch has yet to be confirmed. In the meantime the group continues to meet regularly and energetically to make progress on its many new, and existing, goals.

## Poetry Corner

### ENOUGH

BY SANDRA BUNTING

Two amateur philosophers, one at the back of the queue,  
the other wise man serving at the Galway Saturday Market

-Any Moroccan olives left? -There are enough.

-Yes, but what is enough?

On the Mosquito Coast you ate what you got  
no second helpings; one plate, one cup of coffee.  
Even if you had a craving, more didn't come.  
Fruit is there on trees, rice and beans along banks,  
fish taken from the river meat a special dish,  
animals roam tall and proud in their own family groups.

So after my third mug at a Galway café,  
still not satisfied, I could almost taste  
the single cup in Raista feel how it cradled warm  
in my hands as I sat on the porch  
of a straw-roofed hut, in out of the storm,  
the crack of thunder, punctuation of lightning.

### MY CORRIB

By Rose Tuelo Brock

I cross over you everyday  
The very sight of you energises me  
Your life and liveliness please me  
If only others would feel the same

Your swans, mallards and gulls are a marvel  
Turned into greeting cards to far flung friends  
Many have been lured to view your course  
They cannot believe all that you support

Men in gaiters took large silver greys from your belly  
Nowadays, it takes days and weeks to find salmon  
We seem to work hard to rob you of life  
And will be the losers in the end.

Latter visitors will find you turned to sludge  
As concrete jungles encroach your banks  
empty their bowels into your belly  
snuffing out any vitality.

I am reminded of my youth in an African village  
Crossing our Molopo river to and from school  
A mere stream next to you  
As important to us as you will always be here

In time, we might learn to respect you  
To appreciate your importance  
To maintain and clean up your course  
To keep something for those who come after us

# Galway's Writer in Residence, Michael O'Loughlin, in conversation with Sandra Bunting



**Michael O'Loughlin** is the Writer in Residence for the year. How do you hope the post will contribute to your writing and to you personally?

Being writer in residence for me has a number of positive aspects. It gives me time to concentrate on my own work, rather than spending time teaching or translating for example. From the writer's point of view that's the main thing. But being in Galway has already started to have effects I didn't expect. Although I have lived in a lot of places I never lived outside Dublin in Ireland. That has definitely changed my perspective. I'm beginning to understand, for example, the hostility people outside Dublin often feel for the Dublin-based media. I'm based in the Ballybane resource centre, and now when I hear the DART accent on the radio I realise how bizarre and distant Dublin can seem. The fact is, people in Dublin don't care about the issues in places like Galway. They tend to assume that everywhere is like Dublin. On the other hand, there often

seems to be an umbilical connection between D4 and parts of Galway!

**You have lived abroad. Do you think it helps you develop a new perspective on being Irish and on life in general?**

I suppose I've lived most of my adult life abroad, mainly in Amsterdam. It certainly gives you a different perspective on being Irish. At a certain stage you realise that you have stopped being Irish and become something else, so when you go back to Ireland will always be the 'returned yank', at a slight angle to the rest of society, because you have developed too much perspective. You become too objective. It can be both a good and bad thing.

**What do you hope to accomplish as writer in residence in Galway?**

Well, in a sense the writer in residence's job is simply to be here! There are plenty of writers resident in Galway already, so I would hope that the writer in residence contributes something that is different. In my own case, I think my background abroad has made me acutely aware of other literatures and cultures, and sensitive to the experience of being an outsider in society. I hope that gives me a different perspective. I see myself as a resource for people to exploit: so exploit me! Related to this is the special programme I have developed with James Harold, the City Arts Officer. I am very interested in immigration and emigration and cultural clashes. I want to gather the stories from the immigrant community and explore their experience. We see these people in our midst, we work with them, live with them, yet have very little idea of how they see us, and how they experience emigration. It's a complex project,

but we're working hard on it and hope to publish all these stories somewhere down the line. In addition I'm doing things like giving talks in the libraries on European writers, and I have been giving classes to aspiring writers. I'm available 24/7!

**What do you think of the writing scene in Galway? Are there too many poets here?**

The writing scene in Galway is incredibly vibrant and diverse. I think there are more poetry readings here than in Dublin. People like Kevin Higgins, Fred Johnson and John Walsh are all doing great work in organizing poetry events, and there's the publishing scene, including Crannóg! I've just had a great time in Cúirt, which is easily the best literary festival in Ireland.

**Besides poetry, you have written short stories, criticism and done translations. Is it important to be diverse?**

I have written in a lot of different media, screenplays, poetry, criticism, and translation. Each has its own particular discipline obviously, but I tend deep down to regard it all as aspects of one particular personal quest.

**And the future? What are you working on? Do you plan to stay in Ireland?**

At the moment I'm concentrating on finishing a poetry collection, which is just about done. In addition I have completed a new screenplay, my first to be set in Ireland, and am now about to start trying to get it made. So that's the next 5 years occupied for!

## The New Irish Centre for Social Gerontology in Galway

By Áine Ní Leime

The Irish Centre for Social Gerontology (ICSG) was established in April, 2006. It is a multidisciplinary research centre at NUI, Galway established jointly by the University and through a generous donation from Atlantic Philanthropies. The aim of the centre is to develop and promote research on social ageing in Ireland, in order to promote a holistic and positive view of ageing emphasising participation and empowerment for older people at all levels of society. It offers research expertise and support to public, private and voluntary agencies involved with formulating and implementing public policy for older people.

The ICSG has research links at NUI, Galway in the areas of economics, social policy, public health, nursing and medicine. The Centre provides leadership and support for research in the broad field of social gerontology in Ireland and abroad. The Director of the Centre is Professor Eamon O'Shea.

### Research Activities:

The Centre carries out research on quality of life and well-being for older people in Ireland and is currently involved in research on the following themes:

### Technology and ageing

The ICSG is involved in a €1.5 million major research project on technology and ageing in collaboration with Intel Corporation and the IDA. The overall aim of the project is to develop and evaluate

technologies for independent living for older people.

### Economics of ageing

Recent projects conducted at the centre include the exploration and interpretation of quality of life of older people; economic evaluation of health interventions for older people; funding issues for dependent older people; the economics of voluntary care; disability and employment of older people.

### Social aspects of ageing:

Other current research at the centre focuses on the role of migrant health and social care workers in ageing societies, the role of creativity in healthy ageing, care of people with dementia and the quality of end-of-life care for older people.

### Diploma in Social Gerontology

The ICSG offers a two-year Diploma in Social Gerontology which introduces students to a broad range of economic and social theory and policy relating to age and ageing. The objective of the programme is to examine the impact of socio-economic and cultural conditions on the process of ageing and to explore the broad social and economic consequences of this process both for older people and for Irish society. Topics covered this year included employment, retirement, creativity in older age, healthy ageing, sexuality, housing and death and dying. The programme is of interest to those working with older people in a professional or voluntary capacity, those interested in conducting research with and

for older people and anybody with an interest in the area of ageing. The Diploma runs on a two-year cycle and the next intake of students will be in September, 2008. The Diploma is part-time and classes are held at NUI, Galway. An important and popular feature of the course is that a number of guest speakers give seminars on topics relevant to the course.

### Seminar series

The ICSG will continue its seminar series featuring national and international speakers exploring topical issues in ageing. Further information on the activities listed above is available at <http://www.icsg.ie>

galway city  community forum  
foram pobal chathair na gaillimhe

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.

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