

Age Action

has compiled an excellent information pack for older people entitled 'Keep Well this Winter.'

For more details see page 3



May we wish all our members and contributors a Merry Christmas and Happy and Safe 2008



WORLD AIDS DAY - PG.3



FANA GLAS - PG.4



THE IRISH IN STAFFORD - PG.5



FOR US NOW WOMENS GROUP- PG.8

Threshold

Tackling Housing Issues by Niamh Madden

The not-for-profit organisation Threshold provides advice, information and advocacy for people with housing problems of any kind. Formed in 1978, this National Housing Organisation's aim is 'to secure a right to housing, particularly for households experiencing the problems of poverty and exclusion.' People experiencing housing issues who avail of the service consist mainly of private renting tenants but also includes local authority and social housing tenants and some homeowners.

Threshold offers a placement service on Wednesday afternoons when the accommodation list comes out, to help place up to eight people who are seeking accommodation. 'They have to make an appointment for that,' Deirdre Murphy at Threshold explains. 'We help them make calls or we make the calls for them if they've got communication difficulties. They would be people who have experienced difficulties in the past, approaching landlords or getting housing in general.'

One of the key factors in finding adequate housing or resolving issues, is to know one's rights as a tenant. The 2004 Residential Tenancies Act allows tenants to enforce these rights. The tenant is entitled to a quiet and peaceful enjoyment of their home and shouldn't be interfered with by a landlord. The landlord has no right to walk into a private rented house unless there is an emergency - he must be admitted by the tenant. When it comes to the condition of the house, Deirdre tells me that a tenant has the right to a minimum standard but believes that Irish standards are 'what we call minimal.' Several tenants may not be aware of their rights, particularly

those who are impoverished and are happy to get any kind of housing, regardless of its condition.

Threshold provides a mediation service between landlord and tenant to try and overcome issues with housing; for example if a shower needs to be repaired and is not done, Threshold will show the tenant the legal way to go about this issue. 'We have a fairly good reputation as mediators. Actually what we do is just tell the landlords what the law is. We adopt a soft approach...it very frequently sorts it out.' If the problem is not sorted out, Threshold will assist the client in taking their case to the Private Residential Tenancies Board. Up until the 2004 act, tenants would have had to go to court and usually they did not.

There are two special services that Threshold offers to people who they deem to be vulnerable when it comes to housing, namely the homeless and the elderly. 'We have one worker, Karina, who deals with homeless people and people in imminent danger of becoming homeless. We've another worker, Sinead, who deals specifically with people who are over fifty-five. Those two services are more hands-on.' They spend a lot of time on these cases, making sure they get their welfare benefits, and can help them visit their Community Welfare Officer. They also help older people fill out application forms for grants for essential repairs by visiting their homes.

Threshold provides a drop-in service for people with accommodation issues at 3 Victoria Place, Merchants Road, Galway. Appointments for the placement service can be made at the office or by phoning 091 563 080. The website www.threshold.ie offers advice and information for tenants and those seeking accommodation.

Galway Indian Community celebrates Diwali

by Niamh Madden

Anuradha Galav's home is clean, decorated in tinsel and smells of incense. Her sons put up the coloured tinsel as part of Diwali, the Indian festival of lights, which is one of the most significant Hindu festivals.

'Diwali celebrates the triumph of good over evil,' explains Anuradha, Cultural Secretary of the Galway Indian Community. The feast day is celebrated on the darkest day of the year, and as part of the celebration lights, sparklers, firecrackers, candles and lamps are lit to honour Lord Rama of Ayodhya, who defeated the demon king Ravana. Rama returned on Diwali after a 14-year exile and his victory over Ravana.

The Galway Indian Community held a Diwali celebration in the Westwood House Hotel on Saturday, 10th November. 'Diwali was on Friday, but because Friday is a working day we celebrated on Saturday,' Anuradha elaborates. Between 100 and 150 Indian people arrived at the hotel to partake in the festivities. The Galway City Partnership contributed funding to the event. The committee also sold tickets to provide the music, food and venue for the guests.

Music and colour were key features of the event. DJ Aleem, based in Dublin, played Indian music for the crowd to dance to. The committee ordered authentic Indian food from Kumar's restaurant. All the women wore saris, which are beautiful dresses made from five metres of brightly coloured material. Indeed women usually wear new clothes and jewellery on Diwali and clean their houses thoroughly. The date is considered auspicious. According to Anuradha, lots of business people will open new accounts on Diwali.

Hindus avail of the date not just for luck but also for worship. They say prayers twice a day in honour of Lord Rama, bathing before each prayer session to ensure cleanliness. Anuradha tells me that, 'everyone has a temple in their home,' including those who have moved to Ireland. They pray to thousands of different gods, in particular on Diwali the gods Lord Vishnu, Lord Rama and Goddess Lakshmi (similar to the Holy Trinity in Catholicism). One of the aims of Galway Indian Community is to establish a temple for prayer in Galway: 'When Catholics pray, they go to church; when Muslims pray they go to the mosque; but when we pray we go to the temple.' Hindus sometimes travel to Co. Fermanagh, Northern Ireland, to attend the only temple in the country.

Food is a major element of Diwali. Indian people make and distribute sweets for the festival, including milk sweets and puddings. I was lucky enough to sample one of these homemade delicacies in Anuradha's home. 'Laddus' looks like marzipan shaped into a round ball of dough. The sweet is actually made from chickpeas and tasted deliciously soft with



Galway Indian Community celebrating Diwali with Mayor Tom Costello in the Westwood Hotel

a nutty flavour. As Anuradha is from the North of India, she is vegetarian and the main diet for her and her family consists of dishes prepared from scratch with vegetables. Anuradha deconstructs a popular myth: 'Indians don't just cook curries.' To demonstrate, she brings out a plate filled with beautiful battered creations called 'pakoras' that look like onion bhaji. The fritters are made with a variety of different vegetables and ghee; they taste delicious and are not greasy like bhaji you can get in some Indian restaurants in Ireland.

The committee would like to establish an Indian Curry Festival in Galway. However they need more funding to cater for such an event. They wish to bring their food and culture to everyone, including Irish people and invite everybody in to be part of the community.

The Galway Indian Community was set up in June 2006 and consists of 15-20 committee members. The group gets involved in voluntary work and meets monthly to discuss events and cultural ideas. They are currently seeking a venue for larger meetings including families and appeal to anyone who can help them find a venue with minimum costs or provide funding. All are invited to get in touch with the community **by contacting Anuradha Galav (Cultural Secretary) on 091 515029.**

Worlds Aids Day by Niamh Madden

World AIDS Day takes place annually on 1st December. 'We celebrate World AIDS Day with a major memorial concert every year,' Gerry Coy, Support Services Co-ordinator at AIDS West, explains. This concert took place on Saturday 1st December in St.Nicholas' Church at 8pm, featuring special guests GLORIA (36-piece gay choir from Dublin, Frank Naughton, Delia Boyce and Sandra Shalks. Panels of the Irish Aids Memorial Quilt were on display and extracts from Standing, an Irish Woman's Story of HIV and Hope were performed by Galway actor Marie Greaney. The concert was free and open to everybody. According to Gerry, 'The whole notion of the concert is to look back and remember all the clients that we've dealt with over the years, especially those who have died and those who are living and their families and friends.'

'This year in particular it's special,' Gerry continues, 'Because it's the twentieth anniversary of AIDS West.' AIDS West, located in Ozanam House on St Augustine Street, is a confidential, non-judgemental service funded by HSE West, that offers information and advice to those concerned about their sexual health. Often, if a person finds out they are HIV positive, AIDS West may be their first port of call for getting advice. 'While there have been huge advancements in HIV and AIDS, most people who are positive can still tell very few people about it.' Gerry explains that stigma can come from anywhere, even including close friends and family.

This years World AIDS Day's campaign 'Stamp Out Stigma' tries to remove the fear and ignorance surrounding the stigmatisation of the condition. Gerry says. 'It's very sad. There seems to be a lot of misinformation out there. People need to inform themselves about the condition and understand that most HIV Positive people live very normal lives, like themselves'. Keep your eyes peeled for some interesting adverts over Christmas that may challenge your perceptions of HIV and AIDS.



Liz Martin, Author of Still Standing with the staff of AIDS West. Aids West can be contacted on 091566266,

info@aidswest.ie

or www.aidswest.ie. Their helpline is 091562213.



November by Mary Hanlon

The end-of-year dump strewn with deadheads, clippings, worn-out colours, needless daylight hours.

The over-loaded skies collapse, drains fill. Darkness gets the upper hand, draws tears for the departed.

Their spirits trickle to your memory, flood your labour-saving home with guilt for comfort denied them. Rationing appeased their tyrannical God; an error in perception, soft-toned preachers now say. You feel their raw hardship in the silence of the day.

Mary Hanlon's poetry has appeared in West 47 & The Cuir Annual. She is currently taking part in the Advanced Poetry Workshop facilitated by Kevin Higgins at Galway Arts Centre.

Make a Wish by Micéal Kearney

In this sunny meadow sheep bleat. Today is my birthday. The evening breeze blows out my candles. The sheep still bleat.

Before I go, each guest will get some cake—rude not to share. Five pieces, I will cut: the sun, the wind, the sheep and me. The last piece I will keep for the moon.

Micéal Kearney won the 2007 Cúirt Poetry Grand Slam. He will soon be off to read his work at the Green Mill in Chicago.



Sheila Rennick's work on show at this year's Tulca Visual Arts Festival

Keep Well this Winter

Advice from Age Action

Age Action has compiled an excellent information pack for older people entitled 'Keep Well this Winter.' Its contents include practical advice on keeping warm in winter, including information on the flu injection, meals on wheels, hypothermia, health, fuel allowance schemes, security and heating one's home.

There is also a room temperature guide that can show what level of heat is ample for staying warm, and which level can indicate danger of hypothermia. The guide is in both English and Irish. The pack also contains several leaflets with contact numbers of emergency services and also GP Out of Hours services. These can be invaluable in the winter, when the weather gets colder and the days get darker.

Listed below is some of the advice from the pamphlets but more in-depth information is given in the packs. These are available from the Age Action office, 2/3 West End Square Galway, or by phoning 091 527831. Age action can also be reached by email on aaw@eircom.net or online at www.ageaction.ie.

1. Keeping Well

Have at least one hot meal a day.
Have hot drinks throughout the day and one before bedtime.
Keep stocked up on some basic food for days when you may be unable to get out to the shops or do not feel like cooking.

2. Keeping Active

Walk around the house regularly.
If you have difficulty walking or moving your arms and legs wiggle your fingers and toes while sitting.

3. Keeping Warm

Several layers of light clothes are better than one thick layer.
Wear thermal underwear during the winter.
In very cold weather, keep a flask with a hot drink by your bed.

4. Keeping your Home Warm

Keep the living room warm throughout the day (21 degrees if active, 24 degrees if inactive).
Have heavy well-fitted curtains. Draw them in the evening.
During very cold weather, living and sleeping in one room may be less costly. Get your family or friends to prepare a bed in the living area.

Spirit of Voice

by Ger Mulkerrins

Spirit of Voice festival was officially opened by Deputy Mayor Brian Walsh on Wednesday the 7th of November at the Cottage Bar Salthill, in front of a very appreciative crowd. The comfortable atmosphere staged the scene for an evening's entertainment of vocal styles. International performances from Australian soloist Blue, Johannesburg's gospel poet JoJo, songwriters Conor O'Tuama, Kathleen O'Driscoll, and Maureen Gallagher, overtone singer Frank Hossfeld from Germany and Ciarán Parkes lyrical wisdom. Storyteller MC Kate Moran led the proceedings. It was a great gig to preview the festival with a good crowd, excellent shows, a raffle, and a round of applause to Juliane for organising the event.

The opening launch party of Spirit of Voice 07 took place at the Western hotel on Thursday evening. A large crowd enjoyed the diverse vocal styles and Cllr Padraic Conneely cut the ribbon with kind words for the festival as the stage presented opera, slam, folk and choral melodies to a very appreciative audience. The raffle prizes added extra excitement to the great vocal party vibe. The hugely entertaining Orbsen Choir entertained with songs from Amy Winehouse and classical selections dedicated to Martin Mulkerrins. Up and coming singer/songwriter Conor O'Tuama played a set from his latest CD. There were guest appearances from storyteller Clare Murphy and soloist Blue, before the last act of the evening Under Construction with their European folk and melodic harmonies.

The festival kicked into full swing on Friday night at the Rowing Club featuring a massive choice of vocal talent from slam to gospel to jazz and spoken words. Superb! This international show really had it all. The stage shows from Madagascar's Mfa Kera and Eric Eckhart, originally from West Virginia, were eagerly anticipated and gave memorable performances.

The weekend Voice workshops got off to an early and busy start at the Spirit Centre with singing classes from Jwana, Michel Brandt and Anet Moore. The demand for places was high as "sold out" signs were placed

up in advance. At the same time on the other side of town, a huge turnout of children and adults arrived for the Saturday afternoons free "Storytelling" event with tellers Jonathan Gunning, Rab Swannock Fulton, Mattu Noone & Clare Muireann Murphy. It was a delightful display of tales for all.

Apologies to all who couldn't get into Saturday nights traditional show because it was packed to the rafters. Tickets were snapped up in advance and those who were lucky enough to have them, were treated to a fantastic occasion to celebrate the traditional Irish language.

This year's festival closed its doors at Club Áras na nGael after five fantastic days of vocal entertainment. Sunday's event began with Cavan's lilter Seamus Fay's workshop at the Crane bar, where he taught the origins and skills of this traditional vocal style.

A million thanks to all who contributed in any way to this event. I am delighted with our association and look forward to 2008.



Live Mfa Kera

Fana Glas Residents Association

by Lorraine Carroll



The Mayor of Galway, Niall O Brolchain with the children of Fana Glas

Fana Glas Residents Association, Ballybane, was set up in 2003 with the help of our Tenant Liaison Officer, Christy O'Keefe. We have 44 houses with over 80 children. The estate is all local authority housing with a mix of Settled, Traveller and African families. We are fortunate to have a small green area but there are very few facilities for the children in the area. There are youth groups but these cater for over ten's and the majority of our children are under ten years old.

The committee decided to organise activities for the children, to make them feel ownership of their environment and to know adults care enough to involve them. We strongly feel if the children can become involved and feel a sense of belonging, then this can have a knock-on effect in managing anti-social behaviour.

We have organised Design a Christmas Card competition, Decorate an Easter Egg competition and had a planting initiative in which the parents and children planted new flowers donated by Galway City Council.

This year for the first time we had a Summer Project for 34 of our children. We had two field trips to City Limits and Turoe Pet farm and lots of messy play and arts/crafts in Ballybane Community Resource Centre. Three of the committee members organised and ran it. It was hard work but we gradually had more parents step in and help out as the week went on. The children really enjoyed it and many of the parents have commented on how the children seem to be different since the Summer Project – they seem to be getting on together and seem to interact with the adults better.

We have been involved in the setting up of Ballybane Community Forum. The Forum organised a Halloween Fancy Dress Disco and Parade and over 200 children from all over Ballybane attended with the present Mayor, Cllr Tom Costello awarding the prizes for the best costumes to the children. We had a small number of volunteers to help but could have done with more.

I think getting volunteers on board can be a big issue. So many other things could be organised if we had more volunteers but we are thankful for the few that have helped out so far!

We have felt like giving up sometimes and it has been a struggle but when we see the children's faces and their excitement, any tiredness or frustration we may feel goes out of the door and we know why we are doing this.



Scary Trick or Treaters from Fana Glas

The Irish in Stafford in the 19th Century

by Nuala Nolan (Western Family History Association)

Founded in 1996, the Western Family History Association is made up of amateur genealogists or beginners researching their family trees. The objectives of the Association are to promote:

- The study of Irish Family History and Genealogy.
- The recording of gravestone inscriptions.
- The preservation, security and accessibility of archive material.
- Advise all those interested in seeking their Irish roots.
- Encourage the repatriation of information from overseas on Irish emigrants.
- To allow members avail of our library of family history books.
- To collaborate with and support other societies with similar aims.

The organisation has helped me in research into my own family background. As my grandfather James Patrick Sullivan died in 1941, before I was born, I always wanted to know more about him. I always took it for granted that he was born in Oughterard until I talked to my cousin Maura O'Connor. She told me that he was born in Newcastle Under Lyme, Staffordshire. In his lifetime he was always careful not to disclose this secret to nosy neighbours. It was not popular from 1916 to the 1940s for an Irish person to admit that they were born in England. Even his obituary gave his place of birth as Oughterard.

I knew I was on the right track when I checked the 1911 Census at the Galway Library and found he gave his place of birth as England. With www.familysearch.com, it was possible to search the 1881 UK Census for Newcastle Under Lyme where I found my grandfather's family living at Fletcher Street. His father John worked as a coal-miner.

Over the last ten years I have visited Newcastle Under Lyme many times and it is great to feel that this town is part of my history and the history of the Irish who went to England just before and after the Famine. The old areas of the town remind one of Cornation Street with its small red-bricked houses. The street where my grandfather lived as a child no longer exists; there is now a new road in its place.

The first Irish immigrants to Staffordshire arrived from 1835 onwards. They were mostly unskilled farm workers. According to John Herson of Liverpool University, who wrote extensively on the subject, they came mostly from counties Roscommon, Galway and Mayo. When English farm labourers moved to industrial towns, the Irish took their place on the farms. They, like today's immigrants, moved wherever work was available. They were yesteryear's cheap labour.

From the 1870s, the men started to work in the coalmines, iron works and potteries. When they married they began to settle down and their children blended in with the local society. They became part of the English society and intermarried. As a result their children were looked upon as English. They did not form Irish centres like those who arrived in England in the 1950s and 60s, isolated in an alien society. Those who fell on really hard times in the 19th Century found help available in Stafford. The local workhouse gave help generously and this might have been the reason for many Irish settling for a while in this locality. There were often up to 300 inmates in the Stafford Workhouse, many being English. At this time they were also suffering from dire poverty.

I could not be sure when the Sullivan and Darcy families first came to Newcastle Under Lyme from Oughterard. John Sullivan is in the 1861 UK Census lodging in a house of a family called Coyne. In 1862 he married a Mary Darcy, the witnesses to this marriage had the surnames Welby and Green. Welby is a very well known Oughterard name. In checking out the Staffordshire BDM online I have found surnames like Molloy, Gerrity, Gibbons, Walsh, Griffin, McDermott, Groden, Regan, Loftus, Roddy, Gaffney, Corbett, Flynn, McLynn and many others. Those families were all there in the middle to late 19th Century. It does seem clear that there are far more English people with a bit of Irish blood than I would have first suspected.

Many emigrants like my great-grandfather did return to Ireland. Others emigrated from England to America. Quite a few died in accidents in coalmines with relations back home knowing little of their fate. It is good to spare those people a thought when we look on migrant workers today. Membership of the Western Family History Association costs €20 per year. At present we have 40 members from both city and county and hold 5 public lectures a year. We choose speakers who have a great knowledge of family history or social and local History. Our public meetings are held in the Oranmore Lodge, Oranmore and when funds are available we hold one-day workshops, which is a good way of recruiting new members. Our President this



Memorial to those lost in the Silverdale Mines Staffordshire

year is Aodhagan O'Rodaighe, Secretary Ann Greaney and Treasurer Kathleen Burke. Our next meeting will be our AGM on the 16th of January 2007. For further information contact nuala.nolan@eircom.net Assistant Secretary Useful Research Websites include: www.antiquusmorbis.com (gives Latin terms which are useful which researching cause of death on old Death Certificates),

www.irisholdnews.com,
www.ellisland.org, www.familysearch.org, www.scotsppeople.com,
www.failteromhat.com, www.ancestry.com, www.genuki.org,
www.cwgc.org (Common Wealth War Graves Commission),
www.ukbmd.org, www.1901census.nationalarchives.gov.uk,
www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk, www.leitrim-roscommon.com,
www.shrule.com <http://irishnewspaperarchives.com/>

Active Retirement Ireland

By Dr Eithne Conway-McGee

The first active retirement group came together in Dun Laoghaire in 1978. The group realised there was a need for such a group as retired people find they have time on their hands, miss the buzz and companionship of work, and would benefit from having somewhere to meet, making new friends and organising activities. The idea was an instant success. Now there are over 430 Active Retirement Associations (A.R.As) with a membership of 24,000.

It is a very well organised association, non-sectarian, non-political and open to all retired people over 55 years of age. There is an Executive in Dublin, seven Regional Councils and eight Development Officers and each local A.R.As have their own constitution, their own committees and regular meetings of members. The Western Regional Council meets four times a year in Claremorris. The ethos of A.R.A. is its sense of independence and self-reliance with a philosophy of self-help.

In Galway there are A.R.As in Knocknacarra, Renmore, Salthill, City Centre, Newcastle, Mervue and Ballybane, and in many parishes in the county. At our regular meetings, usually weekly, we have guest speakers whose topics vary from health, history, flower arrangements, lectures, etc. And we finish up with the cuppa, cakes, and a chat. This is very important, as members can get to know each other and make friends.

The members organise many activities including bowls (very popular with the men, but the women have a huge input!), bridge, art classes (followed by an exhibition), line dancing and so on. There is a Tea Dance organised in Claregalway every Sunday afternoon for members - very popular! Our Spring / Summer trip is the highlight of the year - a week in a hotel in various parts of Ireland and I believe there is a cruise on the Mediterranean being organised.

Delegates attend Irish Senior Citizen Parliament, Galway City Community Forum, Healthy Cities Forum, Living Scenes, as well as the Regional, National and Executive Meetings of the A.R.A. If there are any areas that wish to start up an A.R.A. contact the Western Development Officer Larry Carey at 12 Renmore Road, Galway or phone him on 091 753073.

Launch of Galway Green Map

by Rachel O'Toole

Galway's innovative Green Map which features places in Galway city that its citizens, both young and old, have deemed to be important was recently launched. Now available on the Internet, it is a project which has been under preparation for the past year or so. It is part of a larger project which is being undertaken by Dr. Frances Fahy and Professor Michéal Ó Cinnéide of the Department of Geography in NUI Galway, on behalf of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Galway City Council. The Map constitutes part of the 2008 Strategic plan of the Natural Environment and Waterways Group of the City Development Board.

The Green Map is an interactive tool which is on the websites of organisations involved in its preparation such as the Galway Council's website (www.galwaycity.ie). It can be viewed by people worldwide and has huge benefits for those here in Galway and those across the globe. The map can be used by local community groups, individuals, businesses and the Local Authority as well as tourists and people visiting the city. For those who are unfamiliar with the city it is a quick, colourful and easy-to-understand guide to different features and places in the city.

The map reflects what locals have pointed out as being important to them. It includes cycle paths, interesting walks, green areas, cultural sites, organic markets, green businesses and quiet places in the city as well as other features considered to be unique and of significance to the city.

According to Dr. Frances Fahy it is not just the result that is essential. 'It is most important to get the people together to discuss their local areas and identify what is important to them.' She emphasised the need for having the Local Authority, the University, the EPA and the locals involved from the very beginning of the project. The consequence of this involvement is that each group had their input and their view considered. This has resulted in a feeling of shared ownership of the project which promotes its quality and longevity of use.



The Green Map for Galway differs from other such attempts in this respect. In England, towns and villages have produced parish maps but because of the lack of involvement by Local Authorities and other bodies, the maps have not succeeded in bearing any influence on future planning of local areas and become buried on shelves rather than being used interactively. This will not be the fate of the Green Map for Galway because of the involvement of the different groups and its publication on the Internet. It is hoped that it will be considered by the City Council when deciding on planning issues. In relation to this Dr. Fahy is carrying out a study on Quality of Life Indicators, the findings of which will be published and will be further sources of local information to be considered in relation to planning and development. Furthermore it will help to identify areas which need special attention. For example the study has shown that the locals in Renmore are satisfied with the amount of green areas in their locality whereas in some other areas of the city the residents are not. The success of the Green Map remains to be seen but looks promising. The interest and hard work is evident from the involvement of locals of all ages, the EPA, the City Council, the work of Dr. Frances Fahy, and the eventual outcome of its publication on the internet.

The Galway Filipino Community

by Fergal McNally

Christmas time in the Philippines coincides with typhoon season. On average twenty-three typhoons hit the Philippines every year, mainly in the Eastern and Northern parts of the country. The country's poorest people are the ones who are at most at risk. If you can't afford to live in a house built with bricks and concrete, then typhoon season presents the very real possibilities that your property will be destroyed or you will be killed.

When Vincent A. Galeon, president of the Galway Filipino Community, told me about typhoon season, he said, "We don't think of it as a problem anymore, it's just the reality." He explains that in the Philippines it is traditional for every member of the community to give financial assistance to a bereaved family. The Galway Filipino Community has set up the Damayan project to enable Filipinos who are living in Ireland to continue making these traditional donations. The community makes arrangements with the various Irish people who employ its members. Between the 16th and 23rd of December a group of ten singers from the community perform small concerts in the homes of willing employers. The hosts are asked to invite their friends, neighbours, and the singers to make a collection after the concert.

Vincent believes that the opportunity to continue helping bereaved families back home is the main thing that motivates people to join the organization but fundraising for the Philippines is not the only thing on this group's agenda. The Galway Filipino Community's involvement in the St Patrick's Day parade is one example of the integration-focused activities in which this group involves itself. Last year twenty Filipino dancers danced the Singkil, a traditional Muslim dance, in the parade.

I asked Vincent what he thought of Ireland. "Certainly Ireland is a welcoming country," he said. "Except for a few isolated incidents of racism Irish employers are treating us well. Our lives have been improved financially. I would imagine that a lot of the migrants plan to live here long term." I asked him if he thought there were differences between the two cultures which could hinder Filipino migrant's attempts to integrate into Irish society. He didn't think there were, "Filipinos find it easy to adapt to the culture of the Irish. There are no major differences in the way we see things." I pressed him to name something that the Philippines provided which was lacking in Irish life. In his opinion the only thing the majority of Filipinos miss are the family members they have left at home because, "close family ties are a strong Filipino value."

Finally I asked Vincent what makes Irish and Filipino cultures so compatible? He believes it's the fact that the two countries share the same religion. He said that, "Filipinos still have a strong religious sense." The Galway Filipino Community first came into being because Pat O'Conner, an Irish priest who had been on the missions, organized a Filipino mass in Galway. He estimates that there are six hundred Filipinos now living in County Galway but at present the group has only two hundred members. Vincent's goal is to make contact with every one of those six hundred people and include them in activities which would aid their integration into Irish society.

Over The Edge provides golden opportunities for new writers

By Kevin Higgins

Each month, the Over the Edge: Open Reading Series in Galway City Library puts the spotlight on emerging poets and fiction writers. The monthly readings always have three Featured Readers and sessions end with an open-mic, where anyone can get in on the act. If you're a budding poet or fiction writer, then these monthly readings are definitely the place for you.

"We have an open and democratic approach", Over The Edge co-organiser Kevin Higgins says. "We believe in literary standards certainly, as anyone who has taken part in the writing workshops which myself and Susan Millar DuMars facilitate will know. But we also believe in allowing everyone a platform for their work. The Over The Edge approach works. The reading series in the City Library celebrates its first anniversary in January with a reading by renowned poet and publisher Pat Boran. From small beginnings Over The Edge has grown to become Ireland's leading literary reading series."

The popular series has hosted readings by the likes of Medbh McGuckian, Louis De Paor, Patricia Burke Brogan, Kevin Kiely, Mike McCormack, Paul Perry & Michael D. Higgins reading alongside emerging writers. Each year the Cúirt International Festival of Literature hosts an Over The Edge showcase reading at which four emerging writers are showcased. "We work very closely with Galway Arts Centre who organise the Cúirt Festival", Kevin Higgins says, "and it's great to be in a position to showcase the new writers coming up through Over The Edge at what is now without doubt Ireland's leading literature festival. As well as the monthly library readings, Over The Edge also organises the

very successful literary Friday nights at Sheridan's Wine Bar at which many visiting international writers have read.

"The truth is that right now Galway has the best literary scene in the country, by far," Kevin expands, "we have worked with Galway Arts Centre and North Beach Poetry Nights - a brilliant monthly performance poetry event organised by poet John Walsh - to open up and dramatically expand the local literary scene. If you write yourself (or want to write) contact Over The Edge now and we'll do everything we



can to give you a platform for your work and help you become the best writer you can possibly be."

Over The Edge acknowledges the ongoing financial support of the Arts Council & Galway City Council

Over The Edge

For more see <http://overtheedgeliteraryevents.blogspot.com>

Those interested in a featured spot at an Over The Edge: Open Reading in Galway City Library should send three poems or one short story (no more than 2,000 words) to Over The Edge, 3 Carbery Road, Newcastle, Galway, tel. 087 6431748

or e-mail kphiggins@hotmail.com .

Youth Information Centre A key resource for young people

By Niamh Madden

Right in the heart of the city centre, young people can access a variety of facilities and information at the Youth Information Centre. Funded by the city of Galway VEC and the national lottery, the centre offers discounted faxing, photocopying and internet services on several computers. Leaflets, books and booklets, guides and handbooks, brochures, notice boards, CDs, DVDs and newspapers are spread out all around the centre. These cover topics such as employment, legal matters, travel, sport, finance, community services and facilities, health and social services, careers, education and training and voluntary work.

Perhaps the best thing about the centre though is the friendly staff there who advise young people where to look for the information they are seeking. Kathy O'Malley, the centre's co-ordinator, explains, 'We're more a signposting organisation that would tell people where they can go. I think the good thing about youth information is that we are non-judgmental and it's confidential. We give them the information without trying to steer them in a certain way.'

Though there is a wealth of information online and in print at the centre, Kathy admits that 'people still like the personal touch' that the staff offers.



You are not alone booklet

As well as two full-time and two part-time workers, there are also several volunteers and students on placement, many of whom are young people themselves. The volunteers mostly come from NUIG's A.L.I.V.E programme and the centre works closely with the Galway Volunteer Centre.

'The centre is mainly drop-in,' Kathy says.

'We do have outreach to places like the Gaf, the university, the schools and also by bringing out publications.' A successful example of these publications is the wallet-sized 'You are Not Alone!' booklet, which has been translated into seven different languages, including French, Portuguese, Polish, Romanian, Russian and Arabic. Kathy explained how they chose the languages. 'We would have known that Polish would have been popular and we were trying to expand to include Brazilians with Portuguese. There are also a lot of Romanians in the country.' The booklets give a list of useful numbers, email addresses and websites for services such as Addiction, Counselling and Support, Youth Cafes, Helplines, Refugees, Emergency Services and Pregnancy / Parenting. The Galway centre will next be updating the booklet to include an Irish translation.

The centre is linked to a network of Youth Information Centres all across the country, and have network meetings regularly to exchange ideas and take part in training. There is also a European network that connects 550 centres across the globe. 'Eurodesk' provides young people with information on EU funding and travel opportunities abroad. Recently Kathy and five of the YIC workers travelled to Poland to discuss with centres there how they could use Eurodesk further to help young people. They are currently trying to develop more links with the country, especially since there are a lot of Polish people in Ireland. Kathy would like to see Irish people take more of an interest in travelling and volunteering abroad, and advises those who wish to travel to look at www.youthportal.ie. The portal can help with information on EVS (European Voluntary Service) on a long-term and short-term basis.

Education and training are also key features of the centre, with a computer set aside specifically for the Driver Theory Test and books on the test available for reference. Local and national papers are provided for job-searching, as well as advice on letters of application and creating CVs. Information on Third Level Institutions, PLCs, Grants, Scholarships, are available in addition to the college prospectuses. Mature students are encouraged to come in and look at the wealth of information that is on offer.

The Galway Volunteer Centre is in Ozanam House on Augustine Street and is opened from 9-1pm, and 2-4.45pm.
Web: www.youthinformation.ie. Tel: 091 562434
Email: yicgalway@esatclear.ie

Dusty Banjos!

By Marina Gaffney

Complete with Banjo and violin, I meet with Mary Lovett to get the low-down on a traditional music scene called 'Dusty Banjos.' Later, I discover how it has become a wonderful support to the people involved in it. It stems from an organisation known as the Community Music Crew, run by a trio of musicians, all with a particular forte in the music genres.



Mary, although partial to it all, is more involved in the traditional music side. She set up 'Dusty Banjos' in 2002 with the hope of giving adults some direction and instruction in 'session etiquette' as she colourfully describes it. It is open to all instruments in what is not a class, but more of a practice with an emphasis on the 'session' that is a huge phenomenon in the traditional music scene. 'It is ideal for adults generally,' explains Mary. It is non-competitive, gender balanced, open to all abilities and ages, and everyone is treated equally. Dusty's allows for the confidence building of its musicians while improving session skills, and of course it is a great way to make new friends. Since starting, it has welcomed over 5000 musicians from many different countries. Originally it was expected to be an attraction to Irish people only, however, many non-nationals have attended the sessions and so reflects the multi-cultural society that Galway has become.

'The group has exceeded all of my expectations,' Mary says. 'They performed at many public events, including the recent Sean agus Nua World open-air concert at the Galway city museum and at the Bród Ireland celebrations.' Mary runs three groups, a beginners and an advanced group in Galway, and also facilitates a group in Ennis. On occasion they go away for weekends; Inisbofin and Achill Island have played host to the group, and they have travelled farther a field to Germany to play. 'It's never too late to start playing,' Mary stresses. 'We need to respect older learners who can easily lack confidence.' I joined Mary and the group in Richardson's pub later that evening and immediately I could see how it is inclusive and encouraging to all members. Michael, who has been playing the mandolin with Dusty Banjos for a couple of years, explained how much it means to him. 'It has added a fabulous new dimension to my life, Mary is brilliant, and as for the crowd you meet!' It had everything a good session should have, maybe a nice roaring fire and a good pint of Guinness would not have gone astray, but I thoroughly enjoyed the tunes of 'Humours of Ennistymon', 'Christmas Eve, and 'Within a Mile of Dublin'.

CMC along with ID films and the Galway Film Centre are currently filming a documentary on Dusty Banjos. The film will be screened at the 20th Galway film fleadh in 2008. The Community Music Crew have produced three CDs for students on which Dusty Banjos feature throughout. Dusty Banjos play in Áras na Gael on the first Saturday of each month at 10pm. The group have many other pub sessions coming up in December and over the Christmas period, and I can't think of any better way to enjoy a night out over the festive season. Any queries will be answered by emailing dustyanjos@hotmail.com and all details can be found on their website: www.dustyanjos.com.

For Us Now Women's Group

Motto: 'You never know what you can do until you try'

By Marina Naughton



Depression, Positive Thinking and Personal Safety. Outdoor Pursuits Courses held in the Achill Island Outdoor Pursuit Centre were a great success. Windsurfing, Archery, Canoeing and Orienteering were just a few of the activities which we participated in.

Arts/Crafts

Arts and Crafts are essential in almost all groups for many reasons including creativity and social interaction. The satisfaction of making something and seeing the end result cannot be measured. At the moment, members are painting the Westside Library Window – we thank the girls for their hard work in this endeavour.

Computer Education

Over the years, the group has taken part in many courses within the area of computer education. At first, our classes focused on the basics and I.T., training members at various levels from beginners to advanced. Courses were also held on Digital Photography, Computer maintenance, and Computer Graphics. In October 2005, our website www.forusnow.com was officially launched in City Hall. Created by members of the group, they update the site regularly. In liaison with City of Galway V.E.C., members of the group are now taking part in Fetac accredited courses in Computer Education. This course continues until December. Web Design courses organised by the City of Galway V.E.C. are well attended by our group. We are in a constant state of learning! We see that through the years, the group has realised their initial objectives through partnership and support. By working together, the group continues to grow and develop achieving more for themselves, their families and the local community. Our thanks to all who have supported the group through the years.

The For Us Now Women's group was formed in 1995 to cater for the needs of women in the Westside and to utilise it as a stepping stone with which to encourage them to further education, training and employment. We operate as a "drop-in group" and meet primarily during school terms on Wednesday mornings from 10.00 am until 12.30 in the Westside Library, Seamus Quirke Rd, Galway.

Group Aims: To provide opportunities for women to come together and look at identifying programmes and activities which encourage and promote their development.

Group Objectives: To enhance the knowledge, skills and confidence of members through various programmes such as Arts and Crafts, Technology, Personal Development and Networking, etc.

Group Values: Friendship, Support, Encouragement, Equality, Communication, Awareness, Integration and Respect for Diversity. At the group we have made new friends, discovered new interests, discussed matters of mutual concern and been a support to one another. The group has warmly welcomed opportunities that have arisen to gain further knowledge, skills and abilities. Education and Life Long Learning go hand in hand within our group and we are constantly learning and engaging in new projects responding to the changing needs of the group. Over the years we have participated in many courses such as the following: Personal Development Courses Focusing on the health needs of women in the local community we covered such areas as Healthy Ageing, Nutrition, Fitness, Memory, Stress, Relaxation, Menopause,

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