



COALITION OF IRISH IMMIGRATION CENTERS



ANNUAL CONFERENCE & TRAINING SESSION
OMNI PARKER HOUSE HOTEL, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS
APRIL 7TH-9TH, 2006



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MESSAGE FROM BART MURPHY
PRESIDENT, COALITION OF IRISH
IMMIGRATION CENTERS

On behalf of the Board of Directors and Members of the Coalition of Irish Immigration Centers, I am delighted to introduce the 2006 Report from our Annual Conference and Training Sessions that took place in Boston in April.

In keeping with the Coalition's mission of providing a forum for the sharing of information and best practices of importance to our members, significant issues were presented, discussed and taught at the meeting. These ranged from the perennial concerns of our undocumented Irish and immigration law reform to new areas including services for elderly Irish immigrants in our communities in the U.S., to prisoner visitation and substance abuse counseling, to capacity building and best practices development within our member groups and much more. These broad, diverse matters provided the basis for a number of lively and informative sessions. This report and the appendices attached provide a good review and tool-set of much that was presented.

The sheer size of the United States and the fact that our member centers are located right across the country makes it all the more important that we continue to gather together once a year to review where we've been, what we've accomplished and where we need to go in the future in terms of providing frontline services to the needy within our Irish communities. The conference and training sessions are essential to providing this necessary forum.

In this regard, we are grateful for continued conference funding from the Irish Government through the Irish Abroad Unit of the Department of Foreign Affairs. We are also very grateful for additional funding from them that has allowed us to hire Sheila Gleeson as our executive director. Sheila has many years of on-the-ground, practical experience in many of the issues that face Irish immigrants in the U.S. Having Sheila on board in this position has helped the Coalition take a big step forward in terms of organization, outreach and information sharing amongst our member immigrant centers.

We hope and look forward to growing and learning as an organization and being a good working partner in the development and implementation of policies that benefit the vulnerable in our Irish immigrant communities throughout the United States.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bartholomew Murphy', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Bartholomew Murphy

Board President

The Coalition of Irish Immigration Centers (CIIC) Annual Conference 2006 was an opportunity for the CIIC to provide support, practical training and information to our members across the US. The four months from the time I started work as executive director until the 2006 Conference were a whirlwind of planning and organizing to ensure that the event was focused on the central issues in the Irish community. I believe we achieved this outcome as measured by the conference evaluations. I trust that this report will be another tool that members can utilize to help in their day to day work.

CIIC members across the country provide much needed services to vulnerable Irish immigrants. They provide an array of programs including social services, information and advice, immigration services, substance abuse and mental health counseling and assistance with housing and employment. The conference is an important opportunity for the CIIC to provide support for this work and to build the capacity of these non-profit organizations who work tirelessly on the front lines every day. The huge geographic spread of the Centers means that this is our one chance each year to share best practices, provide training and information that will help to improve our member's efficiency and effectiveness in delivering services to the Irish community.

This year has been a particularly momentous one because there was an opportunity to pass legislation that would enable the thousands of undocumented Irish immigrants to come out of the shadows and legalize their status. The huge mobilization of the Irish community across the country is something to be proud of and I commend all of the Irish Centers and their members who participated in and supported the meetings, lobby day and rallies organized by national and local lobby groups

including, the Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform, the Chicago Celts and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Justice for Immigrants Campaign. I know that we are all committed to continuing to work together until we achieve the goal of comprehensive immigration reform.

I want to thank the CIIC Board of Directors for their work and support in developing and planning the conference. Thank you to the Irish Immigration Center and the Irish Pastoral Center in Boston for your help and for welcoming the delegates and guests to your offices. This event would not have happened without the ongoing support of the Irish Government, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Minister Dermot Ahern, and the Irish Abroad Unit. In particular I want to express my gratitude to Seán Farrell and Síle Maguire from the Unit and to Consul General David Barry and Vice Consul, Marianne Bolger here in Boston for their support and assistance in putting this event together. My sincere appreciation to all the members for their hard work and support. It is this work and collaborative effort that has brought the CIIC to where we are today.

When I read through our report I am struck by the quality of the presentations and excellence of the information. Thank you to all of our guests and presenters for your enlightening presentations, exceptional information, outstanding leadership and most of all for inspiring us all to do better.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sheila Gleeson". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sheila" written in a larger, more prominent hand than the last name "Gleeson".

Sheila Gleeson

Executive Director

Conference participants completed evaluations to ensure that CIIC goals and objectives were met. The evaluations will be incorporated as an integral part of the planning for future conferences and training events to ensure that the contents of the presentations and workshops are focused on providing practical assistance to the centers and furthering our goals for supporting best practices.

A total of 27 participants returned completed evaluations.

Conference Outcomes:

The 2006 CIIC conference met or exceeded the overall conference goals. 100% of the participants felt that the stated objectives were achieved:

- Learning about immigration law
- Gaining a firm understanding of the problems facing those who want to return to Ireland
- Assessing the need for a substance abuse program in the Irish community and strategies for developing a program for your community
- Providing detailed information on existing successful programs for seniors
- Building organizational capacity
- Gaining a clear understanding of current immigration legislation.

Participants also felt that substantive discussion was generated on key topics and difficult information was provided and explained in a way that was helpful to professionals in the field. The overall quality, clarity and usefulness of all of the workshops were rated highly by all of the participants. In the additional comments

section many participants wrote such comments as: “excellent,” “needed more time,” “highly informative and highly professional,” “conference flowed very well.”

Suggestions for future training events included the need to follow up on some topics, such as:

- Immigration issues
- Developing and building organizational capacity
- The procedure for planning and implementing a substance abuse program
- Assessing the needs of Irish senior citizens in the US and developing a program to meet those needs.

The value of having presentations from centers who have experience with setting up a program or dealing with an issue was also recognized.

The major critique of the conference was that there was not enough time to cover the material in depth.

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Minister Treacy brought greetings from President Mary McAleese and Taoiseach Bertie Ahern. He thanked the Coalition and its members for their hard work and for the difference their work makes in the lives of immigrants. He spoke about the value of the CIIC conference as a method of sharing best practices and gaining expertise through workshops, ensuring that each member comes away with new ideas and increased expertise. This enables Irish centers across the country maximize their resources to provide enhanced services to their communities.

The Minister shared with the members his own experience as the representative of a constituency in the West of Ireland where emigration represented an opportunity for many. While many made good lives, others were marginalized and needed the valuable help provided by the centers. He assured those present of the continued support of the Irish Government for the provision of services to immigrants and highlighted that this has been reflected in the significant increases in funding over the past number of years

The Minister also detailed the efforts of the government to assist in resolving the issue of undocumented immigrants in the US. The Taoiseach and the Minister for Foreign Affairs made this issue a priority in their meetings over the St. Patrick's Day period. He assured the attendees that all of the groups in the US working to resolve this issue will have the full support of the government, the embassy and the consulates.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Chris Lavery, Esq. is a Boston immigration attorney. He is a partner in the firm Sedna Law.

Chris provided comprehensive information on issues facing the staff at the centers who provide advice on immigration law.

He listed the general visa categories and then discussed each category in depth including lawful permanent resident status, refugees, non-immigrant visa classifications such as the visa waiver program and the categories into which immigrants that are out of status fall. He outlined the process for applying for legal permanent residence, gaining admission to the US, grounds of inadmissibility and grounds of removability.

Details of Chris Lavery's presentation are in Appendix I.

Dr. Catriona Ní Laoire completed a PhD on Irish rural youth migration at the University of Liverpool in 1997. She was a full time researcher on the Narratives of Recent Return Migration from 2003 – 2005, and is currently Team Leader on the four-year Migrant Children research project (2005-2009). She also lectures at the Department of Geography in U.C.C.

This project involved collecting the stories of 92 returned migrants who left Ireland in the 80's and returned during the 90's and 00's. In general, the narratives focused on the migrants successes abroad with many associating their decision to return with Ireland's economic boom. The narratives were humorous at times, sad at others but always poignant.

It was the underlying themes of the narrative that were most significant. The driving factors that emerged among those who returned were:

- Aging parents
- Changes in family circumstances and other life changes
- Desire to be part of extended kinship networks and social networks
- Desire to raise children in Ireland – safety, freedom, social networks

In the case of returnees who were separated, divorced or single, a relationship breakdown was a factor in their decision to return to Ireland.

For families, many returned with the expectation that Ireland was the ideal place to raise children but found the reality was often a lack of facilities, play areas and an unhealthy youth drinking culture. Indeed it was found that while many cited

the needs and welfare of the children as the reason for returning, for many parents returning was more about coming home to a support network for them.

The return experience didn't always live up to the "dream" of return. Many migrants, both single and family based experienced culture shock on returning. The Celtic Tiger has brought many changes and Ireland has taken on some of the characteristics of the countries to which they emigrated. The lifestyle is now faster and more materialistic.

For all returnees, Ireland was considered a haven of family community, belonging and safety while the other country was considered insecure and unsafe. The absence of community triggered both an identity crisis and loneliness in those who returned. In many cases, this was related to the life stage of the returnee because they missed out on the formation of social circles in Ireland while they lived abroad. As a result, many desperately missed the lives and communities they had developed while living away and found that the ties to their lives abroad do not die away.

Contradiction is at the heart of return migration. The migrant has an expectation of familiarity but instead experiences the shock of unfamiliarity. There is disappointment upon returning because the experience of migration places a gap between the migrant's place of origin and their life experiences. There is also disappointment that things at "home" have changed beyond recognition resulting in a sense of loss at losing their home abroad.

Dr Ní Laoire noted, however, that most of the returnees she had spoken to reported feeling satisfied overall with their decision to return.

Joe O'Brien is an information and outreach worker with Emigrant Advice in Dublin.

Emigrant Advice is a programme of CROSSCARE, the Dublin Diocesan Social Care Agency that has been working with migrants in vulnerable situations since 1987. Clients served by the agency include intending emigrants, emigrants, immigrants, returnees and intending returnees. The mission of Emigrant Advice is to provide quality information, follow up and, where necessary, advocacy to enable people involved in a migration decision or experience, to make informed decisions. Emigrant Advice also works to effect positive change in migration policy through social policy work, campaigning and networking.

In 2005 Emigrant Advice worked with 492 people who needed information regarding emigration. Most of these queries related to the US DV Lottery and skilled migration visas to Australia.

In 2005 Emigrant Advice worked with 178 individuals with information needs relating to returning to Ireland. Most frequent questions were in relation to the habitual residence condition, social welfare entitlements and the transfer of benefits.

In October of 2004 Emigrant Advice initiated an outreach service to the most vulnerable intending emigrants. The outreach program aims to make more information on emigrating accessible through presentations, outreach clinics and by raising public awareness of issues faced by emigrants.

Emigrant Advice has produced a number of publications including:

- Research on recently arrived & vulnerable Irish emigrants in the UK
- Information books for emigrants considering moving to the USA, UK and Australia
- Returning to Ireland – 5th Edition

The new binder format of the 5th Edition is designed to better meet individual client needs and to help to eliminate information overload by allowing each client to receive information relevant to their own personal circumstances. The binder format will also enable Emigrant Advice to more easily update materials. The publication has been distributed to Irish Agencies internationally, embassies and consulates and all of the information is available on the Emigrant Advice website.

Habitual Residency Condition

The Habitual Residency Condition (HRC) is a new requirement for returning residents introduced by the Department of Social and Family Affairs in 2004. It is very important for all of the Irish centers in the US and their workers to understand the impact and criteria of HRC.

If a client is to qualify for certain Social Assistance payments in Ireland including Unemployment Assistance and One-Parent Family Payment, they must prove that they are habitually resident in Ireland or any part of the Common Travel Area (Ireland, Great Britain, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man). This means that they must show a proven close link to Ireland.

For US residents this will mean documenting that that Ireland is now their “main centre of interest” and that it is their future intention to live in the Republic of Ireland. They will need to show that they have cut residential ties with their former residence e.g. have terminated employment, sold their house/car/business, shipped a container home. They will also need to show that they have begun to establish a residence in Ireland e.g. sought employment, signed a lease, bought a house/car.

Emigrant Advice staff is available to answer any questions that may arise regarding the Habitual Residency Condition.

Safe-Home Ireland

Safe-Home is a national organization in Ireland that seeks to assist older Irish born emigrants to return to their homeland. The program helps to secure housing in the Voluntary Sector for applicants as close as possible to their place of origin in Ireland.

This is an excellent resource for older low income Irish immigrants who would like to return to Ireland to live.

The following criteria apply to prospective applicants:

- They must be close to or over 60 years of age and returning to their county of origin or a county where they have strong verifiable links.
- They must currently be living in either existing social housing (e.g. local authority, housing association etc) or private rented accommodation in their country of residence, and
- Their circumstances must be such that they could not provide suitable accommodation for themselves out of their own resources on their return.

To find out more about the Safe-Home Program contact them directly at: safehomeireland@eircom.net

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT –
SHARING BEST PRACTICES

Danielle Bowles is a qualified counselor with 6 years experience in social work, case management and substance abuse counseling. In Boston, she has worked as a substance abuse counselor with the IIC where she has been working on putting in place a substance abuse program and holding seminars and workshops on preventing the abuse of alcohol and drugs.

The Irish Immigration Center in Boston set out to study the factors that seem to leave members of the Irish community more ‘problem-prone’ when it comes to alcohol and other substance use issues. The goal of the research, conducted within the Irish community in Boston, was to understand these factors and then to design a program to reach out to those who need support with substance abuse and related problems. The IIC developed their Substance Abuse Service to use a culturally sensitive approach and has successfully reached a significant number of Irish clients. This approach can be adapted and used by other Irish centers in the US to address similar needs in their communities.

In sharing their findings, the goal of the IIC is to:

- Articulate the obstacles that the Boston Irish community faces getting help for substance abuse
- Provide information for other groups who would like to develop a culturally sensitive service for Irish immigrants
- Assist in developing an effective program that utilizes existing services

Cultural attitudes, behaviors and norms relating to substance abuse in both Boston

and Ireland are similar. Ireland has the second highest level of alcohol consumption in Europe, approximately 11 liters per head, per year. The EU average is 9.1 liters per year. In Boston a recent Department of Health and Human Services study found that 30% of Boston respondents binge drink, while another study found that rates of alcohol and illicit drug use in the Commonwealth exceed national averages.

The obstacles to getting help include:

- Cultural norms around alcohol
- Acceptance of binge/heavy drinking patterns
- Denial
- Lack of education around Substance Abuse issues
- Don't know where to go for help
- Fear of immigration consequences
- No health insurance
- Fear of a loss of social life/friends

Danielle has offered a CD with full details of her Presentation to any center that would like it.

Jim Cummins, emigrated from Tullamore, Co Offaly, in the 1960s. In 1973 he began a 10-year reign as governor of Washington State Penitentiary, which housed 2,000 prisoners on a 540-acre site.

Jim outlined the processes for visiting immigrants who are incarcerated, some of the major barriers that can exist and how to overcome them.

A total of 5.9 million people are in the US prison system; one in every thirty five people. A total of 2 million people are actually in prison and 3.9 million are on probation. Eighty five percent of individuals who are incarcerated have substance abuse problems and there is little chance that they will receive any treatment. Many of the individuals who are detained on immigration violations are housed along with the general prison population. Prisons tend purposely to be located in isolated and often difficult to reach areas. This can make it very difficult for families to visit and immigrants who have few family members in the US to begin can feel even more isolated, lonely and fearful.

Jim offered some valuable information regarding the proper protocol for visiting those who are in prison. If you, as a worker or volunteer, are asked to visit someone who is incarcerated it is best to first contact the Prison Chaplin or the individual's counsellor. You should always remember that you are a guest of the institution and you must abide by their rules and policies. Always have a clear purpose for your visit and be prepared for delays and cancellations which may happen occasionally if there is a problem in the prison. As a final word Jim advised that a visitor should never carry any items in to a prisoner or never carry any items out of the prison on behalf of a prisoner.

Eithne Rynne is Director of the Federation of Irish Societies (FIS). FIS is a national umbrella organisation established in 1973, which draws together Irish clubs and societies in Britain.

There are 1.8 million Irish immigrants in the UK according to the last census count. Irish constitute 2% of the population age 60 and over. The largest settlement is in London where 35% of the Irish immigrants are over 60 years. There are forty organizations in London working with elderly Irish.

In the area of health, the Irish population in England has the highest mortality rates of any ethnicity and these high mortality rates are continuing into 2nd and 3rd generations. In addition to concerns about physical and mental health, there are also concerns about poor housing conditions.

The organizations providing services to elderly Irish immigrants have done extensive outreach through social clubs, county associations/clubs, housing associations and luncheon clubs to reach this vulnerable population. These organizations have been successful in achieving a mix of funding from both private and public groups to provide an array of services to Irish immigrants.



CAPACITY BUILDING
FOR NON-PROFITS

Ms. Belay is an independent consultant, advising foundations, faith-based and community based organizations in program management, organizational development, strategic planning and foundation relations. Clients call upon her expertise in the areas of executive coaching, dispute and conflict resolution, board training, personnel and executive recruitment, and development of work plans, proposals, and business plans, as well as fundraising and program design and development.

The training workshop on Board Development and Strategic Planning encompassed a range of information essential for organizations to consider as they grow, develop and strengthen their organizations. The workshop dealt with the following topics:

1. Board Civility
2. Board Basics - Key Terms
3. 3 D's, 3 G's, etc.
4. Responsibility Chart
5. Transparency
6. Review of Strategic Planning Concepts
7. Strategic Planning Process
8. Strategic Planning Definitions

Detailed handouts of the presentation are attached in Appendix II.

REPORT FROM THE IRISH
ABROAD UNIT

The Irish Abroad Unit was created in 2004. The ‘Prime Time’ program on RTÉ highlighted some of the difficult conditions of Irish emigrants in England and this helped to prompt the Government to more fully fund programs for emigrants as well as move to establish the Unit. In 2006 the budget for the Unit is €12,000,000 increased from €3,000,000 in 2003. The U.K. receives approximately 85% of this money and the US allocation is about 10%. The remainder is for organizations in the rest of the world.

There are fewer people emigrating from Ireland at the moment and those who are leaving are not doing so because of economic necessity but for other reasons including personal and family problems. In 2004 net emigration into Ireland was 500,000 of which 225,000 were returning Irish immigrants. Ireland is now experiencing significant immigration from other countries, and currently has the largest Latvian population outside of Latvia and it is almost the same for Lithuania.

The programs and services that are currently funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs include the following general categories:

- 1) Pre-emigration advice and information
- 2) Assistance to vulnerable and marginalized Irish immigrants
- 3) Returning to Ireland – programs for low income elderly emigrants
- 4) Assistance to Irish organizations promoting Irish culture

US Irish immigration centers have focused many of their services on undocumented Irish immigrants. Now many are beginning to look at the needs of older Irish immigrants who came to the US in the 50’s and 60’s.

The Irish Abroad Unit has responsibility for general oversight and monitoring of the grants to all of the organizations. They are working with an accounting consultant who will be visiting all of the agencies in the UK and then the agencies in the US.

SISTER ORGANIZATION REPORTS

The members of IAUSA respond to the physical, spiritual and emotional needs of emigrants in the US as part of their mission to care for migrants. Founded by the Irish Catholic Conference of Bishops in 1997, the IAUSA has nine member centers across the United States.

In 2006, the IAUSA has been an active participant in the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Justice for Immigrants Campaign. Administrator Geri Garvey has been working with the USCCB legislative strategy group which has been very active, visiting the House of Representatives since last fall to advocate for immigration reform. The IAUSA Chaplains also visited Senators in February and Bishop Hegarty has been a vocal advocate in Ireland on the need for immigration reform.

Anyone interested in organizing on a parish level can contact Geri to receive a Parish Kit.

ÉAN is an independent emigration network based in Dublin. It comprises statutory and voluntary agencies as well as individuals and academics interested in emigration from Ireland and return migration to Ireland. The criterion for becoming a member of Éan is an interest in this topic. ÉAN is similar in structure to the Federation of Irish Societies in the UK and the Coalition of Irish Immigration Centers in the U.S.

ÉAN Summary of Goals

- Link more with agencies in Ireland
- Avoid duplication of services
- Develop media relations
- Retain human networking
- Undertake special projects like emigrant holidays in Ireland
- Clarify the connections with ‘umbrella’ bodies in US and UK, i.e. CIIC and FIS to avoid duplication
- Reach out to the parts of the world where there are no umbrella bodies such as Australia & Europe
- Engage with agencies in Ireland such as housing associations
- Develop resources for Irish schools

IMMIGRATION REFORM IN THE US

In December of 2005 the House of Representatives approved an immigration bill drafted by House Judiciary Chairman James Sensenbrenner (R-WI) and Homeland Security Chairman Peter King (R-NY). If enacted into law, the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act would have a very negative effect on the lives of legal immigrants, citizens and business owners, without dealing with the issue of unauthorized migration.

In 2006, when the issue came to the Senate, key leaders in both parties supported a comprehensive and bipartisan approach to this issue. Currently the amendment process has stalled the issue. While the timetable has changed, it is important to note that the opportunity and the need to pass legislation still exist.

There is a need for all of us to:

- Continue the pressure from the general public in the form of mobilizations. This was a key factor in getting the 65 votes needed in the Senate.
- Keep up the pressure on members of Congress.
- Target our advocacy to encourage members to support pro-immigrant measures.

Sheila thanked Joe Hackett from the Irish Embassy in Washington DC on behalf of the CIIC for his contributions to this report and for his outstanding work on behalf of Irish immigrants in DC since the struggle for immigration reform began last year.

The Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform (ILIR) was founded in December 2005 to lobby Congress and to ensure that the voice of the estimated 50,000 undocumented Irish is heard in the immigration debate. There are fears that new legislation would permanently exclude Irish immigrants from the opportunities offered to earlier Irish immigrants.

The ILIR held successful Town Hall meetings attended by thousands of Irish immigrants in San Francisco, Queens, Boston, Philadelphia, Yonkers and the Bronx to rally Irish and Irish Americans in support of comprehensive immigration reform. The National Day of Lobbying in Washington DC on March 8th was a huge success bringing 2,500 Irish immigrants wearing “Legalize the Irish” T-shirts to the halls of Congress. A packed event after the day on Capitol Hill was attended by Senators Kennedy, McCain, Schumer and Clinton as well as several members of the House of Representatives.

The ILIR has been effective not only in mobilizing Irish immigrants to take action but also in getting significant press coverage which in turn has helped the ILIR to be more effective in their lobbying efforts. Making sure that media have good photos, ensuring that journalists have immediate access, and effective use of the internet to keep supporters informed have helped the ILIR to keep the issue on the front burner in the Irish community as well as in Washington DC and in Ireland.

The ILIR will continue their lobbying campaign until they achieve their goal of passing comprehensive immigration reform this year.

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