

The Informed

The newsletter for the residents of
Irish Centre Housing

Issue 15

December 2008

St Eugene Court Celebrates 10 Years

A wide and varied list of guests were invited along to a party at St Eugene Court on 24th September. It was 10 years ago that the scheme was officially opened by Mary McAleese, the President of Ireland. Scheme warden, Rosemary McCloskey was looking for an excuse for a get-together and so a birthday party seemed like a good idea.

Rosemary told *The Informed*, "I wanted to be able to show local people what the place was all about and introduce St Eugene Court to the local community. People round here didn't know what was inside the building and they seemed impressed to see how clean and comfortable we keep it ... and what a great atmosphere there is here!"

St Eugene Court is located in the former Brent Irish Centre and provides supported housing to 26 single men and women aged 55 years or over, in Queens Park, North West London.

The guest of honour at the event was Deputy-Mayor of Brent, Councillor Jim O'Sullivan. He said, "I had a fantastic afternoon at St Eugene Court and it was a pleasure to meet so many of the wonderful residents and staff. There was also some lovely music and food to be enjoyed. I hope to be able to return again soon and support St Eugene Court's work in the future."

Councillor O'Sullivan and Irish Centre Housing CEO, Tricia Durkan presented certificates of appreciation to some of St Eugene Court's residents. Certificates went to Margaret Gallagher and Eugene O'Rourke (for serving as



The Deputy Mayor of Brent - Jim O'Sullivan, resident - Hughie McLeod and ICH CEO - Tricia Durkan

resident reps), to Michael Canning (having spent time looking after the garden) and to Hughie McLeod (for currently doing the garden and being helpful to the warden).

Live music and an enormous buffet was provided for residents and guests.

It's also reassuring to know that the goodwill from the event has continued. A number of Police Community Support Officers who came along on the day have dropped by a number of times since to ensure that all is well. The Deputy Mayor is visiting again on 18th December for music and mice pies with the residents.

ICH management would like to offer a big thanks to Rosemary McCloskey for organising the event and to all the residents and guests for making the day such a success.

Maintenance Explained

During some of the Customer Focus meetings held last year, one of the recurring themes was concern around how long it took ICH to respond to residents' maintenance issues. In response, here's a brief explanation of how ICH prioritises your requests.

First of all, maintenance requests need to be categorised so that the most important problems are given a higher priority and dealt with quickly. ICH has a Repairs and Maintenance policy which includes an explanation of the categories and the priority assigned to them.

Emergency – complete or make safe within 24hours.

Safety, security, health response etc. e.g. burst pipes/tank, gas leaks, complete failure of electricity supply, re-securing of a property.

Urgent – Maximum time 7 days.

Urgent repairs. e.g. roof leaks, water leaks, electrical works that could be a danger, reduced lighting, making good after emergency works, damaged or defective brickwork/ceiling that may be a danger to the occupiers or the public.

Essential repairs. e.g. repairs to electrical points, WC's, basins, kitchen sinks, defective gutters, repairs

Routine – Maximum time 28 days

Any defect that does not cause a resident discomfort.

The response of the Maintenance Team is monitored. Here are the results for the full year ending March 2008.

Routine [28 days]	2005/ 2006	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008
% completion target	95%	95%	95%
Number of Jobs	335	401	460
% completed within target	95%	92.5%	93.9%

Urgent [1-7 days]	2005/ 2006	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008
% completion target	95%	95%	95%
Number of Jobs	940	1403	1347
% completed within target	95%	96.9%	99%

Emergency [24 Hrs]	2005/ 2006	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008
% completion target	100%	100%	100%
Number of Jobs	689	456	321
% completed within target	96%	98.5%	99.6%

Aggregate	2005/ 2006	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008
Number of Jobs	1964	2260	2128
% completed within target	96%	96.4%	98%

The Informed

Welcome to the latest edition of The Informed.

It's been a while since the last issue so there's plenty to catch-up with on events at ICH throughout the year. Whilst it is not possible to report on everything that's happened in 2008 I have included a good selection of stories that I think might be of interest to you.

In 2009 I intend to produce The Informed every three months, so although the newsletter will be shorter it will hopefully be far more up to date. If any of you have any comments or stories that you would like to see in future editions, or any articles that you would like to contribute, please feel free to contact me at Head Office or speak to your keyworker, warden or housing officer.

Finally, I'd like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Steve Webb

Communication and Performance Manager (Editor)

Residents celebrate International Women's Day

March 2008: Townsend House had never celebrated International Women's Day so it was agreed that this year would be different. A trip to the London Museum to see an exhibition on the Suffragette Movement was planned for 8th March. Sadly the Museum was undergoing a refit so they changed their plans and agreed to go to the Natural History museum. "Not very Women's Day," admitted Kim Jeffs, Townsend House Manager, "but we were not going to let a little thing like a closed exhibit ruin a day out."

They had a great morning studying the dinosaurs and they all especially liked the life-sized moving model T-Rex. After lunch and a spin on the bumper cars in the Trocadero Centre they decided to take a walk down to the Embankment ... which is when their International Women's day really got going. As they approached Trafalgar Square they came across a sea of banners and found themselves at the rally from the *Million Women Rise* march from Hyde Park. It took no time at all for the residents to run down into the midst of the rally and grab some banners. It was at this point that they spotted Carole from last year's Big Brother TV show. "We grabbed her for some photos and had a wonderful chat about hostel life," enthused Denise Hüther, Supported Housing Officer. They found out that Carole has actually worked in housing and she was very happy to sign all the residents' banners (which are still proudly displayed in the hostel.)

"Time soon caught up with us and before we new it; it was time to head back to sunny old Borehamwood. We were all *cream cracked* and the night staff had probably the quietest night on record as we all collapsed in a heap," added Kim.

Remy Kane is one of the residents who went on the excursion: "I had a great day. We visited the Natural History Museum and the Trocadero. Denise tried to make us sit in the cinema, but we managed to escape and visit our first rally. I thought it was great at the rally; it makes you realize how lucky some people are. Meeting Carole was an exciting experience and we got her autograph. We had a fun time travelling back on the train."



All smiles in Trafalgar Square

Thank you to Perri Northwood for the photograph.

International Women's Day

Annually on 8th March, thousands of events are held throughout the world to inspire women and celebrate their achievements. While there are many large-scale initiatives, there are many more local activities connecting women from all around the world. For more info, go to: www.internationalwomensday.com

Antonia departs

February 2008: Chief Executive Officer, Antonia Watson, left ICH following her resignation at the end of 2007. She left to progress her career with another housing association.

Before her departure, she said, "After almost 10 years with ICH I felt that it was time to move on and for ICH to recruit some 'fresh blood' to direct the organisation into its new and exciting phase of development.

"ICH is a great organisation that is performing well and has so much to offer the sector. I have worked with some truly excellent people and I am amazed at the creativity across the organisation. I only have to look at the recent edition of *The Informed* which encapsulates this. I know that I will miss ICH but look forward to seeing it flourish over the next 10 years."

Although sad to see her go, staff sent her on her way in the usual fashion: a few quiet drinks ... followed by a few louder ones!

St Louise BBQ Success

July 2008: St Louise resident, Dominique Dawkins, reviews this summer's resident barbecue on 11th July.

"The run up to the 2008 St Louise Annual Barbecue was an exciting one as Fay, Natasha, residents and other members of staff prepared and ran around like headless chickens trying to get everything together. I must say I was bit sceptical about how it would all come together, with the threat of rain and the lack of enthusiasm of a few residents, but suffice to say they did a good job.

Friday morning dawned with scattered showers, and honestly I wasn't sure they would pull it off. But through the tireless efforts of Fay by 6 o'clock in the evening things were good to go.

As I entered, the music was pumping and there was a crowd around the buffet table. Despite the rain there was good turn out of ladies who came to support. Whether they came to get food, or actually came to party I don't know; but every one looked like they were enjoying themselves. "It was a good mix of people despite the weather, I had a good time" says Esther. The food was a multi-cultural mix of Jerk chicken, Jelof rice and salad. There was also cake, snacks and fruit for those who desired them. Therefore everyone was catered to and those with special requirements were satisfied, and needless to say there was a long line to get any food.

As the evening progressed, and people were contented and full, the entertainment began, as there was an array of competitions ranging from a dance contest to cleanest room. Tania and Angela put on a good show as the only members of staff willing to put themselves on the line against very nimble residents. This was video recorded for whoever is interested.

Cleanest room went to Emma-Jo Taylor, Naice Lomani and Ikran Hirsti, and finally best dressed went to Lorraine Herbert who took it home with her classy sophisticated look and Martha Tesgkave who wore a casual outfit fit for such an occasion.

The night drew to a close with the raffle competition where many residents won prizes ranging from a pair of black or white Kurt

Geiger sling backs from Harrods to cutlery and payment of rent; many residents being luckier than others. "It was great to see every one come together and enjoy themselves on a day like today," says a beaming Rita.

"It was great fun," says Fay, "All our hard work paid off."

Overall I enjoyed myself, was stuffed with food and thoroughly entertained; in closing my verdict is a full frontal *thumbs up*."

Dominique Dawkins

(Dominique is Junior Editor for the Prince's Trust Newsletter.)

ICH welcomes new Chief Executive

August 2008: ICH has appointed Tricia Durkan as its new Chief Executive. Tricia, who has over 20 years experience in the housing sector, has held posts in both local authority and housing association and brings a wealth of



Tricia Durkan

leadership, strategy and customer service skills and experience. Tricia was previously Director of Operations Strategy at Abbeyfield UK. Prior to this time she worked as a housing consultant and also held director posts within organisations in London and the North and North West of England.

"I'm very much looking forward to the challenge of running ICH. I have a strong commitment to the values of the organisation whose purpose is to make a difference to people's lives. I have been most impressed with the range of services we provide and the diversity of the individuals and communities we are serving and supporting. I am looking forward to meeting as many residents as I can in the coming months and ensuring that you remain at the heart of everything we do."

Bloomin' Marvellous

May 2008: "A collaboration between Bethany House gardening enthusiasts and St Mungo's Putting Down Roots. A fun filled educational experience which resulted in NVQ qualifications for the residents that participated and a continuing project that will transform the courtyard at Bethany House into a green haven."

The title and the summary is a joint statement written by the participants to describe the project which developed following a presentation at a Bethany House Coffee Morning in March. Matthew Henderson from St Mungo's spoke to the residents about the Putting Down Roots programme and asked for volunteers.

Putting Down Roots is a gardening project for people who are currently homeless, have been in the past, or who are at risk of becoming homeless. Its aim is to develop gardening skills by growing organic vegetables, plants and carrying out hard landscaping and building projects. The London Development Agency fund the training, the plants and materials.

Kathleen, Connie, Margaret, Helen and Sam from Bethany House wanted to create a little oasis for all of the other residents. In the process they secured two qualifications: NVQ Level 1 in Raised Bed Construction and NVQ Level 2 in Planting Trees and Shrubs, which are both BTVC accredited courses.

Fiona Finn from St Mungo's guided the residents. So far they have built a large timber planter in the courtyard which has been planted with Honeysuckle and assorted shrubs. There are also a number of other containers with Purple Basil, three types of Thyme, Bay Tree, French Lavender, Black Stemmed Bamboo, Camellia, Magnolia and Weeping Cherry. Many of the plants that were already in the courtyard have been replanted to make them a bit happier! Additional bedding plants and hanging baskets still need to be planted before the main courtyard is finally completed.

More recently, the small courtyard off of the TV room has become home to additional raised planters growing an assortment of tomatoes, courgettes, beetroot, potatoes and herbs. The plants are very healthy looking, but as yet they're not exactly heavy with fruit, "Just one



Kathleen. Sam. Helen. Margaret and Connie

tomato. One ... and I'll be happy," Kathleen joked. When fully grown, the vegetables will be picked and made available for residents to use.

In addition to the Bethany House project, throughout April and May, Kathleen and Connie have also been involved in planting a Sensory Garden at St George's Garden in Holborn. The garden is designed for blind people and plants were chosen for their fragrance and texture. "They were instrumental in its creation," Matthew from St Mungo's told The Informed. They were invited to the official opening on 7th June. "Friends of St George have asked us we'd like to go back and maintain the garden. They're really lovely people," Connie confided.

Cardboard Citizens

The Cardboard Citizens 'Hostels Workshop' programme continues until 2009 at Bethany House, Conway House and St Louise. The classes in drumming and dance have proved very popular and the high levels of participation from residents have been impressive.

Some of our residents put their classes to good use and were involved with this year's Thames Festival; joining in with Cardboard Citizens on the main parade ... they even got to meet the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson.

Cardboard Citizens have also performed a drama at all three sites called "The Help." They enact four different challenging situations that homeless people might face and show how the problems might be resolved. They then ask the audience to suggest how they might have done things differently and encourage them to come forward to re-enact the situation; to show how there can be many ways to deal with things. Congratulations to all those who participated or attended any of the shows or workshops.

Scheme Update and Activities

Residents living at any of our Supported Housing schemes have a range of activities that they can get involved in. There are many individual and group achievements happening all the time, so do please feel free to get involved. Here are a few service developments and events that you might find of interest.

Bethany House

Knitting and sewing classes are popular and run every Wednesday by resident Kathleen Fleming. There is a weekly Coffee Morning every Wednesday. Lifeskills Worker, 'Bobi' Nenadic invites guest speakers to discuss various subjects; recent topics have included: The Criminal Justice System, Personal Safety and Self-Defense, Budgeting, Drumming, TB Screening, Sexual Health.

Self-Defence and Personal Safety sessions with the Workers' Education Association are currently underway.

Three residents recently completed Thames Reach Painting and Decorating course -- a three month course leading to NVQ qualification.



Nurdo, Connie and Lydia with others on completion of their course

One resident recently graduated on a Community Translation Course in Amharic and English.

Conway / Hackett House / An Caislean

Hungerford Drug Project run drug education programmes and "smoothie" making classes to encourage better nutrition.

Gardening project was run throughout the summer for 2 hours a week.

City of Westminster College are involving residents continually in events that have

included rock-climbing, cinema, cooking classes and trips to the gym.

Budgeting classes are being taught by SAFE at Toynbee Hall.

Careers advice is now provided by Camden Housing Employment Project every 2 weeks.

Paint-balling day out was held on 13 December - the wet weather was atrocious but it didn't dampen the enthusiasm!

Hackett House residents have had a trip to visit a community theatre group at the Tricycle.

An Caislean residents have had a personal safety discussion with the Police.

St Louise

Budgeting workshops by SAFE at Toynbee hall are run throughout the year.

Cooking Workshops continue with Fay Douglas. Sexual Health workshops by NAZ in June aimed to create an understanding of good sexual health in Black and Ethnic Minorities.

Coffee mornings are run every Friday at different times to try to include as many residents as possible. Periodic guest speakers have included: Media workshops, Women's training courses, Crisis Skylight – personal development, Painting and Decorating training opportunities, sexual health.

A boat trip along the Thames marked Black History Month, providing a historical talk.

October saw the start of Personal Best Program run by City of Westminster College; 10 week training opportunity providing skills for volunteers with view on the 2012 Olympics.

St Eugene Court

Resident Warden, Rosemary McCloskey, organises various food-focussed events ... as the days become cooler, there will be plenty of hot soup shared throughout the winter.

Green-fingered residents (and also those from **An Caislean**) are invited to attend the London Irish Centre allotment every Tuesday. A great chance to grow some fresh vegetables!

Congratulations to resident Hughie McLeod for more green-fingered activity ... he has been tending the garden to great effect.

In October there was "Birthday Part for All" ... whereby, regardless of your actual birthday, every resident could have a slice of cake and made to feel special.

Card games with tea and biscuits are organised by Danny and there's Bingo and dominos planned for the New Year.

Hertfordshire

Townsend House have held pizza and video nights. Employment and Training services are provided by Connexions. In the summer there was a four-week course on life coaching and personal development.

Hepburn Court have held a summer BBQ and a Halloween party for the children. Health visitors visit the scheme every Monday.

Social Inclusion – floating support

Brendan McConville, based at ICH Head Office, provides floating support to primarily elderly Irish; both current ICH residents and others in North London. Joining forces with other hostels locally, day trips are organised approximately twice monthly in summer and monthly the rest of the year. Trips this year have included:

Southend-on-Sea, Hastings, Cambridge, Chiltern Outdoor Museum. Also a full week trip to Kerry with Aisling in September provided an opportunity for clients to return home and see old friends and family.

Conway Art Group

Conway House's Art Group started in July this year and has been running weekly since. Residents can choose from a wide range of materials including clay, paints, pastels and craft materials. The group is run by Miranda Atkins who says that, "This is an open and inclusive space where residents choose what to make or paint and can express themselves freely."

The images that residents make often generate lively discussion and their pictures are now decorating the games room.

Change in Regulation

Since the 1st December there has been a change in the way housing associations are regulated. For many years The Housing Corporation was the government agency that funded new affordable homes and regulated housing associations in England.

The role of the Housing Corporation has essentially been split into two new bodies: Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) and the Tennant Services Authority (TSA).

The HCA will be responsible for investing in associations and helping them develop. The TSA will regulate associations and ensure that they are governed correctly. The TSA will have a much stronger tenant focus.

Forde House

November 2008: ICH is pleased to announce the re-opening of Forde House. Formerly a 9-bed shared house, the property had become very tired and in need of modernisation. Having been closed for a couple of years, redevelopment work on the property commenced in January and was completed in October. The work cost almost half a million pounds, a quarter of this was funded by the Housing Corporation.

Located in NW5, it now houses four new 1-bed flats and the residents were all nominated by Camden Council.

Housing Services Manager, Aidan O'Kane says, "It's great to see what a good job has been done on this conversion. Although only 4 units, Forde House provides us with a welcome addition to our General Needs accommodation."

Bird watching

August 2008: Residents and staff had a day out bird watching in the Lee Valley Country Park. This provided a great opportunity for residents to enjoy the countryside and identify as many birds as possible.

Conway House Manager, Rob Marland is an enthusiastic bird watcher and wanted to introduce residents to an activity they might not otherwise consider.

Rob commented, "I must say that the residents showed a keen interest in identifying the birds that we spotted. It is a shame that the weather was not better but it seemed to go really well. I intend repeating the trip shortly."

Residents shared binoculars and walked around the lakes stopping in bird hides to scan the wetlands. Just for a fun, there was a competition for the residents to guess the number of birds that were identified by the group. The prize was won by Abbas Ghanatiaam who was presented with a disposable camera.



Bird watching in action

Office Hours at Christmas

Conway House, St Louise, Bethany House and Townsend House hostels will be staffed as usual 24 hours a day throughout the Christmas and New Year period.

Head Office and Hepburn Court office will be open as usual except on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Years Day. These offices will be closed on 25th, 26th December and 1st January.

Residents from St Eugene Court, Caulfield Court, Highgate Rd or Dunne Mews who need to contact a member of staff while Head Office is closed, should call Conway House – 020 7372 6633. Hepburn Court residents should call Townsend House on 020 8207 1562.

Should you have a need for an emergency plumber (or similar) staff will be able to arrange this for you. Please note that routine and non-emergency work will not be undertaken during this period.

Christmas Cheer

Staff at Bethany House will cook Christmas lunch for the residents on Christmas day followed by tea in the evening.

Residents at Conway House and An Caislean will be able to enjoy their dinner served to them at their table by the managers and staff on Christmas day. Hackett House residents will have a dinner cooked for them prior to Christmas day.

St Louise hold an early Christmas party on 19th December and are inviting local partner agencies and neighbours along to join the celebration. Food will be prepared by staff and residents.

St Eugene Court held a Christmas dinner on 16th December prepared by the warden and served by managers and friends.

Townsend House residents and staff are cooking lunch on Christmas day. Hepburn Court residents are welcome to attend

Toys and presents are donated by the local church to the children at Hepburn Court.

Some useful telephone numbers

We appreciate that while Christmas and New Year is for many a time for celebrations, it can also be a difficult time for others. If you need some help, or someone to talk to, you might find these numbers useful.

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|--------------------------------|--|---------------------------|----------------|
| ◆ Narcotics Anonymous | 0845 373 3366 | ◆ National Drugs Helpline | 0800 77 66 00 |
| ◆ Alcoholics Anonymous | 0845 769 7555 (10am to 10pm 365 days per year) | | |
| ◆ Al Anon | 020 7403 0888 (for friends and family members of problem drinkers) | | |
| ◆ Drink Line | 0800 917 8282 | ◆ Shelter Line | 0808 800 4444 |
| ◆ NHS Direct | 0845 46 47 | ◆ The Samaritans | 08457 90 90 90 |
| ◆ Spectrum Day Centre | 020 7267 4937 | | |
| ◆ Cricklewood Homeless Concern | 020 3273 0049 | | |
| ◆ Overeaters Anonymous | 07000 784985 (Support for all eating disorders) | | |

Management and Staff at ICH wish all of our residents a very merry Christmas and a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year.