

The Informer

The newsletter for the residents of
Irish Centre Housing

Issue 9

December 2005

Residents advise on ICH Drugs Policy

In July a team of staff and residents started work to revise the Association's Drugs Policy. As part of our ongoing process of reviewing and revising our policies in ICH, it was clear that a policy was required to reflect the changing needs of the homeless population in London; our clients support needs and changes in legislature.

A team was formed to complete this task, consisting of residents (Ruairi Kells, Jerry Heath of Conway House, and Katy Upjohn of Townsend House) and staff (Pat King – Support Services Co-ordinator, Claire Hazelwood – Substance Misuse Worker, Mary Cribbin – Supported Housing Manager, Bethany House and Kim Jeffs - Supported Housing Manager, Townsend House).

The policy review is pending management approval and it is hoped that Pat, Claire, Jerry and Ruairi will be attending scheme coffee mornings and team meetings to discuss the policy in greater detail in January and February.

Jerry and Ruairi have written about their experiences on the team. ICH would like to thank them for their valued contribution.

Jerry and Ruairi's story

“Over the last few months we have been taking part in a review of ICH drug policy. We have worked with the ICH Substance Misuse Worker and management of hostels to give a residents view on drug policy and what we felt should be included and put in place

We used our own experiences from life and living in a large hostel, as well as information from drug scope and other drug agencies to draw up a new policy and procedures for the whole of Irish Centre Housing.

Both of us have used some of our hard got life experiences and first hand



Jerry Heath and Ruairi Kells
of Conway House

knowledge of drug use and related issues.

We found it very interesting and satisfying to use experiences from what we thought was a dead and wasted time of our lives in a positive way to build structure and work to produce a new and important policy that brought our views in and can be easily understood by fellow residents.

We know from first hand experience that drug use is a reality of life in a city and have lost friends and people close to us from drug use. We also know what it is to be labelled because of drug use and that the main emphasis of any workable policy should be about allowing everyone, regardless of their experiences and needs, a chance to change and get help, and the right to be treated equally and with dignity by services and housing providers and fellow residents.

Working in a formal way with managers and staff and attending meetings was at first difficult but over the months became a very interesting and satisfying learning experience. We found learning how meetings were structured and decisions made and the way we

were treated as equals a rewarding and beneficial experience that will stand by us in the rest of life.

The fact that what we had lived through mattered and that ICH allowed us a chance to put our point of view across and be treated with respect because of our experiences for one of the first times in our lives broke down barriers and the “us and them” feeling of hostel life, as well as helped us to look positively to the future.

Throughout the experience we learned that we could talk about our drug use without fear of judgement and were made to feel valued and equal.

As the policy is now nearly completed we will be visiting all hostel residents and staff teams to introduce the policy and answer any questions residents and staff might have and we're sure that there will be loads.

We look forward to seeing everyone. Be good!”

Jerry Heath and Ruairi Kells, residents of Conway House

Great start for new St Eugene Court Warden

Rosemary McCloskey is the new warden at St Eugene Court and since being in post since March, she has been busy organising plenty of events to encourage residents to participate in. She has written a few words for The Informed to let our readers know a bit more about what has been happening. Our thanks go to Rosemary for demonstrating such initiative and enthusiasm.

“During the summer we had a couple of barbecues. I have been trying to work with Mary Loughrey in An Caislean, also Barbara Duffy who works in Clochar Court which is a sheltered housing scheme belonging to Innisfree Housing to try and involve their residents too. As the take up for events can be so small in all of these schemes I thought we could benefit by working in partnership with one another, as it would make it more worthwhile to put on functions and events for a bigger crowd. On one occasion a couple of men came down from An Caislean for a card game with some of the tenants from here, but instead of playing cards, they spent the



New St Eugene Court warden, Rosemary McCloskey

afternoon reminiscing about life when they first came to London years ago and all the contractors who ever had employed them got honourable mention!

On 26th September we had a joint lunch for our tenants and those of An Caislean in The Corrib Rest and all who attended it were very pleased, not only with the meal but also with *the craic*.

Some of us went on a day trip for shopping to Watford and that was great as there are terrific shops there and all very convenient within walking distance of the station.

I have made connections with other organisations who provide services for my client group, such as B.I.A.S , Irish Elders, and the London Irish Centre who sent me their new health worker, Vicky Smith, who hopes to give a few talks to our tenants on health matters pertinent to their age. Vicky also keeps me informed of events in other places where our people are welcome to attend and have lunch.

We had an early Hallowe'en party on 20th October since I was going on leave on the 21st. All enjoyed traditional Hallowe'en fare, Irish style. We also had a Mass for our deceased relatives on 9th November. Fr Bert Bromley from Sacred Heart Church, Quex Road, offered it and afterwards we had a hearty lunch of home made broth, sandwiches and scones. For this we were joined by some friends of our tenants as all are welcome at most of our functions here.

On the 15th December we had our “Carols by Candlelight” with mince pies and Christmas cake and the annual Christmas lunch on 19th December at the Corrib Rest. Our coffee mornings and afternoon teas continue as usual too.

Regards. Rosemary.”

ICH Employee of the Year 2005

We are delighted to announce that the ICH Employee of the Year 2005 is Derek Heath of Hackett House. Thank you to all of you who submitted nominations for this year's competition as more staff were nominated this year than any year before.

One resident said of Derek, "I had never encountered anyone who seemed to have a grasp of what people in my position really need."

The presentations were made at the staff Christmas party, and also included 3 additional awards.

The categories and the awards went to the following staff:

Employee of the Year:
Derek Heath

Newcomer of the Year:
Erika Rabbi

Non-Housing or Support Award:
Bridget McEvoy

Housing & Support Award:
Rosemary McCloskey



Employee of the Year 2005, Derek Heath receives his award from Chief Executive, Antonia Watson

Christmas for our Residents

As usual, Bethany House, Conway House, St Louise and Townsend House will all be preparing Christmas lunches for their residents. More information will be available locally at the schemes.

The Light House Chapel held a Christmas party for the residents of St Louise on Saturday 17th December. They do a party for a hostel every year, for free, and this year St Louise was lucky enough to benefit from their generosity. They provided a dance group, a discussion on the meaning of Christmas, food, drink and presents!

Townsend House held an early Christmas party on the 8th December with a buffet, a karaoke machine ... and much merriment!

On 19th December the annual Christmas lunch was held for the elders from the Outside Projects and was much enjoyed.

Office Hours

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 will be closed from 24th December until Wednesday 28th December. It will also be closed on Bank Holiday Monday 2nd January, and open again on Tuesday 3rd January 2006.

Residents from St Eugene Court, Caulfield Court, Forde House, 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. Should you have a need for an emergency plumber (or similar) the staff at Conway House will be able to arrange this for you. Please note that routine and non-emergency work will not be undertaken during this period.

Merry Christmas to all!

Dreaming of a Sweet-smelling Future

Coffee mornings at St Louise are always a diverse affair. Anything can happen from playing 'Twister' to making fresh organic face packs and so the residents weren't surprised when the staff said they had a surprise for them. They were going to plant bulbs for next year ... and dreams too!

"We're going to do what?" they grumbled. "Well, I'm not getting my hands dirty!" one said. "Is this an onion?" said another. But as the residents started to look at the pictures of Crocuses, Tulips and Daffodils and realised they would be able to keep them in their rooms, smiles began to slowly bloom.

"First you have to write down your dream", staff explained, handing out pieces of paper. Some started writing straight away but others grumbled again. "I don't have any dreams!"

But if you don't have a dream, how are you ever going to have a dream come true?



Planting Dreams



Residents proudly showing off their handiwork

Try, start with little dreams. "I want to be resettled into a one bedroom flat" wrote the residents on little pieces of paper and buried them in the soil, beneath the flower bulbs. But slowly, slowly, like the petals of a flower uncurling, more inspirational and deeper dreams came out. "I want to travel to Angola," "I want to set up an orphanage"; "I want everybody to be happy". A whole page of prayer came out from the resident who didn't want to get her hands dirty!

These large dreams were too big for the little pots, and besides, we had run out of pots by that time and so the garden shed was raided. Luckily seven large plant holders were found and the residents got to work planting these with dreams and aspirations and a whole mixture of bulbs.

These plant holders have been placed in the St Louise secret garden and in the spring time the fragrance of the flowers and the residents' dreams will perfume the air. Come along and see ... you are most welcome.

There is one important thing to remember about dreams and bulbs. If you want them to grow and blossom then you have to nurture them. Show them a little bit of love and kindness everyday!

Books Wanted

The new manager at **Conway House** is trying to set up a library for the residents. *All he needs now is some books!*

If any of you have any old books that you would be willing to donate they would be very much appreciated.

If you have a donation then either give your books to your hostel reception or contact Steve Webb at Head Office. Thank you.

Conway House Resident's Committee

The residents committee at Conway House was formed in September 2005 and meets on a monthly basis. Committee members hold weekly surgeries, and make themselves available to other residents to discuss any concerns that they may have.

They will report any concerns on to staff to get them addressed. Committee members will actively participate in staff meetings and on a weekly basis carry out Health and Safety house-rounds with a member of staff. They also organise full resident committee meetings.

The committee is made up of ten residents, Joseph Wiltshire, Ruairi Kells, Brendan Weymes, Ronnie Trimble, Barry Wood, Aaron Blake, Tesafaye Yhedego, David Brazil, Jerry Heath and Gerrard Bennet. Unfortunately, one member, James O'Hagan passed away on Sunday 20/11/05, he will be sadly missed.



Sea Air and Smiles

On the November 19th nineteen residents from Bethany House went on a day trip to Brighton, organized and accompanied by staff from ICH.

Travelling down by coach they excitedly arrived in the heart of Brighton by 11.30am. Some indulged in Fish and Chips on the seafront whilst others chose to explore the Palace Pier.

Residents commented how good it was to get out of London, if only for a few hours ... and even if the weather was freezing! Everyone arrived back safely and happily at Bethany House at 7pm, and a great day out was had by all.



EID celebrated

Eid is an Islamic celebration to mark the end of Ramadan, which is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar (this moves each year). Ramadan marks the period during which the Qu'ran was revealed to the prophet Mohammed, and is acknowledged by Muslims by fasting during the hours of daylight. Eid is therefore a much welcome celebration!

Although this year Eid was on 3rd November, parties were held at Bethany House on 4th and St Louise on 7th November. The parties were open to all residents and there was a good mix of Muslims and non-Muslim residents. "One of the benefits of celebrating Eid in the hostels is that it helps all residents to gain understanding of Islamic celebrations and Muslim culture," said Lifeskills worker Katie Claire.



Henna Tattoos at Bethany House



Eid Buffet at St Louise

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

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 | 020 7730 0009 | ◆ National Drugs Helpline | 0800 776 600 |
| ◆ Alcoholics Anonymous | 020 7833 0022 | (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 | ◆ SAMARITANS | 020 7734 2800 |
| ◆ Spectrum Day Centre | 020 7267 4937 | | |
| ◆ Cricklewood Homeless Concern | 020 8208 1608 | | |
| ◆ Alcohol Concern | 020 7928 7377 | ◆ Alcohol Recovery Project | 020 7837 0100 |
| ◆ Overeaters Anonymous | 07000 784985 / 07626 984974 | (Support for all eating disorders) | |