

ADVICE



The quarterly newsletter from the Northern Ireland Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux Spring 2001

It Could Be You!

Jacqui Gallagher, Manager L'Derry CAB and Ailish McIntyre, Manager Newry and Mourne District CAB

With consistently high levels of demand for advice across the broad range of issues dealt with by CABx, L'Derry and Newry and Mourne District CABx applied for assistance from the Community Fund, previously the National Lottery Charities Board. L'Derry CAB required funding to employ one full-time money advice worker, one full-time telephone advice worker, and a part-time administrative worker. Newry and Mourne District CAB applied for funding to employ an additional adviser and to cover staff and running costs.



Back Row - Paddy Gray, Chair of L'Derry CAB, Sheila Jane Malley, Board Member, Community Fund, Front Row - Jacqui Gallagher Manager of L'Derry CAB, Prof Jimmy Kearney, Chairman, Community Fund

Last month, both CABx were delighted to receive confirmation that funding had been approved for the above posts which is further acknowledgement of the valuable work carried out by the bureaux in their respective catchment areas.

L'Derry CAB Manager, Jacqui Gallagher expressed her delight at the recent award saying:

"Given the substantial numbers of people contacting the Bureau seeking advice and assistance with multiple debt problems, over 1,321 enquiries in the last twelve months, the need for a specialist money advice worker is essential. With this funding the bureau will be able to assist, negotiate and represent people who feel trapped in debt and have nowhere else to turn."

Ailish McIntyre, Manager, Newry and Mourne District CAB was also delighted with the award received by the bureau saying:

"This funding is a reflection of the demand for the service offered by the CAB in Newry and Mourne District."



Back Row - Matt Durkin, Chair of Newry and Mourne District CAB, Sheila Jane Malley, Board Member, Community Fund, Front Row - Ailish McIntyre, Manager of Newry and Mourne District CAB, Prof Jimmy Kearney, Chairman, Community Fund

"It will mean an invaluable increase in staff resources and will enable the bureau to operate more effectively, thus increasing the service available to the local community."

This funding will also assist both bureaux to develop their services to the community within the context of Targeting Social Need more effectively.

Staff News

Angela Welch, Coleraine CAB

Jim Webster, Bangor CAB, has qualified for New Deal 50 plus and is staying on in the bureau as a receptionist for a further 52 weeks - congratulations to Jim!



Jim Webster,
Bangor CAB

Congratulations also to Oonaugh Harris, Manager of Bangor CAB who was elected the new Chair of the Manager's Group in February.



Oonaugh Harris,
Bangor CAB

Carrickfergus CAB is delighted to welcome their two new volunteer advisers Maria Ross and Hazel Sinnamon.

Melvin Elliot has joined Coleraine CAB as a volunteer adviser and Mary Hyde has also started under a 6-month contract through Enterprise Ulster as a clerical worker.

Cookstown and Glengormley CABs have new volunteer advisers - Jennifer McGrath, and Lynn Haverin respectively.

Rathcoole and Strabane CABs welcome new volunteer advisers. Lesley Armstrong and Robert Lee join Rathcoole CAB and Fionnuala Flanagan joins Strabane CAB.

Down District CAB is sorry to lose Jim Masson as Assistant Manager of the Newcastle outreach and wish him well with his new ventures. They welcome Mary Flannagan as a volunteer administrator and Susan Ward as a volunteer adviser.

Antrim Road CAB welcomes David Gibson who is heading up the Carers Advocacy Project and Mick Uffindell as the Carers Support Worker.



Mick Uffindell,
Antrim Road CAB

Anne Breslin the Rural Outreach adviser with Fermanagh CAB has been made full time in this post - congratulations to Anne. Fermanagh is also losing their money advice worker Anne Shine.

Hollywood CAB welcome on board Sinead Mulligan and Lisburn CAB welcome Maurleen Toner both new volunteer advisers.

Mary Curran has joined Armagh CAB on a six month money advice pilot project funded by Nationwide.



Mary Curran,
Armagh CAB

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Views and opinions expressed in Advice are those of the editor or particular contributor, and should not be considered to be the view of NIACAB.

Launch of Employment Rights Booklets

Siobhán McKenna, Information and Policy Officer

The NIACAB Information system has a comprehensive employment section which now contains a number of DHFETE booklets on employment rights. This series of booklets was relaunched in March 2001 in Adelaide House. The Information and Policy Officers attended the launch and reviewed the new booklets for inclusion on the information system.

From left to right - Natalie Strain, Information and Policy Officer, Sean Farren, Minister for Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment, Siobhán McKenna, Information and Policy Officer



Growing volume of work for advice agencies

Derek Alcorn, Chief Executive NIACAB

Advice agencies in Northern Ireland are anticipating a growing volume of work over the next few years, with a range of external factors generating change and growth. These include:

- The Reform of Legal Aid in Northern Ireland, which if it follows the model adopted in England will provide contracts for advice delivery in the areas of consumer advice, debt and social security.
- The business model increasingly being adopted in Government which directly encourages Departments not to duplicate services which other agencies are providing
- The Chancellor's strategy of tax credits aimed at integrating aspects of the tax and benefit systems. This was expanded in the last budget, and since it is based on means testing, will generate a considerable volume of work for advice agencies.

Some amusement was caused in the advice sector recently when a briefing provided by civil servants offered an analysis that the workload of advice agencies should fall because the Social Security Agency had launched a Customer Charter. This analysis missed the following points:

- CAB gives advice to the public across 14 subject areas including employment, housing, travel and trans-

port, communications, health, taxes and consumer, trade and business. CAB caseload shows a high degree of unmet need in respect of employment rights and debt. More fundamentally CAB in Northern Ireland would not use social security as a framework within which to consider the very important range of social interventions which our work supports.

- The Customer Charter Initiative within the SSA is a significant management of change initiative which if successful, will take at least 5 years to carry through, and is dependent on other factors being in place, for example, training across the benefit system and the availability of accurate information for staff - issues which have been raised by the advice sector for a number of years.
- CAB estimates that some £10m of benefit

goes unclaimed in Northern Ireland (the Government has no estimates), and a more proactive approach by the SSA in promoting the availability of benefits is likely to increase enquiries to advice agencies rather than reduce them.

The atmosphere of competition around these issues from statutory agencies is leading to a loss of partnership opportunities and a duplication of voluntary sector advice provision which is unfortunate. Hopefully more varied business models will apply in due course, as the strategic view from central government is implemented across the public service.

When the Law Changes...
...where do you get your information?

NIACAB's Electronic Information System is a comprehensive database containing extensive information covering the broad area of citizens' rights and entitlements. There are fourteen categories of information including: **Consumer, Employment, Health, Housing and Social Security.**

For an information pack contact Jacqueline Scott, Northern Ireland Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux on 028 9023 1120 or e-mail scottj@niacab.org

Bureaux on the move

New home for Coleraine CAB

Angela Welch, Manager, Coleraine CAB

On 20 February Coleraine CAB moved to 24, Lodge Road. The premises were designed by the new landlords, a design company, and the layout and quality of work is excellent.

The accommodation comprises an attractive, well-lit waiting area, large general office, three interview booths, tribunal representatives' room, money advice room, manager's office, kitchen and disabled toilet. The whole bureau is

on the ground floor with full wheelchair access.

It is situated in a very attractive street, which also houses the Samaritans, the Simon Community and the Probation Board, all of which are complementary organisations. The bureau is just a few minutes walk from the rail and bus stations.

Left to right: David Martin, Chair of Coleraine CAB, Robert Millican, John Campfield, Silvia Harbison, Ellen O' Kane, Angela Welch (Manager), Mary Hyde & Sheila Beattie at the opening of the new premises.



Clients are delighted with the new premises and personal callers have increased significantly.

Cookstown on the move

Chris McAleer, Cookstown CAB

CAB's service in Cookstown took a big leap forward in April with the opening of new "state of the art premises" in Molesworth Street, Cookstown. In opening the premises, the Chair of Cookstown Council, Cllr James McGarvey said the Council placed a very high value on the CAB service and recognised how badly needed it was in the area. He congratulated the staff and management committee on the new premises, and looked forward to a continuing and growing relationship with CAB.

Derek Alcorn, Chief Executive of NIACAB said that the acquisition of the new premises illustrates three important facts:

- CAB takes itself and its services to the public seriously, and the new premises are a clear sign that the office is

moving to a new level of operation.

- the wide range of funding sources tapped into to make the renovations possible was a signal to the local Council that CAB recognises the need to match Council funding with funding from other sources, thus adding value to public funding.
- the installation of new technology in the Cookstown office, the high speed ISDN connections linking it to every other CAB office in N. Ireland, and the investment by the NIACAB

Regional Office of some £6000 of EU funding to make this possible, has created a valuable social resource in the Cookstown Council area.

Derek congratulated the committee and staff on creating a modern office environment in which to develop CAB's information and advocacy service.

Pictured at the official opening of Cookstown CAB's new premises are left to right: Chris McAleer, Manager, Cookstown CAB, Derek Alcorn, Chief Executive, NIACAB, James McGarvey, Chairman Cookstown District Council and Sharon Crooks, Chairperson Cookstown CAB.



Life after CAB

Pat Hutchinson, Manager, Newtownabbey CAB

Over the past eight years volunteers from Newtownabbey CAB have used their experience in CAB to develop their careers. This was highlighted at an awards ceremony when Pat Hutchinson and Deborah McClelland received their JEB teaching diplomas in Information Technology. Paula Bradley a Glengormley volunteer who is now the 'Women We'ans & Work' Co-ordinator commented that the time she spent with CAB was the cornerstone of her career.

Deborah McClelland, Bytes Project Co-ordinator said:

"I began working in CAB on the Worktrack Programme in November 1999. To say I was nervous was an understatement, I was petrified! What if I got it wrong? What if I gave someone the wrong advice? I didn't need to worry - as soon as I started in Rathcoole CAB I was welcomed as part of an already well established team and was immediately put at ease and made aware that there was always someone there to help. Working for CAB also opened the door for me to get where I am now."

Liz Elliott now working in an accountancy practice stated that working for Newtownabbey CAB created an awareness of the needs of the different groups within the community, the varying degrees of people's problems and how to help solve them. The experience gained in

the use of computers, telephony, communication skills and administration was invaluable. Not to mention a sense of being part of a large family who were willing to deal with and share interest in my problems. This sense of belonging, is a good basis for a future career and a full time job.

Ciara McMeekin said:

"I went to CAB with a twofold aim, firstly to give some of my time to community work in the hope of helping people, and secondly to gain some experience in the field of advice giving, which would be pertinent to my future career as a solicitor."

Working in Newtownabbey

CAB gave me a greater insight into the issues and problems faced by vulnerable groups in the community. I

feel that it strengthened my communication skills, which in turn gave me more confidence.

It was of great satisfaction to me to go home at the end of the day and feel that I had helped someone out in some way

My knowledge of the voluntary

sector gained in CAB helped me find my current employment with the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust. Now that I am aware of the very necessary role played by CAB in the community, I will try and stay involved in some capacity in the future."

Volunteer Week is 1-7 June 2001 and is a chance to recognise, reward and recruit volunteers. The CAB service is continuously seeking volunteers and can accommodate people from a wide variety of disciplines. For more information please contact Tony Adams, Community Support Worker, NIACAB on 028 9023 1120 or e-mail: adamst@niacab.org or contact your local CAB.

CAB Opens Up Training Programme

NIACAB offers training in welfare benefits, consumer, housing and employment legislation to provide participants with the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for the effective delivery of an advice service. In addition, NIACAB offers a comprehensive specialist training programme tailored to suit your organisational needs.

Searching for New Horizons?

Contact Genevieve Murphy

on 028 9023 1120.

E-mail murphyg@niacab.org

NIACAB Training

West Belfast on Air

Natalie Strain, Information & Policy Officer

CAB was approached by Triple FM, a West Belfast community radio station which operates intermittently throughout the year. Their request was one to strike fear in the hearts of all advisers - a live four-week thirty-minute advice slot. Four advisers from Falls and Suffolk & Andersonstown CABx graciously accepted the challenge, each concentrating on their own particular area of expertise.

Liz Dugdale, from Suffolk & Andersonstown CAB, began the series with an overview of Income Support and Disability Benefits. The following week, Kathrine O'Reilly, Falls CAB, gave advice on Working Families' Tax Credit and Disabled Person's Tax Credit. Kellie Byrne, Falls CAB, was



Clockwise from top left: Liz Dugdale, Suffolk & Andersonstown CAB, Kathrine O'Reilly, Falls CAB, Kellie Byrne, Falls CAB, John Caldwell, Falls CAB

next with advice on Disability Living Allowance and Disability Benefits and an overview of the changes to these benefits in April. Last but not least, John Caldwell, Falls CAB, went on air dealing with employment issues.

The series comprised a question and answer format, with advisers answering questions posed by both the interviewer and telephone queries from the public. A number of people telephoned the station to voice their support for the work of CAB and the advice slot was extremely well received in the local area. All advisers highlighted the continued need for new volunteers, their telephone advice services and details of their opening hours.

Congratulations to Falls and Suffolk & Andersonstown CABx for their enthusiastic involvement in what proved to be a very worthwhile community advice project. We look forward to hearing of many more such initiatives happening on a regional basis.

CABx and Foot and Mouth

Dave Murphy, Director of Development

Many CABx have been dealing with the impact of foot and mouth disease. In particular CABx have been considering the implications of delivering advice in rural areas.

The Association advised CAB Advisers not to undertake home visits to farms and homes in rural areas at times of increased risk. CABx were also asked to consider suspending outreach clinics in rural areas and advised to consider putting extra resources into the delivery of telephone advice where home visits and outreach advice clinics were suspended.

needs.

In addition NIACAB has also been involved in discussions with the National Association, Government Departments and other national bodies about provision of advice and support to people affected by the outbreak.



Phoenix - a symbol of hope for the future of farming.

Implementing the Equality Agenda - The Equality Commission's Perspective

Joan Harbison, Chief Commissioner

To begin at the beginning The Northern Ireland Act 1998, which implemented the Belfast Agreement, included the establishment of "a body corporate to be known as the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland". The Commission came into being on 1 October 1999, and took on the work of the Commission for Racial Equality, the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Fair Employment Commission and the NI Disability Council.

The Commission was also given the job of overseeing section 75 of the Act, which requires public authorities to promote equality of opportunity and good relations in their policies and services. A key point here is that the "statutory duty" covers issues like age and sexual orientation which do not have anti-discrimination protection under the law; this at least means that the concerns of these groups have to be taken into account in the policies which affect them.

The most important thing to say about the work of the "new" Commission is that the work of the "old" agencies has gone on without a break throughout the necessary process of restructuring:

- the work of responding professionally and considerately to people who believe themselves to have been discriminated against;
- the work of advising, informing and training employers and service providers;
- the work of answering the myriad of queries that come in from, eg, students, teachers and lecturers, NGOs, the media, the legal profession and the general public;
- the work of influencing govern-



Joan Harbison,
Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission

ment through formal and informal contacts with policy-makers, supported by the research we carry out or commission;

- the increasingly important work of building partnerships with other groups who impact on equality - the Commission is currently working closely with NIACAB to develop services for disabled people. Staff from the Disability Unit will shortly be training CAB staff to help them identify potential cases under the Disability Discrimination Act, and it is planned to extend this co-operation in the future.

The statutory duty has been the highest-profile new task for the Commission. The process of drafting, consulting on, and finalising the equality schemes has been demanding for all concerned. But these action plans, showing how public bodies will implement the duty, are the essential first step.

The statutory duty is unique to Northern Ireland, giving people in the community a real voice in policy-making. The Commission has been encouraged by the co-operation and commitment shown by public bodies, over 170 of whom have come

under the duty so far, and the community groups and others who have responded to consultations. We are aware that NIACAB is part of the important work of the Equality Coalition to highlight the importance of section 75 and help NGOs influence policy-making through it.

There are now over 140 people working at the Equality Commission. We are all looking forward to moving in the summer to our new premises in Shaftesbury Square. It will be an important development for us, accompanied by the completion of the internal restructuring that was necessary given that we started from four separate organisations.

It is perhaps symbolic that we are at present working on our input to the Single Equality Act. This was promised in the Programme for Government and is designed to bring together the half-dozen or so existing pieces of anti-discrimination legislation. This, like the statutory duty, also has the potential to transform the equality agenda, and is something the Commission has been calling for since we began our work.

There is a daunting amount of work to be done if Northern Ireland is to be a truly equal society. The Commission's starting point is, to quote part of our mission statement, "to value and promote respect for diversity". We will continue to translate this into very practical action, working with the other stakeholders who share the same aim, not least CABx.

The Equality Commission can be contacted on 028 9050 0600, fax on 028 9032 8970, or e-mail: information@equalityni.org and website: www.equalityni.org

Bureau News

Angela Welch, Manager, Coleraine CAB

Ards CAB

Ards Bureau Manager, Linda Higginson was a guest of Phoenix Gas at Age Concern's 25th Anniversary Gala Ball. Linda was accompanied by Bangor CAB Manager, Oonaugh Harris, and the table also had representatives from other charities funded by Phoenix Gas.

Coleraine CAB

Coleraine CAB has recently moved to new premises at 24 Lodge Road - see page 4. The bureau obtained funding from the North Eastern Education and Library Board which allows it to extend the Carers' Outreach Home Visiting Project for another three months. Peace and Reconciliation European funding was also received from Coleraine Borough Partnership towards the expense of refurbishing the new premises.

Down District CAB

Down District has received funding from Friends of CAB for a new telephone system. The bureau also received an increase in their core funding from Down District Council.

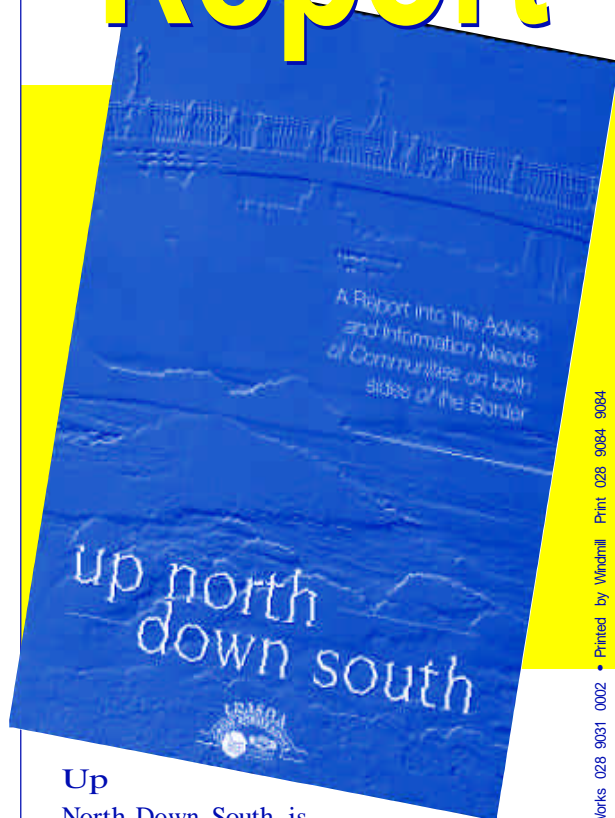
Dungannon CAB

Dungannon CAB is part of the ONE pilot project for their area. A forum has been constituted comprising community and voluntary agencies to assist on the project, which starts on 15 May. The bureau is very involved and will monitor how ONE affects the people of Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council area. Dungannon CAB has noticed a large increase in the number of employment queries brought to the bureau especially concerning holiday pay and working hours. The ONE pilot has a budget of £13 million and NIACAB has written to the SSA and T&EA to ask how referrals from ONE to voluntary agencies will be resourced.

Larne CAB

Inland Revenue staff used Larne CAB premises to meet the public and give advice on the National Minimum Wage, Working Families' Tax Credit and general tax advice. The morning session was very well supported with over 30 members of the public availing of the service.

Trasna Report



Up

North Down South is a Joint publication from NIACAB and Comhairle, which summarises the outcome of our cross border advice and information project Trasna.

The report gives the background to the project, the socio-economic context, and a profile of the cross border queries received. These show a high relevance to Targeting Social Need objectives, with a high percentage of enquiries relating to Social Security and Social Welfare issues.

The Trasna project is a partnership with Comhairle, and both agencies have developed an electronic cross-jurisdictional database which will underpin cross border advice in the future.

Copies of Up North Down South are available from Jacqueline Scott, NIACAB, 11 Upper Crescent, Belfast, BT7 1NT on 02890 231120, or e-mail: scottj@niacab.org.

Price £10 including p&p.

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