

## NEW SOLUTIONS, NEW PARTNERSHIPS

John Napier, NIACAB Director of Information Services

On Wednesday 10th May 2000 NIACAB launched its "New Solutions, New Partnerships" initiative at the Wellington Park Hotel, Belfast. The initial phases of the IT project involved a major capital investment to upgrade the existing hardware and infrastructure, leaving the organisation with a modern, robust IT platform upon which NIACAB will implement future software development. The launch was attended by a number of high profile speakers and a video-conferencing role-play was acted out for the attendees.

The system will enable the network of 28 bureaux and 100 key outlets to instantly share and access information from a virtually unlimited range of public and private sector bodies and will mean a better and more efficient service for the community.

Among the opportunities opened up with the new IT links are the development of a Discussion Forum designed to disperse and retrieve information overnight - used to circulate information about rogue holiday firms and by NIE to publicise their code of practice. The Trading Standards Office has also used the service to collate information about customer service in some NI firms while

the NI Audit Office has used the service to tap into CAB experience of the administration of Income Support. The exchange of complex information with the public sector has now been simplified for organisations such as the Department for Social Development which provides daily updates for its database of social security information to CAB.

CAB is also developing a specialist database for advisers, supporting those in the front line, helping the public to appeal official decisions.

In co-operation with the Dublin based National Social Services Board, CAB has developed an all-Ireland database of information. NIACAB will also use its links in England, Scotland and Wales in the development of an information system incorporating all UK legislation, including the new regional assemblies.

Speaking at the launch were Jim Dougal, Head of European Union Representation in NI, Des Vincent, Director of Civil Service Central IT Unit, John Convery, BIC Systems, Joe Wright, Head of Community Development Branch (DSD) and Alan Gaston, Managing Director of NIE. Welcoming the initiative and the positive impact it will bring, Jim Dougal said: **"The European Union is very much in favour of allowing ease of access to information and of making full use of new technology to ensure that this happens. We are delighted to have been able to back this project for CAB. Information is power and in a democracy it is important that power remains accessible to the people."**

Backing the new working partnerships are (left to right): John Napier, Director of Information Services, Jim Dougal, Head of European Union representation in Northern Ireland, Allen McCartney, Home Energy Marketing Manager for NIE and Siobhan McKenna, NIACAB Information and Policy Officer.



NIACAB - Meeting social need through new technology

# Staff News

Angela Welch, Manager, Coleraine CAB

Central Belfast CAB has appointed a new manager. Congratulations to Pat Coulton, who has been appointed to the post. Pat worked in East Belfast CAB as Deputy Manager prior to this.



Pat Coulton

Coleraine CAB says farewell to Mathilda Taulbutt who has been with the Bureau for over 6 years. Mathilda has gone to a permanent post with Limavady Community Development Initiative as Advice Co-Ordinator.

Regional Office is very sorry to see Roisin Carlin leave NIACAB. She has been providing secretarial support to the Development Unit for the past nine years and will be well known to anyone who contacts Regional Office. Roisin is taking up a new post with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and we wish her well in the future.

The Association is also losing Stephen Matier, who has been part of NIACAB for a number of years having worked in Down District, Derry and Banbridge before becoming Director of the Belfast Group of CABx. Stephen is leaving the post to pursue a full time music career due to the success of "Different Drums of Ireland", we wish him every success with the band.

## Ballymena CAB and Carers Group

Ballymena CAB has a Carers Advice/Advocacy Project, funded by the Peace & Reconciliation fund, the Northern Health and Social Services Board and others. The project has been very successful and is enjoying continuing support.

Recently a Carers Support Group has been set up in the area, with help from the Mayor of Ballymena, Councillor James Currie, the Bureau and others. The Carers Advice Worker from the Bureau, Maura Barker has been elected Chair.

The Group meets once a month, and there are currently 36 members. It is affiliated to the Carers National Association, and has recently received some funding from the NHSSB.

Reverend Robert Coulter, a MLA for the Ballymena area and Bureau Trustee, arranged for the Group to visit Stormont on Wednesday 10th May 2000. Members had a thoroughly enjoyable day with a tour of Parliament Buildings and lunch in the Members Dining Room.

## Information System

If you are interested in purchasing our information system, please contact John Napier, tel: 028 9023 1120 or e-mail: [napierj@niacab.org](mailto:napierj@niacab.org)

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# SSA CLARIFIES POLICY

Sustained pressure from CAB on service delivery failure by the Social Security Agency has resulted in both the Agency and the Department for Social Development clarifying policy on the delivery of advice and information to the public.

Responding formally to NIACAB's report "Accessing Social Security" Chris Thompson SSA Chief Executive stated:

**"It is the Department's and therefore Agency policy to give appropriate advice and information to any member of the public, who either attends in person or contacts us by telephone. Where help is needed to complete forms, we will provide it."**

The detailed text of the response also states:

**"Staff are required to give help to fill in all forms, including claim forms when asked. It is policy not to refer customers to an outside organisation to have forms completed."**

Despite these very clear undertakings, local Social Security Offices are continuing to refer members of the public to CAB offices, in one recent case actually giving the name of a CAB advice worker. Since the Agency has made no formal appraisal of CAB's standards of service delivery, and has no formal referral mechanism in place this is a continuing breach of Service First requirements, and is quite at odds with modern standards of public administration.

The clarification of SSA policy will be welcome to advice agencies and public representatives, and we look

forward to its full implementation. In essence Government has created a self assessment system in Social Security, and introduced long complex forms into a population of higher than average problems of literacy. It is clear that these are the people who have been decanted on to the voluntary advice sector by the SSA over the past 5 or 6 years, causing huge pressure of demand on advice agencies with no corresponding offer of resources. Taken with the February report from the Northern Ireland Audit Office that £42m of Income Support was misallocated, it seems clear that there are major issues of fiscal and social policy here which are well outside the resources of the voluntary sector. The Department for Social Development needs to address these as a matter of urgency.

## NATIONAL VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATION DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Liz Pollock, NIACAB  
NVQ Development Officer

As a result of a NIACAB Manager's residential in December 1998, it was recommended that NIACAB explored the possibilities of developing Vocational Qualifications to enhance the quality of advice work, ensure standards in service delivery and provide transferable qualifications for staff. NIACAB successfully applied for 1 year European funding from PROTEUS, under the Special Support Programme - Peace and Reconciliation, to develop the project.

I was appointed in March of this year and since then have been developing candidate induction materials and promoting the project. A number of information sessions with bureau advice delivery staff and inductions for candidates have taken place for NVQ Level 3 in Advice. Angie Masterson

(Community Advice Trainer) and Barry McVeigh (Specialist Support Officer) are working towards their D32 and D33 Assessor awards. Both Genevieve Murphy (Training Officer and Scheme Co-ordinator) and I are working towards the D34 Internal Verifier award.

The objectives of the project are:

- To make volunteering more accessible to the key target group identified as the long-term unemployed, those aged 25+;
- To recruit and select 50 volunteers yearly throughout the NIACAB network;
- To provide transferable skills for future employment, e.g. IT and communication skills;
- To provide personal development, enabling trainees to compete within the labour market;

- To measure competency through on-going assessment in the bureau;
- Empowerment at community level to train advisers to build capacity in their local community, this is of particular relevance for advisers from areas where no previous service exists, or cross-community initiatives.

It is hoped that in the future long-term funding will be secured to sustain the project with a dedicated member of staff and to develop the project to make National Vocational Qualifications available to salaried advice staff.

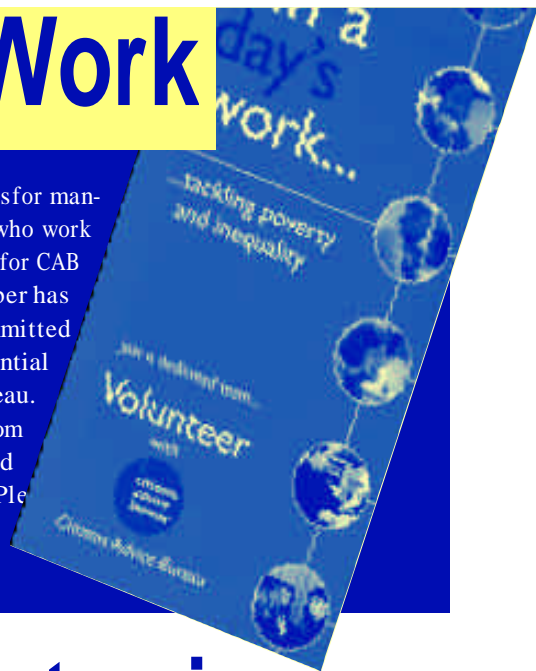
**If you would like further information please contact Liz Pollock at Regional Office on 028 9023 1120 or email [pollockl@niacab.org](mailto:pollockl@niacab.org)**



Liz Pollock reviews materials developed for the project with Barry McVeigh, NIACAB Specialist Support Officer.

# All in a Day's Work

The CAB network successfully integrates dedicated volunteers for management committees, teams of paid workers and volunteers who work day to day in a CAB. Over 330 people volunteer their time for CAB Management Committees across Northern Ireland. This number has increased by 20% over the past year, with more time being committed by all participants. The Management Committee is an essential resource giving support to the manager for running the Bureau. There are a range of volunteering opportunities in CAB, from administration, IT, campaigning work, social policy work and advice delivery to supporting the management of a CAB. Please contact your local CAB, or NIACAB Regional Office to find out more about these opportunities.



## The Value of Volunteering

Valerie Adams, Manager, Antrim CAB

To mark National Volunteer Week, it was decided to make the main thrust of the Bureau's Annual General Meeting, an appreciation of the work of volunteers in our agency. This was to illustrate the value of volunteering, both in monetary terms and in development for the community and also to highlight the value of volunteering to volunteers themselves. Through volunteering for CAB they are challenged, developed and trained, which may result in an increase in their employability.

Guest Speakers for the evening were Paul Dinsmore from Newtownabbey Volunteer Centre and Tommy Stewart, Community Relations Officer from Antrim Borough Council. Genevieve Murphy, Training Officer, represented Regional Office.

It is a known fact that volunteers are the backbone supporting the delivery of advice in all Citizens Advice Bureaux. This point was discussed by William Murray, Antrim CAB Chair. He said that the essence and productivity of the bureau during the year stemmed from its volunteers. William said: "If there were no volunteers, what would become of the Bureau?"

Paul Dinsmore from Newtownabbey Volunteer Centre, gave a comprehensive speech on the history and development of his organisation. He described how the centre focuses on the three R's of volunteering, they Recruit, Recognise and Reward. The Centre dealt with 155 queries last year from potential volunteers. Their placement is varied, ranging from CABx to Hospital Befriendersto counsellors with CRUSE bereavement care. He concluded by stating that the underlying principle of the Volunteer Centre is the support of volunteers by supporting good practice in managing volunteers, training of volunteers and providing funding for voluntary organisations to cover "out of pocket" expenses.

Tommy Stewart, Community Relations Officer with Antrim Borough Council, outlined how a main facet of his role was working with local community groups and, consequently volunteers. He is constantly impressed by the work of these volunteers and found that the positive impact they had on the community is of incalculable value. Tommy went on to say that he had become increasingly aware of the work that Antrim CAB carried out on behalf of the community and that this

is largely due to its volunteers. His hope was that this would continue to be recognised by the Council and that Antrim CAB would find its work being further supported and developed.

The Bureau Report and Deputy Manager's Report specifically appreciated the work of volunteers in Antrim Bureau. Despite working in cramped conditions, dealing with changes in Social Security and Employment Legislation and the sheer complexity of work now encountered in Bureau, statistics had increased by 12%. Volunteers in the Bureau have contributed 31 years of volunteering in total, each one averaging 16 hours per week. In monetary terms (calculated at the rate of a full time adviser) this is £47,923.20 per year.

The meeting concluded that it was more difficult to place a qualitative value on what volunteers do. However they do make a measurable difference to the lives of many people. It was also felt that National Volunteer Week had been under represented in the media and that the vast positive impact coming from volunteering and the subsequent skills and expertise that is cascaded into communities by volunteers should be more fully recognised and appreciated.

# Voluntary contributions throughout Northern Ireland

Tony Adams, NIACAB Development Officer

Volunteers continue to maintain a prominent position within NIACAB. Their contribution throughout the CAB network can truly be described as indispensable.

The measure of their work goes beyond the mere tally of hours and days they contribute in the course of a year. It is a quality, an ambience that pervades the Association. Let us call it the 'v' factor. It's that element of citizenship that we refer to as active. I have observed it many times during my relatively short association with NIACAB. I saw it in the volunteer who would go into his local CAB, to update the filing system, at 6.00 am before going on to his paid employment. There are those volunteers in many Bureaux that remain long after the door closes, or as I was told recently, go into the Bureau on Saturday to continue work on clients' behalf. There are those voluntary management committee members who come out on a wet and windy night in November to complete a funding application.

With Bureaux being so busy and the work so demanding, it is hard and rare to have an opportunity to stand back and see the 'good' being done out there. The work, which is undertaken by volunteers, truly makes a difference. So, all you volunteers reading this, stand up, put your right hand over your left shoulder and give yourself a pat on the back.

The Regional Audit of CAB services in Northern Ireland for 1998/99 showed that there were 707 people involved with the work of the Association in the 27 CABs covered by the Audit:

- 135 paid staff;
- 207 volunteers (advisers/clerical);
- 336 volunteers (management committee);
- 29 Employed on various government training schemes.

From the Audit, there were 54 volunteers who left NIACAB for a variety of reasons. They, in the main, were volunteer advisers. It is interesting to note that 28 left to take up employment. This accounts for 52% of leavers. A further 6% left to commence a course in Further Education or Training. I don't believe it would be incongruous to suggest a relationship between volunteering and securing employment. Of the remaining number who left the Association, 13% retired, 11% left to assume caring responsibilities and unfortunately 15% had to leave due to illness.

## Volunteer Week Roundup

Volunteers at Ards Bureau were invited by the Mayor to a tour of the Council Offices and a talk on the value of volunteering. Afterwards light refreshments were laid on in the Chamber.

Bangor CAB and the local branch of Age Concern combined forces to say thanks to their volunteers. There was an exhibition at Bloomfield Shopping Centre and a light supper and celebration at the Heritage Centre.

Coleraine volunteers also visited their Council Offices where the Mayor hosted a reception in the Mayor's Parlour for them.

Dungannon and District organised a balloon flight as a fundraising exer-

cise. In addition, volunteers and staff took advantage of the good weather in May to hold a team building event over a weekend on the shores of Lough Erne. Funding was provided by Armagh and Dungannon Volunteer Bureau and the training was facilitated by the Bureau manager, Keith Stanyer.

Long time volunteer Helen O'Donnell said: "The training really hit the button and the weekend away was a great success". Linda Wilson, Outreach Development Worker,

said: "this was a wonderful opportunity for volunteers and staff to relax, unwind and gain an insight into personal development".



Enjoying the sunshine on Lough Erne are (from left to right): Fionnuala Fox, Volunteer, Bernie Corley, Senior Adviser, Linda Wilson, Outreach Development Worker, Volunteers Kim Gervin and Roisin McCaffrey and their "Captain" Keith Stanyer.

# WAVE Trauma Centre

## - Support For Those Effected By The "Troubles"



WAVE is a charity which offers care and support to people who have been bereaved, injured or severely traumatised through the "Troubles" in N. Ireland. Many of the clients have been bereaved or injured, however there are growing numbers who have been left severely traumatised through intimidation. The service is offered throughout Northern Ireland and the organisation has four offices at present: Armagh, Ballymoney Belfast and Omagh.

Dermot Maguire has recently moved from Down District CAB to work with the WAVE Trauma Centre as Welfare Rights Worker. Maria Rogers, formerly of Antrim Road and Down District CABs, has moved to the Armagh WAVE office as Advice Worker.

Other services which WAVE offers include befriending, counselling, youth programmes, complementary therapies and funding to undertake training courses.

For further information on our services please contact:

Armagh 028 3751 1599  
Ballymoney 028 2766 9900  
Belfast 028 9077 9922  
Omagh 028 8225 2522

## Volunteering: a way of life

Linda Williamson, Manager East Belfast CAB

For most of us working for nothing is almost a contradiction in terms, for in our "show me the money" culture, the pound is king. But for Joyce Finlay, contributing for no charge has been a way of life.

Mrs Finlay, who is 78, became a volunteer adviser for CAB in 1965. After years of hard work she decided to call it a day earlier this year. Like many other volunteers for CAB, Joyce found that simply doing the work provided ample rewards.

The CAB made a presentation to Joyce to mark her departure from the Bureau and to thank her for her contribution over the years. Joyce commented that: "After all these years it is time for me to move on. Volunteering for the CAB from the 1960's into a new century has been very challenging. When I started out, we were not able to have such a comprehensive approach. Things have changed out of all recognition over the years".



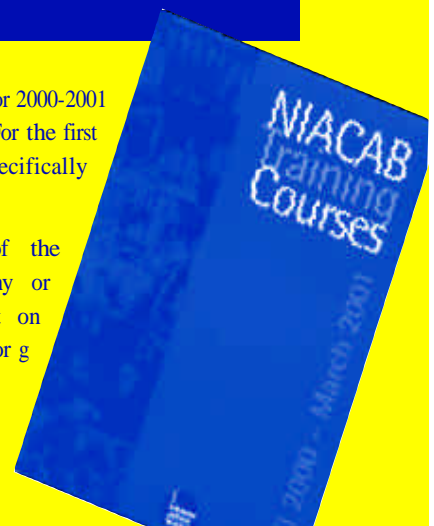
Stephen Matier, Director of the Belfast Group of CABs with Joyce Finlay (centre) and Linda Williamson, Manager, East Belfast CAB.

Volunteers are the backbone of the CAB service and we are very grateful for the excellent work they do.

## NIACAB Training Programme 2000-2001

The new NIACAB Training Programme for 2000-2001 is now available from Regional Office. For the first time the programme includes courses specifically for outside organisations.

For further details or a copy of the programme contact Genevieve Murphy or Angie Masterson in the Training Unit on 028 90231120 or email [murphyg@niacab.org](mailto:murphyg@niacab.org) or [mastersona@niacab.org](mailto:mastersona@niacab.org)



# FERMANAGH CAB

Fermanagh Citizens Advice Bureau is in the unique position of being the only Bureau in N. Ireland with a remit to cover an entire county as well as a District Council area. The Bureau opened in Enniskillen in 1976 and was staffed by five volunteers. The Bureau bears little resemblance now to its early days, with time and effort being spent to raise money to develop services. Fundraising in the Bureau aims to do two things: to provide continuity of services, with paid staff supported by volunteers; and to ensure that we can meet the needs of the dispersed community in Fermanagh.

The services offered by the CAB have evolved in response to the needs of our local community. During the 1990s a substantial programme of expansion has been undertaken, initiated by a significant increase in District Council funding and money obtained from three charitable trusts: the Fermanagh Trust, the Tudor Trust and the Paul S. Cadbury Trust. In 1996, the Bureau obtained funding for a three-year period from Sperrin Lakeland Health and Social Care Trust to set up a Rural Outreach Service. A Service Level Agreement was drawn up between Fermanagh CAB and Sperrin Lakeland Health and Social Care Trust. The success of this project is demonstrated clearly by the recent renewal of the Agreement.

Outreach surgeries were set up in two satellite centres - Irvinestown and Lisnaskea. The Bureau also set up an Outreach Clinic in Roslea in partnership

with Age Concern. The service was set up in Roslea to address rural isolation, extremely poor public transport and the fact that the area has been designated as the 28th most deprived electoral ward in N. Ireland. The other centres are central points for a number of surrounding villages and townlands.

Another key area of work for the CAB has been money advice, with high levels of debt being recorded in enquiries. In 1997, the Bureau made an application to Fermanagh District Partnership for a Money Advice/Income Maximisation Project. The initial funding award allowed us to recruit a part-time Money Adviser, Mrs Anne Shine, for 18 months. The funding for this project has also recently been extended for a further year, allowing us to continue to employ Anne for a further year on a full-time basis rather than part-time. Anne is presently dealing with debt in excess of £900,000. A substantial amount of this work is in regard to the farming community.

Further fundraising efforts resulted in an award in 1999 from Comic Relief Charity Projects to set up a Disability Advocacy Project, with Ms. Wendy Stewart employed as part of the project. Since coming into post in September 1999, Wendy has represented at 81 Disability and Social Security Appeal Tribunals. Wendy has also assisted hundreds of clients with DLA and Attendance Allowance applications, both in Bureau and on home visits. Up until September 1999, this work had

been undertaken by the Rural Outreach Adviser.

Conscious that our existing outreach provision was not able to meet the needs of the population of Co. Fermanagh, we made a successful application to the National Lottery Charities Board to further develop outreach services. Ms. Betty Curry has been appointed Outreach Development Co-ordinator and will start in the Bureau at the beginning of July. Betty will be responsible for establishing Outreach Centres across Co. Fermanagh, staffed by volunteers and managed by local steering committees. Betty will also be responsible for carrying out a Community Audit of the entire county to ascertain those areas where our outreach facility is most needed.

At the end of 2000, Fermanagh CAB will be going into its 25th year and we look forward to exciting and challenging times ahead. We are extremely fortunate to have a dedicated Management Committee comprising of highly qualified and experienced individuals and representatives of local voluntary and statutory organisations. In addition there is a very dedicated staff team comprising of paid workers and volunteers. We are also fortunate to have an excellent working relationship with our local funders, Fermanagh District Council, Fermanagh District Partnership Board, The Fermanagh Trust, Sperrin Lakeland Health and Social Care Trust as well as national funders, the National Lottery Charities Board and Comic Relief.

# Bureau News

Angela Welch, Manager Coleraine CAB

- Antrim** The CAB has received a grant from Friends of CABx towards computers and telephone cabling when they move to their new premises. They also received a donation from the Halifax towards computers.
- Coleraine & District** The Bureau is also a recipient of funding from Friends of CABx. It received money for a photocopier.
- Cookstown** The Bureau is now a Company limited by Guarantee.
- Lisburn** The Bureau's Strategic Plan delivered by Capita Management Consultants was launched at their AGM on 31st May. A new Outreach Service at Hillsborough Health Centre has been established. This is open on Tuesdays from 9.30am to 12 noon.
- Newry & Mourne** The Bureau is grateful to the Halifax for donating money towards computer equipment. Newry has launched a new Outreach - based at Crossmaglen Community Centre and is open on Tuesdays from 1.30 to 4.30.



## Debt Handbook Launch

The updated and rewritten Debt Handbook for Advisers in Northern Ireland was launched in June. It is in a user friendly format and covers all the key subjects for an adviser who is dealing with a complex debt case. It has been produced through a partnership of the main advice agencies in Northern Ireland and was sponsored by the Money Advice Trust.

Addressing the launch were Sir Oliver Napier, who acted as reader for the book. He was happy to be associated with the publication and felt that it was an invaluable guide for anyone giving financial advice.

Derek Alcorn, NIACAB Chief Executive outlined the role the CAB service plays in money advice, with a service having been provided to the general public for many years. He continued by saying that the growth of fee paying money advice services had, in many ways, compounded a difficult problem. The free, independent service from the CAB is well positioned to allow advisers to negotiate a realistic repayment schedule which is sensitive to the clients needs and meets the concerns of the financial institutions involved.

Jan Ferrari of the Money Advice Trust also addressed the launch and gave details of how this partnership project fitted with the Trust's strategy to develop tools for advisers to support them in providing high quality advice.

Copies of the handbook are available from NIACAB Regional Office, price £10.00 per copy plus £2.00 postage. For further information please contact Jacqueline Scott, telephone: 028 90231120 or email: [scottj@niacab.org](mailto:scottj@niacab.org).

At the launch (left to right): Master Redpath, John Hunter, NIACAB Chairperson, Briege O'Mullan, Ballymena CAB Money Advice Worker, Derek Alcorn, NIACAB Chief Executive and Sir Oliver Napier.

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