

ADVICE



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

Beyond the Centre — CAB Reaches Rathlin —

Angela Welch, Coleraine & District CAB

CAB's reputation for reaching the parts that other advice agencies do not reach was enhanced this month when advisers from Coleraine CAB spent a day on Rathlin Island to build upon previous contacts with the islanders and to encourage increased use of CAB's advice services through personal contact and by telephone.

Uniquely in Northern Ireland, Coleraine CAB draws down funding from three District Councils - Coleraine, Ballymoney and Moyle - and provides advice across this relatively underpopulated area through telephone contact and

outreach sessions in Ballymoney, Bushmills, Ballycastle and Cushendall.

Already active in these areas of rural need, the bureau has been able to help farmers caught in the foot and mouth crisis. Outreach worker John Campfield recently reported helping a farmer apply successfully for Working Families' Tax Credit (WFTC). In normal circumstances there is a capital limit of £8,000 for claiming this benefit, however, if the farm is regarded as an asset and is used for business purposes then it is not included in the calculation for WFTC. In addition, business capital, which

includes land, machinery, livestock and the family home, can be ignored when calculating WFTC. However, farmers must be working 16 hours or more on the farm either as an employee or self-employed and must have dependant children.

John has also successfully helped a farmer apply for incapacity benefit on the grounds of stress, and has communicated this information electronically via the NIACAB Discussion Database to every other CAB in Northern Ireland. NIACAB has also been actively in touch with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ulster Farmers' Union and the Rural Community Network regarding these issues.

In addition to its 28 main offices, CAB has an additional 107 outreach outlets across Northern Ireland and is well placed to help the rural community with specialist advice on benefits and debt.



From left to right, Angela Welch, Manager, Coleraine & District CAB, John Campfield, Outreach Worker, Coleraine & District CAB and Councillor Helen Harding, Vice Chair of Coleraine & District CAB's management committee as they depart for Rathlin Island.

Staff News

Angela Welch, Coleraine and District CAB

Antrim CAB is pleased to report that its two new volunteers, Frank McMahon and Raymond McCready are now fully trained and ready for action as advisers.

Banbridge CAB welcomes Paul McGrath and John-Paul Gartland on six-week voluntary placements from The University of Ulster. Both are carrying out very valuable work on money advice and general social policy issues.



Gerry Hagan,
Cookstown CAB

Cookstown CAB is delighted to welcome former volunteer, Gerry Hagan on board as the newly appointed Telephone Advice Worker. Congratulations to Gerry!



Ursula McCann,
Dungannon CAB

Dungannon and District CAB congratulates Ursula McCann who has successfully completed the Adviser Training Programme and



Anne Corry,
Dungannon CAB

attained her accreditation. They also welcome to the bureau volunteers Leonor Osorio and Anne Corr who has just started the Adviser Training Programme, and to the Outreach Project, Bréada Heaney.

Strabane CAB welcomes Pearse McGranaghan, former part time adviser, to the post of Disability Advocacy Officer and Patricia Molloy, the new Administrative Assistant. Both posts are secured for three years and are funded by the Community Fund.



Pearse McGranaghan,
Strabane CAB

Coleraine & District CAB is sorry to lose Sheila Beattie as the Carers Project Worker but congratulate her on her new position with Triangle Housing.

www.niacab.org

NIACAB's website has been redesigned and restructured as part of the increasing Information Technology development within CAB. A dedicated website development team has been set up within NIACAB to ensure that the website is up to date and meets the expectations of its visitors. The website includes information on the services offered by NIACAB, Job Opportunities within CAB, contact details for all bureaux in

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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.



NIACAB's improved website

Northern Ireland, details about CAS - the trading arm of CAB in NI, and associate membership. Later additions will include online access to a database of press releases and a Northern Ireland Advice Guide, which will allow visitors to view basic advice and information on their rights 24 hours a day.

Communication with Deaf People

Liz Dugdale, Suffolk & Andersonstown CAB

Suffolk & Andersonstown CAB has always been proactive about communicating with deaf customers. The bureau currently has a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Project Worker, Brian McLarnon, in the bureau and recently several staff members undertook a Communication Tactics course. This course which was organised by the Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People (CACDP) aims to create an awareness and understanding of the communication needs of deaf and hard of hearing people.

There is a growing recognition that hearing staff need guidance in how to communicate more effectively with deaf customers.

At the end of the course the participants understood when, how and with which groups of deaf people to use particular communication tactics. They also demonstrated an ability to use

a range of basic tactics for clear communication with deaf people through a practical assessment carried out by CACDP approved assessors.

The attendees at the one-day course all passed their assessment and were awarded a CACDP Certificate in Communication Tactics Level 1.

From left to right, Brian McLarnon, Bronach Bellew, Maria McAteer and Moire McCann with their CACDP certificates



The Price of Pregnancy

Siobhán McKenna, Information & Policy Officer

Tens of thousands of women are being sacked illegally or threatened with dismissal just because they are pregnant. Pregnancy related discrimination in the workplace often goes unreported by expectant mothers. However, a recent report by the CAB service entitled "Birth Rights" has collated a body of evidence highlighting the extent of the problem. It contains evidence from CABs throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland and calls upon Government to strengthen protection for women in employment who are often particularly vulnerable at this stage of their lives.

NIACAB provided the following case evidence that fed into this

report which clearly illustrates that discriminatory trends in relation to pregnancy in the workplace are as prevalent in Northern Ireland as they are in the rest of the United Kingdom:

- A **Carrickfergus client** who had been working for her employer for over nine years returned to work following her maternity leave to discover that she had been demoted.
- A **Dungannon client** who worked in the hospitality industry, had been told by her employer, that neither he nor his customers wished to look at a pregnant woman.

- An **Antrim client** who was 26 weeks pregnant and due to go on maternity leave was told that she was being made redundant as her department was closing down. A male colleague was offered alternative employment.

The report was launched on 21 March across the UK resulting in extensive media coverage in Northern Ireland. Copies of the report are available from the Social Policy Department, NACAB, Myddelton House, 115-123 Pentonville Road, London N1 9LZ. (Price £6.50) The report in full can also be accessed via the NACAB website at www.NIACAB.org.uk.

Tackling Housing Debt

Wendy Alexander, Manager Craigavon & District CAB

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive and NIACAB have reached an agreement to provide a pilot Money Advice service. The aim of the service is to reduce tenant arrears, seen as a significant and growing problem across Northern Ireland. The Housing Executive recognised that innovative ways were needed to address tenant arrears with independent money advice being seen as a potential solution. NIACAB demonstrated the ability to provide professional Money Advice to required standards, and it was agreed to run a one-year pilot scheme. This has been targeted at Craigavon, an area identified by the Housing Executive as having a significant tenant arrears problem.

Craigavon District Citizens Advice Bureau are providing a specialist Money Advice service for employed tenants who are experiencing difficulties paying their rent. The tenants must be in work and have arrears of over £200 which they are not paying off. Tenants can use the service if they have not already entered into a voluntary agreement with the Housing Executive, or if they have broken a voluntary agreement.

Before the pilot, the Housing Executive dealt with working tenants in arrears. The staff would not necessarily have considered the impact of

other debts the tenant may have had, such as credit cards, hire purchase agreements or catalogue debts. This could result in a tenant entering into a voluntary agreement that they could not realistically meet.

This would lead to failure of the agreement and possible future legal action for recovery of the debt.

Tenants are referred by housing officers from the Portadown and



From left to right, John Morrison, NI Housing Executive, Wendy Alexander, Manager Craigavon & District CAB and Dave Murphy, Director of Development NIACAB

Brownlow/Lurgan District Housing Executive offices. Tenants can also refer themselves by contacting CAB directly. The scheme is voluntary, and tenants are not forced to enter into it. For tenants that do use

the service, advice is provided on maximising their income and minimising their expenditure. All the tenant's creditors are contacted, including the Housing Executive, and negotiations are carried out to agree an affordable repayment schedule for all their debts.

Those tenants who have used the scheme have had realistic repayment schedules put in place, allowing them to reduce and ultimately pay off their rent arrears and any other debts.

Police Ombudsman and CAB Working Partnership

Mrs Nuala O'Loan, Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland

We have a new system for making complaints against the police in Northern Ireland. I was appointed Police Ombudsman in November 2000 with a very wide remit, perhaps wider than the remit given to any other civilian investigator of police complaints in the world.

I have power to investigate all allegations of criminal behaviour not just those incidents of death or serious injury which may result from police conduct but all allegations, and also a remit to investigate all allegations of breach of the disciplinary code. I can initiate an investigation without a complaint where I consider that it is in the public interest to do so. This means that in situations where perhaps people are afraid to complain I have an ability to investi-

gate anyway. All incidents of death which may have resulted from police conduct must be referred to me by the Chief Constable. The Secretary of State, the Chief Constable and the Police Authority may refer any matter in relation to police conduct to me.

As Police Ombudsman I am able to access all areas of policing, (as a consequence of the fact that my staff have all powers of a constable) to call in evidence, to seize and secure police property such as vehicles, where for example there is an allegation of police assault in a land rover, or batons where there is an allegation that the assault was by a baton, and uniforms, to test forensically, to seal off cells where there is an allegation of assault, to seize notebooks, police logs, telephone records etc. etc.

The ethos of my office is one of independence, openness, fairness, justice, impartiality, integrity and respect for the human rights of all.

We have nearly 100 staff - investigators, complaints officers, researchers, librarian, information and media officer, legal staff etc. They come from different countries and from all parts of the community. Location is

important to us - we needed a venue which was open, not identified with one section of the community, with good public transport links. Our offices, which are opposite St Anne's Cathedral at 11 Church St Belfast, are central, open and inviting and pleasantly furnished. It is significantly different from police stations, and people can just walk in off the street. Complainants no longer have to go to police stations to complain. They no longer have to speak to police officers. They can contact us in any way they choose either directly or through a representative. We will go to meet people anywhere in Northern Ireland and are very pleased to have arrangements with a number of community based organisations, including the CAB to use their premises for meetings. We pay for the rooms when we use them at a rate agreed with the CAB, and we find this a very useful partnership as we establish ourselves as an independent and neutral organisation.

We have received over 2,500 complaints from approximately 2000 complainants since we opened for business on November 6th. Data gathered independently in the week after the office opened showed that 57% of the population knew that we existed, and that 82% knew that we are independent of the police. This can only be viewed as a good start to a very complex business. If you have any queries or comments or if you wish to talk to us you can contact us at 028 90 828 600. We look forward to hearing from you.



Nuala O'Loan,
Police Ombudsman
for Northern Ireland

National Women's Group Meeting

Carolyn Campbell, Bangor CAB

Bangor CAB was delighted to host NACAB's National Women's Group most recent meeting in May. It was a wonderful opportunity to experience the diversity of the CAB movement with representatives from places like inner London, Leeds/Bradford, rural Devon and even Russia. Most representatives made a long weekend of their stay, the weather was wonderful and everyone fell in love with Northern Ireland.

Thanks to Eileen Bell MLA and North Down Borough Council, a trip to Stormont was arranged. It was a fascinating tour and as Brid Rogers was answering questions, it was a good opportunity for a women's group to see a local

female politician in her role as a 'decision maker'. North Down Borough Council held a reception in honour of the group that evening and the Mayor, Councillor Alan Chambers said how impressed he was and how much he enjoyed this particular group.

Within CAB, several interest groups are active; yet this group that represents the largest and possibly the majority of CAB workers is somewhat reticent in forwarding their aims. Great encouragement to continue came from the meeting's guest speaker, Dame May Blood. Everyone who heard May speak described the experience as inspirational.



From left to right, Rukhsana Amjam, Leeds CAB, Patricia Stork, Hull CAB, Pat Brittain, Bangor CAB, Baroness May Blood, Carolyn Campbell, Bangor CAB, Irene Brierley, Manchester CAB and Oonaugh Harris, Bangor CAB

Forging Community Partnerships

Tony Adams, Community Support Worker



The Chinese population is often socially vulnerable and isolated with large numbers (some 90%) working long hours in the catering sector. There are estimated to be some 8000 - 10,000 Chinese people living in Northern Ireland, 60% of whom are first generation Chinese whose first language is not English. In addition, problems are compounded as many of these people are from Hong Kong and the New Territories, which is predominately rural and many do not have any formal qualifications or understanding of the social structures in Northern Ireland.

CAB is working closely with the Chinese Welfare Association (CWA) in order to help break down these barriers to social inclusion by tackling awareness and language difficulties. It is hoped that CAB will become a conduit for the Chinese community and that our regional spread across Northern Ireland will help reduce isolation and assist the community to assert its rights.

Top Photo:

From left to right, Dean Lee and Eva Logan, Chinese Welfare Association and Tony Adams, NIACAB Community Support Worker

Portuguese Employment Problems

Keith Stanyer, Manager Dungannon and District CAB

Dungannon and District Citizens Advice Bureau has recently referred several employment tribunal cases to the Equality Commission. They have all been referred to the Racial Equality Directorate. Over the last two years there has been an influx of workers from Portugal and Spain. They have, in the main, been recruited by employment agencies and placed in employment with local

meat processing companies. Accommodation is provided as part of their contract.

The cases all involve workers who have been sacked with no notice, no P45 issued and no reason for dismissal given. In most cases the workers cannot speak English and have no knowledge of their employment rights or their rights to benefits. They are in most cases left with

very little or no money and in all cases left with no accommodation.

Initially the close-knit Portuguese community solved the problem by contributing to pay for the sacked workers to return home to Portugal.

A member of the local community, Ann Corr, then approached the bureau on behalf of the Portuguese community and we have been able to refer the sacked workers to the Equality Commission and on to industrial tribunals. We have also been able to assist the clients to obtain National Insurance numbers and access social security benefits.

Ann has now become a volunteer with Dungannon and District CAB and is currently undertaking the Adviser Training Programme.

Housing Executive buys CAB Information System

Brendan Kane, Client Services, Northern Ireland Housing Executive

CAB's Electronic Information System was installed in the Housing Executive's Headquarters on 26 April 2001. A spokesman for the Executive commented:

"After receiving a demonstration of the system we had no hesitation in recommending installation to our Management Committee. The system holds a wealth of information on a broad range of issues of interest to the Executive, both housing and non-housing. We intend to put this information to good use and make our own

contributions to the database from time to time. Initially, the database will be held centrally, however, it is anticipated the system will be networked to all of our local housing offices at some time in the future."

Brendan Kane, NI Housing Executive using the NIACAB Information System in NIHE Headquarters, Adelaide House



Bureau News

Angela Welch, Manager, Coleraine and District CAB

Antrim, Cookstown,
and Newtownabbey
District CABx

Several volunteers were involved in the filming of a Community Service video about the work of CAB for UTV.

Belfast Group

The Belfast Group is delighted to announce that The Royal Victoria Hospital has renewed outreach funding for another year. Castlereagh Council and Belfast City Council have also both renewed funding for a further year.

Coleraine & District CAB

Moyle District Partnership has awarded funding to the bureau for materials to assist their money advice worker.

Newry and Mourne
District CAB

Newry and Mourne District CAB is delighted to receive funding from the Community Fund to recruit an Outreach Worker.

Ards CAB

Ards CAB have recently taken part in a Community and Voluntary Awareness week, staffing a stand in Ards Shopping Centre on June 4th. They have also produced an in-house leaflet that takes a local slant on volunteering in a drive to recruit more volunteers.

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.

Contact Genevieve Murphy
on 028 9023 1120.
E-mail murphyg@niacab.org

Meeting Cross Border Need

Up North Down South is a joint publication from NIACAB and Comhairle which summarises the outcome of the cross-border information and advice project *Trasna*. The project was supported by funding from the European Peace Programme and by the Department for Social Development.

The report gives the background to the project, the socio-economic context of the border areas, and a profile of the cross border queries received. These had a high TSN content featuring employment and consumer issues, taxation, access to healthcare and social security. An added feature of the project is the development by both organisations of a

cross-jurisdictional database which allows advisers to move easily between the legislation relevant to both jurisdictions.

Speaking at the launch Derek Alcorn CAB's Chief Executive said that the cross-jurisdictional database was an innovative leading edge initiative.

“The database dovetails in to the North South Ministerial Council study on Obstacle to Mobility in the Island of Ireland, and to government interest in the growth of E-Citizenship and the use of new technology to enhance access to public services. There are thousands of everyday cross-border transactions for work,

shopping, leisure and business. The cross-jurisdictional database combining the information systems of both agencies is well equipped to underpin these transactions.”

The report makes a series of recommendations to governments and agencies in both jurisdictions in order to promote cross border mobility. In particular Governments should place high priority on providing accurate information to people moving across jurisdictions. The report recommends that there should be greater co-ordination between the Department for Social Development and the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs around access to their respective social security and social welfare systems.

