

## Citizens Advice joins up government electronically - *at the point of entry*

Derek Alcorn, Chief Executive, NIACAB

The successful deployment of electronic information by CAB in Northern Ireland across its wide area network, has left the organisation well placed to anticipate Government targets of delivering all services electronically by 2005.

Much of the public discussion on this issue has produced the usual range of inelegant phrases with which government and the voluntary sector like to mangle the English language - e-government, joined up government, citizen centric government, multi-channel e-government, e-transformation - to name but a few.

It is well known that within this context, the move to e-government in Northern Ireland has been slow, in part because of the difficulty of persuading large departments within government - silos - to co-operate across their boundaries. Given the different statutory responsibility of each department silos may be inevitable.

The CAB strategy conceptually inverts this model, providing a generic point of entry to public services and a holistic service with the multiple functions of

dealing with queries, signposting, referring appropriately and where necessary, for example, for people with literacy difficulties, providing mediation and advocacy. In other words government joined up at the point of entry. Which

other agency will help a disabled person with a DLA application, the appeal tribunal, the home adaptation grant and liaise with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the occupational therapist and the private landlord?

In addition the use of lap top computers allows advisers to deliver electronic advice flexibly in rural areas, peripheral estates, and to people in the community who are housebound. The system incorporates the information database of our Dublin based partner, Comhairle, enabling cross border advice to be given



John McAleese, Outreach Worker from Newtownabbey District CAB uses the electronic information system to join up government at the point of entry.

where necessary, and it incorporates the first electronic case recording system to be deployed in the UK advice sector. Both the electronic information system and the case recording system are already being purchased by voluntary organisations, government departments and private solicitors.

We are already using the system to build a range of partnerships with other agencies, and we hope to increase these significantly as the development of electronic services progresses over the next three years.

# Staff News

Siobhán Harding, Information & Policy Officer, NIACAB

Ards Borough Council honoured 20 years service by two volunteers from Ards CAB - congratulations to Eileen Park and Eleanor McGimpsey.

David Gibson has been appointed as a Tribunal Representative at Antrim District CAB. The post is funded by the Community Fund and is a significant development in the service delivery of the bureau.

Antrim Road CAB welcomes their two new workers, Gwen Wilson and Patricia Lyons who hold the Carers Advocacy post in the bureau.

Ballymena CAB also wishes to welcome their two new volunteers Margaret Dempsey and Louise Pettigrew.

Bangor CAB welcomes their new volunteer Agnes Speers to the bureau.



Tanya Doran,  
Banbridge CAB

Banbridge CAB wishes its two new advisers well with the Adviser Training Programme. They are Tanya Doran and Sinead Grady.

Carrickfergus CAB also has a new volunteer, Jeff Ward, who is completing the Adviser Training Programme and Cookstown CAB welcomes their new volunteer Eileen

McNally to the bureau.

Coleraine CAB welcomes their new clerical worker, David McClements.

Down District CABx welcomes Nicole Byrne as the new outreach worker for Ballynahinch.

Fionnuala Fox, previously a volunteer with Dungannon CAB, has taken on the post of Information and Development worker also in Dungannon. The bureau wishes to congratulate both Fionnuala and Anne Corr on completing the Social Security Advocacy Training. Dungannon CAB also has two new volunteers who have just finished the Adviser Training Programme. They are Joe McGlade and Madeline Mulgrew.

Two new volunteers have joined Falls CAB. They are Michelle Logan and Eithne Burns.



Michelle Logan,  
Falls CAB

Fermanagh CAB congratulates Deirdre Armstrong, their new volunteer who has just completed the Adviser Training Programme.

Five new volunteers have joined Newtownabbey District CAB. They are Colleen Smyth,

Roisin Knockner, Jillian McAuley, Tracy Stewart and AnneMarie McLwaine.



Jeff Ward,  
Carrickfergus CAB



Colleen Smyth,  
Newtownabbey  
District CAB

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## Pat Miskimmin 1925 - 2002

The Northern Ireland Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux would like to express its heartfelt sorrow at the sudden death of Pat Miskimmin who made a valuable contribution to the development of NIACAB and will be sorely missed by the voluntary sector as a whole.



# CAB educating the Community

Valerie Adams, Manager Antrim CAB, Pat Hutchinson MBE, Manager Newtownabbey District CAB and Angela Welch, Manager Coleraine CAB

Local bureaux provide more than an advice and advocacy service for their clients - they also have a major input into their local communities.

Angela Welch, Manager of Coleraine CAB regularly gives talks to sixth form students in the Coleraine area, equipping them with practical advice and information on living away from home. Teachers have frequently remarked to Angela that A-level students are ignorant of the responsibilities and obligations facing them when they leave home for the first time. Angela speaks to the students about the law of contract, accommodation issues and basic money advice.

Each year the GCSE Home Economics paper has a module containing either a Social Security or Consumer question. Teachers are often not equipped to deal with these issues and subsequently many have contacted CAB to help cover this area. The questions often require a sound knowledge of the benefits system or the Sale and Supply of Goods Act, Consumer protection legislation or the Small Claims Court system. The questions can sometimes be unclear and may even contain inaccuracies making it difficult for students to give precise answers.

Education and Library Boards and Examination Boards should be aware that CAB could provide a valuable resource for the preparation of teaching packs and lesson plans for such modules.

Pat Hutchinson MBE, District Manager of Newtownabbey District CAB was invited to Ballyclare High School to give a talk on Consumer legislation as part of the students' GCSE course. Pat provided the students with information on which statutory rights are available under The Sale of Goods Act 1979. Pat has also provided training on various social security benefits for local councillors, social workers and carers.

Valerie Adams, Manager of Antrim CAB is constantly being asked to provide information sessions and training for local community groups. Each group has its own defined need, but the breadth of CAB advice and information means that these needs can always be met. Valerie has spoken to various local Women's Groups from the several estates which satellite Antrim town - they ask for information sessions which not only cover social security benefit entitlement but also information on budgeting, money management and credit options to increase financial literacy. Valerie has also spoken to local

Carers Groups who look for information specific to the social security benefits which relate to their particular situation and also to help them identify routes to practical and emotional support.

Requests do not only emanate from the voluntary sector. Following recent changes to Bereavement Benefits and the impacts on premiums for means tested benefits, Antrim CAB was approached by a Senior Social Worker to deliver training to a Social Work Team. CAB was acknowledged as an organisation which had the necessary knowledge and expertise to effectively illustrate how the changes would affect the Social Workers' client group.

Feedback from schools, educational establishments and other groups is always positive and sessions such as these encourage people to visit their local CAB to check out their rights. Integral links are forged with the local community through such work and also helps to spread knowledge of CAB, which is the leading advice agency in Northern Ireland. These training sessions are able to reach people who may otherwise not be aware of the extent of the information and advice provided by CABx.

# New Accredited Housing Advice Training Programme

Louise Togneri, Training Officer, Housing Rights Service

**H**ousing Rights Service has developed the Housing Advice Training Programme, which is the first of its kind to be offered in Northern Ireland. It is designed to enable those working in the housing arena obtain a qualification that recognises the knowledge and skills necessary to provide housing advice in Northern Ireland. The programme is accredited through the Open College Network, on the successful completion of the six week course.

The Housing Advice Training Programme has been designed to meet the training and development needs of generalist advice workers, housing staff from NIHE and housing associations, statutory agencies whose staff have a responsibility for dealing with housing issues, and community and resident's groups.

The aim of the Programme is to provide participants with the necessary skills, knowledge and information to enable them to have an increased role in housing advice and advocacy in Northern Ireland.

# CAB Lobby at Stormont

Barry McVeigh, Specialist Support Officer, NIACAB

**C**AB has visited Stormont to lobby against new Disability Living Allowance (DLA) Regulations. The new regulations entitled The Social Security (Disability Living Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002 stop people who are unable to walk outdoors alone, in unfamiliar places because of fear or anxiety, from being entitled to the lower rate mobility component of DLA unless their fear is due to a severe mental disability, rather than physical disability.

The people who may be most affected include those with visual impairments, hearing impairments, heart conditions,

severe asthma, epilepsy and bowel and bladder diseases who do not go outdoors alone because of fear or anxiety.

Although the regulations have not been annulled either in the Assembly or in England and Wales, the lobbying session at Stormont provided CAB with the opportunity to meet MLAs and highlight the policy aspect of CAB's work.



# Making A Difference

Pat Hutchinson MBE, Manager Newtownabbey District CAB

**A** young man in his early twenties, who was involved in a serious car accident in which three of his friends were killed, approached the Rathcoole office of Newtownabbey District CAB for help.

Gary was confined to a wheelchair and was making constant visits to the hospital. He had applied for DLA and was awarded both the care and mobility components for two years. However in order to qualify for a car under the motability scheme, a claimant

must receive an award of the higher rate of the mobility component for a period of not less than three years.

Gary had exhausted all other sources of help in an attempt to get the award extended but without success. A

local councillor referred him to CAB for help and within one week Gary's award was extended to three and a half years. This meant that Gary could then get his "Motability Car" and with that, the freedom to lead a more independent life.



Gary Ross, client of Newtownabbey District CAB

# NICEM Refugee Integration and Resettlement Service

Lumturi Podrimaj, Refugee Integration and Resettlement Worker

**I**n August 2001 NICEM secured funding from the European Refugee Fund for a Refugee Integration and Resettlement Service. This ensures immediate access to services for individuals and smoothness of transition to mainstream services following the grant of ILR (Indefinite Leave to Remain) and ELR (Exceptional Leave to

Remain). The service assists refugees and people granted leave to remain, providing information on accessing essential services such as health care, use of the English language, training and education opportunities, welfare benefits, housing and advice, volunteering and basic orientation on Belfast and Northern Ireland. This service works with NICEM's Capacity Building and Community Development projects in developing a refugee community organisation, which is able to advocate on behalf of the refugee community in Northern Ireland.

The aim is to ensure that refugees do not continue to experience isolation and exclusion and can access, at the earliest possible stage, opportunities to integrate, participate and contribute to society in Northern Ireland.

# New Electronic Case Recording System in all CABx

John Napier, Director of Information Services, NIACAB

**C**AB in Northern Ireland has now developed and installed a new electronic case recording system across the whole Association. It is the culmination of a major partnership with a prominent private sector technology company SX3, the Government and the voluntary sector. It is the first electronic case recording system to be introduced in the UK advice sector and will help shape similar projects being undertaken in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

The system has been introduced into the organisation via a major training initiative. Over two hundred staff and volunteers have been



trained throughout the organisation on accessing, retrieving and reporting from the new system.

It provides CAB both local and regionally with the tools to report on its workload in a comprehensive and verifiable way.

The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) has become the first non-CAB agency to purchase the system.

# Low Pay Commission

## *National Minimum Wage*

Professor Sir George Bain, Chairman Low Pay Commission

Commenting on the introduction of the National Minimum Wage in April 1999, a national newspaper wrote “minimum wage, minimum fuss”. Last year, when the Low Pay Commission made its third report to the Government, we were pleased to be able to conclude that the National Minimum Wage continued to be a success, benefiting many low-paid workers without any significant negative effect on employment or the economy.

In our report we recommended that the main rate of the minimum wage should be increased to £4.10 per hour and the youth rate to £3.50 per hour in October 2001; these increases have been implemented by the Government. We also recommend further increases to £4.20 per hour for the main rate and £3.60 per hour for young workers from October 2002. If the minimum wage is to retain its value as a wage floor for low-paid workers, it needs to be updated regularly. I am very pleased that the Government confirmed in April that these further increases will go ahead.

As a result of last year's increase in the minimum wage, we estimate that workers in around one and a half million jobs gained a pay increase, including an estimated 40,000 jobs in Northern Ireland. Around 70% of the workers benefiting from the minimum wage across the UK are women, and around two-thirds of the

jobs concerned are part-time.

In order for the minimum wage to help low-paid workers, they need to receive it. So compliance - underpinned by effective enforcement of the law - is central to the success of the minimum wage. Low-paid workers want this, and so do law-abiding employers. The evidence received by the Low Pay Commission shows that the vast



majority of employers are complying with the minimum wage. But it is also clear that some workers continue to be underpaid. Some do not know they are entitled to the minimum wage and others are afraid to complain.

So in its second report the Commission recommended that the Government should fund some local community-based pilot projects. These should enable local organisations, working closely with the Inland Revenue's National Minimum Wage compliance teams, to reach

into areas where workers are most reluctant to report underpayment. The Government accepted our recommendation and set up seven pilot projects around the UK with external partner organisations. One of these projects is the Northern Ireland National Minimum Wage Helpline, which was established last summer. Staffed by officers of NIACAB, this Helpline provides impartial and confidential information and advice for both workers and employers. The project has already scored a number of notable successes in encouraging employees to come forward and helping them to obtain the pay to which they are entitled. The Commission is following the progress of all these projects with considerable interest.

Looking to the future the Government has made clear that the Low Pay Commission is here to stay and the Commission has set up a programme of research to inform its future work. Having been privileged to chair the Commission from its inception in 1997 and to see the minimum wage become firmly established as part of our working life, I have decided that the time has come to step down. I am sure that under its new Chairman the Low Pay Commission will continue to listen to the experience and views of everyone affected by the minimum wage and ensure that the minimum wage continues to make a real difference to the lives of people on low pay.

# CAB Promoting Racial Equality

Siobhán Harding, Information and Policy Officer, NIACAB

The continuing rise in racist attacks being reported to CAB has prompted the Association to address the issues of racism and social exclusion. CABx have seen a 29% rise in queries relating to all forms of discrimination from 1999-2001.

A recent survey carried out by Paul Connolly from the University of Ulster showed that racial prejudice appears to be around twice as significant as sectarian prejudice in the initial attitudes of the population in Northern Ireland. Around twice as many respondents in the survey stated that they would be unwilling to accept and/or mix with members of minority ethnic communities than they would members of the other main religious traditions in Northern Ireland.

As part of a campaign to highlight the escalation in racial harassment and violence against black and minority ethnic communities CAB presented a poster entitled "Report Racism - CAB can help", to the Lord Mayor, Jim Rodgers. The multilingual poster uses 11 different languages and encourages people to report incidents of racism and approach their local CAB for help. CAB and the Chinese Welfare Association have also recently produced an "Advice for All" information leaflet in Chinese which details the services available from local CABx.

Dungannon CAB has been working on behalf of a group of Portuguese workers who have



Lord Mayor, Jim Rodgers with left-right John Napier with son Michael, Sunita Patra with daughter Swarupa, Ivy Lui with son Justin

been brought into Northern Ireland by employment agencies and placed with local meat processing companies. The cases involve workers who have been sacked with no notice, no P45 or no reason for dismissal. In most cases the workers cannot speak English and have no knowledge of their employment rights or access to benefits. The clients have been assisted by the bureau to obtain National Insurance numbers and access to social security benefits. Several cases have also been referred to the Equality Commission.

All CABx in Northern Ireland have access to the Language Line, an instant interpretation service in over 100 different languages. The service is available 24 hours a day, whenever communication is required with someone who cannot speak English. Language Line removes the language barrier therefore helping to widen access to CAB services. Work is

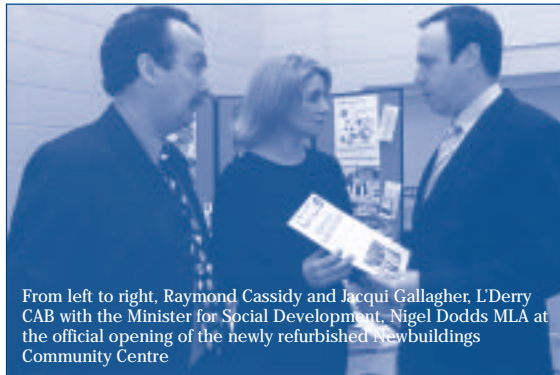
also underway to translate the NIACAB National Minimum Wage Helpline information cards into several different languages. This will help to increase access to this valuable information resource by minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland.

NIACAB is currently responding to the joint Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety and Equality Commission consultation document on Racial Equality in Health. This consultation document provides a framework in order to raise awareness about some of the particular difficulties faced by black and ethnic minority communities and help those involved in the planning and provision of services to ensure that they do so in a non-discriminatory way. NIACAB strongly advocates the promotion of social inclusion and is well placed to comment due to the detailed case evidence presented to it across Northern Ireland.

# Bureau News

Angela Welch, Manager, Coleraine & District CAB

- Antrim CAB** has received funding from Lloyds TSB which was added to by Camlin Credit Union enabling an Outreach Clinic to be reopened in Crumlin. The bureau has also been awarded funding from the Community Fund for a period of three years to fund a dedicated Money Advice service.
- Ards CAB** has secured an increase in its grant from Ards Borough Council. The Friends of Ards CAB held a quiz during April raising over £1,000 for the bureau.
- Bangor CAB** received £528 from the local golf club who held a quiz night to raise funds for the bureau.
- Cookstown CAB** and the Magherafelt external extension are extending their opening hours from the start of June following an increase in District Council funding. They will now be open every day from 10am to 3pm.
- Fermanagh CAB** has had its funding from Fermanagh District Council increased by £7,000 for the current financial year. Funding has also been awarded over a two-year period from the Nationwide Foundation for the Money and Debt Advice Project.
- L'Derry CAB** operates an outreach service from the Newbuildings Community centre one day per week. The CAB outreach project provides a free, confidential and impartial service to the residents of the Newbuildings area and is of great benefit to those who cannot seek advice at the bureau due to reasons such as immobility, caring responsibilities or a lack of transport. The project also plays a valuable cross-community role, enabling people from both sections of the community to use the service freely and on a regular basis. The continued high levels of demand for CAB outreach services highlights the need for continued provision of effective and independent advice in all areas of the city.



From left to right, Raymond Cassidy and Jacqui Gallagher, L'Derry CAB with the Minister for Social Development, Nigel Dodds MLA at the official opening of the newly refurbished Newbuildings Community Centre

- Lisburn CAB** is grateful to Lloyds TSB for a grant allowing its extensive Outreach Services to continue for another six months.

# Mayor honours Coleraine CAB staff

Angela Welch, Manager Coleraine CAB

On Friday 3rd May, the Mayor of Coleraine, Councillor John Dallat held a reception to commemorate the first anniversary of the official opening of the bureau's new premises on the Lodge Road and the 30th anniversary of the opening of CAB to the people of the Borough. The Mayor praised the work of the bureau and said he was delighted and privileged to host such an important event.

The Mayor was informed that in the previous year the staff re-scheduled £2 million of debt for clients and represented 57 appellants at tribunals winning back a total of £30,000 - this is money which will then be spent in the Borough.

Like all CAB offices, Coleraine is fully electronic, allowing for the easy and accurate retrieval of statistical information allowing the organisation to profile service users. CAB is therefore well placed to address the funding issues of Best Value and the need for clear measures of performance and output.

A major feature of the bureau's development is the success of the Outreach Services in Ballymoney, Bushmills, Ballycastle and Cushendall. This has been made possible by the ability of the bureau to draw down funds from Councils in Ballymoney and Moyle as well as Coleraine.

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