

EMBRACE Moves Forward with the Appointment of a Development Worker



Aneta Dabek (right) with EMBRACE chairperson Denise Wright MBE

Aneta Dabek started work in May as EMBRACE Development Worker. She is from Poland and came to Northern Ireland nearly six years ago, has a Master's degree in Law (University Marie Curie Sklodowska in Lublin, Poland), and a Bachelor's degree in Theology (Warsaw Bible College). Last year she completed a one year IT Software Professional Course in Southern Regional College in Newry.

Aneta (pronounced Annetta) is associated with Newry Baptist Centre and has also worked with other churches in Newry, such as the Salvation Army, Metropolitan Church and Hope

EMBRACE Chairperson Welcomes New Worker

New EMBRACE Chairperson Denise Wright of City Church (who was awarded an MBE for services to black and minority-ethnic people in Northern Ireland in the Queen's birthday honours list), explains

We have been seeking for some time to find the resources to employ a development worker and are delighted that support from the Churches and OFMDFM [the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister] has allowed us to do so. We hope to build on the foundational work that began when people from across the Churches were invited to a preliminary meeting in the Curragh Community in 2002. Aneta's appointment will allow us to build stronger links with churches and inter-church groups throughout Northern Ireland. She will be investigating their needs in order to inform our future work and to learn how best to empower people.

On her vision for the future Denise says

The recent increase in migration is no longer something new. We need to move beyond welcoming people as strangers or visitors and think about true integration where we see people as part of us. The Church is one body where everyone's gifts should be valued and used – we need to ensure that our thinking becomes not about 'them and us' but about 'we'. In Aneta we have not simply someone who came as a 'migrant worker'; but someone who is part of us, part of the body of the Church.

Fellowship. Since she came here she has been active within migrant communities and in 2005 set up an English Course in Newry Baptist Church for foreign nationals. She says

On the course we had lots of people from different countries: Poland, Czech Republic, Brazil, Portugal, Spain, Lithuania, Slovakia.

Between 2005 and 2009 she has led a small Polish Christian Group in Newry Baptist Centre. In 2008 Aneta also helped to organise a Polish Supplementary School* in Newry. One hundred Polish children registered in the first year and there are currently about 80 – 100 children. Aneta is now the Chairperson of the school.

She is very enthusiastic about her new role with EMBRACE and says

I hope that I won't disappoint you and that my work will bring lots of blessings for churches and people who came here recently.

***Polish Supplementary Schools** have been established here, and in other countries in order to encourage the children of Polish parents to learn to read and write the Polish language and have a grounding in the culture, history and geography of Poland. Sometimes they also have Religious Education. The children attend outside school hours.

We have many parts in the one body, and all these parts have different functions. In the same way, though we are many, we are one body in union with Christ, and we are all joined to each other as different parts of one body. So we are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us. Romans 12 4–6

A Biblical Understanding of Hospitality

'We encounter God in the face of the stranger. God created difference, therefore it is in the one who – is – different that we meet God. ... The stranger, socially and psychologically vulnerable because he stands outside the network of community reciprocity, needs shelter and food as well as recognition and orientation in an unfamiliar place. However, the stranger in turn, can offer stories, thus opening up new worlds and understandings, and the relationship changes and becomes more balanced. Now the stranger becomes host and the host becomes stranger, having to enter new worlds too. Each becomes "gift" to each other.'

From *The Place Called Reconciliation; Texts to Explore* by the late David Stevens (see page 4), page 75, the Corrymeela Press, 2008.

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REFUGEE & IMMIGRATION ISSUES

Destitution Still the Biggest Worry

Both in refugee and immigration circles, minority-ethnic support organisations are still focussing on how to create better solutions for people who face destitution because they have little or no timely access to public support. The lively **Refugee Week** in Belfast (14–20 June), organised by **NICRAS**, the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers, included a seminar where first hand accounts demonstrated the human cost of destitution. There was also an information workshop, a discussion between refugees and local people, a meeting of the North-South Immigration Forum on issues relating to children, a coffee morning, a fundraising night, the NICRAS annual cultural celebration and a football tournament at Crusaders FC.

New RAG Research on Immigration Enforcement

Refugee Week events also included the launch of a report commissioned by the **Refugee Action Group (RAG)**. Robin Wilson's report, *Distant Voices, Shaken Lives; Human Stories of Immigration Detention from Northern Ireland* includes interviews with 8 people, Fatima, Lodorice, Yousuf, Cuneyt, Upenyu, Aram, Jamiu, and one woman who chose to remain anonymous.

Much of the material is all too familiar: the shortcomings in the asylum system, the shock and humiliation of detention, uncomfortable transport, unfeeling staff, demoralising conditions in removal centres (especially for children), the loss of support when people are moved to Scotland, the separation from friends, family and possessions, and the absence of adequate local data.

The research makes clear the importance of campaigning and advocacy in some of the cases and the significance of church involvement for some people in their successful integration.

The human stories are snapshots of the lives of people who have been caught up in our immigration and asylum system and contain both tragic and happy endings. They illustrate the emotional cost; for example, Jamiu recounted how his immigration status was disputed while in transit to a christening in Belfast, and he was detained:

I was panicked and confused and fearful and lonely. I knew that no one knew where I was. ... I find it impossible to concentrate. I have recurring dreams and flashbacks. I have developed what I can only refer to as a phobia of the police. I can't really discuss my feelings with anyone ... I have never been in any trouble of any kind in my life ... No matter how long I live this ordeal will be with me for the rest of my life.

The report ends with some positive alternatives to detention and makes proposals that could be taken up by politicians locally. The author also asserts that

Showing hospitality, rather than hostility, to the outsider—including the most marginalised, the asylum-seeker—is not just a moral imperative but is in the public interest of the region as a whole.'

One positive note in the report:

We will end the detention of children for immigration purposes.

The Coalition: Our Programme for Government, May 2010.

It remains to be seen if this will be achieved; there is no timescale accompanying this promise.

Living in Belfast Integration Training & Guide

Gems NI, has designed an integration course and a pocket guide for new migrants. See www.gemsni.org.uk/news/128-new-living-in-belfast-project.html

Depression in the Polish Community

Migrant Voice is a migrant-led organisation and its newsletter (*Migrant Voice*) allows migrants and others to air issues of concern. In their 2010 election special, Aleksandra Lojek-Magdziarz reported on the growing number Polish people in Northern Ireland who are suffering from depression because of factors such as homesickness, financial problems and the language barriers that prevent proper integration. She says that there is only one Polish-speaking psychologist (who has been working voluntarily for the Polish Association) for the whole Polish community of 25–30,000 people. Aleksandra, who is a community safety advocate, links the problem with the difficulty that migrants have in getting recognition for qualifications obtained in other countries.

Latest Hate Crime Figures Reveal a Mixed Picture

PSNI statistics for 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010 indicate that there was a fall in recorded racist crimes but a slight rise in recorded racist incidents. Racist crimes totalled 712, down 59 (7.7%) and the detection rate rose to 16.2%, up 3.7%. Racist incidents, however, have risen by 48 to 1,038, up 4.8%. These are not necessarily criminal offences and are defined by the police as 'any incident perceived by the victim or any other person as being motivated by prejudice or hate'.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/8675346.stm

Detailed figures by area are available at

www.psni.police.uk/3._hate_incidents_and_crimes_final.pdf

NCB/ARK Research on Attitudes of Young People

In March 2010 the National Children's Bureau (NCB) and the ARK Young Life and Times Survey published *Attitudes to Difference: Young People's Attitudes to and Experiences of Contact with People from Different Minority Ethnic and Migrant Communities in Northern Ireland*. The key findings from the surveys and interviews with post-primary pupils include the following.

- Young people in Northern Ireland confuse ethnic identity with religious and national identity.
- 19% of respondents have no contact with members of any minority-ethnic group.
- 37% have no friends from any minority-ethnic group.
- Young people are three times more likely to make contact with members of minority-ethnic groups in school than through social events or work.
- Young men were more likely than young women to meet members of other minority-ethnic groups through sports clubs.
- Despite higher levels of contact through sports, young men were more likely to express a dislike of people from minority-ethnic groups.
- 9% of young males compared to 6% of young females said they felt unfavourable or very unfavourable towards people from minority ethnic groups.
- In the school with the highest proportion of pupils from minority-ethnic groups, some respondents made negative comments about minority ethnic groups quite openly.

www.ncb.org.uk/pdf/ATTD_web_final.pdf

CHURCH NEWS

A Message from Aneta Dabek (see also page 1).



Aneta Dabek, EMBRACE Development Worker (left), learning about EMBRACE on the Street, from Ashleigh Hunter who co-ordinates the churches' collections for destitute foreign nationals.

A treasure in your mouth

In the last six years many new people have come to Northern Ireland. They left their own country, where their family and friends live and where they knew everything about life, culture and politics. One of the biggest problems for them is the language barrier – many can't understand and speak English. This barrier has an impact on almost every sphere of their lives and causes lots of trouble.

It is very difficult to get necessary information about benefits, legal issues, housing etc. Simple things, such as going to a doctor are not simple because they have to have interpreters. (In emergency cases it is especially difficult.) Helping children with their schoolwork is impossible. Finding a job in a new economic situation is a big achievement. Language problems have also impacted on their mental health and lots of newcomers are experiencing depression. It is not easy to make friends, so many feel very lonely.

English-speaking people have treasures in their mouths that are so precious for people who came here recently. Every, even very small, conversation is like an English lesson and an encouragement to learn more.

Don't be afraid about making a first contact, inviting your neighbour, colleague, or church member from a different cultural background for a cup of tea, or to some church activities. They have left their family and friends far away and they need to make new friends. Words of encouragement often touch people's lives, giving them strength and good feelings.

I will give you an example. Neena came from Nepal to Northern Ireland in summer 2008 and started work as an au pair. She went to a church with the family for whom she works. At the beginning she was very lonely; she didn't know anyone and she didn't know what to do with her free time. She was missing her family terribly. At first she didn't make any relationships with people from the church, until ... after three months, someone started to talk to her and discovered, surprisingly, that ... she is a very nice girl to talk to, even if her English isn't so good.

Now she is a part of the church and the youth group; she also doesn't feel so much of a "stranger". She has made many friends, on whom she can count. She still misses her family but she is not lonely any more. Now Neena calls many of her friends: 'sister', 'Mum' or 'Aunty'. Friends are our chosen family.

Africa Day at Willowfield

On 29th May, during Africa Week, Willowfield Church of Ireland Church in East Belfast hosted Africa Day with the theme, *Ubuntu; Cosmopolitan Belfast. Local people joined with Africans in listening to music and enjoying the food from many nations. Fifty six African national flags were displayed.



**'Africans have this thing called UBUNTU ... it is part of the gift that Africa will give the world. It embraces hospitality, caring about others, being able to go the extra mile for the sake of others. ... The solitary human being is a contradiction in terms and therefore you seek to work for the common good because your humanity comes into its own in belonging.'*

Archbishop Desmond Tutu
www.tutufoundationuk.org/ubuntu.html

Volunteering at the Homeplus Day Centre

In May 2010 students from Edgehill Theological College decorated the Homeplus Day Centre in Botanic Avenue, Belfast, to make it a brighter place for the clients. This daily drop-in centre for homeless migrant workers offers advice, hot meals, washing facilities and emotional support.



Ruth Watt, student at Edgehill College, and EMBRACE committee member, tidying a storeroom during the redecoration at the Homeplus Day Centre.

EMBRACE NEWS

Committee members are sorry to say farewell to Sr Brighde Vallely, a founder member and first Vice Chairperson of EMBRACE, who is leaving her job as director of CORI NI (Conference of Religious of Ireland) to work within her Dominican order, worldwide. She says 'It was a privilege to be a member of EMBRACE and to participate in its work with so many wonderful Christian people. I thank you Denise and the team for your unremitting dedication and commitment to having a Northern Ireland that welcomes and is enriched by the presence of "the stranger".'

The committee also regrets the untimely loss of former committee member David Stevens, Leader of the Corrymeela Community, who died on 23 May. His life was devoted to the mission of reconciliation and in spite of a hugely busy life, he found time to give encouragement to EMBRACE.

AGM and Spring Meeting on 18 May

Annual Report

This was the last year for Scott Boldt to present the annual report for EMBRACE as Chairperson. Rather than reading it he reflected on the concept of 'embrace' as expounded by the theologian Miroslav Volf. The authentic embrace involves interdependence and risk. His three-year stint has been characterised by energy, warmth and the encouragement of partnership working with other groups. He has been able to leave the chair on a positive note because of the extended hours of Jill Marrs, Administrative Assistant, and the appointment of Aneta Dabek:

'We enter this new season with raised expectations of reaching a greater number of Churches ... and to make all our communities more welcoming. ... we don't really know the specific impact of our work but in faith and with encouragement we hope that our contributions add to the lives of others as we seek to serve in a real and relevant way.'

Financial Report

Gratitude was expressed for the contributions to the General Fund during the year from the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the QUB Christian Union, Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church and the Belfast City Vineyard Church. The Emergency Fund received payment from the St Anne's Cathedral Sit Out appeal for the first time and, on top of the normal contributions, a considerable amount of money from both donations and statutory bodies went through the books to pay for the emergency following the attacks on Roma people in summer 2009. (See Newsletter No 15 page 1 and an insert to Newsletter No 14 for more detail about this crisis – www.embraceni.org/category/about-us/embrace-resources/)

Committee Members and Office Bearers 2010-11

The following comprise the new committee: **Scott Boldt, Paddy Donnelly, Perry Gildea, Dan Healy, Richard Kerr, Maura McCallion, Margaret McNulty, Ruth Watt** and **Denise Wright**. (Susan McEwan remains a co-opted member representing the Corrymeela Community.) Following the AGM the committee appointed the following people. Chairperson: **Denise Wright**, Vice-Chairperson **Perry Gildea**, Secretary: **Maura McCallion**, Treasurer: **Scott Boldt**, and Information Officer: **Margaret McNulty**.

Destitution & Migration: Who Cares?

Like other organisations (see page 2) EMBRACE has concerns about destitution among foreign nationals. At the Spring Meeting

and AGM, **Maura McCallion** (EMBRACE and the Law Centre NI) gave an overview of the legal and social situation and the kind of people who are affected.

The main guest speaker, **Sandra Moore** of the **Welcome Organisation** gave a moving presentation about the lives of people from other countries who are often forced to live rough in appalling conditions when they have no entitlement to public funds and so cannot access hostel beds. She explained how people facing multiple deprivation were helped by the Welcome Organisation and her talk was illustrated by a graphic film. She expressed the view that the failure to support people at an early stage leads to a much greater cost later on, as people inevitably have multiple visits to hospital. The talk's title, **Looking In**, is also the title of a photographic exhibition about homeless people in Belfast that is running in Belfast's Waterfront Hall until 29 June.

Following discussion about how people should respond, former Presbyterian Moderator, the Rt Rev. **John Dunlop**, issued a challenge to the Churches. He used several biblical examples to illustrate how people fail to respond as they should, and their blindness to their own scriptural tradition. When Jesus preached in Nazareth (Luke Ch 4), he was rejected when he spoke about the prophets relating to foreigners. Peter would not let Cornelius kneel before him, insisting that he was only a man. Dr Dunlop said that must be the level of all human interaction. The rich man who feasted every day, not noticing the poor man (Luke Ch 16), was not excused. 'God expects us to notice people.'

Committee Activities

Committee members continue to respond to invitations by churches to speak, for example, at a church/ community consultation in East Belfast and the New Horizons conference in Coleraine in July.

Belfast Inclusion Festival Events

EMBRACE hosted two events in this annual June festival, a Global Café event at Willowfield Church of Ireland Church in East Belfast, and a Voices Together concert at City Church, presenting songs from different countries, language and cultures.

Embracing Diversity; EMBRACE NI Information Update 2010

Our annual information update is now available online: [www.embraceni.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Embracing_Diversity_2010_WEB\[1\].pdf](http://www.embraceni.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Embracing_Diversity_2010_WEB[1].pdf). If you would like to receive a hard copy just let us know and we will post it out.

Thinking of Joining Us or Making a Donation?

Continue to support the EMBRACE Emergency Fund and if you are not already a member of EMBRACE please consider joining us. Subscriptions are £10.00 annually per person and £20.00 for groups. Please write to us at the address below. If you would like to make a donation towards our work please send a cheque, payable to EMBRACE.

Your support is greatly appreciated.

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