

Welcome Poster Launch



Denise Wright of EMBRACE (left) and Councillor Maire Hendron at the Launch of the Word of Welcome Poster and Resource, City Hall, Belfast

On 24 February EMBRACE members, local people, incomers, church folk and the minority-ethnic support sector, including partners from the Belfast Migrant Forum came together for the launch of one of the latest EMBRACE resources, a Welcome poster in 29 languages. The poster is accompanied by a booklet with greetings in 16 languages and tips on pronunciation.

The project was supported by a Hate Crime and Cohesion grant from Belfast City Council's Community Safety Partnership and Councillor Maire Hendron, Chair of the Belfast City Council's Good Relations Partnership spoke at the launch and acknowledged the work of EMBRACE

...in building relationships between the local residents and the new citizens of Northern Ireland.

It is recognised that we as a race are not very good at learning a foreign language. When these newcomers arrived we expected them to speak our language and understand our ways almost immediately. ...

This poster which you are launching today is such a good idea. It will not make us fluent in any these languages but it will indicate welcome and show that we really want our society to be peaceful, welcoming and inclusive of us all.

Support from the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) enabled further copies of the Word of Welcome Poster to be printed for people outside Belfast.

This initiative builds on the set of 'Hear my Voice' leaflets, published in the autumn. These encourage people to understand the feelings of newcomers, through reading their stories, and to reach out in friendship. (See page 3.)

AICCMR Comes to an End

The **All-Ireland Churches Consultative Meeting on Racism (AICCMR)** was set up in 2003 by the Churches to provide 'an all-island focus and vision' to complement the work of other Christian agencies such as the Parish-based Integration Project (PIP), Refugee and Migrant Project, Churches Asylum Network (CAN), and EMBRACE. Research by the late Fee Ching Leong revealed shortcomings within Churches in responding to the needs of minority-ethnic people and this was discussed at a major conference in November 2005, Challenged by Difference: Threat or Enrichment.

Other initiatives included **Taste and See**, an inter-cultural worship/prayer celebration in Dublin and Belfast. AICCMR also brought together 45 church leaders from across Ireland in Dublin for a day of **Listening and Learning**, bringing people from newer, migrant-led churches and longer established churches together.

AICCMR publications include *Inter-Cultural Insights: Christian Reflections on Racism, Hospitality and Identity from the Island of Ireland*, the *Directory of Migrant-led Churches and Chaplaincies* and *What the Bible Says about the Stranger*. (The booklets can be accessed at www.embraceni.org/category/christian-response/what-the-bible-says/ and the directory at www.edgehillcollege.org/Directory%20of%20Migrant%20Led%20Churches)

In looking at today's new realities, AICCMR came to recognise that the modest foundations which it had laid were now being built on by diverse groups (including EMBRACE); therefore, it felt that its work had come to an end. Joan Roddy, chairperson of AICCMR reflected on this:

One might say that the mustard seed which gave birth to AICCMR has died and given birth to a tree with many branches – signs of the presence of many new inter-church initiatives which in diverse ways strive to promote an integrated, inclusive society where each person finds a place and where the dignity of each is recognised and respected.

**For He is our peace who has made us ... one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility.
Ephesians 2:14**

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EMBRACE is a group of Christians from different denominations working together to promote a positive response to people who are seeking asylum, refugees, migrant workers and people from minority-ethnic backgrounds living in Northern Ireland.

REFUGEE & IMMIGRATION ISSUES

Refugee and Asylum Forum (RAF)

The Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS), the Inclusive Neighbourhood Project and groups such as Barnardo's have worked to further refugee integration here, and there is a lot of good will in other agencies. There is, however, no properly integrated approach to supporting people and cuts in the UK Border Agency budget have led to the end of the Refugee Employment and Integration Service.

Since December 2011 EMBRACE has been involved with other groups who provide practical support in coming together as an informal **Refugee and Asylum Forum** to identify gaps in provision, to network, and support each other in sharing good practice.

There are clear needs where people have failed to prove their case for asylum but cannot be sent home, because they often lose all financial support and have to depend on charity.

People who achieve refugee status, however, also find that their world changes dramatically. They acquire the same rights as local people but the sudden loss of asylum cash support and housing and the transition into new accommodation and either work or benefits can be very difficult. RAF members are working to improve this situation.

Planning for Refugee Week 2012 18–24 June

In preparation for Refugee Week in 2012 the UK organisers are looking for refugees who are or will be contributing to making this year's Olympics in London a success. (The theme is 'Spirit', in keeping with the Olympics.)

Locally the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) hope that people will organise a lot of events at community level. If you an idea for something that might be included in the programme please contact Ann Marie White on activities@nicras.org.uk

Some of the events planned already include a photography exhibition, fun run, talent contest, a festival on the Falls, tours of the MAC (Metropolitan Arts Centre) and live music events.

Free Language Classes for People Seeking Asylum

In other parts of the UK people in the asylum system can learn English without paying for classes, so support groups in NI, including the Law Centre, have campaigned for the same treatment here for some years. There are now hopes of success. The Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) is exploring legal issues and the legislative changes needed and it is hoped that free ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes for asylum claimants will be introduced at some time in 2012. Meanwhile NICRAS continues to have to apply for charitable grants for their clients and uses volunteers to provide one-to-one teaching.

Stories of People Seeking Asylum Here

Community Dialogue has published a collection of personal histories reflecting the emotions, hopes and fears of people seeking asylum locally. Partnership between NICRAS (see above), Community Dialogue and City Church, Belfast, allowed the moving conversations to take place and Stephanie Mitchell has recorded these rarely heard voices in *Conversations Around the Kitchen Table*. The booklet is available from Community Dialogue, (call (028) 9035 1450 to obtain a copy), or download from www.embraceni.org/category/information/asylum/.

N Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership (NISMP)

NISMP was launched in October 2011. It brings together the UK Border Agency with local political, NGO and statutory representatives in order to ensure that immigration policy meets local needs. The NISMP website www.migrationni.org/ is beginning to develop as an important hub for finding up-to-date information on immigration issues and contact details for relevant agencies and groups. EMBRACE was the community organisation chosen to feature in the first NISMP newsletter, *Migration News*, January 2012. See www.migrationni.org/DataEditorUploads/Migration%20News%20Issue%201.1.pdf

Crisis Fund for Migrants

In 2011, following pressure from minority-ethnic support groups, a pilot emergency fund to provide stop-gap support for foreign nationals who have no recourse to public funds was financed locally through the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) Minority Ethnic Development Fund. The **Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI)** received £21,000 and, in partnership with the **Red Cross**, drafted eligibility guidelines and identified support groups across N Ireland who could distribute the money. The initial feedback from groups is that the fund has made a big difference to individuals. In October 2011 a further £23,500 was made available within the pilot scheme.

EMBRACE, however, has found no reduction in demands upon their Emergency Fund (see Page 4). Some requests are to assist people who have already had small one-off grants from the crisis fund. Small grants can only be effective where the individuals concerned get back into employment quickly or return to their home country. Piecemeal finance cannot prevent destitution where people are unemployed and have no right to benefits. As of February 2012 there has been no follow-up funding but the distributing groups are assessing the needs that were evident while the money was available, with a view to making a case for continued emergency finance. (See also the work of St Vincent de Paul, Page 3.)

EU Agency Workers Directive

Agency workers are people who are supplied by an employment business or agency to work for a third party. Around 22,000 people work here in this way and some, including migrant workers, have found themselves exploited by unscrupulous employers. In December 2011 the EU **Agency Workers Directive** was extended to Northern Ireland. The law now gives agency workers some improved rights straight away and the same rights in terms of pay, holidays and other basic working conditions, as directly recruited staff after 12 weeks in post. See www.northernireland.gov.uk/news-del-160811-directive-delivers-fairness

Immediately, however, local trade unions noted that people were being given shorter temporary contracts to avoid these provisions.

Report on the Filipino Community

The NI Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) has published a valuable report, *Bayanihan! The Filipino Community in Northern Ireland*, on the challenges faced by people from the Philippines, many of whom work in the healthcare sector. See www.nicem.org.uk/uploads/publications/Bayanihan!_January_2012.pdf

CHURCHES NEWS

Hear My Voice Leaflet Series



Hear My Voice leaflets

On 30 November a series of four leaflets was launched at a social evening of story telling and food from different cultural backgrounds at Edgehill College, Belfast. The event brought together local people and recent incomers from other countries. The leaflets and interactions on the night allowed people to get a true sense of what it feels like to come to a new country.



Some of the Gathering at Edgehill College for the Hear My Voice Launch on 30th November

Since the launch another leaflet has been prepared, giving an insight into the experiences and feelings of children.

Some suggestions from the children's leaflet

- Set an example for young children by greeting and welcoming newcomers.
- Listen and learn from the wisdom of children.
- Expose young children to the rich diversity of cultures present in Northern Ireland.
- Tell stories from other cultures and traditions.
- Encourage children to think about what makes their culture unique and special.
- Teach children to play games which transcend barriers.

All the leaflets are available on request from the EMBRACE office and can be downloaded from www.embraceni.org/category/about-us/embrace-resources/

Christian Resources:

Embracing Diversity: Information Update 2012

The eighth EMBRACE annual information update is now available. It provides an introduction to some of the complicated issues of immigration, asylum and racism and their implications for the life experiences of the people involved. It should help with understanding why our society has become more multi-national recently and dispel some of the negative myths and stereotypes. It also challenges Christians to make a practical and informed response, by living out the gospel values of welcome and love of neighbour. Let us know if you would like a copy or copies.

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

The theme for last autumn's Racial Justice Sunday was 'Created by God, Treated like Slaves: Tackling Human Trafficking'. The resources, including bible studies are still available from the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland web site: www.ctbi.org.uk/551/ You can also download the booklet Combating Trafficking for Forced Labour in Europe published this year by the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe:

www.ccme.be/fileadmin/filer/ccme/70_DOWNLOADS/20_Publications/2011-03-05-ENG-GOING_BEYOND.pdf

St Vincent de Paul

The St Vincent de Paul charity assists large numbers of people by visiting them at home to assess their needs and distributing money and goods, regardless of their faith or denomination. It is estimated that around £300,000 of St Vincent de Paul funds has gone to people from other countries in N Ireland in the last year. They would mostly have received help with the purchase of heating oil, food, clothing or white goods. Many of those whose lives were made a little easier had no right to benefits here. They might be migrant workers, out of work, or people in the asylum system. In some cases money has been given to assist with repatriation and contributions towards funeral costs where people have died far from home.

Debt is a major issue, even for those who are in work. Parents may become ill, for example, in countries thousands of miles away and their children have to pay for their medical care and for expensive flights to see them. (The fall in the value of sterling has added to a drop in buying power for many who send money home regularly.) St Vincent de Paul relies on partners in the advice sector where people are in crisis situations such as crippling debt. The charity liaises closely with the debt counsellors in Christians Against Poverty (CAP). Signposting to the right source of advice is key.

They are also represented on Church Action on Poverty which brings together all the main Christian groups to help find ways of highlighting and tackling the issue of poverty in N Ireland and they co-operate with other Churches and bodies such as the Salvation Army.

EMBRACE has always had at least one member of St Vincent de Paul on its committee.

Keep Fit Classes at Lisburn Road Drop In

The drop in ministry, 'The Meeting Point', in a former Presbyterian Church on the Lisburn Road, Belfast, has added keep fit classes to its activities for people from other countries. Sport is a great way of helping people to have a sense of wellbeing. Is this something your church could offer? See www.facebook.com/meeting.point139?sk=info

EMBRACE NEWS

EMBRACE AGM and Spring Meeting

Please keep the evening of **Tuesday 15 May** free. The EMBRACE AGM and Spring meeting will be held at **Edgehill College, 9 Lennoxvale, Belfast, BT9 5BY**, from **7.30 – 9.30pm**. The subject of the meeting is Home Sweet Home?: Engaging with the Challenges, with presentations on Human Trafficking; the Larne House Short-Term Holding Unit for immigration detainees; and Aneta Dabek will speak about her work as EMBRACE Development Worker. This meeting will also provide an opportunity to obtain the many new printed resources.

EMBRACE Activities

This has been a very busy few months for EMBRACE staff and volunteers, with the development and launch of the 'Hear My Voice' series of leaflets (see page 3) and the Welcome poster and supporting language materials (see page 1).

And You Welcomed Me Workshops for Churches



Aneta Dabek, EMBRACE Development Worker, (Third from Left) Leading one of the Workshops at Ballymena Methodist Church

Since the last newsletter was published, EMBRACE Development Worker, Aneta Dabek, has organised a number of workshop events. These are an opportunity for church people from different backgrounds to learn about the importance of welcome, how to run drop in centres, friendship clubs and language classes and how to assist or signpost people in difficulty. On 1 March workshops were run in Clooney Hall in Derry/Londonderry and the workshop leaders were impressed by the desire of participants to take things further. On 5 March EMBRACE was welcomed by Ballymena Methodist Church where they heard about some recent local initiatives.

A further evening of workshops will take place in the Craigavon Civic Centre at the end of March.

Migration Awareness Training

It is important for Christians to understand the history of migration and practical issues relating to immigration and emigration today, in order to dispel myths and to understand the changing society around them. Aneta Dabek, Jenna Liechty Martin and Denise Wright, EMBRACE Chairperson, have delivered Migration Awareness training recently in Newry and East Belfast.

Denise and Aneta also ran a migration awareness training session at the Ulster Quarterly Meeting of Quakers in Ulster on 18 February.

Other Events

Aneta Dabek has visited a number of churches and groups. She spoke to a Presbyterian women's group at the Maze (along with Ashleigh Hunter and Margaret McNulty). The women had collected contributions for the EMBRACE On the Street project that helps destitute people. Aneta also addressed a women's group in Rosemary Presbyterian Church.

She spoke to a youth group, who were joined by other church members at Groomsport Presbyterian Church. The group took part in a 'Maths Lesson' in Polish and could imagine how it might feel to be in a new school, in a new country. Many young people who are starting their lives here are struggling to find friends. Creating a platform of understanding can help young people to understand the need to make newcomers feel part of the society around them.

Aneta took part in a special Ecumenical service in Newry on 14 March celebrating the life of St. Patrick. A special invitation had been extended to people from minority-ethnic communities living in Newry and Mourne.

Denise Wright (EMBRACE chairperson) led a seminar 'Building Better Relations with Ethnic Minorities' at the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Building Good Relations Conference in Carnmoney. Scott Boldt addressed Church of Ireland ministerial students in Dublin and spoke to the Stormont Presbyterian Women's Association.

Networking

EMBRACE continues to be active in the Belfast Migrant Forum and the Immigration Sub-Group of the Stormont Race Relations Panel. Representatives have attended the Belfast Hate Crime Convention; meetings of the Black Minority-Ethnic and Faith Network, the Refugee Action Group; and a seminar on human trafficking. The group also helped to bring people together to form the new Refugee and Asylum Forum (see page 2).

EMBRACE on the Street

This project raises awareness about migrant destitution and provides an opportunity for churches to help by supplying goods on a rota basis. These are then distributed via homelessness charities and other specialist groups. Recent requests have included specific foodstuffs and toiletries for drop-in centres and groups that support refugees and people seeking asylum.

Emergency Fund

The fund received £750 from the Black Santa Appeal at Belfast Cathedral, Christmas 2011.

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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