

EMBRACE TV Appeal



Gerry Anderson (Photo courtesy of BBC NI)

EMBRACE was chosen as one of BBC NI Lifeline's featured charities for October. The group is grateful to BBC presenter **Gerry Anderson** who introduced a television appeal on behalf of the **EMBRACE Emergency Fund**, which assists people from other countries who are in crisis situations. In the short film he reflected on his own experience as a migrant and introduced people who have come here in recent years. For some, language barriers and delays in processing paperwork had been challenges to settling in. A small number of others face larger issues including poverty and homelessness. The appeal challenged people to respond in a welcoming way and encouraged them to contribute to the Emergency Fund.

Gerry Anderson referred to his own experience as a migrant who found himself 'in unfamiliar territory looking for a welcome and a connection with the locals'. While the appeal encouraged people to be aware of how people from other countries can encounter crisis situations, EMBRACE was keen to stress the importance of welcome and the fact that many migrants have very positive experiences. **Aneta Dabek**, EMBRACE development worker, told viewers

Starting life in a new country can be exciting, challenging and hard at the same time. When I came seven years ago I didn't know English very well, I couldn't speak and hardly understood anything. But I have found here very nice people with big hearts and open minds. Local church gave me a lot of encouragement and support. ... You can make a big difference by just saying a simple 'Hello' to your new neighbours.

The appeal was broadcast on three occasions in mid-October and can still be viewed online, along with other interviews (including one with **Denise Wright**, EMBRACE Chairperson talking about the formation of the group and **Veselka Ivanova** advising new migrants on the importance of building relationships with local people). See www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/community/aac/appeals/lifeline_embrace.shtml You can read about some of the ways that people are helped by the **EMBRACE Emergency Fund** on Page 4.

The Future of the Churches Asylum Network

Sr Joan Roddy used to coordinate the all-Ireland Churches Asylum Network (CAN) as part of the Catholic Bishops' Refugee and Migrant Project. The project was discontinued when she retired earlier this year and it was unclear if CAN would continue. The members decided unanimously that it would be helpful to go on meeting as a network to support each other, share information and provide a Church voice on issues of asylum and integration. The Dominican Justice Office in Dublin has agreed to be the new coordinating point for CAN and meetings will take place approximately five times a year.

The Dominican Justice Office is updating the CAN database currently and if you would like to attend contact justiceop@eircom.net or phone 003531 857 4654.

Harvest Visit to Down High School, Downpatrick



EMBRACE development worker, Aneta Dabek (right), spoke at Down High (Preparatory School) harvest celebration on 22 October.

The children had been learning about homelessness and Aneta explained the importance of supporting people and welcomed the children's donations for the EMBRACE On the Street project (see also page 4).

But He's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. It's quite simple. Do what is fair and just to your neighbour, be compassionate and loyal in your love, and don't take yourself too seriously – take God seriously.

Micah 6: 8 *The Message*

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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

Larne House Short-Term Holding Centre

The UK Border Agency (UKBA) has powers to detain a variety of people, including those who overstay their visas, asylum applicants whose claims have been refused, and people found working here illegally. In the past there was concern because some immigration detainees were held in the prison system locally, alongside convicted criminals. When all detention was moved to removal centres in GB this created other problems. For example, detainees who could not be transferred immediately were kept in local police custody suites that were unsuitable for this purpose.

So the UKBA decided on a dedicated short-term holding centre in Larne, Co. Antrim. Larne House opened in July and is run by the Reliance Security Group on behalf of the UKBA. It is thought that about 130 people have been detained in Larne during the centre's first ten weeks, for an average of three days. The majority will have been moved on to Dungavel Removal Centre in Scotland but some were removed to the Republic of Ireland directly and others were released on bail. The centre comprises the refurbished custody area of a police station and so it is quite claustrophobic with small rooms, narrow corridors and little natural light. However, the staff seem amenable to pre-arranged visits by friends and family.

For the last 18 months or so, **Richard Kerr** (in his capacity as Race Relations Convenor of the Presbyterian church) has been in discussion with the UKBA about the provision of chaplaincy services to the Detention Unit. In August a 'religious advice and support group' made up mainly of clergy from a number of denominations in the Larne area was formed and training and orientation provided by UKBA and Reliance. Members of this group visit the unit on a regular rota basis and are 'on call' as required. Initial reports suggest that interaction with staff and detainees has been largely positive and appreciated.

Ali McGinley Director of the London-based umbrella group **AVID** (Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees) addressed the **RAG** (Refugee Action Group) AGM in Belfast on 4 October and gave an overview of the UK's use of detention and the work of visitor groups. RAG is considering if it would be feasible and useful to have a visitor group for Larne House. Following her talk, Ali, along with **Agnieszka Martynowicz** (formerly of the NI Human Rights Commission) were shown round Larne House.

Launch of NI Strategic Migration Partnership

Northern Ireland is the last part of the UK to have a strategic migration partnership, bringing together representatives from local government departments, local councils, public services, the voluntary and community sector and the UK Border Agency. It aims to provide a regional voice on migration policy. One of its first priorities is to ensure the collection of better local data on immigration.

DEL Qualifications Comparison Service

The Department of Employment and Learning has rolled out its Qualification Comparison Service across all its employment services offices, where advisors have access to the **National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom (UK NARIC)** and can help job applicants from other countries to demonstrate to employers how their qualifications equate to those in the UK.

UK Border Agency Answers Questions at Stormont

The All-Party Group on Ethnic Minorities at Stormont, hosted a useful seminar on 13th September to discuss key issues relating to immigration. The Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM), the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS), and the Law Centre (NI) had the opportunity to question the UK Border Agency (UKBA) about crucial issues.

UKBA were told about the difficulty of accessing appropriate English language tests in NI for the spouses of UK citizens. They were asked about progress towards common visa arrangements between the UK and the Irish Republic. Another local issue concerned the changes to the points-based immigration system where the wage rates required in order to come here as skilled workers are set at the UK average. (There is particular anxiety about senior care assistants and chefs, and especially those already here who do not have residency and whose pay falls below the level now required.) There were further questions asked about the low level of subsistence support for people seeking asylum and the difficulty and expense for those who have to travel to sign on with the UKBA at Drumkeen House, Belfast.

Pilot One-Stop-Shop for Migrant Healthcare

On 12 October the Public Health Authority (PHA) together with the Health and Social Care Board, announced funding for a new regional one-stop-shop pilot project for migrants, in recognition of the fact that they sometimes have difficulty accessing the care they need through the existing health and social care system. This coincided with a conference on minority-ethnic health and wellbeing. Among the speakers were **Denise Wright** of the South Belfast Roundtable (also Chairperson of EMBRACE) who spoke about difficulties encountered by Roma people and **Dr Linda Agnew** of the Refugee Health Special Interest Group who spoke about the physical and mental health of refugees and people claiming asylum. The presentations can be accessed at www.publichealth.hscni.net/event/conference-minority-ethnic-health-and-wellbeing-issues-northern-ireland

Belfast Open Cities Action Plan

Open Cities was a British Council Project led by Belfast City Council in collaboration with a network of European cities. Attracting and retaining migrant labour seems to be a factor in producing vibrant, economically successful cities. The project identified factors that make cities more attractive to international populations and some strategies that encourage integration as well as economic competitiveness. EMBRACE was involved with other agencies and support groups in developing a local action plan. See http://opencities.britishcouncil.org/web/download/local_action_plans/lap_belfast.pdf

Honour-Based Violence and Forced Marriage

The PSNI hosted a conference on 25 October on the crimes of honour-based violence and forced marriage. Delegates heard about the relative prevalence of this cruel form of abuse in GB and were faced with the question: 'Is this occurring locally?' The Civil Law Reform Division of the Stormont Department of Finance and Personnel would like to hear about evidence of any problems occurring here. Send any information to jim.strain@dfpni.gov.uk

Read about forced marriage and the protection available in civil law for people faced with this denial of human rights and dignity at www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/2855621/what-is-forced-marriage.pdf

CHURCHES NEWS

Community and Church Work Together in Lambeg

The **Lambeg for Everyone** festival was organised by Harmony Hill Community Group in conjunction with local churches and ethnic groups. It ran for two days from 28 October in Harmony Hill Presbyterian Church. There were exhibitions from Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and the local community. Foods from different countries and cultures were there to sample and there were information stands, Bollywood dance performances, Polish folk dancers and a henna tattoo artist.



A member of the Chinese community performs in Harmony Hill Presbyterian Church as part of Lambeg for Everyone

Launch of 'Hear My Voice': Migrant Story Leaflets

A series of leaflets recounting the stories of people who have come here from other countries will be launched on 30 November, 7.00–9.00pm at Edgehill College, 9 Lennoxvale Belfast, BT9 5BY. The informal event will allow an opportunity to share experiences and get a deeper understanding about how we can hear and respond to the voices of newcomers. All are welcome.

One Voice Among Many: A Message from EMBRACE Development Worker Aneta Dabek

Ivan and his wife came to Northern Ireland from Bulgaria. They found the church address on the internet and visited it soon after their arrival. The openness and warm welcome of people from the church allowed the couple to feel at home there, become a part of the group and take an active role in church activities. The first few months were difficult and Ivan was struggling to overcome the language barrier, get a work permit and find a job. But everything was much more bearable with supportive people around him. The feeling of not being alone gave him strength to survive that difficult time.

It is very important that we as members of groups and congregations won't be shy to embrace and welcome new people, won't be afraid to start a conversation and won't think too much about the barriers.

Ivan said to the local church congregation 'When you are living abroad, you are missing the most your family and friends. You became our new family, thank you so much for that.'

Other EMBRACE Resources for Churches

Hello poster and cards

'Taking the First Step: The Power of Hello' is an A4 poster encouraging people to take personal welcoming initiatives. There are also 'Hello!' cards listing tips on how to show welcome to people who may not speak English.

Prayer Letter

The November prayer letter is about healthcare for minority-ethnic people. (See also an item on page 2.) It can be accessed, along with previous letters at www.embraceni.org/

English Classes in Belfast

We have started mapping the availability of English language classes run by churches and others. You can find a list of those in the Belfast area on our web site home page www.embraceni.org We would be delighted to hear about other classes, both any that are missing for Belfast and others anywhere in N Ireland. Language is the key to developing relationships.

Strangers in Need: Advice for Assisting People from Other Countries who are Experiencing Difficulties

This online resource is updated as circumstances change and aims to give clergy and pastoral workers some options for signposting people who are in crisis situations.

We sometimes hear about instances where church people have given inappropriate immigration advice and this resource emphasises the fact that it is illegal to give immigration advice without a licence. Bad advice can have very severe consequences.

See www.embraceni.org/category/christian-response/advice-for-churches/

Don't Forget the EMBRACE Translation Service

People respond much better to an invitation in their own language. If you need help with a short translation (up to 60 words) for church notices – for events, programmes or classes – please contact EMBRACE. At present this service is available in Bulgarian, French, Hindi, Polish, Russian, Portuguese and Spanish and we hope to have more available soon. If you speak another language and would like to volunteer as a translator please contact us.

Mobile 077 3137 8037/ 0796 9921 328

Email aneta@embraceni.org

Welcome Poster

A multi-language welcome poster is being prepared for churches.

Migration Awareness Training

As well as the workshop events (see page 4) EMBRACE is now offering Migration Awareness courses. The first was held on 20 September at Edgehill College in Belfast. The training aims to give people an understanding of why people have moved in and out of this country throughout history and why there has been a recent increase in inward migration. This awareness should give people within the Christian community the confidence to challenge negative stereotypes about migrants within their local communities. Would a group of churches in your area welcome such training? Just let us know.

Did you know...?

In the 1600s 6,000 Irish men and women were sold to become slaves in Jamaica/Bermuda.

EMBRACE NEWS

OFMDFM Renews EMBRACE Funding

There were considerable delays in the awarding of grants from the Minority Ethnic Development Fund by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) this year and when the awards were decided they were initially only for six months. EMBRACE was glad to be one of the fortunate recipients and have now heard that they will also be awarded a further grant until March of next year towards development work and administration. This is a valuable addition to the contributions from some of the Churches towards the work.

Belfast and Bangor EMBRACE Workshops

EMBRACE workshops encourage Christian people who are helping to welcome and integrate people from other countries. Following earlier visits to Templepatrick and Newry, a further well-attended event was held on 24th August at Edgehill College in South Belfast. One of the participants gave the following feedback.

It was lovely to talk to people who are 'doing it'. Knowing it works gives hope.

Then on 11 October the group responded to an invitation from **Helen Sloan** of 1st Bangor Presbyterian Church, which is already very active in welcoming people through language classes and other activities. Following a welcome from the church, those who attended heard from **Stuart Buchanan** of **North Down YMCA** about their work with newcomers to the area.

The workshop activities include the sharing of tips about how to make a start in building relationships, running a language class, developing a friendship club or a drop-in centre. There is also information about combating migrant destitution and how to signpost people in crisis situations. Would the churches in your area like EMBRACE to organise a workshop event for you?

Committee and Staff Activities

The committee met for a useful planning meeting on 17 October and are grateful to **Stephanie Mitchell** for facilitating this event.

EMBRACE continues to be represented at the Churches Asylum Network in Dublin and the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland Racial Justice Network, the Belfast Migrant Forum, the Refugee Action Group, the Black and Minority-Ethnic and Faith Forum and the Immigration Sub Group of the Racial Equality Forum at Stormont.

Chairperson, **Denise Wright**, represented the group at the launch of the NI Strategic Migration Partnership (see page 2).

Information Officer, **Margaret McNulty**, has attended several seminars on human trafficking and the PSNI conference on Honour-Based Violence and Forced Marriage (see page 2).

Development worker, **Aneta Dabek**, networks widely with church groups and has attended events such as the Expo-Nations cultural diversity event run by the Place of Victory for All Nations Church, Belfast, the Lambeg for Everyone event (see page 3) and the new friendship club in Ballymena.

'Come with me: A way of welcome'

Jenna Liechty Martin is a member of the Mennonite Church in the United States who volunteers with EMBRACE. In September she wrote a blog for the Centre for Contemporary Christianity.

... One year after I've arrived in Northern Ireland I realize I am still new, still an outsider; however, I also feel I am welcomed and invited to join into the life of the church. I hope that I will always remember what it feels like to be a stranger and to be invited to 'come with me', so that I may extend the same invitation to others.

Read the whole blog at

www.contemporarychristianity.net/blog/?p=196

EMBRACE Emergency Fund

There has been a small short-term pilot scheme of small publicly-funded one-off grants for people from other countries who find themselves in difficulties. In spite of this, EMBRACE has still continued to be asked for money by a range of organisations in order to meet the additional pressing needs of people requiring immediate assistance. Since March some examples of EMBRACE assistance through the Emergency Fund include

- Flights home for people from Romania, Hungary, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia
- Bus fares to GB – where destitute people can stay with friends or family until they get back on their feet
- Short-term hostel accommodation
- Accessing documents from Malawi and Zimbabwe for people who are seeking asylum

On Page 1 you can read about the BBC Lifeline Appeal for donations to the EMBRACE Emergency Fund.

EMBRACE on the Street

As winter approaches life becomes more difficult for people who are completely destitute and sleeping out of doors. EMBRACE on the Street is a project that allows churches to give appropriate donations of practical goods that are then channelled through homelessness organisations to where they are most needed. If your church or group is not yet part of the rota and you want to consider taking part, see www.embraceni.org/category/about-us/projects/ under 'Practical Projects' or contact EMBRACE by telephone.

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 needed and appreciated.*

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