

EMBRACE Faces Change Following Non-Renewal of OFMDFM Funding

Over the last five years, EMBRACE has relied on funding from the Churches and from the Minority Ethnic Development Fund (MEDF) of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) in order to sustain a development programme of workshops, training and publications, and the employment of a Development Worker. In May 2015, however, Chairperson, Denise Wright told members at the EMBRACE AGM (see also page 4) that the latest funding application to the MEDF had been unsuccessful and that the group would have to find different ways of doing things.

The four MEDF aims in 2015 are to bring about 'equality of service provision', the 'elimination of prejudice, racism and hate crime', 'increased participation, representation and belonging' and 'diversity is celebrated'. EMBRACE hopes to contribute towards all these aims but the primary focus of the group is on resourcing churches in a greater understanding of the issues and in welcoming minority-ethnic people. There are a large number of other groups who work directly with, and provide services for, minority-ethnic people. (See also page 2)

The Immediate Future of EMBRACE

Chairperson, Denise Wright says

We have found ourselves in the position where we have had to offer Aneta Dabek (Development Worker) and Jill Marrs (Administrative Assistant) reduced working hours. This means that our capacity to deliver workshops, talks and resources is much reduced. We are hopeful that we will source new funding but will spend the next few months consolidating and discerning the way forward and would appreciate your prayers both for staff and the committee. While this is a time of challenge we also see it as an opportunity to review and hone the work we believe we are called to do and trust God for the provision of the resources to do so.

The World Refugee and Migrant Crisis and Syrian Refugees

The conscience of the world is challenged by the deaths of many of the desperate migrants and refugees fleeing poverty, persecution and war in perilous journeys across the Mediterranean Sea, in a desperate attempt to reach countries where they might find refuge. (Read the EMBRACE prayer letter for May 2015 www.embraceni.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/May-2015-Prayer-Letter.pdf)

European Churches have called for safe legal routes in a joint statement by the conference of European Churches and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe. www.ccme.be/fileadmin/filer/ccme/75_PRESS/2015/2015-04-20-CEC_CCME_press_release.pdf

During the EMBRACE Spring Meeting (see page 3) there was an impromptu discussion as to whether local Christians could make a positive offer of shelter to families who are suffering. The conversation focussed mostly on Syrian refugees and members of EMBRACE explained that there were discussions between local politicians and the Home Office, and some faith representatives, about the possibility of Northern Ireland hosting Syrian people as part of the UK Government's resettlement programme, the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme. See www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/sn06805/syrian-refugees-and-the-uk Local groups who support people who are seeking asylum or are refugees here, would love to welcome such people but are warning that there first need to be clear answers about issues such as the provision of specialist healthcare (especially for the victims of torture and those with psychological problems), safe housing, and sufficient school places for refugee children. This is because refugees who are here already, experience considerable challenges.

As a follow up event, you are welcome to, **Syrian Refugees Welcome Here?**, Wednesday 26 August, Edgell Theological College, 9 Lennoxvale, Belfast, 7pm-9pm (registration from 6.30), to learn more about the facts, the challenges and possible responses.

Jesus, speaking to Bartimaeus, the blind man:

'What do you want me to do for you?'

Mark 10: 51

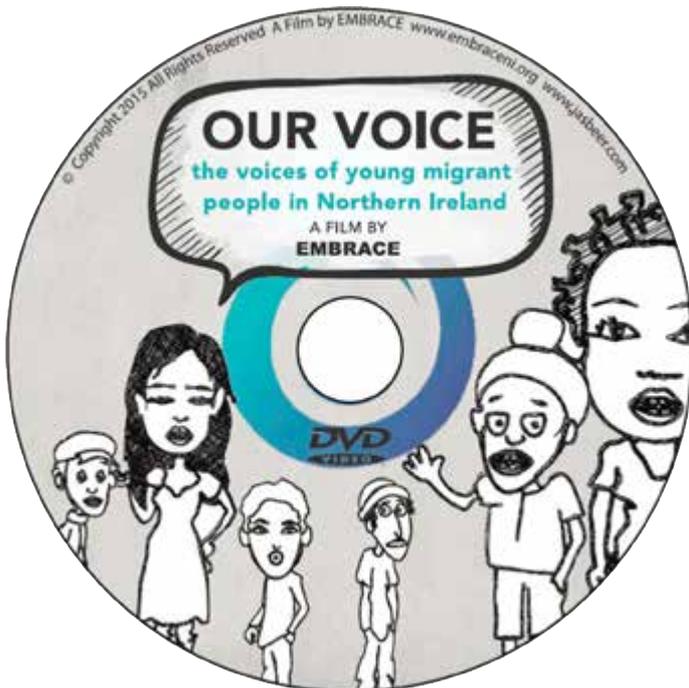
'Compassion means full immersion in what it is to be human.'

Henry J M Nouwen

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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.



NEW EMBRACE RESOURCE
Our Voice Youth DVD (see page 3)

REFUGEE & IMMIGRATION ISSUES

Refugee Week 15–21 June

The theme for this year's Refugee Week has been 'Celebrating Cultural Diversity' and included the launch of a diversity booklet at the Belfast City Hall, refugee awareness training, many community and cultural events, experiencing life in a refugee camp, a screening of the film *War Child*, a legal talk on the future of international protection in the UK and a church service.

Funding Crisis for Homeplus in Belfast

The Homeplus homelessness charity failed to get a grant this year from the OFMDM Minority Ethnic Development Fund (MEDF) (see also Page 1 Col. 1), for their drop-in project for foreign nationals. This is especially unfortunate because of the vulnerability of the many people, especially those in the asylum system, who rely on Homeplus to assist them, not just with food, clothing, advice and advocacy but also a place where they can feel safe and have emotional support from the staff and from one another.

Homeplus hope that money can be found so that the project can restart but in the meantime are appealing to the public to sponsor them in trying to keep their doors open. There is an opportunity to contribute through JustGiving. www.justgiving.com/homeplus-ni

Human Trafficking and Forced Labour

In response to the passing of the UK Modern Slavery Act, The Law Centre NI has published a useful overview explaining what is meant by trafficking and forced labour and the legal situation. <http://lawcentreni.org/Publications/Policy-Briefings/Forced-Labour-April-15.pdf>

The Department of Justice NI (DOJNI) has published a progress report on the Action Plan relating to human trafficking and exploitation. An appendix analyses cross-border activity and shows that 176 potential or suspected victims of human trafficking were recorded in Ireland across both jurisdictions during 2013 and 2014. www.dojni.gov.uk/index/media-centre/ford-publishes-progress-report-on-human-trafficking.htm The DOJNI is currently consulting about their future strategy and action plan. www.dojni.gov.uk/index/public-consultations/current-consultations/consultation-on-human-trafficking.htm

Families Divided by Immigration Regulations

Since July 2012 a UK citizen sponsoring the entry of their non-EU spouse, for example from America or India, has to be earning at least £18,600. This rises to £22,400 for families with a child and by a further £2,400 for each additional child.

When this was challenged in court the judge said that it was not unlawful but was 'so onerous in effect as to be an unjustified and disproportionate interference with a genuine spousal relationship'. (The rule affects people in Northern Ireland even more than elsewhere because our average incomes are lower.) It can leave children separated from one of their parents and from siblings. www.embraceni.org/about-us/embrace-prayer-letters/embrace-prayer-group/)

The rule changes also affect reunion with adult dependent relatives such as parents or grandparents www.jcwi.org.uk/policy/adult-dependent-relatives

NI Regulations Relating to Healthcare of Migrants

There are new regulations governing the access of migrants to healthcare in Northern Ireland. Healthcare is generally accessible to everyone but only free to those who are Ordinarily Resident. Others are regarded as visitors and only those visitors with exemptions are entitled to free care. These regulations clarify for the first time who is entitled to free primary and secondary care, as well as emergency care and some other specialist services. There is also an updating of the list of countries that have reciprocal arrangements with the UK. The Law Centre NI has summarised the regulations in a policy briefing. <http://lawcentreni.org/Publications/Policy-Briefings/New-NI-Regulations-healthcare-for-migrants-SUMMARY-March-15.pdf> The most positive element of the new regulations is that anyone who has made an asylum claim, including people whose application has been refused, is now entitled to free healthcare. This lifts a heavy burden from some people who may be destitute and have complex health issues.

Immigration Health Surcharge

In addition to paying for certain services such as prescriptions, dental treatment and eye tests recent changes mean that foreign nationals from outside Europe who are here on visas, for work or study, must now pay a surcharge before they can access the NHS. The charge is £150 per year for students and £200 per person per year for other visa holders and their dependents. www.gov.uk/healthcare-immigration-application/overview

News in Brief

A Return to Net Immigration

For the first time in four years the number of people coming here exceeded those who left. The total for people leaving N Ireland between July 2013 and June 2014 fell by 10% to 22,800 and 24,400 people either migrated here or returned, an addition of 1,600 people to the population. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-33005767

Profiles for New Local Government Districts

If you want to find out more about migrant and minority-ethnic populations in your new council area, the NI Strategic Migration Partnership has published a set of community profiles in order to help councils with their integration responsibilities. www.migrationni.org/newsfeature/44/nismp-community-profiles-for-new-councils.aspx

Community Relations and Cultural Awareness Week

Events throughout N Ireland will take place on the week beginning 28 September 2015. If you are planning an event please register the details at www.community-relations.org.uk/2015/04/community-relations-cultural-awareness-week-2015/community-relations-week-2015-entry-form-version-2/

Polish Ambassador Calls for Action on Race Hate Crime

Witold Sobkow asked for a more co-ordinated response to racist attacks and more integration of the Polish community here. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-32968724

Race Harassment Cases Settled

Two Filipino workers who took cases against a restaurant chain with the support of the Equality Commission have had their cases settled. www.equalityni.org/Footer-Links/News/Individuals/Two-race-harassment-cases-against-restaurant-chain?utm_source=NewZapp&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Ezine%20May%202015

CHURCHES NEWS

'Inclusive Church' Residential Conference

On 24–25 May EMBRACE held its first residential conference, in Belfast, in conjunction with the Irish Churches' Peace Project (ICPP).

Around 50 people from at least 10 Christian denominations met at the Wellington Park Hotel, Belfast, to learn together how best to create welcoming spaces in their churches for people of all cultures and backgrounds.

Stephanie Mitchell, who runs the Belfast Friendship Club, set the scene on the Friday evening when she explored how to create safe space and begin to see through the eyes of others.

Saturday began with a theological reflection on welcome from Revd Richard Kerr of EMBRACE. This was followed by a panel and group discussion on the experiences of migrant people. During the final morning session participants heard about existing Christian initiatives and were able to ask questions about language classes, a drop-in initiative and a children's club.

In the afternoon there was a choice of workshops. Scott Boldt (EMBRACE) led a discussion on how initial welcome can lead on to the active participation of newcomers in the life of parishes and congregations. Denise Wright (EMBRACE) shared her experience of working with Roma people in N Ireland. Peter McDowell of the ICPP led the final workshop and explored some of the cultural barriers that migrants face and how churches can assist in the integration process.

The atmosphere was lively with lots of opportunity for networking and the feedback was very positive.

For other EMBRACE initiatives see page 4.

Resources

Our Voice Youth Resource

This animated DVD contains the voices of young people who have come here from other countries and describes their experiences here. The rough cut received a preliminary showing at the Spring Meeting and was finalized taking the comments received into account. Copies are available from the EMBRACE office.

Racial Justice Sunday Resources for 2015

The theme of this year's Racial Justice Sunday on 13 September is Hospitality and Sanctuary For All and has been written by Inderjit Bhogal of the Leeds Church Institute and former leader of the Corrymeela Community. It contains material for Bible study, group discussions, activities and worship and can be viewed online.

One of the best-loved New Testament stories is of encountering the risen Christ in the stranger over a meal, and how he was 'made known to them in the breaking of the bread' (Luke 24: 13-35). We meet God when we break bread with others.

This is beautiful gospel wisdom. Christian Discipleship is about being on the way, following Christ, and encountering Christ in the stranger. The followers of Jesus have no option but to welcome the stranger, and to share good hospitality.

<https://ctbi.org.uk/racial-justice-sunday-2015/>

Young Voices Focus at EMBRACE Spring Meeting



From the left: Jim Weir with Fatima, Soli, Naomi (Volunteer Youth Worker with the NI Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers), Kasia and Adam, with Abdul, right foreground

Jim Weir, a Youth Worker with the Education Authority (formerly Belfast Education & Library Board), introduced a short video about a relationship-building project involving migrant and local young people, entitled 'Welcome to My World'. He raised the issue of how people who left their home country when they were quite young might struggle with dual identity. Are they from here, from there, or both? He noted that diversity among young people locally was significant, with 1 in 20 being born outside the UK or Ireland.

Young people, many from refugee families, from Sudan, Eritrea, Poland and Palestine, introduced themselves. They answered questions from the floor, spoke about their experience of welcome and gave tips for churches/people seeking to build relationships. They said

- Talk to young people
- Take them to church/church activities
- Include them as part of the church family

When asked about their friendship groups they said that their friends were not local people, but those from other countries 'who get me'; 'they don't think the way we live at home is weird'. Joining the NI Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) youth group was seen as a significant point in building friendships and was the source of most friends:

I thought that I was the only one. Then I joined NICRAS and realised that there were other people like me.

Some saw their future in Northern Ireland, while others spoke of perhaps moving on to the USA or England.

Denise Wright thanked the young people and said that they had so much to give to us.

'No Longer Slaves, but Brothers and Sisters'

Pope Francis chose the 2015 World Day of Peace to speak about the growing scourge of human exploitation.

We know that God will ask each of us: What did you do for your brother? (cf. Gen 4:9-10). The globalization of indifference ... requires all of us to forge a new worldwide solidarity and fraternity capable of giving ... new hope ...

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20141208_messaggio-xlviigiornata-mondiale-pace-2015.html

EMBRACE NEWS

EMBRACE AGM

The EMBRACE AGM took place on 14 May 2015 at Edgehill College, Belfast and was followed by the Spring Meeting on the topic of 'Young Voices; the Future is Now', which is covered on page 3.

AGM Reports

In her Chairperson's report **Denise Wright** spoke about the negative climate raised around migration during the general election and how EMBRACE events have helped to build skills within churches around these issues, while enabling the group to hear and learn about what is happening on the ground.

There had been changes. Denise thanked Ashleigh Hunter who had organised EMBRACE On the Street for her past work. (This is now a Storehouse project.) She also paid tribute to Bill Parkinson who has stood down as Honorary Auditor after many years.

Treasurer, Scott Boldt, spoke about how EMBRACE funds were healthy in spite of the fact that there would no longer be OFMDFM support (see page 1 column 1). The Emergency Fund was in a particularly healthy state with over £9,000 (see column 2).

Committee Elections

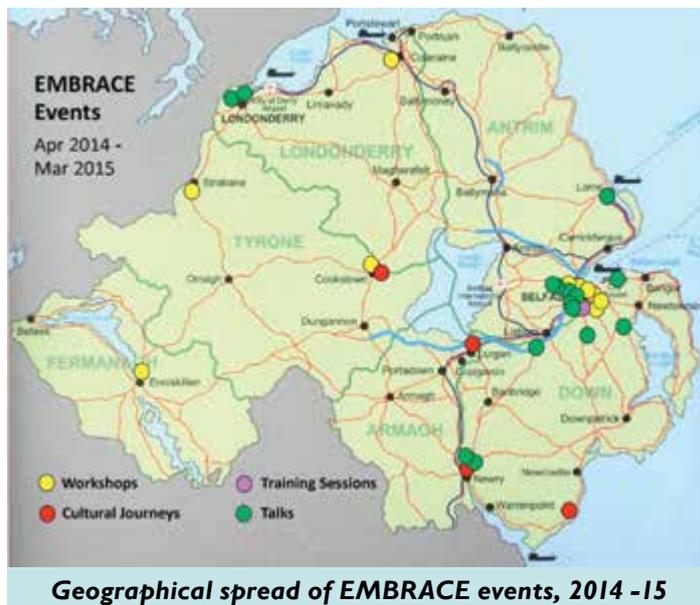
Jim Campbell facilitated these and the following were elected: **Scott Boldt, Patricia Carty, Paddy Donnelly, Irene Jovaras, Richard Kerr, John Mbayo, Margaret McNulty, Rosaleen Murray and Denise Wright**. At a later committee meeting it was voted to co-opt onto the committee, **Noel McCune**, who represents Contemporary Christianity. The following were elected as office bearers: **Denise Wright**, Chairperson; and **Scott Boldt**, Treasurer.

EMBRACE Staff and Committee Activities

The first months of 2015 have been busy. In January, Richard Kerr and Aneta Dabek, Development Worker, made a presentation about 'Being Welcoming' to students at Methodist College in Belfast and EMBRACE resources were distributed to students. Aneta organised workshops in February, on refugee issues for staff at the Glen Alva, Salvation Army Family Centre in North Belfast and a morning on welcome for people from other countries for staff and volunteers of Vineyard Compassion in Coleraine. A similar event took place in Strabane in March. The information officer, Margaret McNulty, accompanied her to these events.

EMBRACE has been working in partnership with the Irish Churches Peace Project, the Rural Community Network, Cookstown Council and Cookstown and Western Shores Area Network (CWSAN) and in February and March they ran a further series of 'Cultural Journey in Cookstown' events to enable local and new residents to meet and begin to understand each other.

There were a number of engagements with church groups. In January Richard Kerr spoke at a meeting of Larne Inter-church Prayer Group and shared information about EMBRACE and the Short Term Holding Centre in Larne for immigration detainees. In February he gave a talk to the Carryduff Presbyterian Church Men's Fellowship, and shared information about welcome and new communities. Also in February, Scott Boldt gave a talk about welcome at Holywood Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church.



Geographical spread of EMBRACE events, 2014 -15

In March, the Chairperson, Denise Wright and the Information Officer met with the Northern Ireland Community Relations Working Group of the Church of Ireland to share information about issues relating to migration and integration. Denise Wright also assisted at training sessions for Street Pastors from Belfast, Newtownabbey, Coleraine and North Down and Ards. Scott Boldt spoke to Irish School of Ecumenics students in Dublin about 'Encountering the Other', at the end of April. On 24 May St Paul's Church, Falls Road, Belfast, held an 'Inclusive Church' conference and Aneta and committee member, Irene Jovaras took part in a panel session, sharing their personal experiences.

Staff and committee all appreciated a morning of reflection at Dromantine Retreat and Conference Centre in March and the input of Fr Des Corrigan.

Emergency Fund

At the AGM there was a question from the floor about the fact that the Emergency Fund had expended only £1,663 in the previous financial year. Scott Boldt explained that the fund was set up with strict criteria, to assist people who have no access to statutory or other charitable funds and are in crisis situations. During the year, the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) had released £55,000 funding for migrant people, which had deflected some requests. This money had to be expended by the end of March 2015 so it is expected that the EMBRACE fund will be seen to have had greater use in the early part of this year and until a new OFMDFM fund is put in place. Since the end of the last financial year grants have included money for destitute people to fly home, donations towards food and short-term accommodation for people who are in temporary hardship, the financing of documentation to assist asylum application and support for funeral costs. Bus passes have been purchased for people seeking asylum who need to attend Home Office and hospital appointments but are unable to walk due to health problems.

Thinking of Joining Us or Making a Donation?

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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