

'A Stitch in Time': Responding to Racism

EMBRACE is grateful to Anna Wherrett (pictured below) who suggested working on a project with the group as part of her MA Design Communication degree at the University of Ulster, Magee. She has given freely of her time, energy and creativity and this has resulted in the development of two series of postcards for use in discussion groups.



Anna Wherrett with the 'Stitch in Time' Cards

The first series to be completed is 'Stitch in Time', a series of four cards which chart how a happy home can be transformed negatively by outside threats and how racism can include a process of escalation. The notes for leaders suggest how the cards can be used to stimulate discussion, and it is hoped that they will help people to think through how to respond to racist language and actions in practical ways. The cards can be used in conjunction with the information sheet 'How Should We Respond to Racism?' <http://www.embraceni.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Responding-to-racism-Final-I.pdf>

A second series has still to be completed and is entitled 'Fish out of Water'. It uses imagery to stimulate discussion about how it feels to move somewhere different and try to make a new life.

***Rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue
of the wise brings healing***
Proverbs 12:18 NRSV

Ten Years On

EMBRACE was founded officially in the autumn of 2003 but its roots extend back to at least a couple of years before that. A number of people in religious orders, including Mercy and Dominican sisters, had been exploring how the Christian community could provide a welcome for people who come here as refugees. They worked together to become more informed about the issues and began to gather others around them. On 3 December 2002 the original group invited people from a range of denominations to join them for a meal in the Curragh Community on the Springfield Road peace line in Belfast. At a follow on meeting of this informal gathering Sr Noreen Christian of the Curragh Community explained that it had always been the intention that the group should be inter-denominational and so it has continued to this day.

(In 2002 there were few workers coming here from other countries so there was a focus on refugees. This changed as economic expansion accompanied the peace process and EMBRACE responded accordingly in trying to build welcoming attitudes towards all migrant people.)

Some early members of the group were already familiar with the experiences of people seeking sanctuary in Northern Ireland because they volunteered in a Red Cross orientation scheme for new asylum applicants. What those early members also had in common was the fact that they had received an unconditional welcome when they worked in some of the poorest countries in the world and were shocked to return here and find that people who had been forced to flee from their home countries were being met with indifference and suspicion.

An ad hoc steering group was set up at a meeting in January 2003 in St Clement's Retreat Centre on the Antrim Road and two priorities were identified:

- An educational programme geared to church people, delivered through the churches and laity
- Disseminating information

As the 10-year anniversary approaches EMBRACE would love to hear from any of the founders of the group who could comment on their experience of the early days and on how they feel that the work has developed.

Contact us:

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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

Bryson One-Stop-Service for Asylum Seekers

The One-Stop-Service has moved from Lower Crescent to Bryson House, 28 Bedford Street, Belfast, BT2 7FE. The telephone numbers have not changed: **Tel: (028) 9043 9226** and **Tel: (028) 9024 2025** – emergency out-of hours number for asylum claimants in need of assistance. Government cuts mean that Bryson is still sub-contracted to advise people who are seeking asylum but the overall hours have been greatly reduced so there is now only be one advisor on duty at any one time. **Bryson Intercultural** (formerly the **Multi-Cultural Resource Centre**) has also moved to Bryson House.

Refugee and Asylum Forum (RAF)

The informal RAF group, which includes NGOs and statutory bodies, has been networking in order to help improve the co-ordination of support for members of the refugee community, especially those who have recently been given leave to remain here. As Government no longer has a refugee integration service, it is important that everyone is aware how delays in applying for benefits, for example, may leave people severely disadvantaged.

RAF has a sub-group that is discussing how the ideas of the **City of Sanctuary** movement might develop from the desire of local people to make this a place of safety for all. The national co-ordinator for City of Sanctuary, **Tiffany Allen**, visited Ireland in October and explained to groups in Belfast, Coleraine, Derry~Londonderry and Dublin how she developed her own passion for helping to build communities that are safe for everyone. She illustrated her Dublin talk with a short film on the work of Bristol City of Sanctuary, which you can view at www.cityofsanctuary.org/Bristol She is enthusiastic about how **Schools of Sanctuary** are developing, for example, in Leeds where she lives. www.cityofsanctuary.org/leeds/schools (See page 3 for how churches can use ideas of sanctuary in worship.)

Belfast Migrant Centre Expands Advice Service

The **Belfast Migrant Centre**, 2nd Floor, Ascot House, 24-31 Shaftesbury Square, Belfast, BT2 7DB, offers an immigration advice service by appointment: **Tel: (028) 9043 8962** E-mail: info@belfastmigrantcentre.org. There are drop-in advice clinics in Belfast on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5.30pm to 7.45pm, for issues not related to immigration. They also now run clinics outside Belfast. Contact: **Max Petruskin 077 307 47 860**, **North West Regional Office**, The Old Church, Clarendon Street, L/Derry BT48 7ES or **Liz Conor-Kerr 075 455 022 85**, **Mid-Ulster and Down Regional Office**, Ozanam Centre, 14–16 William Street, Lurgan BT66 6JA.

Third Edition of Migrant Rights Guides

The most up-to-date version of *Your Rights in Northern Ireland: A Guide for Migrant Workers* is now available in English, Brazilian Portuguese, Bulgarian, Chinese, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian, Russian and Slovak. Available from the Law Centre NI or to download from www.lawcentreni.org/publications/migrant-workers.html

Celebrating Migrants Day: Our Day 2012

The Migrants Rights Network is encouraging everyone to organise or attend an event to celebrate **International Migrants Day** on 18 December. See www.our-day.org/events

Some Developments in Human Trafficking Locally

Public awareness about trafficking has been building and the response in the political and administrative arena is also developing rapidly.

In June the NI Assembly Research and Information Service produced a briefing for politicians, *Human Trafficking in Northern Ireland*. www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/RaISe/Publications/2012/ofmdfm/10012.pdf

In September the **Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA)** reported on the UK and made some specific comments about N Ireland. They noted confusion around First Responders and the process of referral, the few prosecutions, lack of compensation awards and absence of reliable data. They were also anxious that informal co-operative arrangements on policy and its implementation should be formalized.

On 9 October the Department of Justice NI (DOJ) and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety published guidance on the care of adult and child victims of Human Trafficking. See www.dojni.gov.uk/index/media-centre/news-archive/october-2012/guidance-on-the-support-of-adult-victims-of-human-trafficking-published.htm

On 18 October Amnesty (who advise government on the issue locally) welcomed the fact that the DOJ is to establish a collaborative group to tackle human trafficking.

Meanwhile, consultation has closed on Lord Morrow's Private Members Bill on human trafficking. Some proposals have been welcomed widely, especially on the provision of protection and services for victims. Clause 4, however, which proposes making payment for sexual services illegal, has blurred the issue of prostitution and trafficking and allowed some commentators to talk about a right-wing Christian conspiracy and scaremongering about the extent of trafficking here. See for example this *Belfast Telegraph* article: www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/opinion/news-analysis/the-prostitution-proposal-needs-kicked-to-the-kerb16224308.html It would be possible for some of Lord Morrow's proposals to be included in the DOJ's own planned legislation to bring us into line with the EU Directive on Human Trafficking. See www.northernireland.gov.uk/news-doj-070212-legislation-on-human_?WT.mc_id=rss-news

News in Brief

Hands Off My Friend (HOMF) Hate Crime Initiative: This Derry City Council HOMF initiative to encourage reporting of hate crime and incidents and the supporting of victims has now been extended to Ballymena, Ballymoney, Coleraine, Larne and Moyle. See www.foylemf.org/handsoffmyfriend/

Revision of Family Immigration Rules UK: There have been some significant changes in migration rules including the requirement for a new income threshold of £18,600 for anyone wanting to sponsor a non-EU partner to enter and settle in the UK. For all the changes see www.migrantsrights.org.uk/files/MRN_Family_migration-briefing-June_2012_0.pdf

Rethinking Integration: The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) has published a report, *Rethinking Integration*, which suggests that the focus should be on everyday life experiences rather than grandiose ideas of citizenship or national identity. See www.ippr.org/publication/55/9761/rethinking-integration

CHURCHES NEWS

'Have I Overstayed My Welcome?' Workshops

On 21 August an EMBRACE workshops event took place in Edgehill College, Belfast. The topics differed from earlier workshops and included 'Lost in translation – exploring cultural differences' with Rev. Canon Jerome Munyangaju; 'How to react to racist incidents?' with Scott Boldt; and 'I am Roma' – Learning about the Roma community in Belfast' with Sorina Toma and Nicola Nicolae. In his opening message Rev. Canon Tom Keightley said that 'When we embrace others we embrace change and new possibilities arise.' Those who attended were asked which topic they found most helpful and these are some of the responses.

- Lost in translation. An authentic view from an immigrant.
- Roma community. Didn't know they were not entitled to benefits.
- How to react to racist incidents. Opened up conversation about actions to take going forward.

EMBRACE is planning to facilitate workshop events in Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey in the near future.



Sorina Toma (second left) who spoke about her work with the Roma Community at the Edgehill Workshops

Irish Episcopal Council for Emigrants (IECE) Emigrant Information Pack 2012

Between April 2010 and April 2011 around 76,400 people emigrated from the Republic of Ireland, just over half of whom were Irish Nationals. The IECE has published an information pack for people going abroad. www.usairish.org/iece.html While most of the advice is for recent emigrants the IECE also highlights the importance of Supporting Irish Abroad campaigns and the existence of vulnerable groups including 'the elderly Irish emigrant community, the Irish Traveller community in the UK, our undocumented in the United States and Irish prisoners overseas'. The parish resource pack can also be accessed at www.catholicbishops.ie/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Parish-Pack1.pdf and the prayer resources can be downloaded separately www.catholicbishops.ie/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Emigrant-Prayers.pdf

Loving God, we pray for those whom we love,
But who are absent from us.
Keep them safe from all harm, evil, and danger.
Bless them with peace, laughter, wisdom, love and joy.
Grant that we may be reunited in the fullness of love;
In Christ's name we pray.
Amen.

(Prayers of our Hearts, Vienna Cobb Anderson)

Resources

Thinking of Planning a Sanctuary Sunday?

If you are considering how your worship might reflect on creating a culture of welcome and hospitality for refugees and people who are seeking asylum, see Leeds City of Sanctuary Sunday Resources, April 2012. www.cityofsanctuary.org/files/sanctuary_sunday_resource_pack.pdf

Chorus of 'Stranger's Welcome'

Watch, the door softly opens
A stranger is coming
In his hands there is nothing
But the marks of his pain
Let your heart stretch with welcome
Your table extended
In the meeting of strangers
The Lord comes again.

Written by Brian and Tiffy Allen in the Celtic tradition.

EMBRACE Leaflets for Churches

There are now four leaflets which can be downloaded from the EMBRACE website by church people who would like to have information on important topics in a compact form. The leaflets also indicate how people can find out more and take further action. These are the topics:

- Opening our Eyes to the Reality of Human Trafficking
- Migration and Us
- Refugee Issues
- Responding to Racism

www.embraceni.org/category/about-us/embrace-resources/

Please let us know what you think of these leaflets and whether there are other topics that you would like to see addressed in a similar way.

Africa Day Service May 2012

During this year the Place of Victory for All Nations Church, which meets in the Europa Hotel conference centre, held several special events, including a service celebrating the 50th anniversary of Jamaican independence and their annual cultural and religious celebration, Expo-Nations, which showcases some of the many different national traditions now present here. This is a description of their service for Africa Day:

Within the span of fifteen minutes, the auditorium was packed to the brim with people from China, Poland, France, Slovakia, Northern and Southern Ireland, the Caribbean islands of Jamaica and Barbados, India, and of course right from the Northern, Southern, Eastern, Western and Central regions of Africa. The turnout was awesome! The service was an enactment of the beautiful scripture in Isaiah 2:2 that we at PVN [Place of Victory for All Nations Church] have come to love so much:

'And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.'

Part of an article by Patrick Oz in Ecclesia June 2012 Vol. 6 (The monthly newsletter of the Place of Victory for All Nations Church, Europa Hotel, Belfast) www.placeofvictoryni.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/June-Newsletter.pdf

EMBRACE NEWS

EMBRACE Year of Languages?

Many of EMBRACE's new resources this year have focused on language. These have included the Welcome poster and 'Word of Welcome' booklet with phrases in 20 languages. (The NI Housing Executive was so impressed with this resource that they are printing an edition of the booklet for their staff and for use by EMBRACE.) Other projects have included 'business cards' with greetings in different languages. These have also impressed others and have been developed for hospital chaplains and the 'I am Roma' project. A card was also printed with tips on developing conversations with people whose English is not fluent.

Aneta Dabek, Development Worker

Aneta continues to network widely and undertake speaking engagements. For example, she talked about responding to racism at the 13th Young Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research (Young SIETAR) Congress in Belfast in September and in October spoke to an inter-church group in Castlewellan and the Soroptimists in Belfast. She has organised Migration Awareness Training in a number of venues recently, including Armagh, Belfast, Cookstown and Newtownabbey, assisted by Scott Boldt, Ashleigh Hunter, Jenna Liechty Martin and Peter Martin.

Committee Activities

EMBRACE committee members continue to network widely in groups such as Churches Asylum Network, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, the City of Sanctuary subgroup of the Refugee and Asylum Forum, the Belfast Migrant Forum, Immigration Sub Group of the Racial Equality Forum, BME & Faith Network, Refugee Action Group and the Equality and Diversity Committee at Hydebank Prison. Scott Boldt has addressed newcomers from other countries in the Lisburn Road Belfast, Presbyterian drop-in centre about our local politics and culture and spoke to the Belfast Central Mission about injustice and exclusion. Chairperson, Denise Wright led a seminar at the New Horizons conference in Coleraine in August on the topic of 'Who is my Neighbour?'

EMBRACE On the Street

This project responds to requests from organisations supporting people who are destitute or homeless. During 2012 the following churches made contributions: Fitzroy Presbyterian, Crescent Church, Lowe Memorial Presbyterian (Finaghy), St Jude's Parish, Cooke Presbyterian, Good Shepherd, Ballynafeigh Methodist, Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian, Portaferry & Glastry Methodist, Templepatrick Presbyterian, Maze Presbyterian, and Carnlough Methodist Inter-Church Fellowship. There were several individual donations as well. EMBRACE would like to express thanks to everyone who has made a contribution this year. The items are greatly appreciated and have been put to good use, reaching directly those who need them most. The EMBRACE On the Street Co-ordinator Ashleigh Hunter has spoken of the real need for donations at the moment:

I would like to appeal to churches for donations now that the winter is upon us. There is a very high demand at the moment with weather conditions being particularly severe for those who are destitute or sleeping rough. Items like jumpers, coats, hats, gloves, scarves and sleeping bags are a priority.

There is also an extremely high turnover of the basic essentials like non-perishable foodstuffs, toiletries, underwear and towels. I have been finding that those providing drop-in and outreach services come immediately to collect donations, to be used as soon as that day or night.

If you would like to know more about the project and how to make a contribution, please contact Ashleigh by email ahunter@edgehillcollege.org or call **(028) 9068 6933**.

Funding

There was no call for applications to the OFMDFM Minority Ethnic Development Fund in 2012 because the scheme was being evaluated. Organisations with existing funding, including EMBRACE, have had this extended until the end of March 2013 when the fund will be open for new applications.

Emergency Fund

Since April EMBRACE has responded to 29 requests for support, giving £3026.90 via the following groups: Bryson Intercultural, NI Council for Ethnic Minorities, Educational Welfare, Belfast Education and Library Board, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, Ballymena Inter-Ethnic Forum and NI Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS). The money assisted individuals and families and covered the cost of travel, flights, accommodation, food, school uniforms, accessing urgent documents, fuel and heating costs. In all cases there was no recourse to public funds. Many asylum applicants are being given emergency accommodation without heat, and EMBRACE is working with NICRAS to ensure that short-term heating costs can be covered. As with the On the Street Project, there are especially heavy demands on the Emergency Fund during the winter months.

An OFMDFM fund has provided some emergency support for people from other countries, but it does not cover travel. For people who have no realistic hope of getting work or housing, or those who need medication for chronic conditions and have no entitlement to free prescriptions or healthcare, returning home is the best option and EMBRACE is the only group who can assist this in a timely way.

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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