

DIVERSITY SLIGO ANNUAL REPORT 2019



Globe House

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Chairperson's Address

At a time when other communities protest over the planned introduction of a direct provision centre for asylum seekers in their midst, we recognise that people are displaced for many reasons: war and conflict, climate change, economic necessity. The world is changing, people are moving and are attracted to better lifestyles in Europe. Sligo has the largest proportion of asylum seekers per head of population. Diversity Sligo welcomes asylum seekers and tries to respond to their needs.

In the last year, independent living was introduced in Globe House. There is now a shop on site and a large kitchen where people can cook for themselves and their families.

About 70 residents are now working and contributing to the local economy. This has also contributed to people's wellbeing. The atmosphere in the centre is much happier, more relaxed and people enjoy cooking and eating their own food and going out to work.

Further progress needs to take place and we look forward to more changes on the recommendations of the MacMahon report.

Diversity Sligo expanded this year and we recruited two more staff members, an Activities Organiser and an Administrator. They have already made a significant contribution.

The number of our volunteers increased to 42. They deliver an invaluable service and enjoy the relationships that they have developed with residents.

We acknowledge with thanks the financial supports that we have received from all our funders over the years. We would not be able to operate without you.

Thank you to all the volunteers, staff and committee members for all their efforts.

Thank you to all the asylum seekers, men, women and children and the refugees who have let us be part of their lives.

Josette Newman

14 November 2019

Introduction and Context:

There are approximately 199 people living in Globe House, the direct provision centre for asylum seekers in Sligo. Figures vary slightly and at the time of writing, there are 29 children (25 in school and 4 pre-schoolers, 2 under 1 year, 34 family units, 46 single women and 90 single men. Residents come from 30 different countries and 12 religions are represented. 70 residents are working.

There are 29 residents with papers. In Ireland, there are 982 people with papers still in direct provision. There are 1,302 asylum seekers in emergency accommodation outside direct provision.

- Sligo has the highest proportion of asylum seekers and refugees in Ireland – the average in each county is **0.13%** and in Sligo it's **0.40%**
- Sligo accounts for **1.38%** of the national population, whereas **4.06%** of all asylum seekers and refugees in Ireland live in Sligo.

Diversity Sligo Activities

We continue to support adult and children's activities. Thanks to our volunteers and to a grant from Grow It Yourself, the poly tunnel is now available to 35 residents who can grow their own herbs and food. Thanks to a substantial grant from the Community Integration Fund from the Department of Justice and Equality, we are now able to give out two vouchers per week for the gym or the swimming pool. Thanks to Churches Together and St Anne's Parish, we organised a trip to Eagles Flying. Thanks to the ETB, we ran a sewing course and thanks to one of our volunteers, we ran Creative Story Telling workshops.

Support to children included educational grants thanks to a donation by Bishop of Elphin Kevin Doran, after-school activities of all kinds with volunteers transporting the children, Tread Softly festival hosted teenagers for art activities during the Summer for free, Bridgestock made a donation towards the Summer Camps and we organised an art afternoon over Hallow'een.

We helped organise a talk on Women's Sexual Health in conjunction with Akidwa, the African Women's Network and Aids West.

This year, some more of the MacMahon report recommendations were implemented in Globe House: Home cooking was introduced, whereby people can now cook for themselves. A large kitchen is now available, with ten cooking stations and people can prepare meals. Qualified staff are on standby for advice and guidance and to insure the smooth running of the facility. An on-site shop has been opened. In addition to their weekly asylum seekers' allowance, residents are given a card with credits to buy food and other items. The atmosphere in the accommodation centre has changed for the better. People are more relaxed, more talkative, they seem to enjoy eating together the meals that they have prepared themselves and they seem to be under less pressure. They have received an increase in board and lodging, the allowance is now at € 29.80 per child and € 38.80 per adult per week.

Since last year, people who have been in the asylum system for nine months and have not yet received a decision on their case are allowed to work, for an employer or for themselves. It is estimated that over 70 residents now have part-time or full-time jobs. Some residents work locally, whereas some travel for work. Their qualifications and experience vary greatly and many are ready

for work. Diversity Sligo has this year developed working relationships with staff from other organisations involved in job seeking, such as Mary Bruen of the Department of Employment and Social Protection, staff at the ETB who work on CVs and interview skills, staff at the Sligo LEADER Partnership who run special workshops and programmes and with Anne Brennan in her capacity as Youth Information Officer and Career Guidance Counsellor in Youth Work Ireland Connaught. Some residents have improved their employability, sat interviews and found employment. The right to work is restricted to a certain category of asylum seekers and many of those who are not in this category deplore the fact that they cannot work. They are losing skills, positive habits and motivation.

There are many challenges in an asylum seeker's life: they have fled situations of conflict in the past, have left their family and community behind, they are often traumatised, their present consists of a very restricted lifestyle and they look at their future with trepidation. They face the daily challenge of checking their post. They do not know from one day to the next if they will receive news that they are allowed to live in Ireland or if they will be asked to return to a country where they do not want to live, most of the time because of very negative living conditions there. Some face dangers. For many who are not allowed to work or who are not engaged in education or in voluntary work. There is a high incidence of mental health issues.

Our response to this need for support was to create a project called the Friendship Benches. Introduced by Gilla Cornelius, long-time supporter of Diversity Sligo and based on an idea from Dr Dixon Chibanda, the Friendship Benches originated in Zimbabwe. Grandmothers, who hold a place of respect and support there, were trained as listeners and asked to staff benches around Harare. People approached them with their troubles and found a listening ear. Similar projects exist in New York, Canada, London, the Netherlands. We plan to introduce it to Sligo in January 2020, although we will shelter from the wind and rain.

We now have three members of staff: Anne Brennan, the Transition Support Worker, who helps people in their transition from direct provision into the community. She has been helping for over a year with

- Filling housing applications
- Applying for HAP
- Applying for Social Welfare
- Applying for Education
- Applying for a Job
- Applying for Family Reunification
- Looking for accommodation

Anne liaises regularly with County Councils, the Department of Justice, St Vincent de Paul, MSL ETB, MABS, Sligo Citizens Information Services, Focus Ireland, Tusla, the St Stephen's Green Trust, the Home Youth Liaison Service, the HSE, Department of Social Protection, Credit Union, Sligo Family Resource Centre, schools, UNHCR, Garda Immigration Officer, Immigrant Council, estate agents and landlords.

A new development was introduced this year by the Reception and Integration Agency in order to face the increasing numbers of people with their papers unable to move out of direct provision. There are now about 980 people with papers still living in direct provision. In addition, there are 1,300 people in emergency accommodation. The new development consists in asking the Peter McVeery Trust and the DePaul Trust to work with residents in looking for accommodation, applying

for Social Housing and Job Seeker's Allowance. In Sligo and Mayo, there is now a Development Worker in this post. Tusla estimate that there is a duplication of services with the service that

We had very fruitful talks with Sligo IT who have committed to take on asylum seeker students on courses for free and are considering letting other asylum seekers access the library and computers, Diversity Sligo and is now terminating its funding for this project. Other Sligo agencies working with asylum seekers deplore the termination of Anne's employment as they had developed excellent working relationships with her.

Since January 2019, we have been employing Mohammad Al Salihi as Activities Organiser under the TUS programme run by the Sligo LEADER Partnership. Mohammad has worked with other organisations providing activities for adults and adults as parents and has been very successful at encouraging them to attend ETB courses. 40 are registered. The programme will end on 31 December.

In June, in collaboration with Youth Work Ireland Connaught, we recruited Celia Drummond as Administrator on a Community Employment Scheme. She has been liaising with new volunteers and coordinating activities for the children of Globe House.

as well as advising them on how to have their home qualifications recognised. We welcome this new development for Sligo.

We were instrumental in setting up and running a Sligo Asylum Seekers Network comprising of Bridgestock Care, the DSP (Employer Liaison Service), the HSE (Social Inclusion), Lifestart, MSLETB (Career Guidance), Sligo County Council (Place Finder), the Sligo LEADER Partnership and ourselves.

We are happy to report that a national direct provision network was established by the St Stephen's Green Trust and we are very much looking forward to working with them.

There are many refugees living in the Sligo community but no figures are available for convention refugees who have gone through the asylum system and others in the categories of persons with leave to remain on humanitarian grounds, on subsidiary protection or residency for being the parent of an Irish child. We continue to support refugees and others with permission to live in Ireland.

How we work

Our mission statement: Diversity Sligo supports asylum seekers and refugees towards their integration into Irish society.

Our aims and objectives are:

- To provide person support and or group base support as appropriate
- To respond to needs identified by Asylum Seekers and Refugees
- To identify possible solutions to meet the presenting needs of Asylum Seekers and Refugees
- To liaise with other organisations and agencies as needed
- To provide information, advice and support on an ongoing basis
- To advocate on behalf of Asylum Seekers and Refugees
- To support social connection and participation of Asylum Seekers and Refugees
- To support positive physical and mental health and well-being.
- To promote equality and respect for Asylum Seekers and Refugees.
- To be a voice for change at a local and national level

Internal Statements

To challenge and address the Direct Provision System with the view to improving it at the national level. Direct Provision is a short term solution and as an entity needs modification.

Funding

Funding for our activities comes from donations and grants. This year we received grants and donations from

The St Stephen's Green Trust	Transition Support Programme and Children's Activities
Tusla	Transition Support Programme
Bishop Doran	Children's Educational Needs
GIY Ireland	Poly Tunnel maintenance
Bridgestock	Summer Camps for Children
Sisters of Mercy	General expenses and comfort fund
MSLETB Mayo Creds	Gym and Swim tickets, bicycle maintenance and Summer Camps Sewing classes Friendship Benches Volunteer Listening Course
Sligo Sports and Recreation Partnership	Adult and children's activities
Sligo Social Services	Christmas Party
Churches Together Week	Trip to Eagles Flying
St. Anne's Parish	Trip to Eagles Flying
Swim Ireland	Donation of swim gear
St. Vincent De Paul	Use of premises for training

We are very grateful to all our funders without whom we could not operate.



Interagency work:

Our partners include: Bridgestock Care, the Department of Social Protection (Employer Liaison), the Home School Liaison Service, HSE (Social Inclusion), the Sligo LEADER Partnership, Lifestart, Resource House Project, Sligo Social Services, the Sligo Sports and Recreation Partnership, St Vincent de Paul, MSL ETB, Sligo Volunteer Centre, Swim Ireland, Tusla, the St Stephen's Green Trust, Sligo County Council (Housing Section and Place Finder), the Avalon Centre, the Bishop of Elphin, the Sisters of Mercy Western Province, the Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Counselling Centre for Sligo Leitrim and West Cavan, SPIRASI the Centre for the Victims of Torture, Dublin and Galway Law Centres, Immigrant Council of Ireland, the Migrant Rights Centre, the HSE Mental Health Social Workers and other organisations concerned with the welfare and well-being of asylum seekers and refugees.

What we do:

- We support asylum seekers living in Globe House, the direct provision accommodation centre
- We support people in transition between Globe House and the community when they get their papers
- We support refugees living in the community

Who we are:

Directors:

The Board of Management is composed of four directors, JoAnne Neary, Josette Newman, Nike Ogun and Peter O'Rourke. Our Company Secretary is Ramona Dolan.

Committee:

The committee is composed of the directors above and Sr Kathleen Conneally, Nneka Cummings, Michael Fox, Jonathan May and James Sahr Aruna. Some of the committee members are representatives of organisations, others are volunteers, one is an asylum seeker living in Globe House and one is a refugee living in the community.

The committee has two sub-committees:

- The Employment sub-committee
- The Finance sub-committee

Volunteers:

We have 42 volunteers

- 12 Befrienders
- 4 English and homework tutors for children
- 4 English tutors for adults
- 4 Gardening and befriending volunteers
- 1 Website designer
- 1 Art teacher
- 1 Music teacher
- 3 volunteer listeners for the Friendship benches
- 1 interpreter
- 1 facilitator for the Creative Storytelling workshops
- 3 residents helping out in various tasks
- 7 committee members including the chairperson, secretary and treasurer. They take on specific additional roles:
 - Funding co-ordination



- Information provision and advocacy
- Organisation of activities for adults and children
- Finance co-ordination for educational purposes for children
- Poly tunnel supervision
- Volunteers co-ordination

There is a constant need for Befrienders and English tutors for adults on a one to one basis. These roles are very beneficial to residents and real friendships are formed. Applications are made through the Sligo Volunteer Centre.

Staff:

Transition Support Worker

Anne Brennan has been working for over a year on a part-time basis. She helps people who have got their papers and who are moving from Globe House into the community. She can help with

- Filling housing applications
- Applying for HAP
- Applying for Social Welfare
- Applying for Education
- Applying for a Job
- Applying for Family Reunification
- Looking for accommodation

Anne liaises regularly with County Councils, the Department of Justice, St Vincent de Paul, MSL ETB, MABS, Sligo Citizens Information Services, Focus Ireland, Tusla, the St Stephen's Green Trust, the Home Youth Liaison Service, the HSE, Department of Social Protection, Credit Union, Sligo Family Resource Centre, schools, UNHCR, Garda Immigration Officer, Immigrant Council and estate agencies.

Regretfully, this position will not be renewed in 2020 as DePaul have been commissioned to do similar work by the Reception and Integration Agency.

Summary of Activities

Information, Advice and Advocacy:

Clinics in Globe House take place twice a week. They are held in Globe House dining hall or in the conference room. Queries include:

- Requests for transfers
- Requests for education
- Information about engagement in voluntary work
- Requests for activities
- Queries regarding the International Protection procedures
- Requests to write letters to solicitors
- Queries on employment and self-employment
- Personal queries

20 residents per week on average avail of this service.

Meetings take place in the community in response to demand. Queries include:

- Applications for Travel Documents
- Applications for citizenship
- Applications for Family Reunification
- Visa applications

20 refugees per year on average avail of this service.



Activities for adults:

- Physical activities include the very popular Gym and Swim opportunities in the Sligo Sports Complex, Mindfulness, Football and Badminton membership. We have obtained substantial grants from the Sports and Recreation Partnership and the Community Integration Fund (Dept of Justice) and suggestions from residents are welcome.
- We have a poly tunnel staffed by volunteers. It has expanded over the years. 35 residents now have a plot where they can grow their own herbs and vegetables. Residents pick the crops and volunteers cook with the residents
- Information is available from the Activities Organiser on activities in the community and residents are encouraged to take part.
- Well-being activities are very beneficial and we apply regularly for funding to run workshops

Activities for children

- We run a book library for children
- We provide out of school and out of centre activities for children. These include football, Gaelic football, swimming and swimming lessons, martial arts, athletics and dancing. We consult with parents and children and respond to requests
- We provide Christmas presents at the Christmas party
- We try to provide second-hand bicycles for all the children



Activities for families

- We worked with Lifestart to run a Parent and Toddler group in Globe House.

Educational Supports for Children

- We provide contributions to book rental, the purchase of educational supplies and exam fees thanks to donations from the Bishop of Elphin
- This year we provided school packs thanks to Sligo Social Services and a grant from FEAD.

Future Developments:

Thanks to funding for physical activities, we hope to be able to respond to requests from residents in many different fields for their physical and mental wellbeing.

Many residents are keen to undertake studies to supplement their home qualifications or to prepare for a new career. The possibilities of adults availing of education will continue to be extended in MSLETB and in Sligo IT thanks to the University of Sanctuary and grants from the Irish Refugee Council and St Vincent de Paul.

We have started training Volunteer Listeners to sit on the Friendship Benches, further training is needed and we also plan to train a new group of volunteers, pending funding.

We plan to continue to make applications for funding, as opportunities arise.

Some work remains to be done on Governance in order to fully comply by 2020.

We trust that our involvement with other organisations locally will continue to be fruitful and that the new Direct Provision Network will influence practice and policy at national level, for the benefit of asylum seekers.