

Introduction

After a successful and well attended Mind the Gap Conference on the question of “***Health, Poverty and Social Exclusion in the Border Area***,” held on 7th March 2006, it was agreed that a report back meeting would be held in June.

The aim of the meeting was to report back the findings of the previous conference, discuss the issues of most concern and to work out possible areas for campaigns in the Central Border Region. This meeting would also be used to canvass the level of interest in setting up a Central Border Region Anti-Poverty Group.

The meeting was held in Teach Na Duine Family Resource Centre and was well attended with 47 participants (attached), including members from local communities.

There were a number of residents from St Patrick’s Direct Provision Centre, Community Workers from Monaghan and surrounding areas and a presence from Northern Ireland in the form of community and voluntary sector workers from Fermanagh, the Armagh Travellers Association and STEP (South Tyrone Empowerment Project) in Dungannon.

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1. Summary report on Introductory seminar

Seamas Devine, Mind the Gap Development Officer working in the Southern Border Areas reported from the previous meeting. The following is a summary of his presentation.

The previous meeting concentrated on the question of health and the significant differences between access to health provisions amongst different sections of the population.

A study conducted by CAWT (Cooperation and Working Together) had shown that the border region despite being 25% of the total land area of the island of Ireland, with 21% of the total population, the border area had been marginalised from political and economic decision making.

CAWT is a cross border body, formed in 1992 when the North Eastern and North Western Health Boards in the Republic of Ireland (known as the Health Service Executive as of 1 Jan 2005) and the Southern and Western Health and Social Services Boards in Northern Ireland agreed to cooperate in improving the health and social well being of their resident populations.

In terms of health, over the previous decades, a gap had developed between those living in border areas and those living in centres closer to the economic and decision making areas.

According to the CAWT study of people living in border areas, (the study conducted by CAWT examined the entire border area) the study found that they were 7% more likely to suffer Ischaemic heart disease, 6% more likely to suffer cerebrovascular disease, 16% more likely to be injured in accidents and 33% more likely to be injured in traffic accidents. (Interestingly the report also showed that people in these regions were less likely to suffer from larynx or trachea ailments.)

On top of these difficulties it also emerged that people in border regions had further difficulties accessing healthcare and had poorer transport systems including those to and from hospitals or accidents.

CAWT was working on a series of proposals to alleviate the situation with regards health inequalities including diabetes support mechanisms, disabled carers training, mental health awareness training and numerous other courses and campaigns.

Seamas then outlined the information presented at the workshops held at the previous seminar.

The issues canvassed in the workshops were women's health, men's health, disability needs and the health needs of migrant workers.

The key issues presented at those workshops were as follows.

Regarding women's health, issues identified were;

- the need for access to reliable and regular transport services,
- the need to recognise mental health including dementia, post natal depression,
- the need for support for women isolated in rural regions,
- the need for more screening for breast cancer,
- the need for support and advice for women suffering domestic abuse, and
- the need to deal with poverty and lack of access to affordable medicine.

In issues relating to men's health it was suggested that;

- education for men with regards to their health needs was lacking,
- bureaucracy was often getting in the way of access to information,
- suicide amongst young men particularly in Northern Ireland was an issue which required more substantial attention,
- education to reduce the impact of social conditioning in terms of a macho image was required.

In the workshop regarding the health needs of people with disabilities, the issues identified were;

- more work needed to be done to help those visually impaired,
- access both on an economic and a physical level was considered,
- lack of support for people with a disability was of some consequence,
- poverty and the lack of finances was a big factor in the inequality suffered by people with disabilities.

In the workshop regarding the health needs of migrant workers, these were highlighted as follows;

- this identified need was not considered a priority issue for government bodies, despite the fact that often migrants had specific health requirements,
- education was required to help the language barriers many migrant workers experience.

Seamas concluded his report by proposing that if there was to be a Mind the Gap Anti Poverty Group set up in the Central Border Region it would be possible to look at some of these issues as campaigning issues which the group could consider being involved with.



Attendees at Monaghan call back meeting

2. Summary of Conor Heaney's report on the progress of the North

North West Region Anti-Poverty Group

Conor Heaney, a member of the North West Region Anti Poverty Group (NWRAPG), reported on the progress of the group. What follows is a summary of his presentation.

He informed the seminar that the NWRAPG had been established to address issues identified as being at an earlier cross border conference, i.e. Poverty, health, education, fuel poverty, and various government measures aimed at addressing the situation.

The North West border region suffered particularly acute poverty given that the region had been notorious for lack of employment and marginal access to government funding. This had meant that the North West region often had higher statistics when it came to poverty than most other affected regions.

A decision was taken early on to concentrate on the Limavady, Strabane, Derry and Donegal areas and consider them the North West Region

While there were many areas and issues which the group could have campaigned on, the group has concentrated on a couple of issues, on which they felt they could deliver meaningful change.

The first issue was the question of evidence to highlight the difficulties and statistics to back up anecdotal evidence

The NWRAPG found that on a cross border basis, cross referenced statistics did not exist. This meant that the problem of poverty in a border area was often confined statistically to one side of the border or the other.

This meant that what was often a shared experience was being marginalised and divided.

Rather than people working collectively along the border to solve problems they were being forced to try and solve the problems often common to both, working independently of each other.

The NWRAPG found that the border areas as a whole suffered detrimentally and needed to be looked at not in isolation but as a connected entity.

The NWRAPG had decided to commission statistics which highlight the situation on both sides of the border but also made comparisons between the situations on either side of the border. These statistics would be used to help locate common issues and find solutions to these issues on a border wide basis.

The second issue was Fuel Poverty

In the North West Region fuel poverty, (*defined as a household spending more than ten per cent of its income to heat the rooms in the house to 21 degrees Celsius in the living room and 18 degrees Celsius in other rooms*), is particularly acute.

According to government figures, Strabane has over 50 per cent of households living in fuel poverty. In Derry, Strabane and Limavady the figures vary slightly but are all over 40 per cent. The Northern Irish average is 33 per cent. That means that the North West Region suffers fuel poverty at an alarming rate.

The NWRAPG has raised the issue by writing a letter to President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela requesting that the region be looked at for inclusion in Venezuela's cheap heating oil programme. While it was not expected that this would happen it was a good way of gaining publicity for the issue.

The NWRAPG has also decided to host a series of meetings on the fuel poverty issue with the view to establish growth of the NWRAPG and to establish interest in the possibility of a fuel poverty campaign.

The third activity undertaken by NWRAPG was to host a conference

The NWRAPG had also decided to host a conference to highlight a number of issues which had emerged from the groups discussions both internally and within the local communities where members of the NWRAPG lived.

It was often claimed that the North West Region had received high levels of funding either through Government provision, Irish or British, or through the various peace funding initiatives provided for on a European level.

Unfortunately the North West Region was still at the high end of all statistics in terms of poverty.

Three issues stood out, fuel poverty, single parent poverty and consumer debt. Consumer debt emerged out of liaison work with the Limavady Community Development Initiative.

A conference has been organised, to be held on November 28th and 29th, at Radisson's Hotel in Limavady, which aims is to find answers as to why the region is so poverty stricken and perhaps look at solutions to the problems that exist.

Conor Heaney concluded his presentation with a suggestion that cross-community cross border work through anti –poverty groups was useful, essential and rewarding and if the NWRAPG has been anything to go by, could highlight issues and campaign around them where otherwise they may have been ignored.

3. Overview of workshops and issues identified by participants

The participants in the seminar split into two groups of approximately 22 people to discuss ideas and issues on the question of poverty in the central border region.

The workshops were participatory and inclusive and the discussion flowed for the full hour of each session. (One difficulty expressed was that there was so much discussion that hosting the workshops in close proximity to one another made it more difficult for the fullest of discussions to be had.)

The following questions were introduced to each workshop;

1. What are the issues surrounding poverty in the region?
2. Who are the people suffering and why?
3. Who deals with the issues?
4. What could MTG initiate in order to campaign around these issues?
5. Where to from here?

What follows is a summary of the issues raised from the workshops

1.

Health – access, availability, transport to and from medical centres,
Unemployment
Single parent poverty
Asylum seeker poverty – isolation, not allowed to work, application trauma
Transport – poor quality – poor availability
Training – lack of useful training
Pensioners – pensions too low – not enough subsidies for transport or necessities or medicines
Rising costs of housing

2.

Single parents
Asylum seekers
Ex-prisoners
Pensioners
Unemployed
Part-time workers
Migrant workers

3.

Issues often not dealt with by anyone
If dealt with dealt with in an inadequate fashion
Government failing the poor
Bureaucracy
Unemployment benefits too low
Pensions too low
Local councils don't contribute anywhere near enough

4.

It was suggested that MTG could look at campaigning around the Monaghan Hospital closures
Delegations to government or local council over transport
It was suggested that MTG could look at asylum seekers particularly the government payments which were nowhere near enough to live on.

5.

It was agreed that a future meeting would be held and those interested in establishing a Central Border Region Anti Poverty group would meet.

Developments

Since the report back meeting a Central Border Region Anti-Poverty Group has been established.

It is now involved in the Monaghan Hospital Campaign, in liaising with the Asylum Seekers who live at St Patrick's Direct Provision Centre and members of the CBRAPG will be attending the NWRAPG conference in late November.

List of Participants

	Name	Organisation
1	Conor Heaney	Bogside & Brandywell Initiative
2	Sharon McQuaid	Cortolvin Lone Parents Group
3	Maria McQuaid	Cortolvin Lone Parents Group
4	Martha Clerkin	Cortolvin Lone Parents Group
5	Helena Rehill	Cortolvin Lone Parents Group
6	Margaret Ann O' Leary	Cortolvin Lone Parents Group
7	Conor McConville	Craigavon Travellers Group
8	Susan McKenna	Dochas for Women
9	Geraldine McKenna	Dochas for Women
10	Geraldine McCreanor	Dochas for Women
11	Ken Goreham	Ederney Community Development Trust
12	Angela Maguire	Emyvale Loneparents Group
13	Bridie Lavery	Emyvale Loneparents Group
14	Jim Nolan	Enniskillen Together
15	Assi Shittu	Louth African Women's Group
16	Stella Oforu Antwi	Monaghan Intercultural Group
17	Grace Ijiraneza	Monaghan Intercultural Group
18	Derin Olutitan	Monaghan Intercultural Group
19	Kenyde George	Monaghan Intercultural Group
20	Gary Cawley	Mullaghmatt Men United
21	Willie O' Leary	Mullaghmatt Men United
22	Alan McCann	Mullaghmatt Men United
23	Michael Power	Mullaghmatt Men United
24	Aideen Clerkin	Mullaghmatt Women's Group
25	Laura Cawley	Mullaghmatt Women's Group
26	Bernie Trainor	Mullaghmatt Women's Group
27	Ann Murray	Pettigo FRC
28	Sally Davis	Second Chance Education Project for Women
29	Bernie O' Neill	STEP
30	Mohammed	St Patrick's Detention Centre
31	Jean Pierre	St Patrick's Detention Centre
32	Hazel Leahy	South West Cavan CDP
33	Lorraine McTeigue	South West Cavan CDP
34	Sharon Kennon	The Rural Health Partnership
35	Teresa Nugent	The Rural Health Partnership
36	Margaret Lawton	Tullacmongan FRC
37	Nora O'Reilly	Tullacmongan FRC
38	Patricia Walsh	Tullacmongan FRC
39	Bernie Brady	Tullacmongan FRC
40	Jennie McCormack	Tullacmongan FRC
41	Mary O'Donnell	Women Making Waves
42	Monica Parciak	
43	Liz Salter	
	Others/Staff	
	Seamas Devine	Southern Development Officer MTG
	Gordon Hewitt	Northern Development Officer MTG
	Patricia Mulvenna	Finance & Admin Officer MTG