

## EDITORIAL



The Anne Frank Education Trust was launched here in the UK in 1991 as a sister organisation of the Anne Frank House Amsterdam. This multi-faith educational charity continues to carry out the wishes of Otto Frank, that his daughter's diary be used as a tool for educating people against racism and prejudice. The diary speaks of the psychological effects of living in hiding. Two weeks before the occupants of the hiding place were arrested and deported to

Auschwitz, Anne wrote that she had not lost all her ideals while living through her captivity. In spite of everything she believed people are really good at heart.

In this edition of Edges we see how people can deviate from the good and impose injustice on the weak and vulnerable. Whether it is racism, verbal or sexual abuse. The reality is that it devastates human life. We can disguise with a smile our deep-rooted prejudices and manipulatively inflict our own destructive attitudes with the aim of fragmenting the human family with our own depravity and amoral energy. Yet in the spirit of Anne Frank, let's keep hope alive.

From those formative years our ears can be exposed to fierce, brutal and violent human voices. When we feel no one is listening we smash windows and write graffiti on walls. We work with young people who carry a damaged history which stifles their present moment. There is a secular language which says to such people you have made your bed and now lie in it. In other words there is no hope for you. I can never accept this view. To err is to be human. So many young people with the confusions of life dig holes for themselves which come back to haunt them as they try to build their lives in their early adulthood.

Working with a people who were once known as junkies, thieves and basically juvenile criminals, constantly reminds me of the difficulties they face as they try to correct their mistakes. In the chaos of their lives they have inflicted pain on themselves and others. Society can find it hard to forgive.

I have seen with my own eyes those who confront their mistakes and are determined to change and alter their ways of behaviour. This resolute and positive attitude is not created over night. It is constructed over a period of time.

Our organisation continues to stand with those who suffer the pain of exclusion. **We speak the language of optimism**

## New Project is Launched

Our organisation has recently opened a new project that will provide dispersed support for people in the community. Our new team is raring to go.



## THOMAS Offers Hope

Garry is in our drug rehabilitation programme; he says: "I first heard about THOMAS through my mate Alex. He came into this project a year ago with a drug problem. After leaving THOMAS he went on to college. He is now preparing for university. I want to better my life that's why I have come here for help."



## Our Trip To Oxford

Engaged to make a difference is a new project set up by THOMAS. Its aim is to give a voice to young people, especially those from the ethnic communities. Our group recently took part on a human development course at Plater College Oxford.

Hanif Ali, our Ethnic Community Link Worker says "The weekend was a great success. I learned a great deal about how young people can become leaders in their own right."

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**Garry is in our Drug Rehabilitation Programme. He came to us directly from HMP Lancaster**

I was born in Workington, in Cumbria, I've had a good life really, good parents. But my father started drinking and became an alcoholic. He used to come home from the pub and beat me and beat my mum, I had to go and live with my grandparents to get away from it all.

Because of that violence came naturally to me, I got expelled from school when I was 13 and no other school would have me because of my violence and aggression and I got put into an approved school. One of the carers there played rugby and I got interested and I turned out to be good at it, I was good at all sports but I took to rugby.

When I left there at 16 I signed professionally for Carlisle. I was there for 3 years then I signed for Salford, when I was 19 or 20. From there I moved to Halifax, and then I started taking cocaine after games. I used to be out whole weekends, days, weeks, even a month. My partner and kids weren't happy, and when she complained I'd use violence then go out and take more drugs. She couldn't take any more and we split up and my family knew I had a problem then, I just thought the world was against me, and I took more drugs and ended up in hospital. They tried to section me because they said I was a danger, they got a court order against me and I had injections every 2 weeks to calm me down. They didn't, I just got worse on drugs, my family tried to help but they were just talking to themselves because I wasn't listening I was too wrapped up in the drugs.

My mum went to families anonymous and a word kept popping up - tough love, it's been the best word I ever learned because they all turned their back on me. I had nowhere to go, but that didn't teach me a lesson because I ended up in jail, on assault charges. In jail I was on my own, nobody wanted to know and that's when I knew I had a problem, the problem was me.

I saw the carat workers at Durham and they said there was a 12 steps programme at Lancaster which is successful, but you have to put the work in, so I went to Lancaster Prison. I went because I had a drug problem so I couldn't understand what they were saying about behaviour and boundaries, after a while it started to sink in. They taught me there are patterns leading up to drug use, etc, it's the best thing I've ever done.

I came to THOMAS because I thought that it would be too much for me going straight from prison back into society and it is the best move I've made as I am moving gradually. Now I have choices, the only choice I had in the past is where I was going to get drugs from. Every one is happy now, my family and children have smiles back on their faces.

The worst time for me in my drug taking is when my family turned their backs on me I couldn't talk to anyone or eat with anyone, it was the best thing they could do because I was affecting their lives. My family threw me out and I moved from house to house. I went days and weeks without food and clothes as all my things were at my mum's and sister's and they wouldn't answer the door. When I went to jail my family said it was the best place for me, and looking back it was.

***In the future there is talk of college courses, I want to better myself and I am more motivated in life.***



# Homelessness in Ireland

Father Peter McVerry SJ talks about what it is that we are all in great need of.

**"This young man almost lost his life, not from lack of food, or the cold or an illness brought on by living on the streets. He almost lost his life because he had lost his dignity." -**

A young man threw himself into the river, about two weeks ago. He was pulled out and brought to hospital. The hospital kept him in, as he was suffering from severe depression. This young man was homeless. Some nights he got a bed in a hostel, most nights the hostels were all full and he slept on the street. During the day, he walked the streets, bored, tired and hungry. While he was in hospital, I went to visit him. He told me: "I can't go on living like this anymore". "Living like what?" I said. "I can't go on living", he said, "knowing that nobody cares".

This young man almost lost his life, not from lack of food, or the cold or an illness brought on by living on the streets. He almost lost his life because he had lost his dignity.

He felt that his life was of no value to anyone, that he was worthless, that he wasn't worth caring about. He felt useless, that really whether he lived or died would make no difference to the world or to anyone in it. His sense of his own worth was so destroyed that whether he lived or died didn't even make any difference to himself.

After visiting him in hospital, I came away feeling that we, our society, all of us in it, including myself who had known him for many years, had failed him. Not only had we failed him, we had failed our God.

If the scriptures say anything to us, they tell us of a God who is our Parent, the Parent of every person who is and ever has been and ever is to come. I love praying that image, the image of a God who loves me with the infinite and unconditional love that only the God-Parent can have. I love sitting or kneeling in quiet, just enjoying the knowledge of the love of God, just being grateful.

Then I remember that God is not just my Parent, but the Parent of this young man and the Parent of all like him. They too are the beloved children of God, they too have this dignity of being the child of God and nothing can take this dignity away from them. To God, this young man was of infinite value, just as I am, this young man was worth caring about, this young man was so loveable. But we, God's followers, the Christian people of God, had failed God, because we had failed to communicate this to him, God's child. The one commandment that Jesus had left us, we had failed miserably, "Love one another as I have loved you". And God is the Parent who loves and cares for and cherishes those I find it hard to love, those I despise, those I can't stand,

those who frighten me or those who repulse me. And as I sit or kneel and am filled with the consolation of knowing that I am loved by God, my Parent, I am also filled with embarrassment at my failure to love some of those other children of God's.

Because I work with the homeless, I am often asked "Should I give money to someone begging on the streets?" I always answer, "I don't know". And then I add, "But always have a kind word for them".

You may know the story of the priest in London who was asked by a beggar for "a few pence for a cup of tea, Father." And the priest said to him, "You're from Tipperary." "How did you know, Father?" "Because my mother was from Tipperary and you have the same accent". And the two of them had a little chat about life in Tipperary. And when the priest was moving on, the beggar took out a handful of coins from his pocket, and said "These, Father, these are from those that don't care." That priest had given that man much more than money, he had respected his dignity, he had communicated to him what the Gospel is all about, the dignity of that man as a child of God.

I remember one day on my way to court with a young person, I noticed a man lying on the footpath. I wasn't sure if he was dead or alive. So I went over and shook him. He turned over and looked up at me. "Are you alright?" I said. "I am, sir", he said, "but thanks for asking." I did nothing for that man, but he felt that someone cared. And that made a difference.

In our hostels for homeless young people, I always say that what we are trying to do is to make each of those young people feel that they are just as valuable, just as loveable, just as worth caring about as any other young person of their age. If we are not communicating that, we may as well pack up and go home. Feeding them, clothing them, giving them a bed for the night is worthless if we are not giving them back their dignity. If we fail to feed them, to clothe them or give them a bed for the night, they will not die. They will manage somehow to get food on the streets, to clothe themselves, to find some little nook or cranny to sleep in. But they will not find dignity on the streets and that is what we have to give them. And if we fail to give them back their dignity, our failure could be their death.

We are building an extraordinarily successful economy. We keep getting told that we have never had it so good. We are told that there is no end in sight to this success. But if our success leaves some people feeling under-valued, feeling left out, feeling that they have no place in this project, feeling that the rest of us are so busy that we have no time or inclination to care for them, then we are building our house on sand. And that is how many people are feeling today. We have failed them and we have failed our God.

The only house that is worth building is the house in which there are many mansions, the house that has a place for all, that welcomes all, that cares for all, that respects the dignity of each and every one of God's children. The kind word, the reaching out, the caring is the cement that binds that house together. None of us can build that house. But each of us can place a few bricks somewhere in the walls.

no dignity  
despair

# The Struggles of the Refugee.

## "Britain, I am here without choice"

### Tita's story

#### – when seeking asylum means saving your life

Tita has two lives, and would like to combine them, but it's a struggle. A doctor from Bolivia, where she enjoyed a life of comparative comfort and wealth, in Britain she's a refugee, battling to master a new language and gain the qualifications that will allow her to practise medicine again.

Her fight to re-establish her professional standing following the torture and intimidation that brought her working life to an abrupt, numbing halt is by no means uncommon. Many other professionals forced to flee their country of origin through no fault of their own have to live in vastly reduced circumstances, their skills and talents going unrecognised until they have proved themselves all over again. The scepticism they are met with, and the rebuffs they endure, give the lie to the portrayal of asylum seekers as "bogus" claimants simply after a better way of life.

"Finding a good job at home was no problem," says Tita, aged 30. "I had a good standard of living but it became impossible to stay. Leaving behind everything that I had strived for and achieved involved destroying part of my life. No one does that voluntarily. I had no choice."

At home, Tita was the family extrovert, with a mind of her own. As a young doctor, she eschewed a settled career path, opting instead to use her skills as an emergency surgeon in poverty hit areas in the north of the country as an outreach worker for international charities such as the Catholic Relief Service and *Medecins sans Frontieres*.

Three years later she returned home to work in the city of her parents, but her extensive travels had raised suspicions and she found herself the target of men she believes were part of an organised crime gang with links to the government.

Three times she was abducted off the street and subjected to grave abuse while being interrogated. "They knew everything about my life and job. They accused me of being involved in trafficking because of my movements in the north. But I didn't know what they were talking about - drugs? Weapons? I just didn't know anything!"

She was beaten, tortured with electricity and threatened with death if she did not reveal all she knew. It was a threat she was in little doubt would be carried out. On one occasion, as she lay bound and blindfolded, a man being held prisoner with her said their abductors had removed all his fingertips so that he could not be identified after he was killed. A little later he was taken away and Tita heard gun shots.

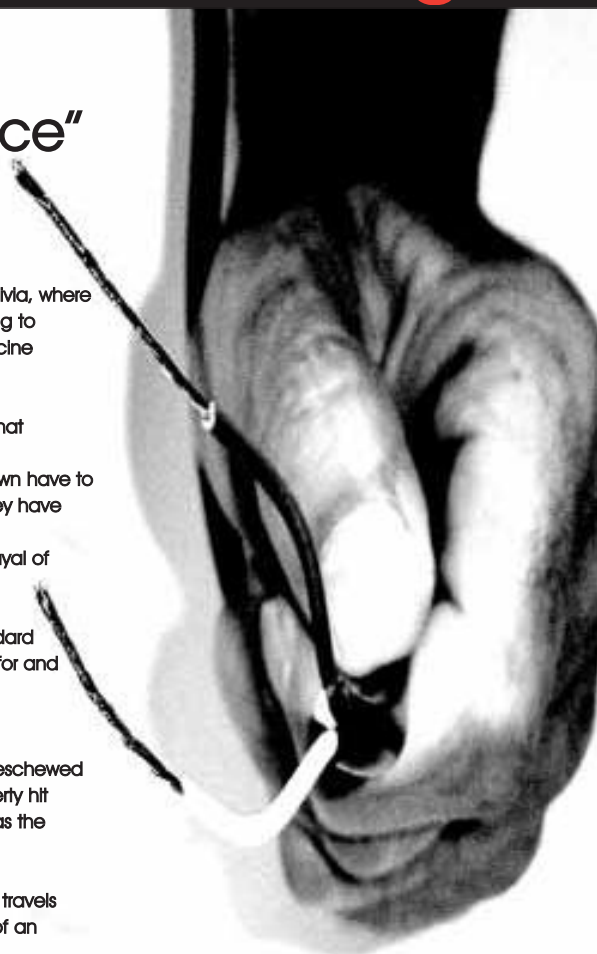
After each abduction, Tita was eventually freed. At first, she believes, the gang wanted to see with whom she made contact. The third time she was snatched, it was to kill her. She heard the order for her death, but later, as she was being driven away, the men began arguing and once again, she was given her freedom.

Soon afterwards she was chased and shot at, and Tita, with the help of a friendly doctor, fled the country. She was unsure where to go, working simply on the premise that she should get as far away as quickly as possible, she took the first flight to Europe.

On October 2, 1998 Tita arrived at Heathrow, telling immigration officials that she needed help - "human rights help". A charity at the airport gave her accommodation over her first weekend in the UK, and a doctor who called to check her wounds told her about the Medical Foundation, where she was able to draw extensively on a range of services.

A case worker helped her come to terms with her experiences, and deal with the practicalities of exile. She also received psychotherapy, an immigration lawyer was found who specialised in cases from Latin America, and a forensic medical report on her injuries was supplied to help her case for asylum. Finally, in September 2000, she was granted full refugee status.

Tita was worried that she would not be considered for asylum because her home country is technically a democracy but, like many impoverished and corrupted countries, being a democracy does not mean that human rights are necessarily safeguarded.



"It is not easy being an asylum seeker," she says, recalling the embarrassment she felt on entering the Post Office every Tuesday to collect her benefit. "I would think I am young, I'm able to work, there are jobs I could do, I was ashamed to be there. But I had just one thought - to study hard and learning English so I could work again as a surgeon."

Devoting herself to study, she took classes in beginner-level English during the day, and intermediate level classes simultaneously at night. Later she began a special language course for doctors and in March 2001 got the marks she needed to be recognised by the General Medical Council. Now she has two examinations to pass in order to start work as a senior house officer at a hospital. "I'm going to pass them," she says. "Luckily I am still young, I can do it."

There are friends that Tita has never told that she is a refugee, so uncertain is she of the reaction it might provoke. "Asylum seekers come here out of necessity. They come because they are in fear in their own country. Somehow that fact often gets overlooked," she says.

Anglavi and Tita's story published with kind permission of the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture - [www.torturecare.org.uk](http://www.torturecare.org.uk).



# Why won't Ireland accept its refugees?

Raymond Dooley

**As a boy growing up in America in the 1950s, my images of the Irish and Ireland came directly from TV and the movies. There were the priests and nuns of *Going My Way* and the *Bells of St. Mary's*, the leprechauns of *Darby O'Gill* and the drunken, fighting Irish sergeants of countless John Ford Westerns. Ireland itself meant pubs, churches and lots of green countryside. The people were happy and friendly, except when they were fighting. All of the men were brave and strong and loyal, as long as they were sober, and the young women were either angelic or wild, but always beautiful. Most were named Maureen O'Hara.**

Predictably enough, the most emotionally evocative images of Ireland for me came from a Ford movie, but not from one of those usually cited. *How Green Was My Valley* wasn't set in Ireland at all but in a Welsh mining village doing duty as an Irish surrogate. Told from the perspective of a grown man recalling his childhood memories, it was the story of a family torn asunder by the struggle to survive and a pastoral way of life swept away by modern times. The scene in which the unemployed young miners take leave of their mother before setting off to find work and make new lives for themselves in America and Australia left a vivid first impression of the reality of forced emigration.

As I grew older, my idea of what it meant to be Irish underwent certain adjustments to provide for such phenomena as Joyce, Yeats, Beckett, Bernadette Devlin (who made a big impression in the United States), the rise of the IRA and the arrival of a new wave of young Irish immigrants in the 1980s. Still, my view of the Irish as an open and friendly people remained largely intact.

#### **Irish Internationalism**

My first visit to Ireland came in 1989, which led to my living here for much of the following year. The early, superficial impressions I had of Ireland were in many ways reinforced (it was quite wet and the people were indeed very friendly). But I was surprised by the extraordinary interest in and orientation to the affairs of the rest of the world that seemed to



be shared by everyone I met, regardless of age or occupation or where in Ireland they lived. Political attitudes varied, but sympathy to the plight of people living in the Third World was the norm, with many expressing the opinion that the Irish people themselves were not far removed from such circumstances. It seemed that every second person had a family member living somewhere in Africa, Asia or Latin America working for a relief agency or on some kind of development assistance project, or serving in the UN peace keeping mission in the Lebanon.

All of this was in sharp contrast to the predominantly inward-looking national perspective I was used to. I gradually realised that Ireland was in many respects a far more internationalist society than the United States, despite its much greater ethnic and racial heterogeneity.

### **Growing racism**

After visiting Ireland periodically through the nineties, and then moving here at the end of 2000, my impressions of Ireland have of course undergone some change. The Irish still strike me as among the most friendly people I have ever met. As an American living abroad, I cannot imagine receiving a better welcome. But towards people from the developing world and towards those whose skin is not white, Irish attitudes and behaviour appear to me to have changed markedly, and for the worse.

Perhaps, as some maintain, the racism that is now so visible has been present all along and has only surfaced because Ireland is losing its ethnic and racial homogeneity. Whatever the case, it's there, and you only have to listen to talk radio to get a taste of it. If you doubt it, just look at the statistics: racist attacks were up 60% in the second half of last year over the previous year's level.

### **The lesson of Boston**

Having spent much of the past thirty years living in Boston, I've had the opportunity to learn a great deal about racism and what it takes to stop it. The Tanalste says that in terms of public policy and building a modern society and economy, Ireland should move more in the direction of Boston than Berlin. I don't know about Berlin, but in at least one important respect the experience of Boston has a lot to offer to Ireland, which I believe now stands at a crossroads. Ireland will either build on its history of generosity and internationalism by embracing diversity and tolerance, or retreat from that record by succumbing to racism, bigotry and hostility to newcomers.

For most of its history, Boston was known as a centre of liberal and progressive thinking. Movements calling for independence from England, the abolition of slavery, the development of free and equal public education and opposition to the Vietnam War all had a home in Boston. During the 1970s, however, the court-ordered racial integration of the public schools involving the busing of schoolchildren exposed an underlying racism and ignited a period of racial strife and violence that lasted for more than a decade. Boston, once the City on a Hill, became an international symbol of intolerance featuring scenes not dissimilar from those witnessed at the Holy Cross school in North Belfast two years ago.

It took many years and the efforts of thousands of people in Boston to get past that period and to restore a climate of racial harmony and mutual respect. Much of that work was done by ordinary people working in their neighbourhood and community organisations and in their workplaces to build bridges across the racial divide.

Their efforts, however, would have been for naught were it not for the fact that the political leadership in the 1980's made it absolutely clear, over and over and over again, that discrimination, racial stereotyping and racial violence were illegal and would not be tolerated.

Those in public life who chose to play the race card were repeatedly challenged and, over time, effectively isolated.

By the mid 1980's, the word had gone out that one rule would apply to all and that no resources would be spared and nothing less than the highest priority would be given to making Boston an open city welcoming to all and proud of its racial diversity (including the new wave of young Irish immigrants, the vast majority of whom were illegal).

### **Heads in the sand**

In Ireland, I see little of that type of response on display. In February, in the aftermath of the comments made by the Longford Judge, I saw nothing to suggest that those lessons had been learned.

The people of Ireland had been told that a member of the judiciary, speaking from the bench, had suggested that shopping centres might impose a race-based ban and might begin refusing entrance to people because of the colour of their skin. At no point did the judge say or did the people hear any senior public official (outside of the Equality Authority and the NCCRI) say that

such a ban would be grossly illegal or that it would be an affront to basic human rights or that, if imposed, it would be absolutely prohibited and be met with the full force of law.

Instead, the public heard a deafening silence from the highest quarters.

There were no loud and clear statements about upholding the law, about racism or about equal protection for all under the law. There was no message from on high that judges will have to step down if they are too bigoted to realise that it is an individual, and not a racial or ethnic group, standing in front of them in the dock, or if they convey to the public the clear impression that it's not illegal to ban people based on their skin colour.

The subsequent public 'apology' for giving offence and references to 'sensitivity training' may have even led some to believe that this was merely a PC issue and that you just have to be careful not to use phrases like 'coloured people' that might offend the refined sensibilities of the Dublin 4 set.

If incidents of this sort continue to be handled in this way, Ireland will forfeit its opportunity to check the spread of racism.

### **Which way from here?**

The lesson from Boston is a simple one. The only way to stop racism and racial hatred is to confront it and to confront it forcefully. It can't be ducked and it can't be left to public service ads aired during anti-racism week. If Ireland is to build a society that values diversity and respects the rights of all and has no room for racism, Ireland's political leaders have to rise to the occasion and provide leadership, both by speaking out and through active intervention.

If they don't, a steep price will be paid by Irish society for years to come.

Racial and ethnic minorities, of course, will pay the dearest price, principally in the form of abuse and denial of rights. But racism and overt hostility to non-nationals could also destroy one of Ireland's most important cultural legacies, its history of active concern for the well-being of people throughout the world, regardless of their race or national identity, and its reputation as a friendly people whose door is open.

Such a change, in my view, would strike at the very heart of Irish identity. How sadly ironic it would be if behaviour ostensibly aimed at preserving what it means to be Irish actually helped bring about its loss.

**With thanks to the Irish refugee council:**

**[www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie](http://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie)**

# I Have Survived Torture

A refugee's road to recovery:

## Anglavi's story

- The difference refugee status can make to a torture survivor

They are an instantly recognisable cultural symbol, as iconic as Big Ben, red telephone boxes or fish and chips. The giant double-decker buses of London are British through and through.

And so it is that six days a week, nine-and-a-half hours a day, behind the wheel of any one of the 6,500 diesel-powered monoliths that traverse the streets of inner London, you'll find 33-year-old Kokouvi Anglavi – originally of Togo but thankful now to hold a passport that confirms his right to be considered as British as the buses he drives.

"Route 91 – Crouch End to Trafalgar Square; 476 – Northumberland Park to Euston; 341 – Tottenham to Waterloo..." Anglavi begins rattling off the diverse routes for which he can be rostered in any given week. From his vantage high in the driver's seat these streets of London surely seem a million miles from the life he knew in Togo. It was early in the 1990s that Anglavi joined the young people's political party, the Action Committee for Renewal (CAR), which called for genuine democracy to be established.

One afternoon, as Anglavi helped with a leaflet drop near his home, he was picked up by government soldiers. They took him to a camp where he was detained in abysmal conditions for close to two years – denied even the briefest contact with his family. His small cell contained more than 20 people, which meant people either continually stood or sat in a hunched position. Lying down to sleep was impossible. Each day they would receive a meagre portion of bread that was meant to sustain them, even though they were used as forced labour beyond the camp's walls. Anglavi was repeatedly beaten and brutalised. "People would die right in front of you," he says quietly. "Then you would be made to dig their graves and bury them."

The most feared experience by those being held was to be hauled out of the military prison in the middle of the night and loaded onto trucks. This they knew meant almost certain death. Those taken were transferred to an army shooting range to be used as human targets.

Nearly two years had passed since Anglavi had been imprisoned, and now it appeared it was his turn to be callously gunned down. However, when the soldier in charge of this particular death detail recognised Anglavi as an old school friend, he allowed him to escape.

So much time had passed without word of him that when Anglavi arrived at his own home, his family could not believe he was still alive, if only barely. During the next six months he received medical treatment – he could not see properly, he vomited his food, he could not sleep and there was blood in his urine.

When physically able again, Anglavi, galvanised by his experiences, started to participate in political activities once more. At one large protest the police came and videotaped all those involved. For safety he left home to stay with his uncle, who in turn hid him temporarily elsewhere.

Two days later his uncle returned to tell him the devastating news. Anglavi's home had been burnt down, his father had been trapped in the blaze and killed, there was no trace of his mother. His four sisters were all away at school at the time but word soon reached them and fearing more reprisals they fled into neighbouring Ghana. It would be many years before Anglavi would see them again, even longer before they were reunited with their brother.

Anglavi was helped to flee to Britain. Initially he was held in detention here by the Immigration Service, and after release was twice denied international protection by the Home Office.

Having been put in contact with the Medical Foundation, his case file today, nearly seven years on, is an inch-and-a-half thick. It stands as a lasting testimony to the attempts made to have his story believed; to help him come to terms with his experiences in detention; and to have him reunited with his sisters.

The quest to be recognised as a refugee was a long and draining one. Initially denied by the Home Office, and then again on appeal, he was granted a judicial review thanks to the tenacious work of a new lawyer, an immigration specialist found for him by the Medical Foundation. Anglavi had been told to prepare himself. Should that review have failed he would be returned to Togo within days.

This time, however, with all the facts assembled – a forensic medical report by a Foundation doctor, letters of support from local MPs, and the presence of two witnesses who knew first-hand the veracity of his story and had travelled from Germany to give evidence – Anglavi received refugee status.

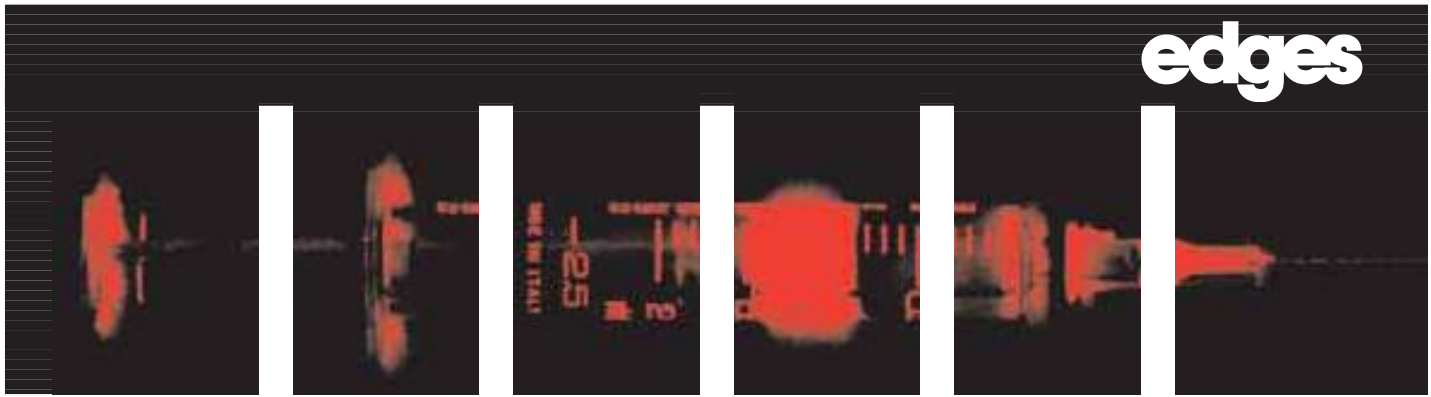
Meanwhile, after repeated attempts to find his family with the help of international aid agencies, he at last received news they had been located. Joy was tempered with distress when he learned that the second eldest of his four sisters, Adjom, who would today be 19, had died of malaria whilst in exile in Ghana.

With the support of the Medical Foundation he gained an emergency loan to travel to Ghana to see them, verify their identity, and bring them home with him. Officialdom was not convinced and on the first occasion Anglavi had to return to Britain empty-handed. Only after submitting DNA tests to establish beyond doubt his relationship to the girls, were his sisters allowed to join him.

Taking care of them has been his priority since the day they landed. Initially he worked as a pastry chef. Having qualified as a teacher in Togo, he began teaching French at a secondary school in Essex but found that job too stressful. And now Anglavi works for the First Capital bus company.

"In the beginning I was having a very hard time," he says. "I was very depressed. The Medical Foundation was a fantastic help... they helped me to get my life back. "Receiving refugee status has transformed my life as well. I have a good job and have made great friends through First Capital. It is hard to forget the past but now life is good for me and my sisters."





# Heroin & Prison – I've Had Enough

## Paul shares his story

I am a 29-year-old heroin addict nearing the end of a 4 years sentence for supplying heroin to undercover police in an operation – Tetley, to crack down on street level drug dealers in Preston. I'm released September 4th this year, help has been available for me in jail. I once went to do the 12 steps programme at Lancaster Castle but for reasons out of my control I wasn't able to complete the course and I was sent back to Risley, I have still been using drugs in jail on and off but I haven't used now for about 3 months.

I started using drugs when I was 11 years old. It started out with glue sniffing and drinking cider, and then I tried cannabis but never really liked it much. When I was about 14 I started taking LSD (acid trips) and speed. When I was about 17 I was released from Thomcross young offenders jail and I got heavily into alcohol and would spend many a night binge drinking in my bedroom on my own. At the same time I'd be tripping on acid, LSD and be high as a kite on glue.

Between the age of 11 and 16 I was taken into institutional care for my own safety. Eight times I was put in those prison like children's homes. I didn't like it but I knew my mother was doing it because she cared but I didn't change my ways.

When I was 19 my brother asked me to come upstairs into my bedroom. My brother knew I was on drugs but I was surprised to learn that day in my bedroom that he was taking heroin. I'd never seen heroin before but I was willing to try it when he offered me some. I was never the same again after that. It wasn't like the other drugs, although I used them a lot and drank far too much it didn't bother me to do without, I wasn't dependent on them. But within a few months of taking heroin I was held quite firmly in its grip and it wasn't letting go.

I mainly shoplifted to fund my habit and spent many a short sentence in jail for doing so. In 96 my brother was on remand at Preston jail and I was caught taking him a £10 bag of heroin and 7 DF's (painkillers) on a visit when I went to see him. At a later date I received 2 years 9 months at Preston Crown Court, I was given 2 years for the drugs and 9 months for theft. When I was released in 97 I was back on the heroin within minutes. Being released from Preston jail, my hometown, it was quick and easy to score drugs. In 97 along with my brother I started using crack cocaine. Although I enjoyed taking crack and couldn't get enough of the drug it was more a luxury than a must.

I was a slave to heroin, I sold everything I owned and when that ran out I stole from my parents, my sister, my sister's kids, my auntie and my friends. I couldn't be trusted by anyone I was too deep into heroin to care for myself or the people around me. I told myself that when things got too bad I'd inject a lethal dose of heroin and end it all. I was selfish, I didn't care about anyone or anything but my next fix. I'd try to make my family feel guilty by telling them "I wish I was dead, you brought me into this world and I'd be more than happy to make my own way out of it." They would be walking on eggshells because I was self-harming when I had no drugs.

Whilst going through cold turkey I went into the bathroom and slashed my left arm right through the muscle. One night my mum heard banging coming from my bedroom, it was my legs I presume hitting my bedroom door, I'd hung myself because I was rattling. (cold turkey) I remember coming round with an oxygen mask on, surrounded by police and 2 paramedics.

Then in 99 whilst on remand in Preston jail I slashed my arm needing 30 stitches and a week or so later I was found hanging on the hospital wing at Preston jail. The prison staff really did think I was dead, I believe it took them and the paramedics a long time to revive me. As daft as it may sound I've never had any intention to end my life. Playing Russian roulette was my way of saying "look I need help here, I'm not coping too well with my situation." I know the prison staff are there to help if I need them, all I have to do is ask and they'll help. The health care staff, the screw, the chaplain they're here to help. I've never found it easy to ask for help so I resort to madness, the last time I self harmed was about 6 weeks ago.

No matter how much I stole from my family they never loved me any less, no matter what prison I've been in or how far away it is they've been there to visit me and my brother when he's been in jail.

In 98 my brother was in remand at Preston and after a few weeks the courts sent him to a rehab. Three days later he came home, he couldn't cope with rehab. The courts can't decide to force help on a heroin addict. A heroin addict will stop using heroin when he/she is ready to stop, no sooner. My brother came home and he said to me "I've had enough of all this, heroin has really screwed me up and I can't take no more," I listened as he went on "You look after mum and get yourself off those needles, there's still hope for you kid but I'm too far gone, I'm going to do myself in with a lethal injection." Although it hurt to hear those words I didn't act upon what he told me because I know how heroin gives the user suicidal thoughts.

Four days later on the 27th May 98, me and my brother went into Preston town centre to do our shoplifting, then we got a taxi home. I got out before him and went to my mum's and he carried on to go to his girlfriend's. The last thing he said to me before I got out of the taxi was "be up early in the morning and we'll go in town on a graft." The next day, 28th May 98 he phoned from my auntie's. He spoke to my mum and said "tell our kid I'll be there shortly," he never turned up! On the evening of May 28th 1998 my brother was found dead due to an overdose of heroin. I was devastated, I couldn't believe it, I was in shock like the rest of my family. It didn't make me want to stop using heroin, if anything it made me worse. Heroin numbs emotion so the more I used, the less I hurt. Selfish of me I know, my mum had not yet buried one son and she had me to worry about. I couldn't get over the death of my brother. When he got buried on June 8th 98, just 8 days before his 31st birthday, it made it final.

Once a good lad, my brother gone, dead never to be seen or heard again, and why? Because heroin destroyed his life, wrecked his marriage and caused his family more misery and suffering than they could possibly handle, then it provided its final blow on May 28th 1998. I couldn't let go when my brother died and I even started to sleep at his graveside in the freezing cold, it just made me feel closer to him, being there at his grave. I don't think I've grieved properly since he died.

I know I'm in prison now for selling heroin but I'm glad I sold it to undercover police when I did. I wouldn't wish the misery and suffering on any family that heroin causes. When I was selling heroin to feed my own habit I was providing someone with a very powerful drug that could have easily ended their life and cause their family to suffer in the same way as mine has suffered. I'd never sell drugs again, I just wish I had the same confidence and say I'd never use again either.

Although I was introduced to heroin by my brother I don't for one minute blame him for my addiction. I was 19 at the time with a mind of my own. I've only got myself to blame for the way I've turned out. I would have discovered heroin anyway once I knew the drug was available on the streets of Preston. I just discovered it with my brother first. I am released in four and a half months, I hope I get it right this time, I owe it to my brother's memory to do so.



Elden gives a disturbing account of what really happened.

He speaks to Edges from the USA

# The Tragedy of Abuse –



**I am a thirty-six year old male whom you would think would have it all together. I don't. The reasons are as numerous as there are days that have passed since I was a kid. For me growing up was not to be an easy task. My start in life was shaky. I was born the third of five children. My parents were poor at best. They had their own problems. Now here was one more. At least this is what I was to come to think about myself. My earliest memory was at three, crawling to the foot of the bed where my father was waiting on me. Instead of being picked up by him, I was the one to be doing the picking up. I was not offered a baby bottle, but his genitalia instead. I do not know how early this started except to say I knew what I was doing. The sounds around me were not sounds of Love and Joy. Instead they were drunken words of hate, anger, rage, and bitterness, and as far as my young ears knew, they were all meant for me. I learned at a very early age what it felt to feel physical pain.**

My father was the type of man who thought that to be a man one must express pain without crying. This was taught to me first hand. One of the many beatings that I can remember was when I asked to go to the restroom in a public place. My father ripped off my shirt and shoved me across the store, causing me to urinate on myself. When we got home I had to take a bath. Before dressing he made me come out in front of company and ask for my punishment. I am not sure which hurt more, being hit on my bare skin or the humiliation that I felt standing there with no clothes on in front of people.

I had heard some kids at school laughing about calling their fathers old men. So in a child-like way and wanting so badly to hear my father laugh, I called him "Old Man". What I got instead was a fist in the face that put me over the porch railing. My father came after me, kicking and screaming names: "stupid, ugly, lazy, crazy," and yes, that one they liked the most "We brought you into this world; we can take you out". He almost did. While this was going on my mother was just standing in the door watching, not helping me in any way. I didn't understand. I felt so alone and unwanted. I thought that if I could just die everything would be OK. There were many nights I lay awake listening to my father call my mother "slut", "whore", and "bitch". He would accuse her of sleeping with this person or that. Then I would hear him hitting her. I wanted to come to her aid, only I didn't know how. I learned that no matter what I did it was not the right thing. I was soon to learn what being shamed meant in a way that was both physical and mental.

We travelled to many places to get booze for my parents. On one such trip we stopped so my mother could go to the bathroom. With curiosity I watched her as she went into the woods. When I turned around I was met with a fist in the face and was told I was a pervert. My father taught me never to look at women that way again. One morning I woke up with my father staring me in the face through the window. He was all bloody from God only knows what. I remember him telling me that when he got his hands on me he would kill me. To this day I do not know why he said this. What I do know is that for a very long time I was terrified to look out of windows. Though I have talked a great deal about my father, my mother was by no means innocent. She had me commit acts on her that, honestly, are too hard to talk about.

By around the age of six or seven I still had no concept of what normal, healthy friends or playmates were. I was still searching vigorously, even desperately for something I had no understanding of: healthy love and affection. There was a neighbor who took advantage of my great need. He showed me attention by offering to introduce me to a game. This game required me to lie face down on the bed and not look back. To my young mind and starving heart, this was no game, but an adult who cared. Again I was raped under what I understood as care and love.

By the time I had reached age nine a schoolteacher took notice of the battle scars on my back and reported them to the Department of Social Services. They did an investigation, and we were put into temporary foster care. We stayed in the foster home for about a year. During this year whenever I would find out we had a weekend visit with my biological parents, I would get physically sick. I had to be placed on nerve pills. This by no means stopped my other siblings from going. They would come back and tell the foster parents and me what a wonderful time they had, along with how much things had changed. This led us to go back home. All of this was a result of my oldest sister saying everything was OK. Of course it wasn't, and we all found out the hard way ... more beatings and being left alone for long periods of time.

We were taken for the final time, and our parent's rights to their five children were terminated. I was to carry the responsibility for the break-up of the family. My father said it was my fault and I still believed him. I then went back to the original foster home where I stayed for four years. No harm came to me from them; it was outside of the foster home that the abuse was to continue. I did not understand the care that was coming from my foster parents. The only kind of affection I'd had was perverted. I felt my foster parents did not love me because they were not using me as my parents and others had done. I was sure something was wrong with me.

Perhaps that is what attracted me to Jim. We meet him at a flea market where we would go on the weekends. After a time he was able to befriend both my foster parents and gain their trust. It was no surprise to us when he asked permission for me to stay overnight. He then offered me beer. I got drunk and passed out. The next morning when I woke I found my clothes were bloody. My first thought was that I had fallen during the night. My next thought was I am going to get in trouble with my parents not only for messing my clothes up but also for getting drunk. It did

not occur to me that the blood was coming from my rectum. He kept this up every weekend thereafter. I was not able to tell the truth to my foster parents for fear I would be the one to get in trouble. It did not occur to me that he was doing something wrong.

After living with these foster parents for four and a half years, I was placed in another home. Here I was introduced to pot and sniffing glue, again by someone much older than I. He would tell me how much he loved me. I had to show him my love.

By then, my life was filled with confusion and total isolation. There is fear, shame, guilt, anger, rage and even blame directed at myself. Add to this that I was about to enter into the teen years. Somehow I thought I was perceived as a useless piece of a human. After all that I had been through, this is what I thought. Between the ages of twelve and nineteen I was to see more foster homes. At one there was an introduction to more humiliation. At some point I remember being tied to a tree and made to eat the grass around it. I can't remember what I had done to deserve this only what it made me feel like. I felt like an animal. I even thought that of myself, at least inside that somehow, everyone else saw it too.

It was during this time period that I tried to kill myself by hanging and then by suffocation. By this time in my life I was starving for attention and affection. I would do anything to get it. When I did not get what I had to come to understand as normal attention, I thought there must be something wrong with me. It did not matter what I did, for it was never good enough, at least in my own eyes and heart. I had friends, even though looking back now they were as quiet as me. I wonder now if they were being abused at home. They knew very little about me and I knew very little about them. I was always terrified if they knew my past they would run away. This was to go on for some time. Try to imagine not letting people too close and yet at the same time needing and wanting to be liked and yes, even Loved. Still I did not know how to ask for what was needed to fill a continuing void.

Out of all the foster homes I stayed in only one foster parent molested me (one too many wouldn't you say?). He would come into my room to tuck me in at night and rub his arm over my genital area until I was aroused. Then he would tell me how bad I was for getting aroused. My punishment then, was that I had to do the same to him. Sometimes I would be left at home alone to think about why I got aroused and would have to tell him when he got home. It was at the age of seventeen that I introduced myself to Alcohol. I thought I had arrived. Now I could laugh sing dance and yes, even CRY. My first drunk session was a blackout. I was to have many more. One thing you the reader need to know; I blame no one for my alcoholism. That was and still is my responsibility.

The last of my abuse (well somewhat the last) took place in a group home and school not very far from Columbia. The name of the home is unimportant. What happened there is very much the opposite. I was a senior. What to most is the happiest time of their lives was a living nightmare. A teacher took a liking to me. He would have me come over to his home after school with the pretence that I needed extra help with my schoolwork. What I found myself doing was giving him oral sex for cigarettes. The way it got found out was that someone else he was "helping" discovered what was going on and told the group home. I am not sure what he told them; what I am sure of is that I was taken out of the classroom with my peers for the last month and half. I studied and worked in a second

grade room after everyone else had left. I was not allowed to eat or sleep with other people for fear I might "do something" to them. I lived in the infirmary. It was decided that I would not be going to graduation with the rest of my class. I was told this was so that I wouldn't be embarrassed about "my affair" with the teacher.

Looking back, it was their own embarrassment they were trying to avoid. I finally got my diploma when someone risked their job to take me to the school. When we arrived at the school, my diploma was thrown at me. I was told that I should be ashamed that I had ruined a teacher's career. When I got back on campus a few days later I packed my things and left. As I was leaving I was told, "It's about time you left". These words stuck with me for a very long time.

Perhaps in these writings that is just what I have done. I am no longer willing to live with the shame, guilt, anger and blame. After all I was a child with the needs and wants of a child. Only others chose to use and abuse me for their own selfish pleasure. Enough. I am a Male who once was a victim who is now becoming a survivor. I am alive and growing stronger every day.

For me life at nineteen was no easier than it had been in the past. I was soon to be out from under the title of Ward of the State. After all that, is about all it was. My last foster home was in Gilbert, South Carolina. There I got my first paying job. Also this is where I meet my first partner. Before I go any further there is one more thing I must say about myself. I am a Gay Male. That in itself has a story behind it. I will say for the record that being gay is nothing to be ashamed of. It took me many years living in fear of what others would think or say if I was to say a thing like that public. Say what you want to. In my heart of hearts I know I am a Child of God. Now that this is said, back to the story.

When I met that partner I had no clue what it was to be in a relationship other than that which I experienced through childhood. I was to have many years living with this person with that mind set. Now, looking back I was still searching for a father figure, someone to take care of my every need. I did not understand or think I could take care of myself. No one had told me I could. We stayed together for almost ten years. During this time I became an every day drunk. For a very short period of time it helped me to be social in settings I had not ever been in. Like bars.

I thought I had found where I belonged. Soon though, I was to learn that to keep friends from the bars, I had to be willing to do what I thought every one wanted me to. One day my partner and I decided that we were no longer in love. We went our separate ways; yet I was to keep coming back to him over and over. There were many other reasons why this relationship did not last. One of the most important was that I was very immature.

Well, I finally got my first place. Boy did I cry that night. I felt so alone. Of course my first response was to go out and get drunk. This again worked for a short period of time. I allowed others to use my body many more times than I care to remember when I did not have the money to buy that next drink. You see, Drinking became my most important friend. It helped to numb the pain of the past. Well one day it stopped working. The alcohol became my Master.

During this time I was to work many different jobs, not sure what I wanted to do, or for that matter could do. By this time my self esteem, self worth, and self-confidence were almost as low as one can get. The first ray of hope that came my way was through meeting a friend; his name is Jay. He was to become someone I could go to and talk about things I had not dared share with anyone; nor did I think anyone else would care. He did and still does.

Then the day came when I was offered a job out of the state of South Carolina. Through much encouragement from Jay and a few other friends I took the job. It took me to Chicago IL. There the biggest change was to occur. After staying in a motel for a month I was told either to find a place or move back to South Carolina. Well I found a place. Only I found much more than that. On February 18 I went to my first AA meeting.

There for the first time I admitted I was an alcoholic and that I need help. For the next 11 months I was to do a lot of crying and trying. Crying for things lost from childhood and trying to understand the effects that they had on me. I came back to Columbia just knowing for sure that I would be able to find a Male group of Survivors, only to be told I had to be on a list. If enough others came forward then there could be a group. Well I knew there had to be a group somewhere. So I went on a search. It led me to Orlando.

There I found what I had needed and had been wanting. I discovered there four of the most courageous men I had ever met. You see, they were Survivors just like me. We were to share parts of our life we had not spoken of until then. To tell you it was easy from that point on would be a lie, for it was something I would have to learn to live with for the rest of my life. Now, however I no longer have to be ashamed of who and what I am. After all I am a caring, loving, hoping, trying kind of guy.

My name by the way is Elden Phillip Owens. I no longer choose to stand on the sidelines of life and watch it go by. Instead it is time for me to come completely out. Though I never knew Matthew Shepard I knew what it was like to live in fear, shame, guilt and blame. No more. Matthew, you will be missed by a brother you never met. That is a Gay brother. It took me until I was thirty-one years old to begin realizing that I was and still am somebody. There have been many people who have helped me in my life for the last three and a half years. Thanks to each and every one of you for believing in me when at times I could not.

**I hope this will help some others to realize just how twisted a person can get from what is seemingly such a simple act. In writing these, there are still other things that are left out. Not because I wanted to, but only because the space was limited. Thanks again. I must say that at this very moment my**



# Living inside my head – is this awful

# EATING

# disorder



**Kemi shares her story**

**Sitting here now, casting my head back, to when I was a small child at the age of five years old I cry, I was such a happy little tomboy. I used to run and up down my street where I lived in Bow in London, UK, and hang out with my friends. Life was a constant whirlwind of excitement and frenzy. I stayed blissfully happy, immersed in that happiness until the age of eight years old when my parents decided to relocate to a new area. My family began to have problems we never had to worry about before. Money now became an issue. My family life was difficult; my parents often fought in front of my sister and me. We had to try and separate them often. At the same time I also found it hard to settle down in my new school. It had a completely different approach to education my former primary school had had, and I found it hard to relate to my new classmates. I felt misunderstood during the three years that I spent at my second primary school. Furthermore, I was used to having quite a few black pupils around me and there were hardly any in my 'new' school. As a result of all this upheaval and unsettlement, I only managed to make one good friend during this period. I was used to being friends with nearly everybody before. I terribly missed my old school and my old school friends at this point in time.**

Also, at the age of eight, it was at this time that the feelings of love from my parents seemed to stop almost overnight and I felt unrecognised by my parents. I felt like I was too big for my father to demonstrate me any love. He never showed it anymore. I was a "big" girl, or so he said. You must remember too that my parents heritage and roots are in Africa where "parents" are not encouraged to be overly demonstrative towards their children once they reach a certain age, but I was such a sensitive child that I needed more than the show of affection that I was being given. I remember standing there as a little girl at the age of eight and wondering, "daddy do you love me anymore, because, if you do love me daddy you don't seem to show it anymore. Of course I kept these feelings submerged and silent, but in truth I felt like I was unlovable and that I had done something wrong and that was why my dad didn't love me as much as he used to do. I felt alone, the feelings of loneliness intensified by my feelings of isolation brought on by my relocation as well. My parents catered for all my financial needs, I had good parents, but the emotional content of our relationship was just not there. My mother, at this stage, was also very consumed in her job and I was a latch key kid. I often used to sit in the house with my sister for long periods of time alone while my parents were out at work. Given my feelings of isolation, I turned to food for comfort and to blot out and numb my pain. I was hurting. It is also important to note at this stage that my mother got a new job employed in the catering industry and used to bring lots of food home. My sister and I were not used to having all this extra food around the house, it was a lot and my sister and I definitely went overboard with the food because it was seen as a 'new toy' and we had to try it out. Our parents did not put an end to our excessive eating. I remember walking to primary school with 12 packets of crisps in my bag and eating them before I got to school. I remember queuing for endless food outside the school tuck shop in an attempt to feed my already ingrained disorder, (which I now believe was emotional overeating). I also remember telling a dinner lady that I wanted to starve myself to death, and that I was going to refuse food. Of course she was very worried and got me to eat.

As you can see, disordered eating was with me back then to some degree. Still with the extra food I soon gained weight and the teasing started. I hated it, I didn't like people making rude comments about me, but I just tried to laugh it off at this stage. The memories that I hold from those years are quite painful. I remember at age 11 being

forced to stand on a pair of scales and my family laughing at me. I was still rather happy-go-lucky at that stage, but three years later I decided to take control of my life. I wanted to show them all that I was good at something and that I could be successful at something. I wanted to be the slimmest of all my friends. I wanted to be tiny, I simply had had enough of my size back then and thought that it was time for a radical change. I began cutting back on food and soon enough I lost a phenomenal amount of weight. My parents, and especially my father, forced me to break my dieting and it was with this force of pressure to eat that I turned to vomiting to try and fool him. I needed to control something in my life and that was my intake and weight. My father was also very dominating back then. I was beaten beyond what is considered acceptable discipline for a child to endure. I had no freedom and I felt suffocated, so my eating disorder was also a struggle of power interplay between my father and me. I needed autonomy and I needed to live my life and be the author of my own destiny.

The years to 14-16 at school were very difficult because my eating disorder was in full swing. I lived in my own world as most eating disordered people do. I was quite popular during this time despite my eating disorder and I had quite a lot of friends; but in many ways I was a joker and I put up a tough exterior in an attempt to protect my fragile mind and to try and stop people from further hurting me.



### That is the brief story of the start of my eating disorder.

Through the years my eating disorder has worsened and my physical and mental health have taken a battering. I have been admitted to several specialized eating disorders units for refeeding attempts and my heart has been put on heart pumps at my lowest point, 50lbs at 5ft6 inches tall. I also now have long term heart problems as a direct result of my ED. I have never had a boyfriend, still a virgin, and I have no real prospects and I have no 'real' friends in my "real" life, I am very withdrawn now. All my IP experiences have been traumatic. I have been compulsory detained in hospital under Section 3 on many occasions. I have also absconded from all of many IP stays. This has happened because it is very difficult for me to allow my weight to be elevated above a level that I can cope with. No eating disorder unit has been able to give me back my life. A friend of mine referred to me as being a "lifer" and I cried because I feared this was true. I am saddened that it has come to this. I privately shed my own tears over this. I often do not cry outwardly (I am too emotionally detached to cry outwardly mostly, though I do cry through the language that is my eating disorder. I shed tears inwardly over this because I once had dreams, and I loved life at one stage and I cry that now my voice is now mute. I feel like I am like a bird in a cage who is trapped and cannot get out. That is how that I can best describe how I feel.

Some problems as a black eating-disordered woman that I have experienced and do constantly have to deal with are the need to validate that yes, I do have anorexia (although most days I think that I am too fat for the classification and feel like there is nothing wrong with me even at an emaciated weight) and that I am not merely copying anybody else! I have been told in Inpatient refeeding stays by black nurses why I have this disorder is because I am copying white girls. I am not copying anybody. I am me. It is very painful when people tell me this, because they are, in effect, denying my suffering and my experiences. My disorder has cost me very dearly in my own life, so to deny and to not recognize the root causes of my problems is very painful. It is like I suffered and am suffering for no real reason. and that it is my own fault, although with confirmed negativity disorder I tend to blame myself anyway. My parents are also ashamed of my eating disorder although they have become more accepting of it over the years and they now do all they can to help me through spirituality and endless compassion. An eating disorder is just not something that they 'do' in their culture, or so they say. My parents do not like the mental health profession and have fought against sections for me by refusing to give their consent to the section. My parents are also thankful that I am not really 'mental' and that I should just get myself together and sort myself out with the help of god, as if it is that easy (my parents classify an eating disorder as a more acceptable mental illness). I would also add that because of the social stigma that being detained under the mental health can bring and because of my parents' religious beliefs, my parents choose to believe that God can/will cure my ED and not the mental health profession, another very common trait that I have found that is shared amongst other black women with eating disorders. After my first edu admission, my parents seemed to believe that their treatment was better than psychiatric treatment, and short of medical emergency my parents do not truly believe that the medical profession can help me or either cure me. That is god's domain, or so they say.

Today in the here and now my eating disorder has become my way of coping and it is now very much my dangerous lifestyle while at the same time a very damaging mental illness. My eating disorder began long before I even knew what an eating disorder was. I have just had to drop out of my studies again because of my eating disorder. I didn't want to write a piece that blamed anybody because I do not. I have totally forgiven everybody who caused me suffering intentionally or unintentionally. I do not bear malice, so some things in my life cannot be talked about without dredging up the past and that has the power to hurt a lot of people and I am past that. Funny now that my family seems to give me more of the love that I wanted back then now that I am "sick." In many ways I am still very much that little girl that I was back then, the little girl who yearned for love and the need to be looked after. In my mind I also think that my family, especially my father, will cease to love me as much if I am again big, and I am constantly tortured by the thoughts of people hurting me when I was chubby, so I never ever want to go there again. In terms of my future I fear it so much and I believe deep down that I will never have a future. The future just does not look good for me. It has been seventeen years of persistent hell now and I am starting to get tired of my life but cannot/will not force a change for some reason. I wish that I could write something more positive but I just cannot, I am sorry. I am disabled now as a direct result of my eating disorder and my outlook is not fixated on recovery although I wish that for everybody who suffers from a ed. One cannot give up entire hope though as there is god and with god then comes hope. However, at present my life is dominated by my eating disorder and I am but a shell of my former self. An eating disorder is the worst thing that has ever happened to me because it has taken away my voice and it has put a halt to my emotional and life development. I wouldn't wish my life on my worst enemy (although I have no enemies in reality). Thank you for listening to my story.



# We can Fight Racism – by Respecting Each Other

Fawad A Bhatti – Interfaith Development Officer

Asalaamu-alaikum. (Peace be upon you)

**Racism manifests itself in many, many different ways. In blatant (physical violence) and latent (institutional) forms. It is clever and sometimes even "clever-clever" (so clever it appears silly). It is perceived and actual. You can be racist wittingly, also un-wittingly. There are male and female perpetrators and victims. Young and old. Most of it is by the ethnic majority against the ethnic minority but in recent times there have been cases of it being the other way round. But where do we get racism from? Why does there appear to be a need to target a race / faith / culture (these do often blur into one) that then makes us feel better about ourselves?**

Fear of the other. Myths, stereotypes and exaggerations will always happen when we restrict our personal interaction with our fellow human beings and rely upon information by people to form our morals, opinions and beliefs. Are some of us racist because of the 'island' mentality? We are cut off from the rest of Europe. What about the illusion of being part of a great empire? We ruled the world once (or at least our rulers did). Or is it jealousy? Why have they got something we haven't?

"I admit I've got racial problems but doesn't everyone?". 'Mancs' don't like 'Scousers', 'Jocks' don't like the English, the 'Blues' don't like the 'Reds', our lot don't like yours – it's as simple as that. Or is it? "Well don't you lot hate each other as well?". We are made aware Africans don't like Caribbeans, Indians don't like Pakistanis, Hindus (or for that matter Jews, Sikhs & Christians) don't like Muslims. We're also told that Muslims don't like anyone else! By citing other occurrences of conflict / rivalry / hatred between peoples, this does not give us a justification to harbour our own. By perpetuating divisions our society will not move forward and we will always be prone to be influenced by those who want to divide and rule over us.

In Old Testament times the itinerant Hebrew nation had a novel way of cleansing itself of any guilt arising from social sins. The religious leaders laid their hands on a goat and ceremoniously transferred the guilt of the people on to the goat. The beast was then driven outside the camp of Israel into the wilderness. From this ancient ritual we have developed the practice of 'scapegoating'. When something goes wrong in society and it is perceived that it is due to corporate wrongdoing we look for a scapegoat. We usually pick on the eccentric, the minorities and the unlovable – those who are different. Someone has to bear the guilt for society's ills so that the rest of us can rest easy in our own sense of self-righteous well-being. So from its Jewish origins in the temple to its modern media context, by blaming others or demonising others we divert away attention from possibly the real sources of society's problems. The Daily Mail around 50 or so years ago called the influx of persecuted Jews from Europe into Britain's ports an "outrage" but nowadays we can substitute Jews for Muslims / Kurds / Afghans / Africans / Refugees / Asylum seekers and the story more or less remains the same 50 years later and many readers accept it as they did then. It wasn't long ago that people of Irish heritage were being thought of as potential terrorists and a threat to our security. Currently it's Muslims.

'Housewives favourite', media personality Robert Kilroy-Silk wrote in his column for the Daily Express some years ago that he thought Islam was an evil religion and if he is thought of as a racist then "so be it". Did this comment influence his readers? Why was he so happy to brand himself a racist? Was this public comment the product of living in a free society where we can speak our minds? Surely you can't generalise to this large extent? Is every Muslim cleric a terrorist? Is every Christian cleric a paedophile?

I was part of a group that went to visit the Corrymeela community in Northern Ireland in 2001. We met Dean Lee, a Honk Kong Chinese Catholic from Belfast who whilst growing up there was attacked regularly for being 'Fenian scum' by Protestants and then attacked for being a 'chinky' so & so by his co-religionists. It seems your race can sometimes prevent you from seeking the identity you want, in Dean's case simply Northern Irish Christian. Samuel Johnson in 1775 did say that "patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel" – indeed.

Sitting in a friend's house one day, the daughter came home from school distressed. She had been verbally racially abused by some Asian schoolgirls on her way home. She was called an ugly white so & so, amongst other things. The discussion that followed really moved and humbled me when he described as a teenager he had been part of a far-right organisation who picked on Asian young and elderly. During his childhood he had grown up on a Glasgow estate where your 'Orange' or 'Green' identity was formed. Then after moving to East Lancashire, 'Orange' and 'Green' became 'White' and 'Black' (or Asian). Then and us, all over again. He urged his daughter not to fall into the traps he fell into when young. Is this irony? History repeating itself? Can you justifiably be racist if someone of a different race has discriminated against you?

A recent TV programme investigating far-right activity in the UK interviewed a self-confessed white supremacist, who managed to forget his racist views temporarily when he was secretly filmed dating a Black mixed-race woman. Why did he do this? "We had your women before you had ours!". The relationship between sex and race goes back a long, long way. Are men more racist than women? Are they racist in different ways?

"My English Granddad fought to keep this country British!". Well so did Jewish Granddads in the trenches of the Somme, Arab (even Palestinian) Granddads in the Battle of Britain and Indian Granddads around the world where Britain was attacking or being attacked. All these different races fought to keep this country British – my own forebears gave their lives for the British in World War 1 & World War 2.

So how racist is Britain? There is a tiny minority who would meet the requirements for being an out-and-out racist but a better question would be: is the British system racist? The judicial and policing system, the health & social care system, the governing & political system, the education system, the media and public information system are to some extent because policies and procedures if not sufficiently robust can be abused by some. Following Stephen Lawrence's murder, Macpherson's Report made famous the term 'institutional racism'. I see institutional discrimination on a regular basis – not all is intentional but it's effects can be much more hurtful than verbal or even some physical racism. Two faith groups, Jews and Sikhs, were recognised as races so were covered by legislation in the Race Relations Act but Muslims weren't (or Hindus and other faiths for that matter). We do need a level playing field to stop the generalisations such as Robert Kilroy-Silk's previous remarks.

How do we combat racism? Hmmm ... tough one! It's difficult to do in a co-ordinated approach, that's why the Commission for Racial Equality and other such organisations will always be limited in what they can achieve. Changing hearts and minds isn't tangible. Some faith groups / races have their own methods for tackling hate and discrimination against them. Propaganda, lobbying (government) decision-makers and media presence will offer protection from media demonisation and workplace discrimination but will it change the clichéd 'hearts and minds'?

For Christians and other people of faith, coveting your neighbours wife, dishonouring your parents, hoarding wealth, etc are not really illegal in this country but upholding racist practices and discriminating because of someone's race, ethnic origin or faith are. Or so we're told.

## A Scottish Perspective on Racism Mona McAllinden

**I'm originally from Glasgow and I now live and study journalism in the city. When I was 6 my family moved to a small town in East Ayrshire.**

**I am of mixed race (Egyptian and Scottish) but live with white parents. I suffered racial abuse when I was in both primary and secondary school, although more so at primary school as I was not yet confident enough to stick up for myself.**

**I think one of the main factors of racial abuse in a small town is undoubtedly ignorance. There were no black people living in my town and only two Asian families, so I felt as though I stuck out like a sore thumb.**

**Obviously you can't force ethnic minorities to move to small towns merely to combat ignorance but there must be some way of making people of colour more familiar to small town residents, so that they're not regarded as peculiarities.**

**Maybe people who have suffered abuse at the hands of racists could visit primary schools and other youth centres to talk about their experiences - so kids can see that people from ethnic minorities are just normal people, the same as them.**

**Maybe then the small town mentality may gradually dissipate and ethnic minorities may not be as isolated in towns like mine.**

# The Lost Child

Elaine Kennedy

**Do you know how many hours a person with a lifespan of eighty years spends alive on this earth? Have a guess! A million? Five million? Actually its about Six hundred thousand. Doesn't sound much does it?!**

If we were able from birth to chart every hour and how it should be filled, I wonder how many would be more fulfilling, how many would be less wasted, by ditching all kinds of manipulations imposed on us by previous generations? Would our fertile minds be freer to explore new horizons instead of spending hours sifting through the boggy silt of inherited drudgery?. What would matter and what wouldn't matter? How wonderful it would have been as a child to have time to assimilate the wonders of nature, and of being a live part of it, before being made aware of the adults' world of fears, inadequacies and prejudice. Long forgotten is the realisation that childhood innocence is not just a space full of ignorance, but a buffer given by mother nature, in her wisdom, to be released very slowly over the years in order to allow the young mind to develop and assimilate knowledge at a pace it can cope with.

However, in our modern world of global and instant communications, urban overcrowded living etc., it has become impossible to shield our young from the destructive premature loss of that buffer of innocence - the globalisation of communications seems to be increasing the problems, not reducing them. The Dalai Lama says "Modern Industrial Society often strikes me as being like a huge self-propelled machine. Instead of human beings in charge, each individual is a tiny insignificant component with no choice but to make a move when the machine moves".

To millions of us, a huge element of that machine which tries to make us move is prejudice. Prejudice is a hugely destructive force which starts from tiny seeds sown into that fertile young mind from the day of its birth, pushing the buffer of innocence wide enough in order to condition our offspring and to engender in them all our pettynesses and inherited fears - and so every generation ensures that the next doesn't stand a chance!

In days of old, before mass movement of people around the globe, prejudice about each other was contained. However in this age of multicultural societies, of families finding them selves split by vast distances and ways of living their lives, of the passing of old family and community structures, of people with no idea of their origins due to sperm bank donations etc., we face a new target for possible prejudice, one against people who have no sense of identity, who are genetically homeless, people who have no rootedness, people who have evolved in totally different ways from their blood relations, and don't feel totally at home where they have been born and bred.

Seeing the play 'Midnight Children' by Salman Rushdie, which involves the children born at the exact moment India was separated from Pakistan, I felt an affinity with the people who are divided individuals and go through life needing to reinvent themselves in order to achieve a sense of rootedness. The play takes a dramatic license by making each midnight person believe they had special magic powers. In real life this would translate into the need to prove constantly that one has something of value which makes one worthy of being included - and we do so want to be included. Of course the special gifts of multicultural lingual ability, true insight into more than one culture and dual genetic make up are invaluable tools for the road of life. However, one is also doubly aware of the ignorance that is our inherited prejudice, the destructive forces of seeing with a jaundiced eye and the hopelessness of early conditioning and bigotry infused into the powerless child. If one poisons his landscape, he will either grow into that scene and perpetuate it in his offspring or he will rebel and see it for what it truly is, a destructive and arid force which he will have to waste many a precious hour of his life trying to wriggle free from. Eventually, resentful of the time he has been made to waste shedding powerful early indoctrinations, he will emerge a restructured adult. He will never feel truly rooted, but however many of his six hundred thousand hours are left to him, he will have a sense of divided wholeness, especially if he believes in the words of St Paul: "There is a variety of gifts but always the same spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them". Divided wholeness - it is the most some of us will ever achieve - but overcoming prejudice is achievable by every sentient being on this planet.





Denise Richardson

# Living on the Edge in Ireland

**Stories and images of exclusion** have characterised all cultures over long historical periods. In our western contemporary society of racism, sexism and marginalization of minority groups, exclusion has become the dominant factor the creation of psychological, social, cultural and spatial boundaries. 'Ireland's Own' Glimpses of the Excluded - Surviving on the Edge, seeks to identify the forms of social and spatial exclusion and examine accounts of members of the Irish Traveller community.

In embarking on a Doctoral thesis and evaluating documents and testimonies on the lives of Irish Travellers by a variety of writers, the author asks why the history of Irish Travellers is so neglected by the academic establishment. I dare to suggest that both the practices which result in the marginalization and the exclusion of certain minorities and those which also result in the denial and exclusion of valuable knowledge, have important implications for society, and for ways of celebrating difference and diversity.

Having drawn on a wide range of ideas and evidence this paper presents some accounts which highlight the tendency of powerful groups to view Irish Travellers as defiled, folk devils and deviants threatening to society; and those representing the 'difference' and 'diversity' of the lives of Irish Travellers.

## 'Irish Travellers - Echoes of the Past'

"They are a police problem, a sanitary problem, a poor law problem....they are country folk unable, unwilling and unaccustomed to city life." These were the words of Dorothy Page, an historian, who was describing the Irish riots in London in 1736. The negative way she, and generations of people have thought and treated the Irish as a problem bears similarities to the way some people have treated Irish Travellers.

**Mutual Fear.** In 1983 The National Council for Travelling People reported that "Because of their deprivation and generations of isolation and poverty, the travellers have an inborn fear of the settled community. This is one of the reasons they band together in different areas, living illegally on the roadside with all their untidiness and litter. Conversely, the settled community fear the travellers for many reasons, mainly the fear of violence and thieving, but also because of the effect the encampments may have on the value of their houses and appearance of the neighbourhood.

Also, The fact that many of the travellers cannot read and write makes them feel insecure amongst the settled community. Imagine having to rely on someone else to read and write your letters, or to ask directions all the time when going to visit the doctor, a social worker etc..., only to be told that one is standing in the building which has the name displayed. These are a couple of examples of humiliation suffered by illiterates.

**Concerned at conditions of travelling people** - "The members of Newry and Mourne District Council, in a statement, have expressed concern at the conditions under which the Travelling People on Middlebank are living....We ask the District Council to take action to alleviate their hardship and the Youth Council will support any moves which the council takes to provide a permanent site in our area if it is acceptable to the Travellers" the response from the local residents was Move the itinerants on NOW! "itinerants, travelling people, gypos or tinkers-call them what you will - they have all one thing in common and that is wherever they go they besmirch and spoil whatever they pull into, be it town or country".

The Irish Travelling People's conduct covers the same broad spectrum of social and moral behaviour of the general population, from the scrupulous and upright to the drunken vagabond. Sacks comments that 'One belief, more than any other is responsible for the slaughter of individuals ...it is the belief that those who do not share my faith - my race, [my Travelling culture] or my ideology - do not share my humanity. At best they are second-class citizens. At worst they forfeit the sanctity of life itself.

The Report of the Working Party with the Travelling people in 1979 states "their problems are compounded by their way of life and general ignorance and hostility of the settled community towards them".

## Getting to Know the Strangers Living on the Edge' Glimpses of the Lives of Irish Travellers

Sacks reminds us that 'the problem of the stranger, the one who is not like us', has proved to be the most difficult in the history of human interaction and that 'most societies at times have been suspicious of,

and aggressive toward, strangers'. He reminds us that 'You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger - you yourself were strangers in the land of Egypt'.

**Irish Travellers are not strangers** in Ireland - their own land.

Traditionally itinerant craftsmen they travelled through areas of rural Ireland, performing a variety of trades and services - tinsmithing, peddling, horse dealing, chimney sweeping and seasonal farm labour etc. Most tinsmith families followed regular routes travelling within a small area seldom covering more than two or three counties connected with the old ways in which the settled and the travelling tinsmith family lived together as a vital part of Irish rural and urban life. Considering place means considering the ways in which particular locations are important in making of a cultural world. Our understanding of the world is tied closely to the ways in which we construct and context the meanings of particular often named places. Story telling, folklore and myths convert objects, people, places and particular times into real presences. Myths, histories and folklore are not just stories but are foundational stories that provide support and glimmers of understanding for the basic institutions of society.

## Glimpses of Irish Travellers in Folklore

The Irish Tinsmith Craftsmen travelled their trade circuits in family and clan kinship groups. Women and children were an essential component of this family trade/business unit providing the traditional roles, functions and services required to maintain a family unit - food, education, religion, cultural norms etc.

Folklorist Artella Court in 'The Lives and Literature of Irish Tinsmiths' refers to Tinsmith wives. 'Just as the Travelling tinsmith's success in trade was wrought by his own aptness, so his wife's prosperity depended on her ability for the traditional enterprises of a Travelling woman. In work and in money matters her family responsibility, and her autonomy, often exceeded those of her settled counterpart'.

"...sometimes in comparative splendor on an ass or horse-drawn cart, they sallied forth with strings of tin vessels and baskets full of the requisites of rural work, play, and vanity. Women carted into the countryside and villages: an inventory comparable to that of Woolworth's. The craftsman's wife also managed his trade's peripheral business.

She and her children would carry a vessel needing repair or an order for new tins back to the camp. They would frequently deliver finished tins, collect payment for work done, and relay messages between smith and his customer. Some women too had talent, learning or earnings to develop substantial sales specialties of their own."

Now at the beginning of the 21st century Mary Moriarty, an Irish Traveller from County Galway and a Traveller liaison worker, has commented that "the history of the itinerant Irish Tinsmith community, their contribution to Irish society and the changing nature of itinerant Irish Tinsmiths like the Irish Traveller culture has to date been largely unrecorded. Much of this history remains in the memory of the older Travellers and is held in the stories passed on by them to their children and grandchildren". This is a void that has been the focus for one community project tracing the history, nomadism and economic activity of five Traveller families in the West of Ireland.



# Male Victims of Abuse

A victim

**Life is moving along as well as it can. All of a sudden there is an unfamiliar knock at the door, upon answering I find two Police officers standing there. Out of the blue they say we need to talk to you about your time in care.**

Bang, I am hit with something that takes me back to when the most horrendous events of my life took place. After a short time of getting to know each other, we got down to what was wanted. They wanted to know if anything had happened to me in my time at this place. Because of the shame, I could not divulge any of the grossest details, but I told them that I was touched in the anal and genital areas, and forced to touch the same areas of my perpetrator.

After some 7-8 hours of questions and repeating of my answers they leave, telling me that if I thought of anything else to give them a ring. I think great that's over. (How wrong I was). I am unable to deal with the situation I am left in, as all the effects of what I had suffered hit me all at once. I take myself off to be alone, in my safe haven whilst here I am able to write down all of what had happened when I was in care, after several hours I emerge from my safe haven, holding numerous pieces of paper, I ask my wife to read what I had suffered. This is done with a tremendous amount of fear, (that fear being after reading such disgusting material she will leave me). My wife tells me that I need to let the police know what had happened at the hands of these monsters. I find the courage to ring the police they say they are on their way, they arrive within 30 minutes, when we sit down they tell me, we knew that there was more than what I had said previously.

I hand over the many pieces of paper that contain all the details of what I had suffered at the hands of my perpetrators. After sometime of reading the material the officer said I would have to tell them in words what was in the papers. This was not what I wanted to hear. I knew it was going to be a tremendously difficult thing for me to do, as I am already feeling isolated, worthless, ashamed, dirty, responsible for what happened and guilty for allowing it to happen. I eventually find the will to tell them what they want to hear. I sign the statements after 8-9 hours they have what they want and leave. They leave me with nothing.

Bang, it is like it has all just happened, the psychological, mental, physical and emotional effects are so immense that nothing matters. I do not care about anything or anyone, I go into a cocoon wanting to be left alone, I try to sleep but I can not as the flashbacks and nightmares begin as a result I do not try to sleep any more, I start to

feel low and the depression begins. I cannot go to work, do not want to wash, shave, eat, drink (except for alcohol) or change my clothes. I just let the world go by.

I need help so I speak to the police who give me the number for the NSPCC, I ring them tell them that I have been abused they ask my age when I tell them I am 34-35, they say I am too old and can not help me, given another number to try again I receive the same response, this happens time and time again. I then feel even more isolated no one wants to help. Depression deepens so I visit my GP, I tell him what I am going through, the only help he can give me is Sleeping tablets and Anti-depressants, these do not work so the hole gets bigger and bigger. I became lower and lower and found myself at the point were all I want is for this to end. That is when the suicidal thoughts begin which then become greater and greater and believe me you can not get any lower. I see my doctor who then prescribes Anti-psychotics and tranquillisers; I feel that the only way out is to go away and never come back.

Eventually after much persuasion, the police found me some kind of support. It took me some 2-3 years before I realised that it was helping, this also led to me getting 1-2-1 counselling, which I am still attending. But I found a group named Fire in Ice from whom I receive a great deal of support. I still have to use the Anti-depressants but at a much reduced dose.

I must also add that without the help, support and nurturing I have had from my wife and families I can honestly say I do not know were I would be now without it.

Police interviews, visits to solicitors and barristers, psychological reports, psychiatric reports and medical examinations all have a detrimental effect on you. I believe that none of these professionals realise how much of a distressing and abusive effect it has on the victim / survivor.

As with all forms of distress you eventually find a coping strategy. What has happened cannot be removed as some people think.

**The effects are real; they can be put away, but are not forgotten.**

## A Self Help Group

**Fire in Ice is a Merseyside based self-help project run by and for adult men who have experienced childhood abuse, especially those who suffered while in institutional childcare establishments. Fire in Ice aims to enable men who have suffered child abuse and their families to make positive change in their lives, also aims to make the care experience safe for children and young people. Fire in Ice offers one to one, group and telephone support in a friendly empathic environment. It also works with non-sex-offending survivors in prisons throughout Northwest England. Fire in Ice is made up of ordinary men who have overcome their abuse and volunteer to support others who suffered as innocent children.**

## UNKNOWN TALE

Once we were two people, who became friends  
Close friends over many years.  
We never lost that friendship, no matter what  
Each valuing the other  
Showing respect, tolerance and patience  
Without a single thought.  
We needed each other, but wouldn't admit it  
For fear of rejection.

Once there was mutual and reciprocal love  
A love built to last forever.  
Unconditional.  
Once there were two hearts, with a bonding so tight  
That nothing would sever.

Once we both wanted each other  
We both wanted love  
We both needed to be loved  
We were both in love, with each other  
We didn't need to impress, not doubt.  
We were just 'there' for one another.  
A beautiful feeling of knowing  
And belonging.

Then the love was clouded and stilted  
by the dreadful memories and trappings of the innocent  
And almost five years passed, whilst the other love  
tended the scars  
and shared the pain and desperation.  
The innocent and the carer survived - against all  
adversity.

And the friendship remained  
Because of its sheer strength already gained  
And the love stayed.....  
It was tucked away for safe keeping  
Until it was safe to emerge.  
It never died - and never will  
Because it too - was so strong.  
And always will be.

It may or may not ever be manifested -  
But if ever it is  
It will be the most beautiful and tender love  
That will last forever.

**Helpline: 0151 707 2614**

Open Mondays 5-9pm.

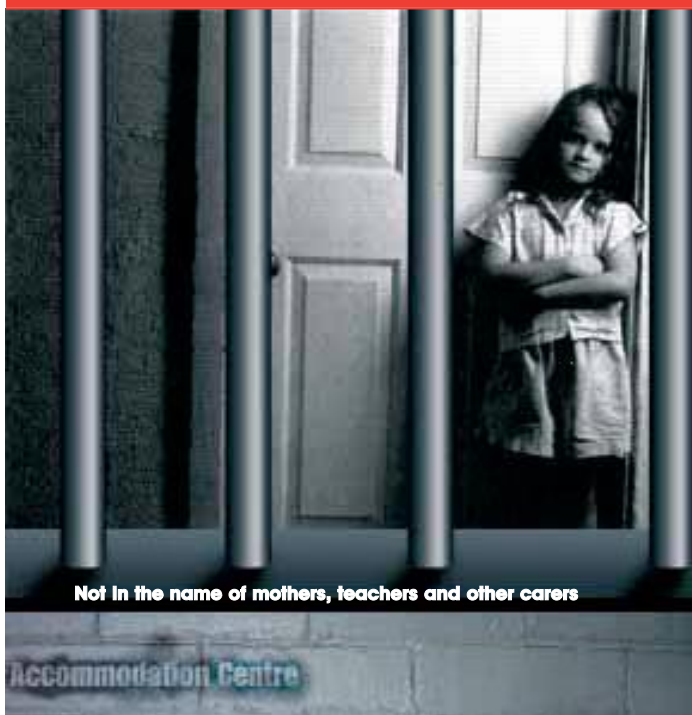
Office: Tel: **0151 708 6339**

Open Monday- Friday 10am-4pm.

**Contact: Matthew Byrne**  
Project Co-ordinator

Address: **88 Rodney Street**  
**Liverpool L1 9AR**

Email: [fireinice@freenet.co.uk](mailto:fireinice@freenet.co.uk)  
Web sites: [www.fireinice.co.uk](http://www.fireinice.co.uk)  
[www.victimsnolonger.org.uk](http://www.victimsnolonger.org.uk)



# NO SCHOOL APARTHEID

The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act (NIA Act) aims to force traumatised children and families claiming asylum into isolated "Accommodation Centres" whilst their claims are being considered. Children living there will be denied the right to go to school with other children.

Many children seeking asylum now are being held in Detention Centres, denied proper schooling, allowed little exercise, some living and sleeping with as many as five to a room. A number of articles have come out in the press recently condemning this treatment.

The Act intends for more people including women with young children, to be held in detention (like prisons) when they first arrive. Traumatized women, children and men who have been victims of the most horrendous violence, including rape and other torture, whose loved ones have been murdered in front of them, are being criminalized, denied basic human rights, independent legal advice and essential health care, and most crucially, the time they need to present their full case. If the vast amount of money spent on bombing and invading other countries (Britain spent £3.5bn on bombing Iraq alone) went into caring there would be much less devastation and many less asylum seekers displaced in the world.

Mothers, fathers and other carers formed the No Schools Apartheid Campaign (NSA) to oppose plans for segregated education. The Campaign, led by mothers, has been effective. It has brought together a diverse network of people including teachers, professionals, charities, refugee rights and church groups to oppose the legislation.

We strongly believe that all children, starting with resident children, benefit from growing up in an integrated environment where they can

make friends and be educated with children from all over the world. There is no better anti-racist education, so vital for a caring society, than to grow up in a multi-racial school ready to defend its most vulnerable pupils and would-be pupils. What better way to learn first hand than no one needs, wants or deserves less than yourself?

Every teacher we have spoken to said it's a lie that asylum seekers are "swamping" schools, and stressed that these children make a positive contribution to the communities they live in and have brought great benefits to the schools.

"This is the most disgusting bit of vote catching I've come across. I'm not swamped by refugee children I'm swamped by government initiatives and bureaucracy. Segregating children will only fuel racism and deprive English children of the chance to mix with youngsters from different backgrounds" Andy Knowles, Head of Hampstead Community School London.

My school is enriched by diversity, it's not a problem, it's an opportunity. As children, we get one chance at being a five-year-old, a six-year-old, a seven-, an eight-, a nine-year-old. As an adult we get many more opportunities. Brigid Jackson-Dooley, Cleves Primary School, Newham London.

The government has not been able to find one head teacher ready to support segregated education.

As part of NSA's campaigning we called two briefings for the Lords and MP's as the Bill passed through Parliament so they could hear from the grass-roots. In their debate the Lords referred repeatedly to people's contributions which no doubt helped to win the vote against segregated education at that stage. Although the government finally passed the legislation in November 2002, they were seen to be pushing it through at any cost and the deal the Liberal Democrats were ready to make with them was exposed and dropped.

We have always said that the government plans to educate children in accommodation centres means no education at all. This is proved right by recent publicity of conditions in detention where children receive no formal, substantial or age appropriate education, and there is no Ofsted inspection. As many as 56 children under the age of 18 are currently locked up by the Immigration service, some for as long as 270 days.

We are focusing on stopping the government's plans and have called for non-co-operation from teachers and others. Blunket depends on to open the accommodation centres.

We would like to be in touch with teachers and other staff, trade unions and church people and anyone who would consider supporting the call for non-co-operation with apartheid education. If they can't find the staff and there is enough opposition this policy could go the way of vouchers and children would be back in school.

#### What you can do:

- >> Ask your school, nursery, local education authority to protest -- send them your letter and tell them the community feels strongly about it.
- >> Send your letters to local press, educational journals, education editors, and any school TV or radio programmes and ask them to cover it.
- >> Contact teachers' association/trade unions and ask them to get their branches to write and to call for non-co-operation with accommodation and other detention centres. Ask them to publish information in their journals and on their websites.

Co-ordinated by mothers with the support of Legal Action for Women  
[kay@crossroadswomen.net](mailto:kay@crossroadswomen.net) Tel: 0207 482 2496 07904 25514

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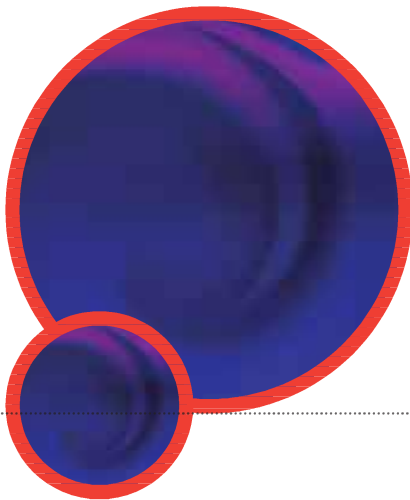
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