

2004 – 2005

Cois Tine



EXECUTIVE REPORT

*“In Jesus God came seeking hospitality....
How can the baptized claim to welcome Christ
if they close the door to the stranger who
comes knocking.”*

Pope John Paul II

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Mission Statement

Cois Tine addresses the pastoral, spiritual and social needs of the immigrant community. Rooted in the call of the Gospel to welcome the stranger it promotes an appreciation of other cultures and the rejection of racism.

15. INTRODUCTION

This Report covers the period from February 2004 to February 2005 and gives an overview of Cois Tine's services, activities, involvement with other groups and an account of income and expenditure. The Report will also outline aims and objectives for the year 2005-2006.

In the text below the terms "Asylum Seeker" and "Refugee" will be used. An asylum seeker is a person who has come to Ireland and applied for Refugee Status. While their application is being processed that person is legally present in the country. A Refugee is a person whose application for asylum has been granted. They then have the same rights as an Irish citizen. Some immigrants do not meet the criteria to be granted refugee status. A small number of these are granted "Leave to Remain" on humanitarian or other grounds. For the purposes of this report the term "Refugee" includes not only those granted refugee status but also those granted Leave to Remain.

2. BACKGROUND

The Society of African Missions (SMA) in its Irish Provincial Assembly 2001 recognised the growing number of refugees and asylum seekers to Ireland. It committed to undertaking positive initiatives to respond to the needs of Africans in Ireland. Subsequent needs assessment revealed that while a number of organisations had the remit of addressing needs related to issues such as the

asylum process, housing and legal advice, little response was being made to the emerging spiritual and pastoral needs of asylum seekers and refugees. In April 2002 Cois Tine began with the specific remit of addressing these needs.

From the very beginning the cooperation and participation of the Diocese of Cork and Ross and Religious has been essential to the very existence of Cois Tine. This support is one of the main contributing factors to our achievements to date and it needs to continue and grow if Cois Tine is to develop and fulfil its pastoral role.

3. WHAT IS COIS TINE?

The name Cois Tine or “The Fireside” in the Irish language was chosen, because in Irish culture it was a place of welcome, warmth and safety where people could meet, socialise, discuss and make decisions. Cois Tine’s aim is to extend a warm welcome to immigrants and to provide them with a place where they can tell their story, be listened to and can obtain the information they need in order to make informed decisions.

Cois Tine is also a multicultural interfaith organisation which addresses the pastoral, spiritual and social needs of the immigrant community. It is rooted in the call of the Gospel to welcome the stranger and is focused on facilitating the integration of immigrants into the faith life of the Church and the community.

Cois Tine became an outreach project of the Society of African Missions Justice and Peace Office in November 2003 with the support of other religious congregations and the local Church. Its remit is purely a pastoral/religious one. While it does not address the political, legal or physical health dimensions of immigrant life, it does deal with the social, cultural and mental health dimensions but only in so far as they pertain to the pastoral.

Cois Tine's objectives are as follows:

- To provide a place where asylum seekers can meet, reflect and tell their story.
- To provide a space for social interaction.
- To facilitate the full participation of immigrants in the life of their faith.
- To promote ways for all members from different faiths and cultures to share and learn from each other.
- To provide ongoing education in relation to spirituality, scripture and faith.
- To liaise and to encourage cooperation between churches in multicultural ministry.
- To provide resources for groups involved in seeking out and welcoming the stranger.
- To raise racial awareness and remove the barriers of indifference, prejudice and fear.
- To resource and provide materials for liturgical and pastoral dimensions of multicultural ministry and mission.
- To develop leadership training for intercultural communication.
- To facilitate the provision of counselling for traumatized asylum seekers.
- To offer spiritual direction.
- To move towards a new vision of mission.

4. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE YEAR

The past year was a very busy one during which many changes and developments took place. In line with the aims stated above our work focused both on asylum seekers and on the Irish community.

February and March 2004 were largely taken up with the refurbishment and setting up of the office in Victoria Avenue and moving the Drop-in Centre from Fr Mathew Hall to Mercy House in Convent Place. In February a part time coordinator was employed and in the following months he received a comprehensive induction. In May the coordinator's post became a full time one.

Services at the new Drop-in Centre were rebuilt and expanded. More than five hundred individuals received one to one support at the Centre during the year. This work, which is described in more detail below, formed the core of Cois Tine's pastoral response to asylum seekers and refugees.

During the summer months the number of asylum seekers using the Centre increased. This was due to the fact that most agencies working with asylum seekers closed down in this period. In addition to continuing our normal services Cois Tine also ran a Summer Activity Programme that included Typing and Computer Classes, Drama, Outings, a Discussion Group and other activities. Throughout the year other pastoral activities and programmes also took place e.g. an RCIA Catechumenate Programme, Pre-Baptismal classes for parents etc.

An equally significant part of our work was that undertaken with Irish people. This sought to promote Christian values and the welcoming of the stranger. By delivering talks, presentations, training and through printed material Cois Tine made contact with many thousands of Irish people. Each opportunity was used to promote a Gospel centered and balanced view of asylum seekers and at the same time a rejection of prejudice and racism.

Much attention was given to establishing links with local and national organisations. As a result clients could be referred on to agencies that provide the services beyond Cois Tine's specifically pastoral remit. These contacts also allowed us to avoid unnecessary duplication of service and also to make the best use of scarce resources, both our own and also those of other organisations.

Other events of note during the year were the launch of the Cois Tine Newsletter, our participation in the Mission Alive Festival and the Card Campaign at the end of the year. These allowed us to reach out to more people and to raise awareness of racism and of issues affecting asylum seekers. Early in 2005 links were made between local parishes and our RCIA Catechumenate programme. Meetings concerning Pre Baptismal Programmes and regarding Cois Tine's work

in general were held with diocesan clergy and also the first in a series of Briefings regarding asylum seeker issues was also sent to parishes in the Cork area.

In the autumn of 2004 the Cois Tine Chaplaincy came into being when Fr Kevin Kiernan was appointed Chaplain to the asylum seekers by the Capuchins. Based in the Drop-in Centre the Chaplaincy will focus on the Sacraments liturgy, spiritual direction and pastoral visitation to immigrants. This is a positive and welcome development that will be a catalyst in developing Cois Tine's pastoral response.

In line with our policy of working with other agencies many of the activities of the last year were undertaken in cooperation with other groups, for example Cork Women's Education Initiative, Cork City Partnership, Refugee Legal Service, the Garda and Welcome English. The aims expressed in Cois Tine's Mission Statement and the objectives stated on the previous page were furthered through the following activities:

- Setting up and running a Drop-in Centre for Asylum seekers
- Providing one-to-one assistance to asylum seekers, i.e. emotional support, information and advocacy.
- Providing or facilitating classes, training and courses for asylum seekers.
- Setting up a new Administrative base at 21 Victoria Avenue.
- Pastoral/Sacramental activities.
- Running an asylum seeker Women's Group.
- Training Courses for Women, i.e. Leadership, Facilitation, Self-development Courses and Crafts. See Appendix II
- Pastoral visitation of asylum seekers in Accommodation Centres.
- Provision of Training to Accommodation Centre Staff and to Youth and Community Groups.
- Running a Summer Activities Programme for asylum seekers.
- Organising outings/trips for asylum seekers.

- Training volunteers to provide support for our clients.
- Outreach work – providing talks, meeting with groups, publishing a Newsletter, participating in multicultural and other events, e.g. International Women’s Day and Mission Alive.
- Facilitating the provision of Counselling for traumatised asylum seekers.
- Campaigning for the better treatment of asylum seekers.
- Facilitating and promoting multi agency cooperation by participating in and by hosting multi-agency meetings.
- Providing a venue where asylum seeker Community Groups could meet.
- Engaging in fundraising activities to support our core work.
- Undertaking the administrative and record keeping tasks needed to ensure efficiency and to meet the monitoring requirements of Management and Funders.

5. THE SPIRIT OF COIS TINE

Above and in the rest of this report we will give a factual overview of our work during the past year. In this section, instead of dealing with ‘What’, ‘Where’ and ‘When’ we touch on the ‘Why’ – on the need to be involved in the work that we do and on the feelings and emotions it engenders.

The move of the Drop-in Centre from Fr Mathew Hall to Mercy House was a big change. Unconsciously there was an expectation that the centre would take up where it left off in Fr Mathew Hall. This did not happen. The larger space, the separate areas for pool, table tennis and teas and coffees made it difficult to find a hearth, to be, ‘*cois tine*’. Most of the volunteers who had played such an important role when Cois Tine first opened its doors gradually drifted away. People from the English Classes held downstairs came and went but there was little sense of who they were or what their needs were. They were largely Muslim coming from Sudan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Eastern Europe and the connectedness that Cois Tine previously experienced with West African people was absent.

This period was also marked by a growing awareness of a change of mood in the asylum seeker community.

“There is a good reason why exile was once used as a punishment. It is life apart, life on hold, life in waiting. You may begin full of strength and hope, or just ignorance, but it is time, nothing more than an unending passage of time that wears down your resilience, like the drip of a tap that carves a groove in the granite below. Exile is a war of attrition on the soul, it is a slow punishment, and it works”.

That is how Aminata Forna described exile in her book “The Devil Danced on Water”. It is also how we experienced asylum seekers in the past year.

In 2004 there was a big fall in the number of people seeking refuge in Ireland. Many of those who came to the Drop-in Centre had been in Cork for over two years. Some had found work. All had lost heart. They were depressed and saw no sense in making an effort to do anything because nothing made any difference to their lives. An additional burden for them was the fact that families in Africa or elsewhere had expectations of financial support. In this reality pastoral care took on a whole new meaning. Cois Tine began to find its feet again!

Those in need found a safe place where they could tell their stories. The stories themselves make Cois Tine a sacred space. Their bodies are scarred, burnt and misshapen by torture. Their minds are tortured by memories, their sleep by horrendous dreams. Shame, that they have escaped, while others are still trapped at home, accompanies them by day. Most shamed, most wounded are the women who have been raped. They are many. And they may have the added shame of being HIV positive. Only with time are these stories shared and then it matters little whether they come from Africa or Afghanistan or anywhere else. It even matters little that different languages are spoken. Human spirits can communicate whatever the language.

In Cois Tine we do not see asylum seekers. We see brothers and sisters who are courageously trying to pick up the pieces of their traumatised lives. It is a privilege to accompany them on this journey.

6. PASTORAL CARE

In excess of five hundred individuals made use of the Drop-in Centre during the year. They were welcomed and provided with support consisting of information, advice and advocacy. Some needed support on a deeper level and so were referred to counsellors. Others received spiritual direction and many just wanted the opportunity to tell their story to a listening ear. Asylum seekers and refugees also came to relax or to use the recreational facilities available in the Centre. All of these means of support were aimed at helping individuals through the asylum process and issues arising from moving to a new country and culture. Contacts with many of these individuals were numerous and over a long period. Indeed some are on-going. This was, and is, real pastoral work, in the truest sense, the 'welcoming of the stranger who comes knocking'. (See quotation on cover).

A multicultural Mass took place each Sunday. This was an opportunity for keeping in touch with the Catholic Immigrant community and for responding to their expressed needs. Four groups of parents benefited from pre-Baptismal Programmes delivered by Cois Tine volunteers. A small Catechumenate group also met regularly during the year. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) is a long and demanding process that demands a great commitment on the part of the Catechumen and on those who accompany them on their faith journey. Cois Tine's role in this process has been the provision of Catechesis and facilitating the process of integrating the Catechumen into a local faith community or parish. A Bible Study Course took place early in the year. Pastoral visitation of isolated asylum seekers and refugees in their homes and in Accommodation Centres also took place.

7. COUNSELLING

Cois Tine facilitates the counselling process by providing counselling rooms and an infrastructure that allows counsellors and clients to meet. Counselling takes place both in the Drop in Centre and at Victoria Avenue. This service is particularly beneficial to asylum seekers who have been traumatised by the events which forced them to leave their own countries. This is often compounded as they try to integrate into a new environment. It is our experience that there is added trauma and feelings of insecurity due to the long delay in processing asylum applications, discrimination, accommodation, lack of social support and unemployment. Many experience anxiety or depression which prevents them going about their daily life.

At present six Counsellors work with Cois Tine. Two of these speak French, and one has specialised in multi-cultural counselling. The French speakers are particularly valuable as many of our counselling clients come from French speaking African countries such as Burundi, Congo and Algeria. All of our counsellors have an accredited supervisor.

8. OUTREACH

Apart from pastoral visitation of asylum seekers and refugees most of the outreach work undertaken by Cois Tine during the past year focused on the Irish Community.

This work was undertaken to further our stated aim of 'promoting an appreciation of other cultures and the rejection of racism'. It has become clear that there is a very low level of understanding of the reasons that cause people to leave their own countries and of the actual number of asylum seekers that come to Ireland. These factors coupled with inaccurate, exaggerated and sometimes biased media coverage have led to the growth of a negative and unbalanced view of asylum seekers. Using the means listed below Cois Tine made a contribution to addressing these issues.

Training, Presentations and Sunday Liturgies: Throughout the year talks and presentations and training sessions were given to Schools, Community, Parish and Youth Groups. Most of these focused on dispelling the myths that surround asylum seekers and on giving a realistic picture of the reasons for and the level of immigration in Ireland.

On occasion Masses were celebrated by priests associated with Cois Tine in local Parish Churches in the Cork and Ross Diocese. Homilies during these occasions were an opportunity to highlight asylum seeker issues and a Christian response to them.

Newsletter: The first issue, published in June, was well received 500 copies were printed and largely distributed in the Cork area. In December 2004 a second issue of 900 copies was printed. At least half went to addresses outside Cork – every TD in the country received one as did individuals and agencies from all around Ireland who responded to our card campaign.

Mission Alive Festival: Cois Tine participated by presenting an interactive experience called the “Story of the Asylum Seeker”. Thousands of primary and secondary school students and hundreds of adults visited the event. A lot of work went into preparing for Mission Alive – it was time and effort well spent. The response received from participants was excellent and opinions expressed during evaluations of the event stated that the “Asylum Seekers Story” was one of the best presentations at the festival. Participants were informed of asylum seeker issues and racism. Through the festival many new contacts were made that led to subsequent outreach visits to schools giving us further opportunities to raise awareness of asylum seeker issues and racism.

Card Campaign: - In conjunction with the Mission Alive Festival a Card Campaign, in essence a petition, calling on the government to improve the treatment of asylum seekers was launched. The campaign highlighted the suffering of asylum seekers caused by shortcomings in the asylum process and

also proposed clearly defined measures that would address this situation. After the Festival more than 1,600 signed cards were sent to the Minister of Justice. In phase two of the campaign participants were asked to sign the cards and post them to their local TD. In all more than eight thousand cards were distributed throughout the country. The Campaign was not only about bringing about the changes asked for, it was also about raising awareness of asylum seeker issues among the general public and among our elected representatives.

9. NETWORKING

As a matter of policy Cois Tine avoids the unnecessary duplication of services and cooperates with other agencies to ensure the best possible service and the optimum use of available resources. To this end links were established with many groups during the year. In particular with groups affiliated to the Cork Networking Committee (CNC). Participation in CNC was useful not only in terms of making useful contacts with other NGO's and statutory groups it also led to funding and training opportunities. See Appendix III for a list of member organisations.

On the national level meetings of and the Churches Asylum Network (CAN)¹ based in Dublin were attended. Meetings are a useful source of information and on a more practical note the Network helped to distribute Cards during our Card Campaign.

In order to promote the integration of refugees and asylum seekers into the local Church it was important to establish links with Cork Diocese. To this end all parishes in the Cork area were sent copies of the Cois Tine Newsletter. In addition the first of a series of Briefings was sent to Priests in the Diocese and the meetings with diocesan clergy already mentioned above also took place.

¹ CAN is an interdenominational network of groups working with asylum seekers. It is led by the Refugee Project an agency set up by the Irish Bishops Conference.

10. SERVICE USERS

In 2004 the majority – approximately 55% of the client group that used the Drop-in Centre were, as in the previous year, black African males. Unlike the previous year however, the majority of these did not come from West Africa but rather from the Sudan and Somalia. A further 20% were males from areas such as Afghanistan, Iraq, North African and Eastern Europe. Roughly 25% of service users were female. Most of these were Black African. The remainder were mainly from Eastern European countries.

It is much more difficult to put a figure on the number of Irish people Cois Tine came into contact with or to measure the impact those contacts made. It certainly numbers in the thousands. Feedback received regarding our newsletter, after talks and presentation was very positive and indicated that people felt that their eyes were opened to a more informed and positive view of immigrants.

11. VOLUNTEERS

Our volunteer profile went through stages and changes as the year went on and the number of volunteers varied greatly depending on the work taking place at different times during the year. Sometimes volunteers became involved with Cois Tine for a specific task, for example, setting up the Drop-in Centre, Mission Alive, the Summer Activities Programme or the Book Sale held in last June. Other volunteers had specific roles for example Counselling, running the Drop-in Centre, Training Courses (Drama, Crafts etc). These volunteers worked over a longer period, some throughout they year.

During the year we had some excellent volunteers both from the asylum seeker and Irish community. It is clear that Cois Tine could not operate without volunteers. While we understand that the asylum seeker community is by definition transitory we also see the continued recruitment of volunteers from this group as being essential to making a relevant response to immigrants needs. By the end of the year the work of defining volunteer roles and drawing up a

Volunteer Guidelines document was close to completion. This will be used to expand a short volunteer training programme used earlier in the year and will form the basis for better volunteer training, support and supervision. (See Section 14 below)

12. PREMISES

Cois Tine is most fortunate to have the use of two premises, both are suited to our work and both are provided rent-free.

The Drop-in Centre: Located at Convent Place off Proby's Quay it is not far from the City centre and therefore is easily accessible. Consisting of twelve rooms of varying sizes it occupies all of the first floor in Mercy House. Nearly all of the activities listed above that focus on asylum seekers take place at this venue. The ground floor of the building is occupied by "Welcome English" who provide English lessons to asylum seekers. During the year a strong relationship developed between Welcome English and Cois Tine with each organisation benefiting from the presence of the other.

The Centre was open Monday to Friday between the hours of 10.30am and 4.30pm. Staff members/volunteers were available to listen to asylum seekers and to assess their needs. Appropriate follow up was then made, for example referring the person to another service, providing relevant information or making telephone contact with other agencies on the client's behalf. Many clients came to socialize and relax; this was an important part of the service provided. Every effort is made to make clients feel welcome, all are offered light refreshments.

The Centre provides a range of facilities; primarily it is a space where asylum seekers are welcome and welcomed. Within this space are meeting rooms, which can be booked for meetings of asylum seeker groups. They are also used by staff and counsellors for one to one meetings, training and for the activities listed above. Five Computers are available to those who use the Centre.

Cois Tine is grateful to the Sisters of Mercy not only for allowing us the use of the premises but also for the support of our work and the commitment they have shown to the care of asylum seekers.

21 Victoria Avenue: This premises is a terraced house in a residential area. Owned by the Society of African Missions the house is used mainly as Cois Tine's administrative centre. It is also used for counselling, meetings and training. The work of refurbishing the house was completed by the end of March and the office was set up by May. Cois Tine has use of an office, kitchenette, two counselling/meeting rooms and a larger training room.

13. FINANCES

Cois Tine does not have any salary costs since the coordinator's post is funded by the Society of African Missions. However it must secure all its running costs through fundraising activities and donations. See Appendix I for a full breakdown of income and expenditure

14. PLANS FOR 2005-2006

- Our main priority will be the consolidation of services to asylum seekers. This will be achieved through volunteer recruitment and training and also the improvement of structures and day to day running of the Centre. Ideally we would also like to improve the environment of the Drop-in Centre through extensive refurbishment work. This will depend on a number of issues, primarily the securing of a longer term lease and also raising the funds needed to carry out the work.
- Extension of Drop-in Centre hours – in response to a perceived need open on Saturday for meetings of specific groups.
- Develop a Chaplaincy Team and expand our pastoral services. See Appendix IV.
- Development of the RCIA Catechumenate and Pre Baptismal Programmes. In respect of the RCIA, Cois Tine sees its role as cooperating with the local Church in providing resources and support both for Catechumens and for

those who accompany them on their faith journey. Pre Baptismal Programmes are an important element in welcoming Immigrant families into the local Church. Overall Cois Tine wants to be of service to the local church in order to facilitate the welcoming of Catholic immigrants into the local Christian Community.

- The pastoral visitation to asylum seekers in their homes and places of residence will also be expanded. See Appendix IV.
- More effort will also be placed on outreach work with the local community, anti-racism workshops and talks will be provided for local Parishes and groups. Funding for two workshops has already been secured.
- The circulation of our Newsletter will be increased and it will continue to be used as a medium to promote a Christian approach to Asylum seekers and to challenge inhumane practices and racism.

15. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our sincere thanks to all who have supported the work of Cois Tine during the last year. Below is a list of major contributors who provided support in kind or financial support.

The Holy Rosary Sisters.

The Sisters of Mercy.

The Capuchins.

The Reception and Integration Agency.

Cork City Partnership.

The Presentation Sisters.

Our Lady of Apostles Sisters.

Bon Secours Sisters.

Dennehy's Cross Parish Faith and Action Group.

SMA Parish Wilton.

Douglas Parish.

O'Sullivan's Office Furniture, Old Blackrock Road.
Cork VEC.

Our thanks also go to many individuals not mentioned above but who made donations in cash or kind or gave of their time as volunteers. The contributions you made helped the work of Cois Tine during the year 2005. We are sincerely grateful.

