

VIEW

**ADULT
LITERACY
PROBLEMS
ON THE RISE
AS EGSA IS
SHUT DOWN**

WHY?

SEE PAGES FOUR AND FIVE

Film on tour

Pages 6-7 We talk to creative director Zhenia-Mahdi Mau about her new film Tapestry of Colours

A raw deal

Page 8 Conference looks at the reasons why women are still getting a raw deal when it comes to wages in the workplace

Pay day loans

£200 PAYDAY LOANS FOR £25

BORROW £200 FOR ONE MONTH AND PAY £25 INTEREST. ONE REPAYMENT. TOTALING £225. INTEREST 13% FIXED REPRESENTATIVE APR 319.1% ON FIRST LOAN ONLY.

Pages 9-10 Citizens Advice Northern Ireland have urged people with concerns over taking out pay day loans to contact them



On the stage

Pages 11-12 A group of disabled youngsters have taken part in a play in Armagh called 'Don't box me in'

My story

Pages 14 Emily Gallagher, left with her son Oisin, tells journalist Lucy Gollogly why she decided to start a charity for children with autism

Movie treat



Page 18 Older people living by themselves in the Republic are regularly treated to a visit to the cinema by the charity Alone

Profile

We talk to Sean Moynihan, chief executive of the ALONE charity in the Republic, which helps older people who are living by themselves



Older people in need are under pressure, cuts in services and allowances has led to a surge in demand for ALONE services

1, How long have you been in your present position?

I am four years in my current role. As an organisation we work hard to live our values and to provide the best quality services we can to those older people in most need. Our staff and volunteers have achieved so much in what are extremely challenging times.

2, How much State support does the charity received?

For the day-to-day running of all our services we receive no funding. We are an independent charity who work in partnership with all agencies and with the community to help older people age at home with dignity.

3, Does your charity depend on public/private donations?

Yes, we are totally dependent on the public and on the corporate sector to fund our work. In ALONE we are very strong on outcome to demonstrate to all funders that we are value for money. We put large and small donations to good use.

4, Given the present economic recession/cutbacks in the Republic, how do you view the situation for older people?

Older people in need are under pressure, cuts in services and allowances have led to a surge in demand for ALONE services. The people who use our services are living on fixed incomes and the cuts have had a direct impact on the quality of their lives.

5, What are the main areas of work that your organisation is involved in?

ALONE provides services to older people, including providing houses to homeless older people, organising befriending and social events to combat isolation and loneliness, an emergency community response to older people in need who contact us and we campaign for individuals and for change

6, Do you think that politicians could do more when it comes to helping older people?

At ALONE older people express to us they want to be treated the same as all members of society – young and old. If our politicians built an age-friendly society it would also be a family, children and people-friendly society. Decisions need to be made to support those in need and not for short term political gain

7, Your organisation has referred to “a consistent bias against older people in the health system”. What do you mean by this?

Old age is the only part of the health system where there are no targets to reduce waiting lists. Older people in hospital are often referred to as 'bed blockers', ie, a drain on valuable resources. The reality, however, is that older people often have protracted admissions to hospital due to inadequate resources in the community. Placing people on long term waiting lists indirectly discriminates against older people as the waiting affects them more than it does younger people. Many older people do not receive timely assessments or treatment as health complaints are often dismissed as simply

part of the ageing process.

8, What are the main steps that individuals could take to assist older people who are living alone?

There are 120,000 over 65 people living on their own in the Republic. The community can show its support by visiting older people and by being aware of the issues that affect them.

9, Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future for older people in the Republic.

At ALONE a better word is determined. We intend to work to support all those who come to us. We will campaign to address the gaps and blocks and in these time of cuts to ensure that older people are treated fairly.

10, What do you like the most and the least about your role?

I am very proud to lead ALONE. I can see how hard everyone works and I enjoy seeing the outcomes and hearing the stories of the people we support. I know how necessary it is but I dislike administration work.

11, Can you tell our readers the name of your favourite film and book.

My favourite film/book is Cool Hand Luke and Simplicity by Edward de Bono

12, What job would you like to do if you were not in your present position?

I think I would like to work on the land close to the sea.

PHOTOLINE

Photographer Kevin Cooper has more than 25 years experience in Press and PR photography. Kevin works to a wide range of clients in community and voluntary sector organisations as well as the trade union movement.

FOR QUOTATIONS CONTACT

Kevin Cooper
E: photoline@supanet.com
T: 028 90777299
M: 07712044751



Editorial

VIEW, the online publication for the community/voluntary sector in Northern Ireland.

I make no apologies for two of the articles that feature in this edition of VIEW.

The first concerns the closure of the Educational Guidance Service for EGSA. It happened recently with an awful suddenness.

After the Department of Education and Learning (DEL) decided had decided not to renew EGSA's existing contract or even issue a new one for open tender.

The loss of funding for its core work meant that the board of EGSA had no choice but to wind up the organisation.

Since last year, I had forged a strong link with the organisation and respected and valued the friendship of its chief executive Ann Osborne and the staff members.

They were all doing a great job of providing a vital service, for a number of years to adults who



VIEW editor Brian Pelan

were seeking educational guidance.

The staff members lost their jobs and have now been added to a growing unemployment register.

The funding decision was also highly ironic as it roughly coincided with an Audit Office report which showed an alarming rise in the number of young people

in Northern Ireland with literacy difficulties.

● This issue also contains an appeal by Citizens Advice Northern Ireland for people to contact them who have concerns about pay day loans.

The call comes as the UK's biggest payday lenders have been threatened with being put out of business after a damning report into the industry uncovered evidence of "widespread irresponsible lending".

The Office of Fair Trading's (OFT) report is the culmination of a large-scale probe into the £2 billion payday sector, including spot checks on household names such as Wonga.

The OFT said the issues raised were causing "misery" for borrowers.

In these hard-pressed times do we really need these pay day loan firms who seem to prey on the most vulnerable people?

Blow for adult learners as vital service is shut down

In an **exclusive** interview, VIEW talks to Ann Osborne, the ex-chief executive of the Educational Guidance Service for Adults, about the decision to close down the organisation and the impact it will have on the hard-pressed sector

VIEW: Can you explain the background to the decision to close down EGSA?

Ann Osborne: EGSA had a number of funding streams but our core educational and career guidance support for adults has been funded by DEL and before that DE for over 40 years. We received core funding until three years ago when the relationship with DEL changed to a Service Level Agreement to deliver outreach guidance in Neighbourhood Renewal areas and support to those facing redundancy. The three-year agreement was due to end later this year. We had a number of meetings with the department including with the Minister to discuss the future of the work. However it became clear that DEL had decided not to renew or the existing contract or even issue a new one for open tender. The loss of funding for our core work meant that the board had no choice but to wind up the organisation.

VIEW: How difficult was it to tell the staff that they had lost their jobs.

Ann: It was very difficult. It's a very sad time because EGSA had been in existence since 1967 – a long history, a lot of great work and it was very ironic that an organisation that helps people facing redundancy was making staff redundant, particularly in the current climate. I think the staff were devastated, not only because of the loss of their own jobs, but because of the need that they were addressing in the community and knowing that that need is still there.

VIEW: Is there any chance in the future of some sort of reconstituted EGSA in the future?

Some of the work will continue, the project we have with Action Hearing Loss will go on – that was a Lottery-funded project. So that's work going to continue. We're working to keep the money for Life Challenge going in another way so that will continue. But I would be keen – and I suppose I'm moving on to the future a bit now – to look at ways of keeping some of the work that EGSA was doing alive in other forms, maybe through other organisations, but I think there is still work that needs to be done.

VIEW: A recent Audit Office report found that two out of

every five teenagers in Northern Ireland leave school without basic reading and writing skills. What's your thoughts on this issue?

Ann: There are no signs of any decrease in the number of young people coming from school with poor literacy and there is still a significant percentage of adults who need support to improve their Essential Skills. It was particularly those adults who are often harder to reach, adults who would not ever see themselves joining an Essential Skills class, who benefitted most from EGSA's support.

The staff were devastated because of the need that they were meeting in the community and knowing that that need is still there

VIEW: Why are adult illiteracy levels so high here?

Ann: I think Northern Ireland is very good at excelling at the top end but we do have a long tail of 'under-achievement' as it's often known as. I think it's probably down to the fact that we have a segregated system where academic learning is very much valued, above, for example, more vocational routes. Those who don't make the grade are not always encouraged and we would have witnessed the intergenerational impact of this. So for example, if a parent has gone to school, has had a bad experience, has been told they're stupid, that they will never make anything of themselves (as clients have told us) it's very difficult for them to see education as

being very important for their children, and to inspire them and to encourage their children to attend school and have the confidence to help them with their homework.

VIEW: How long were you with EGSA?

Ann: I was with EGSA for 13 years. I've only been chief executive for just over a year. The previous chief executive was Eileen Kelly who held the post for 22 years. Before her was Dorothy Eagleson who set up the organisation. I had been involved a lot in the adult literacy work in EGSA. We always had a literacy referral line which supported people with essential skills need and helped refer them into classes, but again that service was funded by DEL and then the funding was withdrawn a number of years ago.

VIEW: In your opinion, do you believe that EGSA made a difference to adult learners.

Ann: I think EGSA made a difference really in terms of our work around educational guidance and giving people who never thought they could learn a second chance at learning by helping increase their self-esteem and raise their aspirations. A lot of organisations would have used us as a referral point and we would have worked across areas like mental health. We worked in the workplace, we worked with people with drug and alcohol issues – so we were a referral point for other organisations and that's not going to be there. Another area that we did a lot of work in was around student finance and helping people to understand how to finance their learning, particularly for mature students moving into higher education, who perhaps did an access course and then found that they couldn't afford to go to university. We not only supported the learners but provided specialist support to other advisers in this area.

VIEW: What sort of reaction have you had about the closure of EGSA?

Ann: People were very shocked. I have been totally inundated with messages of support from other organisations and everybody is saying the same thing – that there's going to be a gap there, that that support – that people were used to referring people to EGSA – that that

It's so sad that we have a team of skilled, specialist advisors joining the unemployment register



Looking back Ann Osborne, the former chief executive of EGSA

support is no longer there.

VIEW: Looking back now on the entire period, what sort of service did EGSA provide to its users?

We prided ourselves on providing a high-quality service. EGSA was a trailblazer for Educational Guidance across the UK and instrumental in the establishment of the

National Association for Educational Guidance (NAEGA) in the UK. EGSA was the first organisation in NI to be accredited to the Matrix Quality Standard for advice and guidance and the first organisation in NI to win an award from the Institute of Careers Guidance. EGSA went on to win a further award from ICG and three National Training Awards for our work in Guidance, Essential Skills and Redundancy support in the workplace.

VIEW: What is your outlook for the future

The current economic climate means the need for EGSA's educational and career guidance has never been greater. It's so sad that we have a team of skilled, specialist advisors joining the unemployment register. If there is a funder out there willing to support a much needed service, I would be more than willing to talk to them.



‘You don’t know the city you are in, you don’t know the streets, you don’t even know the shops’

Brian Pelan offers his thoughts on Tapestry of Colours, which focuses on a range of nationalities and their experiences of living in Northern Ireland

I grew up in west Belfast in the 1960s and the 1970s and like many of my family and friends from the same era, I was pretty unaware of other nationalities, until I moved to London in the early 1980s for the first time. It was a big wake-up call for me but one that I readily adapted to. The idea of moving among Jamaicans, Nigerians, Chinese, Pakistanis, etc, was exciting, vibrant and eye-opening. It wasn't that I didn't like where I came from, it was more a case of that I was open to new ideas and challenges.

Fast forward to 2013 and I'm back living in Belfast and have been for a few years now. In many ways we have moved on and in other ways we are firmly rooted to the past – and not always in a positive way. The ongoing flags dispute typifies this – a need to surround your community in symbols and reject change. A screening of Tapestry of Colours, which documents the voices and experiences of people from all over the world who have come to live in Northern Ireland. Some of them came here to seek work, others for love and some who were fleeing persecution in their own countries.

To see Tapestry of Colours is a moving experience as too often we don't engage with people of other traditions, ethnic backgrounds and beliefs. Those people who trot out the familiar cliché – “that they are all here to take our jobs” – should watch this film. We are introduced to a range of people who explain how difficult it can be when they move here and the struggle to live in a community that may not always accept you.

Nikolay and Veselka Ivanov, who moved to Banbridge from Bulgaria in 2010, talk in the film about the difficulties they first encountered. “You don't know the city you are in, you don't know the streets, you don't even know the shops,” says Veselka.

Natalkia Kennedy, whose parents, from Belarus and Ghana, moved here in 1996, talks about some of the racism that her children encountered at a local primary school. “Our kids would come home, upset and crying, because they were called names like ‘blackie and nigger’,” says Natalkia. “I had to speak to the parents of the children about the names they were called. I found that some people didn't know how my children were being affected by this. There was also a threat issued to my family by a paramilitary group. It was a very difficult time and we were very scared. My children are dark in colour but they are Northern Irish. This is their home, this is where they grew up. They are here to stay.”

Other people who have moved here recount about how friendly local people were towards them and they discuss the new friendships they have made in their lives.

In a society where sectarianism is such a dominant factor, it is perhaps not surprising that ‘outsiders’ may be resented. The problems we face can only be challenged by a range of initiatives, including more films like Tapestry of Colours which examine the idea of community. Is it an adherence to one tradition that fears all change or do we want a multi-cultural outlook where no one tradition is dominant?

Director Zhenia Madhi-Mau, who made the film with financial assistance from the Community Relations Council, is adamant that Tapestry of Colours is not about ethnic minorities. “It is about me as an artist observing the world as I look at it. Northern Ireland, where I live at the moment, is made up of so many different colours and cultures. In essence, I am interested in how an individual looks at their own identity. It's not about ethnicity, it's about human stories. I was very driven about let's see what happens and where it takes you. Basically I wanted to see what happened when I put the question to each individual. ‘How do you see yourself, what is your culture?’ ”



Forthcoming screenings

- **March 14, 7:00pm, Magherafelt Council Office, Screening followed by Q&A with director and discussion.**
- **March 18, 7:00pm, Holywood Baptist church, North Down, Screening followed by Q&A with director and discussion (Contact Bridget.Burgess@northdown.gov.uk for tickets).**
- **March 20, 7:30pm, Braid Arts Centre, Ballymena, screening followed by Q&A with director and discussion.**
- **March 21, 1:30pm, John's College (Lecture Theatre), Cork City, Cork City Life Long Learning Festival. Screening followed by Q&A with director and discussion.**
- **March 22, 7:00pm, Ranfurly House Arts & Visitor Centre, Dungannon, Screening followed by Q&A with director and discussion.**
- **May 16, 7:00pm, Market Place Theatre, Armagh, Screening followed by Q&A with director and discussion.**
- **May 20, 6:30pm, Flowerfield Arts Centre, Coleraine. Screening followed by Q&A with director and discussion.**
- **May 21, 11am, Burnavon Arts Centre, Cookstown, (Invited Post-Primary Schools only). Screening followed by Q&A with director and discussion.**
- **May 22, 10:30am, The Nerve Centre, Derry/Londonderry. Screening followed by Q&A with director and discussion.**
- **May 23, 10:30 am, Web Theatre, Newtownards. Screening followed by Q&A with director and discussion.**
- **May 23, 7:00pm, Mayes Hall Civic & Conference Centre, Craigavon. Screening followed by Q&A with director and discussion.**
- **May 24, 7:00pm, Sean Hollywood Arts Centre, Newry. Screening followed by Q&A with director and discussion.**
- **May 25, 2:00pm, Alley Theatre, Strabane. Screening followed by Q&A with director and discussion and music.**

Zhenia Madhi-Mau, Creative Director,
www.zmncreativestudio.co.uk

Image: Sonya Whitefiled



Former BBC journalist and VIEW associate Julia Paul speaking at the recent Equality Commission conference, which was held in Riddel Hall at Queen's University

Impact of welfare cuts on women discussed

By Julia Paul

Women are acting as shock absorbers for the cuts – That was the stark message from women's campaigner Bronagh Hinds to the 'Getting a Fair Share?' conference organised by the Equality Commission during a week of events celebrating International Women's Day.

The conference was examining the reasons why women have failed to achieve economic independence. Around 100 delegates from organisations across Northern Ireland gathered at Riddel Hall at Queen's University in Belfast to discuss the question.

I was chairing the event, and sitting on the

platform, listening to the speakers give details of exactly how welfare reforms will impact on women was a sobering experience.

Lynn Carvill, the women's sector lobbyist from the Women's Resource and Development Agency, told conference delegates that it's estimated that women will bear 72 per cent of the cuts.

Adrienne Peltz, the president of the National Union of Students and Union of Students in Ireland, said that while 47 per cent of staff at universities was female, only 20 per cent of professors were women.

Tracy Meharg from Invest NI said that when it came to entrepreneurship, the rate of women setting up businesses was less than half that of men.

The speakers all agreed that the issue most responsible for holding women back was the lack of affordable and accessible childcare in Northern Ireland.

Equality in NI is the responsibility of the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister. The conference was opened by Jennifer McCann, the Sinn Fein junior minister in that office.

OFMDFM's consultation process towards a childcare strategy has just closed.

The conference also heard some positive stories, via video clips, from women interviewed from across Northern Ireland.

You can see these interviews on the Equality Commission's website at <http://bit.ly/10y6mcx>


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TIME TO HOLD PAY DAY LENDERS TO ACCOUNT

£200
PAYDAY
LOANS
FOR £25

BORROW £200 FOR ONE MONTH AND PAY £25 INTEREST. ONE REPAYMENT TOTALLING £225. INTEREST 13% FIXED REPRESENTATIVE APR 319.1% ON FIRST LOAN ONLY.



Fast Cash
 NO FAX PAYDAY LOANS

Citizens Advice Northern Ireland recently launched a national survey to hold payday lenders to account. The move came as the organisation released new statistics demonstrating a worrying increase in the number of serious debt cases relating to payday loans.

The Citizens Advice service has seen a ten-fold increase in the proportion of clients receiving casework help with multiple debts which included a payday loan debt in the last four years.

In the first quarter of 2009/10 only one per cent of CAB debt casework clients had at least one payday loan and in the same quarter in 2010/11 this had risen to four per cent. Twelve months later, 10 per cent had at least one payday loan.

A regional debt advice project seen a 164% increase in the proportion of clients receiving casework help with multiple debts which included a payday loan debt in the last six months of 2012, compared to the first half of the year.

Citizens Advice bureaux, which comprises a network of 28 offices, helped clients deal with over £75 million of debt in 2012. Advice given by money and debt advisers

has supported clients with which of their debts to prioritise, as well as informing them of their right to stop payday lenders taking money straight out of their bank account. Citizens Advice also assists those in financial difficulty by preparing a budget and negotiating a manageable repayment plan with the lender on a client's behalf.

Citizens Advice is calling on people who have taken out pay day loans to take part in a national survey to monitor whether payday lenders are sticking to their self-regulating charter. The year-long survey will ask payday loan customers questions including:

Q: Did the lender ask you to provide documents about your personal finances and general situation to check that you could afford to pay back the loan?
Q: Did the lender tell you that a payday loan should not be used for long term borrowing or if you are in financial difficulty?
Q: Did the lender offer to freeze interest and charges for you if you make payments under a reasonable repayment plan?

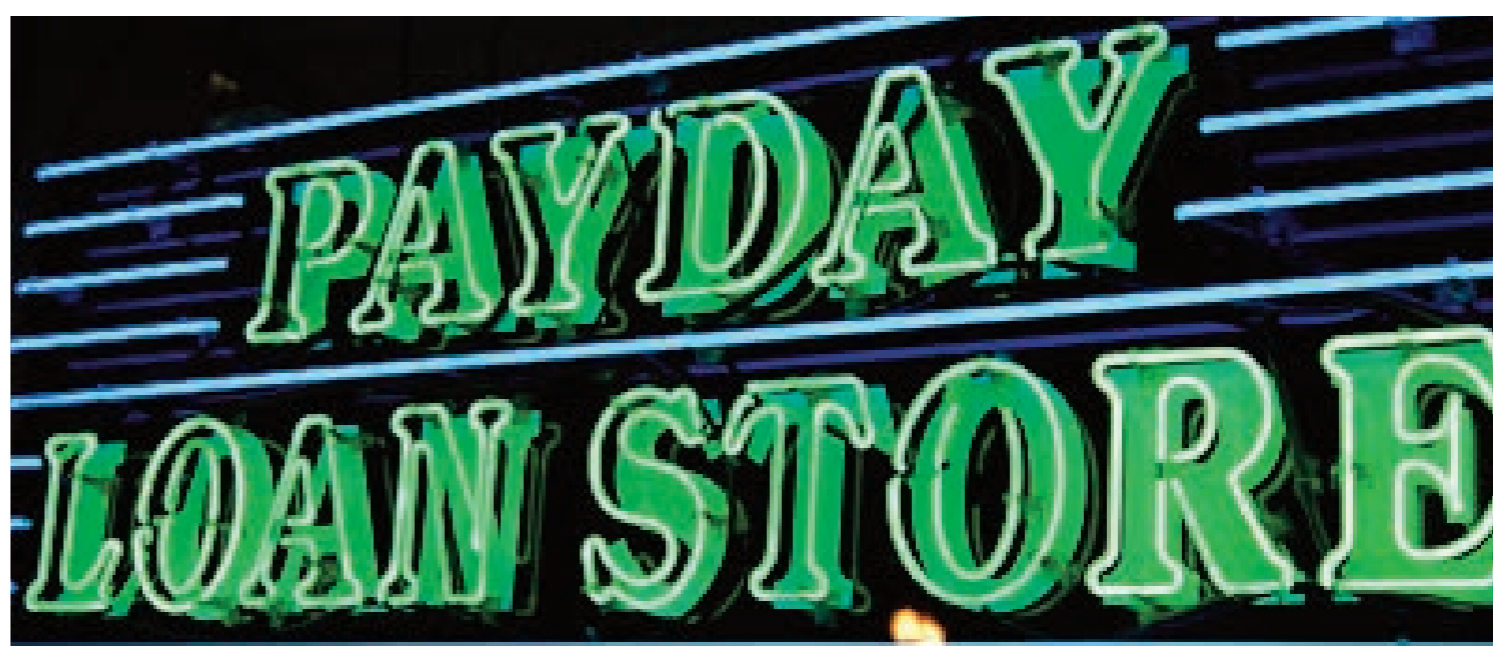
The survey will run on the Citizens Advice Adviceguide website at <http://bit.ly/WVsgQj>

Participants will also be able to fill in template letters to inform the payday loan company of their situation and experience of taking out a payday loan. Citizens Advice will report initial findings from the survey later.

Rachael Cray (Citizens Advice Money Advice Programme Manager) said: "We want our clients to help us hold payday lenders to account. For too many people payday loans are a fast but dangerous way to borrow money. Quick cash payouts can have damaging long-term consequences."

"We've seen problems relating to payday loans rise significantly over the last couple of years and we're worried that this will only increase as more people feel the squeeze. It is now just over a month after Christmas. Citizens Advice want to send out this message, if you took out a payday loan or other form of credit that you cannot afford to pay back, contact us immediately for budgeting advice."

Citizens Advice NI is urging anyone who is experiencing difficulties with a payday loan or is considering taking one out to contact them.



PAYDAY
LOAN STORE

‘Do not box us in’

A group of young disabled people from the Armagh area who are members of Barnardo’s NI ‘Disabled Children and Young Peoples’ Participation Project’ (DCYPPP) based at Towerhill, Armagh, recently took to the stage at the Market Place Theatre in a production of their own entitled ‘Don’t Box Me In’.

The production, which included drama, art and animation, highlighted the issues which young people with disabilities experience when they move from childhood to adulthood.

Gary Crozier from Richhill and a DCYPPP group member said: “We wanted to show how challenging it can be for young disabled people moving into the adult world.

“Like everyone as we get older we want more independence, freedom of choice, job opportunities, families and a home but sometimes the barriers to achieving those goals can be very frustrating and isolating.

“Hopefully putting on this production will help people focus more on our abilities rather than our disabilities.”



Members of Barnardo’s NI Disabled Children and Young Peoples’ Participation Project who recently staged a ‘Don’t Box Me In’ production at the Market Place Theatre, Armagh. Left to right: Terry O’Connor, Churchtown, Co Tyrone; Sam Gibson, Banbridge; and Aoife French, Armagh
Michael Burch Photography

A message of hope and support to older people living in rural areas



Sarah Lynch and Helen Kieilty at the Health and Mind stand in the Galbally Community Centre

By Una Murphy

It's good to get out of the city to find out what's happening in rural areas, so I was dispatched by the editor of *VIEW* to Galbally outside Donaghmore, Co Tyrone, for an event organised by Agewell.

It was a few days before the Mid Ulster Westminster by-election, the sun was shining and the countryside looked beautiful to this urban dweller.

Politicians' posters fluttered gently in the breeze and whatever about the election to find a new MP, all the excitement was to be found at the Galbally Community Centre.

Agewell is an initiative by local councils to help older people in rural areas who might get very isolated at home. The organise Good Morning telephone calls to keep in touch with

older people and even run a maintenance service to help with odd jobs around the house.

On the day that I visited the organisation was hosting an advice, awareness and information day for older people. In addition to talks and exhibition stands there was a lunch of tasty home-made vegetable soup – nearly as good as my mother's.

Among those taking part was the redoubtable Anita Kelly who runs Citizens Online <http://www.citizensonline.org.uk/project/northern-ireland> backed by the BT Connected Communities programme – <http://www.btconnectedcommunities.com>.

Anita is the Project Coordinator of Citizens Online and her goal is to get more people in rural areas to embrace digital. I had a chance to show her the new *VIEW* website <http://www.viewdigital.org> where the *VIEW*

digital social affairs magazine is published online every month and is host to video reports with stories of interest to the community and voluntary sector.

Older people from the local community were also able to get information to deal with fuel poverty, benefit uptake and entitlement, rates relief, home safety and crime prevention and information about library services at the event.

Agewell is a local Partnership covering the Mid Ulster area (Cookstown, Magherafelt and Dungannon & South Tyrone Council areas), working together to improve services for vulnerable and older people in the community.

They have an office in Magherafelt and offer and also advice on accessing benefits and energy efficiency initiatives. Telephone: 028 796 32170 Email: info@agewellpartnership.org.



Call: Cameron Watt

'Robust legislation' needed for housing body

THE Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations Cameron Watt has said that "robust regulation" is needed of the new system to be set up to provide social housing.

Mr Watt told a recent conference in Belfast that 20,000 households in Northern Ireland are in severe housing stress and that "shamefully high levels of fuel poverty" need to be tackled.

Social Housing in Northern Ireland will be dramatically transformed following proposals to abolish the independent Northern Ireland Housing Executive – which was established in 1971 and was one of the demands

of the civil rights movement.

The House Executive is a public housing authority and the UK's largest social landlord dealing with 90,000 households. Its landlord function is set to be outsourced from the public sector and in due course transferred to the housing association sector – with a new regional housing body set up to deliver non-landlord functions.

An independent social housing rent panel would agree annual rent levels.

The Housing Minister, Nelson McCausland, DUP, also proposes that the Department for Social Development takes responsible for housing

strategy, policy, legislation, funding and inspection.

Mr Watt said: "Robust regulation must underpin the new system to protect tenants, taxpayers and landlords, and that's best delivered by an independent body that focuses on outcomes. I don't believe it's possible for the same department to properly balance the need to deliver short-term goals, for example new-build targets, with ensuring the long-term health and viability of housing associations.

"Short-term priorities inevitably win out – no Minister will be held to account for decisions taken five or ten years earlier," he said.

Marking the legacy of Inez



Event being held in Belfast to remember the life of Inez McCormack

A celebration event to mark the life of Inez McCormack, the internationally renowned human rights and trade union activist, will be held on Saturday, March 23, at Elmwood Hall, Elmwood Avenue, Belfast, from 2pm to 4pm.

The 'Out of the Ballrooms: Peace, Participation and Equality' event is available for open registration. A completed registration form must be returned to Claire Morrison at claire@pprproject.org or fax 004428 9024 5847. The event is being organised by Participation and the Practice of Rights organisation (PPR) which Inez founded in 2006.

Inez, former regional secretary for UNISON NI, passed away on January 21, this year following a short illness.

Tributes were paid to her life and work from a range of people, including the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson; and actress Meryl Streep, who portrayed Inez on stage in New York in 2010 in the documentary play SEVEN.

Commenting on Inez's legacy her husband Vinny and daughter Anne said: "We were touched by the many messages we received from ordinary people whose lives Inez had touched.

"We would like to thank them, and to tell them that the family has taken comfort from their words of support. It is our wish, as it was Inez's that her work carries on into the future."



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My story

When south Belfast mother-of-two Emily Gallagher's elder son Oisin (4) was diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder, she and her husband John were devastated. But their lives were transformed when she helped set up two after-school clubs for autistic children in Ballynafeigh and Donegall Pass



Playtime: Emily Gallagher with her son Oisin

Image: Kevin Cooper

When Oisin was around 18 months old, he started regressing. He was meeting his development milestones, and then just stopped doing everything.

At that stage the doctors said, we think he might be autistic, but nobody actually sits down and tells you what autism is. So you come home and look on the internet, and then you're looking at scary stuff.

The diagnosis took a year. We didn't know anyone else who had an autistic kid, so it was a very isolating year.

Last summer I thought, I'm going to start my own group. I had said that to a friend who knows Joan Henderson, who started the educational charity Sólás three years ago. We met and it started from there.

In September we had the Autism Family Fun Day in Botanic and through that we started collecting names of people in the area who wanted something for their autistic children.

The improvements we've seen in Oisin have been huge. When he was first diagnosed, he'd be oblivious to what was going on around

Friends of mine now have autistic kids and I say to them, your life's not over, your life's beginning but you have to look at it in a different way

him – in his own little bubble. There were no hugs and kisses and now there are loads of hugs and kisses.

He still has no speech although he's said a couple of words in school so that means his speech is coming. It's another bit of pressure off.

The ethos of our after-school club is really that the kids are in a safe environment.

They've done all their hard work at school but when they come to us it's about having fun and socialising. And it also gives the parents a couple of hours off.

Friends of mine now have autistic kids and I say to them, 'your life's not over, your life's beginning but you have to look at it in a different way. You don't see them doing their 11-plus and graduating from university – that can happen, but you have to take it month by month. They're very happy kids, so take all the joy out of it but get in contact with these support groups and get yourself involved in the community'.

It is a fight but it is all worth it. I wouldn't change Oisin for the world.

For more information on the Autism Spectrum Disorder after-school clubs in Ballynafeigh and Donegall Pass community centres in Belfast and the 2013 summer scheme, see www.solasbt7.com or telephone 02890 247600.



The Big Picture

Local cross-community organisation Beyond Skin came across Demi-Leigh Pitchforth (above) while delivering a Global Education workshop in Orangefield High School, Belfast. Her talent became clear when she wrote and sang a song about hunger within a 20-minute timeframe.

Photographer: Hannah Mitchell

If you would like your community/voluntary organisation to be selected for The Big Picture in the next issue of VIEW, send images to editorial@viewdigital.org



You're not **ALONE** when you go to the cinema

ONE of the popular ways that the ALONE charity in the Republic of Ireland, which supports the needs of older people, engages with its clients is by holding a regular cinema outing.

The ALONE Cinema Club takes place on the last Wednesday of every month in the IFI

film centre in Dublin.

It's an opportunity for 15 isolated older people to see a movie and have some lunch afterwards.

This event, which costs about €200 each month, proves to be a vital social outlet for those who attend.

If you would like to make a donation visit www.alone.ie

The film this group, above, watched was *Stella Days*. Directed by Thaddeus O'Sullivan, it's about a struggle between faith and passion, Rome and Hollywood and a man and his conscience.

Rathmore pupils win £3,000 for chosen charity

TWO thousand students across Northern Ireland are going to have the opportunity to be agents of change in their local communities.

Thanks to a grant from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, the Youth and Philanthropy Initiative (YPI) was launched in five schools in Belfast this year and will grow into 15 schools across Northern Ireland by 2014.

The ground-breaking programme aims to create the next generation of passionate and committed philanthropists by providing 'real life' experiences of charitable giving.

Working in teams to identify the social needs of their local community, pupils select a local charity that best addresses their chosen issue. They then interview staff and beneficiaries before preparing a presentation for a 'Dragon's Den' style judging panel, with the best team winning a £3,000 donation for their charity.



Success: Winning Rathmore students with SDLP leader Alasdair McDonnell and a representative from their nominated charity, Horizon House

The programme has been running in England since 2007 and is also active in Scotland, USA and in Canada, where it was founded.

Rathmore Grammar, in Belfast, has already launched YPI this term and, Stephanie Murphy, the school's Learning for Life and Work

Coordinator and Head of Sociology, is enthusiastic about the programme:

"YPI is proving to be very popular with year nine students. We are delighted in Rathmore to have this opportunity as the programme very much reflects the ethos of our school."