



# SPIRASI

## Newsletter

Issue 2: Autumn 2007

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### Recent SPIRASI Events

All in all, it was a busy summer for SPIRASI. In June, we launched our **Strategic Plan for 2007-2009**, and our **Annual Report** for 2005. We were fortunate to have Her Excellency, Priscilla Jana, the South African Ambassador to Ireland as the guest of honour to launch these two important publications along with the new-look SPIRASI web-site (<http://www.spirasi.ie/>).



An account of the launch event along with a copy of the Ambassador's speech on the theme of violence and photographs of the event are available on our website at <http://spirasi.ie/publications-launch-jun07/>.

On the 26th June, staff and clients of SPIRASI marked United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture with a party for our clients who are survivors of torture.



In July, we held our annual **Summer Graduation** ceremony in the Ballroom of Wynn's Hotel. A hundred students who had successfully completed courses in English, Computer Literacy, and Art along with the participants of the Employment Programme for Parents of Irish Born Children (EPIC) received awards from Conor Lenihan, the newly appointed Minister for Integration Policy. This was also Minister Lenihan's first public speech in his capacity as minister and he spoke about integration in Ireland, his new ministry and its



purpose. After the graduation ceremony, the students enjoyed a traditional party with music, food and refreshments.

A transcript of the minister's speech with photos of the event is available on the SPIRASI web-site at <http://www.spirasi.ie/graduation-07/>.

August saw the re-launch of the **SPIRASI Public Education project** to provide information on asylum and immigration issues to schools and universities. Kieran Allen, the newly appointed Public Awareness Officer along with a team of trained volunteers drawn from the asylum seeker and refugee communities to provide informative and interactive presentations. For more information on this programme, contact Kieran by ringing SPIRASI at 01-8389664. Further details are also available on the SPIRASI web-site at <http://www.spirasi.ie/public-education/>.



## Festival of World Cultures

*This year, the SPIRASI Arts Programme participated in the Festival of World Cultures which took place in Dún Laoghaire over the last weekend in August. As an opportunity to show the positive aspects of cultural integration, we participated in two different activities – story-telling workshops and an open drumming circle. This proved to be an enjoyable and fulfilling experience for the participants as testified by Mbonisi Ncube (in his own words) ...*



“Where were you on the 25th and 26th of August 2007? If you have not been at Dun Laoghaire you really missed on a great annual event. I will, anyway, do you a favour, including those who of course attended, by taking you back as we reminisce the colourful day.

The Dun Laoghaire world Festival of Cultures is an annual event held on the last weekend of August. This year it started on the 24th at 8pm, just to warm up for the following two great days.

From the Canadian food to the Caribbean dance, from global warming issues to bridal dancing skills. Orchestra to opera, from music of Mali to food from the resort of Bali. There were issues about religion to problems affecting the whole region. Storytelling in the People’s Park to free picture taking in Noah’s Ark. Form the stalls of food to wares carved of wood. From Arctic to Zimbabwe you would find everything you would think of from A to Z.

I was doing storytelling with my friends from Spirasi. I was of course nervous at first, but the atmosphere and the mood of the children and the festival itself would not allow me to be. One thing that amazed me about the children is that when you are telling them a story, you never do it alone; they help you along as if they had heard it before. Later in the afternoon I joined the drumming group (from Spirasi as well) but of course not before going round the whole area watching more acts done by other performers. The following day was even better because most people, including myself, had gained confidence from the first day, so they improved on whatever they were doing.

I in particular enjoyed the drumming session on which I was just an opportunist drummer. When we were marching down the harbour people followed us clapping and dancing along. One who confessed he liked us from the onset the previous day asked to video me and asked for my contact details, thinking that I was a professional drummer, little did he know that I had joined the group only on that day just to make up for their absent members. Another Irish lady made an audacious move and asked me if I was married. (I hope my wife does not see this). Who can deny that I had become a celebrity?

At for an hour I enjoyed and experienced what the Beckhams of this world go through, with the exception of gold and silver, though.

For the first time I felt welcome, involved, belonging and part of the Irish family, and for one time I forgot the woes that bewilder me in my life. Yes I might have been adrift in a daydream, but the memories and effects of that reverie will live and be cherished by me.

To me both these days seemed just like minutes, (perhaps the timekeepers up there had left the clocks unattended and joined the revellers in the festival, who knows?) although the festival came to end, there is one thing that will always be with me, I changed the way I perceive things.

Allow me to be frank, previously when I was walking down the streets in the city and local people stared at me, do you really know what I thought was in their minds? “What does this African want here? I was wrong. I now know what would be in their minds. “That Bloke can hit the drums man.”

To my fellow immigrants, sometimes it is just the way we perceive things that we think we are discriminated against. We should utilize the occasions like these to showcase what we can offer to the Irish community have they provided the platform for that. I witnessed it first hand at Dun Laoghaire Festival of Cultures.

I integrated.”



## Art and Dialogue Weekend Friday 23rd - Sunday 25th November

SPIRASI and the Glenree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation have come together to offer a unique weekend ‘Art and Dialogue’ programme. Its aim is to support ordinary members of our communities to come together to share their experiences, concerns and challenges of living in a multicultural land.

The programme will run from 6pm on Friday 23rd November to 5pm on Sunday 25th November. Meals and accommodation will be provided in the Glenree peace and reconciliation centre situated in the beautiful Wicklow hills as well as transport to and from Dublin.

Through sharing of personal hopes, fears and experiences we hope that understanding and integration will develop between all participants. Native Irish people are particularly welcome to participate. Please contact Anne on 01-8389664 or email [artproject@spirasi.ie](mailto:artproject@spirasi.ie).

## Volunteers Wanted

The Arts Programme is looking for members of minority ethnic communities to take part in a Storytelling project.

If you are a migrant, refugee or asylum seeker, you are welcome to participate in any of the Arts Programme activities. Contact Anne Walsh, the SPIRASI Arts Co-ordinator. Up to date information available at <http://www.spirasi.ie/art/>

### 2008 St. Patrick's Festival Project

Take part in showing the new face of Dublin. The Arts Programme are inviting people to take part in City Fusion, a St. Patrick's Day Festival project. In this Intercultural Community Project you will learn how to drum and also make costumes that will be worn on the Parade. Everybody is welcome especially members from minority ethnicities. The workshops take place each Thursday afternoon from 5-7pm at SPIRASI from mid-December until March 17<sup>th</sup>. To register, contact Anne or Grainne (01-8389664 or [artproject@spirasi.ie](mailto:artproject@spirasi.ie)).



*Sebastiao at the 2007 St. Patrick's Parade*

### Balbriggan Research Project

SPIRASI is carrying out a survey amongst the refugee community in Balbriggan and are seeking volunteers to take part in the study. To complete the research, SPIRASI is going to conduct short interviews with refugees and those who have been granted leave to remain and who are based in Balbriggan, Co. Dublin.

The research will focus on community-based services and how well refugee communities are able to access them. This will involve highlighting any gaps in existing services and identifying the areas where uptake is low, as well as evaluating if current services are appropriately designed. Both community based service providers, and users will be consulted in the research process in the interest of encouraging engagement between planners and the community and help to strengthen community involvement.

Balbriggan is being used as a sample area as it highlights many of the issues that refugees are facing in Ireland. It also has one of the largest communities of refugees per capita. A representative sample group will be interviewed and we hope this research will be of benefit

to the whole community. SPIRASI hope to have the survey completed before Christmas and the results will be published early in the New Year.

SPIRASI would like to hear from you if you are a refugee or have been granted leave to remain and are living in Balbriggan. We would like to ask you some questions about health, education, information and social services in the area. Your anonymity, confidentiality and privacy are ensured. If you are interested in taking part, contact **Sharon McGuigan** on (01) 838-9664 or e-mail [research@spirasi.ie](mailto:research@spirasi.ie)

### Staff News

In June, we were delighted to welcome Her Excellency, Priscilla Jana and Professor Kathleen Lynch as new members of the SPIRASI Board of Directors. Priscilla Jana is the South African ambassador to Ireland and Kathleen Lynch is the Chair of Equality Studies in UCD.

Also in June, Edward Horgan retired as manager for the Centre for Care of Survivors of Torture to complete his doctoral studies at the University of Limerick and continue his work as a peace campaigner. We're now delighted to welcome Maura Connolly, former director of Ruhama who started in her new position at the beginning of November.

Over the summer, receptionist, James O'Brien who over the past four years had welcomed clients and made them feel comfortable and at home when they arrived in SPIRASI left to pursue further education. Fr. Linus Mbajo who worked in SPIRASI as volunteer co-ordinator for the past three years also left to take up a new appointment as the chaplain of St. James' Hospital in Dublin.

Finally, we would like to welcome Winifred Akinyemi who started working in September as an administrator for the Health Information Programme and Jennifer Carberry who recently started work as an administrative assistant in our integration and education department.

### Funding News

The SPIRASI Centre for Care of Survivors of Torture was selected as one of 15 organisations to receive €5,000 from Dublin Bus in order to buy plinths and other much needed medical equipment at a ceremony on 6th September in the Burlington Hotel, Ballsbridge. Niall Quinn, patron of the Dublin Bus Community Support Programme and Guest of Honour, Bertie Ahern presented the award to Dr Abdul Bulbulia and Greg Straton of the centre. The SPIRASI Centre for Education and Integration of Migrants also received €2000 to cover material costs for their Arts programme.

In October, Caroline Lemaryle and Ludmilla Radautan visited SPIRASI on a EIDHR monitoring mission on behalf of the European Commission. During their visit, they also met with Frank Caffrey of the Refugee Legal Services, Eddie Matthews of the Health Services Executive, Frank Edwards of the Reception and Integration and Manuel Jardao the UNHCR representative in Ireland.

SPIRASI would also like to thank Maryfield College, Sandford Park School and Deirdre Healy who raised money and made very generous donations to SPIRASI at the start of the summer.

## Upcoming Events:

### Winter 2007

Wed 5<sup>th</sup> December – International Volunteers Day

Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> December - Client Christmas Party

Friday 14<sup>th</sup> December – Staff Christmas Party

SPIRASI will be closed for Christmas Holidays from Friday 21<sup>st</sup> December until Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> January.

### SPIRASI Mentoring Programme

*For just over a year, SPIRASI has been running a mentoring programme which matches up volunteers with clients who now have refugee status and who are no longer institutionalised in accommodation centres. The following piece was written by Aoife, one of our volunteers (the name of the client has been changed to protect her privacy):*

“I decided to get involved with SPIRASI’s mentoring programme after reading a newspaper article about a similar initiative in Britain. In the context of Ireland’s changing cultural profile I think that it’s very important to interact with the country’s new residents to help build mutual understanding between communities and to promote a successful multicultural society.

I was matched with Badria in early 2007. We got on very well from our first meeting so we agreed to meet every week. I generally call to her house for dinner once a week after work and we have an informal chat. We discuss new English words and concepts that come up in conversation and I help her to improve her use of grammar. I feel that our weekly meetings have been of great benefit to Badria as I can hear her spoken English improving week on week and her confidence has grown considerably. The programme has also been of benefit to me as I have learned a lot about Badria’s national culture and history and I have genuinely enjoyed the weekly visits. Furthermore, I have gained a valuable insight into the processes that immigrants to Ireland face.

From the beginning of and throughout my involvement in the mentoring programme with SPIRASI, there was a lot of support offered to volunteers by the organisation. Regular training and information sharing sessions were offered and I always found the staff to be extremely approachable and helpful.

Overall, mentoring with SPIRASI has been a very positive experience and much more mutually beneficial than I anticipated.”

### Psychotherapy News

In September, Margaret O’Reilly Carroll, psychotherapy team leader attended a workshop on *Sensorimotor Psychotherapy for Trauma*. The workshop demonstrated how certain parts of the brain are active when a person experiences trauma and affirmed the practice of the CCST psychotherapeutic team in avoiding re-traumatisation of clients. Unfortunately due to space restrictions, the report on the conference that Margaret wrote for this newsletter couldn’t be included and has instead been published at <http://www.spirasi.ie/articles/>

SPIRASI is supported by: The European Refugee Fund, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, the Health Service Executive, the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, the World Mercy Fund, the Holy Ghost Provincialate, FÁS, Pobal, CDVEC, the Family Support Agency and the Reception & Integration Agency.

### 2007 Adidas Dublin City Marathon

SPIRASI recently participated in the Dublin City Marathon. We had a team team of 10 people running the marathon for SPIRASI—some clients, some SPIRASI friends, some novices and some experienced athletes who run the marathon year on year.

Our ambition was to raise €6,000 in aid of SPIRASI with the help of volunteers and friends who have kindly agreed to help out by raising sponsorship for the SPIRASI running team. Some of the money they raised will help to cover the costs involved in SPIRASI clients’ participation. The rest will be used to help SPIRASI to continue its important services. We are well on track to raising our target, with a confirmed €3000 so far known of and many more sponsorship cards to be returned.



Of the enthusiastic 10 participants, 6 walked and 4 ran.

All those running for SPIRASI did the organisation proud. These are Patrick Boyd, Liban Mohamud, Cathy Hynes and Jean Marie Sebagobo. Each of the runners completed the race in under 5 hours. Four SPIRASI staff members walked: Gillian Mangan, Fatima Gholizadeh, Mieke Herman and Erin Thomas. Two female clients, Agustina and Eloho part walked and part jogged the course. Both Eloho and Gillian were forced out of the race as a result of injury but all remaining SPIRASI walkers made it to the finish line in great time, completing the daunting 42.25 kilometres.

We were extremely disappointed that 2 of our client runners were forced—due to injury—to make the difficult decision not to participate in this year’s marathon. Another member of the public who was to join our marathon team was also unable to participate as he missed the closing date for registration. We wish them a speedy recovery and all the best for Marathon 2008.

2006 was the first attempt by SPIRASI to join the ranks of the Dublin City Marathon runners. We recruited 8 staff and volunteers to participate as a pilot initiative to see if the marathon could work as a viable fund-raising opportunity. The success of this first attempt led to our participation in 2007. We will also be focussing attention on the Women’s Mini Marathon in May 2008.

Now that we intend to run this as an annual event – as well as participate in the mini-marathon, we hope that our running team will continue to grow and that the income we generate continues to ensure that our services are delivered to those who most need them when they most need them.