

Simon Voices



Simon Users Speaking

Communities United



People from four Simon Communities - Cork, Dublin, Dundalk and Galway joined with two people from Focus Ireland to participate in an Introduction to Facilitation Skills course between March and May. Simon Involvement and Action Group (SIAG) applied for funding under the ESB Electric Aid Grant Scheme for this training.

This course was designed to give people the skills to run groups in their own Communities. Some people who took part in the course put their skills to work immediately.

This is only one of the projects that SIAG is involved in. Why not join us and become involved too?

Barriers to Employment

My name is Mike and I'm involved with the Simon Involvement and Action Group. I was asked to go to Brussels to the 10th EU Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty on 16th-17th May, with the European Anti-Poverty Network. I was part of the Irish delegation.

The theme for the meeting was Employment. Prior to the meeting I was given the task to get information on barriers to employment for people who are homeless. I worked with the Simon Involvement and Action Group at their meetings. I spoke about the barriers they had highlighted at the Conference and there was a great



Michael Mackey speaking at the Conference in Brussels

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response from other delegates. Then all the other delegates had to make a report on all the other issues and I was given the task of reading the report to all the delegates.

It gave me an opportunity to have my voice heard on the issues concerning homelessness and the barriers to employment for

homeless people. It was a great event for me and the Irish delegation.

At the meeting in Brussels there were 24 countries represented with 350 people. The reports from the meeting will be sent to the EU Commission.

It was a great honour for me to speak about the issues concerning

homelessness in front of legislators and policy makers. It was through the Simon Involvement and Action Group that this trip happened. It would be great if we had more involvement from people in all the Simon Communities, having an input into participation.

Barriers to employment that can arise for some people who are homeless

Lack of Job Opportunities

- Due to the current economic downturn and high unemployment levels
- Casual employment (cash in hand) has become scarcer

Lack of Housing

- Living in a hostel is an unstable lifestyle with little security. It is impossible to get a job without an address and telephone number.
- Local Authorities often 'segregate' people who have experienced homelessness into certain areas and then the address itself is stigmatised

Discrimination

- If a person's address is a known 'homeless service' to prospective employers, there may be discrimination and stereotyping
- Stigma, people have experienced being 'let go' when it has become known they have been homeless. Also people have experienced being talked about because of their experience of homelessness
- If you are registered as homeless it can affect your chance of employment
- Prison – if you have a criminal record

Personal Barriers

- Lack of confidence and knowledge – confidence in filling out application forms or doing interviews. Lack of

knowledge about support and advice in finding jobs and improving interview skills.

- Life skills – the ability to get up and show up on time, to keep a schedule and stay at work as required. How to deal with work related stress.
- Limited reading, writing and numbers skills – can be a barrier to getting a job
- Communication and social skills – interacting with people and people of authority may be challenging.
- Addiction, it can take a long time to recover

Financial Barriers

- Low paid employment means that sometimes people are better off on benefits
- If you have previously been on Disability Allowance, there is no record of stamps or tax

Lack of Transportation

- Public and private, to help get to work

Health Barriers

- Due to the mental and physical health needs of a large number of people who are homeless, they require medication and other support. With the loss of the medical card when working this can create additional problems.
- Having experience of poor mental health and homelessness can be a double barrier to employment because

of discrimination

- The medication can prevent people being able to work
- Receiving poor mental health services in general is a barrier
- Psychiatric hospital – if you are coming out of a psychiatric hospital with no address, you end up back on the streets. It's a vicious circle of prison – street – hospital. People just give up – it can lead to suicide.
- Often no flexibility from employers for people with different health needs

Employment Services

- Training may be required for staff, to prevent discrimination and stereotyping, and for them to be able to respond to individual needs.

What experiences to you have of what employers have said to you? Have you had any positive experiences? Have you discussed these issues within your Simon Community? How have you dealt with these issues?

Please feel free to contact us with your experiences. (Your name will not be published if you don't want it to be).

Ignore the Appeal



The charity shop didn't close due to lack of custom, but that's the official cause. The actual cause was greed; yes greed was the diminishing factor. Funny, it closed due to the need of money, but this was an obsessive need. Sisters Imelda and Ursula Ovens were practically joined at the hip, wore the same outfits, lived together, even once dated the same guy. But because he almost drove them apart, swore to remain celibate for the rest of their lives. Oh and they despised cats, couldn't stand the fur balls. The sight of a kitten would drive them barmy.

Imelda the eldest of the two secured the positions claiming to care for all orphaned babies. So for the past five years they ran the shop in a small village somewhere in the west of Ireland. Promises of promotions with raised wages and fancy new cars is what probably pushed the sisters. They would put a price on anything that came in to the small musty shop which was situated on the main street. If you were to stand still for two minutes they would try to sell you, that's how desperate they were.

Head office demanded no mistakes were to be made, the sisters were frightened by this, they practically cowered when the supervisor would pay them a visit. One time they found themselves a new volunteer who seemed to be more reliable than the other 'slaves', he'd often make a mistake while serving but they had to pay out of their own pockets. When he didn't turn up they really got angry, once the whole village flooded and the shop was destroyed, yep, guess who got the blame? The shop was simply

horrible, old musty mountains of clothes and books that would never be shifted, the volunteer had enough, he was warned not to make this decision. You'll ruin your life they said, but he had enough of the crappy, god awful, mind numbing, back breaking work. At the end of the day his clothes would smell like the shop.

So he was finally free, but some were jealous because he had no mortgage or other financial responsibilities. Oh, did I tell you, that he was being paid to do this fucking work. So the shop finally went belly up because the sisters and this so called charity only cared about money. They craved money, this charity is not a charity, it's just a business disguised as a charity and they deserve this and things will get worse. So please don't give to this charitable organization, its being run by money grubbing twits who are just pretending to be nice. Things never became sour for the former employee; he went on to find fame as a fabulous filmmaker who frequently visited France and Fiji. He never worried himself about money and grown up problems. Most adults are twits and to be one is simply absurd, so he does his best to avoid their company and less to avoid their stares. I once met him and asked him would he change anything about the world, he simply said "no it's fine the way that it is, the adults are the ones who should change" and then he bade me adieu. As far as I know he is still alive, but not like you or I, whatever could that mean? Guess we'll never find out.

Alan Maguire

Writer's Corner

Anywhere But Here

Can anybody help me as, I landed here.

A psychiatric nurse appears with meds for my ills as I hoped for a quick fix, I learned the hard way there was no such thing I would escape from my hospital bed and look at the fast flowing river, Should I leap without faith, and hope for a better place, I would imagine life somewhere else.

I wasn't brave enough, I got drunk in the nearest bar, and woke demented in my hospital bed.

I would in jest more meds for my ills; I wished I could be anywhere but here. I would lie on my pillow and dream faraway dreams only to wake bedraggled beside a hot radiator, On a hot summers day, nothing to do here just counting the hours until tea time.

I would ask a pretty nurse can anybody help me, I was told there was no such thing, How sad I felt inside to be a place like this.

My thoughts were mangled I was deranged, to be told by my fair weather friends that I was mad what a stigma that was stuck on me, how sad I felt to be a place like this.

Heard of euthanasia that would be great, can't see any future here.

Can anybody help me be anywhere but here?

Brian Burke

One Night on the Streets

All on your own, on the streets as one stands in his front room

No walls around to stop the winds and rain prevail

As I try to stay sheltered in a doorway

Soaking wet feeling condemned to no feelings

As I am numb with cold and I have my age looking old

Can't think can't sleep

And if I lie down more than likely questioned by the Gardai

I no want to go to a cell

I prefer to be wet and cold

And stay on the streets than to be locked up in hell

As I roam no home

It's not a life I choose but that's the way the system goes

Let loose at who knows

Meet someone in the same state as me

Makes it great to have some friend as company

As we sit on steps soaking wet trying to light a lighter we found

Some tobacco lucky papers dry

But all we want is one cup of tea to warm us up

Chest infections and worry about the others

As if it was just ourselves and no-one else

And remember when I was that friend

As we talk among us as if we were kings, and one day we might get

But it's just til dawn the clothes stick to your backs

People coming and going to work and home

And just us begging on the bridge still thinking we're kings

A few coppers and fags a new day begins

And the wind lets us sing

One more night over

One night on the streets

James O'Flynn

Parsnips



Last week my cat parsnips died. he got run over by the garbage truck. People say cats have nine lives but parsnips just had one if he had been all black he woulda survived. I cried and cried for day's mom and dad told me to shut up. Now parsnips is gone but one day we will see each other. I really miss him I wish I got hit by the garbage truck also then I wouldn't be alone.

Alan Maguire

Jesus Loves Beggars

JESUS LOVES BEGGARS, written in red marker on the cardboard sign, held by the one legged first gulf war vet who sits on the corner day in day out begging for change, begging for an answer, begging for a way out of this madhouse.

Alan Maguire

IT REALLY HAPPENED...

Relapse – Don't do it!

To you lovely people who are addicted to alcohol, you will know what I am talking about.

I was off drink for approximately seven years and ahh, one night a friend said to me 'a hot whiskey won't kill you' because at the time I had the flu.

One hot whisky, you must be joking. It lead to nine weeks of heavy drinking and I could not stop. I did not want to stop, over hurt and abuse.

After that it was Guinness, gin and tonics, whiskey and beer. *It was an awful nightmare.* I went back to my old ways of drinking, not eating and got very very

sick, in mind and body. I woke up in the morning and did not know what day it was. I had to ring a friend to find out.

So I am writing this to the lovely, sober people out there – never relapse. It's not worth it. I lost more in nine weeks than ever – a course I was doing, my confidence, my self esteem, and my dignity. I was afraid of my own shadow and afraid to go out.

Please, please, it's true, never pick up that first drink, we can't do it, we can't cope, we can't stop.

Shelly



News from three of the Communities

Galway

In Galway there are two groups that meet once a month. First, the Simon Action Group that is made up of people who use the services of Galway Simon. At the moment we are working on updating the Welcome Pack (for newcomers to services), which will also include the Complaints Policy. We are hoping to launch it during Simon Week along with a photo exhibition, based on photos taken by people who partake in services, entitled 'Simon's Eye'.

The group also hosted a card games night in July to attract new members.

Second, the Simon Circle Group is made up of people who avail of the services, staff and volunteers. There are a number of sub groups, arising from Simon Circle. The Skills sub group for example, are planting window boxes with the Community. The Participation sub group have started working on their piece for the Strategic Plan 2012-2015. The Policy sub group are working to ensure that more policies relating to people who partake in services, are easily understood. The Activity sub group organise two events a year and are also going to show two TV documentaries featuring members of Galway Simon Community, during Simon Week. The New Members sub group are working to attract new members to both groups.

Dublin

In Dublin the Simon Users Development Group (SUDG) which is made up of past and present service users, staff and volunteers meets monthly to raise a range of issues, including support, housing and legal issues etc. Some initiatives that they have organised to date include

- 2 very successful Speakouts
- A Volunteer Placement programme for service users
- Training in First Aid, Manual Handling, fire safety, chairing and minute taking, induction and involvement in Staff Induction
- Team building day
- Saturday social once a month
- Various activities and outings

Cork

The Breakaway Theatre Group run in conjunction with Cork Simon Community recently put on a production of 'Just Passing Through', a dark comedy about a family run funeral home, pictured below.

The next production will be in October during Simon Week and will be followed up by a performance and CD launch of the Claddagh Rogues, a band founded through Cork Simon Community.

Competition

In the 1960's Mungo Jerry had a hit *In The Summer Time*. What word completes the following line:
In the summer time when the weather is...

A. Hot B. Fine C. Blue

How to Enter

To be in with a chance of winning a €50.00 shopping voucher send your answers to Simon Involvement and Action Group, c/o Catri O'Kane, Simon Communities of Ireland, St Andrew's House, 28-30 Exchequer Street, Dublin 2 or text your answer to 087 799 3860 with your name and address. Closing Date September 30th 2011.



Cooking This Summer

A common dilemma for many people living on their own is that they are often left to cook for themselves, so here are two recipes that are worth the effort, cost and time.

Summer Chicken Salad



Serves 2

- 2 tablespoons of olive oil
- 2 chicken breasts cut in to strips
- 1 punnet of cherry tomatoes-cut into halves
- 1 packet of mixed leaf lettuce-chopped
- 1 small pack of pine nuts or cashew nuts
- 1 lemon
- Salt & pepper

METHOD

- 1** Heat one tablespoon of oil in a frying pan over a medium heat and cook the chicken strips for about 10 mins or until cooked through, take out of the pan and leave aside.
- 2** In a large bowl place the tomatoes, lettuce and choice of nuts, mix well and add the chicken strips then drizzle with olive oil and lemon juice.
- 3** Season with salt and pepper and divide into two bowls. Serve immediately.

Summer Fruit Flan



Serves 2

- 1 small sponge flan case
- 125g mascarpone cheese
- 100g fromage frais
- 1 dessert spoon of caster sugar
- A few drops of vanilla essence
- 1 punnet of strawberries
- 1 jar of Dunnes' Stores summer fruit sauce

METHOD

- 1** Mix the mascarpone cheese, fromage frais, vanilla essence and castor sugar in a bowl.
- 2** Spread the mixture over the base of the flan.
- 3** Place the sliced strawberries on top.
- 4** Drizzle with the summer fruit sauce.
- 5** Serve and enjoy.



Flying High! One of our readers Dennis Connolly from Galway with the model airplane he made

Simon Voices Needs You!

We want to hear from you. Please send your personal stories, opinions, poems or news to Catri O'Kane, Simon Communities of Ireland, St Andrew's House, 28-30 Exchequer Street, Dublin 2 Or email to catriokane@simoncommunity.com

We may not be able to publish everything we receive. Thank you to everybody who has sent in a contribution. Sorry if it has not been included in this issue.