



Exchange House's National Educational Achievement Award highlights academic success in the Irish Travelling community



Catriona Stokes, Margaret McCarthy, Shenise Power, Rachael McDonagh, Emma McDonagh, Christina Joyce show off their Exchange House National Educational Achievement Award medals

The inaugural Exchange House National Educational Achievement Award ceremony was held on Friday the 14th of November in the Dublin City Council Offices at Wood Quay. The Awards were presented to members of the Traveller community who had recently completed Junior and Leaving Certificates and O-Level and A-Level examinations. The awards were open to nominees from all over the island of Ireland. There were fifty six recipients

of the award and thirty seven of them were present to collect their certificates and medals in person. The medals and certificates were presented by the Lord Mayor Eibhlin Byrne. "I want to congratulate all recipients of this award on their personal success in achieving this award. This award highlights the importance of education in our society. Education is the gateway that opens many exciting opportunities for all who make it part of their lives" said the Lord Mayor.

A key objective of the Award was to highlight positive role models within the Traveller community. "Today's award recipients are role models for the wider community. As well as giving great pride to their families and communities, their example shows what can be achieved on a wider scale with sufficient support and encouragement" said the Director of Exchange House, Heydi Foster. Another purpose of the Award was to show

nominees how highly valued formal education is by Exchange House. "The other



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Education Department



Clockwise from top: Recipients of the Exchange House National Educational Achievement Awards with Lord Mayor Eibhlin Byrne; Heydi Foster, Director Exchange House; Cathleen McDonagh, Exchange House Education Department Team Leader; and Kieran Cunningham, Dublin City Council; Mikey Cunningham & Michelle Cassidy with their Exchange House National Educational Award medals; Mary McDermott, ALO City of Dublin VEC; Geraldine Myers, winner of a laptop; Lord Mayor Eibhlin Byrne; & Cathleen McDonagh

(cont. from page 1)

aspect to this award is to support the fact that education is something positive, which will only improve peoples' lives and the Traveller community in general. As a community, education can only enrich us. We need to engage in education and use the benefits wisely for the future of our community and society. Education is one of the cornerstones for our future; you are our future and you, like all people, need to have every opportunity opened to you," said Cathleen McDonagh, Team Leader of the Exchange House Education Department. Exchange House will hold this national event every year and has plans to provide scholarships to one or two students each

year in the future. There are also plans to honour members of the Traveller community from all over the country who achieve third level qualifications at future events, building on the success of the 2008 awards ceremony.

The recipients of the Exchange House National Educational Achievement Award, and their proud families, took part in the event, which would not have been possible without the kind generosity of the sponsors: Dublin City Council, FÁS, City of Dublin VEC, Hugh McDermott, Postermania, St. Stephen's Green Trust, Health Services Executive, City of Dublin Youth Service Board and Lena O'Donovan Florist.

Paul Cullen
CE Scheme Supervisor

Photo on front page:
Dublin Lord Mayor Eibhlin Byrne is presented with a bouquet of flowers by Exchange House CE staff member Winnie McDonagh





December 2008

Community Employment

Reflections on Christmas from CE staff



Nellie Collins

"I remember when I was a little girl I used to love Christmas. I would wake up very early on Christmas morning, because it's my birthday, I would run into the sitting room and find a Christmas stocking hanging from the fireplace for me. There would be colouring books, markers, sweets and a doll in it. I would be very happy with it. I would see the big smile on my Mother and Fathers faces. I would give them a big hug and tell them that I love them.

The kids nowadays is getting too much. They want phones, laptops, Playstations and big money for the RDS and are never thankful with anything they get."



Bernadette Collins

"There's one thing I don't like about Christmas nowadays; the children get far too much. They have no appreciation anymore for anything. They want so much and they get what they ask for. When I was small I would be looking forward to Christmas for a brand new doll with blonde hair and a new dress and I would love her. The children have toys everyday they don't need Christmas anymore. The reason that Christmas is all about is forgotten, the birth of Jesus."



Phyllis Connors & Maggie Collins

Phyllis and Maggie are grandmothers now and they began to reflect on Christmas and how it has changed for them through their lifetime.

"People get more now and appreciate less", says Maggie. "When we were small sometimes the only difference between Christmas and other days was a nice dinner if we were lucky. If we had jam and brack, we thought we had the world". Phyllis agrees "It was better years ago; people are all competing with one another now. Christmas can be expensive and stressful"

Both women agree that Christmas trees and Santa Claus were not part of their traditions when they were small but they knew other people had them because they saw the lights and decorations in town. They both remember that Christmas was more of a religious celebration than it is now and they would have been brought to midnight mass when they were children.

Phyllis recalls "Christmas time, you would have red ribbon in your hair: yellow ribbon at Easter and green ribbon at St. Patrick's Day."

"For Christmas dinner, you would be glad of what you got", says Maggie, "mind you, I get asked out for dinner a lot now at Christmas, you wouldn't have got that then because people didn't have enough!" Santa Claus became a part of Phyllis and Maggie's tradition when they became mothers themselves. Phyllis summed it up by saying "I gave my children what I wished I had as a child".

"Christmas time, you would have red ribbon in your hair: yellow ribbon at Easter and green ribbon at St. Patrick's Day."

A few words from our Director

Welcome to our winter edition of *News Travels*. 2008 has been a very exciting year for Exchange House Traveller Service. In this issue we want to highlight a number of events and exciting new developments. In the Education Department we've had the Launch of the National Traveller Educational Achievement Award where we celebrated the Educational achievements of Travellers around the island of Ireland.

The Family Support Department is bustling with excitement around a number of new projects including two covered in this edition - the Parent Plus Programme and work on the Census for the All Ireland Traveller Health Study 2007-2010. We also hope this edition gives you insight into the everyday work of one of our family support workers and our drug outreach counsellor/worker.

The lively Youth Department was busy launching the Happy Days Park aimed at providing a safe space for young people. Our football season was filled with excitement and pride as our team earned second place in the tournament.

We have lots of plans for 2009 - we will be working in partnership with FÁS starting a New Local Training Initiative Programme. This programme will offer opportunities to both Traveller men and women to improve their training and education. In an effort to better meet the needs of our clients, we will further develop our domestic violence project; our Lifeskills Project aimed at families experiencing homelessness; and our substance misuse programme. We are also looking forward to our Youth Educational away trip to Poland; and researching and meeting the needs of young homeless Travellers in Dublin.



Merry Christmas to all our readers and best wishes and every success for 2009!!!

Heydi Foster
Director

News Travels

Family Support

Juliet in Dublin's 21st Century

Cathleen is looking at her hands. The last time she was with Michael they felt so good. She touched his face while they were looking at each other wondering if they would meet somewhere sometime again. Cathleen is a bright beautiful woman, but she can't stop thinking about her future. She is young but her hands are aging before time without her even noticing. She knows she has to do something for herself and not for others but she doesn't know who to talk to, and doesn't know where to start from. She is feeling quite isolated within her family. She loves her mother, brother and sisters but they are all very busy keeping themselves going. Daddy left a long time ago, she was only six, but she has never forgotten about him. He loved eggs, and so did she.

Cathleen wants to be independent, but most of all Cathleen wants to be with Michael.

Cathleen is in love.

Cathleen is living on the streets because she is not happy at home. That's how I met Cathleen. She was a quiet girl, she didn't say much. Her heart pumped loudly. Cathleen wanted a place to live, somewhere to shelter her soul.

We talked for a long time, Cathleen seemed unusually comfortable talking about herself. She had so much to say, and she said it so quietly. I was so honoured while listening. That's how our relationship started. In an empty room full of history.

We both knew we had to look for accommodation, and we did. But getting to know her was fascinating as well as...

a holistic approach? Perhaps, I don't



Patricia Sagasta
Family Support
worker

want to know. We met every week since. In the beginning we booked Cathleen into emergency accommodation. Not a home, yet a roof. Not for long but for the night. Not for tomorrow but for tonight.

Transitional housing came next. We applied to a few different places. It took a while, the waiting was difficult. Hope was high. Forms, interview after interview, and a lot of 'fags' in between. We were ready. We were packed. Pyjamas and a new duvet. That's all Cathleen needed for a sweet dream in a dry 'mattressed' bed.



At last we were called. It was Cathleen's chance. The excitement was high. Cathleen was shaky, frightened, edgy, pitiful, embarrassed and very anxious. I couldn't wait.

Cathleen got the place. Yeaahh!! Ah, ah!

Explosion of joy with a caution sign. The cheering didn't last. She was out in a week. She didn't like it, it wasn't for her. I was angry and then I learned.

We started all over again, from the beginning. From the quiet girl whose heart pumped loudly; AND, the man who kept hiding in her heart. Cathleen introduced Michael to us and we were now looking for accommodation for a couple.

Michael had always been in our conversations but he hadn't found the courage to meet us. Michael was a well mannered, fine young man with lots of pain and anger in disguise.

Cathleen and Michael meant well. They wanted to live together this time. As for me, I was delighted to open a new chapter. Getting to know him as much as her. So wonderful. At last I had two lovebirds instead of one and no nesting place.

This time with Michael on board we all seemed a little bit more confident. I

remember having a laugh while filling one of the housing forms. It wasn't a joke but it did look like it. Not for Cathleen. She remained quiet. She wanted a place so bad. And she loved Michael with all her heart.

After that I went away. I took my leave. I went away to a warmer place, just like birds do.

When I got back I got a surprise. The nest was there. My colleague had managed to find it. I felt happy and selfishly sad for

having missed the 'crack'. Not that there were any eggs but Cathleen and Michael were living together in a house. A private rented house. Isn't that great? Hats off to Miss Cheerful; and everyone who was supportive along the way.





December 2008

A day in the life of a ... Drug Counsellor

A day in Exchange House is never the same. As an addiction counsellor it varies from day to day and often it does not work out as planned. Many of my clients live very chaotic lives as they are caught up in a cycle of addiction which often brings homelessness, severe emotional problems, relationship issues, criminal charges and other social problems.

When I first joined Exchange House in June 2007 I had no client base to work with so I spent a lot of time building up my case load and a network of agencies to work with. Gradually I built up a very solid base of clients. They all spoke positively of work they had done previously with Exchange House and wished to continue working with us. Much of my initial work with clients is centred on building relationships with them and to build up trust with them and the simplest way of doing this is having a cup of tea and a chat about their everyday lives.

I have been working with Niamh for a long time, she was in fact one of my first clients that I came in contact with. I had heard a lot about Niamh before I met her and I was expecting to meet a tough lady who had been hardened by living on the streets and events that have taken place throughout her life. However, over the past 18 months working with Niamh, she is the client who has managed to get under my skin. I am very fond of her and she drives me mad a lot of the time too! I'm sure she may feel the same about me at times.

When I first met her she had a black eye and was losing her accommodation due to violence and excessive drinking. Over the



Caroline O'Reilly
Drug Counsellor

past year and a half we have had many ups and downs with herself and her partner Paul. These ups and downs generally consisted of Niamh losing her accommodation, breaking up with her partner, violence, and of course Niamh's turbulent relationship with alcohol. Niamh and her partner have secured accommodation in recent weeks but they are drinking heavier than they ever have and it's becoming a major worry.

On this particular day I met with Niamh, she had been arguing with her partner and her behaviour while drinking had been disrupting the other residents at the accommodation. Niamh was quite abusive to her partner in my presence and I felt bad for him as the things she had been saying were quite hurtful and maybe a little embarrassing for him. Niamh was in particularly bad form this morning and I had not seen her in such a state before. She was extremely anxious about Paul leaving her as he appeared to be very serious about it and he repeatedly said that it was her drinking and subsequent behaviour that was resulting in his decision. Niamh, however, was determined to not take the responsibility for it or the fact that most of her problems at present had been a result of her heavy drinking. Niamh also had a bad hangover which was adding to her anxiety.

For me it was disheartening to see her in this way as this was probably the worst condition I have ever seen her in. I was very concerned about her at that moment and emotionally there has been very little counselling work that can be done with her as she appeared to have no boundaries with alcohol lately. The main work that can be done with Niamh at present is harm reduction and to

keep her as healthy as possible while she decides to continue drinking.

Perhaps the most surprising thing to hear her say was that she was alcoholic and she was going to spend the rest of her life drinking. I was shocked to hear her speak like this as while she is "binging" on alcohol she is usually planning her detox from it. All I could do was spend some time with Niamh that day to calm her down and reassure her that she has help when she needs it and that when she is ready we will work with her to help resolve her issues.

"Much of my initial work with clients is centred on building relationships with them and to build up trust with them and the simplest way of doing this is having a cup of tea and a chat about their everyday lives"

News Travels

Parents Plus Project



Claire Feeney
Student Social
Worker

The Parent's Plus Project – Early Years Programme is currently taking place at Exchange House. It is an eight week parental programme running once a week for two hours per session and is been facilitated by Martina McGovern (Social Worker), Rebecca Dunne (Family Support Worker) and Claire Feeney (Student Social Worker). All staff in the Family Support Team are fully trained to run the Parent Plus Programme. The programme currently taking place at Exchange House will be finished before Christmas but plans are underway to run more in the New Year.

The programme is aimed at helping parents maximise their children's learning, language and social development. It is particularly relevant to families with younger children aged one to six years. It is also ideal for parents who want to reduce behavioural problems, while ensuring their children reach their full potential and are emotionally secure. It is suitable for children with a normal range of development as well as children with special needs such as ADHD, speech and language and other development problems. As the programme is flexible in its design, the facilitators adapted the programme to suit the parent group at Exchange House. It was important for us to establish a group that was inclusive to all the parents willing to get

involved and also not to stigmatise while at the same time ensuring the group identified a common goal so we could work together in achieving this.

In week one, we outlined the goals of the parents and also set ground-rules for the programme which included respect for one another, confidentiality, focus on strengths and to have fun!! We wanted to create a relaxed environment in which people would have the opportunity to open up to the group, therefore a positive outlook is essential to achieving this and empowering the group. The programme itself is based on a solution-focused approach. Topics to be covered in the programme include being a responsive parent, encouraging and supporting children, promoting language and development, managing tantrums, misbehaviour and problems and helping children concentrate and learn. The video material which forms the basis for the training captures and highlights the topics outlined for the programme. Also included in the programme are group discussions, role-plays, planning exercises and handouts for participants.

The programme that is currently under way at Exchange House is proving to be a success and has its own personal touch to meet the group's needs and goals. By using a positive and strengths based approach, we are able to empower the group and create satisfying and enjoyable family relationships to help children grow up and reach their full potential with help from the most important people in their lives, their parents.



“Parents Plus is aimed at helping parents maximise their children's learning, language and social development”



Martina McGovern,
Rebecca Dunne &
Claire Feeney,
Exchange House
Family Support
staff who
facilitate the
Parents Plus
Project, with a
certificate of
attendance which
will be given to all
participants





December 2008

Our Geels - All Ireland Traveller Health Study

The 14th October marked a very important date for every Traveller in Ireland as it was the beginning of the Census for the All Ireland Traveller Health Study 2007-2010.

The Census marks the initial step in the first detailed study into the health of Irish Travellers in 22 years and it is unique in that the Census is coordinated for, with and by Travellers. The study employs both qualitative and quantitative measures and has been undertaken in conjunction with the UCD School of Public

Health and Population Science. The information gathered by Travellers visiting other Travellers in their own homes will be used by Traveller organisations and the Health Authorities to work in partnership to improve Travellers Health Status. The objective of the Census is to provide population estimates broken down by gender, age, region, nature of accommodation, access to facilities and services. The Census is part of a wider study which, over the next three years, will include a Birth Cohort Study, Mortality Study and discussion groups by Travellers



Above: Jules McDonagh, Family Support Worker; Below: Laura Rigney, Family Support Worker



and Health Service providers.

Participation in the Census is voluntary and information, which is collected by Traveller Community Health Workers at peoples' homes, is kept strictly confidential. Travellers from The Exchange House Community Employment Scheme and members of the Family Support Team facilitated the study at Exchange House which consisted of 67 families within the catchment area of the South Inner city and took place over a period of 4 weeks. Other organisations involved in the study include Pavee Point, BTAP, CTDG, STAG, BTDG, and Balbriggan Travellers as well as Traveller Health Units all over Ireland. The information is recorded on laptop computers which are designed to be user friendly to all Travellers, including those who have literacy difficulties. The computer speaks the questions out loud so that participants always know what answers are being recorded. The questionnaire was designed to throw up facts about the educational backgrounds and experiences of the Health Service by Travellers. It also highlighted key information about the standards of accommodation and sanitation as well as experiences of discrimination amongst Irish Travellers. The outcomes of the study are crucial as if there are issues, for example, of drug misuse or poor facilities arising from the study, the government will need to provide greater funding or develop new services to tackle these issues.

Exchange House would like to thank all the Travellers who took part in the study, especially the peer researchers and the many families who participated in the study and welcomed researchers into their homes.



If you are an Irish Traveller you need to be counted. The All Ireland Traveller Health Study will identify your health needs and help to build a stronger future for you and your family. If you haven't heard about the study and need more information please see below for details of your local contact:



One of the many promotional posters use for the *Our Geels* - All Ireland Traveller Health Study

News Travels

Two New Staff Members



Penelope More & Laura Rigney, the two new staff of the Family Support Department

Penelope More is from Johannesburg, South Africa. Her experience is, amongst other areas, in Child Protection, Medical Social Work and Homelessness. She says

“Working for Exchange House has enlightened me to the Traveller community, the issues that affect them including education, health, accommodation and discrimination...I am learning about their diversity...”

Laura Rigney hails from Sandymount, Dublin. She studied Social Science at UCD and Human Resource Management at Griffith College. She previously worked in a men’s emergency shelter and dealt with issues of addiction, homelessness and mental health. She says

“I’ve had the privilege of working as a Family Support Worker at Exchange House for three months and I’m very happy...I love the work and the families that the job brings me into contact with...the staff have made me feel welcome, so thanks to them!”

The Importance of Training

Exchange House works from an ethos of delivering a high quality service to Travellers in Dublin. As such the staff in our Family Support Team, Youth Service and the Education Department has been busy this year updating and learning new skills so that they can help address the needs of Travellers accessing our service. Whereas some of this training has been individually tailored to the staff member there has also been training for staff as a whole. Everyone within Exchange House has done *Children First* training as well as *Women’s Aid Training on Domestic Violence*.

All the social workers and family support workers in the Family Support Team have been trained in *Parent Plus*, giving them the skills to help parents develop their parenting based on their own strengths. There has also been training on *Homelessness and Addiction* and *Family Support and Addiction*. The drug outreach workers have done

extra training on *Motivational Interviewing*, *Cognitive Behavioural Therapy* as well as the *Quantum Training on Project Skills* offered by the South Inner City Drug Task Force.

The Youth Workers have had a busy year updating their computer skills, three of whom completed *FETAC accredited IT Modules*, another two completing their *Certificate in Addiction* at NUI Maynooth. Training was also carried out in *Youth Participation*.

The Education Department believes strongly in lifelong learning not only for the participant within their department but also for the staff! The C.E. Co-ordinator has just completed a *Certificate in Education* at NUI Maynooth as well as training in *Quality Assurance*.

The managers in Exchange House lead by example and continue in lifelong learning by doing a *Diploma in Management* through NCI and DIT as well as *Strategic Management Training*

run by SICDTF.

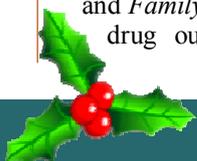
There are also three upcoming training days for all the staff at Exchange House on 1) *Disclosures of Sexual Abuse* run by the One in Four organisation, 2) *Solution Focused Training* run by the Brief therapy Group and 3) *ASSIST* training on suicide run by Aware

“Foghlam Mian Gach
Eagnaidhe”

(Learning is the desire of the wise)



Joanne Ryan
Family Support Team Leader





December 2008



More images from Exchange House's National Education Achievement Award ceremony in Dublin City Council's Civic offices on 14th November 2008

*Clockwise from top: Sally Flynn, Ballyfermot, Leaving Certificate, receives her Award; Education Award nominees and their family and friends in the lobby of Dublin City Council's Civic Offices; Heydi Foster, Exchange House Director, Lord Mayor Eibhlin Byrne and Cathleen McDonagh, Exchange House Education Department Team Leader; Cathleen McDonagh receives a bouquet of flowers from Award recipient Shenise Power; Carmel Terry, member of Exchange House's Board of Directors; Lord Mayor Eibhlin Byrne; Lena Joyce, Mullingar, Leaving Certificate, receives her Award; Joe Donoghue, Tallaght, Leaving Certificate, receives his Award
Left: The design of the National Educational Achievement Award medal; each Award winner received a medal and a certificate to acknowledge their hard work and dedication in completing and passing their state examination certificates.*

News Travels

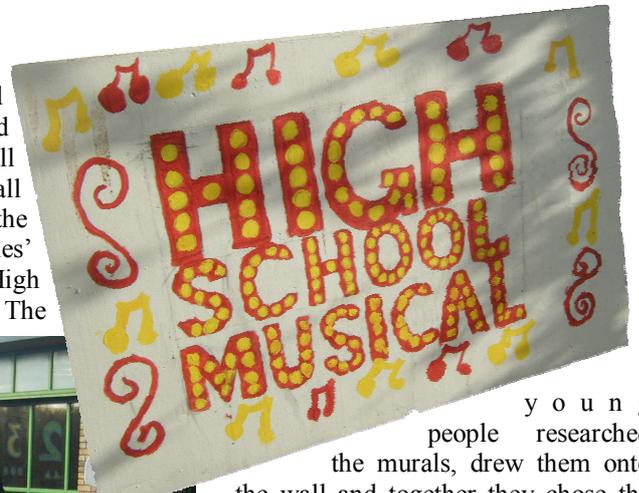
Traveller Youth Service

Happy Days Opening

On the 12th of November 2008, The Happy Days Park in St. Oliver's and Bridgeview Clondalkin was officially opened by the Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs Minister Éamon Ó Cuív. It provides a playground for all young people living on the site. Alongside the playground there is a wall mural created by young people from the site, the Youth team, and the Afterschools staff. The mural includes paintings of the young peoples' favourite programmes and films including Hannah Montana, Bratz and High School Musical and activities they are interested in such as football. The



Above: Minister Éamon Ó Cuív at the opening of Happy Days; Top: Part of the new mural at Happy Days



young people researched the murals, drew them onto the wall and together they chose the colours which they would paint the pictures. The young people greatly enjoyed this project. This project, like the park itself, was a great success and will be an asset in the future to the young people from the site.

William McDonagh
Youth Service Manager



Summer Projects



As the Youth Service prepares to end a busy year and our heads are filled with Christmas trips and programme evaluations we look back at our busiest time of the year - the Summer Projects. While other people plan holidays to Spain and mobiles in Wexford, the Youth Service plans a six to eight week summer programme for all of the young people on our sites who access our service throughout the year. This year we

split into teams and gave a week to each of our groups from the sites where we work and our referrals. The projects consist of fun based educational activities for our young people which include trips to :

- The Zoo
- The National Museum of Ireland
- Dvblinia
- The Cinema
- Sports day & BBQ in the Phoenix Park
- Fort Lucan
- The National Aquatic Centre
- Newbridge House
- The Viking Splash Tour
- Farmleigh House
- The Leisureplex
- Fishing

The Projects were very successful and ran to full capacity each week.

The young people enjoyed the projects very much and there is talk of next years already.

We hope to build on the success of this year's projects for future years to run just as successful a programme which will live up to our young peoples' expectations.

Sarah Byrne & Jimmy Maughan
Youth Workers



Emma Parsons with Summer Project participants at Dublin Zoo





December 2008

Educational Away Programme - Poland - 2009



In September we chose a group of ten young boys from three different sites around Dublin to join us on a trip to Krakow, Poland.

The aim of this trip is to raise awareness among the group of the genocide and persecution of the Roma, Jewish and other groups in the German Nazi death camps of World War II. In doing this we hope to raise awareness of the dangers of racism and discrimination in Ireland today, especially of the Irish Traveller



community.

In preparation for this trip, the group is participating in a research project about the history of Poland and issues which gypsies face.

The trip will include a visit to Auschwitz the most infamous concentration camp set up in World War II. We also hope to visit an organisation in Krakow that works with Roma people.

On the 16th of February the Youth Team and the ten boys will board a plane for their 6 day trip. Watch this space for an update in our next Newsletter.

Emma Parsons & Patrick Stokes
Youth Workers

“we hope to raise awareness of the dangers of racism and discrimination in Ireland today, especially of the Irish Traveller community”

Youth Football



On the 19th of November, a team from St. Margaret’s Park, Ballymun played in the Anna Livia Winter League run by the F.A.I. Set up by Jamie Wilson, Intercultural Officer for the F.A.I in the Ballymun area. He approached the youth workers upon hearing about our teams from other organisations. It was an intercultural programme set up by the F.A.I to integrate young Travellers from the area.

We selected 7 boys from the site who were trained for months beforehand by myself and Jimmy. The boys played four games in total. They won two, drew in one and lost one, earning them the respectable place of second in the tournament. Well done boys!! The boys are back in training already as another tournament will begin again in January when we hope to enter two teams from St. Margaret’s Park and show the F.A.I what our teams are made of. Good luck boys.

John Paul Collins
Youth Worker



Jimmy Maughan with the players of St. Margaret’s Park, Ballymun Youth Team



News Travels

Spaces available for new Exchange House Local Training Initiative (LTI) Programme

We are looking for people to take part in a new Local Training Initiative (LTI) programme. The scheme is open to men and women who are members of the Traveller community and who would like to take part in classes.

Age: 18 years and upwards

Start Date: Monday 2nd February 2009

Hours of Training: 20 hours per week

Training Allowances: FÁS rates € 113.85 per week
(Travel/Childcare allowances may apply)

For Information Contact:

Cathleen McDonagh at 01 872 1094

Exchange House Travellers Service
61 Great Strand St
Dublin 1



Christmas Wishes designed by **Chantelle McDonagh**, age 10, Ballymun



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