



Fáilte Club members at our recent 'Bring your own dish' evening in MIA

### Ongoing Activities

#### Drop-in Centre:

Drop in for information, advice or advocacy every Wednesday Morning from 11 – 1.

#### Refugee Information Service Outreach:

Michelle from the Refugee Information Service (RIS) will be in the MIA offices, every second Wednesday from 11 am to 1 pm.

The Refugee Information Service (RIS) provides a free and specialist information, advice, advocacy and referral service to asylum seekers, refugees and people with permission to remain. Support is available on issues such as the asylum process, residency, citizenship, family reunification, travel, education, social welfare, health, accommodation and language supports. If you have any queries, please drop in or make an appointment by contacting MIA, or Michelle directly at 091 532850

### MIA Christmas Party

An evening of food, music, dance and fun to be had by all involved with MIA and its activities. This takes place on Friday 21st December in the MIA offices, starting at 7:30 pm. Feel free to bring along any dishes/cakes/sweets eaten in your country at Christmas. Looking forward to it already!!!

### Drama and Puppeteering Project

Starting in the New Year, there will be the chance to take part in a series of drama workshops in which you will work with members of the international community now living in Mayo in order to create a story which will then be made into a puppet show. This show, produced and acted by Fluid Theatre Company, will tour schools in the County.

Fluid was established by puppeteer and artist Carmel Balfe in 2005. It focuses on puppetry, dance, mime and music. Fluid aims to produce high quality puppet shows involving both professional and community participants. Carmel is interested in using puppets to tell a story which belongs to the newcomers to Ireland.

Workshops will run throughout January and February in eight three-hour sessions. If you are interested, and feel you can commit the time, please contact Thérèse in MIA.

### Intercultural Singing and Music

Takes place weekly in Castlebar, Kiltimagh and Ballyhaunis. If you are interested contact Thérèse and remember you don't have to be an expert to join in.



### Seminar on Sexual Violence and Refugee Law

A seminar organised by MIA and the Mayo Rape Crisis Centre, took place on Thursday, 29 November last at Lough Lannagh, Castlebar. There were speakers from the Irish Refugee Council, Mayo Rape Crisis Centre, MIA, Refugee Information Service, HSE Social Work Dept. This seminar was of particular interest to asylum seeker women who are presenting for interviews at the Dept. of Justice as well as people interested in human rights.

### Photo exhibition: 'Burma: Forgotten Nation - Forgotten People'

An exhibition of photographs by Philip Daly, organised by Burma Action Ireland, was held in Castlebar Library from 19 November to 07 December. If you would like to find out more about the situation in Burma you can log on to Burma Action Ireland's website [www.burmaactionireland.org](http://www.burmaactionireland.org)

### Reading: 'From the Land of Green Ghosts'

Pascal Khoo Thwe's memoir, *From the Land of Green Ghosts* (HarperCollins 2002), tells of his childhood in Burma, his involvement in the 1988 uprising, his time on the run in the jungle and his subsequent escape to England. This is a remarkable book from a remarkable man, taking us to the heart of Burma's tragedy. Pascal is at present working as an interpreter with the Karen refugees recently arrived in Mayo. You can order his book from your local bookshop.



# Mayo Intercultural Action (MIA)

Promoting the positive effects of interculturalism in Irish society

## Have you heard of MIA and Naisc Nua?

**Mayo Intercultural Action - otherwise known as MIA - is an organisation that exists to make newcomers to County Mayo feel welcome and to help them sort out any difficulties they may have.**

MIA was set up in 2004 and is a voluntary group, managed by a voluntary steering committee and run by a small multicultural team of exceptional volunteers.

We're in the centre of Castlebar, on the second floor of the Social Services Centre

which is in the Castle Street Car Park (behind Archway Stores). You can call up at any time for a chat or to ask for advice (give a call first, though, to make sure there's someone in - it'll save you climbing those stairs for nothing!) or you can join in any of the many social and educational activities that are run by the group.

At the heart of MIA is a project called Naisc Nua, which means New Links in Irish. This project is run by MIA in partnership with Meitheal Mhaigheo, with funding from Pobal, which makes it possible to have a paid co-

ordinator: Thérèse Ruane. Naisc Nua's role is to work directly with immigrant families, such as refugees and people who have residency because of a child born in Ireland and has a focus on education, training and employment.



Co-ordinator: Thérèse Ruane

### Building a Diverse Mayo



Widely recognised as a model of its kind, Building a Diverse Mayo is a report on immigration, integration and service provision, commissioned by MIA in 2006 and launched by former President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, (above with MIA committee), on December 20th last year. MIA's aim with this extensive report was to make a positive contribution to the debate around identity and integration and to be of practical assistance to Mayo-based service providers as they plan for the future.

Mary Robinson with Rock Akpotor (left) and Seamus McEvoy (right).



### Fáilte!

A big fáilte to the 52 Karen refugees from Burma who arrived in Ballyhaunis in September and have now settled into their homes in Castlebar. And another big welcome to the second group of Karen people who are at present in Ballyhaunis before moving to their permanent homes in Ballina. We look forward to meeting them. We wish them all peace, health and happiness as they start their new life in Ireland.

### Photo exhibition and reading

There was a good chance to learn more about the tragedy of Burma when an exhibition 'Burma Forgotten Nation - Forgotten People' came to Castlebar Library last month. The exhibition comprised 40 photographs taken in the refugee camps on the Thai-Burmese border. These camps are home to thousands of Burmese refugees (such as our Karen friends) who have been driven out of Burma by the violence of the military regime. To coincide with the exhibition, Burmese exile and author Pascal Khoo Thwe, a member of the Padaung tribe, gave a reading from his astonishing memoir *From the Land of Green Ghosts* (see back page for more details).



Eh Htoo interpreter, and Po Kweh, at Burma information evening



## Where would we all be without VOLUNTEERS.....?



Helen Doherty

Nowhere much, is the honest truth. And in MIA and Naisc Nua we are extremely fortunate in having a great wealth of experience and cultural variety in our team of volunteers. From places as far apart as Nigeria, South Africa, Algeria and Ireland, we have a huge debt of gratitude to offer to these remarkable people who share in our belief in justice and human rights. A good sense of humour and a willingness to turn your hand to any task are the only essential requirements. So if you feel you'd like to contribute to MIA's work, just drop up to the office and have a chat with Thérèse, or give her a ring.

And special thanks to **Helen Doherty** who has been on a work placement with us since September. Helen is studying in Galway for a Masters in Community Development.



Veegy, Halim and Madonna are amongst the volunteers with MIA/Naisc Nua.

- NOLLAIG SHONA DUIT!
- HAPPY CHRISTMAS!
- EKELE NCHETE OMUMU
- ONYE NZOPUTA!
- WESOTYCH SWIT BOEGO
- NARODZENIA!
- JOYEUX NOEL!
- ARÓ-OFUDIMMA!
- FELIZ NAVIDAD!

## Mayo Intercultural Action

Naisc Nua is funded under the Dormant Accounts Scheme, through Pobal

(MIA) + Naisc Nua  
Thérèse Ruane  
Project Co-ordinator

Social Services Centre  
Castlebar  
Co. Mayo  
094 904 4511  
[miamayo@eircom.net](mailto:miamayo@eircom.net)



Iyewum Falana took part in a very enjoyable puppet-making workshop with artist Carmel Balfe last summer. Up to 10 people attended the workshops which were held in the MIA/Naisc Nua offices.

## Education, Training and Employment

There are many barriers to migrants finding meaningful employment in Ireland and Mayo. To ensure that migrants can integrate, be a valued member of the community and to contribute to society, their access to education, training and employment is crucial. Since Naisc Nua opened its office and drop in centre, the main barriers identified by migrants coming in to the office include: childcare and family friendly working hours; racism and discrimination; access to information; English language difficulties; recognition of educational qualifications, access to courses and training, exploitation in the workplace.

**Keep an eye out on this page for projects and initiatives developed by Naisc Nua to bridge the gaps and support people into training, education and employment.**



Participants at a European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) consultation, organised by MIA/Naisc Nua, in the Castlebar offices

## Why Naisc Nua: a bit of background...

### Naisc Nua – New Links: a joint project between MIA and Meitheal Mhaigheo\*

"I dreamed of getting my papers and being allowed to stay in Ireland," an African mother-of-three recently confided, "but I had no idea life would be so hard once I had my Stamp 4 card." Childcare, recognition of foreign diplomas, child-friendly working hours, lack of training opportunities: these are just some of the difficulties facing the people **Naisc Nua** was set up in 2006 to help. And that's before we talk about major cultural differences.

A special project, operating from MIA's offices, **Naisc Nua** aims to "co-ordinate and implement employment and capacity training programmes for people living in Mayo who have refugee status or who have been granted leave to remain in the country, including the parents of Irish citizen children". It will also work towards promoting meaningful integration and addressing the social isolation experienced by many recently settled refugees and

parents of Irish citizen children.

"There are many women on their own with small children," project co-ordinator Therese Ruane explains, "and the hurdles facing them if they want to enter the workforce are enormous." Cut off from their network of family support at home, these women live with the added stress that their right to stay in Ireland in the future can depend on getting a job and showing that they will not be a burden on the State.

**Naisc Nua's** further role, as the title suggests, will be as a bridge between the people they have been funded to support and service providers and organisations. "We see ourselves as being a voice for the voiceless, acting as advocates for a vulnerable group of people until they have grown strong enough to speak for themselves," Therese Ruane says.

[\* **Meitheal Mhaigheo** is an area-based partnership whose overall responsibility is to implement the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme]



Omar Williams (left) and some enthusiastic children enjoy the Family Art Workshop which was facilitated by Mayo Arts Squad as part of the Naisc Nua Project



## Voluntary Work Placement Scheme

Naisc Nua has secured funding from South West Mayo Development Company to set up a pilot scheme placing a small number of people in voluntary employment for a four to six week period. This pilot is well under way and will end before Christmas. We hope that the idea will then be adopted by other organisations and delivered on a wider scale. Four candidates have availed of the scheme which allows a vital opportunity for a person preparing for employment in Ireland to gain valuable work experience in a supported atmosphere. "So far, it's been great. It's so hard to find a job where you can use your skills and qualifications. I hope this will give me some experience for a future career," said one project participant.

## Jobs Club

Are you experiencing difficulties finding work? If so, why not sign up for a Jobs Club, which will take place in the MIA/Naisc Nua offices from 7th – 25th January 2008. It will take place each morning, Monday to Friday and will provide guidance in cv preparation; interview skills; job resourcing, etc. This will be facilitated by Jackie Brennan from Meitheal Mhaigh Eo and should prove very worthwhile and useful for people in their preparation for the jobs market.

**For further information, or to put your name forward, please contact MIA/Naisc Nua office as soon as possible. Places are limited.**



A proud day in Ballyhaunis: children and parents celebrate the fruits of an art course organised by 'The Old Convent' Residents Committee

## Music and Singing

**Brid Kivneen lives for music, song, dance and stories** and has a gift for sharing her passion with others.

The other great thing about Brid is that she lives in Mayo, and that means that MIA has been able to invite her to run an exciting project bringing together refugees, migrant workers, asylum seekers and Irish to share and learn music from around the world.

Three groups are in Brid's capable hands at the moment, in Castlebar, Kiltimagh and Ballyhaunis. They meet once a week for two hours to share songs from their culture and learn songs from other cultures, regardless of their musical or language skills.

The project will run for eight weeks when all three groups will come together to perform, thus sharing what they've learnt with a wider audience.

Now there's a concert to look forward to!

## Migrant Forum/County Advisory Group

One of the key recommendations MIA made in the conclusions to its report **Building a Diverse Mayo** was for "a county-based *Forum for Migrant Communities* to be established by the County Development Board, from which a Charter for Diversity in County Mayo could be drawn up".

"Positive and historic" is how Therese Ruane described the inaugural meeting of just such a body on 26 June last. "This is the first time a representative group has sat down together to address migrant issues in Mayo," she said.

MIA welcomes this new interagency body and looks forward to fruitful work with and within it over the coming years

## Information Evenings

MIA has begun a series of information evenings relating to specific countries and issues. We hope to continue with this initiative in 2008.

The first was held on 30 May when Palestinian human rights lawyer, Khaled Quzmar, on a visit to Ireland, spoke of the hardships faced daily by his fellow Palestinians. Therese Ruane, recently returned from a study trip to Palestine gave a short slide show.

On September 27 the topic was Burma. This was held to coincide with arrival of the Karen refugees in Ballyhaunis. Little did we know it would also coincide with renewed revolt and repression within Burma itself. Four Karen from Ballyhaunis took part.

The turnout on both evenings was good and showed that there was a keen interest amongst the people of Castlebar to learn more about the countries of origin of Ireland's new communities. Keep an eye out for future events.

## Fáilte Club

The Fáilte Club is as varied and exciting as the people who attend its activities. It was set up to give people with different backgrounds and cultures the chance to meet up and do something they enjoy. What better way to break down shyness and language barriers?

*The Club meets in the offices of MIA. Check with Therese for dates and times.*

The Club is growing and changing all the time and now you can come along for:

- Drumming
- Christmas Crafts Day
- Absolute Beginners Irish
- Themed monthly meetings
- Conversational English
- Bellydancing

## Intercultural Soccer Tournament

MIA, in partnership with Travellers' An Garda Síochána and the FAI, held an intercultural soccer tournament on Sunday 17 June in Castlebar. A great day, good fun, and a win for the Travellers' team: Pavee United. Well done to everyone who took part!



Euro Nations Team



Old Convent Team



The Winners; Pavee United

## Residents' Committees

Life is hard for asylum seekers.

Understatement of the year? Probably. That's why MIA, in conjunction with Integrating Ireland and other agencies, has undertaken to do what it can to support the residents of Mayo's two hostels – The Old Convent, Ballyhaunis and The Railway Hotel, Kiltimagh – and assist them in safeguarding their rights and entitlements, enabling them to live out their waiting time with dignity and respect.

A residents' committee has been established in each hostel. This will be a forum where people seeking asylum can come together to discuss their situation and to air any grievances they have. Sometimes 'a problem shared is a problem solved'. Often, however, action must be taken and, in this case, 'there is strength in numbers'. The committee also organises activities and events for residents of the hostels such as swimming, art classes for children, sports, etc.

MIA encourages residents to participate in these committees.