

Profile

– Racist Incident Referral and Support Service-

‘No Irish need apply’. People still remember how Irish emigrants over the centuries often had to deal with hostility and discrimination when they sought a better life in countries around the world.

Today, people in Sligo, especially ethnic minorities, asylum seekers and Travellers, often experience the same sort of treatment.

Racism is a specific form of discrimination and exclusion faced by minority ethnic groups. It is described in the Irish Equality Legislation as “the treatment of a person in a less favourable way than another person is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation based on ‘race’, skin colour, nationality and ethnic or national origin’. An Gardaí Síochána and British Police define racism as ‘an incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person’.

To be abused and excluded because of who you are or where you come from is hurtful and unfair. Racism can limit a person’s opportunities in life. It can damage health or emotional well-being.

In Sligo, people who experience or witness racism often felt there was nothing they could do to report or challenge it because there was no single independent body to which they could report their treatment. Sometimes racism might even be hard to prove because such behaviour has been regarded as ‘normal’ – ‘it was just a joke’.

Research was commissioned by the Peace and Reconciliation Partnership, which confirmed the existence of racism in Sligo and examined what people needed to help them deal with it. This identified a desire for a confidential service to report racist incidents that would both support the person who is targeted and monitor the level and pattern of racist behaviour.

The research was followed by an action stage in which Sligo Family Resource Centre coordinate the setting up of an interagency Working Group which will help to set up a framework for an independent, confidential incident recording and support service. This service will be staffed by trained key personnel from public and private service providers,

guided by an inter-agency group that will include state agencies, voluntary organizations, NGOs and representatives of minority groups. It will befriend, record and support, advising people on their rights and referring them to other agencies where appropriate.

By framing a common definition of racism for all agencies, and gathering standardised information, it will ensure a consistent response by all organizations. It will neither label nor punish but will encourage learning about racism and try to establish where changes in policy, procedures or legislation are needed.

In the long run, by raising awareness and putting policy statements in place, the service will help build better relations among people and communities in County Sligo.



Group photo at the Launch Event, Glasshouse Hotel, 17 June 2013.

Quotes

'Maintaining peace is everyone's business. Every individual in the Sligo community can play a pivotal role in improving and safeguarding peaceful relations amongst diversified Sligo communities.'

'I have been here for over ten years and have pledged allegiance to the Irish Flag. How could I always be referred to services that deal with non- Irish just because I was not born here? I feel that service providers treat me like a second class citizen just because of my physical natural appearance which will never change anyway. This needs to be addressed.'

'What I have learned from my last decade in Ireland is that racism is not about who we are; it is always about what we are. The 'Who' is immovable but the 'What' can always be challenged.'

'Sligo is beautiful, most people are friendly, the landscape is gorgeous; don't let racism remain a stain in the mist. Shout it out, stamp it out'