
ST ANDREW'S RESOURCE CENTRE

114-116 Pearse Street
Dublin 2

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS 1973-2023

Celebrating Our 50th Anniversary

2023 marked the 50th Anniversary of the organisation and provided an opportunity to reflect on its development over the years. It has changed in structure and scope but it has remained grounded in the founding vision of community service, rooted in the community and responsive to their changing needs.

Westland Row Social Service Centre opened its doors in September 1973. It was established out of a stirring of the community's concern for its future, expressed through a parish renewal led by Fr Tom O'Keefe in 1972.

The premises provided free by Trinity College at 9 Westland Row were small and cramped, but enough to create an impact. With the support of the Eastern Health Board a social worker – Sr Margaret Cadden – and a home help organiser – Moya Russell – supported by a team of volunteers began to make a difference. In 1977 a Day Centre for the Elderly opened in the annexe to St. Andrew's School on Pearse Street, while in 1983 the Centre moved to 20 Westland Row, again provided by Trinity College.

A community stirs

The fight for survival has brought City Quay Parish before the public eye on many occasions. During the past month it was the turn of St. Andrew's to make its protest.

*St. Andrew's Parish Bulletin
July 1972.*

Some recollections of early days

Just a few years after its beginnings I joined the staff as a young social worker. I learned so much and gradually got to know a great deal about the riches and the struggles, the joys and the sorrows of this part of inner-city Dublin. I have never forgotten those early days and I'm so happy to witness St. Andrew's, thanks to the generosity and skills of its generations of staff and volunteers, grow from small seeds into a giant tree where many shelter under its branches.

*Sr Marjorie Daly
Sisters of Marie Auxiliatrice*

Westland Row/City Quay Social Service Centre 1973

The Social Service Centre began with the object of coordinating the work of local voluntary organisations, stimulating voluntary effort within the community, assessing needs in the area and providing services to meet those needs. ... As well as identifying the social problems, a Social Service Centre should organise the community itself in tackling these problems in a neighbourly, Christian fashion.

*Fr. Tom O'Keefe
Founding Director*

The Centre was relocated to the former St. Andrew's National School which had closed due to falling enrolment and was made available by the Archdiocese of Dublin. The refurbished premises were developed by the Centre, which adopted a new title and mission as St Andrew's Resource Centre. The Resource Centre was formally opened on 16 June 1989. Subsequently, a purpose-built Childcare Centre was added and The Junction building at the corner of Macken Street was made available by Dublin City Council.

Over the past fifty years the Centre has reflected changes not only in the needs of the community but also changes in public policy and funding opportunities. Having begun as a Social Service Centre, St Andrew's participated in the Community Development Programme for many years but since 1996 has received core funding as a Family Resource Centre, initially from the Department of Social Welfare and more recently from Tusla.

The Centre has delivered an increasing range of services in partnership with a variety of other public bodies including the Department of Social Protection, the HSE (and formerly the Eastern Health Board), Dublin City Council, Education and Training Boards, City of Dublin Youth Service, Pobal and (formerly) the Dublin Docklands Development Authority. Over the years the Centre has joined national programmes that offered funding for services relevant to community needs, while at other times it has negotiated financial support for innovative programmes tailored to local needs. Partnership with public agencies has at times been challenging - not least as a result of varying reporting requirements - but over time it has enabled the Centre

not only to address local needs but also to advocate for policies and resources needed by the community and other disadvantaged communities, especially in the inner city.

Summer project 1975

During my social work studies in Trinity College I was lucky to get the opportunity to work on an (unpaid) placement on the first summer project to take place in the area. I was based in the Social Service Centre, which was then at 9 Westland Row. There was great excitement when the "T-shirt", Dr Garrett Fitzgerald, attended the sports day and the prizes were presented by the ViceProvost of Trinity. The three weeks of the Project flew past, but the friendships I made have lasted to this day.

Rosemary Grant.

Lessons of early days.

Back in the 70s it sometimes seemed that we would not make it to the following week, never mind the following year, but we always pulled together and pulled through. Since I left Ireland I've worked with communities from Aceh to Yugoslavia whose lives have been destroyed by war, disaster or crisis. I've always been able to apply the lesson I learned in Westland Row - find those with the biggest heart, support them to help themselves, they will help others and soon everybody is on the road to recovery. It is the most effective, most sustainable model of development that I have ever encountered, and I owe it to what I learned working there.

*Kevin Byrne
Community Development Worker 1979-90*

The Centre has benefitted from financial support from the local business community, in particular over recent years by encouraging multinational companies locating in the area to share their resources with the community of which they have become part. This financial support has enabled the Centre to develop and sustain services beyond what would otherwise have been possible. The significance of the financial support provided over a number of years by Google and Perigo in particular, the extensive support of Dublin Port and the advice and support of Wm Fry Solicitors deserve particular acknowledgement.

The Centre's commitment to community development principles has been expressed through its close relationships with and support for local residents groups and many community organisations working in the area. Their views and priorities as well as the Centre's own insights have been regularly advanced with public authorities and public representatives, whose support for the work of the Centre has been consistent. The Centre makes facilities available for local groups and events and publishes The New Link as a vehicle for local communication. Community events led by the Centre - such as the South Docks Festival, the Youth Summer Project and the Winter Wonderland for families - and the Sport and Recreation Centre operated on behalf of Dublin City Council - reflect the Centre's commitment to supporting a flourishing community and the wellbeing of its members.

While the focus of the Centre and its activities is on the community of Westland Row and City Quay, the organisation has always worked in partnerships or alliances with other organisations with similar goals and services, whether in the context of the inner city, the Dublin Docklands, networks of service providers or the community and voluntary sector as a whole. Whether at the invitation of funding bodies or in response to opportunities to achieve an appropriate scale of activity, the Centre has extended some services outside its home area: homecare services are delivered in Ringsend and the Liberties, while training programmes are run in the North Inner City (in partnership with the Inner City Renewal Group).

In reflecting on its long term development in this anniversary year the Centre identified a number of themes as defining characteristics:

- Closeness to the community to identify changing needs and priorities.
- The holistic vision of delivering joined-up services as seamlessly and accessibly as possible.
- Belief in the capacity of local people to develop skills and apply them creatively in delivering and managing community services.
- The value of combining a positive and proactive engagement with public and private funders with critical advocacy for community needs.

Memories

My first job as a social worker was in the Social Service Centre from 1977-80. I remember the great welcome I received and the warmth of all those involved in the work and those who have availed of the services. The experience of working with community organisations and the Centre management structure greatly influenced the rest of my career, where my focus remained on ensuring a community development approach in my work with communities and identifying and responding to local needs.

Marguerite Hanratty

The Centre was delighted to welcome back to the Centre many former staff and volunteers to join the current team and supporters in a celebration of the 50th Anniversary on 30 November 2023 (the Feast of St Andrew), featuring an exhibition and many striking reminiscences.

The anniversary was formally marked on St Andrew's Day when President Michael D Higgins honoured us with his presence at Mass in St Andrew's Church, Westland Row celebrated by Archbishop Dermot Farrell and attended by many friends and supporters, past and present.

Our Story through the Years

Over the years the services of the Centre have changed and developed in line with changing local needs and available funding. Services that began on a small scale with volunteers have developed in scope and sophistication. They remain rooted in a holistic vision of service delivery, responding to the needs of individuals and families in a joined-up way to support their flourishing. The Centre focuses on the different stages of the life cycle, from toddlers in our Childcare Centre to those enabled to continue to live independently by our Homecare services.

Housed largely under one roof, the Centre's services respond to the range of interlocking needs experienced by families without the barriers that are often created when fragmented services are delivered within silos by different bodies. Whatever the initial trigger for contacting the Centre, our families are encouraged to access the full range of services that may be of benefit to them.

In addition to a holistic model of care, the Centre has developed around a number of guiding principles:

Partnership

Providing a broad range of services means partnering with many public agencies and other voluntary groups: the Centre operates 11 different programmes supported by 8 public bodies. That partnership extends to businesses in the area whose generous support acknowledges the community of which they form part. Generous donors are vital for the continued work of the Centre. We partner with many other voluntary organisations, especially in the inner city, to develop our services and share ideas and resources.

Innovation

The Centre has developed by learning from our mistakes as well as our successes, and from the good example of others, such as from a very basic model of Home Help into a highly effective Home Care Service, and our Job Centre which focused on providing direct employment and placement services paved the way for our current Education and Training Hub which has been highly successful in equipping people for local jobs, especially in construction.

Capacity Building

The Centre has also prioritised investing in our people, equipping them with the skills to serve the community and lead the development of services, both in the Centre and in the community. We support local residents groups to represent their communities and we celebrate our community through Heritage projects, publishing The New Link magazine and organising the annual South Docks Festival.

Looking to the Future

A significant anniversary is a time to look forward, as well as back. The fact that the Centre is still full of energy and hope is a testament to our team of staff and volunteers and the deep connections with our community. These have enabled us to withstand crises – of funding, of changes in public policy, of demoralisation in the community and, of course, of the Covid pandemic. In fact, Covid demonstrated how robust our model is and how necessary to maintain locally-based and responsive services.

We have at times had to withdraw from some activities, but always with an eye to what might replace them. We have embraced the challenge of growing in scale in order to be more sustainable and at times of making way for others to start new projects.

We aim for the highest standards of governance, even as we've struggled with the burden of administration. Above all, we have remained true to the values which led to the establishment of the Centre, fundamentally the conviction that the dignity of every person is best assured when we come together in solidarity.

Our roots in the Parishes of Westland Row and City Quay are more than geographical; we are striving to put into practice the Christian call to be a good neighbour, to proclaim Good News and to hold fast to what is good.

St. Andrew's National School

The former St. Andrew's National School faces the open end of Pearse Square, with the traffic along Pearse Street running past steadily in between. The School was built between 1895-7, designed by William Hague, on a site that had previously been used a sawmill and marble works. St. Andrew's National School closed in 1976 following a huge population drop in the area, and in 1985, the Archdiocese of Dublin made the building available for use by the local community.

From outside the silhouette of the gables is lovely, with the curved peaks of the two end bays and the monuments-in-miniature level of decoration above the central section. The terracotta and brick detailing continues down the centre, framing the first-floor windows and taking in the building's date and name. Attention to detail on the front of the building is impressive; the detailed pattern in terracotta behind the smoothness on the date is worth examining and taking time to enjoy.