



03 May 2007

## **Irish eyes are smiling**

Older residents in the city enjoyed an Irish-themed event aimed at highlighting the needs of the Irish community.

Local Irish band The Jiggers entertained more than 60 residents and staff as the Chace Centre played host to representatives from Teach na hEireann, Coventry Irish society and Cara Housing.

The event was part of a drive by Whitefriars Housing Group to promote to residents what is on offer in the local community.

The Chace, which was built in 1935, is home to 201 residents, of which a high proportion has Irish roots.

Resident Pat McCusker, 82, said: "I had a great day and it was great to learn about what help is on offer. It's good to know the places in Coventry where I can go and spend time with other Irish people of the same age."

Coventry has a long-established Irish population that numbers more than 10,000, and is proportionally almost three times that of the national average, at more than three per cent of the population. The city was one of the main places of refuge for Irish people fleeing the potato famine in the mid 19th century.

Christine Burn, administration and support officer, said: "At the Chace we work hard to ensure that the residents have a link into the local community. Many of our older Irish residents came over to Coventry to help re-build the city following the Second World War and it's important that now they are older they are aware that Coventry is willing to repay their efforts with support and advice.

“Accessing services can be difficult for some residents so by bringing organisations here and adding a touch of culture then we can encourage attendance and help spread a few smiles around.”

Whitefriars Housing Group, which houses more than 300 older people across the city, has been awarded the Code of Practice for Sheltered Housing. This is a specific standard which shows that Whitefriars is providing a high-level service for tenants.

Coventry Rehab has opened an elders drop-in centre called Teach na hEireann. The organisation aims to help isolated and housebound Irish elderly people in Coventry and the surrounding area.

The centre provides an ethnically sensitive social care service for Irish people, offering social activities, health care, information on benefit entitlement, housing, pensions, training and education.

The centre has established partnerships with Age Concern and Coventry Community Education, both of which run classes in the centre. It also provides a drop-in facility for people to socialise and relax reading Irish newspapers.

**Ends**

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