

Reminiscence Project

Leaving home –emigrating

Waves of people left Ireland at different times since the Famine. The majority came for economic reasons, there being few opportunities at home. After the Second World War, Britain actively recruited from Ireland and the Commonwealth to build Britain (literally), the welfare state and the NHS. Some had employment lined up, but others came knowing that jobs were plentiful.

Although work or training was the main reason for emigrating, many young men and women were also escaping a claustrophobic, authoritarian society. Many who left Ireland were escaping abuse in institutions or family, some unmarried girls were pregnant and other men and women did not fit in because of their sexual orientation.

Some useful questions to trigger discussion

Why and when did you leave Ireland?

How did you /your family feel about you leaving home?

Did you come alone or to join somebody such as a sibling or friend?

How did you travel?

Where did you live when you first came?

How long did you plan to stay?

Did you ever go back home to live? What made you return to England?

Do you think of returning to Ireland now? What does/ might stop you?

Where is “home” for you?

Where is home for your children?

NB It is important to recognise that reminiscence may resurrect painful issues which may or may not be discussed or may be divulged for the first time. Please refer to [Risks of Memory Work](#).