

Lesbian Lunacy, by Des Ekin
Sunday World, 3rd September 1995,
Courtesy of Anita Thoma



CHEERS: Anita Thomas of the lesbian group which is £50,000 richer thanks to the Government.

THE Government's decision to grant FIFTY thousand pounds to a lesbian group was met with outrage last night by the mothers of sick children who are being denied proper medical treatment.

The women have claimed that the donation is a scandalous waste of taxpayers' money considering the large number of seriously ill children who can't get funding.

Tomorrow Social Welfare Minister Prionsias de Rossa will toast the lesbians at a ritzy wine reception to celebrate their £50,000 windfall.

Minister de Rossa will meet with the bi-sexual and lesbian women at a formal reception in the headquarters of LOT (Lesbians Organising Together) to

Fury as gay women get a £50,000 grant while sick kids are denied cash

EXCLUSIVE by DES EKIN

thank him for his generous donation.

The Government grant to the group is to help them

publicise the lesbian cause.

Last night one outraged mum whose seriously ill child desperately needs £50,000 funding to get specialist treatment in America, branded the

lesbian grant "crazy."

"To tell you the truth, it makes me mad. I'm absolutely outraged," said Cork mum Veronica Isherwood.

■ SEE PAGES 2 & 3



TOAST: Prionsias de Rossa going to reception.

LESBIANS WERE MY AUTISTIC

Huge grant to gay group by Minister

A GROUP of lesbians are planning to raise their glasses in celebration of a £50,000 handout they're getting from the Irish taxpayer.

Tomorrow, the Dublin-based group Lesbians Organising Together (LOT) will hold a wine reception to toast Social Welfare Minister Proinsias de Rosca for his generous gesture last Wednesday.

The grant, drawn from the coffers of one of the country's biggest-spending and most overstretched departments, will be used to provide "support, education and social facilities" purely for lesbian and bisexual women.

LOT says it will use the taxpayers' money to expand its organisation and support more lesbian women who decide to "come out".

The Government cash will also go to developing a health programme and to providing a network of support for lesbians' families and friends.

The lesbian group says it hasn't ruled out campaigning to the public and even in schools in a bid to break down "social taboos".

It's the first time any gay or lesbian organisation has received official State funding.

But last week there was growing indignation over the grant - NOT because it was directed at lesbians, but because the money is vitally needed by other cash-strapped organisations and individuals who claim their causes are being overlooked by the Government.

Funding

One mother who has been battling for years without success to persuade the State to help her severely handicapped children get specialist treatment in America said: "I'm absolutely outraged.

"This £50,000 would be enough to pay for a full year's treatment for one of my children in the States. But I can't get a penny out of the Government and I'm being forced to raise the cash myself."

Cork mother Mrs Veronica Isherwood, whose nine-year-old twin sons Colm and Eric are severely autistic, has had to seek treatment at the world-famous Higashi School in Boston because she feels the needs of her children are not being met in this country.

Veronica has had to fund-raise to get £80,000 towards the £100,000 fee she needs for the first year. But she's at her wits' end as to how to get the remaining £20,000.

"I'm sure this organisation (LOT) feels as strongly about its cause as I do about my campaign, but I honestly think it's crazy that the Government should hand out cash to them and not give us a penny.

"To tell you the truth, it makes me mad."



WAIT: Twins Colm and Eric Isherwood (9) - their parents need £20,000 to send them to an autistic treatment centre.

WE HAVEN'T A PRAYER OF GETTING HELP

AS 60 lesbians celebrated their fifty-grand handout from the Minister for Social Welfare in Dublin, there was little room for celebration in Macroom, Co Cork.

There Patti and Michael Creedon set out four months ago to raise £50,000 to send their five-year-old autistic son Conor to the Higashi School in Boston for one year.

After an amazing response from people all over the county, they topped their target by £20,000 - and the extra money will go towards next year's fees. The full course lasts three years.

Again, like the case of the Isherwood family in Cork city, they haven't had a prayer of getting assistance from the Government.

This weekend Veronica Isherwood, 30, from Mahon, told of the trauma of her campaign to persuade the Health Department to help her get therapy for her autistic twin sons Eric and Colm.

"The twins go to a school in Lota where they are mixed in with other children suffering

from various handicaps like Down's Syndrome and spina bifida," she said.

"What they really need is to get specialised treatment alongside other children with their own disability."

It was Veronica who first heard of the remarkable achievements of the Higashi School and set the ball rolling for other parents of autistic children. Five of them will be travelling to Boston from Ireland this year.

Agree

Autism is a distressing condition which affects a child's ability to cope with simple processes like toilet training and to communicate with parents and other children.

Veronica says: "My sons aren't yet toilet trained, they're poor eaters and they're hyper-active. One of them keeps trying to escape from the house all the time. My home is like a fortress, and there are times I feel ore like a prison warden than a mother."



STRUGGLE: Patti Creedon raised cash for son Conor.

She says that after years of campaigning, the Department of Health has recently been checking out 'the school in Boston.

Now Veronica and her husband Edward, 33, are "keeping our fingers crossed" that Health Minister Michael Noonan will finally agree to help them with funding.

In Macroom, Patti Creedon said: "I first heard about the Higashi School one week after Michael was diagnosed as autistic.

"They use a technique

called Daily Life Therapy which helps autistic children live as normal a life as possible."

Big-hearted fundraisers all over Cork raised £70,000 to send little Michael to the school.

Patti said: "What we would ideally like is for the Government to bring Daily Life Therapy to Ireland.

"In the meantime, we have asked the Government to help us with funds for the three-year course, but so far they will say only that they are considering our request."

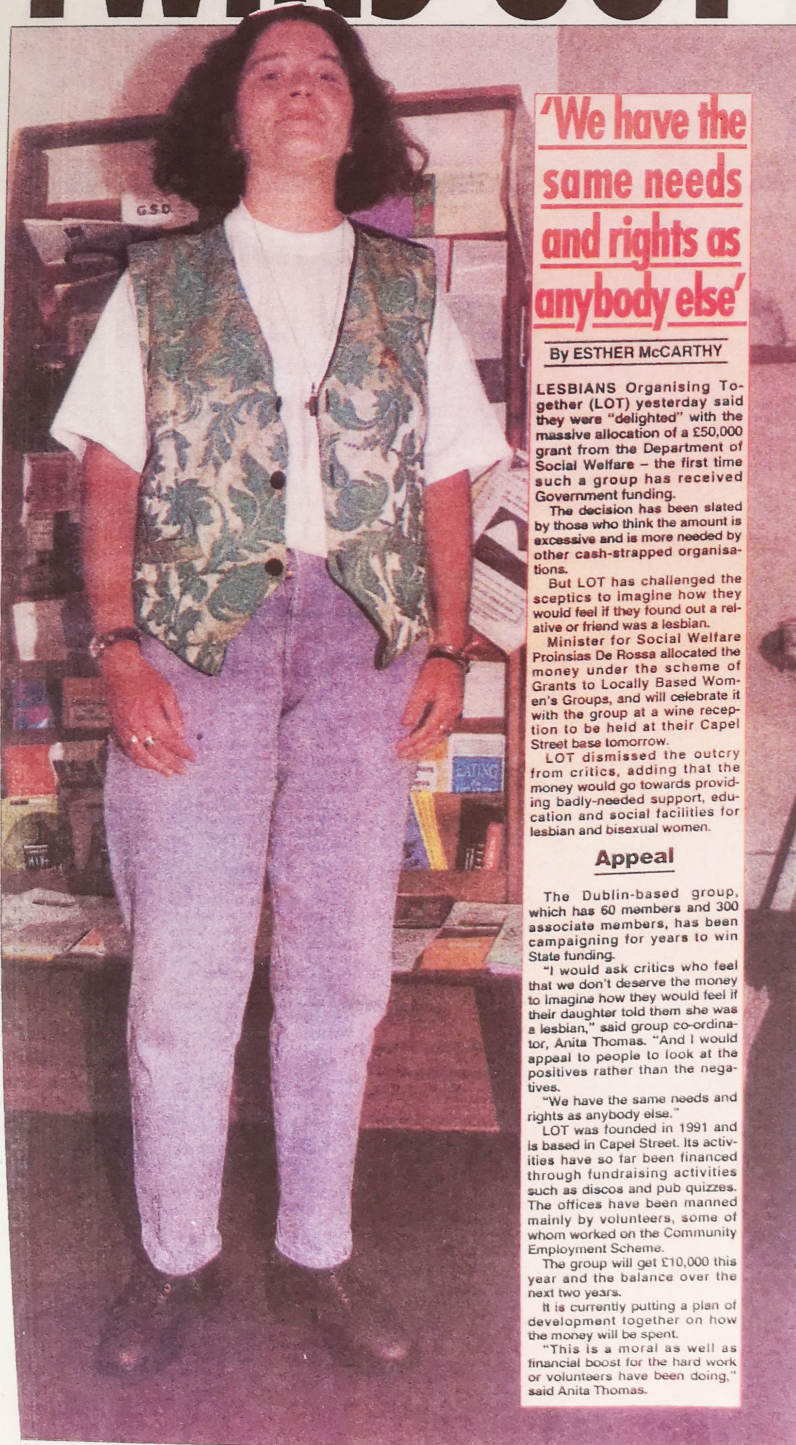
**WHAT THE
£50,000
CAN BUY...**

- It could provide 2,500 screening examinations for early warning of breast cancer, the biggest single killer of Irish women.
- It could pay basic dole money to 833 unemployed people for a week.
- It could buy computers for 50 charities and voluntary organisations.
- It could give £1.50 to every lone parent in the country.
- Spread out over two and a half years,

it could pay the salaries of three junior nurses.

- Overstretched schools could afford another teacher.
- It could put nearly two new gardai on the beat.
- It could cut waiting lists at drug treatment centres by employing a substance abuse counsellor.
- It could buy five second-hand minibuses for charities.

GIVEN £50,000 BUT TWINS GOT NOTHING



'We have the same needs and rights as anybody else'

By ESTHER McCARTHY

LESBIANS Organising Together (LOT) yesterday said they were "delighted" with the massive allocation of a £50,000 grant from the Department of Social Welfare - the first time such a group has received Government funding.

The decision has been slated by those who think the amount is excessive and is more needed by other cash-strapped organisations.

But LOT has challenged the sceptics to imagine how they would feel if they found out a relative or friend was a lesbian.

Minister for Social Welfare Proinsias De Rossa allocated the money under the scheme of Grants to Locally Based Women's Groups, and will celebrate it with the group at a wine reception to be held at their Capel Street base tomorrow.

LOT dismissed the outcry from critics, adding that the money would go towards providing badly-needed support, education and social facilities for lesbian and bisexual women.

Appeal

The Dublin-based group, which has 80 members and 300 associate members, has been campaigning for years to win State funding.

"I would ask critics who feel that we don't deserve the money to imagine how they would feel if their daughter told them she was a lesbian," said group co-ordinator, Anita Thomas. "And I would appeal to people to look at the positives rather than the negatives."

"We have the same needs and rights as anybody else."

LOT was founded in 1991 and is based in Capel Street. Its activities have so far been financed through fundraising activities such as discos and pub quizzes. The offices have been manned mainly by volunteers, some of whom worked on the Community Employment Scheme.

The group will get £10,000 this year and the balance over the next two years.

It is currently putting a plan of development together on how the money will be spent.

"This is a moral as well as financial boost for the hard work or volunteers have been doing," said Anita Thomas.



SMOKING CAUSES HEART DISEASE
Irish Government Warning

WE DESERVE IT: Group co-ordinator of Lesbians Organising Together Anita Thomas stresses the cash is a "morale boost" for the gay community.

Lesbian Lunacy, by Des Ekin
Sunday World, 3rd September 1995,
Courtesy of Anita Thoma