



Justice Media Awards, Thursday 4 June 2015

Winners and citations

The Law Society of Ireland has this afternoon (Thursday 4 June 2015) announced the winners of its annual Justice Media Awards.

The annual Justice Media Awards are 23 years old this year. They focus on published works or broadcasts that have helped to inform and educate Irish citizens on the role of law in society. The aim is to give national recognition to published works or broadcasts that:

- 1) Promote the highest standards in legal journalism;
- 2) Foster greater public understanding of the law, the legal system or any specific legal issue;
- 3) Inform and educate citizens as to the roles in society of the law, the courts, law enforcement agencies and the legal profession;
- 4) Disclose practices or procedures needing reform so as to encourage the development and modernisation of Irish laws, courts and law enforcement agencies; and/or
- 5) Assist the legal profession, the judiciary, and all others involved in the administration of justice in attaining the highest professional standards.

The Law Society wholeheartedly congratulates all of today's winners of 'Justice Media Awards' and 'Merit Certificates'.

The winners are as follows:

JUSTICE MEDIA AWARD – DAILY NEWSPAPERS:

The winner of the Justice Media Award in the Daily Newspapers category is Cormac O'Keeffe of the Irish Examiner for his compelling, in-depth piece: "*When life doesn't mean life*"

This report is an excellent example of using a real-life case to examine a difficult and often emotive aspect of the legal system. The author brings the reader on a journey, from the night a young woman was murdered, the impact her death had on the family she left behind, to their experience of the subsequent trial, sentencing, and eventual release of the man convicted of killing her, despite having had a life sentence imposed on him for his crime.

The journalist skilfully combined this powerful personal story with analysis of the changing patterns in average jail time served by so-called 'lifers', a critical examination of the term 'mandatory life sentence', and comment from those advocating for victims and their families.

For his sensitive, detailed and important work on an ever-relevant topic that we all hope never touches our lives, the author richly deserves the a Justice Media Award.

Two Merit Certificates were awarded in the Daily Newspapers category to:

(1) Carl O'Brien, Sinead O'Shea, Bryan O'Brien and Paul Scott of the Irish Times for their article: "*Lives in limbo*"

Taking readers inside the walls of direct provision centres, where almost four and a half thousand people current reside, this detailed and well-presented report sheds light on some of the lesser-known aspects of life as an asylum seeker in Ireland.

Putting names, faces, and life stories alongside the statistics, the authors used photography, video and graphics to superb effect. Just days after publication, the Minister for Justice announced the establishment of a working group to find a better way to steer asylum seekers through the process.

AND TO:

(2) Conor Gallagher of the Irish Times for his article: "*Untangling the vexed question of anonymity in sex cases*"

Recent high-profile cases of British celebrities accused of sex crimes have prompted calls for a review of the UK's anonymity laws, and also prompted the author of this piece to examine Ireland's laws in such cases.

Drawing together his own research, expert legal opinion and the experiences of a rape victim who chose to go public with her story, the author delves behind the statute books and the statistics to reveal some of the anomalies the strict rules have created.

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JUSTICE MEDIA AWARD – SUNDAY NEWSPAPERS:

The winner of the Justice Media Award in the Daily Newspapers category is Alison O'Reilly of the Irish Mail on Sunday for her thought-provoking piece: "*2,000 children up for adoption*"

Alison O'Reilly is to be congratulated for her exclusive report on an overhaul of the adoption laws in Ireland, her skilled treatment of the complex legal issues involved and the inclusion of powerful personal testimony on what can be a difficult topic to address.

Incorporating the statistics, the law and the voice of advocates for children in care, she created a clear picture for readers of what the changes will mean for those involved.

Drawing attention to problems within an area of law that deals with some of the most vulnerable people in society – children in the care system – the author has made a valuable contribution to the public’s knowledge and understanding of the law as it currently stands, and what is planned for the future.

One Merit Certificate was awarded in the Sunday Newspapers category to:

(1) Niall Brady of the Sunday Times for his series: “A Question of Money”

Condensing, clarifying and championing consumer rights and entitlements can be a difficult task but this journalist does so with great skill. All-too-common but tricky reader queries relating to issues such as cross-border shopping and the mis-selling of financial products are tackled with skill and precision.

With the input of solicitors, tax practitioners and other experts, this journalist achieves results on behalf of readers and campaigns on issues of public interest. He is to be commended for assisting the public’s understanding of everyday legal and financial issues, in particular for an excellent piece on resolving cross-border disputes involving Ernie Ball guitars.

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JUSTICE MEDIA AWARD – REGIONAL NEWSPAPERS:

The winner of the Justice Media Award in the Regional Newspapers category is Ann Murphy of the Evening Echo for her comprehensive article: “When love breaks down – relationship law in Ireland”

Ranging from waiting times for legal aid in family law cases, divorce and annulment law, alternative solutions to family law conflicts, to the complex issues surrounding domestic violence, this series is an almost perfect look at the laws dealing with the breakdown of relationships.

The *Evening Echo* is to be congratulated for allowing the journalist to provide an extensive overview of this important part of the Irish legal system. Such was the depth of her research, that the work was published as a week-long series of articles featuring expert opinion, statistics, explanations of complex legal topics and shocking insights into the plight of domestic violence victims.

This work is a standout piece from a journalist who has proven herself to be an excellent contributor to the public discourse on law and the legal system.

One Merit Certificate was awarded in the Regional Newspapers category to:

(1) Nicola Donnelly of the Fingal Independent for her articles: “Campaign to keep Swords and Balbriggan District Courts open”

This well-presented and researched series of articles explores the impact the proposed closure of Swords and Balbriggan courthouses would have had on court users, solicitors and

court workers, digging into the functions of such courts in areas of high population density and the many strong arguments against their closure.

Having spoken to local solicitors, members of An Garda Síochána and officers of Fingal County Council in putting together this series, we believe Nicola Donnelly made a significant contribution to the local community's understanding of the seriousness of the proposals.

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JUSTICE MEDIA AWARD – COURT REPORTING – PRINT MEDIA:

The winner of the Justice Media Award in the Court Reporting – Print Media category is Helen Bruce of the Irish Daily Mail for her article: “*Closing speeches in the Graham Dwyer murder trial*”

A key part of the complex and intensely distressing evidence presented to the jury in the Graham Dwyer trial, the closing speeches were relayed with precision, skill and sensitivity by Helen Bruce. Her experience as one of Ireland's leading court reporters is evident in the reading of these articles.

The in-depth articles carefully lay out in great detail what was said in the court. With the duty to report faithfully from a trial that horrified a nation, came a responsibility to ensure that standards of taste and decency were met; a challenge that this journalist met with aplomb. In her well-honed style, the winning journalist admirably described the speeches in easy-to-understand words; tabloid journalism at its best.

Two Merit Certificates were awarded in the Court Reporting – Print Media category to:

(1) Mark Tighe of the Sunday Times for his article: “*The Ian Bailey trial*”

Covering what the trial judge has described one of the most important cases to come before the High Court, Mark Tighe relayed clearly and concisely the complex and often bizarre evidence and legal rulings produced in the Ian Bailey case to readers.

The key personalities, and their roles in the saga, are skilfully portrayed with the journalist displaying a strict attention to detail that is the hallmark of excellent court reporting. The significance of the case is reflected in the time and resources invested in the paper's coverage of the trial and it is to be commended for that investment.

AND TO:

(2) Catherine Fegan of the Irish Daily Mail for her article: “*View from the Gallery – the Graham Dwyer trial*”

Reporting from the public gallery of the Graham Dwyer trial, rather than the media benches, Catherine Fegan displayed an impressive ability to create pen pictures of an astonishing courtroom drama.

Focusing on the human element of a distressing trial that was a constant challenge for journalists, the author brought the personalities involved in the trial – witnesses, barristers and the accused – to the reader in a unique way.

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JUSTICE MEDIA AWARD – COURT REPORTING – BROADCAST MEDIA:

The winners of the Justice Media Award in the Court Reporting – Broadcast Media category are Siobhan Bastible, Aisling Ni Choisdealbha, Colette Fitzpatrick and Brian Daly of *The 5.30* on TV3 for their special TV news report: “*Graham Dwyer trial – the verdict*”

A powerful and focused report from outside the Criminal Courts of Justice, delivered skilfully and clearly. Combining the devastating human aspect of the story with the complex legal issues, this news team rounded off their comprehensive coverage of the gripping Graham Dwyer murder trial in a well-presented extended news report.

A court reporter surrounded by city life outside the courthouse, an analysis piece detailing reaction from the key stakeholders, and an assured studio team combined to deliver a compelling, clear report on one of the most anticipated murder trial verdicts in the State’s history, in what must have been challenging and high-pressure circumstances.

Four Merit Certificates were awarded in the Court Reporting – Broadcast Media category to:

(1) Philip Boucher-Hayes of *Drivetime* – RTE Radio 1 for his radio reports: “*Ian Bailey v Ireland coverage on Drivetime*”

Using the technique of quoting extended passages from the trial evidence and legal argument, Philip Boucher-Hayes brought one of the most intriguing cases to come before the High Court into the cars, homes and workplaces of his listeners.

The journalist and station devoted massive resources to the reporting of the Ian Bailey trial and this series of enlightening and important reports is the impressive result.

(2) Conor Gallagher and Declan Brennan of *The Last Word* on Today FM for their radio reports: “*The courts round-up*”

Ranging from questions of secret evidence from Garda witnesses at the Special Criminal Court, cases of assault on the sportsfield, tractors outrunning Garda cars in rural Kerry and ATM fraud in the capital, this slot focusses on cases that escape the mainstream media attention.

Delivering the facts of the cases and the rulings in an interesting and informative fashion, these journalists deserve credit for shining a light on some important proceedings that may otherwise have remained under the radar.

(3) Radio Kerry News team for their reports: “*The Killorglin double murder trial*”

In a time when the resources of local radio stations are increasingly limited, this news team’s coverage of the immediate aftermath of the murder of a young woman and her daughter in their own home, and the subsequent trial, is admirable.

With sensitivity, attention to detail and a focus on the human element of a terrible crime, the reporting and post-verdict analysis of a distressing trial was compelling, impactful and balanced.

AND TO:

(4) Vivienne Traynor for her reports: “Key moments in the Ian Bailey case”

In a case that took many turns to the bizarre, Vivienne Traynor consistently delivered clear pictures of the courtroom drama to nightly news viewers. In fluid reports accompanied by camera pictures of the main players, the audience gleaned an understanding of the facts, atmosphere and personalities at play.

The judges particularly enjoyed a scene in one report showing lawyers for the plaintiff persuading a reluctant witness to return to the courtroom to continue giving evidence.

With these reports, the journalist displayed her impressive experience as a court reporter and a talent for clear, balanced and compelling journalism.

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JUSTICE MEDIA AWARD – NATIONAL RADIO:

The winner of the Justice Media Award in the National Radio category is Francesca Comyn of Newstalk for her sensitive report on *Newstalk Breakfast*: “District Court childcare proceedings”

In April of last year Francesca Comyn broke a distressing story from the District Court, where the previous evening an emergency care application had been made relating to two young children, in what she described as a ‘house of horrors’ situation.

Very serious allegations of abuse and neglect were being made against the parents of those young children, and the facts were indeed disturbing. This reporter explained the details incredibly well, skilfully combining the facts with a clear analysis of the legal issues involved. She successfully filtered the distressing facts to present an appropriate, compelling report, which also highlighted the often unexplored role of women in abuse cases, and the sensitive work of the family law courts.

This case presented a challenge on many fronts, which this reporter surmounted admirably.

One Merit Certificate was awarded in the National Radio category to:

(1) Sarah Carey of *Talking Point* on Newstalk for her feature: “Gender identity – Lydia Foy”

Speaking to Dr Lydia Foy shortly after she had effectively settled her long-running action against the State, *Talking Point* sought to combine the various personal, legal and social elements of her battle to secure a birth certificate in her acquired female gender.

The journalist approached the interviews with sensitivity but asked the necessary questions. In doing so, she has contributed significantly to the public’s awareness and understanding of this evolving area of the law.

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JUSTICE MEDIA AWARD – LOCAL RADIO:

The winner of the Justice Media Award in the Local Radio category is Niall Delaney of *North West Today* (Ocean FM) for his report: “*The Prison of Direct Provision*”

Prompted by a ministerial visit to the Globe House facility for asylum seekers in Sligo, Niall Delaney took the opportunity to shine a light on life as it is experienced by those in residence as they await the processing of their applications.

Highlighting the issues faced by the individuals and families as go through life as an asylum seeker, and speaking directly with Minister Aodhan O’Riordain, the programme admirably addresses what is an issue of increasing concern across Ireland. The result is a compelling, balanced and informative piece, that never loses sight of the human side of the story.

One Merit Certificate was awarded in the Local Radio category to:

(1) Ciara Plunkett and Susan Webster of KFM radio for their *Mini-series on Family Law*

Teaming a local solicitor with a skilled talk-show presenter, this programme has developed an excellent formula to bring important legal topics to their listeners in a clear, consistent and accessible way. The continued success of this legal discussion slot is a credit to the team involved.

This entry focuses on the area of family law, dealing with some of the most pertinent aspects over a three-part series delivered in a clear, concise and professional manner. All in all, the series has enhanced the listening public’s understanding of this fundamental area of the Irish legal system.

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JUSTICE MEDIA AWARD – TELEVISION NEWS:

The winner of the Justice Media Award in the Television News category is Vivienne Traynor of RTE News for her superb report: *the Anglo Trial*

One of the most closely-watched court cases of last year, the Anglo trial, lasted several weeks up to Easter 2014.

In her end-of-trial summary of one of the most complex financial cases to come before the Irish courts, Vivienne Traynor carefully distilled the background, legal arguments and facts of the case, described the roles of the key players and the impact of their actions in a clear, fluid and thoroughly engaging manner, using graphics and visual aids to superb effect.

The judges were particularly impressed with the reporter’s explainer of the provisions of Section 60 of the Companies Act, as it had applied in that case.

Displaying her experience and talent in covering what must have been an endurance test of a court case, this reporter is richly deserving of the Award.

Two Merit Certificates were awarded in the Television News category to:

(1) Caitriona Perry of RTE News for her excellent report: “Drumm – in his own words”

The fall-out from the demise of Anglo Irish Bank continues apace, on near shores and far. In this report, Caitriona Perry obtained recordings of David Drumm’s evidence as he sought to be declared bankrupt in the United States – apparently the only journalist to do so.

She used these recordings of live voices to superb effect, illustrating the court hearings for her Irish audience. A creative approach richly deserving of a Merit award, this journalist brought the viewer into the courtroom as Mr Drumm explained how he simply forgot about large sums of money.

AND TO:

(2) Stephanie Grogan of Ireland Live – UTV Ireland for her report: *The Gender Equality Bill*

Debate began on the Dáil on the new Gender Equality Bill early this year. This reporter took a look at the Bill, its contents and the debate around it through the eyes of one person it will be directly affecting, who has transitioned from a man to a woman.

In doing so, the journalist has contributed greatly to the public’s awareness and understanding of the background to the bill, why it was introduced, and some of the problems that remain to be worked out.

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JUSTICE MEDIA AWARD – TELEVISION FEATURES & DOCUMENTARIES

The winners of the Justice Media Award in the Television Features & Documentaries category are Barry Cummins (reporter), Denise O’Connor (producer) and John Cunningham (producer) of RTE *Prime Time* for their powerful documentary: *Missing in Mayo*

A well-presented, moving and truly engaging report saw reporter and producers spend weeks with the family of a Mayo woman who disappeared in 2000, as they prepared for, and sat through, the trial of the man accused of murdering her and hiding her body.

Giving access to the team at such a difficult time in their lives was a brave thing for the Collins family to do; and the reporter and producers repaid that bravery by creating a powerful piece of programming that honoured Sandra Collins’ memory and provided a unique and important insight into an aspect of murder trials that we rarely see.

Two Merit Certificates were awarded in the Television News category to:

(1) Lisa Marie Berry of *Tonight with Vincent Brown* – TV3 for her report: *A search for justice – death in Bray*

The report focussed on a heartbreaking murder-suicide in Wicklow, and the aftermath for the families involved. The reporter gave a platform to the bereaved families to air grievances with the inquest process, the role of the media, and questions over the role of prescribed antidepressants in the crimes.

Using CCTV footage and remaining focussed on the powerful personal testimony of those directly affected, the report gave voice to the victims of crime and their experiences of the legal system in the aftermath of tragedy.

AND TO:

(2) Rita O'Reilly of RTE *Prime Time* for her report: "*The Torture Files*"

The report, and accompanying newspaper piece, laid bare the some of the shocking details of the inhumane interrogation methods, the 'five techniques' of sensory deprivation, brought into the modern day and used on 14 men interned in 1971.

A painstaking investigation through thousands of difficult files was brought to life by this reporter in a well-presented, clear and troubling programme.

This important work led directly to the application by the Government to the European Court of Human Rights on December of last year to revise its judgment in the case of *Ireland v United Kingdom*, and is thoroughly deserving of reward.

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OVERALL WINNER

It is the prerogative of the judging panel this year to present an Overall Winner award, to the entry they saw as standing out from the others. The 2015 Overall Award goes to **Ann Murphy of the Evening Echo, for her excellent series: *When love breaks down – relationship law in Ireland.***