

Opening Power to Diversity



Adaku Ezeudo

Placed with Derek Keating TD from February to July 2012

Biography

Adaku emigrated from Nigeria in 2000 and now lives in Mulhuddart with her three children. After a number of years of working as a Fund Accountant with International Fund Services in Dublin, she has recently completed a Masters in Development Studies at Kimmage Development Studies Centre. Adaku acts as a group coordinator with 'Women's Space', a monthly networking platform for migrant women organised by New Communities Partnership. As a newly naturalised Irish citizen, this scheme represents for Adaku a unique opportunity to gain first-hand experience of the inner workings of Irish Politics while promoting the social inclusion of new Irish citizens.

Diary

"I was not expecting the debates to be so animated"

My placement with Derek Keating Fine Gael TD for Dublin Mid-West began on the 27th February 2012, and I was keen to get involved from the very start. After meeting Parliamentary Assistant Tommy, I was immediately immersed in a Committee meeting on Health and Children at Leinster House 2000, of which Derek Keating is a member. Following a short tour of Leinster House, and being introduced to what felt like the entire staff of the House, I met Derek's secretary Linda. Both

she and Tommy were warm and easy to talk to; Tommy had me laughing out loud at his jokes from the start. Struck at how quickly I felt at ease, I was more than happy to assist with some constituency work. By handling queries from members of Derek's Dublin Mid-west constituency, I quickly came to appreciate the variety of issues addressed to a TD. By the time I met a warm and welcoming Derek that afternoon I had renewed respect for the work carried out by his office. Far from what some people might think about TDs being removed from matters at local level, the constituency is very much at the centre of a TD's work.

Aside from constituency work, I have also have briefly attended the Leaders Questions at the Dáil, where members of the opposition have the opportunity to address questions to the Taoiseach. My initial impression was one of surprise, as I was not expecting the debates to be so animated. I have also had the chance to be involved in a birthday surprise for Senator Martin McAleese, which was a perfect way to network and meet people from assorted levels of government. In my brief experience, I have come to challenge my preconceptions of the world of politics by expanding my knowledge and understanding of it. I realise that unlike the stereotypes often portrayed, politicians are both approachable and personable. They are a lot more involved in everyday issues than I had initially thought; a task which they approach with a professional attitude and a good sense of humour. I look forward to what the next 6 months will bring.

"Developing a rapport with the constituents has been one of the most rewarding parts of my experience to date."

After the Easter break, I really got the opportunity to gain an insight into the inner workings of a TD's office, as Deputy Keating's secretary was out of the office due to illness. In her absence I worked with Audrey, her temporary replacement, to cover all the back-office administration. Included in these duties was the task of managing the huge volume of emails received on a daily basis on behalf of Deputy Keating. These can involve anything from arranging meetings and dealing with Local Authorities, to advising Constituents on Social Welfare entitlements and liaising with Community Welfare Officers. I have come to understand the importance of dealing with every query on an individual basis. Dedicating time to ensure that each is dealt with in a professional and sensitive manner is paramount as people expect the politician they voted into office to respond to and solve their problem quickly. Developing a rapport with the constituents has been one of the most rewarding parts of my experience to date. Some of them have even begun asking for me by name, which is a real compliment and demonstrates to me that I have gained their confidence and gratitude.

Working in Leinster House has a real feel good factor about it - just walking in through the gates and flashing my gate pass makes me feel like a VIP, not to mention the sensation I get by walking through the same corridors as TDs, Senators and even the Taoiseach. When I mentioned to Tommy, Deputy Keating's Parliamentary Advisor, that my mother was visiting me from Nigeria, he suggested that I give her a tour of Leinster House. She is delighted and very excited at the prospect of this. Speaking to my friends and family, the reactions I get when I mention what I am doing are mostly of amazement and curiosity. To my kids, I am now 'cool' as I get to see the Taoiseach in person rather than on TV! It has also surprised me to learn that some of my female migrant friends have never heard of Leinster House, and I have taken it upon myself to educate them on Irish politics. I think

they now view me as someone well connected, when in fact this opportunity is open to anyone of migrant origin settled in Ireland and I think that is especially important for migrants to gain awareness and exposure to the politics of their adopted home. To date this experience has certainly broadened my horizons and has enabled me to discover new ideas as well as form lasting friendships.

“The OPD internship is an empowering and valuable experience that should be grabbed with both hands.”

In retrospect, I can confirm that my internship at Leinster House was a rewarding experience and provided me with some new perspectives that I would not have ordinarily come across as an outsider.

Firstly, having worked closely with Derek Keating TD, I realised that his role as a TD was no piece of cake. The long working hours, thousands of emails in his inbox, incessant phone calls and series of meetings and functions to attend made me realise how much work TDs put in while working in their constituency or political party. This was far from my initial myopic view that politicians had lots of time on their hands with little to do other than make speeches. Secondly, I expanded my knowledge on issues I found challenging and interesting by researching the internet and asking lots of questions. I was quite taken aback at how quickly the staff at Leinster House warmed to me, and how happy and patient they were when providing answers and explanations to questions I threw at them. Lastly, listening to and resolving clients’ queries was a very memorable and rewarding experience for me. It enabled me to re-discover myself and my passion for humanity. I have always wanted to reach out, touch lives and put a smile on people’s faces. Giving a listening ear, resolving pressing issues and hearing the smile from the client’s voice gave me a sense of fulfilment and motivation.

My expectation of the internship scheme was met and I will definitely recommend it to other migrants who are thinking of taking part. It is indeed an empowering and valuable experience that should be grabbed with both hands. It opens participants up to new experiences and provides them with the opportunity to learn more, expand their horizons and network.



migrant project