



Two-hundred homes built by **Niall Mellon** trust volunteers

BILL CORCORAN
in Cape Town

SCENES OF joy erupted in a South African township yesterday when scores of families were handed the keys to their new homes by Irish house-building volunteers.

The 950 volunteers, who were taking part in this year's Niall Mellon Township Trust (NMTT) **building blitz**, met their target of constructing 200 low-cost homes at the Wallacedene township near Cape Town.

One of the first recipients was Siphokazi Sgentsu, who had been living with her children in a shack for 11 years. "This is like a happy dream, living in a house will make a huge difference to our lives. My sons' health will improve as the house will be well ventilated and not damp."

Now in its eighth year, the trust has built more than 12,500 houses across South Africa with the help of Irish volunteers, who each raise €5,000 to travel to the building blitz and pay for construction materials.

Emily Meehan (16) from Loreto High School Beaufort in Rathfarnham, Dublin, said the experience of working in heavy rain, and seeing how it affected an informal settlement without proper sanitation, had shown her what a privileged life she had in Ireland.

NMTT founder **Niall Mellon** was at the centre of controversy this week when the businessman accused Irish Aid, the Government's overseas development arm, of being "grindingly slow" and bureaucratic. NMTT and Irish Aid also clashed over whether the trust had submitted a report on how it had spent €5 million in State aid.

NMTT said it had submitted a detailed report last September. But an Irish Aid spokeswoman said this report was a response to recommendations made by officials who visited South Africa on May 9th last in a monitoring capacity, and that a financial statement was still outstanding.