



INDEPENDENT LIVING
MOVEMENT IRELAND

Joint Committee on Disability Matters: ‘Planning for Inclusive Communities’.

Opening Statement 6th December, Independent Living Movement Ireland

Thank you chair, on behalf of Independent Living Movement Ireland for the opportunity to address the Committee.

Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI) is a National Cross-Impairment Disabled Persons Organisation (DPO). Our vision is an Ireland where Disabled People have freedom, choice and control over all aspects of their lives and can fully participate in an inclusive society where everyone achieves more.

We recently launched our new ambitious Strategic Plan which is led by our strategic values of Human Rights, Collective Empowerment and Social Justice. These core values reflect the philosophy of Independent Living as defined by the Disabled Peoples Movement and our ambitions for genuine inclusion where everyone lives to their full potential. They underpin our mission, and our plans and activities in pursuit of our mission.

For ILMI, Human Rights are about discovery, capacity, and control over one’s life. It involves having options and making informed choices.

For ILMI, Collective Empowerment is about organising, shared analysis, representation, and consultation. It involves giving voice to the lived experience of being disabled and building collective power for change.

For ILMI, Social Justice is about making rights real and achieving a more equal distribution of resources. It involves dismantling structural Ableism and embedding the Social Model of Disability in policy thinking, policymaking, and policy implementation.

In our opening statement we want to focus on how Disabled People are supported to organise our own collective spaces so that we are given the time to analyze how our communities should be built and how the State needs to resource and support our collective spaces: Disabled Persons Organisations or DPOs.

Planning for Inclusive Communities must from the outset be led and guided by the UNCRPD. Before even beginning to think about how we plan for Inclusive Communities, or how we might design or build homes we must embed the concept that Disabled

People, through their DPO's, are actively involved in the Co-Creation of strategic policies and practices that impact our lives.

The realisation of Disabled People's rights under the UNCRPD in resourcing Inclusive Communities must be grounded on the principle that as Disabled People, we are the experts in our own lives. In realising the UNCRPD, we need to move away from passively being asked to participate in consultations when policy has already been decided towards resourcing Disabled People to work together to drive the development of policy, practice and systems that will lead to our active involvement in our communities as equals.

Due to the historic lack of investment in Community Development Approaches with Disabled People to develop collective autonomous DPO's, policy discussions in relation to disability in Ireland have either happened through Disability Service Providers speaking on our behalf, or Individual Disabled Activists seeking change for themselves – neither of these provide lasting results in making Inclusive Communities real for Disabled People.

However, with the emergence of ILMI and other DPO's, that process has thankfully begun to change, and we welcome the chance to inform this Committee's thinking on the need for investing and resourcing the sustainability of local DPO's to inform local planning for Inclusive Communities.

The Role of DPOs in Realising Inclusive Communities

From an ILMI perspective, planning for Inclusive Communities can only be effectively done when we as Disabled People are actively involved in designing what our local communities should look like in order that we can participate as equals.

This means two fundamental shifts in thinking in how the State engages with us:

1. We need to move from consultation to Co-Creation
2. We need to move from engaging with Disabled People individually to structured engagement with us collectively through DPO's.

For us to strategically be involved in policy development and design, we need to be given time to work collectively together locally and nationally through our DPOs.

A DPO is a Disabled Persons Organisation. DPO's, unlike disability services providers, are led by and for disabled people. DPO's work on a Cross-Impairment basis with disabled youths and adults.

DPO's are about bringing disabled people collectively together to bring about a more inclusive, equal society through Community Development Approaches. DPO's are social inclusion and collective spaces for Disabled People, informed through an Equality, Human Rights and Social Model of Disability lens.

DPO's must be the voice of Disabled People so that statutory, non-Statutory, media, cultural, sporting, economic, employment and social inclusion dialogues will reach directly out to local DPO's as the voice of Disabled People.

Disabled People working together in DPO's is a relatively new phenomenon in Ireland. DPO's are not just social spaces where disabled people meet (online or in-person). They are spaces where we as Disabled People are empowered collectively to critically analyse the social exclusion and oppression we experience through a Social-Model Equality and Human Rights Framework.

DPO spaces are about not only identifying the issues we face, but identifying how systems and structures need to be changed for all disabled people and by strategically identifying what DPO's can and should do to drive this change.

There is a world of a difference between Disabled People collectively identifying what their priorities in how their locality needs to incorporate issues relating to inclusivity and the current system whereby we are sometimes invited in as individuals to respond to plans and policies that have already been drafted. We ask how this can continue to be ok. The NDA's review on the last National Disability Inclusion Strategy showed that there IS a real need to explore alternative means of capturing the living experience of disabled people to help inform monitoring of the next strategy.

And give consideration on how to meaningfully engage with Disabled People and Disabled Persons Organisations in monitoring the new strategy.

Like other communities who are experiencing social exclusion, when we are resourced, we can develop clear strategic objectives to inform how our communities are built or how the State can invest public funds to progressively realise our rights.

Collective spaces for Disabled People in DPO's allow for strategic thinking and for our representatives to bring agreed actions and targets. These discussions take time but allow for DPO representatives to come to the table supported by collectives to develop strategic thinking.

The current system relies on decisions made without our active involvement. Or we are invited to consult on plans that have already been designed without our involvement. Some of the consultations are tokenistic whilst others are organised with good intentions but lack clear ways to think about how to engage disabled people.

Often there is a real need to develop policies quickly, but time still needs to be given to DPOs for us to support our members to critically engage in what change we want to see. We may need time or resources to make the policy context clearer so that all of our members can effectively inform how systems need to meet our needs. Realising the UNCRPD by recognising the role of DPO's and resourcing their development.

In our strategic plan, under the value of collective empowerment, ILMI will work to secure a recognition of and supports for DPOs and their value as authentic autonomous spaces. We will organise, support, build capacity of, and network local DPOs to form and advocate for the collective interests of disabled people.

We have begun that work of DPO development in Sligo, Leitrim, Meath, Dublin and Cork, and through our work funded under the Community Development Programme, we will aim to establish DPO's in Wexford, Waterford, Kilkenny, Carlow, Tipperary and Kerry.

We have begun to engage with relevant stakeholders and organisations at local level to identify and secure funding streams for DPO's; and promote inclusion and accommodation of DPO's in relevant local structures and networks, such as Public Participation Networks.

ILMI worked with Pobal on their "Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making" to promote not only DPO's but the need for local agencies to engage with the UNCRPD and social model thinking around Disability Equality.

We are committed to engaging with national DPOs, including through the DPO network, to promote networking and shared learning; build and strengthen agreed understandings of the nature and role of a DPO.

Conclusions:

In conclusion, in order to fully realise the implementation of the United Nations on the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), effective policy making forums must be established to foster co-creative spaces with DPO's to develop and implement effective policies, locally and nationally.

Real planning for Inclusive Communities must be led by local DPO's. Instead of responding to what has been designed and about to be built, DPO's would identify what local authorities should apply for funding for.

DPOs give the time and space for Disabled People to strategise on what should be prioritised in what is built and how it is built. In out-dated systems we are only asked at the end to "rubber stamp" decisions that have already been reached or being asked to offer our opinion on investments we never would have prioritised if we were really in control.

Central to the realisation of the UNCRPD is the direct involvement of Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) in the design, delivering, implementation and monitoring of policy to promote the inclusion as per Article 4.3 and General Comment 7.

DPO's have only begun to be established in Ireland. Their growth and development should inform how the State interacts with disabled people collectively and how DPOs should be prioritised in Statutory Policy Forums. The prioritisation of DPO's needs to be met with multi-annual investment to build the capacity and scope of DPO's to support the involvement of Disabled People in their work and to respond strategically to the implementation of the UNCRPD.