



PwDI AGM in Galway



Some of those who attended the AGM

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The Galway branch of People with Disabilities in Ireland (PwDI) held it's AGM in the Menlo Park Hotel on April 22nd. The meeting was well attended with people coming from many parts of county Galway. The main speaker was Rebecca Leavey from the Galway Advocacy Centre. Our chairperson Hugh Conlon welcomed everybody to the AGM, and gave a brief outline of what PWDI does locally and nationally. Rebecca Leavey began her talk by explaining what the Galway Advocacy service does for disabled people in Galway. It was set up under the Citizens Information

Act 2007. Galway Advocacy Service is funded by the Citizens Information Board in Galway. It 's aim is to provide support and assistance to disabled people, and "empower disabled people to access their rights". Many disabled people are unaware of their rights and the Galway Advocacy Service helps them become aware of them and enforce them. She then outlined the services and functions of the Galway Advocacy Service. She explained the process for dealing with complaints or queries, bringing them to the relevant authorities (cont'd page 2)

Access for Disabled People

Ita Kilgarraiff and Hugh Conlon of PwDI represent disabled people on the 'Access for All' group. Access for All is a group, supported by Galway City Council, which keeps under constant review the ease / difficulty of accessing public facilities in Galway – in particular, for people with special needs. At the most recent meeting of the 'Access for All' group I was delighted to see the City Mayor Declan McDonnell present and express the importance of Social inclusion for all

people with disabilities. As more of our society are living live longer it is well known that we have a lot more of our public living in the community with different disabilities. At this meeting a new card was issued expressing things to know for hearing and vision disabilities.

1. If someone is using a guide dog, never distract the dog when in Harness
2. Never cover your mouth when communicating with a person with a hearing impairment (cont'd page 3)

PWDI AGM in Galway

Continued
and resolving them.

Many of the difficulties experienced by disabled people in Galway were addressed and it was very interesting and informative to see how they were addressed and eventually resolved. Rebecca also outlined individual cases (the names were kept anonymous), where disabled people were mistreated and the particular issues involved and the efforts made to get justice. Some issues had to be brought to court, some to the Equality Tribunal and some required dialogue and mediation between disabled people and state / private organizations. Issues included problems with poor housing or no housing, day centre facilities, access to buildings, independent living, legal issues, family life, education and social life.

Rebecca stated that a new Social / Human Rights Model was being used by her organization to address the concerns and needs of disabled people, and that society and organizations will be required to make changes, not the person. Contact details are on the back page of this Newsletter.



“If Society is at fault it must change to meet the needs of the person”

Accessible Transport

Transport is a very important issue for disabled people today, as it impacts on their lives and opportunities on a day-to-day basis. Today, there is still a lack of accessible transport in urban and rural areas, and this is creating serious difficulties for disabled people throughout Ireland, particularly in rural areas. PwDI has lobbied the Irish government about this for several years. In 2005, the Government passed the Disability Act and this established Sectoral Plans for various government departments. These Sectoral Plans aim to provide greater access for all disabled people to all goods and services, including transport services. The Department of Transport has a Sectoral Plan which aims to increase accessibility on all public and private transport vehicles with a view to having all public transport vehicles fully accessible by 2016. Though this timetable may not be reached due to the economic downturn and collapse in government revenues. The Department of Transport is also increasing the percentage of private transport operators with accessible facilities to meet demand in urban and rural areas.

Modes of transport include public and private buses, rail, taxis and hackneys, light rail (Luas, DART), airports and airplanes, ports and ships, and disabled parking. PwDI is working with Government Ministers and transport managers on this Sectoral Plan and its implementation in each county of Ireland. Some of our members are doing accessibility audits on vehicles and facilities

and providing valuable feedback to the Government and transport managers.

PwDI is working at Government level to address this problem. We have received Progress Reports and will continue doing so. PwDI is also working at local and county level to address this problem. Members of PwDI are on the management boards of the rural transport programmes in Galway and representing the interests of disabled people on these rural transport programmes. We have a PwDI representative on Bealach the rural transport service for Connemara, and a PwDI representative on the North Galway rural transport service and the South Galway rural transport service. They are working to have accessible facilities on all buses engaged in these rural transport programmes. They are also working on expanding the routes covered and rural areas serviced. This is vitally important for disabled people in rural areas.

“Information is power”



Access for Disabled People



Continued from front page
 These points may seem small but they would be very important for people with a hearing or vision disability. It's amazing how such small points are of great importance for the person with the disability.
 Someone asked me once had

I ever noticed that a deaf person can never go to sleep on the train as they would not know when they reach their destination. I have to say I have noticed that over the years CIE have improved and put more visual signs up on the trains and bus's which would be of great importance . for the person with the hearing disability. Little points like this are of great importance and this news letter could be the start for communicating such information.
 There has been a lot of work done around the city for wheel chair accessible areas and disability car parking. This Access for All committee works closely with the Galway City Council in implementing Part M of the Building Regulations, and in auditing and providing feedback on existing works. Part M provides for accessible building and footpaths. We in PwDI realize that City and County Councils have legal obligations in this regard under the Barcelona Declaration and Disability Act 2005, and we are helping them fulfill these obligations for the benefit of all disabled people.
 Very often the Public are not educated enough on the importance of such facilities for the people with a disability. This is where this newsletter shall add to the education of the Public on such issues and everyone has a voice on expressing the needs. It was suggested that car clamping can be a good solution to such problems but perhaps with good education people shall become more aware of the importance of disability car parking.

PwDI Conference to mark International Disability Day

The Galway branch of PwDI held a big Conference on December 3rd to mark 'International Disability Day'. This was held in the Menlo Park hotel in Galway city. This Conference had a very impressive set of speakers. We had Siobhan Barron head of the National Disability Authority, the Access Officers for Galway City Council and County Council, Frank Kelly the Regional head of FAS, and Bill Ryan from Social Welfare



Headquarters in Dublin and a disability law lecturer from the University in Galway.

The Conference was attended by a big crowd and the room was full to capacity. Siobhan Barron of the NDA explained what the NDA did and what it had achieved over the years. Plans for the future were briefly outlined. The Access Officers from Galway City Council and County Council gave very impressive presentations and showed picture slides of accessible buildings, footpaths and bus stops throughout county Galway. There has been some progress, and indeed progress is continuing throughout the county. Frank Kelly of FAS gave a presentation about training programmes and opportunities for disabled people, and also accessibility facilities

on training courses. Disabled people train alongside able-bodied people on courses and have the same rights and opportunities. Bill Ryan of Social Welfare outlined the Sectoral Plan for making Social Welfare buildings, services and information accessible to all disabled people. He also explained the different 'back to work' and 'back to education programmes' available to disabled people. Finally, a disability law lecturer from the University gave us a detailed account of the recent UN Treaty on Disability Rights and it's effects in this country. Ireland has yet to implement this.



What can People with Disabilities in Ireland (PwDI) do for Me as a disabled person ??

People with Disabilities in Ireland (PwDI) is the only national cross disability organisation funded by the Government. PwDI wants to help all people with disabilities to take part in and influence the decision making process that impacts on their lives and opportunities. Cross disability means that PwDI is for all people with disabilities, whether those disabilities are physical, emotional, intellectual or mental. We also want to include and welcome parents, partners, carers and groups of people with disabilities to join PwDI.

PwDI headquarters in Dublin works with government ministers, government departments and politicians, and with top civil servants and managers of public services on issues which have a direct impact on all disabled people — such as Accessible transport, Accessible buildings, Social housing, Special needs education, FAS training, Employment, Advocacy for the disabled, etc.. PwDI listens to the needs and concerns of disabled people and seeks to directly influence government policies, initiatives and structures to address these needs and improve the lives of disabled people. Many of the new laws, new works and new initiatives by the government over the last 10 years have had PwDI input and involvement. And we are continuing to work with disabled people and the Irish Government to keep improving the lives and opportunities of all disabled people.

In Galway, we in PwDI coordinate the work of PwDI headquarters at local level, and provide advice, assistance, advocacy and information to disabled people in Galway. We also make contributions to Government White Papers on proposed laws, changes to laws and amendments which affect the lives of disabled people. We also work on important disability issues through our representation and involvement with many state bodies and community organisations in Galway. PwDI has representatives on the following bodies and we are representing the interests of disabled people on these bodies.

- Access committee of Galway City council	- Rural bus service for Connemara, named Bealach
- Access committee of Galway County Council	- Rural bus service in north east Galway
- Galway City Partnership	- Rural bus service in south Galway
- Social Housing committee of Galway City council	- Regional Board of FAS
- Social Housing committee of Galway County Council	- Board of HSE West
- Galway City Forum	- HSE committee overseeing residential institutions for disabled people
- Access for All group	- Board of VEC
- The Joint-Policing committee for Galway	- Consultation group for Centre for Disability Law and Policy in NUI Galway
- Board of Galway airport	
- Galway Bus	

Arts, Culture and Creativity and Disabled People

PwDI has representatives on the Galway City Community forum (GCCF). This meets on a regular basis and supports the continued commitment of Galway City Council to developing Galway as a City of Arts, Culture and Creativity. Our PwDI representatives aim to include disabled people in this.

PwDI welcomes the Draft City Development Plan's policy to:

1. Encourage design flexibility in buildings of community, arts and culture, allowing for a diversity of different uses and accessibility for all.
2. Provide community and cultural facilities and local services of a nature and scale appropriate to serve the needs of the local community.
3. Explore innovative ways to deliver community, arts & culture facilities, and examine the best practice models of subsequent management.

Access for All in Galway : An Overview



Access for All is a group, supported by Galway City Council, which keeps under constant review the ease / difficulty of accessing public facilities in Galway – in particular, for people with special needs. Its meetings are attended by representatives of people with various categories of disability, e.g., wheelchair & mobility-scooter users, people with other mobility difficulties – often described as the ‘walking wounded’, people with visual or hearing impairments, etc. Meetings of the Group are always attended by Access Officers from the City Council. The meetings and activities of the Group are ably co-ordinated by Nollaig Mc Guinness, from the Galway City Partnership, and have been concerned with issues such as awareness by the public of the special needs of people with disabilities, specific instances of difficulties caused by absence of ramping of footpaths at junctions and crossings, broken paved surfaces, control of footpath obstructions – including tables, chairs and screens outside pubs and restaurants etc. - bollards, parking on footpaths, cycling on footpaths, abuse of designated disabled parking spaces, design of road junctions, provision of bus stops, design of bus stops, etc.

For particular topics, officers of the City Council, and from other bodies, who have responsibility for the topics in question have been invited to attend meetings to hear of the problems regularly encountered by people with special needs and to discuss how these might best be resolved. For example, Community Wardens have attended to discuss their role in the enforcement of the licences for street furniture; a Planning Engineer has attended to discuss the Smarter Travel proposals, an officer from the HSE has attended to discuss access problems at the hospitals, ranging from waiting times at outpatients departments to inadequate special-needs parking. Other activities undertaken by the *Access for All* group have included collaboration with a local second-level school to devise material for the public awareness campaign to highlight the rights and special needs of people with disability. This has resulted in the large poster campaigns on the advertising hoardings on the approaches to the city and printed cards, which were distributed to shops and places of work giving simple tips on how people with disability should and should not be dealt with.

A project in progress at present is the ‘vetting’ of bus-stops on all the routes of the city bus services. This has involved obtaining the use of an out-of-service bus from Bus Éireann on a number of occasions and, on each occasion, to travel the entire length of a city bus route – stopping at every bus-stop to allow a wheelchair-user to alight from the bus and to re-enter it again and to note any particular problem at each stop. All problems are passed on to the City Council for corrective action.

For the past few years, *Access for All* has been fortunate to have the attendance at its meetings of Eithne Murphy who, in addition to being an Access Officer in the City Council, was also the Executive Engineer to whom was allocated the budgetary allocation for works to the roads and streets of the city to improve access for people with special needs. She has recently been transferred to another area of work in the Council. We all wish her well there, and we hope her successor will be just as sympathetic to the needs of those with special needs and as effective in meeting those needs.

Special Notices

Employment

Rolling Elephants Limited has positions for Customer Service and Marketing people. Disabled people are encouraged to apply.

Email Mira Merkert at mira.merkert@sicher-raus.de



Homecare Medical Supplies stocks aids to daily living, specialist footwear, stair-lifts, waking aids, toilet aids, nebulisers, backcare products, scooters, etc. for disabled people and the elderly.

Address: Terryland Retail Park, Headford road, Galway city.

Phone: 091 567812

Web: www.homecaremedicalsupsies.ie

Inspiration

In this Section we celebrate the achievements of disabled people in certain fields. It is important that people realize that disabled people are capable of achieving as much and in some cases even more than able bodied people, and that everybody regardless of ability has an important contribution to make to economies and to society.

Stephen Hawking who has neuro-muscular dystrophy has been in a wheelchair for 30 years. He is Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of the Royal Society. For over 35 years, he has educated many hundreds of students who went on to distinguish themselves as scientists, mathematicians and engineers, making vital contributions to society and the world. He is well known for his books about space, black holes, the formation of stars, planets and the Universe, and theoretical physics.



He is generally acknowledged to be one of the top scientists in the world and has been compared to Albert Einstein. Stephen Hawking communicates via a speech machine on his wheelchair, this machine receives input via head / eye motions, selects phrases, sentences and words on a computer screen, and outputs speech via speakers. Technology has enabled Stephen Hawking to deliver lectures and tutorials, write books, read books, engage in debates, socialise and have an independent life. In August 2009, Mr. Hawking was given the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Obama in Washington DC. This is the highest honour which can be given to a civilian. This acknowledges a life-time of great work and achievements. In Spring 2010, Stephen Hawking launched 3 film documentaries, titled "Into the Universe" which explain the Universe, space, planets, life, and humanity's destiny in a format which most people will understand, and this has opened up important knowledge to many millions of people worldwide. One can see these documentaries on the Discovery Channel or buy them on the Internet at <http://dsc.discovery.com/tv/stephen-hawking/>

Stephen Hawking is a good example of a disabled person overcoming adversity and living a fulfilling and independent life, and making a valuable contribution to the economy, to science and to society.

Legal Disclaimer

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Useful Addresses

Galway Advocacy Service

Westside Resource Centre,

Seamus Quirke Road, Galway.

Ph: 091 528325 / 087 0641163

Email: galwayadvocacyservice@eircom.net

Webpage: www.galwayadvocacyservice.ie

Citizens Information Centre

Augustine st., Galway city.

Ph: 091 563344

Email: galway@citinfo.ie

Webpage: <http://centres.citizensinformation.ie/centre.php?cic=Galway+CIC>

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