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**ILMI opening statement to Joint Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media on the development of local and community arts (arts and disability, health, and older**

**May 24<sup>th</sup> 2023**

**Paula Soraghan and Peter Kearns**

Thank you chair. I am going to present on behalf of ILMI with my colleague. Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI) is a cross-impairment national Disabled Person's Organisation (DPO). Our vision is an Ireland where disabled persons have freedom, choice and control over all aspects of their lives and can fully participate in an inclusive society as equals. Central to the way we work is to ensure that policy decisions that impact on the lives of disabled people have to be directly informed by those whose lives are directly affected. Our philosophy can be summed up as: 'Nothing about us without us!' and 'Rights Not Charity'. Our vision is an Ireland where disabled persons have freedom, choice and control over all aspects of their lives and can fully participate in an inclusive society as equals.

ILMI as a grassroots DPO has many disabled artists in its membership. As a DPO we have created spaces and workshops locally and nationally in discussing and developing disability arts. Most recently, we have worked with the No Magic Pill production to provide a strong disability equality lens to the development of this ground-breaking drama which has disabled actors at the forefront of a play about disabled lives. ILMI as an organisation were directly involved in the multiple award-winning play "No Magic Pill", which broke new ground in Disability Arts in Ireland.

ILMI want to speak to this committee about the development of local and community arts not only from the perspective of disabled people as audience members, but as art creators, producers, directors and technical crew. ILMI also work from the arts movement concept of Disability Art, which is art made by disabled artists which reflects the lived experience of disability.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) at its core is framed through an understanding of disability known as the social model of disability. From ILMI's perspective, it is vital that there is a clear and full understanding of what the social model of disability is and how it should inform future discussions on policy development and improvement and policy implementation, including discussions on developing and supporting local and community art.

The social model looks at how society is structured and how it disables people. It is not based on a person's impairment, it is focussed on the barriers that exist in terms of attitudes, policy development, access or lack of supports that prevent people from participating in society as equals, with choice and control over their own lives. In this model it is society that disables people from achieving their hopes and dreams, not a person's impairment. The social model informs all aspects of the work of ILMI. Where disabled people are referred to in our presentation to the Committee, this should be understood to include all disabled people, including those with learning difficulties, people experiencing emotional distress and physical and sensory impairments.

Ireland ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2018 and under this there are a number of articles which relevance to the development of local community arts, specifically Article 30 ("Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport"). Article 30 relates to the disabled people accessing arts and culture, but also importantly to removing barriers to the participation of disabled artists in the creation of art and management of local arts centres.

ILMI believes that any development of policy relating to the inclusion of disabled people in local and community arts needs to start with an understanding of the social model of

disability by national, regional and local arts mainstream resources. In framing disability as how attitudes, systems, legislation and policies that disable the participation of people with impairments we can begin to design systems that remove these disabling barriers and look to invest in structures and supports that promote effective cultural inclusion for and with disabled people - 'No Arts About Us Without US'.

Through a social-model lens and informed by the UNCRPD, ILMI as a cross-impairment DPO welcomes the opportunity to inform discussions in relation of community and local arts from a disability equality perspective. I will now pass over to my colleague, who will talk about the role of DPOs in the development of local art strategies.

A DPO is a Disabled Persons Organisation. DPOs, unlike disability services providers, are led by and for disabled people. DPOs work on a cross-impairment basis with disabled youth and adults.

DPOs are about bringing disabled people collectively together to bring about a more inclusive, equal society through community development approaches. DPOs are social inclusion and collective spaces for disabled people, informed through an equality, human rights and social model of disability lens.

DPOs should be the voice of disabled people and that statutory, non-Statutory, media, cultural, sporting, economic, employment and social inclusion dialogues will reach directly out to local DPOs as the voice of disabled people.

At their core, an autonomous collective space for disabled people is best placed to inform strategic decisions relating to the inclusion of disabled people. DPOs also are informed by the importance of social education through art and the need for disabled artists to be actively involved in developing local arts spaces.

This is consistent with the UNCRPD article 30, which calls on State parties to take appropriate steps to ensure that disabled people “have the opportunity to develop and utilize their creative, artistic and intellectual potential, not only for their own benefit, but also for the enrichment of society.” In the development of a local and community arts programme, policy and funding decisions to disability arts need to be led by discussions with DPOs locally and nationally. ILMI through our work whether in our Department of Rural and Community Development-funded Virtual Online Inclusive Community Empowerment or VOICE project or the work we are doing in the cross-border region is supporting the emergence of autonomous, collective spaces to develop organic DPOs to inform local policy and work to co-create with Statutory bodies to build inclusive, equal systems of service delivery.

There is a lack of disabled people involved in all aspects of local and community arts. This is not just in relation to disabled artists, but also as disabled people actively involved in the management and direction of community spaces that host art events; disabled people actively involved in the design and delivery of productions. Any discussion on community and local arts needs to work with DPOs locally and nationally to develop access routes for disabled people interested in arts production to ensure the involvement of disabled people in creating disability arts.

In terms of policy development and best practice in community arts, ILMI feels that any disabled roles must be played by disabled actors, especially at a local level. This would lead to disabled people being social included in their communities through mainstream professional and community arts groups. There is now best practice of how effective access-for-all to arts and cultural process and product with dialogue and artistic engagements with national and local DPOs.

The UNCRPD calls on State Parties to take “all appropriate measures” to ensure that disabled people can enjoy access to cultural materials in accessible formats. It is imperative that Local Arts Officers, the Arts Council and local community arts groups work with DPOs to avail of disability equality training. Disability equality training is led by disabled people and is informed by the social model of disability. Disability Equality Training can inform the development of best practice of how community arts groups can engage with disabled people and build processes to ensure disabled people can access arts locally in their communities both as creators, participants or consumers.

The provision of access for disabled people to attend local and community arts can learn from the production of No Magic Pill as a process for learning on how to promote inclusion not only of disabled actors, but how best to make a drama performance accessible for disabled people attending their local community arts space.

Thank you for listening and we look forward to answering any questions