

Independent People with Disabilities Ltd. Westmeath ● Longford ● Roscommon

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We Are Here to Help You !

New Website: <http://www.independentpwd.ie>

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

Company Registration Number: C524496

Charitable Status Number: CHY20251

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Company Registration No.: 524496 | Charitable Status No.: CHY20251

Directors:- Chairman: Mark Ahern Company Secretary: Noel Mulvihill, Carol Harrington, Gene Mulvihill, Larry Quain, Joe Faherty, Sean Kane, Padraic Mac Craith, Michael Gogarty, Theresa Lyons, Marie Moylan and Dermot Hope.

Current Company Board of Directors

- **Mr. Mark Ahern.**
- **Mr. Noel Mulvihill.**
- **Ms. Carol Harrington.**
- **Mr. Larry Quain.**
- **Mr. Joe Faherty.**
- **Mrs. Gene Mulvihill.**
- **Mr. Pádraic Mac Craith.**
- **Mr. Seán Kane.**
- **Mr. Michael Gogarty.**
- **Ms. Theresa Lyons.**
- **Ms. Marie Moylan.**
- **Mr. Dermot Hope.**

The Board of Directors are excited to share the highlights of our year.

Our team has been actively engaged in community events organized by Westmeath County Council, supporting important causes throughout the county.

We're not just watching from the sidelines; we're fully involved! Our team has been providing assistance on disability-related issues, addressing questions, concerns, and making a positive impact on countless lives.

In addition, our office serves as a vital resource, offering information and support to those looking to regain entitlements or better understand various disabilities. Stay tuned for more updates on the exciting developments at Independent People with Disabilities!

Thank You to Our Sponsors

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the H.S.E. Dublin Mid-Leinster for their ongoing help and support. You've been a steadfast backbone for our work! A special thank you to the generous people of Westmeath – your contributions during our charitable collections have not gone unnoticed.

We are also incredibly thankful to Westmeath County Council, North Midlands Credit Union, Mullingar, and The Tesco (Blue Chip) Community Fund and The Courts Service of Ireland for their invaluable support in funding our office at 96 Seán Costello Street, Athlone, County Westmeath.

These contributions have been crucial in keeping our organization vibrant and focused on our mission. Thanks to our meetings with Westmeath County Council and other partners, we've been able to adapt to a perfect balance of virtual hangouts and in-person catch-ups which has provided us the opportunity to conduct our meetings post COVID

Activities for 2024

Disability / Older Peoples Services & Information Day 2024

This Event took place in Bloomfield House Hotel, Mullingar on Monday 27th May and was hosted by Independent People with Disabilities in conjunction with the Disability Working Group of Westmeath Community Development and Westmeath County Council.

This event was free and open to everyone in the county who had an interest in disability-related topics. It provided an opportunity for the public to access valuable information on a wide range of disability issues, all in one place, aimed at supporting individuals with their specific needs and circumstances.

The event at the Bloomfield House Hotel was an important gathering focused on disability and age-related issues, providing valuable information and resources to the community. Linda-Jo Quinn, the MC for the morning, warmly welcomed attendees, introduced herself as a representative of Westmeath Community Development, and noted some housekeeping points, such as silencing mobile phones and identifying fire exits. She highlighted the presence of distinguished guest speakers and encouraged participants to engage with the event.

Robert Troy, a guest speaker, expressed gratitude to Linda-Jo for her introduction and praised the strong turnout, emphasizing the event's significance for connecting attendees with service providers.

He encouraged the participants to explore the various stalls and engage with the information on offer, offering his continued support for the event.

Frank Murtagh, CEO of Westmeath Community Development, followed with a heartfelt thank you to Linda-Jo for her leadership in organizing the event and praised its 19-year legacy. He highlighted the impact of the Social Inclusion Community Activation Program (SICAP) in supporting the community and encouraged attendees to explore the available resources, reaffirming his commitment to ongoing support for both older individuals and people with disabilities.

Brendan Campbell, Chairperson of the Disability Working Group, also thanked Linda-Jo and Deputy Troy, emphasizing the group's ongoing efforts to raise awareness about the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities. He noted the event's growing success and encouraged attendees to explore the valuable information available throughout the day.

Dermot Hope, representing Independent People with Disabilities, shared a speech on behalf of Mark Ahern, the organization's chairperson, who was absent due to a family bereavement. The speech highlighted the organization's commitment to ensuring equal access for all, introduced a project for a mixed ability outdoor gym in Mullingar, and called for collaboration between older individuals and people with disabilities to strengthen community efforts. He also encouraged local groups to join the Public Participation Network for increased involvement and support.

Annette-Barr Jordan from Westmeath County Council thanked the organizers and highlighted the overlap between the needs of older people and individuals with disabilities. She spoke about Ireland's pioneering Age Friendly Programme, which focuses on sports, transportation, housing, and social inclusion. Annette also discussed various initiatives aimed at improving accessibility, such as the Live Longer and Prosper program and transportation projects like the disability-friendly Garda bus in Athlone. She encouraged attendees to engage with local libraries for more information on these initiatives.

Sam Hogan, Local Coordinator for the Healthy Age-Friendly Homes Program, spoke about the program's mission to support older individuals in maintaining their independence by staying in their homes for as long as possible. This service provides home assessments, support for housing adaptations, and assistance with health services and transport. It aims to prevent premature admissions to long-term care facilities, helping older individuals live healthier lives in their communities.

Muriel Flynn, manager of the Westmeath County Childcare Committee, presented the "Guide to Services for Young People with Disabilities," which provides valuable information for parents, guardians, and the community. She highlighted the research conducted in 2007, which identified gaps in childcare services for children with additional needs, leading to the creation of the directory. Muriel encouraged attendees to share the guide and make use of the information available online.

Sharon Dunlevy, a service user from the National Learning Network, shared her personal story of living with limb muscular dystrophy and how the Ar Aghaidh Linn program helped her gain confidence and pursue further education in art. She appreciated the program's personalized approach and the connections it provided to various therapists.

Michael Gogarty, another service user from Independent People with Disabilities, spoke about the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in County Westmeath, emphasizing the need for

greater visibility, accessibility, and inclusion. He highlighted barriers to participation in the community and stressed the importance of consulting people with disabilities when making decisions about services and policies.

Aleeysha Hennessy, a support worker at Westmeath Community Development, discussed the Care & Repair program, which offers social support and small home repairs to older individuals and those with disabilities. She outlined the program's services, including home visits, befriending phone calls, and minor home repairs. She also mentioned the expansion of services in 2023, such as physical exercise courses, IT training, and the Live Longer and Prosper program.

John Tynan from the Athlone Access Awareness Group spoke about the need for better accessibility in public spaces. He highlighted the group's efforts to improve access in local areas like shopping centres and medical facilities and called for proper use of accessible parking bays. John emphasized that small infrastructure changes could significantly improve accessibility for people with disabilities and stressed the importance of continued community collaboration to create a more inclusive society.

Overall, the event provided a platform for sharing valuable information, fostering collaboration, and raising awareness about the issues faced by individuals with disabilities and older people. Through these efforts, the community took important steps toward a more inclusive and supportive environment for all.

A.G.M. 2024

The 2024 Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Independent People with Disabilities (I.P.w.D.) was held on Tuesday 17th September 2024 with attendance from key members, including Mark Ahern (Chairperson), Noel Mulvihill, Larry Quain, Marie Moylan, Gene Mulvihill, Brendan Campbell, Linda-Jo Quinn, Olivia Lennon, and Dermot Hope.

The meeting began with the approval of the previous year's minutes, which were circulated before the meeting and endorsed by Larry Quain and Mark Ahern. There were no issues arising from the minutes. Chairperson Mark Ahern then addressed the attendees, providing a financial update for the organization. While there was a slight decrease in the annual surplus, Mark assured the group that I.P.w.D. remained financially stable with strong reserves. He expressed gratitude to the volunteers, companies, and community members who supported the organization, particularly through donations and collections. Mark also highlighted I.P.w.D.'s active participation in community initiatives like the Westmeath Sports Partnership, and the installation of accessible gym equipment, as well as his involvement in the Make Way Day event addressing local access issues.

The meeting continued with the approval of the 2023 accounts, which had been circulated earlier and were formally accepted by the attendees. The Annual Report for 2023 was also approved, with Mark praising Dermot for improving the report's quality. The election of new directors was another key point of discussion. Mark introduced the need for fresh leadership, and the nominations process led to the formal election of Marie Moylan and Theresa Lyons to the board, with Joe Faherty and Mark Ahern retained for another term. This decision was unanimously approved by the attendees.

Finally, the meeting focused on upcoming events in 2024, including meetings addressing access issues, a regional networking event by the Cavan Disability Network, and I.P.w.D.'s Employment Conference, which will feature speakers from the Department of Social Protection and local

authorities. The AGM concluded with Mark Ahern thanking the attendees for their participation and officially closing the meeting. This event underscored I.P.w.D.'s ongoing efforts to support people with disabilities through strong financial management, community involvement, and leadership development.

Cavan Disability Network – Regional Networking Event 2024

Independent People with Disabilities (I.P.w.D.) attended a function on Tuesday, 24th September, 2024, at the Cavan Crystal Hotel, represented by Noel Mulvihill, Larry Quain, Marie Moylan, and Dermot Hope, with Mark Ahern also attending. The event, organized by Cavan Disability Network in collaboration with Cavan County Local Development Committee, was part of Local Development Week.

Bridget Boyle, Chairperson of Cavan Disability Network, kicked off the event with a presentation on the network's achievements and efforts in supporting people with disabilities in the region. The first presentation was by Mark Gilsenan from the Health and Wellbeing Committee of Kingspan Breffni Park. He highlighted their initiative to make sports accessible to everyone, particularly focusing on a special area for families of children with Autism to enjoy events together.

Next, Eva Burke, Chairperson of Neurodiversity Navan, spoke about their work to ease anxiety-related issues for individuals in the community. Matthew Nevin, Access Inclusion Officer for Fermanagh & Omagh District Council, shared insights into accessibility initiatives in his area. Paul Mulligan, Area Engineer with Cavan County Council, followed with a personal presentation on the council's ongoing efforts to improve accessibility, supported by disability activists. He also showed a video of a newly installed greenway in Cavan Town.

A sensory experience workshop by Helena McDonald from Vision Ireland gave attendees a chance to experience different types of sight loss. Participants wore glasses simulating vision impairments and attempted tasks like reading newspapers with various print sizes and counting money, deepening their understanding of challenges faced by people with vision impairments.

The event concluded with a roundtable discussion on service provision and gaps in each county, followed by a networking lunch. The function offered valuable insights into accessibility issues and initiatives aimed at improving inclusivity for people with disabilities.

Make Way Day 2024

On Friday, September 27, 2024, Independent People with Disabilities (I.P.w.D.) participated in National Make Way Day in partnership with Athlone Access Awareness (A.A.A. Group) and the Athlone Branch of the Irish Wheelchair Association. The event took place under the canopy near the Civic Centre on Church Street, Athlone, where the group moved inside to the reception area of Athlone Town Council's headquarters for photographs due to the cold wind.

Attendees included members from St. Hilda's Services for the Mentally Challenged, the National Learning Network, and Transition Year students from Athlone Community College. Local dignitaries such as the Mayor of Athlone, Cllr. Frankie Keena, and Cllr. John Dolan were present, along with Jennifer McKeown from Westmeath County Council, and Linda-Jo Quinn and Hubert Rooney from Westmeath Community Development.

The event began with a welcome from John Tynan of Athlone Access Awareness, who thanked all attendees, especially the dignitaries. Speakers, including Cllr. Keena, Cllr. Dolan, Brendan Campbell (Chairperson of the Disability Working Group), and Linda-Jo Quinn from SICAP, addressed the significance of Make Way Day.

The main focus of the day was to identify and highlight obstacles that hinder accessibility for people with disabilities on Athlone's streets and footpaths. These obstacles included cars blocking footpaths, sandwich boards, litter bins left on footpaths, broken paving slabs, and other hazards impeding safe passage.

Larry Quain and Dermot Hope (I.P.w.D.), along with John Tynan, Olivia Lennon, Brendan Campbell, and Hubert Rooney, reviewed specific areas of concern, particularly in the newly pedestrianized Seán Costello Street. While acknowledging the improvements made, concerns were raised about the insufficient highlighting of level differences, particularly near the steps at the canopy and outside the Town Centre Shopping Centre on Mardyke Street, which pose risks for people with visual impairments.

Additionally, the smooth surface of Seán Costello Street, while visually appealing, becomes hazardous on wet or windy days, especially for those with mobility aids like crutches or walking sticks. The group emphasized the need for better colour coding of steps and different levels, especially outside Dunnes Stores in Irishtown, for the safety of visually impaired individuals.

Further concerns included the need to increase the green light time and volume of audible signals at pedestrian crossings. The first tree on John Broderick Street near Golden Island Shopping Centre was identified as a potential hazard for individuals with visual impairments. The footpath outside the Dark Horse pub on Seán Costello Street was deemed too narrow, requiring attention. Lastly, a new surface laid on St. Mary's Square was flagged due to hazardous uneven levels, posing an accident risk.

The group expressed gratitude to all who supported the event and hoped that their observations would lead to improvements in accessibility over the coming year.

Empowering Abilities – Employment of People with Disabilities

The "Empowering Abilities – Employment of People with Disabilities" conference opened with a welcome address by Dermot Hope, a director with Independent People with Disabilities (IPWD), who thanked the attendees and handed over to the Mayor of Athlone, Frankie Keena. Mayor Keena emphasized the importance of collaboration between local organizations and the Westmeath County Council, highlighting the need to address accessibility issues and create a more inclusive community. He expressed his commitment to ongoing cooperation to tackle challenges in the future.

Mark Ahern, Chairperson of IPWD, shared his personal experiences with employment and disabilities. He stressed that employment provides financial support and a sense of purpose, and noted the ongoing challenges faced by many individuals with disabilities seeking work. He expressed hope that events like this would make a difference, even if it helped just one person. Ahern also mentioned his role with the Public Participation Network, encouraging people to share relevant information for wider circulation.

Marie Giblin, Assistant Principal Officer with the Department of Social Protection, presented the "Work and Access" program, which offers support to people with disabilities to secure and maintain employment. The program includes workplace needs assessments, communication support, in-work

support, and adaptations. Giblin explained that the program replaces previous schemes and was developed in response to recommendations from a review in 2023. Eligibility for the program requires individuals to have a disability that impacts their ability to work, among other criteria.

Martin Murphy from the National Learning Network (NLN) discussed the organization's initiatives in providing training and support for people with disabilities. The NLN offers a range of flexible courses and work experience programs, including programs in Athlone that focus on skills for work, mental health, and horticulture. These programs aim to prepare participants for employment and further education. Murphy also highlighted the supports available, such as rehabilitation psychologists and resource teachers, and explained how individuals can apply by completing an application form.

Patricia McKenna, Employment Officer at Westmeath Community Development, spoke about the services provided to individuals with learning difficulties, such as Autism and Asperger's, to help them gain and retain employment. She emphasized the importance of personalized support, including assistance with CVs and mock interviews.

Tony McCormack, Co-ordinator of Employment Schemes at Westmeath Community Development, outlined two key programs: the Community Employment (CE) Scheme and the TÚS Scheme. The CE Scheme provides income support and services to participants involved in community work, while the TÚS Scheme focuses on supporting rural communities and providing employment opportunities. Both programs have specific criteria and aim to enhance communities through various projects.

Tony Reilly from Turas Nua (formerly Employability Service Midlands) discussed how the service helps individuals with disabilities access employment. The service offers job matching, employer outreach, job trials, and post-placement support. Reilly highlighted the key principles of the service, including integration into the open labour market and providing ongoing support to both jobseekers and employers.

Brendan Campbell shared his personal journey with a physical disability, discussing the challenges he faced in securing stable employment. He spoke about the frustration of being let go after being promised a job and questioned whether the public sector was meeting its commitment to employ individuals with disabilities. His heartfelt account shed light on the systemic barriers that continue to hinder the employment of people with disabilities.

The conference also featured a networking lunch, where attendees enjoyed soup, sandwiches, and tea/coffee, providing an opportunity for further discussions and collaboration.

The event underscored the need for greater support, awareness, and collaboration to ensure that people with disabilities can access meaningful employment and lead fulfilling lives.

Representation

The organization maintains a strong local presence through active participation in a variety of committees, such as the Westmeath Public Partnership Network, Westmeath Local Community Development Committee, the Disability Subgroup of Westmeath Community Development Ltd, Westmeath Youth Forum, and the Westmeath Older People's Forum. This involvement allows the organization to have a meaningful influence within the community.

On the national stage, the organization is represented on the board of Iarnród Éireann and regularly engages in discussions with the Department of Social Protection in Dublin. Although in-person

meetings with Iarnród Éireann were paused due to COVID-related travel restrictions, the organization quickly adapted by transitioning to virtual meetings with the Department of Social Protection via the Webex platform. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, these online meetings were highly effective.

Advocating for individuals with disabilities and ensuring their voices are heard remains a top priority for the organization. Whether at local committee meetings or in national-level discussions, the organization is committed to representing the needs of people with disabilities, contributing to a more inclusive and supportive community at both local and national levels.

In Conclusion

Larry Quain, the Office Manager, expresses his sincere gratitude to all fellow Directors on the Board for their steadfast support in the fundraising efforts carried out by Independent People with Disabilities over the past year. He also extends his thanks to the members of the public whose contributions have made these efforts successful. Larry looks forward to continuing this collaborative work and is eager to join forces with everyone again in the future.

