
A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

A HISTORIC ASSEMBLY

ON

SATURDAY, JUNE 13TH, 2015

IN

ATHLONE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY,
DUBLIN ROAD, ATHLONE

PROGRAMME INFORMATION



A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

People with disabilities, our families and friends are standing strong together. We are making a Declaration.

It's a declaration of independence, of equality, of participation, of leadership, and of choice.

If you join with us, it's a declaration that can change forever the way people with disabilities, our families and friends will live in this country.

It will be a declaration that cannot be ignored.

The Future Starts Here

Welcome and thank you for joining this historic Assembly.

Today is a vital moment in time. It's a day when the wheels of change start turning.

It's truly wonderful to be here together, to engage in a strategic, social and creative manner and to make this a shared and memorable occasion.

We gather to celebrate our resilience – the experience of growing strong through adversity – and to set out on a new journey.

Today, we aim to inspire the next major shift needed in Ireland to achieve real equality and independence for people with disabilities, our families and friends.

For this to happen, it is necessary to take a clear and critical look at exactly what sort of change is needed.

And to begin to build the momentum, excitement and energy

needed to secure that change.

Our Assembly therefore opens with an introduction to a set of three embracing and inclusive principles that address many of these key areas of change.

Our simple but ambitious aim is, in the next short while, to develop and fine-tune these *Athlone Principles* – based on contributions and insights garnered today – and to have them included and actioned in the next Programme for Government.

To further inform such a campaign, we will also collectively examine, in a serious but accessible way, the key human rights and related equality issues in Ireland that directly affect our lives.

Crucially, we will hear from advocates – from across the disability spectrum – about how important it is that new models of leadership and support are found within our community.

One of the core tasks of the day is to address how our values, our

institutions, our politics and our funding models can therefore be transformed so that the needs of people with disabilities are put first and centre in all future decisions and actions that affect us.

This is your chance to declare your independence and help renew a collective spirit of courage and confidence to meet the challenges of our times.

If you add your insights and momentum, it will be a historic declaration that cannot be ignored.



Programme Timetable

11.00am

Arrival at Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) Food Court

12.00pm

Parade to International Arena and music

12.20pm

Formal welcome / Introduction to event

12.30pm

A Story yet to be Told

Donal Toolan - Writer / Actor and Disability Activist

An introduction and personal reflection on the draft *Athlone Principles* proposed and the type of shift needed to achieve real equality and independence for people with disabilities in Ireland.

Niall Crowley - Independent Equality Expert

A snapshot of current Human Rights and Equality matters in Ireland, identifying the challenges and opportunities that might animate the disability sector in new and inspirational ways

Eilionóir Flynn - Centre for Disability Law and Policy (CDLP) at National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG)

An overview of progressive trends, both nationally and internationally, of people with disabilities leading out on change within their sector and wider society

13.15pm

Pound the Pavement

Music Element

13.20pm

Whose Story is it Anyway?

Personal testimonials in challenging times

Introduced by

Rhona Coughlan – Radio Producer and Disability Activist

John Cradden – Journalist and Deaf Advocate

Tony Heffernan – Founder of Saoirse Foundation

13.50pm

A Different Drum

Music Element

2.00pm

Lunch

3.15pm

Beat a Path

Music Element

3.30pm

The Collective Kitchen Table

A cross-disability sector panel drawing out experiences and views on the main themes of the day

Chairperson - Alice Griffin – DESSA
Adam Harris – As I Am | Autism Advocate

Eileen Daly – Independent Living Advocate

Ronan Smith – Advocate for People Living with Dementia and Alzheimer's

Stuart Lawler – National Council for the Blind (NCBI)

Intellectual Disability Advocate
- tbc

4.00pm

Music Element

4.15pm

Welcome to Day One

Reflections on the day and an examination of practical ways in which to advance the development of the *Athlone Principles* and related actions

Martin Naughton – Founder of Áiseanna Tacaíochta (ÁT) and Disability Activist

4.30pm

Make Your Move

Musical Finale

More Information



How do I get there?

The First Assembly is taking place between 11am and 4.30pm in the International Arena in AIT on Saturday, 13th June.

Athlone is the most central town in Ireland. AIT is based on the Dublin Road in Athlone. It is approximately a ten-minute drive from the main town. A map to the campus, which lies on the east side of the town, is available by [clicking here](#)

Is the venue accessible?

Both the Food Court and the International Arena in AIT are wheelchair accessible, and accessible bathrooms are available. We will have a significant number of sign language interpreters available throughout the day. Health and Safety personnel and stewards will also be available to guide and direct people to the various areas of the venue and to support people if they experience any difficulties.

If you have any access requirements that you would like to enquire about, please contact Orlaith Grehan by calling 086 183 1502 or by e-mailing orlaith@theatnetwork.com.

Will there be food available?

Yes! We're kicking the day off by gathering in the Food Court of AIT at 11am, where there will be tea, coffee and refreshments available to purchase. Lunch will also be available during our afternoon break, at an average cost of €8 per person.

For Health and Safety purposes, no food or drink is allowed into the International Arena itself during the event.

Please Note:

No high heel shoes are permissible on the stadium floor and stewards will request they be removed.



Music at the Declaration of Independence Assembly

Brian 'Bongos' Fleming brings together a special mix of musicians for the occasion, with members of the band Tig Linn at the core, blending traditional Irish and African music. Tig Linn combines Dublin and Nigerian musicians and creates original songs in English and Yoruba. They have played at all the major Festivals in Ireland and supported both Mavis Staples and Hugh Masekela at the National Concert Hall. Brian has played in some 30 countries on 40 albums and with the likes of Jack L, Davy Spillane and The Chieftains. He is in the Guinness Book of World Records, 2001, for creating the world's biggest drum. His invited guests today include: Solomon Ijigade, vocals
Zeenie Summers, vocals
Frank Kilkelly, guitar
Paul O Driscoll, bass
Robbie Sinnott, piano accordion
Darragh O Héiligh, piper
Gwenn Frin – flute



For further information on the Assembly and its outcomes, you can contact Orlaith Grehan at Áiseanna Tacaíochta:

Chase House,
City Junction Business Park,
Malahide Road,
Dublin 17.

Phone: 01 525 0707

Email: info@theatnetwork.com

Web: www.theatnetwork.com



Short Biographies

Donal Toolan

Donal Toolan is a writer, actor, journalist and former director of the Forum of People with Disabilities. Beyond his tireless campaign work on human rights and rights based legislation for people with disabilities in Ireland and international contexts, he has been a recipient of a National Broadcast Journalist of the Year award and is an accomplished professional actor with many significant stage and screen credits.



Niall Crowley

Niall Crowley is an independent equality expert. He was Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Equality Authority in Ireland from its establishment in 1999 until 2009. Prior to this, he worked in the community sector with the Travellers' rights organisation, Pavee Point, for twelve years. He is the author of *An Ambition for Equality*, published in 2006, and *Empty Promises: Bringing the Equality Authority to Heel*, published in 2010.



Eilionóir Flynn

Doctor Eilionóir Flynn is Deputy Director of the Centre for Disability Law and Policy (CDLP). Her interest in disability law stemmed from a broader interest in social justice and a recognition of the invisibility of people with disabilities at the time in broader human rights discourse. Her current passions in this field include assisted and supported decision-making, rights-enforcement mechanisms and access to justice.



Rhona Coughlan

Rhona has been working in the disability sector for four years, and is a Support Worker with Greater Dublin Independent Living (GDIL). She has over 20 years' experience of working in radio, presenting *Perceptions*, a programme discussing all aspects of living with a disability, on Dublin's NEAR FM during that time. Rhona is currently setting up her own coaching consultancy business and is undertaking a Master's degree in Third Sector Management.



John Cradden

John Cradden is a freelance journalist who writes for a number of national newspapers, publications and websites, but mainly the Irish Independent, the Sunday Independent and the Irish Times. John is deaf and a (fairly) fluent user of Irish Sign Language (ISL), now a cochlear implant user (in one ear); he has written a short book about his experience of becoming an implantee and other musings on deafness - for which is he is now seeking a publisher.



Tony Heffernan

Tony Heffernan is the founder of the Saoirse Foundation, a national charity focused on proactive advocacy, and an investor into Batten's and rare disease research that is focused on delivering positive practical supports for those affected by rare conditions. Liam's Lodge and Bumbleance are both projects of the Saoirse Foundation. Tony was Chairperson of the Patient and Support Subgroup, which worked on the development of the Ireland's first ever National Plan for Rare Disease, launched in July 2014.



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Stuart Lawler

Stuart, as the manager of NCBI's Rehabilitative Training Facility, coordinates the delivery of a national training programme, working with people who are experiencing sight loss and who wish to move towards further education or employment. He also leads on the support of mobile and Braille technology used by people with low or no vision. Stuart is totally blind and believes passionately that technology is the greatest enabler for people with disabilities.



Ronan Smith

Ronan is a highly experienced Arts Management professional, whose work as an actor, producer and director has spanned local, national and international contexts. He was recently diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's, which has prompted him to engage on a national platform as an advocate and leader; he is a member of the Irish Dementia Working Group. Ronan - also a qualified solicitor - has developed a particular interest in mediating the conflicts of approach and execution that often arise in collaborative creative processes.



Eileen Daly

Eileen, a graduate of Social Science in University College Dublin (UCD), lives independently with the support of her Personal Assistants (PAs). She is a qualified Guidance Counsellor and Life/Career Coach who has worked as a Disability Officer and Guidance Practitioner in a variety of educational contexts. Eileen currently works as a Careers Adviser for Students with Disabilities in Trinity College Dublin and is a director on the board of Greater Dublin Independent Living (GDIL).



Martin Naughton

Martin Naughton is a disability activist and pioneer of the Independent Living movement in Ireland. He was at the centre of influencing the move away from institutionalised living in Ireland, co-founding the first Center for Independent Living (CIL) in the country in March 1992. Martin works as a Support Officer for the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI), and acted as Co-Director of the European Network of Independent Living (ENIL) until January 2015. In 2010, he and three other people with the lived experience of disability established ÁT, the first organisation to facilitate Direct Payments to people with disabilities in Ireland.



Adam Harris

Adam Harris is the founder of AslAm.ie, Ireland's online support and advocacy service for those affected by Autism Spectrum Conditions. Adam founded AslAm in response to his own experiences of living with Asperger Syndrome and the need for greater public awareness of Autism. A member of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Consultative Forum, Adam is a frequent commentator on Autism on national television, radio and print media.



Alice Griffin

Alice Griffin is the Director of DESSA, the Disability Specialist Support Agency. DESSA is a national community development organisation working to promote equality for disabled people throughout Ireland. Alice is a graduate of UCD and has been involved in community development and human rights work for over 25 years.

