

Independent People with Disabilities Ltd.

Westmeath ● Longford ● Roscommon

Address: 96 Seán Costello Street, Athlone, Co. Westmeath.

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We Are Here to Help You !

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

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Company Registration Number:

C524496

Charitable Status Number:

20251

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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**
- **Mr. Dermot Hope.**

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

The Board of Directors is here to share our year's highlights.

Our People with Disabilities team has been actively involved in community activities hosted by Westmeath County Council, supporting noble causes across the county.

We're not just observers; we're active participants! Our team has been offering assistance on disability-related matters, addressing inquiries, concerns, and making a positive impact on many lives.

Additionally, our office is a well-functioning hub, providing information and support to those seeking help with reinstating entitlements or understanding various disabilities. Get ready for the inside scoop on our adventures. Stay tuned for updates on the fantastic happenings at Independent People with Disabilities!

Thank you to our sponsors

We wish to thank the H.S.E. Dublin Mid-Leinster for their ongoing help and support – you've been our reliable backbone! And to the wonderful folks in Westmeath, your generosity in our charitable collections hasn't gone unnoticed.

We would also like to thank Westmeath County Council, North Midlands Credit Union, Mullingar and The Tesco (Blue Chip) Community Fund for their contributions towards the running of our office at 96 Seán Costello Street, Athlone, County Westmeath.

This financial contribution has meant a lot to our organisation, keeping us buzzing with energy and purpose. Our meetings with Westmeath County Council and other organizations have seamlessly blended virtual hangouts with in-person catch-ups, adapting to the "New Norm" born out of the rise of online communication during the COVID pandemic.

Activities for 2023

Disability / Older Peoples Services & Information Day 2023

This Event took place in Bloomfield House Hotel, Mullingar on Monday 22nd 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 was a free event open to all people in the county who were interested in disability related issues.

The event was open to members of the public wishing to find out information on all disability related topics which may help people's circumstances/issues under the one roof.

Independent People with Disabilities Chairperson Mark Ahern spoke at this event about how we as an organisation continue to work within the County advancing disability issues both locally and nationally and the need for us to hear what the issues on the ground are.

He went on to speak about our goals for the coming year addressing issues around Medical Cards for people with disabilities in employment and accessibility for people with disabilities. He also spoke about the footpaths in

Athlone and Mullingar and has commended Westmeath County Council for their work done to date but also stated that there was more to be done in these areas.

Pointing out that we had a stand at the event, Mark alluded to the importance of becoming a member and joining our e-mail list to be informed about upcoming events and any developments in the disability sector.

His message for this event was that Independent People with Disabilities are open to collaboration with other disability organizations and that all ideas where we may be able to help were welcome.

Make Way Day 2023

Taking place on Friday 22nd September 2023, this was a nationwide event where disability groups came together with members of the local authority in an effort to point out obstacles to safely traverse the streets of our towns and villages.

It was led by the Disability Federation of Ireland and launched by the President of Ireland and participated in by all disability organisations in Ireland.

Independent People with Disabilities collaborated with Athlone Access Awareness and went around the town pointing out areas where we thought might need attention and highlighted where vans and cars were parked on footpaths, blocking these areas for wheelchair users and compelling them to alternatively use the public roadway which can be very dangerous.

A.G.M. 2023

Our A.G.M. for 2023 was again held online on Tuesday 19th September 2023. It was a successful evening with a good online attendance.

With optimism, it is noted that the worst of the Covid virus seems to be behind, allowing the organization's activities to resume normalcy.

The organization maintains representation on influential committees such as the Westmeath Public Partnership Network, Disability Working Group, Westmeath Sports Partnership, and Westmeath Older Peoples Forum, providing significant influence in the community.

An ongoing project involves seeking funding for the installation of accessible gym equipment in Mullingar Town Park, expected to be completed by 2024.

Throughout the year, the organization has been actively engaged in various events, including Make Way Day and the Disability Showcase Day, with a future event in Athlone scheduled for November, focusing on the theme of "working together."

The involvement of guest speakers has already been confirmed, adding value to these initiatives.

Gratitude is extended to sponsors, including Westmeath County Council, Athlone Credit Union, Mullingar Credit Union, and The Irish Court Service, for their continued support.

Lastly, the Chairperson expresses appreciation to the rest of the Board for their dedicated efforts, highlighting plans for other Directors to take on meeting chair responsibilities to enhance the overall skill set and ensure organizational continuity in the future.

Empowering Communities – Fostering an Inclusive Society for People with Disabilities

Independent People with Disabilities organized an enlightening event on Wednesday, November 8th, 2023, at the Shamrock Lodge Hotel in Athlone, titled "Empowering Communities – Fostering an Inclusive Society for People with Disabilities."

The event aimed to address the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities and promote inclusivity in society.

Dermot Hope, Disability Information & Development Worker, passionately spoke about the organization's commitment to breaking down societal barriers and ensuring equal opportunities for everyone, emphasizing the need for open dialogue.

Councillor Louise Heavin, the Mayor of Athlone, shared her insights into fostering inclusivity in the community, focusing on enhancing accessibility, particularly for individuals with disabilities. Her commitment and unique perspective as both an architect and county councillor showcased the comprehensive approach Athlone is taking under her leadership.

Linda-Jo Quinn discussed the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), highlighting its efforts to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion, with a particular focus on supporting disadvantaged communities, including people with disabilities.

Ronan Harney, Principal Officer in the Department of Social Protection, shed light on the government's commitment to supporting individuals with disabilities through various initiatives and outlined key statistics on social assistance payments.

The government's engagement with stakeholders and ongoing collaboration with representative groups emphasized its dedication to gathering public opinions and suggestions, as evident in the consultation on the Green Paper on disability reform.

Frances O'Connell, VP Student Education & Experience at the Technical University of the Shannon in Athlone, discussed the university's diverse student body and highlighted initiatives focused on enhancing the student experience, particularly in the area of disability support.

The TUS Disability Service, through strategic initiatives and collaboration, strives to create an inclusive community for students.

Frances O'Connell's commitment to inclusivity was further demonstrated in her participation in national projects and addressing the Oireachtas Committee on Autism.

The collaborative efforts of various individuals and organizations, such as Mr. Brendan Campbell, Mr. Laurence Quain, and Mr. John Tynan, exemplify a commendable spirit of volunteerism and underscore the positive impact of collective action in supporting the needs of people with disabilities.

For further information, individuals are encouraged to contact Independent People with Disabilities at 96 Seán Costello Street, Athlone, Co. Westmeath.

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Representation

The organization maintains local representation on various committees, including the Westmeath Public Partnership Network, Westmeath Local Community Development Committee, Disability Subgroup of Westmeath Community Development Ltd, Westmeath Youth Forum, and Westmeath Older Peoples Forum. This involvement affords the organization significant influence within the community.

At the national level, the organization holds representation on the board of Iarnród Éireann and participates in meetings with the Department of Social Protection in Dublin. While in-person meetings with Iarnród Éireann were halted due to COVID-related travel restrictions, the organization successfully transitioned to online meetings with the Department of Social Protection, facilitated through the Webex platform. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, these virtual meetings proved to be highly productive.

Ensuring that individuals with disabilities are represented and their voices heard is a paramount priority, both at local committee gatherings and national-level engagements. The organization recognizes the importance of advocating for the needs of people with disabilities in various forums, contributing to a more inclusive and supportive community both locally and nationally.

In Conclusion

Expressing his gratitude, Larry Quain, the Office Manager, extends his thanks to all fellow Directors on the Board for their unwavering support in the fundraising activities undertaken by Independent People with Disabilities throughout the year. He eagerly anticipates the prospect of continued collaboration and looks forward to working with each of them in the future.

Ends.