

## **The Disabled Person's Organisation (DPO) Network**

### **Opening Statement to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters**

#### **DPO's and the implementation of the UNCRPD (resumed)**

01<sup>st</sup> June 2023

**Dear Chairperson, Deputies and Senators, the DPO Network welcomes the opportunity to be here today.** The DPO Network is an Irish alliance of Disabled People and their organisations (five DPOs) who have joined together as we have a common interest in the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Ireland.

The five DPO member organisations of the DPO Network are:

- As I Am - Ireland's National Autism Advocacy Organisation
- Disabled Women Ireland (DWI)
- Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI)
- Irish Deaf Society (IDS)
- National Platform of Self Advocates

The DPO Network is committed to the human rights and social model of disability which says that the exclusion, inequality, and discrimination that disabled people experience is not the consequence of our impairments but a result of the economic, cultural, social, and political barriers which are created and persist in society.

#### **DPO's and the Implementation of UN CRPD**

The DPO Network recognises that this Committee and other State agencies are beginning to identify the primacy of DPOs as per Article 4.3 and General Comment 7 of the UNCRPD. This recognition of the role of DPOs in the development of policy and direct consultation is welcomed.

However, the DPO Network is concerned that with the increased awareness of the role of DPOs without a real plan for how our development is to be supported and resourced. This results in DPOs being

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unable to participate in a meaningful way in the representative and consultative spaces or that the calls for DPO involvement result in tokenistic participation that is not underpinned by clear positions and strategies developed by the DPOs.

On that basis, the DPO Network would like to again repeat the following observations on how DPOs should be resourced locally and nationally to inform the development of policies to authentically implement the UNCRPD.

### **Investment in DPO Core Funding**

Ireland's obligations under the UNCRPD are to ensure that State invests in policies, practices, and supports to include disabled people in society as equals. Central to the effective implementation of the UNCRPD will be the full and effective participation of disabled people in the design, delivering and monitoring of policy at a local, regional and national level.

Due to the dominance of disability service providers and the disability industry in Ireland, disabled people and DPOs have not directly benefited from sufficient investment to develop effective representation and policy development functions. This call for investment and core funding is imperative and continues to have a serious impact in disabled people's voices being heard in policy and community development locally and nationally.

Meaningful engagement can only be done through strategic, multi-annual investment in DPOs. This will allow us to create spaces for disabled people to work collectively together: to identify what structures to engage in that maximise our time and effort; and to bring collective policies to influence State policy and service development. Investing in DPOs will also allow us to lead on consultation with disabled people and to nominate our representatives to bring our voice to the table.

We hope that with the increased recognition of the primary role of DPOs in the UNCRPD, we will see a systemic shift towards investment in DPOs

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so that they can organise collectively, and sustainably, to bring about a more inclusive society and we will continue to campaign for this.

### **Register of DPO's**

A method of identifying authentic DPOs needs to be established in partnership with existing DPOs. (One example of this is the checklist developed by the DPO Coalition of New Zealand).

The criteria required to be recognised as a DPO need to be available and accessible to groups representing disabled people, and indeed, support must be available to enable appropriate groups to meet any criteria additional to those outlined under General Comment 7. (For example, should it be necessary for an organisation to have a Terms of Reference or Constitution, or to register with a body such as the CRO to secure recognition as a DPO - advice and practical support should be available for this.) Disabled people have, as a community, significantly decreased access to financial and educational resources and many DPOs and local disabled people's groups are run on an entirely voluntary basis - navigating criteria such as these may fall outside their skillset without support to build these skills being made available.

While it is important to have a rigorous and transparent method of identifying DPOs and distinguishing them from all other types of organisations, it is important that all genuinely self-representative groups advocating on behalf of their membership are adequately supported to do so. We have a relatively sparse and new DPO landscape in Ireland, and investment in empowering this sector to grow is imperative to advancing the CRPD on both a local and national level.

### **Meaningful engagement with Oireachtas Committees**

It is critical that DPOs are invited to all meetings where issues related to their work are discussed at Oireachtas Committee sessions. We are aware of many instances of meetings over the last year across different committees that included discussions with stakeholders, including service

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providers, about disability issues but where the relevant DPO organisations were not invited to attend, or worse, requested an invite but were excluded.

We acknowledge that until DPOs receive adequate State funding and resourcing we will not be in a position to attend all meetings, however, at a minimum, we should be aware of, and invited to, all meetings that include stakeholder feedback, testimony or feedback. We request that the Joint Committee on Disability Matters leads by example in relation to this important aspect of inclusion to demonstrate adherence to the principles of UN CRPD. We also request that the Joint Committee on Disability Matters would assist DPOs in making the same request of all Oireachtas committees.

### **Conclusion**

The UNCRPD cannot be implemented locally, regionally, or nationally without investment. It is time to ensure disabled people are resourced to collectively have our voices heard. It is time for “Nothing About Us Without Us” to become a reality.

Thank you.