

CASE STUDY: Arts For All

Arts and Disability Ireland

January 2011

Pádraig Naughton, Director of Arts and Disability Ireland, talks to Arts Access Aotearoa about Arts and Disability Ireland's role, some of its key partnerships and projects, and its plans for 2011 and beyond.

1. Background: about us

Arts and Disability Ireland is a national arts development organisation, based in Dublin. Our primary aim is to promote the engagement of disabled people in the arts as audience members, artists, performers, participants, advisors and employees.

Back in 1985, we were set up as a voluntary committee called Very Special Arts (VSA) Ireland as part of Dublin's City Arts Centre. In 1998, VSA became an incorporated society and three years later, it changed its name to Arts and Disability Ireland.

When I was appointed Director of Arts and Disability Ireland in 2005, we had a budget of €77,000 and were involved with just two Dublin groups: the Quick Bright Things Theatre Company and Counterbalance Integrated Dance Company. I was the only staff member, and our administrative needs were managed by Create (www.create-ireland.ie), Ireland's national collaborative arts organisation.

Today, we're involved in 15 or more projects – many of which could be replicated in cities and communities throughout Ireland. We head into 2011 with a staff of three, a budget of around €190,000, a new office in the Sean O'Casey Centre, and some exciting partnerships happening.

The Arts Council of Ireland supports us with approximately €165,000 a year, and this covers our core costs and programmes. We get another €20,000 a year from local councils and a lot of in-kind support such as venues, staff and administration. Many of our projects wouldn't happen without in-kind support.



Arts For All is an Arts Access Aotearoa/Creative New Zealand partnership programme. The aim of this programme is to encourage arts organisations, venues and producers to improve their access to disabled audiences. Download Arts For All, published in 2014 by Arts Access Aotearoa, at artsaccess.org.nz or call 04 802 4349 for a hard copy.



2. What are the key services that Arts and Disability Ireland offer?

Our key services include:

- arts development support for organisations and individuals in the arts and disability sectors
- audience development support for arts organisations to make their venue and services more accessible to disabled people
- arts-focused disability equality training for organisations, arts workers and the wider arts sector
- support and information through an inquiry service for organisations and individuals in the arts and disability sectors.

3. Describe some of your recent partnerships.

- VISUAL ARTS: In partnership with the Fire Station Artists' Studios (www.firestation.ie), we offer the annual Disabled Artist Studio Award. The Fire Station provides a rent-free, live and work accessible studio with Arts and Disability Ireland providing funding of €7000 towards a stipend. Together we facilitate opportunities for the artists to showcase their work, work alongside mainstream artists and engage with the wider community. For the first two years, we've had international artists (Noëmi Lakmaier and Anna Berndston) undertaking the residency. In 2011, we're inviting two Irish-based artists to use the space.
- WRITING: In 2010, we teamed up with Fishamble: The New Play Company in Dublin, which specialises in new writing for theatre. We worked with them to commission plays by disabled writers. The plays could be no more than ten minutes long and for no more than two actors. Four plays by four writers were selected and then presented as staged readings – firstly in Dublin and then at the VSA Festival in Washington DC in June 2010.
- ACCESS: The Arts and Disability Network **Pilot** is a partnership with the Arts Council of Ireland, Mayo County Council, the Irish Museum of Modern Art and South Tipperary County Council. The aim of the project is to work with local councils to improve opportunities for disabled artists to create and present work, and to improve access to venues. The project is ongoing and will engage with an increasing number of county councils. A resource pack called *Shift In Perspective* (www.adiarts.ie/resources/shift-in-perspective) was launched in December 2010.
- FILM: We hosted and supported the Oskabright Film Festival (www.oskabright.co.nz) in Dublin, firstly in 2007 and then again in 2009, when the festival extended its reach by touring Ireland. Based in England, it's the first film festival in the world to be run by, and for, people

with a learning disability. As well as presenting films from around the world, the festival runs filmmaking masterclasses and Q and A sessions. We plan to continue our support for this festival in 2011.

- DANCE: We've worked with the Dublin Dance Festival for years to ensure there's a disability perspective included in its programme. Last year, for instance, there was a symposium called *Many bodies of contemporary dance*.

4. In your view, what are three vital ingredients to ensure healthy, long-term partnerships?

- Approach potential partners with a clear, well-conceived and manageable idea.
- Endeavour to create a working environment where all partners have expertise to share and learn.
- Assure partners that you will be there to support them as they implement new practices and ways of working.

5. As Director of Arts and Disability Ireland, what's something you're particularly pleased to have achieved?

Arts and Disability Ireland is the sole provider of audio description and captioning services for live performance in Ireland. We pioneered this work in 2006, with funding support from the Arts Council. This enabled us to buy audio description and captioning equipment; train people to become audio describers and captioners; and work with the Abbey Theatre (www.abbeytheatre.ie) in Dublin to run a pilot project. From two assisted performances in 2006, the Abbey Theatre now offers a captioning and an audio description performance for every production. There are also notes in Braille, large font and audio.

It's more cost-effective and efficient to offer the two services at the one performance. For each performance, the theatre contributes around €1000 and we contribute between €500–700. It's a huge commitment but something I'm very proud to have made happen.

It's definitely building new audiences for the theatre. On Saturday 4 December last year, when we had all that snow, most places cancelled their performances but the Abbey Theatre stayed open and played to an almost full house. This included six visually impaired or blind people and 12 Deaf people. Because the service is offered for each production, people know about it and can plan ahead.

6. Looking ahead: the future of Arts and Disability Ireland

2011 is a year of consolidation for Arts and Disability Ireland after relocating to our new premises last year. We're involved in a lot of projects and now that we've cemented some strong partnerships, we're currently involved in a phase of strategic development. This is a significant and exciting challenge for Arts and Disability Ireland to extend its vision and national reach.

Many of our projects could be replicated in other areas of Ireland: for example, our audio description and captioning work.

I'm also keen to see more masterclasses and high-quality work by disabled artists and integrated arts companies presented in mainstream arts festivals.