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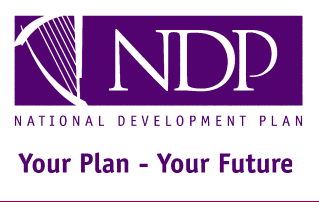
the occasion of the visit of the

PRESIDENT of IRELAND

MARY McALEESE

on the 9th July 2003 to

The L.Inc Resource Centre, Cork



L.Inc 2000-2003: A Herstory

..... by Tina O'Toole



The current L.Inc organisation is the fruit of much labour, and many different women have been part of the process that brought it into being. The following is a short herstory of L.Inc to date.

A 1998 community meeting of about forty women in Tig Filí agreed to start a support network for lesbian/bisexual women in Cork, and find funding for a resource space. Undergoing various changes, the group elected by the community that night experienced the teething problems of all new groups and disbanded a year later. This group were a forerunner of L.Inc, and the efforts they made contributed to the organisation here today. At the time (1999-2000), activist energies were running very low in the Cork community, there was a general feeling of burn-out among activists who had been involved for many years with no support, funding or much recognition.

However, a small but persistent group of women continued to meet and discuss the idea of a resource centre. In three groups – a Funding Group, Premises Group, and Communications Group – we laid down the basic groundwork for funding proposals, viewed rental properties in the city, compiled a mailing list of about 40 members of the Cork lesbian community, and then met together to review the situation.

The initial steering group was formed at this point, consisting of eleven people – Phyllis Walsh, Deirdre Walsh, Petra Stone, Helen Slattery, Tina O'Toole, Fiona O'Neill, Siobhán O'Dowd, Chris Moran, Mary Hogan, Emma Bidwell, and Soren Mayes

who represented the Cork Lesbian Line. We named the group "L.Inc"/"Lesbians in Cork". Throughout this period, we held a series of open community meetings which were attended by a small number of women, indicative of the lack of energy for this kind of project at the time. But sometimes when it seems things can't get any worse ... they get better: we got a letter from the Millennium Project in 2000 to say they had awarded us a grant – we were the only lesbian/gay project to be funded under this scheme.

The Millennium funding enabled us to establish better communications and training for the Cork lesbian/bisexual communities. It facilitated groupwork and computer training, and thus the setting-up of our website at www.linc.ie and the first issue of the LINC magazine in November 2000. We secured funding from other agencies, rented a premises at 34 Princes St and began to set up a resource centre. We have had a lot of support from community development workers in the city since we started, particularly at the Southern Health Board, and Ballyphehane / Togher CDP, who support our CE scheme and enabled us to employ our first development worker at the L.Inc centre, Community Artist Spark Deeley. We worked strategically with organisations at national level, such as the National Lesbian & Gay Federation, and the Equality Authority, as well as more recently with initiatives such as Cork City Partnership, the City Development Board, RAPID Cork, and the City Arts Officer, as well as Gay HIV Strategies in Dublin, and WERRC UCD, among others.



L.Inc (Lesbians in Cork) is a network and community resource centre based in Cork city. The organisation was set-up in 2000 and is primarily for women who identify as lesbian or bisexual, including transgender people (or those in transition) who identify as lesbian or bisexual.



Recognising the value of ongoing social events organised within the Cork LBT communities, such as the Cork Women's Fun Weekend (now in its 19th year) and the Fantasy Ball, we acknowledged that in building any community, social networks first have to be supported. L.Inc concentrated on providing and facilitating a number of diverse groups and spaces in which people can gather, meet and network. One of the first regular events held at L.Inc was the weekly Drop-In, hosted by a small number of volunteers in the first few years, where the atmosphere is informal and gave women a chance to meet outside the pub scene. This was the venue through which many members of current groups first encountered L.Inc – and we continue to host a Drop-In twice a week. In 2000 and 2001 we ran the highly successful Matrix women-only discos, on Bank Holiday Sundays, and we hope to see some kind of similar social event hosted or facilitated by L.Inc again in the coming years.

In 2001, we were awarded core funding by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, under the Equality for Women measure. This enabled us to employ a full-time Project Co-Ordinator/Development Worker at L.Inc, Rita Wild, and continue the training, community development, and networking we had put in place over the previous two years. More recent funding under the Equality for Women measure has enabled us to employ an Administrator, Mary Hogan. We also have a second C.E. worker, Brigid Roche. The current steering group are: Marcella Brown, Toddy Hogan, Gwen Kennedy, Lorraine King Marshall, Catherine Morley, Eleanor Moore (SHB), Siobhán O'Connor, Siobhán O'Dowd (BT CDP), Mary O'Reilly, Deirdre Walsh, Phyllis Walsh, and Liz Willows.

Since 2000, L.Inc has concentrated on providing and facilitating a number of diverse groups and spaces in which people can gather, meet and network. A host of groups are facilitated by L.Inc, including a core Community Arts project: the Mural Project, Seisún na Mná, Cork Dyke Dramas, Creative Writing Group, and the L.Inc Film Club set up in 2000 by Aisling O'Loughlin. The L.Inc Mural Project has been a consistent source of creativity and development in the centre over the past three years, and the finished mural was launched in a public exhibition this week at Tig Filí. The Magazine Group have just produced our 8th issue

of LINC, and recently co-produced an issue with Women's News in Belfast – the magazine is available free to everyone on our mailing list and can also be downloaded from the website. Support groups include a Lesbian Parents Group, 40+ Group, LBT Youth Group, as well as support work with Cork Lesbian Line.

Communication within the LBT communities was an early priority for L.Inc – currently there are more than 300 addresses in our database and an international email network. Our cyber-presence at: www.linc.ie is testament to the energy and skills of Petra Stone. The discussion board on the website has become another vibrant space for women to interact as well as providing information about services for the LBT communities locally. In addition to these groups,

L.Inc also provides training, resources and information for the LBT communities on a range of different issues, as well as facilitating outreach training in the wider community. We've run seminars and workshops on a variety of issues within our community – such as lesbian parenting, anti-racist training, and outreach training work with Cork City Partnership among others. Our 2001 seminar in conjunction with members of the Transgender communities enabled us to formulate L.Inc policy (see above). Furthermore, over the past year, WERRC at UCD have run an outreach Lesbian & Queer Studies course in conjunction with L.Inc, which will be continued in the autumn.

Just now, the Cork LBT communities are coming of age. We have been consistently surprised by the numbers of women at events, or joining, and starting new groups. Today, our communities are greater in number, but our needs and interests have developed in new and diverse directions too. Like many other communities, we continue working to forge links with other marginalised groups and to develop our own policies of tolerance and inclusion within our own communities. Furthermore, we maintain and develop links with other agencies, NGOs and institutions locally and nationally. In this way, we hope to support members of the LBT communities, develop and mainstream LBT experiences and policies in mainstream discourses, and thus challenge the invisibility of our communities in the wider Irish social context.



Message from Rita Wild, L.Inc Project Co-Ordinator

We are living in interesting times in the history of this state and country. We are moving away from the fear and secrecy that blighted many, many women's lives and families here in Ireland. The Magdalene laundries have gone, our citizens with intellectual disabilities are no longer hidden in institutions, and our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender citizens no longer must choose emigration. This visit by the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, is another significant step for this community towards our full and equal citizenship. Lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender have always played a role in the important affairs of this State and indeed in the very foundations of the State. Until very recently this history remained hidden from us, but the work of many women and men over the last few years has begun to lift this veil of secrecy. The discovery of documents such as Dr. Kathleen Lynn's diaries demonstrate clearly not only her commitment to Irish freedom and the Irish people but also her enduring love for her partner in arms Madeleine French-Mullan. Both were arrested for their part in the 1916 uprising, and Kathleen's diary entry for 10th May 1916, written after being moved to Mountjoy Prison reads: "I would give ten thousand pounds to be back in Kilmainham with Madeleine"

We are still in the process of uncovering our history. And as we journey together towards full and equal citizenship we are still writing that history with our daily lives. The visit to our centre by the President of Ireland Mary McAleese is history-making indeed. It is a great honour and privilege to welcome the President on behalf of our community. To be honoured and recognised by our First Citizen in this way is a gift that will be treasured by each and every one of us. This is a day which all of us will remember and speak of, to our grandchildren and grand nieces and nephews.

Céad Míle Fáilte, President McAleese.



Message from the L.Inc Steering Group by Siobhán O'Dowd

A warm Cork welcome to President Mary McAleese from all at L.Inc today, and to every one of you who have helped create and become part of the L.Inc community. Across the page you can read where L.Inc has come from, our journey over the last few years. Today as we host the visit of President Mary McAleese, not just to a resource centre but to a whole community, we celebrate another stage on that journey, L.Inc's coming of age; established now as an organisation and a resource for the Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender communities and other friends who identify with the aims of L.Inc. Today allows us to acknowledge all of you who have been part of this journey and to thank you for making it with us.

Resource centres have become part of the landscape of many geographical communities, but the fact that L.Inc is the only resource centre of its kind in Ireland tells us that we have some way to go towards achieving diversity and equality for all citizens. The presence of President Mary McAleese here today should encourage us to keep working towards this in a real way. L.Inc exists because many of you have given the energy and commitment to making it happen and because we have persuaded significant other organisations to assist us to do this. We have received funding and support from a number of sources: the Southern Health Board, the Department of Social and Family Affairs, Ballyphehane/Togher CDP and the Millennium Fund which allowed us to create and slowly build L.Inc as a community organisation. The success of L.Inc in securing core funding for three years under the Equality for Women measure allows us to contribute towards a more equal and diverse society as we help to shape policy in our interactions with organisations like Cork City Partnership, Cork City Development Board and RAPID locally and many other initiatives nationally. Thank you for your help and we count on your ongoing support to be able to continue and mainstream this work.

In seeking to achieve a more equitable, diverse and inclusive society one of the challenges facing all of us is to ensure that L.Inc itself also works towards becoming more diverse and inclusive. As a community organisation we need to ensure that we acknowledge and support diversity within our own community as well as challenging outside of it. When our LBT identities can sit easily with family status, age, ability, race and ethnic identity, social and economic status then we will have created as vivid a rainbow within L.Inc as that which we would hope to see beyond.

Produced by Tina O'Toole, Siobhán O'Connor, Maria McConville, and Siobhán O'Dowd.
With thanks to Rita Wild and Petra Stone.