





Range of Badges from 1980s showing mix of social change campaigns
 Arthur Leahy Collection, Photograph by Josef Kovac

QUEER REPUBLIC OF CORK

Cork's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual
& Transgender Communities
1970s-1990s

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ORLA EGAN

ONSTREAM



Orla Egan, Arthur Leahy, Dave Roche at Launch of Queer Republic of Cork Exhibition, Camden Palace, Heritage Week, 25 August 2016

With love to my son Jacob, my partner Carol and my father Jim.

With gratitude to Arthur Leahy.

For all those who fought for respect and equality, and for those who did not survive.



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I have been lucky to be part of a vibrant and politically active LGBT community in Cork which has nurtured me and enabled me to develop a pride and confidence which ameliorated the impact of living in a homophobic heterosexist society. It also contributed to changing that society fundamentally and moving us towards greater respect, inclusion and equality for LGBT people in Ireland. I owe the members of this community a huge debt of gratitude. I wish to acknowledge in particular those activists who fought hard for change and also those who did not survive the battle.

Arthur Leahy has been centrally involved in the LGBT community and social change movements in Cork since the 1970s. His contribution to equality, progress and social change in Cork, Ireland and abroad needs to be acknowledged. Arthur had the foresight to begin putting things in boxes and storing these boxes in his basement, thereby gathering the Arthur Leahy collection of newsletters, posters, reports and other documentation relating to the LGBT community and other social change movements. This collection forms the core of the Cork LGBT Archive. I am really grateful to Arthur for gathering this collection and for giving me access and permission to use and share the materials therein.

I am grateful to UCC and the Graduate School of CACSSS for supporting my work with the Cork LGBT Archive. The Digital Arts and Humanities team in UCC has been especially encouraging. In particular I would like to thank Orla Murphy, Mike Cosgrave, Jess Jones, Paul O'Shea, Patrick Egan and Donna Alexander. The UCC History Department has supported me to visit other LGBT archives in the USA and UK. In the university I would also like to thank Mary Byrne, Peter Flynn, Cathal Kerrigan and Sandra McAvoy for their support.

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Cork has a long and rich history of LGBT activism, community formation and development. Since at least the 1970s, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Cork have forged communities, established organisations, set up services and reached out to others.

As well as campaigning for LGBT rights and providing services and supports to LGBT people, the LGBT community has played a vital role in movements for social justice and political change in Cork. There were, and still are, close connections, collaborations and mutual support between the LGBT community and other 'alternative', left-wing groups and organisations in Cork working towards social and political change in Ireland.

Yet this community, like many other LGBT communities worldwide, has been largely invisible in historical accounts and its contribution to social and political change, and developments largely unacknowledged.

In 2015 the Irish people voted in favour of Marriage Equality for same-sex couples and the Irish government enacted the Gender Recognition Act – two important steps towards equality and rights for LGBT people in Ireland. The Marriage Equality campaign in particular has attracted huge interest and attention, nationally and internationally.

A common narrative or story has emerged and is frequently re-told – that the successful campaign for Marriage Equality was the result of the recent actions of a few (mostly Dublin-based) high profile individuals. There is a tendency to slip into the adoration of the icons, but while these individuals did play an important

role in the campaign, their actions are just a small part of the story. The continuous re-telling of this version of the story obscures the history of the LGBT community in Ireland. It ignores the fact that what happened in 2015 was the result of decades of activism by LGBT individuals and organisations throughout the country, decades of determination to fight against discrimination and to demand equality and respect for the LGBT community.

Unfortunately, this history is all too often hidden and unacknowledged in mainstream society, as well as by many in the LGBT community. Too many young LGBT people grow up unaware of the long and rich history of the development of their own community. The information that does emerge about Irish LGBT history tends to be Dublin-centric and ignores the important history of activism in Cork and other parts of Ireland. Many of the 'firsts' of Irish LGBT activism happened in Cork – the first National Gay Conference in Cork in 1981, the first Irish AIDS leaflet produced in Cork in 1985, the first NUI college to recognise a LGBT Society in 1989, the first Irish Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in Cork in 1991 and the first Irish LGBT float in a Patrick's Day Parade in Cork in 1992.¹ Yet these are often ignored or unacknowledged; this ignorance diminishes our knowledge of our history and heritage.

This publication hopes to redress this invisibility and to begin to tell the stories of the history of the Cork LGBT community; focusing on the 1970s to 1990s. Much of the material currently available relates to the history of the lesbian and gay communities, with much less information available on the transgender and bisexual communities, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. In that time period there was very little acknowledgment of, or respect for, the bisexual and transgender communities, in mainstream society, and also within the lesbian and gay communities. Bisexual and transgender people often engaged with, and socialised within, the lesbian and gay communities, but their identities were



Dominic Whyte carrying the Cork Pride banner 1993, John Calnan Collection

often not explicitly acknowledged or respected. It is hoped that *Queer Republic of Cork* will stimulate the emergence of more information and stories, particularly in relation to the bisexual and transgender communities, thereby providing a fuller picture of the history of the LGBT community in Cork.

Some of the information here relates to groups or organisations that were not specifically or exclusively LGBT, but in which the LGBT community was actively involved – for example the Quay Co-op and the Women’s Place. The Cork LGBT communities did not exist in isolation, but were actively involved in a wide range of social change movements and organisations, and they were active agents of social and political change.

Queer Republic of Cork links with the work of the Cork LGBT Archive which aims to preserve, digitise, share and display information in relation to the history of the LGBT communities in Cork. The source of much of the information for this work is the Arthur Leahy Collection. This is a private collection, gathered since the 1970s, and includes posters, newsletters, leaflets and other items. I am grateful to Arthur for his foresight in gathering and storing this collection, and for his generosity in sharing it.

The Cork LGBT Archive can be found at corklgbtarchive.com.



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Poster for Women's Fun Weekend 1988 *Arthur Leahy Collection*



In the 1970s the LGBT community in Cork faced criminalisation, ignorance, discrimination, isolation and emigration, but that decade also saw the development of social and political networks which fostered a sense of community, fun and belonging for LGBT people. The first LGBT community organisations were established in the 1970s and these provided a range of services and supports for the Cork LGBT community. The focus of the community was primarily gay and lesbian, with little acknowledgment or respect for the existence of the bisexual and transgender communities.

In the 1970s in Ireland gay sex was still criminalised. Buggery and 'gross acts of indecency' between men were criminalised in Ireland under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act.² Lesbian sex was not explicitly criminalised, allegedly because Queen Victoria could not imagine what women might get up to in bed that could be criminalised! However, all LGBT people were affected by the negative impact of criminalisation and the associated discrimination against the LGBT community.

Many LGBT people grew up never hearing about LGBT people or understanding what it meant to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. One woman remembers, "When I was growing up I never heard of a gay person. I didn't know what it meant; I didn't know what it was. I always thought gay was happy. That's what we were told, and my mother was right – it is happy!"³

In the early to mid-1970s there were no formal LGBT organisations or social centres in Cork; these began to emerge in mid/late 1970s. There were informal social networks, mostly centering around parties and gatherings, particularly in the homes

of some of the wealthier gay men. Public toilets and parks also provided loci for casual, clandestine sexual encounters between men. A social network emerged amongst the men involved in this casual sex scene, fostering lifelong connections and friendships. Even in the midst of hostility, criminalisation and discrimination, the LGBT community created spaces for the celebration and enjoyment of LGBT culture.

Dave G. remembers attending the gay parties in Cork in the 1970s:

They were great fun!

We used to travel a lot, carloads of us, in the city and outside – There was kind of a circuit...We used to go down to Buttevant to a lad who lived there and he used to throw fabulous parties. They were great fun. He was very rich so there was always plenty of booze ... There were quite a few places, Kinsale etc.

But that also was a kind of a clique.

They were mostly gay men, or the gay men and their straight lady friends ... there were quite a few of those ... which they unkindly called fag hags.⁴

These parties were primarily for gay men, and were only accessible to those who knew about them and were invited. Many LGBT people coming out in the early 1970s were isolated and found it difficult to find a community.

Cork LGBT people would sometimes travel to Dublin to socialise in the emerging LGBT scene there. There was a number of gay bars in Dublin where Cork people went to socialise, including Rice's and Bartley Dunne's bars.⁵

There was also an emerging transgender community and scene

in Dublin in the 1970s. In the mid 1970s an Irish transgender organisation, Friends of Eon, was established in Dublin. In the mid 1960s a transgender organisation, the Beaumont Society, had been established in the UK; one of the founders of this Beaumont Society was Irish. Many Irish transgender people began to contact the Beaumont Society; it was clear that there was a need for, and interest in, an Irish organisation, and the Friends of Eon was established in the mid 1970s.

The Friends of Eon had a broad definition of transgender, and included transexuals, those who were transitioning, and transvestites. There were members from all around Ireland, so it is probably safe to assume that at least some transgender people from Cork engaged with the Friends of Eon, especially as there was no transgender organisation in Cork at the time. I would assume that Cork transgender people also socialised at the Friends of Eon's weekly club, Lola's Club, which ran in the Parliament Inn in Dublin on Thursday nights from 1977 until the mid 1980s.⁶



Friends of Eon Membership Card Sara r Phillips, Irish Trans Archive

Being able to access the LGBT social scene in Dublin was important for those experiencing isolation in Cork. Growing up in Cork in the 1960s and 1970s Barra O'D⁷ experienced an increasing fear that he might be 'one of those'. He was acutely aware of the hostility towards, and ridicule of, gay people and the pressure to hide who you were.

Your options were stark: hide and conform or become a pariah and object of ridicule, derision and hate. Not surprisingly, many chose to check out of our society. Tragically, for many that meant self-destruction in its various forms.

Barra describes finding a social scene and a community in Dublin:

To realise after your entire life that you are not alone is a very powerful experience, and I felt that I had a lot of catching up to do in terms of growing up and being emotionally involved with another person. After a lifetime of hiding and denial, it was great fun with this new group of friends to spend 90 per cent of our time together commenting on guys. Much of the rest of our conversation was spent talking about who knows, who doesn't know and who will never know.

Many Cork LGBT people emigrated to cities such as London, where they could find a larger and more open LGBT community and escape from the isolation and hostility they faced in Cork.

When Mary⁸ began to realise that she was lesbian in Cork in the early 1970s she found it very difficult to find any information or supports.

She contacted the telephone helpline of the Samaritans – they told her it was 'just a phase.'

I found the situation very stressful and lonely and I ended up being hospitalised.

In the end Mary moved to London where she found a lesbian group.

I was so delighted to meet other lesbians and discover that we were normal.

Bernie moved to London when she was 17, in the mid 1970s. She realised she was gay at 19 when she met a gay man in a bar where she worked.

I instantly took a liking to him. I said, 'you're very girly', and he said, 'I'm gay.' I asked, 'what's that?' He told me and I thought, 'that's me – that's me definitely!' After that I was very actively gay!

Bernie returned to Cork in the late 1970s and she told her mother she was gay. Her mother's response was, "Ah sure, we're all happy!" Bernie had to spell it out for her mother, eventually saying, "Mother I have sex with women." Her mother's response was, "Oh Jesus Christ Almighty, don't tell your father." However, her mother went on to tell everyone in the family, and that was that. Bernie would bring all her gay friends back to her parents' house for parties on a regular basis, where they were welcomed by her family.⁹

SOCIALISING IN BARS: 1970s CORK

In the early/mid 1970s, gay men and some lesbians began to meet in the bar of Imperial Hotel on weekend nights and early Sunday evenings. It was known as Bangladesh because of the décor. This provided an important public venue for LGBT people to find one another. As one gay man commented, "You were pretty much

guaranteed to meet someone there.”¹⁰ A gay woman tells of going there on Friday and Saturday nights with her gay male friends. They wouldn’t have much money, so they would buy one cocktail between them and stay there all evening. However, some LGBT people in Cork at the time knew that the Imperial was a meeting place for gays but were afraid to be seen to be going there in case they were ‘outed’.

The Green Room, on the corner of Paul Street and Academy Street, was a popular bar for gay men and some lesbians in Cork in the 1970s and early 1980s. It was frequented by the ‘theatrical crowd’ from the Opera House and other venues; as one woman commented, “Everyone went there, anyone who was interesting. I used to hang out there because I wanted to be interesting. I used to love the Green Room coz it was so alternative there.” It was one of the few public venues where gays could be somewhat open with one another.¹¹

Le Château on Patrick’s Street became a popular meeting place for gays in the 1970s. In the mid 1970s, the London newsletter *Gay News* included Le Château in a listing of ‘gay friendly’ locations in the UK and Ireland. When the owner of Le Château saw this she barred the gays she considered ‘too obvious’. The more ‘acceptable’ gays were not barred.¹²

Krojaks nightclub on Carey’s Lane was a popular dance venue for Cork LGBT people in the 1970s. The restaurant in the club was Gordon’s Gallery, named after Dave Gordon, a popular and vivacious gay man, and a key figure in the Cork ballet community.

The Steeple Bar by Shandon provided a welcoming and safe environment for the LGBT community, particularly the lesbian community, in the late 1970s and 1980s. It was run by Claire O’Sullivan: “She was great to the gay community, but she was never acknowledged for it. I was there nearly every night. You could sit down there, you could hold hands, there was no problem – it was very alternative.”¹³ Cathal Kerrigan describes The Steeple

Bar as being “like a refuge with a great sense of community.”¹⁴

Hill’s Bar, on the corner of Patrick’s Hill and MacCurtain Street, became a popular meeting place for gay men and a small number of lesbians. Later on, Stripes bar opened across from Hills on MacCurtain Street – most of the clientele were gay.

CORK GAY RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The first Cork LGBT organisation, the Cork Branch of the IGRM (Irish Gay Rights Movement) was set up in 1975.

The Dublin Branch of the IGRM had been set up in 1974. *The Sunday World* newspaper had published an article about the newly founded IGRM and gave a P.O. box address for the group. A lot of people from Munster got in touch through the P.O. box, and given the level of interest, it was decided to hold a meeting in Cork.

In 1975, two members of the Dublin branch, Sean Connolly and Clem Clancy, came down to Cork. They booked a room, under a pseudonym, and invited everyone from Munster who had been in touch. Around 60 people turned up, and it was decided to form a Cork Branch. The original committee members included Cathal Kerrigan, Bert Meaney, Sean, Oliver Cogan and Pat.¹⁵

The aim of the IGRM was to improve the lifestyle of the homosexual in Ireland. These aims were to be achieved through:

- (i) *Reform of laws relating to homosexuality.*
- (ii) *Removal of social prejudice and misconceptions regarding homosexuality.*
- (iii) *Provision of counselling, befriending and social facilities for homosexuals.*¹⁶

THE BUTTERFLY CLUB

In the mid 1970s a butterfly club in Cork became the unlikely location for gay meetings.

Following the establishment in 1975 of the Cork branch of the IGRM finding rooms for meetings or social events for the LGBT community was problematic. Most venues would refuse a booking from a gay group and, as Cathal Kerrigan notes, “Even if they did, there was so much fear in the community about being identified at the time, that most people wouldn’t come.”¹⁷

Pat, one of the members of the Cork IGRM’s Committee, was also Secretary of the local lepidopterists club (The Butterfly Club). This club had access to community rooms in the yard at the back of St. Francis’ Church in Cork city centre. Pat had the keys and suggested using this venue for a cheese and wine event. In order to get permission from the lepidopterist club, he told them that it was for a literacy support group!

These afternoon cheese and wine social events were held on the first Sunday of each month. The room was on the first floor of a building at the rear of the car park in a non-residential area, providing a degree of safety for gay people who did not want to be noticed attending a gay event. Word spread and the event became popular with around 30-50 people attending. One man recalls, “I remember I had my first gay kiss there.”

However, The Butterfly Club gatherings were short-lived. After a few months one of the other members of The Butterfly Club became suspicious and started asking questions. As Cathal Kerrigan comments, “Success brought its own problems. While everyone was careful not to draw undue attention, by leaving in small groups etc, Sunday was not a shopping day back then and North Main Street was very quiet. The activity there could not go unobserved.”

One Sunday, there was a knock on the door as the group was

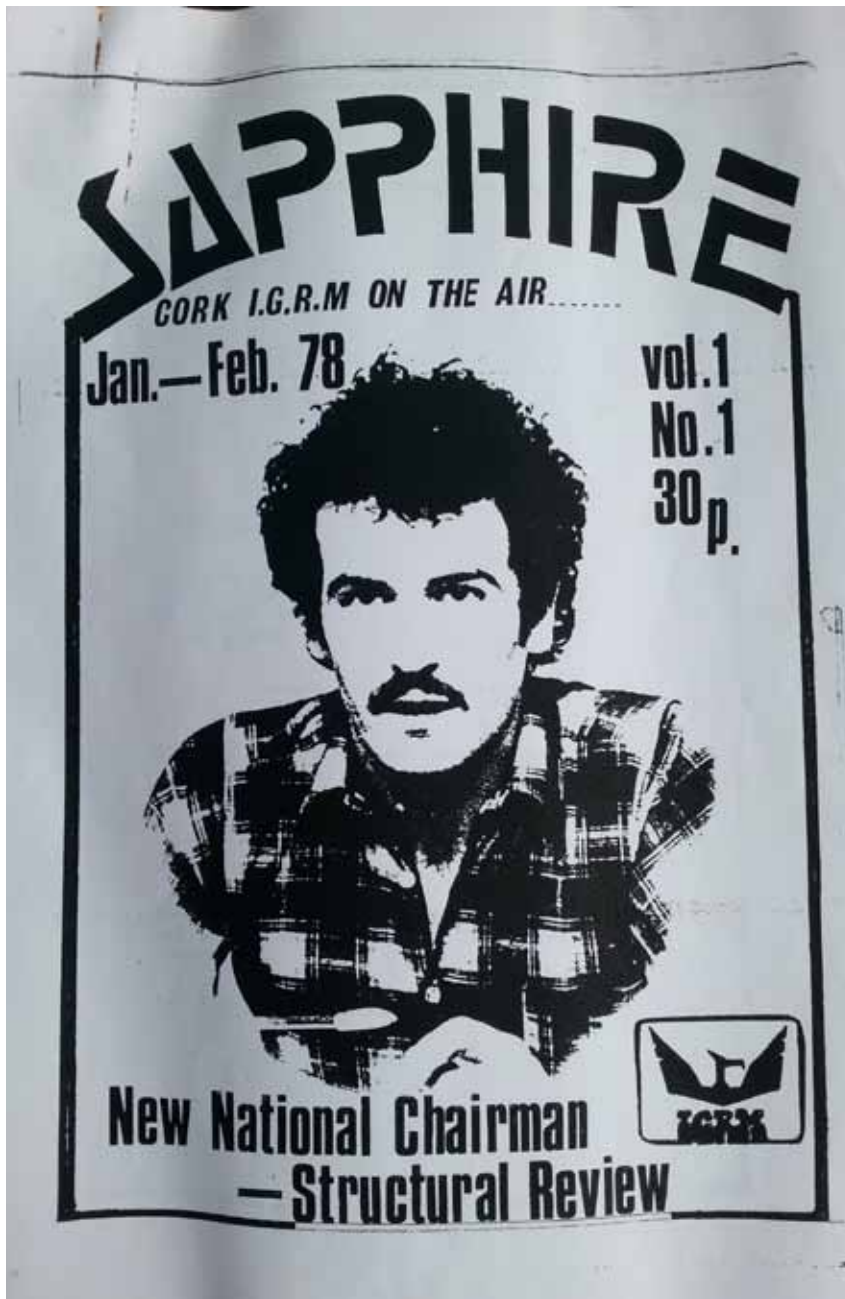
setting up for that day’s social. Pat answered the door to his fellow committee member from the lepidopterists club. He told Pat that he knew that something ‘questionable’ was going on. As Cathal remembers, “He gave Pat an ultimatum: He’d say nothing to rest of the club committee provided it ended there and then. Pat agreed. The other committee member had said he’d return in half an hour to check!”

The gays packed everything up and Edmund offered his apartment in Sunday’s Well as an alternative venue, and efforts were made to let people know. According to Cathal, “A couple of us stayed behind to hang around the gateway and inform people of the change of venue. We didn’t have mobile phones or e-mail in those days, just landlines and not many people had them, but phone calls were made to those we knew who did.”

This event highlighted the need for a safe gay venue where members of the LGBT community could gather and organise without fear of being discovered or being told to leave. As Cathal Kerrigan comments, “When we had time to reflect, several of us felt that our scurrying away like criminals was pathetic. We decided we needed to be bolder and assertive. Several of the Cork IGRM committee members had business experience, and with the funds gathered through the cheese and wine event, set about finding a premises. This was how the 4 MacCurtain Street premises was found and set up.”

NO. 4 MACCURTAIN STREET: CORK’S FIRST GAY CENTRE

The first Cork gay centre opened in 1976 at No.4 MacCurtain Street. This provided an important space for the LGBT community, with social and community activities being organised, including weekend discos, newsletters and a telephone helpline.

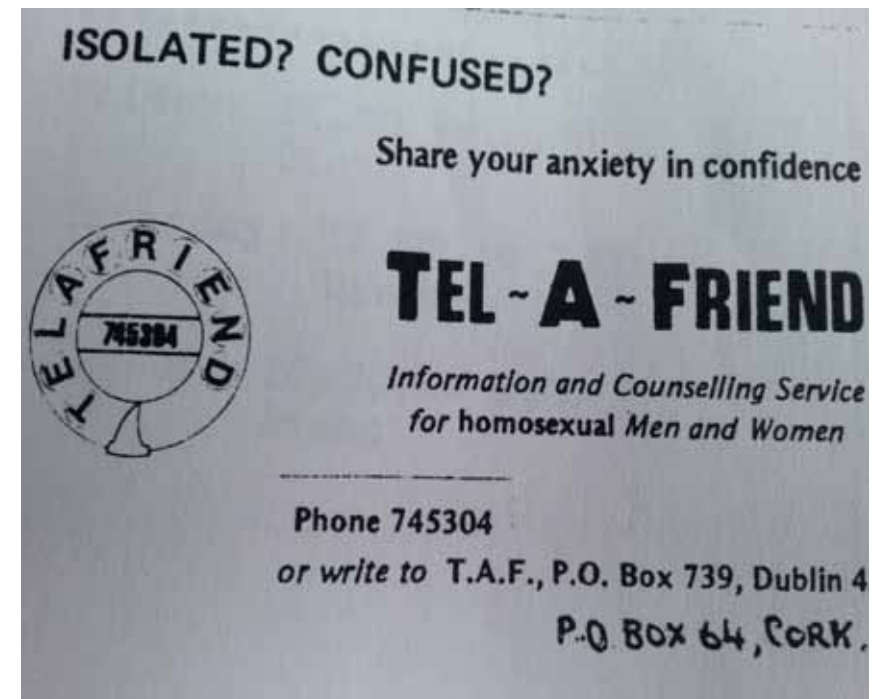


Sapphire Cork IGRM Newsletter 1978, Arthur Leahy Collection

Weekend discos and social events were held here up to the mid 1980s. The gay centre provided a more public space for the LGBT community to socialise than the private parties. The Cork discos were predominantly male, but some women did socialise there too.

Bernie recalls the No.4 Club as the best club ever. “It was brilliant, a great place to go. It was great fun.” She recalls a great sense of community there.¹⁸ It was really important to have a safe space where people could be openly affectionate and dance together. It was a time when it was not safe for LGBT people to hold hands publicly in Cork, and gay men in particular were subjected to a lot of public harassment and assaults.

The Cork IGRM set up a telephone helpline and counselling service, *Tel-A-Friend*, to provide support and advice to gay people.



Tel-A-Friend Advert in Sapphire Newsletter, 1978 Arthur Leahy Collection

The nascent LGBT community sought to challenge misinformation and prejudice about LGBT people, for example through media programmes on radio and on TV. In 1977, four issues of a Cork gay newsletter, *Corks Crew*, were published. In 1978 the Cork IGRM began to publish the newsletter *Sapphire*.

The Cork IGRM engaged in informal discussions with local Gardai, and a good working relationship was established. The Gay Centre was directly across the road from the Garda Station. They would visit the club regularly and check if everyone was over 18, that they were members of the club and that no alcohol was consumed (there was no bar licence), but in general the Gardai did not interfere or try to prevent the operation of the Gay Centre. Unlike the situation in Dublin, I have found no reports of gay men being arrested and publicly shamed in Cork in the 1970s.

At this stage the community identified as gay and lesbian, with little acknowledgment of, or respect for, bisexual and transgender people. From the beginning, tensions emerged between lesbians and gay men, with struggles over the allocation of resources for lesbian activities.

CORK LESBIANS: 1970s

The first Cork lesbian meeting of which I am aware took place on 30th January 1978. This meeting took place in the gay centre at No. 4 MacCurtain Street. It was part of an attempt to set up a specifically lesbian social scene in Cork. There were negotiations with the Cork IGRM to try to make the gay centre available exclusively for women one night a week.

Marian Barry wrote a short article in the 1978 edition of *Sapphire* about this lesbian meeting:

Since the formation of the Cork Branch of the IGRM the gay women of this city have been considering setting up a social scene for themselves. Now that the facilities of the club have been made exclusively available to us for one night a week, I will try with your assistance to get this underway. The first women's meeting will take place on Monday 30th January, 1978 at 8pm, and hopefully will continue on each subsequent Monday at the same time. Looking forward to your support.¹⁹

Bernie recalls that the meetings continued for some time, with women meeting at the No.4 Centre and then going to The Metropole for a drink and then on up to The Steeple Bar. After a while the formal meetings stopped and women met in The Steeple instead for a drink and a chat. Bernie recalls “loads of lesbians coming into the Steeple” in the early 1980s.²⁰

It seems that Cork lesbians continued to encounter difficulties in trying to negotiate space and support within the MacCurtain Street centre. One of the motions passed at a 1981 National Gay Conference in Cork proposed that, “the men in MacCurtain Street allocate one evening of each week for a social run by women for women.”²¹ This would seem to indicate a lack of support for independent women’s activities in the MacCurtain street centre and that the centre continued to be geared primarily towards the needs of gay men in the city.

The Cork Women’s Collective (CWC) was set up in late 1978/ early 1979, following two public meetings on feminist issues. The CWC campaigned on various issues, including contraception, abortion, rape, politics and nationalism. According to Joan McCarthy, there was very strong lesbian involvement in the CWC and there was good support for issues of concern to lesbians.²²

HOMOSEXUALS IN CORK: RADIO PROGRAMME, 1978

On 20 January 1978 members of the Cork branch of the IGRM took part in a radio programme, *Homosexuals in Cork*, that was aired on CorkAbout, the Cork RTÉ (Ireland's national broadcaster) local radio programme. This was significant in drawing attention to the issues affecting LGBT people living in Cork and to highlight the activities and services provided by the IGRM.

Oliver Cogan wrote an article about the programme in *Sapphire*, the Cork IGRM's newsletter. The twenty-minute programme included interviews with Bert Meaney, Oliver Cogan and Anne Philpott on the "legal, religious, social and personal aspects of gay life in Cork." There was also a live discussion between a psychiatrist, a priest and a solicitor that "covered the medical, legal and religious aspects of homosexuality." Discussing the response to the programme, Olive Cogan notes, "From the very start of the programme the phones in RTÉ were literally 'hopping'. Listeners comments ranged from 'take that rubbish off the air' to complete support for the contributors and the organization. Whatever the general consensus of opinion, the programme certainly stimulated discussion."²³

TELEVISION INTERVIEWS

RTÉ broadcast a number of interviews during the 1970s/1980s that helped to highlight the existence of the LGBT community in Ireland and the issues the community faced.

On 11 February 1980 Cork gay couple Arthur Leahy and Laurie Steele were interviewed by Áine O'Connor for the *Week In* programme on RTÉ.²⁴ The interview highlighted many of the issues and challenges facing gay people in Ireland in 1980 and also

discussed what the gay community was doing to address these challenges and bring about positive social change. The couple was filmed walking through the streets of Cork, as well as in their home in Cork. This was important in showing the existence and activism of LGBT people outside of the confines of Dublin.



Laurie Steele and Arthur Leahy RTÉ television interview 1980

In 1979, RTÉ's *Late Late Show* included an interview about the Irish Trans organisation, Friends of Eon. In the same year Pat Kenny's *Day by Day* programme on RTÉ radio focused on transgender people in Ireland. In 1980 RTÉ's *Summertime* TV programme focused on the life of an Irish trans woman.²⁵ These programmes began the process of acknowledging the existence and experiences of transgender people in Ireland.

In February 1980, Joni Sherrin (later known as Joni Crone) was interviewed on the *Late Late Show* on RTÉ and declared, “I am lesbian and I am proud.” Joni is usually credited as being the first out Irish lesbian to appear on Irish national television. However, Teresa Blanch was interviewed on behalf of IGRM on RTÉ’s *Tuesday Report* in 1977.²⁶

Joni Crone’s appearance on the *Late Late Show* was very important in terms of lesbian visibility. Corkonian Louise Walsh writes of her reaction to seeing Joni Crone on the programme:

*As a teenager I was saved from the notion of homophobia by the appearance of Joni Crone on the Late Late Show in 1980. She was the first Irish lesbian to come out loud and clear on Irish national television, claiming her space with humour, honesty and dignity. Although I had no idea that I was queer myself at the time, her appearance raised questions for me regarding the negative representations of lesbians and gay men that were prevalent at the time. I’d seen one on the telly, and she was brilliant!*²⁷



Cork Gay Collective Poster *Arthur Leahy Collection*

CORK GAY COLLECTIVE

MANIFESTO

The laws on homosexuality are an unwarranted intrusion on personal freedom. They must be repealed, but legal changes are merely beginning; society's view of sexuality and the structures reflecting that view, must be altered. The Cork Gay Collective encourages gay people to have a positive view of their sexuality, to live fully and to challenge society's control by coming out in the family, work, church and social life.

We fight against job discrimination, for equal access to accommodation, for freedom from harassment and for the equal right to express our feelings. Underlying this fight is the need for access to, an dissemination of positive information about sexuality in the media and through all educational structures.

We are convinced that this struggle cannot take place in isolation and that gay liberation involves the freeing of all oppressed groups. Therefore we work

towards forging links with other movements for social progress. In particular we emphasise our solidarity with the women's movement, recognising that our shared oppression derives from the abuse of sexuality as a tool of exploitation which necessitated strict gender stereotyping and the denial of sexual fulfillment.

Further, we are internationalist; the oppression of gays is not solely an Irish problem nor a feature of one particular economic or political system. We pledge solidarity with our sisters and brothers everywhere who suffer oppression because of their sexual orientation and we make this solidarity part of our practical work. We are products of society's conditioning and are aware of the danger of oppressive relations among ourselves. We are attempting to overcome this danger by developing more open and responsive structures for communications.

Cork Gay collective
agreed statement
25th Jan. 1981.



The 1980s brought a significant increase in LGBT activism in Cork; a number of new groups were formed and a more radical political perspective developed. The opening of the Quay Co-op in 1982 and Loafers Bar in 1983 provided important bases for LGBT activism and socialising, as well as fostering close links with other radical, left-wing, 'alternative' groups and activists in the city. In the 1980s many LGBT people were involved in political campaigns, movements for social change and in responding to the AIDS crisis. However, some LGBT people found these political activist groups to be alienating and boring and they were more interested in the LGBT social scene and in having fun. These two worlds (political and social) sometimes existed separately but often overlapped.

The community was still primarily lesbian and gay; in the 1980s there was still very little acknowledgment of or respect for the transgender and bisexual communities.

CORK GAY COLLECTIVE

The Cork Gay Collective (CGC) was set up in 1980. It was established as a new, more radical type of Irish gay group, a departure from what many would have seen as the more reformist policies of groups like the Irish Gay Rights Movement and the National Gay Federation.

The CGC recognised that legal change was important, but that this was not enough. What was needed was a deeper challenge

to society's view of sexuality and gender stereotyping. They sought to encourage more positive and open attitudes among gay people to their sexuality. They also located the struggle for gay rights as part of a wider movement for social change and made links between homophobia and discrimination against gays and lesbians and other oppressed groups in Ireland and internationally.

CORK GAY COLLECTIVE MANIFESTO

It was common for 1980s organisations to produce a manifesto, outlining their aims and objectives. Cathal Kerrigan recalls that the Cork Gay Collective's Manifesto was "hammered out through several hours-long argumentative meetings of the half-dozen members – Arthur Leahy, Cathal Kerrigan, Donal Sheehan, Kieran Rose, Laurie Steele and Tony O'Regan."²⁸

The following is the text of the Cork Gay Collective's Manifesto, produced in 1981:²⁹

The laws on homosexuality are an unwarranted intrusion on personal freedom. They must be repealed. Legal changes are merely a beginning: society's view of sexuality and the structures reflecting that view, must be altered. The Cork Gay Collective encourages gay people to have a positive view of their sexuality, to live fully and to challenge society's control by coming out in the family, work, church and social life.

We fight against job discrimination, for equal access to accommodation, for freedom from harassment and for the equal right to express our feelings. Underlying

this fight is the need for access to and dissemination of positive information about sexuality in the media and through all educational structures.

We are convinced that this struggle cannot take place in isolation and that gay liberation involves the freeing of all oppressed groups. Therefore we work towards forging links with other movements for social progress. In particular we emphasise our solidarity with the Women's Movement, recognising that our shared oppression derives from the abuse of sexuality as a tool of exploitation which necessitated strict gender stereotyping and the denial of sexual fulfilment.

Further, we are internationalist; the oppression of gays is not solely an Irish problem nor a feature of one particular economic or political system. We pledge solidarity with our sisters and brothers everywhere who suffer oppression because of their sexual orientation and we make this solidarity part of our practical work. We are products of society's conditioning and are aware of the danger of oppressed relations amongst ourselves. We are attempting to overcome this danger by developing more open and responsive structures for communication.

GAY THEATRE CORK: 1980

In 1980 the London-based gay theatre group, Gay Sweatshop, performed their play *Blood Green* in the Granary Theatre in Cork.³⁰ This was one of the first events organised by the newly formed Cork Gay Collective. Gay Sweatshop was established in 1975. Their aim was "to expose the media misrepresentation

GAY SWEATSHOP PRESENTS

BLOOD GREEN



of the homosexual and to increase general awareness of the oppression of sexuality both homosexual and straight.”³¹

According to reports in *In Touch*, Gay Sweatshop played to “packed enthusiastic houses” in Cork³², but to small audiences in Dublin. The Junior Common Room in Trinity College, where the performance was held in Dublin, was broken into and the set damaged.³³

Kieran Rose, a founding member of the Cork Gay Collective, reflected on the experience of organising this event as part of the newly formed CGC. It provided the new group with valuable experience in organising an event.

The project was critical in our development as gays because the work put in and its success gave each of us a sense of our collective strength and a feeling of solidarity from working together as gays.

It was the first time that a gay political theatre group played in Cork. Despite the fact that there was little controversy locally, the play, discussion etc. helped to make gay rights more of an issue for Cork people.

Although at times it was a hard slog, it was an exhilarating experience for the gays involved. We have our bars and discos, but for most of us this was the first time seeing a public performance by lesbians and gays in our own town - it was a step out of the ghetto. Also, it was re-inforcing to meet and work with strongly confident gays.

*In addition to everything else it was fun, especially the parties.*³⁴

UCC GAY SOC

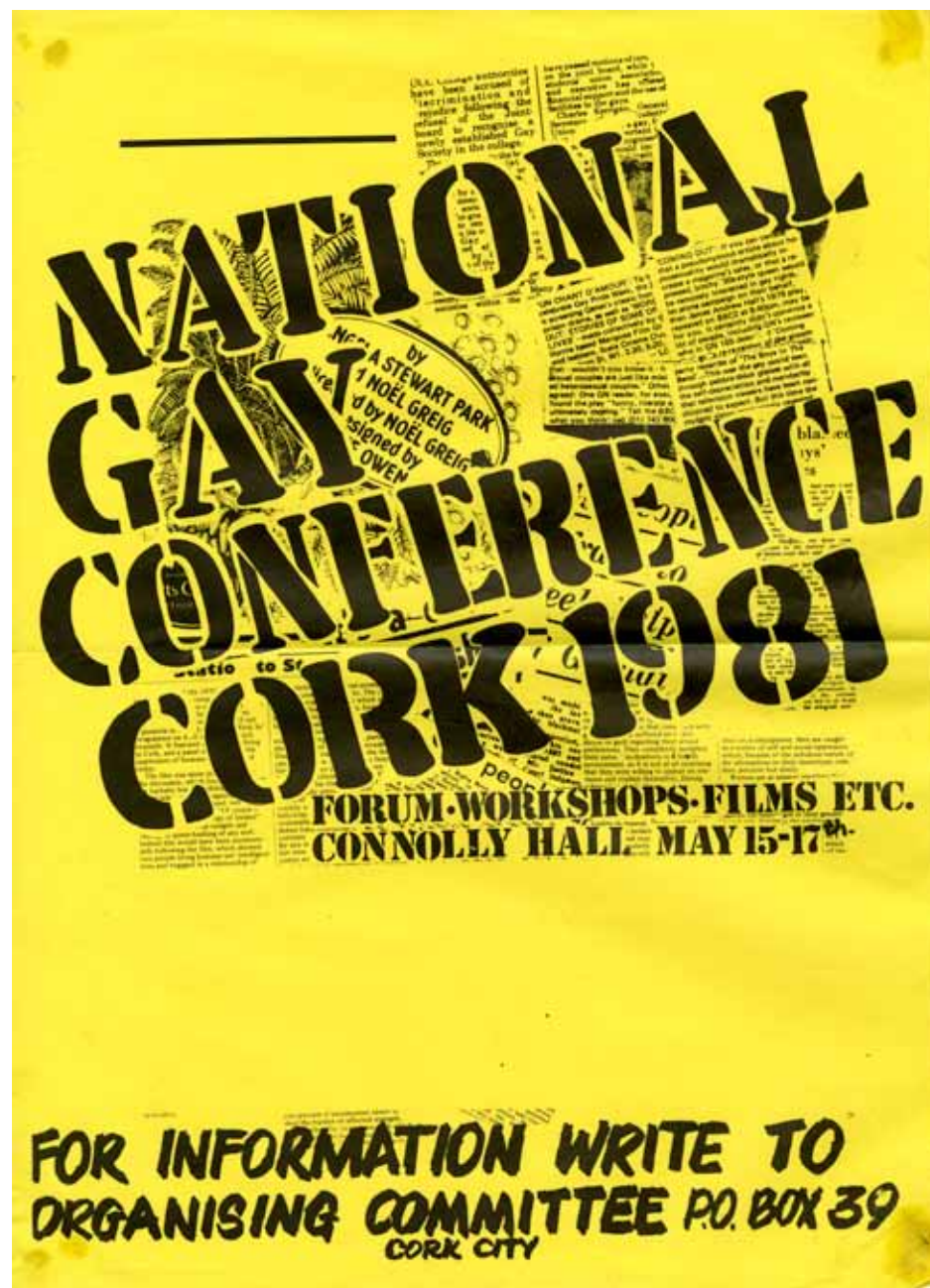
The UCC GaySoc was established in December 1980 following a debate at the UCC Philosophical Society, addressed by Cathal Kerrigan and David Norris. The motion was “That this House supports the establishment of a college gay society”. The motion was supported, and over 30 members joined the GaySoc.

The Society’s aim was “to promote and support socially, politically and legally the well-being of gay people in the University community and the community at large.” The group began to meet weekly in the UCC Student’s Union. In January 1981 the GaySoc applied to the Joint Board of UCC for recognition as a college society, but was refused recognition.³⁵

The Auditor of the UCC Gay Society, Donnacha McCarthy, commented that the Society deeply regretted the decision of the Joint Board as they felt it reflected the ignorance and lack of understanding of the problems gay people face in an institution like UCC. It also exhibited an undeniable discrimination in that this was one of the first societies in the university to be refused recognition.³⁶

A leaflet produced by the UCC GaySoc (undated but probably circa 1984) notes that college is a time when many students explore their sexuality and come out as a gay person. It stresses the importance of meeting and gaining strength and support from other gay people. It also emphasises the political significance of the GaySoc’s activities and locates itself within wider social change movements:

Affirming the validity of your gay identity, being with other gay people is a political act, challenging the social and institutional control of our sexual lives is a political struggle. We welcome the co-operation of the Socialist Society because we see the struggle for the rights of gay people as being part of the larger struggle for



Poster National Gay Conference Cork 1981 Arthur Leahy Collection

*socialism. Our rights will not be granted freely by the establishment. We will have to take them. And we can only do this by organising with others who realise that their needs demand also that this society is radically changed. This means organised workers and women.*³⁷

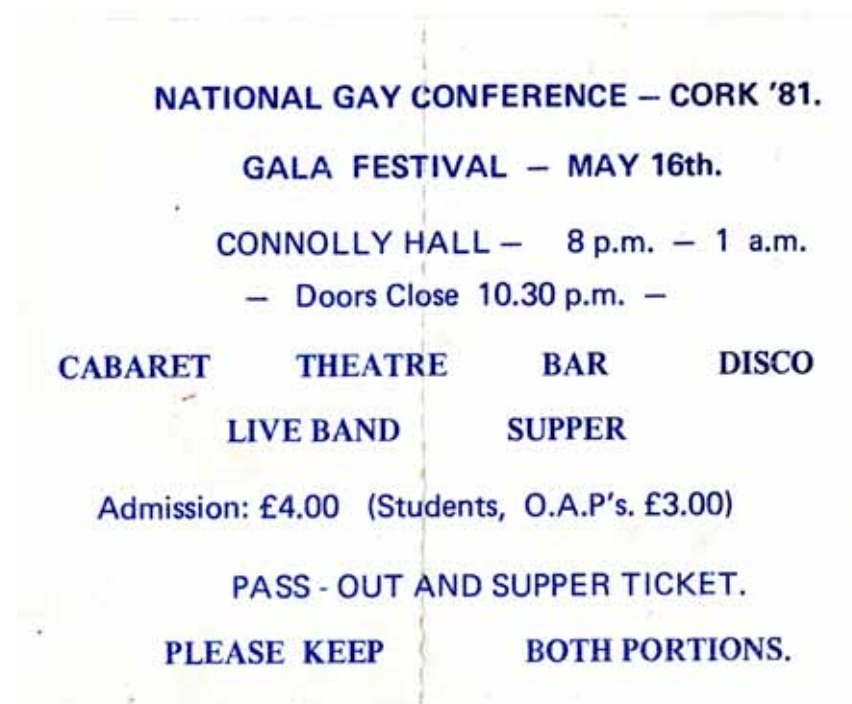
In April 1989 UCC became the first constituent college of the National University of Ireland to give recognition to a gay group, enabling the UCC Lesbian and Gay Support Group to avail of funding and facilities in the college. UCC would later become the first Irish University to establish a Staff LGBT Society.

IRISH TRANSGENDER WEEKEND

The Irish transgender organisation, Friends of Eon, organised a transgender weekend 22-24 November 1980, at Killoshane Castle near Borrisoleigh Co. Tipperary. This was an important opportunity for Irish transgender people to socialise together in a safe setting. It is likely that Cork transgender people attended this weekend away.³⁸

1981 NATIONAL GAY CONFERENCE CORK

The first ever Irish National Gay Conference was held in Cork 15-17 May 1981. The Cork Gay Collective, the Cork IGRM, the UCC GaySoc, as well as a number of individuals, came together to organise the conference, bringing together lesbian and gay activists and organisations from throughout Ireland, with a number of British and American activists also attending. The basic aim of the conference was “to fulfil an accepted need for a general assessment of the progress of the gay movement in Ireland to date and to consider fresh initiatives for the future.”³⁹



Ticket for Gala Ball, National Gay Conference Cork 1981 Arthur Leahy Collection

Over 200 people attended the conference, participating in workshops on a wide range of topics.

Workshops were held on the following topics:

- ↪ Gay Identity
- ↪ Gays and Partition
- ↪ Gay Archives
- ↪ Gays and Religion
- ↪ Young Gays
- ↪ Gays and the Left
- ↪ Women's Workshops

- ✧ Structures for Development
- ✧ Gay Rights/Human Rights
- ✧ Gays in the Media
- ✧ Gays and the Medical Profession
- ✧ Gays and the Law
- ✧ Gays in Isolation
- ✧ Gay Activism
- ✧ Gays and the Women's Movement
- ✧ Gays and the Trade Union Movement
- ✧ Disabled Gays
- ✧ Gays in Education.⁴⁰

Forty-nine motions were passed by the conference. Kieran Rose comments that these motions “set the agenda for the lesbian and gay movement for more than a decade.”⁴¹

On the Saturday night a Gala Dance for gays and friends was held in Connolly Hall. This was seen as an important event in its own right.

*It was a wonderful night of fun. It was a unique experience to see hundreds of mixed couples dancing together in a public building. For us this dance was as politically important as the rest of the conference and it certainly was a night to remember for anyone who had attended.*⁴²

The importance of the 1981 National Gay Conference in Cork has been acknowledged by a number of commentators. Kieran Rose claims, “The conference made a significant contribution to the development of an indigenous theory and practice of lesbian and gay politics in Ireland.”⁴³

Writing in In Touch newsletter in June/July 1981, T. McC comments:

The Cork Conference will, I feel, become to the gay rights movement in Ireland what Stonewall is to the gay liberation movement worldwide. It was not so much the discussions at the workshops or the strategy for the future which we talked about (although these are important) but rather the spirit of unity and the recognition of diversity of view and approach which marks the threshold which we have crossed. The Cork Conference is already the symbol of the unity of the gay movement in Ireland. All gay organisations in Ireland were represented, gay women were working with gay men, major goals of the 80s were isolated and the commitment to work together towards them was made. The conference was a statement about the growing confidence and maturity of the Irish gay liberation movement. Gay men and women have been coming out of their closets for years. Now, in a sense in which it has never happened before, the gay movement is coming out of its closet. The healthy diversity of the movement, the diversity which leads to constructive analysis of our prospects in Ireland, was much in evidence at the conference. The divisions among us, which all too easily divert, did not. The gay community is looking forward!”⁴⁴

CORK GAY PRIDE 1981

One of the first Cork Pride events was organised in 1981. As part of Gay Pride Week in June 1981, the Cork LGBT community produced and distributed leaflets in Cork city centre calling for



GAY PRIDE WEEK
20:28 JUNE 81



GAY RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

**5 to 10% OF THE IRISH POPULATION
IS GAY**

OVER 6,000 IN CORK ALONE

**IRELAND IS THE ONLY EUROPEAN
COUNTRY WHICH STILL LEGISLATES
AGAINST GAYS**

**WE DEMAND SOCIAL AND
LEGAL EQUALITY NOW!**

GAY RIGHTS NOW!

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**THE RIGHTS OF LESBIAN WOMEN
AND GAY MEN**

The homosexual minority in Ireland has long been a repressed and oppressed minority. It is also a large minority, if the conservative figures are accepted this minority is larger than all of the religious minorities put together. The gay minority has long lived in fear, isolation and loneliness, frightened to live their lifestyle in a country with a barbarous official attitude towards it. Gay men and lesbian women are now organising and demand the rights they deserve in dignity as human beings and Irish citizens.

**THE RIGHT TO FORM LOVING
RELATIONSHIPS WITHOUT
BEING LABELLED CRIMINALS**

Ireland is the only remaining sovereign state in Western Europe which criminalises male homosexuality. The laws are uncivilised. The smallest show of affection amounts to 'gross indecency' - for greater offences the penalties range from 10 years to life imprisonment with hard labour. These uncivilised laws date from the middle of the last century. Lesbian women, although not criminals in law, suffer from the general label of criminality given by these laws to homosexuality. Every year half a dozen to a dozen men have their lives ruined by being charged under these laws. We demand an end to this official barbarism.

**THE RIGHT TO LIVE AS CITIZENS
EQUAL BEFORE THE LAW WITH
OTHERS**

We ask for not only cosmetic change in the statutes but real changes which will protect the rights of lesbian women and gay men before the law. In the sexual and emotional sphere we want equality with heterosexual citizens. This means that we demand the same rights with regard to the age of consent, the right to be publicly affectionate without being criminals, the right to work and lead useful lives without the threat of sanctions, such as sacking, on the grounds of homosexuality. We also demand the right for those of us who have children, particularly lesbian women, to have the rights of custody of those children and access to those children on an equal footing with heterosexual parents.

**WE DEMAND AN EDUCATION
WHICH SUITS OUR NEEDS**

Irish education in general ignores the area of human loving relationships. To the extent that our educational system deals with human relationships it paints a narrow unrealistic view of the scope of these relationships. It puts women and men into stereotypical roles - the only possible relationship being a one-to-one match between man and woman. This situation leads to great unhappiness and fear among school-going adolescents of a homosexual orientation. Along with the usual pressures of adolescent life many young Irish women and men face an isolation which scars them for many years after. An educational system which perpetrates myths and ignorance about the complexity of human relationships is out of touch with a world in which all of us must deal with these complexities. It ensures that the parents, relatives, friends, teachers and doctors of the lesbian women and gay men are often unable to cope with this diversity but react with fear, ignorance and sometimes hostility. We share the desire of the women's movement and many other sections of our society for change in the educational system.

We intend to continue our struggle until our demands are met. We intend to begin sensible debate in Irish society on the question of homosexuality. There are many myths to be dispelled, much ignorance to be informed and in the coming months and years we will be active in this process. More and more gay men and lesbian women in Ireland are proud to be gay. We will continue to live honest, open life styles and more will join us. We will not go away. Perhaps its time you thought about your attitudes. Are you ready for the day when you discover that someone close to you is a member of our not so small minority?

**gay rights
are
human rights**

IRISH GAY RIGHTS MOVEMENT:

CORK: 4 McCurtain Street, Tel 505394.
Gay Switchboard: Tel. 505394.
Postal enquiries: P.O. Box 1, Cork.
WATERFORD: P.O. Box 36, Waterford

CORK GAY COLLECTIVE: P.O. Box 39, Cork

U.C.C. GAYSOC: c/o Students Union Office, U.C.C.

‘equal rights for gays in Irish society’.⁴⁵ The action was organised by the Cork Gay Collective and the Cork branch of the IGRM (Irish Gay Rights Movement).

The bright pink leaflet stated, “Gay rights are human rights”. The back of the leaflet provided more detailed discussion of the issues facing LGBT people in Cork and in Ireland.⁴⁶ The ‘homosexual minority’ was described as a ‘repressed and oppressed minority.’ “The gay minority has long lived in fear, isolation and loneliness, frightened to live their lifestyle in a country with a barbarous official attitude towards it. Gay men and lesbian women are now organising and demand the rights they deserve in dignity as human beings and Irish citizens.”

The leaflet went on to state some of these demands: “We ask for not only cosmetic change in the statutes, but real changes which will protect the rights of lesbian women and gay men before the law. In the sexual and emotional sphere we want equality with heterosexual citizens. This means that we demand the same rights with regard to the age of consent, the right to be publicly affectionate without being criminals, the right to work and lead useful lives without the threat of sanctions, such as sacking, on the grounds of homosexuality. We also demand the right of those of us who have children, particularly lesbian women, to have the rights of custody of those children and access to those children on an equal footing with heterosexual parents.”

Early pride marches in Cork were small and scary. The few brave LGBT people who marched down Cork city centre streets in the early 1980s were often met with hostility and silence. Michael O’Sullivan, a Cork bus driver, trade unionist and left-wing activist, tells of how he and some colleagues decided to lend support to their gay friends during the Cork pride march. A number of bus drivers, in full uniform, along with other trade union activists, positioned themselves along the South Mall in Cork and shouted out support to their gay friends as they passed

by. This was accompanied by some friendly teasing or ‘slagging’ as it is called in Cork. Michael felt that this was important in breaking the hostile silence that had greeted the march up to that point.⁴⁷

LGBT SUPPORT FOR H-BLOCK PROTESTS

In 1981 a group, Lesbians and Gays Against H-Block Armagh, was formed to support the campaign for political status for republican prisoners imprisoned in Northern Ireland.⁴⁸ The group was formed by two members of the Cork Gay Collective, Cathal Kerrigan and Máirtín Mac an Ghoill, along with Tarlach MacNiallais from Belfast. In 1983 some members of that group went on to form Gays Against Imperialism.⁴⁹

WORK & TRADE UNIONS

Equality at work was an issue of key concern to the LGBT community. Many LGBT people feared discrimination or dismissal if they were open about their sexual orientation or gender identity. A workshop on Gays and the Trade Union Movement was held at the National Gay Conference in Cork in May 1981.

A number of motions in relation to work were passed by the Conference, including the following:

The achievement of equal employment rights for lesbians and gay men should be a priority for the Gay Movement.

The Conference calls on all trade unionists to support the rights of lesbian and gay workers.

The Conference recognises the central role the Trade

*Union Movement plays in defending and advancing the rights of workers and calls on all lesbian and gay men to be active in their union.*⁵⁰

The Conference also passed a motion recommending that the Cork Gay Collective act as an information centre for all individuals working on the issue of gay rights at work.⁵¹

In 1982 Kieran Rose and Tricia Tracey succeed in getting the Cork Branch of the LGPSU (Local Government and Public Service Union) to pass the following motion:

That this Union calls on the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to work for:

(1) repeal of those laws criminalising consenting homosexual act between men (i.e. Section 51 and 52 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 and Section 2 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885)

(2) amendment of the Unfair Dismissals Act, 1977, the Employment Equality Act, 1977, and the legislation dealing with the employment of civil servants, the armed forces and the Gardaí to prevent discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

The motion was subsequently passed by the Annual Congress of the LGPSU and can be seen as the beginning of moves which led to decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1993 and the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender equality in the Employment Equality and Equal Status legislation passed in the 1990s.⁵²

GAY GAMES

Cork LGBT people have won gold medals at all the Gay Games

since they started in San Francisco in 1982. The Gay Games is a quadrennial athletic event that brings together international LGBT athletes to compete in a range of sports.⁵³

An American Olympic decathlon athlete, Tom Waddell, started the Gay Games in 1982 in San Francisco. In that first year, Cork

Niamh Walsh winning gold, Gay Games Amsterdam, 1998 *Niamh Walsh Collection*



gay man Oliver Murphy won a gold medal in the decathlon. He did it again the following Gay Games in San Francisco in 1986.

Cork lesbian Niamh Walsh competed in the Gay Games in Vancouver (1990), New York (1994) and Amsterdam (1998). Niamh won gold medals each year in the 200m and 400m individual races and in group relays. Other Cork athletes also competed each year.

In 1998 a group of Cork LGBT people competed in the Gay Games in Amsterdam, accompanied by a large group of supporters. A number of Cork LGBT swimmers competed in the 2002 Gay Games in Sydney, once again bringing gold medals back to Cork.



Helen Slattery, Emma Bidwell, Clodagh Redden, Soren Mayes at Gay Games Amsterdam, 1998
Clodagh Redden Collection

QUAY CO-OP 1982

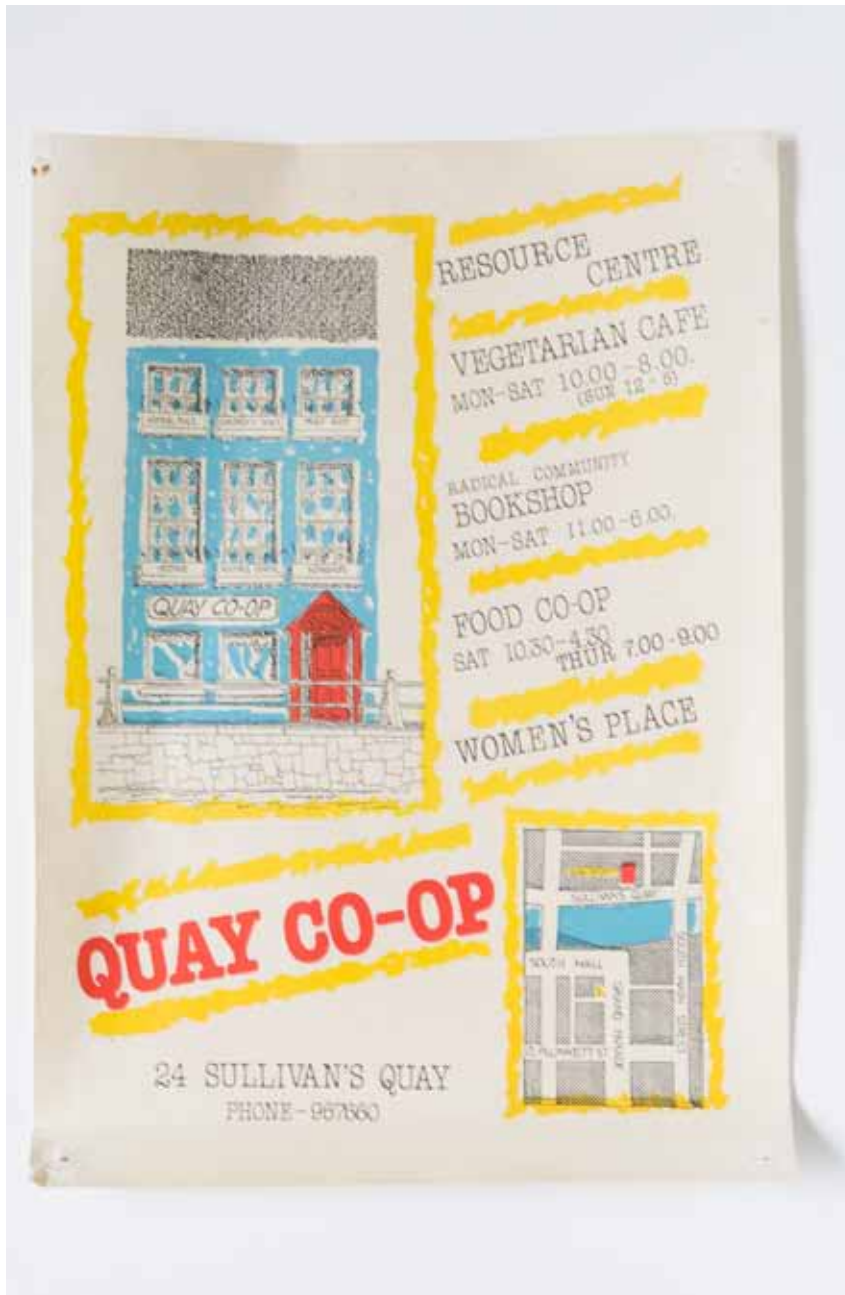
The Cork Quay Co-op opened on Sullivan's Quay in May 1982. The Quay Co-op was established as a workers' co-operative that brought together gay men and lesbians, women's groups, left-wing organisations, environmental and anti-nuclear groups. The building housed a café, bookshop, food co-op, women's place and meeting rooms that were used by various 'alternative' groups in the city.

The Quay Co-op was founded as "a radical/alternative community project by a collective effort of feminist, lesbian and gay, environmental and other alternative groups and individuals. Throughout the 1980s it provided a local base for the politics of the new social movements of the period at a time when Irish society, and its economy, seemed to be going backwards rather than forwards."⁵⁴

The Cork Gay Collective (CGC) was one of the key organisations involved in efforts to establish the Quay Co-op. Kieran Rose notes that the establishment of a resource centre was an original objective of the Collective and that they were centrally involved in setting up the Co-op.⁵⁵ The Cork Gay Collective operated from the Quay Co-op in the 1980s.

The Quay Co-op became an important base for the further development of LGBT groups and campaigns during the 1980s, and for facilitating the engagement and mutual support between various left-wing, 'alternative' groups in the city. Various groups would support each other's campaigns or activities, or come together for more general campaigns, such as the Anti-Amendment Campaign in the early 1980s and the campaign in opposition to the proposed Criminal Justice Bill.

A Co-op policy document outlines the reasons and ethos behind its establishment:



Quay Co-op Poster 1980s Arthur Leahy Collection, Photograph Josef Kovac

The Co-op was formed on the recognition that there are many oppressed groups of people who are excluded from full participation in society because they are denied access to information, skills, resources and decision-making. A central aim of the Co-op therefore, is to ensure that space is provided for minority groupings working for change, who would otherwise have difficulty in organising in the city because of isolation and lack of the necessary support structures. The Co-op provides a focal point where people actively involved at different levels of social change can meet and share ideas and support each other.

Similarly the Co-op broadsheet stated: “The Quay Co-op is a project, organised co-operatively, for people who wish to develop alternative ways of living, working and sharing our resources. Our ideal is self help, not waiting for the Government or other statutory agencies to take the initiative ... The Co-op will provide a centre for the many groups and individuals in the city who up to now have been isolated, and lacking the necessary support structure.”⁵⁶

Returning to Cork in the early 1980s, Deirdre Walsh described the Quay Co-op as “a happening place in Cork at the time, having been set up by the efforts of many women and men with 'alternative' ideas and lifestyles.”⁵⁷

The Quay Co-op provided an important space for social and political activity for the LGBT community in Cork. Chris Robson wrote about the Quay Co-op in *NGF Newsletter* in 1982: “It is not a predominantly ‘gay place’ but there is a strong gay presence and needless to say, an atmosphere of support and acceptance. The Co-op seems to offer one way out of the gay world and into an alternative, more open grouping that gays are helping to form.”⁵⁸

Kieran Rose commented: "The facilities made available, and the paid jobs in the Co-op allowed Cork to become a powerhouse of initiatives and a confident example for the rest of the country ... The Cork experience shows that with resources and expertise, it is possible to build a supportive community that can dramatically improve the quality of people's lives and which can, in turn, achieve progressive change in the wider community."⁵⁹

The Quay Co-op is still in existence, with a thriving vegetarian café and wholefood shop.

WOMEN'S PLACE, QUAY CO-OP

When the Quay Co-op opened in May 1982, A Women's Place was established as part of it, housing a library and drop-in space where a series of Newsletters were produced. It provided a base for a number of groups including a Women's Action Group, the Cork Women's Collective, the Cork Rape Crisis Service, the Women's Health Group, Anti-Nuclear and Disarmament Groups as well as lesbian groups and activities.⁶⁰

The ethos of the Women's Place was clearly feminist. The Women's Place Newsletter stated, "The women in the Co-op have taken a separate place for ourselves as a base from which to work on issues affecting our lives, incorporating a feminist perspective."⁶¹

There were some tensions between the Women's Place and the Quay Co-op where it was based. These tensions escalated over the years and led to the Women's Place leaving the Quay Co-op at the end of the 1980s and relocating to premises on MacCurtain Street.⁶²

WOMENS Place

24, SULLIVAN'S Quay.



ALL WOMEN WELCOME.

TEL. NO: 317660

ASK FOR Wendy OR MARIAN.

LESBIAN ACTIVISM: 1980s

A lesbian discussion group began meeting in the Women's Place in the Quay Co-op in November 1983 and the Cork Lesbian Collective was set up.

An article on the lesbian group in the Women's Place News states: "It was felt that there was a need for lesbians to get together to combat isolation and provide support."⁶³ Meetings were held every Thursday night; they were "generally informal and unstructured. The nature of the group is variable, sometimes political sometimes social depending on the mood of those women who turn up."⁶⁴

Deirdre Walsh comments that, prior to the establishment of this group, "there was no identifiable lesbian scene or group at the time." She describes how she and a lesbian friend would be sitting in Loafers' pub, looking over at Helen S and Paula K, wondering if they were dykes, while they would be sitting there, looking over at Deirdre and Finny, wondering the same thing! The lesbians gradually did get organised. As Deirdre comments: "It was on the 17th November 1984 that we Politico-lesbians organised what we thought was the first lesbian group. We had fifteen women at our first meeting. I remember it well, the amazing feeling that there were so many of us and we were all so different."⁶⁵

Following the Thursday night meetings, women began to gather in Loafer's Bar, thus beginning the tradition of Thursday night as the night that Cork lesbians met in the pub, a tradition that continued into the 2000s. The back room of Loafers was reserved, with 'Women Only' signs placed on the tables.

One of the interviewees in Jacqui O'Riordan's study *The Womenspace* comments on the importance of the lesbian group:

For the first time there was a group, an actual identifiable

lesbian group and that was like very important for Cork... an identifiable social scene, started in Cork from that group and from that organisation.

Many of the lesbians who were centrally involved in the Women's Place were feminist, but the lesbian group brought in other women who came because they were lesbian and who thought

'feminism was just a whole load of crap or whatever.' The feminists would be in one corner and the kinda non-feminists in the other, we used to have huge debates about things.

The groups discussed various topics including sexuality, coming out experiences, relationships with parents and various difficulties which women experienced as lesbians.⁶⁶

Helen Slattery describes the first time she attended the Thursday night lesbian discussion group:

I went alone for the first time. There must have been fifteen lesbians in the room, some political, others not. There was heated debate. I kept going back after that. It seemed that the way to meet most of the lesbians was through political activism, so I became involved.⁶⁷

Not everyone's experience was as positive. Denise remembers how, "As a 17 year old out dyke", she was intrigued by the Women's Place, by

this concept of a designated space for women. What I encountered was a conflict between Lesbian Feminism and the emerging Queer Movement that left me averse to identifying myself as a Feminist for many many years.⁶⁸

Similarly Bernie found the Women's Place and the Lesbian Discussion Group a bit intimidating and a bit too political.

Some of the lesbians used to scare me off a bit, they were too kind of political for me, and high politics and me just don't work ... I tried but I couldn't cope, couldn't last, I wouldn't be able to sit there and listen. But I used to love when Nell McCafferty came around, coz she was great fun.⁶⁹

The following is part of an entry to the 1985 *Alternative Ireland Directory* written by the Cork Lesbian Collective:

Despite society's belief that lesbians do not exist, or that we are invisible, the situation in Ireland today is changing. More Women are coming out as lesbian to their friends, families, and co-workers. Although lesbians have previously met in secret there are now more groups and meeting places which are becoming more widely known.

We feel that it is through getting together with other lesbians and defining ourselves as such that we acquire the strength and develop the support to increase our visibility and undertake to fight for the recognition and acceptance in Irish society, which is our right.⁷⁰

LOAFERS BAR

Loafers Bar on Douglas Street was opened in 1983 by Derrick Gerety and operated until 2015, making it one of the longest running gay bars in Ireland. Loafers became an important social meeting space for the LGBT community as well as for people involved in 'alternative' groups and lifestyles in the city and for those involved in the Quay Co-op.

Explaining his reasons for opening the bar Derrick comments:

I just wanted to have a bar where I felt comfortable



Derrick Gerety in Loafers Bar 1980s Arthur Leahy Collection

myself. Not necessarily a gay bar, that wasn't the plan, but a bar that was new but kept old style elements. We played good music, sold bottled beers like Becks and Stella Artois, sold gallons of tequila and orange, and all for a reasonable price. So we got loads of art students, funky stylish kids and, of course, gays. It was about 50/50 gay/straight in the beginning. Quite an atmosphere for the early 80s in Cork.⁷¹

Derrick continued to run Loafers for 16 years and saw it develop into a primarily gay bar that provided an important public venue for the Cork LGBT community. It was subsequently managed by Rena Blake, and then by Ted O'Connell.

Having a public social venue was very important for the development of the Cork LGBT community. This public space, and the contact and social interaction it facilitated, was an important element in the building of contacts, connections and



elements of community. In 1992 *Munster GCN* described Loafers as “an institution on the Irish lesbian and gay scene which has provided an invaluable, safe and welcoming meeting-place for the community down through the years.”⁷²

The back bar in Loafers was reserved for women only on Thursday evenings. This provided an important regular public meeting space for the Cork lesbian community, facilitating social support and engagement as well as political discussions.

Loafers closed suddenly in May 2015. The announcement was greeted with sadness and shock by the Cork LGBT community and the wider community.

OTHER BARS & SOCIAL VENUES: 1980s

While Loafers was the main bar for the Cork LGBT community, there were other social venues in Cork in the 1980s that were ‘gay-friendly.’ Some of these were listed in an article in *OUT* newsletter.⁷³

The Cork IGRM continued to run a club at No.4 MacCurtain Street in the early 1980s. There was also a club in Slick’s Bar, on the corner of Patrick’s Hill and MacCurtain Street, on Thursday nights and Sunday mornings. Bars listed in *OUT* magazine as also being ‘gay-friendly’ were Le Château Bar, Patrick’s Street; Dan Lowry’s Bar, MacCurtain Street and Stripes, MacCurtain Street.

A women’s social was held the first Tuesday of the month in the Berwick Tavern in Tuckey Street. Women used to also meet in The Steeple Bar near Shandon.

Other bars were occasionally and temporarily turned into a lesbian bar for an evening when hosting a women’s band. For example Pa Johnson’s bar became almost entirely lesbian one evening in the 1980s when the lesbian band Major to Minor played there.⁷⁴

Loafers Bar Photograph by Orla Egan

CORK WOMEN'S FUN WEEKEND

The first Cork Women's Fun Weekend was held 13-15 April 1984. The Fun Weekend is still running, and is now held during the first weekend in May each year in Cork. It is a social weekend with a mixture of dancing, music, workshops, sporting events and an infamous pub quiz.

Commenting on the beginnings of the Cork Women's Fun Weekend in the 1980s, Helen Slattery says, "There was a lot of heavy-duty political women's conferences and discussions going on, and as an antidote we decided to have a weekend of just fun."⁷⁵

A report on the 10th Cork Women's Fun Weekend in *Munster GCN* discussed the beginning of the Fun Weekends in 1984:

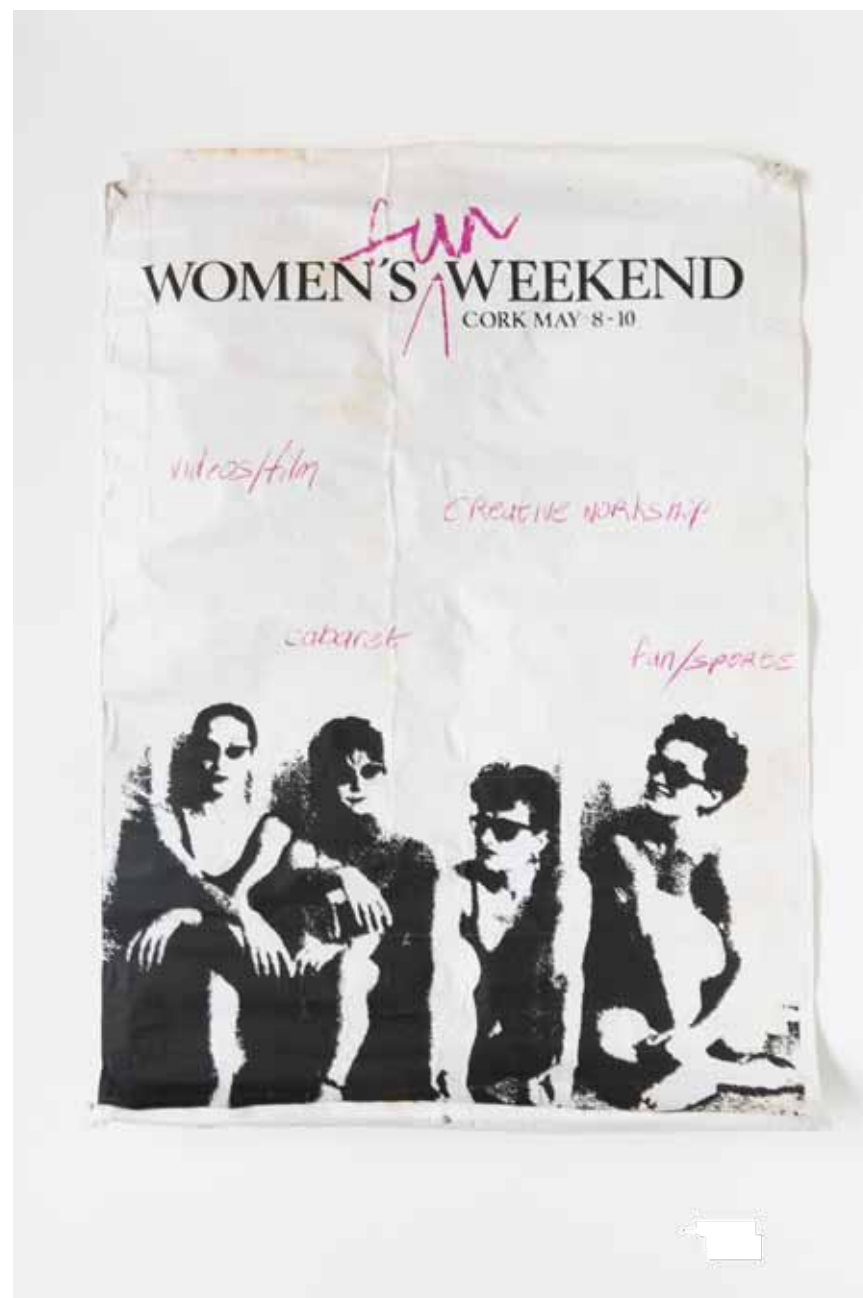
*That was an era of serious politics. Questions about contraception, abortion, divorce and the most elementary rights for lesbians and gays were the focus of virtually every meeting then. The Fun Weekend aimed to provide a space to recognise and celebrate the identity, culture and community that women were creating. A measure of its success has been the emergence of similar events in other places.*⁷⁶

One of the interviewees in Jacqui O'Riordan's study *The Womenspace* notes that the fun weekend started off as a fundraiser for the Women's Place library but then became a separate, self-funding project with any money made going to fund the weekend the following year.⁷⁷

A number of Cork women's bands were formed in the 1980s and they played at the Women's Fun Weekends in the mid 1980s. These included bands called Brazen Bitch and Standing Ovulation.

Writing in 1988, Deirdre stated that the Women's Fun Weekend was a time

when women from all over Ireland, and the rest of the



Women's Fun Weekend Poster Arthur Leahy Collection, Josef Kovac Photograph

world, come together in Cork to celebrate women's culture and generally to have some fun. It's a time to take a break from meetings, campaigns, housework, homework, all work and any kind of daily drudge. We intend it to be a weekend off for women and it is hoped also that it is an effective way of recognising our strength as women and of appreciating ourselves.⁷⁸

The Women's Fun Weekend is still running, having skipped only one year since it began. It has been held in various venues over the years, with varying degrees of welcome. Women travel from many parts of Ireland and from abroad to participate. It has helped to forge and foster relationships between women from Cork, Belfast, Galway, Dublin, London etc. In the 1980s busloads of women would travel down from Belfast to join in. Cork women who had emigrated would return to Cork for the Fun Weekend bringing friends with them from their new homes, facilitating connections and cross-pollination of ideas and politics between the Cork community and international lesbian and bisexual communities.

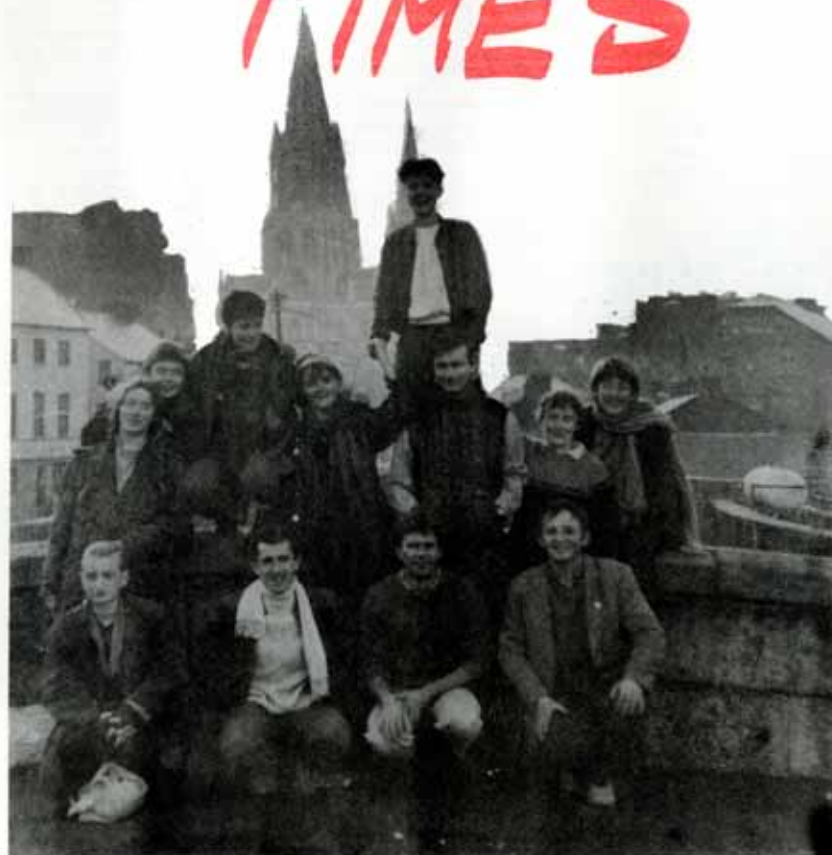
The Cork Women's Fun Weekend has become one of the key events in the Irish lesbian calendar. In a presentation at the 2000 Lesbian Lives conference in UCD, I stated,

Every year in the middle of May lesbians come out of the woodwork to join in a weekend of fun and frolics in Cork. The Cork Women's Weekend is one of those events and opportunities we create for the exploration, expression and celebration of lesbian culture – the kinds of events which recharge our batteries and give us the strength and motivation for political activity and for negotiating the daily stresses and perils of living in a society which does not support us as lesbians. Events which are time out from that, time that is lesbian centred and, most importantly, time that is fun.⁷⁹

Quare Times Magazine, Cork 1984 Arthur Leahy Collection

SPRING '84

QUARE TIMES



LESBIAN/GAY MAGAZINE

50p (35p unw)

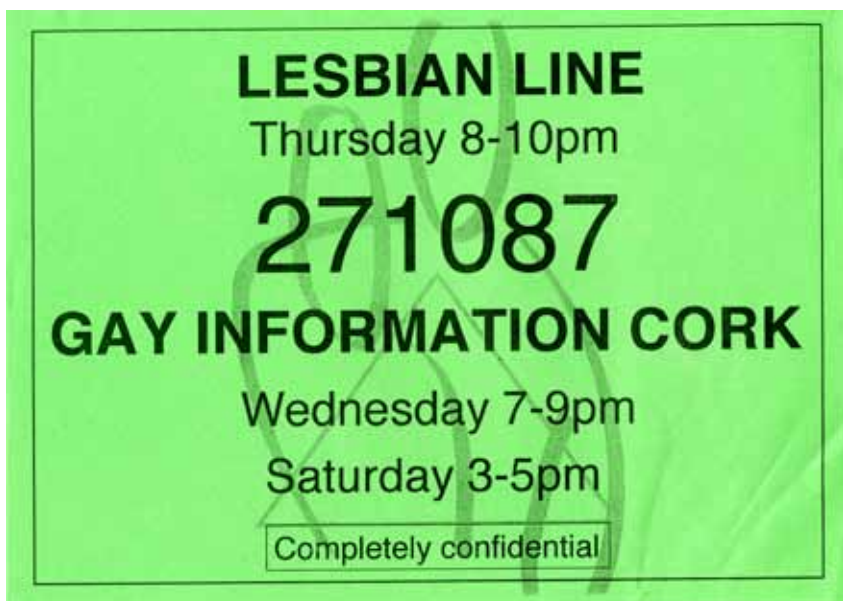
CORK LESBIAN LINE/GAY HELPLINE

LGBT telephone helplines have always been seen as crucial for providing support and information for people who are coming out and who are trying to access the LGBT community. In 1977, the Cork Branch of the IGRM set up Tel-A-Friend, a telephone counselling service, to provide outreach and telephone support to the community. This line operated until the early 1980s.

Around 1984 a small group of lesbians began to meet in Cork with the aim of setting up a Lesbian Line befriending and information service. Helen Slattery remarks,

We had a commitment amongst ourselves to make it easier for newcomers to find other lesbians.

The groups received training from the London Lesbian Line and from a guide for self-training.⁸⁰



Cork Lesbian Line/Gay Information flyer Cork Arthur Leahy Collection

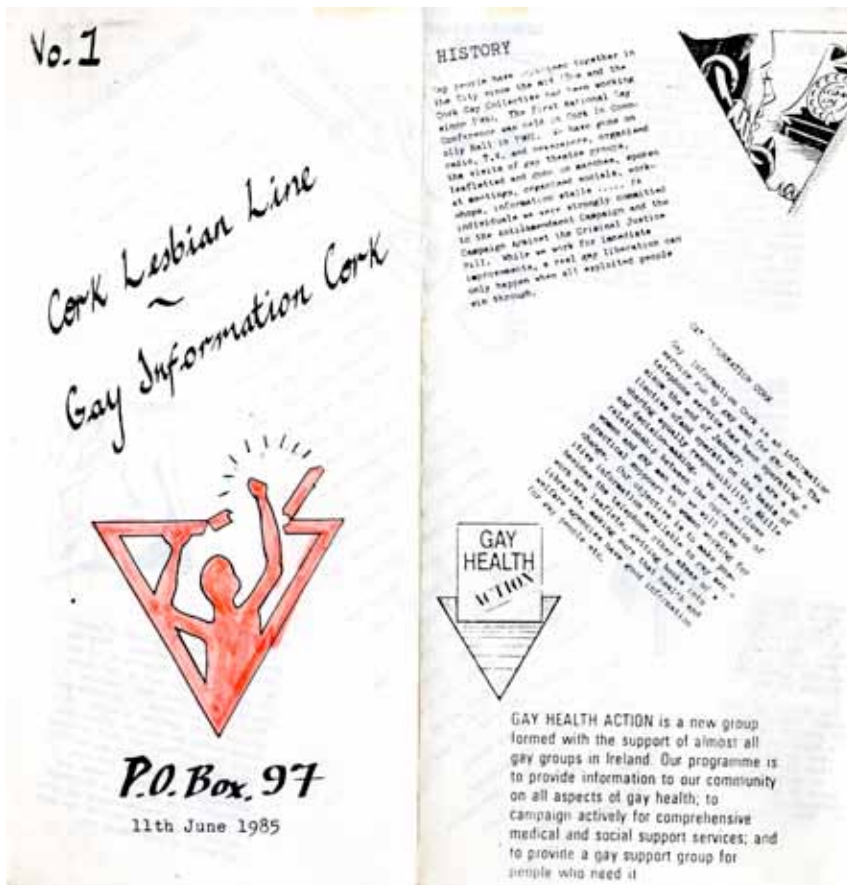
Around the same time the Cork Gay Collective began to consider setting up a telephone information line. A number of meetings were held with the Cork Lesbian Collective to discuss areas of co-operation.

The Cork Lesbian Line began operating on Thursday nights in January 1985. An article about the Cork Lesbian Line published in 1986 stated,

It grew out of an awareness of the problems of isolation and lack of information facing lesbians. The Line aims to counteract this by providing support and contact and giving a positive image of lesbians. Women contact the line for a lot of different reasons. The variety of enquiries range from calls from women who are first coming out, women unsure of their sexuality, to lesbians wanting to contact other lesbians and find out what social events are happening...A lot of the women who ring up are in a very isolated position and feel themselves to be the only one in the world. We stress that they are not alone and we aim to give them a positive view of themselves and of lesbians.⁸¹

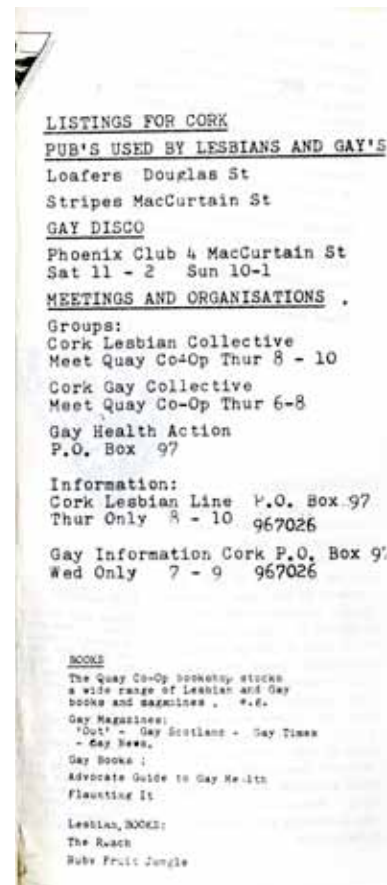
An entry in the third edition of the Alternative Ireland Directory explained why the Cork Lesbian Line was set up:

The Cork Lesbian Line came into existence in January 1985. We feel this service is greatly needed. Some of the main problems facing lesbians are isolation and the damaging effects that the popular stereotype image of lesbians has upon them. We hope to counteract this by being a first meeting point and to give a positive image of lesbians. Because of the fact that this public telephone service is run by lesbians means that we can understand a lot of the problems faced by lesbians when they are first coming out. We all feel that lesbians are kept



Cork Lesbian Line, Gay Information Cork Leaflet, Arthur Leahy Collection

invisible by the paranoid heterosexual dogma of society. Heterosexuality is seen as the 'norm' and the only way to be. This has the effect of silencing women who are questioning their sexuality and makes them feel that they are in the wrong. Because lesbianism is generally considered a taboo subject, lesbians are kept separate and isolated from each other. The few images of lesbians that are given to us in this culture are totally negative and damaging. As part of our fight against this we believe



the Cork Lesbian Line to be essential.⁸²

Gay Information Cork also began to operate in January 1985. It was, a 1985 leaflet notes,

An information service run by gay men for gay men. Our objective is to make positive information available to gay men – besides the telephone other areas of work are leaflets, getting books into libraries, making sure that health and welfare agencies have good information for gay people etc.⁸³

One of the main problems facing both lines was how to advertise the service they were providing. The local newspapers, *The Cork Examiner* and *The Evening Echo*, refused to carry advertisements

for the Lesbian Line and Gay Information Cork, claiming that it would be illegal to do so.⁸⁴ A letter from the Chief Executive of *The Cork Examiner* in 1986 claimed, "That the type of activity referred to is illegal and, accordingly, any advertisement referring to same is also illegal and, as such, we must decline publication."⁸⁵ This presumably refers to the fact that gay male sexual activity was still illegal in the 1980s. Lesbians were not covered by that legislation, but the Lesbian Line advertisements were still refused. Helen Slattery claims that *The Cork Examiner* refused to take the Lesbian Line advertisement, claiming it "wasn't suitable".⁸⁶

Despite interventions on behalf of the information lines by politicians, trade unions and health professionals, the newspapers continued to refuse to carry the advertisements. This had serious consequences in terms of publicising the services available, and the number of callers to the lines remained low in the early years. The Cork Lesbian Line's article in the 1986 *Out for Ourselves* states that the number of calls received averages at two calls per night.⁸⁷ The Cork Gay Collective's minutes note an average of 0-5 calls per night. The Cork Lesbian Line produced stickers to advertise their service but, even in the most 'alternative' of places, they were pulled down almost immediately.⁸⁸

The telephone lines did succeed in having their numbers placed in the telephone directory. Helen Slattery recalls,

*We were brave for our time. I remember going in to put the listing in the telephone directory for the Lesbian Line. It was all done in a very strained silence, with a lot of pointing to the offending word 'lesbian'. It felt like a great victory that they accepted it.*⁸⁹

Despite these difficulties, the Cork Lesbian Line and Gay Information Cork Line continued to operate throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and still operate today, under the umbrella of the LGBT Helpline. The National LGBT Helpline⁹⁰ emerged from a Cork initiative to link together the various LGBT helplines around the country, and to share resources and a common number.

ANTI-AMENDMENT CAMPAIGN

On 27 April 1981, a Pro-Life Amendment Campaign (PLAC) was launched with the aim of putting pressure on the Irish government to hold a referendum to insert an amendment to the Irish constitution guaranteeing the right to life of the foetus. Gradually

opposition to PLAC emerged in feminist, socialist and liberal circles, and Protestant church leaders began to voice their objections. Two conferences were held in December 1981 and March 1982 to discuss how to respond to PLAC. The conferences endorsed the establishment of a Women's Right to Choose Campaign (WRCC) which would oppose PLAC from a pro-choice position. Others felt it was better to set up a broad-based alliance which would oppose the amendment but would not be openly pro-choice; in April 1982 an Anti-Amendment Campaign (AAC) was set up.⁹¹

The Cork LGBT community was actively involved in the Anti-Amendment Campaign in the early 1980s. The community was conscious of the importance of making links between campaigns for LGBT rights and wider social change campaigns, particularly those that were concerned with morality, sexual freedom and gender stereotyping. The Cork Gay Collective had stated clearly their solidarity with the Women's Movement, "recognising that our shared oppression derives from the abuse of sexuality as a tool of exploitation which necessitated strict gender stereotyping and the denial of sexual fulfilment."⁹²

The Cork Gay Collective, the Cork Lesbian Collective and the Women's Place were all centrally involved in the Anti-Amendment Campaign in Cork alongside a broad-based alliance of 'alternative' groups and individuals. Kieran Rose asserts, "Gay men were to become a driving-force in the campaign giving it a sense of energy and confidence." He claims that involvement in the AAC was an important and valuable experience for the Cork Gay Collective: "It provided us with the opportunity to challenge conservative hegemony especially in what was a tightly knit town such as Cork. While the campaign continued over more than a year and monopolised our attention, it also provided us with considerable skills, experience and confidence."⁹³

There seems to have been a problem over the recognition and acknowledgment of the contribution of lesbian and gay

organisations in the Anti-Amendment Campaign nationally. The Dublin Lesbian and Gay Collectives in *Out for Ourselves* note that “the first time we became involved in a national campaign as a separate, visible entity, was during the Anti-Amendment Campaign (AAC). Lesbians and gay men all over the country worked very hard to fight the anti-woman proposal. Despite our activity, our fund-raising efforts and our position as some of the earliest affiliated groups, none of us managed to make it onto the public list of affiliated organisations. Nor did our rights even sneak into campaign literature.”⁹⁴

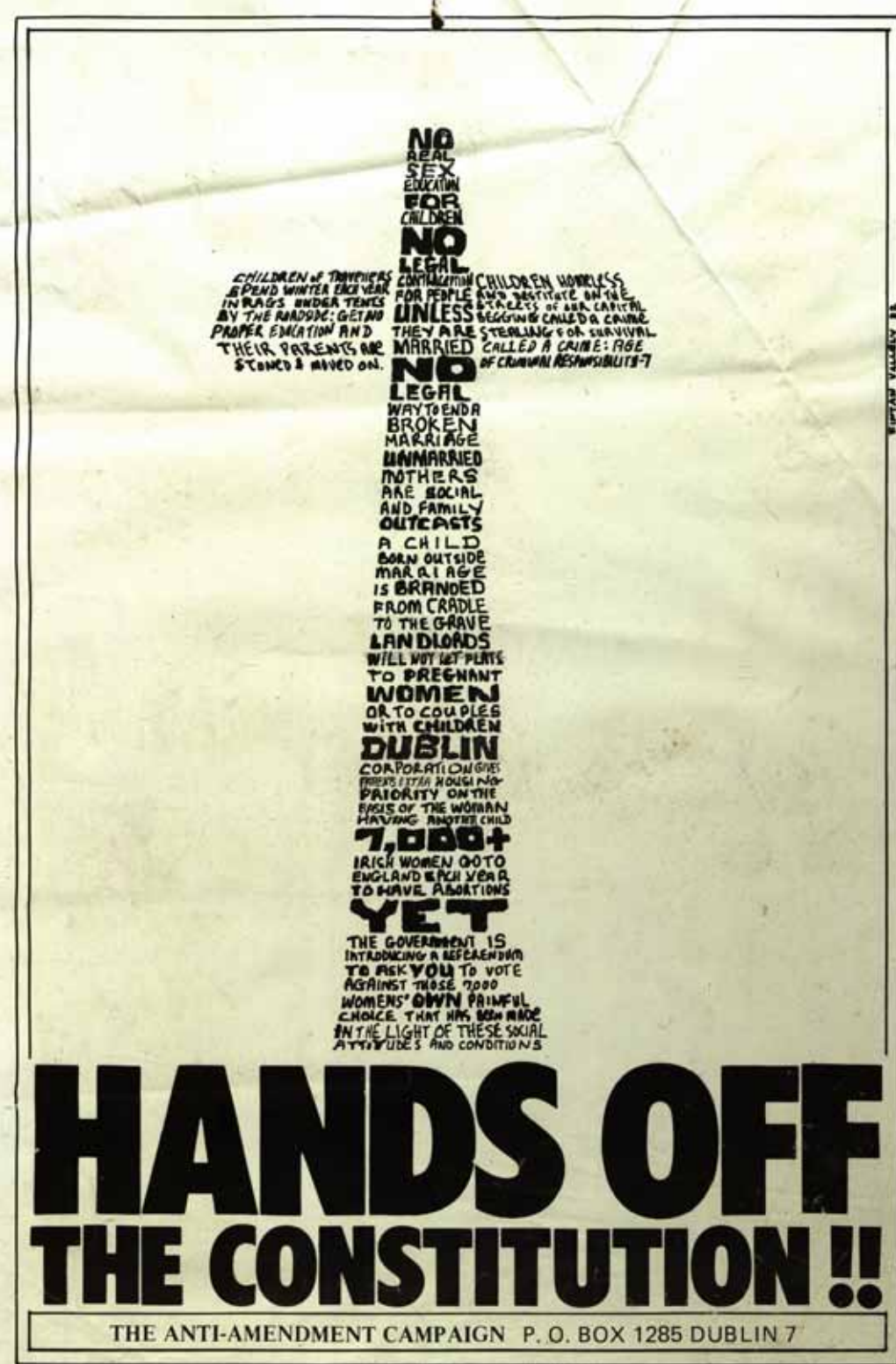
So while LGBT groups saw the need for mutual solidarity between groups opposing restrictive and repressive measures in Ireland, this support was often not reciprocal and some in these campaigns sought to hide the involvement of LGBT groups because of fears that visible involvement of LGBT groups would damage the image of the campaigns.

Despite the work of the AAC, an amendment enshrining the right to life of the unborn was passed on 7 September 1983.⁹⁵ Cork LGBT groups continued to be active in the post-amendment campaigns. After the 1983 referendum, the campaign became more broadly based, with the focus on access to the full range of contraceptives, removal of the illegitimacy status, proper child care facilities, choice of sexuality, and support in custody cases for lesbian mothers.⁹⁶

Members of the LGBT community are still actively involved in the campaign to Repeal the Amendment which was passed in 1983 (Repeal the 8th Amendment Campaign).⁹⁷

OUT FOR OURSELVES

*Out for Ourselves*⁹⁸ was an Irish publication produced in 1986 by the Dublin Lesbian and Gay Collective. It was one of the first



Irish produced and written publications detailing the lives and experiences of lesbian and gay men in Ireland. It contained a variety of contributions, including ones from LGBT people in Cork. Annette Hctor and Joan McCarthy, both of whom were involved in the Cork Women's Place and the Cork Lesbian Collective, were centrally involved in the Editorial Group for the publication, ensuring a strong Cork contribution to the book.⁹⁹

CORK LESBIAN AND GAY ACTION PROJECT

A Cork Lesbian and Gay Action Project was started in 1984. A leaflet on the project, produced by the Cork IGRM, the Cork Gay Collective and the Cork Lesbian Collective states:

*The need for closer consultation and co-operation within the gay community has prompted the recent formation of the Cork Lesbian and Gay Project, which has as its main objectives the improvement and expansion of the existing social, political, supportive, and advice facilities for the lesbian & gay community.*¹⁰⁰

The project aimed to explore the possibility of starting a youth group, looking for a building for a lesbian and gay centre, starting a befriending group, expanding the phone service, having socials and forming a health group.¹⁰¹

An article in the May 1984 edition of *Round Up* reported on a meeting of over 25 lesbians and gay men from the Lesbian Collective, the Cork Gay Collective and the Irish Gay Rights Movement to discuss both existing facilities and areas of future action. Among the outcomes of this meeting were:

↪ *The setting up of a study/structure group to seek out a larger building for a new lesbian and gay resource centre, and to examine the kind of organisation needed to co-ordinate gay activities in the city*

↪ *The revitalising of the befriending/switchboard services*

↪ *The re-starting of the youth group*

↪ *The initiation of an information/archives 'data bank'.*¹⁰²

This can be seen as the start of moves which led ultimately to the establishment of the Other Place LGBT Resource Centre in 1991.

CLOSING OF THE CORK 'LOOS'

Public toilets have often been used by gay and bisexual men for casual sexual encounters, particularly by those who are closeted (not open about their sexual orientation); this is sometimes known as 'cottaging.'

In 1984 Cork Corporation instigated a policy of closing public toilets in Cork city in the evenings. Heavy, barred gates were put on all the public toilets in the city and they were locked at 6pm every day.¹⁰³

One toilet remained open in Cork in the evening – a tiny, concrete pill-box loo jutting out over the river on Pope's Quay. This became 'the busiest loo in Cork' in the evenings. Local residents became concerned about the comings and goings at the toilet and began to compile a list of car registrations; they believed that the area had become a centre for drug dealing but

the Gardai's explanation was that it was 'perverts.'

A front-page article in *The Cork Examiner* on 7 May 1985 headed "Drug Addicts or Perverts", described foot-patrols, hand signals and other mysterious goings on which had disturbed the residents on Pope's Quay.¹⁰⁴ Councillors went on local radio to call for a 'clean up', and city engineers hastily promised another barred gate. A gate was subsequently placed on the Pope's Quay toilet and it was also locked in the evenings. The 1985 article in *OUT* commented,

*Cottaging is for many gay men in Ireland still the only possible way to make contact. The barred gates in Cork mean the effective elimination of an aspect of gay life in the city. No gay group was consulted about the decision.*¹⁰⁵

AIDS ACTIVISM

From the mid-80s onwards the attention and resources of Irish LGBT organisations were increasingly directed towards addressing issues in relation to AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) and the HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) virus.

The July 1985 minutes of the Cork Gay Collective note that AIDS is becoming a 'bigger issue week by week.'¹⁰⁶ *Out for Ourselves* claims that AIDS was "used to support homophobic attitudes and has eroded away many of the gains we have made. Anti-gay scare stories began to appear in the Irish media in 1984."¹⁰⁷ The National Gay Federation claimed that in 1985 40-60% of gay material in the press was AIDS related.¹⁰⁸ Articles on AIDS and safer sex began appearing in Irish gay newsletters, for example in the May/June 1985 edition of *NGF News*. As awareness grew of the impact of AIDS on gay communities in other countries, and given the inaction of the Irish government and health authorities

in addressing the issue, Irish LGBT organisations began to look at how best to address the issue in the LGBT community.

Bernie recalls the impact of AIDS on the safety of the LGBT community in Cork in the 1980s: "It was very scary, especially for the boys. It was a very scary time and a lot of my friends were beaten up." She also recalls how a dentist refused to treat her because he knew she was gay: "A lot of dentists wouldn't treat gay people in case their gums would bleed – they'd really be cautious."¹⁰⁹

Gay Health Action (GHA) was set up in February 1985¹¹⁰. A meeting on AIDS was held in Trinity College Dublin on 3 February 1985. Cork gay groups were centrally involved from the beginning. The Trinity meeting was attended by members of the Cork Gay Collective, the Cork Branch of the IGRM as well as the Dublin Lesbian and Gay Collectives, NGF and the Trinity College Gay Society. The groups present agreed to work under the new title of Gay Health Action¹¹¹. Gay Health Action was set up "as an umbrella group representative of most of the gay organisations in Ireland to tackle the issues of gay men's health generally and the developing AIDS crisis in particular."¹¹²

The first Gay Health Action information leaflet on AIDS was produced in Cork in May 1985, just before the presence of the AIDS virus was confirmed in Ireland.¹¹³ The Health Education Bureau provided funding for the production of the first 15,000 leaflets "but further funding was vetoed by the Department of Health because their legal advice was that information relating to gay sexual practice would be contrary to criminal law."¹¹⁴ At this stage gay sex was still criminalised in Ireland (decriminalisation didn't happen until 1993). The Department of Health was slow to respond to the growing AIDS crisis. Kieran Rose states, "While the various statutory health bodies avoided their responsibilities, it was left to a small group of gay men and lesbians with few resources to keep up with international

developments and disseminate this learning throughout the country. For at least two years the GHA was the only organisation providing information and advice to the gay community, to other 'at risk' groups, to professionals and to the media."¹¹⁵

The Gay Health Action leaflet stated the aim of the group was

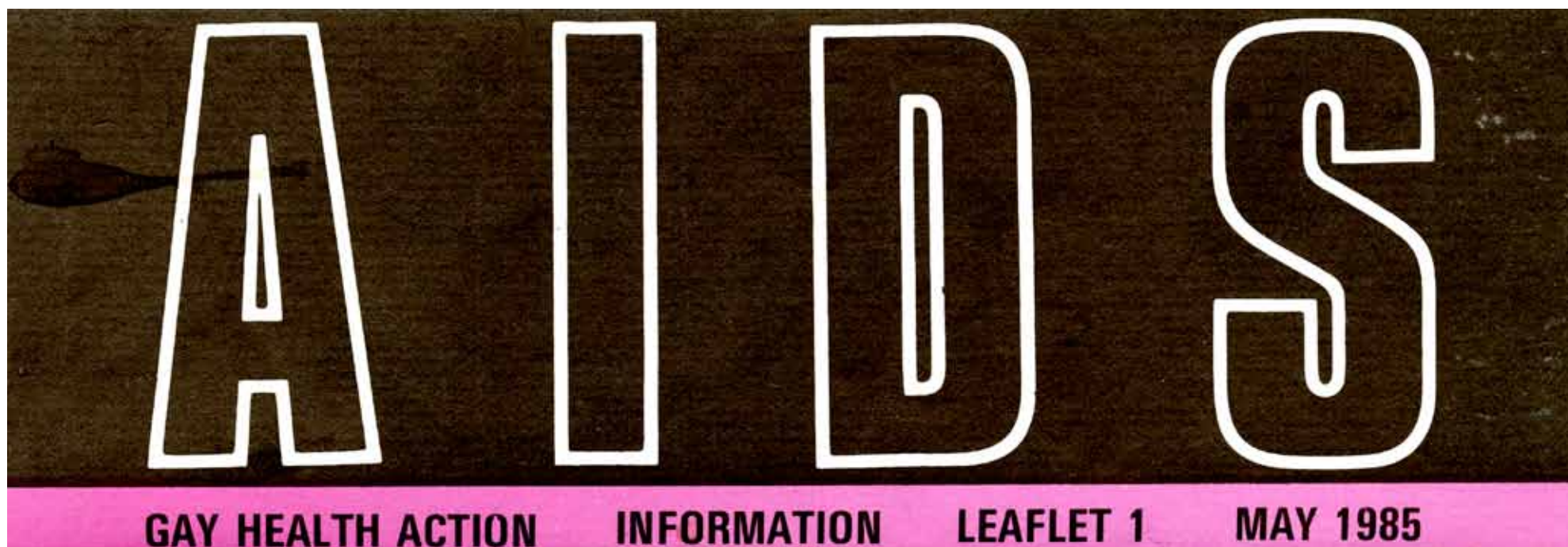
*To provide information to our community on all aspects of gay health; to campaign actively for comprehensive medical and social support services; and to provide a gay support group for people who need it.*¹¹⁶

There was a consciousness that the issues around AIDS were much more than 'a medical problem.'

AIDS has been used by the press and TV to arouse anti-gay prejudices, and to attempt to deny our civil liberties. Our work in Gay Health Action is part of the ongoing fight

*for lesbian and gay liberation which because of the anti-gay hysteria on AIDS is now more necessary than ever.*¹¹⁷

While the Department of Health refused to fund the activities of Gay Health Action, the group did get approval for Social Employment Scheme workers, and a staff member, Mick Quinlan, was employed¹¹⁸. An open meeting was organised by GHA in Dublin on 3 September 1985. It was addressed by two California based doctors who were in Dublin to present a paper on AIDS at the World Health Organisation Conference in Dublin. They spoke of the Buddies Support System in California and offered to do a mini-training session if people wanted to organise a similar group in Ireland. On the following weekend, seventeen people from Cork and Dublin participated in an intensive training weekend. Following the training, the group met weekly, and formed the support group Cairde (Irish for friends).



First Irish AIDS leaflet produced in Cork in 1985, Arthur Leahy Collection

*Primarily we are a group of gay men who are prepared to support and help other gay people who are affected by AIDS, whether they are worried about it, have been tested positive to the antibodies test, are experiencing symptoms or are family or friends of people affected.*¹¹⁹

In Cork, members of Cairde provided invaluable support to people affected by AIDS, and also provided training for nurses and other people involved in the care of people with AIDS.

GHA was involved in the establishment of the AIDS Alliance which was set up to co-ordinate the activities in relation to AIDS in Ireland. The group also developed links with international AIDS groups. GHA disbanded in 1990. Kieran Rose claimed this was, “partly due to official neglect and hostility and partly due to the related exhaustion of the activists in GHA.”¹²⁰ The work of GHA was subsumed into the AIDS Alliance. In terms of the achievements of GHA, Kieran Rose commented, “It managed to challenge the initial, sometimes hysterical, anti-gay media coverage and develop a positive image of the role of the gay community as being responsible, effective and caring.”¹²¹

The AIDS Memorial Quilt began in the USA in 1987 as a memorial to those who had died of AIDS.¹²² In 1991 the Irish Quilt Tour brought the AIDS Memorial Quilt to Ireland; it was displayed in the Cork City Hall 17-20 January 1991. Talks and workshops were organised along with two memorial concerts in the Cork City Hall.¹²³

UNEMPLOYMENT & EMIGRATION

The high levels of unemployment and emigration in Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s impacted on LGBT activism in Cork and elsewhere in Ireland.

On the one hand, those who were unemployed had more time to engage in activism and do volunteer work in LGBT organisations and centres. On the other hand, membership and energy of groups were continually depleted by emigration.

Those who emigrated found greater freedom among more open LGBT communities and greater employment opportunities. However, they also faced the loss of home, family and friends in Ireland. Those who emigrated to Britain often faced anti-Irish racism. Eilis Mhara left Ireland for Britain in 1976, and commented, “For those of us who focused our energies on lesbian and feminist issues we were to find ourselves marginalised and isolated in English feminist groups, amongst women whose racism mirrored the population at large.”¹²⁴

CO-OPERATION NORTH LESBIAN EXCHANGES

In 1987 the Women’s Place in Cork and the Women’s News Collective in Belfast applied for and received Co-operation North funding to further develop links and exchange skills. Writing in the first edition of the *Cork Women’s Space Newsletter*, Scotlyn Ruth describes the reasons behind the exchange:

*Women from both collectives met and decided that it would be a good thing if the women of Women’s News could teach the Cork women the intricate skills of producing a newspaper so that the Cork women could start one; and that, likewise, it would be a good thing if the women of the Women’s Place could teach the Belfast women the delicate art of running a library, so that they could start one.*¹²⁵

Exchange visits were organised: the Cork women visited

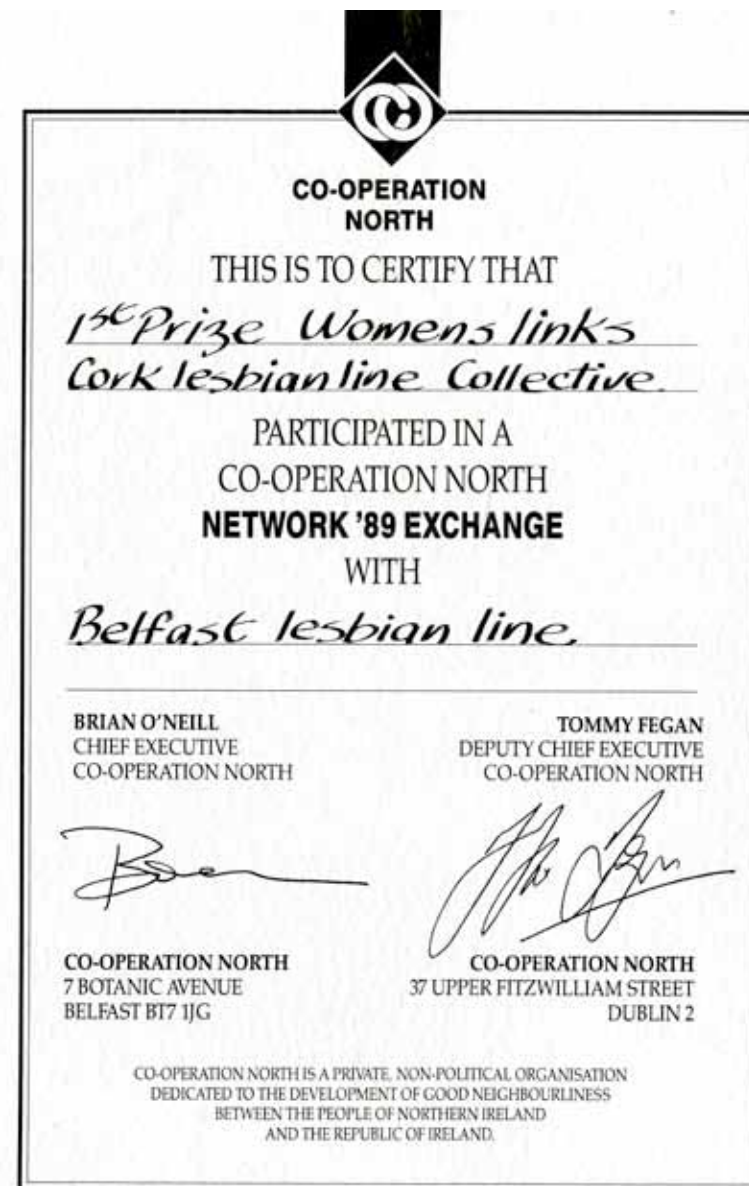
Belfast in June 1987, and the Belfast women came to Cork in January 1988. “Newspaper workshops and library workshops were organised, areas of future co-operation were discussed, life-long vows of friendship were made and LOTS and LOTS of fun was had by all.”¹²⁶

The Belfast women’s visit to Cork 29-31 January 1988 coincided with another lesbian gathering in Cork – the first National Lesbian Line Conference, with women from Cork, Belfast, Dublin and Galway Lesbian Lines attending.¹²⁷ The women shared anecdotes of their experiences in setting up and running lesbian telephone lines and worked together on developing their counselling and listening skills.

In 1988 the Cork and Belfast Lesbian Lines received further funding under the Women’s Links (Community Programme) projects of Co-operation North, to organise an exchange between lesbian lines throughout Ireland. The Lesbian Lines in Galway, Dublin, Derry and Limerick also became involved: “What we had on our hands was an All-Ireland Lesbian Exchange. Luckily there were already some personal friendships among various women which made planning quite a bit easier.”¹²⁸ The first planning meeting was held in Dublin in September 1988, and the first exchange was held in Galway in November 1988, followed by an exchange in Belfast in March 1989. While the first exchange was hosted by the Cork Lesbian Line, it was held in Galway to facilitate equal travel for women from the North and South. G. McCarthy also notes, “At that time Galway was a new line and we all felt that an exchange happening in that city would give much encouragement.”¹²⁹

Commenting on the Co-operation North exchange, one of the participants noted,

This exchange offered us a chance as Lesbian Lines to meet with relative ease with each other. It certainly wove



Co-operation North Exchange prize certificate Arthur Leahy Collection

*a very strong network between us all for the continuation of skills, information and fund raising. It is only because the exchange took place that we were enabled to begin to do many of these things. As isolated groups we have neither enough information, skills or money to get much of the work needed to be done, done. As a larger national network all things were possible.*¹³⁰

The Lesbian Lines received an award from Co-operation North in acknowledgment of the work that had been done. They were joint winners under the Women's Groups projects under the Community Programme, sharing the award with the Dublin Travellers' Education and Development Group and Newry Travellers' Group.



The 1990s saw the further development of the Cork LGBT community, with greater visibility. A new Cork LGBT Resource Centre, The Other Place, opened in 1991 and provided an important base for the further development of LGBT activism and social space. The end of the decade saw the opening of a lesbian centre in Cork. A significant milestone was the decriminalisation of gay sexual activity in 1993. Sexual orientation was also included in the new Employment Equality and Equal Status legislation, providing an important framework for challenging discrimination and inequality, although it did allow some exceptions for religious run institutions (section 37). The LGBT community seemed to have greater confidence and visibility. A Lesbian and Gay Film Festival began in 1991, and the LGBT community participated in the Patrick's Day parade in 1992. While the community still identified primarily as lesbian and gay, there was some greater acknowledgment of the transgender and bisexual communities.

THE OTHER PLACE LGBT RESOURCE CENTRE

The idea of establishing an LGBT centre in Cork had been discussed since the early 1980s. Among the aims of the Cork Lesbian and Gay Project, set up in 1984, was to try to locate a suitable building for a lesbian and gay centre.¹³¹ In 1991 the



Quay Co-op undertook the project of developing a lesbian and gay centre with part funding provided by the Munster Lesbian and Gay Trust Fund. The trust fund was established in 1989 to raise funds for the development of lesbian and gay community facilities in the Munster region.¹³²

In 1991 a four storey building on Augustine Street in Cork was leased by the Quay Co-op for the development of the new Lesbian and Gay Centre. Initially known as The Augustine Street Project, the centre soon became known as The Other Place. The building was semi-derelict: “Just a shell of a building – floors had to be put down; ceilings had to be put up; walls had to be re-plastered; windows had to be put in. It was full of rubbish and it took six months to clean up the building.”¹³³

The acquisition of the building allowed for the provision of a safe space and services for the LGBT community. Weekly discos and social events were held in the centre; there was a café, meeting spaces, a bookshop, resource centre and offices. The Other Place also provided employment for LGBT workers under the Social Employment Scheme. The *Munster GCN*, a four page supplement to the *GCN*, was produced by staff in The Other Place. In Munster it was placed on the outside of the *GCN*, and was an insert for the rest of the country.

A leaflet on The Other Place, produced in the mid 1990s, outlines the aims of the centre:

As a focus point for the lesbian and gay community, the centre aims to provide a resource catering specifically to the needs of this community in a supportive and safe atmosphere. The projects undertaken by the centre are initiated in direct response to the needs of the community and The Other Place aims to rise to the challenge of responding to these needs as the community changes and new requirements emerge.



The Other Place Club Poster, Arthur Leahy Collection

*The provision of support groups, as well as information lines and services, is an integral part of the work of the centre. The drop-in social space is provided in answer to a crucial need for a safe meeting place where lesbian and gay men can relax and feel comfortable. Less visible aspects of the Centre's work involve networking with State and voluntary bodies and responding to Government and social issues which affect the lesbian and gay community. The Centre is committed to supporting and initiating events which reflect the creativity of lesbian and gay people and our place in the wider community.*¹³⁴

Weekly discos and socials were held in The Other Place. The entrance to the club was down a dark alley, and the toilets were known to leak onto the dance floor, but the club provided a really important regular social space for the LGBT community. A range of activities and projects were organised in or from the Other Place, some of which are outlined below.

CORK LESBIAN AND GAY FILM FESTIVAL

The Cork Film Festival began in 1956, making it one of the longest running European Film Festivals. In 1991 a Lesbian and Gay Film Festival began in conjunction with the Cork Film Festival. This was the first Irish Lesbian and Gay Film Festival (the Dublin Lesbian and Gay Film Festival began the following year). Donal Sheehan was Director of the Lesbian and Gay Film Festival for the first two years. It proved to be popular and successful: "The response showed that a strong audience does exist here for a programme of film aimed specifically at a lesbian and gay audience."¹³⁵

The Lesbian and Gay Film Festival became a regular part of the Cork Film Festival. In the first few years, the launch of the Lesbian and Gay Film Festival provided an opportunity for the



Poster First Lesbian and Gay Film Festival Cork 1991
Arthur Leahy Collection, Photograph Josef Kovac



Poster 2nd Irish Lesbian and Gay Film Festival Cork 1992
Arthur Leahy Collection, Photograph Josef Kovac

presentation of awards recognising individuals' contributions to LGBT activism in Cork. In the first year, Arthur Leahy and Ger McCarthy received awards for their work in the Cork lesbian and gay communities, and the following year Helen Slattery was presented with a golden telephone in recognition of her work with the Cork Lesbian Line.

PATRICK'S DAY PARADE

The first Irish LGBT float in a Patrick's Day Parade was organised in Cork in 1992. As I wrote in an article in *GCN* in 1992:

On Patrick's Day '92 we made history, and we did it in style. Our float was a blaze of colour with balloons, banners, streamers and dancing lesbian, bi and gay people blowing bubbles at the 80,000 people lining the streets of Cork. ¹³⁶

The US based organisation ILGO (Irish Lesbian and Gay Organisation) was set up in 1990. One of its first actions was to apply to march in the annual St. Patrick's Day parade in New York. However, the organisers of the parade, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, refused to allow them to participate. Over the years ILGO employed a variety of strategies to attempt to join the parade and to protest at their exclusion.¹³⁷

In many ways the decision to enter an LGBT float in the Cork Patrick's Day Parade was a response to the banning of ILGO from marching in the parades in New York and in Boston.¹³⁸ We felt that if we could organise an LGBT entry in the Cork parade, it would show just how ridiculous it was to ban Irish LGBT people and organisations from participating in Patrick's Day parades abroad. However, it was also about availing of the opportunity for increased visibility for LGBT people on the streets of Cork – a



Orla Egan Article in Munster GCN 1992 Arthur Leahy Collection

prospect that was both exciting and daunting. We decided to do this in a way that was celebratory and joyful – kind of like ‘we’re here, we’re queer and we’re having fun!’ We dressed in bright costumes and organised a bright, cheerful, colourful float with huge bunches of purple and pink balloons, and we danced and sang through the streets of Cork singing, ‘Sing if you’re glad to be gay.’

The response to the float was mostly positive. There was some negative reaction: there were some people who stared with stony faces, and there was some disbelief and curiosity. An occasional finger or fist was raised at us. I was hit in the head by a bottle, but at least it was plastic! But there were also people all along the route who were clapping or shouting or waving in support. Sometimes in the middle of a silent crowd one person would start cheering and others would join in. Sometimes whole groups of people were hollering in support. On Patrick’s Bridge three women at the back of the crowd were jumping up and down frantically trying to attract our attention to encourage us. On the South Mall a 70 year old woman waved enthusiastically and called out ‘ye’re gorgeous!’

In the end, the LGBT float won the prize for the best new entry to the Cork Patrick’s Day Parade in 1992 – a far cry from the experiences in New York and Boston. Commenting on this prize Dermot Bolger wrote in the *Sunday Independent*:

*I think that can be a source of considerable pride. The Ireland being celebrated in Cork is a real and living place as against a fossilised past which we are supposed to be strait-jacketed within.*¹³⁹

The Cork LGBT community continued to organise impressive entries to the Patrick’s Day parade for a number of years. For example the LGBT entry to the 1995 Cork Patrick’s Day Parade won the prize for ‘Best Voluntary Group’.

ÁRAS AN UACHTARÁIN VISIT

In December 1992, Cork LGBT people were among a group invited by President Mary Robinson to visit Áras an Uachtaráin in Dublin, the home of the Irish President. This was prior to decriminalisation, and the visit had enormous symbolic importance for the Irish LGBT community. Kieran Rose commented:

*Being welcomed into the symbolic home of all Irish people was very important and significant. It seemed to me that those years of struggle, exclusion and abuse were being put behind us.*¹⁴⁰

DONNA McANALLEN CASE

Donna McAnallen was employed as a lifeguard and fitness instructor in the Brookfield Leisure Centre in Cork. On 26 April 1993, she was dismissed from her job following an allegation that she had been seen kissing her girlfriend in the changing rooms.

In June 1993, Donna took the case to the Labour Court alleging that her dismissal constituted a contravention of the 1977 Employment Equality Act.¹⁴¹ The case was heard in Cork on 28 October 1993.

Her solicitors put forward the following points:

- 1. That she was discriminated against in circumstances in which a male person doing exactly the same action as she did, would not have been dismissed i.e., that a man allegedly kissing his girlfriend would not have been dismissed for such an action.*
- 2. That the Employment Equality Act prohibits sexual harassment and that the European Commission Code*

of Practice on Sexual Harassment recognises that discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation must be seen as sexual harassment.

*3. That the worker's sexual orientation, her lesbianism, is a characteristic unique to the female sex and that actions based on that characteristic must constitute direct discrimination on the grounds of sex and as such is contrary to the Employment Equality Act.*¹⁴²

In the judgement delivered in February 1994, the Labour Court found “that the worker was treated in an arbitrary and unfair manner” but that the unfair treatment was not covered under the 1977 Employment Equality Act.¹⁴³

The Labour Court refused to interpret the 1977 Act as including protection on the basis of sexual orientation. However, the case strengthened the argument for the explicit inclusion of sexual orientation under the new employment equality legislation being planned at the time. Following the judgement in the case, the Minister for Equality and Law Reform indicated that he would be publishing a Bill which would outlaw discrimination such as that suffered by Donna McAnallen.¹⁴⁴ Sexual orientation was included as one of the protected grounds under the 1998 Employment Equality Act.¹⁴⁵

The case was also raised in the European Parliament in its debates on its Civil Liberties Committee report that recommended stronger protection of human rights and equal treatment for all, irrespective of nationality, religion, colour, sex, sexual orientation and other differences. Speaking in the European Parliament on 7 February 1994, Irish MEP Mary Banotti said that the Cork case raised very disturbing issues, and that as long as EU and national laws were weak then “discrimination would rear its ugly head. We still have a long way to go in terms of legislation in Ireland and other EU countries to ensure that overt discrimination does

not take place in the workplace and elsewhere.”¹⁴⁶

The Cork LGBT community rallied to support Donna McAnallen, and protests were organised at the Brookfield Leisure Centre with people wearing t-shirts with the slogan “I wished I had kissed Donna McAnallen.” The case generated widespread publicity. The Editorial in *The Cork Examiner* (8 February 1994) stated: “At least one positive outcome, which may be of some small consolation to the woman involved, is that the publicity and international attention given to the case makes a repetition unlikely.”¹⁴⁷

DECRIMINALISATION

In June 1993 the Irish government passed the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act which decriminalised gay relationships and provided for an equal age of consent for same-sex and heterosexual relationships. Decriminalisation was the successful outcome of decades of campaigning by LGBT activists and organisations.

CORK LESBIAN FANTASY BALL

The first Cork Lesbian Fantasy Ball, billed as ‘Pandora’s Box: a Lesbian Camp Drag Fantasy Cabaret Ball’, was held in Blackrock Castle on 19 November 1994.¹⁴⁸ Emma Bidwell, who was centrally involved, commented:

It is in many ways the Irish lesbian scene and herstory in miniature. There are all kinds: butch, femme, man, boy, girlie, goddess, slut. There are those still finding their nerve to be what they want, those who are pushing the limits of what is acceptable to others, those who will



Emma Bidwell, Soren Mayes, Clodagh Redden, Fantasy Ball 1996 Clodagh Redden

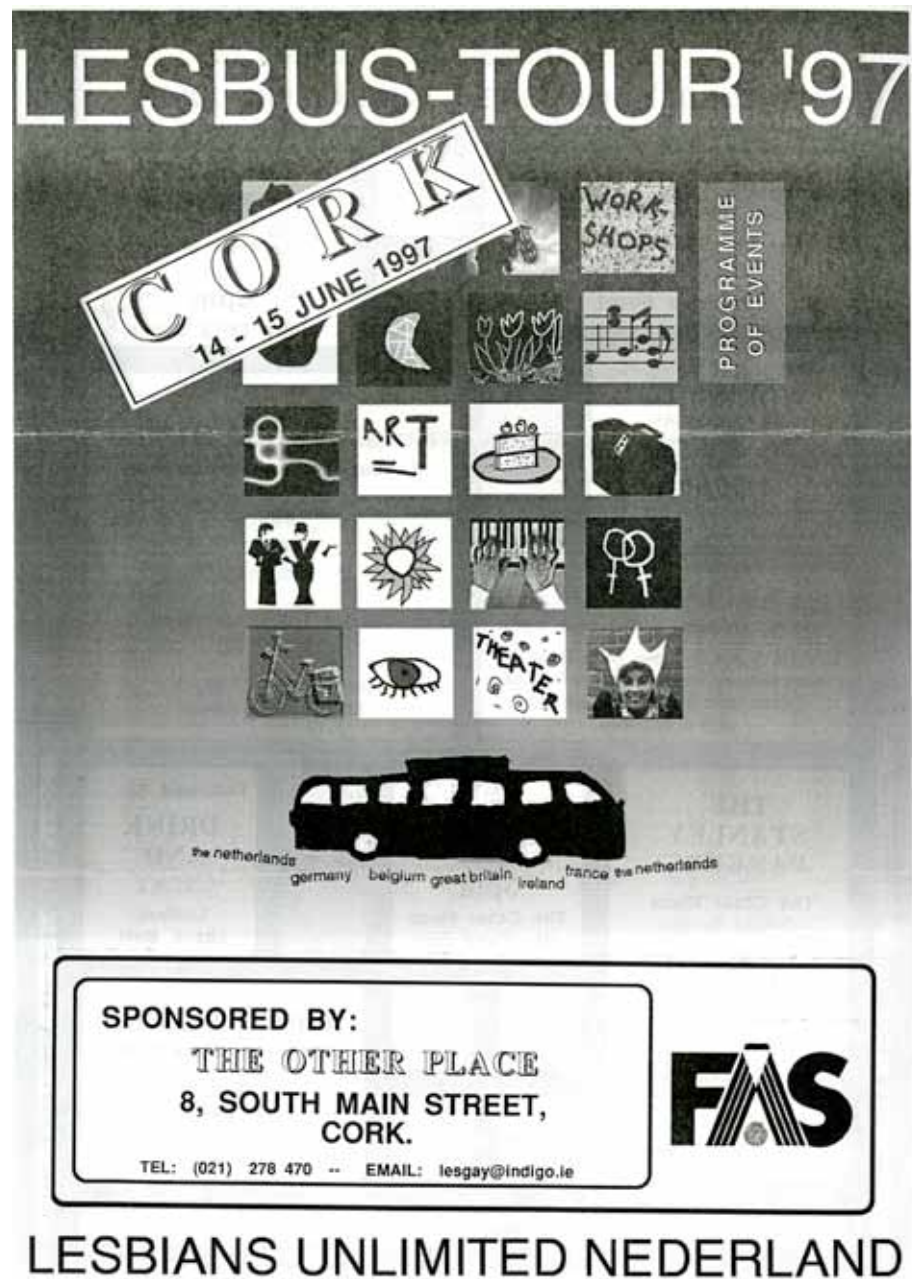
*always play safe, those comfortable with who they are and the unseen many who are still so scared of being lesbian that they are invisible in this parade.*¹⁴⁹

The advert for the 1996 Fantasy Ball described it as ‘A Time For Lesbians to Unleash Their Desires (Or At Least Wear A Silly Costume)’.¹⁵⁰ The *Inside Out* report of that ball captures the atmosphere:

*On a bitterly cold night on a hill near Glanmire the gathering began. From Cork, Belfast, Dublin, England, Scotland and Spain women, girls, dykes and divas arrived at Vienna Woods House Hotel for the Fabulous Fantasy Ball. Looking around: a space chick passed a cocktail to the Ice Queen, a demon licked the hand of an Amazon and Marilyn Monroe shared the bar with a buccaneer. In the make-up room, an inventive woman had organised safe sex packs, sewing kit and nail clippers. The drinks flowed along with the laughter, and sexual innuendo and the raucous evening turned into a rampant night.*¹⁵¹

The ball became an annual event and is symbolic of the playful, gender bending nature of the Cork lesbian community. Writing in 2000, I commented that the Fantasy Ball provides

*the freedom to express and explore and play with our fantasies – wear something you have always wanted to but never dared before or something you would never usually wear or something particularly daring for you or just something you feel good in. The ball provides one of the few opportunities for overt lesbian sexual expression and play – an opportunity which is not often available for lesbians in Ireland.*¹⁵²



Poster for LESBUS tour Cork 1997 Arthur Leahy Collection

LESBIAN & BISEXUAL PROJECTS IN THE OTHER PLACE

A number of workers employed in The Other Place were assigned to work on specific projects for lesbian and bisexual women. On 14 November 1994 a lesbian forum was held there to get feedback from the Cork lesbian community on priorities. Ideas were put forward in relation to social activities and groups to be developed. A LEAP project was established (Lesbians for Employment Against Poverty), and a number of self-help groups were set up and facilitated by LEAP. These included a Lesbian Addictions Group, a Married Lesbians Group, a Coming Out Group and a Young Lesbians Group. Monthly socials were organised by LEAP to provide an alcohol-free lesbian social space as an alternative to the pub or club scene.¹⁵³ A bisexual group was also formed, one of the first times that this community had a specific group in Cork. LEAP later became known as CLASS: Cork Lesbian Advice, Support and Self-Help Project.¹⁵⁴

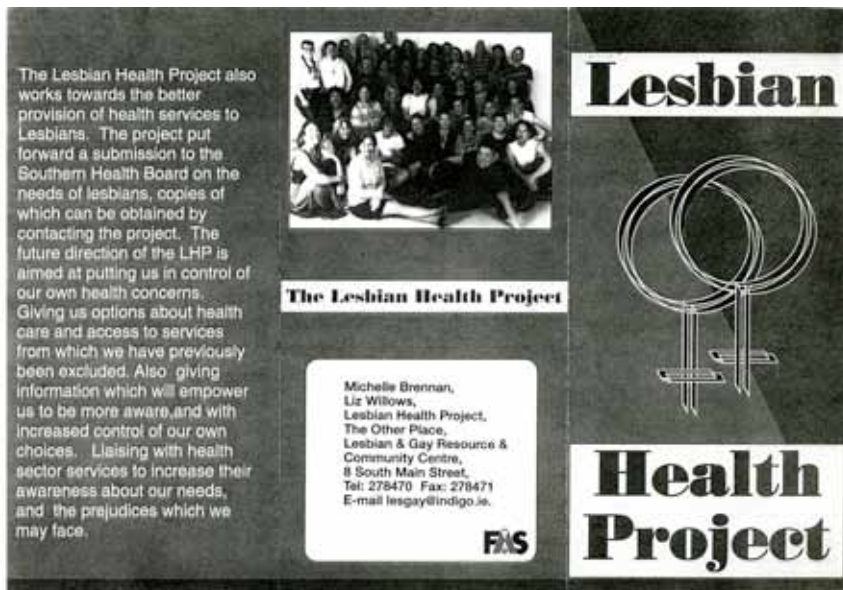
A visit by the Dutch Lesbuis Tour was supported in June 1997, with the touring group bringing a weekend of theatre, art workshops, wall painting and social events to the city.

A Lesbian Health Project began in The Other Place in February 1996.

The project was set up out of a recognition that even where there is adequate women's health care in society the needs of lesbians are often overlooked as the clientele are all assumed to be heterosexual. Whether this is in GP practices, ante/post natal care, sexual health (STD clinics), cancer screening, drug and alcohol treatment centres etc., lesbians can find it hard to get a sympathetic ear from healthcare professionals who are unaware of the needs (and sometimes of the existence!) of lesbian women.¹⁵⁵

The Lesbian Health Project provided advice for women on health care issues; it facilitated the Lesbian Drug and Alcohol Recovery Group, provided Lesbians and Safer Sex Workshops and conducted a Women's Sex Survey. The project also worked on the development of lesbian specific information on STDs, addictions, bereavement issues and AIDS prevention.¹⁵⁶

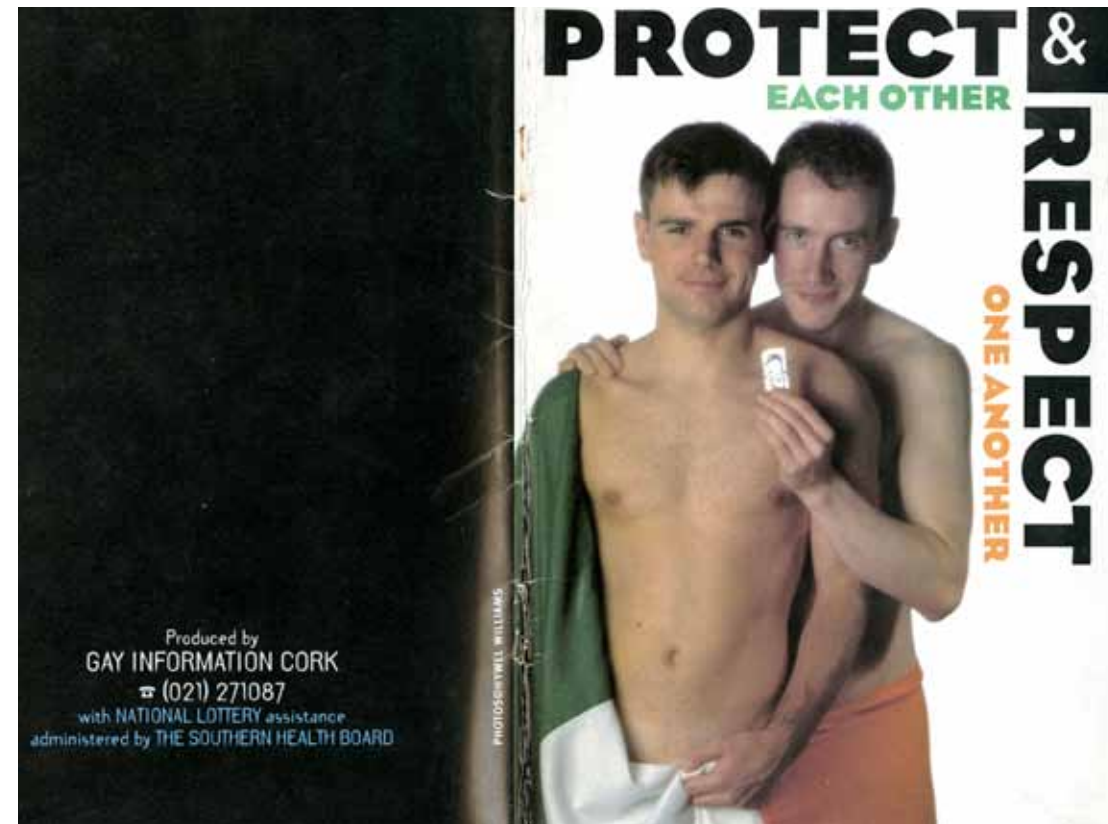
The Lesbian Health Project received some funding from the Southern Health Board to organise an annual Lesbian Health Day. The first of these was held on 25 May 1996 with workshops on a range of issues, including Co-Dependency, Female Cancers, Menopause, Reproduction/Birthing, Mental Health, Lesbians and Domestic Violence, Homeopathy, Body Images, Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll, Women and Alcohol Abuse and Self-help to Health. The Lesbian Health Day, which was attended by around sixty women, was seen as "a major breakthrough in lesbian visibility and access to health care information in Ireland. The first event of its kind."¹⁵⁷



Lesbian Health Project Leaflet 1990s, Arthur Leahy Collection

The Lesbian Health Days were organised annually for a number of years. The fourth one was held in Farranree Community Centre 4-5 December 1999. Entitled Access All Areas it covered topics as diverse as disability rights, transgender issues, mothering in the lesbian community, staying sober, accessing insemination services, lesbian lines, mental health, access to alternative health therapies, ageing and younger lesbians.¹⁵⁸

SOUTHERN GAY MEN'S HEALTH PROJECT



Safe Sex Booklet, Cork 1990s Arthur Leahy Collection

The Southern Gay Men's Health Project also operated out of the Other Place. This was a sexual health organisation that took a community development and holistic approach to health promotion. They provided training and workshops on the health care needs of gay/bisexual people for health care professionals and others. They also developed and provided promotional materials in relation to safer sex. They did outreach work in bars, clubs and public sex environments, providing free condoms and information on STIs and HIV/AIDS. They also provided a helpline, a befriending service, one-to-one counselling, personal development courses, support groups and a website.¹⁵⁹

SPORT

In 1994 a Cork lesbian soccer team, Douglas Street, was set up. Helen Slattery explained the motivation behind its establishment in an article in *LINC Magazine*.

I had been playing soccer for eight years with a straight club and I knew lots of other lesbians playing in other straight teams. At the soccer socials all the lesbians would hang around together but lesbians were not being recognised or valued. So I said, 'Why not start a lesbian soccer team?' That's how the Douglas Street soccer team came about.

The team trained and competed in Cork soccer leagues for a number of years, with the lesbian community coming out to support the team at its matches. In October 1996, the Cork soccer team was invited to Galway for a friendly match against the newly formed Galway lesbian soccer team. It was a successful weekend of soccer, partying and flirting. It led to further exchanges between the teams, and ultimately led to an annual lesbian soccer tournament in Galway.

A number of Cork lesbians were keen pool players and competed in the Cork pub pool competitions. Groups of lesbians would meet regularly to play pool, and a number of pool tournaments were organized in the Coliseum Leisure Centre in the early 1990s. There were also regular softball games on Sundays in Cork in the 1990s.

From the mid-90s, Sunday walking trips in West Cork were organized by the Boot Women group, with occasional canoeing sessions organized by the same group, known then as the Boat Women. There were also regular informal gatherings and camping trips on beaches and in the gardens of various women living in West Cork. There was also a men's walking group and various outdoors activities were organised.

As mentioned earlier, a group of Cork LGBT people competed in the Gay Games in Amsterdam in 1998.

DEVELOPMENT OF CORK LESBIAN CENTRE

The idea of a Cork lesbian centre had been discussed for some time. Over the years Cork lesbian and bisexual women had tried to share and negotiate space and resources with gay men and other women's groups; these attempts have at times been successful, but have often been problematic.¹⁶⁰ A number of lesbian community meetings were held (December 1998 and February 1999) and a steering group, operating under the name Cairde Corcaí (Cork Friends), was established to explore this possibility. A small grant (£10,000) was obtained from the EU funded LEA (Lesbian Education and Awareness) project. This enabled Cairde Corcaí to open Cork's first lesbian centre at 14 George's Quay on 26 April 1999.

A number of groups operated from the George's Quay



Linc Newsletter 2000 Orla Egan Collection

lesbian centre. Social and information events were organised. For example a Health Day was held on 6 November 1999 and a Seminar on Racism and the Lesbian Community was held on 21 November 1999. However, there were challenges due to the lack of resources to employ any staff, which led to limited opening hours. Problems also emerged with the homophobic landlord. The lesbian centre moved to Princes Street in 2000 and the name was changed to LINC (Lesbians in Cork). It moved to its current home on White Street in 2002. The employment of staff, initially under the Community Employment Scheme, and later with a grant under the Equality for Women Measure of the National Development Plan, was key to the development of the Cork lesbian centre. As I observed in 2004: “This funding, staff time and commitment has enabled LINC to develop into a vibrant and active lesbian centre which is the envy of lesbian groups throughout the country.”¹⁶¹

TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY

During the 1990s there was increasing visibility and acknowledgment of the transgender community. Trans people socialised at the discos in the Other Place in Cork, and also at transgender social clubs in Dublin, including Amanda Barry’s club and the Gemini Club which started in 1996 and is still running. A number of information and discussion evenings took place in Cork, including one at the Princes Street office of LINC.

While there was growing visibility, understanding and respect for the transgender community, this was not universal and some tensions existed. There were some difficult situations, for example, a trans man, who had previously been part of the lesbian community, was refused entry into the Cork Women’s Fun Weekend disco because he no longer identified as a woman.

A Cork woman, Dr. Margaret O'Regan, was one of the first Irish doctors to provide psychological and hormone support to transgender people in Ireland; people would travel to Cork specifically to meet with her. Her sudden death in 2000 left the transgender community without an important ally.¹⁶²

In the mid 1990s a West Cork trans woman was engaged in a battle with the Southern Health Board to get support for her gender reassignment, but the Health Board resisted supporting her. She died of cancer before she was able to get the operation.¹⁶³

The Irish transgender organisation TENI (Transgender Equality Network of Ireland)¹⁶⁴ was established initially in Cork in 2003 (known then as Transsexual Equality Ireland). The original TENI group fell apart and was restated as TENI (Transgender Equality Network of Ireland) in Dublin in 2006.¹⁶⁵

In 2005 Cork independent filmmaker, Carol O'Keeffe, made a documentary about transgender issues in Ireland. Called *Written on the Soul*, this film included interviews with three Irish based transgender people, and is one of the few Irish films to deal with issues of concern to the transgender community.¹⁶⁶

OUT AND ABOUT

In 2005, Frameworks Films produced a film, *Out and About*. The film, narrated by Orla Egan and John Dunlea, takes viewers on an LGBT historical walking tour through Cork city.¹⁶⁷



From the 1970s onwards the Cork LGBT communities became more organised, visible and vocal. New organisations were established, and a range of events, services and campaigns was organised. Strong links were developed and maintained with other LGBT organisations nationally and internationally and with other social change movements, with the Cork LGBT community playing a vital role in social change movements.

The Cork LGBT community actively challenged the prevailing prejudice against LGBT people and provided safe and positive community venues for LGBT people. The work of the early organisations and activists laid the foundations for the further development of the community in the following decades.

However, the development of the community was not always without controversy and disagreements. While, at times, the lesbian and gay communities worked well together, there were often disputes over politics, priorities and access to scarce resources.

Lesbian and gay history is a hidden history, often obscured and ignored in mainstream historical narratives. However, within that hidden history is another hidden history: that of the bisexual and transgender communities. There was little, if any, acknowledgment of or respect for bisexual or transgender people in the lesbian and gay communities of the 1970s and 1980s in Cork. This gradually began to change in the 1990s, but much work remains to be done to uncover and acknowledge the histories of these communities.

Queer Republic of Cork is a step towards acknowledging and

documenting this history. The story of the development of our community is beginning to emerge. The Cork LGBT Archive will continue to facilitate this, and to enable multiple voices and narratives to be heard.

If you want to add to this history and if you have stories or materials to donate to the archive please contact: corklgbthistory@gmail.com

corklgbtarchive.com



- 1 Exhibit celebrating Cork Firsts: corklgbtarchive.com/
- 2 Offences Against The Persons Act 1861, Irish Statute Book irishstatutebook.ie
- 3 Interview with Bernie O’Leary, September 2016
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- 43 Kieran Rose, *Diverse Communities* p. 17
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- 114 Kieran Rose *Diverse Communities* p. 22
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- 136 Orla Egan "Historic Victory" in *Munster GCN* April 1992
- 137 Maguire, Anne. *Rock the Sham!: The Irish Lesbian & Gay Organization's Battle to March in New York City's St. Patrick's Day Parade*. New York, N.Y.: Street Level Press, 2005.
- 138 I was working in the Other Place at the time and was one of the key organisers of the Patrick's Day entry, along with Petra Stone.
- 139 Quoted in Petra Stone "Where do we go from here? In *Munster GCN* April 1992
- 140 Kieran Rose *Diverse Communities* p. 34
- 141 She was unable to take the case under the Unfair Dismissals Act because she had been employed at Brookfield Leisure Centre for less than a year, the minimum period proscribed by the legislation.
- 142 Arguments presented at Labour Court hearing by Noonan and Linehan Solicitors in report of Labour Court case EEO1293, Brookfield Leisure Limited and A Worker.
- 143 Labour Court Order case EEo1293, Brookfield Leisure Limited and A Worker
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- 150 *Inside Out* newsletter Issue 4 October 1996
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- 166 carolokeeffedocumentary.com
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Orla Egan has been actively involved in the Cork LGBT community since the 1980s. She has published and presented papers on Cork LGBT history in various forums. With over 20 years experience working in the education, equality, community development and social inclusion arenas, she worked as Director of the Higher Education Equality Unit, as Manager of Cherry Orchard Community Training Centre and was Training and Development Officer with BeLonG To LGBT Youth Service. She was also an independent community development consultant.

She is currently completing a PhD in Digital Arts and Humanities in University College Cork, where she works as a part-time tutor/lecturer in Women's Studies, Applied Social Studies and Digital Arts and Humanities. She has developed the Cork LGBT Archive to gather, preserve and share information on Cork's LGBT history. She is also involved in the LINC Drama Group where she has co-written and performed in a number of productions.

She is the proud parent of Jacob, and the partner of Cork independent filmmaker Carol O'Keeffe.