

SHAPING OUR FUTURE

IS FÉIDIR LINN with the COMMUNITY PLATFORM

CONFERENCE REPORT
BY
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COMMUNITY PLATFORM

CHALLENGING POVERTY & INEQUALITY

28 NATIONAL NETWORKS & ORGANISATIONS

Is Féidir Linn

INTRODUCTION: SIOBHÁN O'DONOGHUE

Is Féidir Linn is an informal *ad hoc* grouping of individuals with a commitment to, or involvement in, community work, social inclusion, anti-poverty, human rights and equality issues. The group first came together out of concern about the difficult relationship between the community sector and the state. This concern has broadened to encompass a focus on what an inclusive, equal and sustainable Ireland might look like and what is required to develop such an Ireland.

There is a palpable sense of change in the air. The Community Platform publication “A Better Ireland is Possible”, the SIPTU protest at the cutbacks to community and voluntary sector funding, the work of the Equality & Rights Alliance, and the recent meeting of the Community Workers’ Co-operative on the challenging times facing the community sector all provide evidence of this. There are other spaces and places where people are gathering and organising in response to the crisis in national and global financial and economic systems and to the weaknesses exposed in the Irish political project and the chosen model of development. This conference marks a further contribution to this search for change.

We now need a strong civil society. We need a politics that transcends the boundaries of self interest, organisational interests and political partisanship. Now is the time to realise the potential of a wider civil society in creating an inclusive, equal and sustainable Ireland. This requires improved communication, co-operation and collective action.

Times of recession represent a turning point in a society. We need to shape that turning point by re-imagining how we organise ourselves and we organise our society.

THE CASE FOR CHANGE: RICHARD WILKINSON

Almost everyone benefits from greater equality. How well countries do in relation to a wide range of health and social problems relate to income inequality in that country.

Income inequality is related to higher levels of mental illness, violence and rates of imprisonment in countries. It is related to lower levels of life expectancy, educational attainment, social mobility and levels of trust in countries. There is an extraordinary close relationship between income inequality and these different social problems. There is no consistent relationship between these social problems and national income per head.

There is a general social dysfunction associated with inequality. Over history we have lived in very egalitarian societies. The amount of inequality is a trigger to which we appear to be highly attuned. Our position and status in society matter. Social evaluative threats, social anxiety, and the need for respect make us very sensitive to inequalities.

Economic growth has been used as a substitute for equalising incomes. As long as there is growth people feel there is hope and thus large income differences are made possible. However this is at the cost of the destruction of the planet. We have already got to the end of what rising living standards can do for us.

Further information on the work of Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, including data from their publication ‘The Spirit Level – Why more equal societies almost always do better’ (Allen Lane), is available on www.equalitytrust.org.uk.

A MANIFESTO FOR CHANGE: MARY MURPHY

The *Is Féidir Linn* proposal for a manifesto starts by identifying what kind of society we want to live in – an inclusive, equal and sustainable Ireland. It then establishes the social relations on which this kind of society can be built on. Finally, it identifies the type of economy that is required to achieve such a society.

The *Is Féidir Linn* proposal seeks to enable people to take their place in the battle of ideas and to do so based on commitment to a sustainable productive economy, redistributive justice, high quality public services, equal status for people and groups, and a democracy that is participative as well as representative. It seeks to enable people to bring forward an agenda for change based on the values of balanced development, equality, participation and global solidarity.

There are five policy goals set out in the *Is Féidir Linn* proposal. These are:-

- A model of development that ensures economic and social security, eliminates environmental risk, accommodates a variety of different economic structures and forms of ownership, and recognises global interdependence.
- A model of development where income and resources are distributed more equally so as to avoid poverty, inequality and excess of wealth. This requires high levels of taxation and social expenditure and high quality public services.
- A model of development which prioritises, invests in and develops high quality, efficient and effective public services for all.
- A model of development where society and its institutions appropriately and adequately value the diversity that makes up society and eliminates all forms of discrimination.
- A model of development that enables greater diversity of influence through an enhanced system of representative democracy, and a more inclusive, participatory and active democracy including an autonomous and critical civil society.

Change happens through people, through people making alliances, through tangible ideas and values, and through spaces and places in which to share those ideas with other actors. We need to engage with political parties, trade unions, ecology groups, faith-led organisations developing world groups and others to advance the ideas in this manifesto. We need to find or create the spaces that enable us to move forward together on these ideas and values.

RESPONDING TO THE MANIFESTO: JACK O'CONNOR

Things will not be the same after the current crisis. The crisis has the potential to change the direction of human development and history, though not necessarily for the better – that outcome will depend on the balance of forces at play in society.

The amount of scope in responding to the crisis is limited. There are not many alternatives to the plan agreed with the EU. The Government/Employer establishment is set on:-

- Saving the banks from nationalisation on the basis of real fears of sentiment effect among global money lenders.
- Rectifying the public finances through cuts in public spending so that investors are not alienated.
- Improving competitiveness and relying on a global economic recovery.

However we cannot shift the strategic space if we confine ourselves to campaigns about cuts. The trade unions have put forward the concept of social dividend – there will be hardship now but there must be a social dividend at the other end. The manifesto of *Is Féidir Linn* is to be welcomed though it could have greater emphasis on promoting the vision of and developing the instruments to create democracy such as the right to participate in collective bargaining.

Equality and justice are morally superior values but hold very little traction with people. There is a real challenge to ensure that this proposition of equality and justice is understood. We need to build organisations that serve to counteract the power of global capital. There is a coalition developing here and we need a broad coalition of the left.

RESPONDING TO THE MANIFESTO: PARTICIPANT DEBATE

Overall there was a broad and positive welcome for the manifesto and the broad thrust of its content.

A number of overarching issues were raised in relation to the content of the manifesto. These included:-

- The manifesto should state that it is linked to a human rights framework. The language should reflect a more rights based approach.
- It needs to be established how the manifesto would link to a broader environmental agenda, international trade policies and the EU. Particular reference was made to the need to further develop environmental issues and to weave them through the document and to the need to protect and nationalise our natural resources.
- It was suggested that the document poses no challenges to the non-governmental sector itself.
- Should the document be more oppositional? Suggestions were made to name the key drivers of inequality such as patriarchy, capitalism and racism. There were other suggestions that the document was strong for emphasising what it stood for rather than what it was against.
- It was suggested that there was insufficient recognition of real economic problems of national debt, loss of competitiveness and excessive public spending. A brief section on current socio-economic realities was recommended.
- Should the document list specific issues or specific groups? There were suggestions to reference multi-culturalism, to stress socio-economic status as an equality ground, to address demographic changes in particular the ageing of the population, to name people with disabilities as experiencing exclusion and an income gap, to set out income gaps based on age, and to identify gender as a key contributor to inequality.
- Is the balance between inclusion and equality achieved? There was a suggestion to focus more on inclusiveness and rights, a suggestion to include more recognition of diversity, and a suggestion that inclusion and recognition were unhelpfully dealt with on twin tracks.
- The document is highlighted as idealistic and even as a wish list. Suggestions were made to flesh out ideals with examples of actions we would like to see taken. Other suggestions were that the idealistic approach was good.

A number of specific developments to the contents of the manifesto were put forward. These included:-

- To include a focus on collective bargaining as a right.
- To develop the focus on housing policy and the need for a comprehensive housing policy based on the concept of housing as a right.
- To give greater prominence to the production of resources, and industrial policy, including a focus on foreign direct investment.
- To include a reference to the need for separation of church and state.
- To strengthen the democracy section. Accountability is a central issue to be built in. Participative democracy needs to be put alongside representative democracy and not as a subset. Need to include a bit on enabling people to be more critically conscious. Need to reinforce the right of the community sector to be political.
- To develop the Equal Status section by ensuring public bodies are required to report on outcomes in achieving equality and to ensure impact assessment names clear actions to be taken to address inequalities.
- To identify where volunteering and active citizenship fit with the document.

USING THE MANIFESTO: PARTICIPANT DEBATE

There was a significant focus on making use of the manifesto within organisations, at local level and at societal level. There was also a strong call to communicate the manifesto to a wider audience.

To **communicate** the manifesto it was suggested to:-

- Develop a toolkit to help people move the agenda along and promote discussion.
- Progress elements of the manifesto in specific chunks. Use separate pull out sections to concretise ideals and deepen thinking on specific elements. Develop data based evidence to back up points being made.
- Implement an education programme and create the spaces for this.
- Make use of the Spirit Level data to legitimise the agenda and to stress that equality makes economic sense. Sell the reality that equality is better for all.
- Make use of new media for discussion and organisation, including using already existing IT communication mechanisms.
- Engage with the mainstream media and alternative media.
- Explore other policy platforms such as the ICTU Ten Point Plan and identify points of commonality.
- Make links with Citizen Information Centres.
- Publish a quarterly newsletter and make use of theatre to promote the manifesto.
- Find particular hooks to draw people into the debate. Find ways to engage middle Ireland.

To advance the manifesto **within organisations** it was suggested to:-

- Use the manifesto to assist in going beyond the immediate concerns of one's own organisation and in taking up wider concerns and issues.
- Explore how manifesto could be used to frame demands and advance issues of one's organisation. It should change the way we work and act.
- Ensure the manifesto informs policy in one's organisation.
- Make the manifesto a focus for debate within one's organisation.
- Identify how the policy framework could be advanced at local level.

To advance the manifesto **at local level** it was suggested to:-

- Stimulate self organisation around the manifesto.
- Use the manifesto at local level as a tool to raise awareness.
- Re-ignite conversations about social change at local level.
- Organise regional and local meetings to discuss the manifesto and build alliances, possibly through a series of county based meetings. Include trade unions, political parties etc. in these meetings.
- Present manifesto to Local Authority Council meetings, the Boards of Partnership Companies and within City and County Development Boards.

To advance the manifesto **at societal level** it was suggested to:-

- Build broad civil society alliances. Ensure clarity as to what we want to achieve together. Develop a particular space from which to build momentum through new alliances. Create a forum for civil society dialogue and action. The Developing World, Environmental, Student and Trade Union sectors are interested in building alliances.
- Explore how the community and voluntary sector engages with the political system to force the pace of change. Do we need a new political party? Do we join political parties to advance agenda? Do we get more

people voting? Do we bring manifesto to political parliamentary party meetings? Do we align ourselves politically in the broad sense or should we be wary of danger of being aligned to any one political actor?

- Build solidarity within the community and voluntary sector to build influence. Challenge the silencing of the sector and provide cover to those for whom it is dangerous to speak out.
- Make use of social partnership as a vehicle for this manifesto.
- Make use of international agreements to advance the manifesto agenda.
- Build a campaign based on the manifesto.
- Influence opinion formers and champions beyond the usual suspects.
- Provoke a response from the right to generate debate.
- Organise around specific elements of the manifesto.

APPENDIX ONE

IS FÉIDIR LINN MANIFESTO

19th June 2009

A vision for an inclusive, equal, sustainable Ireland

The crisis in national and global financial and economic systems, combined with grave weaknesses in the Irish political project and the chosen model of development, is creating hardship for many individuals, families and communities in Ireland.

The most disadvantaged and marginalised groups in society, who gained least during the economic boom, are bearing a disproportionate burden of poverty and inequality as a result of policies in place to manage and address this crisis. Organisations at community and national levels, which have been at the forefront of combating poverty and inequality, are being silenced and dismantled.

There is an urgent need for an alternative model of development with a capacity to create a more equal Ireland which also breaks free of enduring injustices such as socio- economic and gendered inequalities. In more equal societies everybody does better. Economic and social restructuring can only make sense in the short term if the recovery programme contributes in the medium and long term to a better, more equal and more sustainable society and economy.

Is Féidir Linn is an ad hoc grouping of individuals with a commitment to or involvement in community work, social inclusion, anti-poverty, human rights and equality issues. We want to be part of a sustained movement committed to bringing about a better society. We believe now is the time to develop an alternative political, economic and social model of development for Ireland.

This document outlines the values and goals of what that alternative model of development could look like. In preparing this document the aim of *Is Féidir Linn* is to stimulate discussion and understanding of the need for and content of such an alternative model. The next step is to build consensus, momentum, solidarity and alliances among those interested in this vision and these goals, with a view to working towards an inclusive, equal and sustainable Ireland.

POLICY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

1. Sustainability

Goal: A model of development that ensures economic and social security, eliminates environmental risk, accommodates a variety of different economic structures and forms of ownership and recognises global interdependence.

Policy Objectives:

- ◆ Policies and programmes should seek to achieve full employment where everyone can exercise their right to freely chosen, decently paid work and where employment standards are fully enforced.
 - ◆ Profit from economic activity and human work and endeavour should be fairly shared across generations through universal pensions and child income support.
 - ◆ Employment, income support and public policy should interact to guarantee security for all in a flexible labour market.
 - ◆ Policy and programmes should reflect an understanding of work that includes care work and should ensure that all work, paid and unpaid, is shared so that everyone has the right to work and care.
 - ◆ Policies and programmes should support social economy employment that produces social gain.
 - ◆ Industrial policy should promote indigenous industry and localised production, both being central to a sustainable economy.
 - ◆ The state should regulate to protect society from unsustainable economic activity which exploits workers, destroys the environment, adds to global injustice or damages work life balance.
 - ◆ International commitments should support the greater global distribution of wealth, fair trade with 'developing world' countries and highest levels of international aid to 'developing world' countries.
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2. Income, Taxation, Wealth

Goal: A model of development where income and resources are distributed more equally so as to avoid poverty, inequality and excesses of wealth. This requires high levels of taxation and social expenditure and high quality public services.

Policy Objectives :

- ◆ Tax and incomes policy should ensure minimum and maximum income standards. Highest income earners should have no more than ten times the income of the lowest earners.
 - ◆ The level of taxation should be that required to achieve the highest standards of efficient and effective public services of the four best performing countries in EU.
 - ◆ The tax system should be progressive and the tax base should include all forms of wealth with full compliance.
 - ◆ Wages, taxation and income support policy should ensure incentives to take up quality employment that pays sufficiently to prevent or eliminate poverty.
 - ◆ The minimum income level should be adequate to allow people to live a dignified life and to ensure that no one has an income less than 60% of the national median income.
 - ◆ Economic policy should seek to eliminate income, pay and employment gaps between groups, paying particular attention to women and members of minority ethnic groups.
 - ◆ There should be no tax shelters. Tax reliefs should be minimal and used only for employment creation, social gain and to promote environmentally, economically and socially sustainable behaviour.
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3. Public Services:

Goal: A model of development which prioritises, invests in and develops high quality, efficient and effective public services for all.

Policy objectives:

- ◆ All public services should be of high quality with clear legally enforced minimum standards.
 - ◆ There should be publicly funded universal access to education, health and care services. There should be no public support for private enhancement of these core rights.
 - ◆ Broader public services should enable participation in public, social and economic life through rights that secure access to decent housing and accommodation, a range of culture, sports and recreation and transport.
 - ◆ Services of general interest such as water, refuse and transport should be kept in, or returned to, public control.
 - ◆ Public services should be developed in ways that promote equality, provide for diversity, are non-discriminatory and meet peoples' needs in an integrated and accountable manner.
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4. Equal status:

Goal: A model of development where society and its institutions appropriately and adequately value the diversity that makes up society, and eliminate all forms of discrimination.

Policy objectives:

- ◆ Require public and private sector organisations to be proactive in taking action to promote equality through improved equality legislation.
 - ◆ Introduce a new ground of 'socio-economic status' into the equality legislation.
 - ◆ Ensure independent adequately resourced statutory agencies to effectively implement and monitor equality legislation.
 - ◆ Adequately support programmes that enable people to exercise their rights under equality legislation.
 - ◆ Enhance policy and programmes in place to eliminate violence and abuse targeted at specific groups in society.
 - ◆ Establish policy, standards and programmes to eliminate stereotyping, in particular in all forms of media and advertising.
 - ◆ Ensure effective assessment of all policies for their impact on equality and social cohesion.
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5. Democracy

Goal: A model of development that enables greater diversity of influence through an enhanced system of representative democracy and a more inclusive, participatory and active democracy including an autonomous and critical civil society.

Policy objectives:

- ◆ Establish an independent electoral commission which, through such mechanisms as gender and minority electoral quotas, ensures that political representatives reflect the diversity of society.
- ◆ Reform local government to devolve greater powers to local level, to develop local funding sources and to more effectively coordinate and integrate public services.
- ◆ Develop models of participatory democracy and specific supports for those experiencing poverty and inequality to participate in and influence decision-making.
- ◆ Implement policy and programmes to support wider and more diverse participation in decision making in workplaces, public sector services and educational establishments.
- ◆ Ensure private and state funding respects and protects the independence of community sector organisations and affirms and supports their advocacy role.
- ◆ Increase public sector accountability through enhanced freedom of information.
- ◆ Ensure competent and diverse representation on state boards by making all state board appointments through the Public Appointments Commission.

VALUES

Balance

This model of development balances economic, social and environmental objectives and can sustain itself into the future through: an economy that is productive and promotes full employment and well-being; a society that is cohesive, caring and inclusive of all; an environment that is cared for and well managed.

Participation

This model of development is governed in a way that enables all in society to have a real say in decisions that impact on them.

Equality

This model of development contributes to equality for all groups and individuals in society in terms of: the distribution of resources and services: the recognition of diversity: the exercise of influence.

Global Solidarity

This model of development contributes to independence, equality and development for the disadvantaged regions of the world.

Further information on 'A vision for an inclusive, equal, sustainable Ireland' is available on the Community Platform website: www.communityplatform.ie

APPENDIX TWO

CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

Name	Surname	Organisation
Mike	Allen	Focus Ireland
Lynsdey	Anderson	Respond Housing Agency
Pedro	Angulo	Prospectus
Felicia	Barins	Longford Community Resources Ltd.
Margaret	Barry	Corporate Community
Dr Catherine	Bates	Students Learning with Communities
Ava	Battles	Carmichael Centre for Voluntary Groups
Francine	Blache-Breen	Donegal CWC
Andy	Bourne	Galway Simon Community
Patrick	Boyle	NASCADH CDP
Maura Ann	Brennan	Integrating Ireland
Trish	Brennan	Kilkenny County Council
Katie	Burke	Prospectus
Margaret	Burns	Jesuit Centre for Faith & Justice
Lindsey	Butler	Kilkenny County Council
Cllr. Eric	Byrne	Dublin City Council
Clodagh	Byrne	Trinity College Dublin
Frances	Byrne	OPEN
Gemma	Carney	ICSG
Anthony	Carrick	DFI
Mary	Carroll	NUI Maynooth
Paula	Clancy	TASC
Con	Colbert	Irish Doctors Environmental Assoc
Martin	Collins	Pavee Point
Martina	Comerford	Kilkenny County Council
David	Connolly	Dublin Inner City P'ship
Thomond	Coogan	UCD Adult Education Centre
Tommy	Coombes	Bluebell CDP
Richard	Costello	Edenmore CDP
Anne	Costello	Community Platform
Susan	Coughlan	Corporate Community
Dr Wendy	Cox	Independent Researcher
Anastasia	Crickley	Dept of Applied Social Studies, NUIM
Niall	Crowley	
Susan	Cullinane	Kildare VEC
Liz	Curry	POBAL
Sally	Daly	DIT
Marianna	Darillo	Dublin Multicultural Resource Centre
Jeanette	Delaney	NUI Maynooth
Martin	Dier	Living Democracy

Paul	Donnelly	N/A
John	Douglas	MANDATE
Carmel	Duggan	WRC
Hugh	Fahey	Dublin City Council
Niamh	Farren	Aontas
Ronnie	Fay	Pavee Point
Cllr. Stephen	Fitzpatrick	Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council
Ciara	Flanagan	Pobal
Nadette	Foley	Dublin Multicultural Resource Centre
Brian	Forbes	Mandate
Hugh	Frazer	NUI Maynooth
Bernie	Furlong	Pobal
Bobby	Gilmore	MRCI
Shirley	Graham	Hannas House
Martina	Griffin	Rathmines Community partnership
Brian	Harvey	Social Researcher
Ann- Marie	Healy	Mayo Centre for Independent Living
Liam	Herrick	IPRT
Angela	Holohan	Donegal CWC
Frank	Horne	Longford Local Authority
Cristina	Hurson	Tullamore Traveller Movement
Moira	Hyland-Doyle	NYP Blanchardstown
Madeline	Johansson	SWP
Barry	Johnston	Amnesty International
Karin	Jonsson	Quarryvale Community and Family Resource Centre
David	Joyce	ICTU
Jacqueline	Kane	MRCI
Sharon	Keane	CPA
Owen	Keenan	Middlequarter
Freda	Keeshan	Ballyfermot/Chapleizod P'ship
Nuala	Kelly	POBAL
Prof. Peadar	Kirby	University of Limerick
Seanie	Lambe	ICON
David	Lawless	RAPID Co-ordinator
Aiden	Lloyd	POBAL
Aiden	Lloyd	POBAL
Jennifer	Lloyd Hughes	South Dublin Community Platform
Joyce	Loughnan	Focus Ireland
Barry	Lowe	Sligo Institute of Technology
Helen	Lowry	MRCI
Iris	Lyle	N/A
Siobhan	Lynam	Researcher & Consultant
David	Lynch	Clondalkin Partnership

Martina	Lyne	NUI Maynooth
Paula	Madden	ITM
Mayte Calvo	Martin	
RoseMary	Maughan	ITM
Margaret	McArdle	Community Consultants
Oonagh	McArdle	Community Workers Co-op
Prof. Vincent	McBrierty	Irish Commission for Justice & Social Affairs
Terry	McCabe	Blanchardstown Area P'ship
Mairead	McCann	Rathmines Community partnership
Kathleen	McCann	N/A
Niamh	McCrea	UCD Equality Studies Centre
Bernie	McDonnell	POBAL
Mary	McEvoy	N/A
Valerie	McFarlane	Longford Community Resources Ltd.
Edel	McGinley	MRCI
Niamh	McGrath	ITM
Rosalind	McKenna	Amnesty International
Bernadette	McMahon	Vincentian Partnership
Tina	McVeigh	People before Profit
Allen	Meagher	Changing Ireland
Brian	Melaugh	Dept of Applied Social Studies
Pat	Montague	Montague Communications
Rachel	Mullen	ERA
Kieran	Murphy	SVP
Monica	Murphy	Dublin City Council
Dr. Mary	Murphy	NUIM
Eoin	O Broin	Sinn Fein
Dr Ide B.	O Carroll	O' Carroll Associates Research & Evaluation
Darragh	O Connor	SIPTU
Jack	O Connor	SIPTU
Mary	O Donoghue	POBAL
Siobhan	O Donoghue	MRCI
Felim	O hAdhmaill	N/A
Sean	O hEigartaigh	NESF
Chris	O Leary	Farranree CDP
Sean	O Leary	IRL
Cathleen	O Neill	Kilbarrick CDP
Margaret	O Riada	Galway Traveller Movement
Marianne	O Shea	South Dublin Community Platform
Paul	O Sullivan	Clann Credo
Claire	Oakes	Living Democracy
Annette	Patton	Donegal CWC
Sinead	Pentony	Pobal

Will	Peters	D.I.T.
Fleachta	Phelan	Comhlamh
Maria	Power	Community Consultants
Dawn	Quinn	Marriagequality
Padraic	Reilly	Social & Health Education Project
Niamh	Roche	Caring for Carers
Aine	Roddy	NUIG
Mick	Ruane	BogDog Films
Breedge	Scanlon	INO
Monica	Shannon	Corduff CDP
Pat	Shannon	Caring for Carers
Sheila	Simmons	Irish Association of Older People
Ailbhe	Smith	Feminist Open Forum
Anne	Smith	Corduff CDP
Jean	Somers	Dublin Employment Pact
Anne	Speed	SIPTU
Charles	Stanley-Smith	An Taisce
John	Stewart	INO
Liz	Sullivan	CPA
Marian	Tannan	Dominican Justice Office
Seamus	Taylor	Dept of Applied Social Studies
Ronan	Tierney	Pobal
Prof. Sean	Tobin	Irish Federation of University Teachers
Donal	Toolan	EAPN Ireland
Deirdre	Toomey	Equality Authority
Joanna	Tuffy	Labour Party
Anna	Visser	EAPN Ireland
Grainne	Weld	Vincentian Partnership
Maura	White	CAN
Richard	Wilkinson	Equality Trust
Marie	Williams	Dominican Justice Office
Bob	Wilson	Transition East Clare Initiative
Toby	Wolfe	Irish Childcare Policy Network
Hans	Zomer	Dochas