

Jacqueline Johnson-Fagan investigates access to concert venues for people with disabilities and discovers that even now many unnecessary barriers remain.



Selina Bonnie is a veteran gig-goer and like lots of people, loves to cut loose on the dance floor when the humour takes her. For many of us, music plays a significant role in our social lives and for Selina, this is certainly the case. Except, while most people do not have any problems attending gigs or getting into clubs, Selina is a

wheelchair user and regularly encounters difficulties when engaging in her social life activities.

“I’ve been turned away from nightclubs by bouncers who claimed that I was a fire hazard,” says Selina. One of her biggest grievances is that at standing gigs in one well-known Dublin venue, wheelchair users have to stay at the back and have little or no chance of being able to see the stage.

Last September, the Irish Government introduced the Disability Bill

2004 which establishes a statutory basis for placing obligations on public service providers to support access to services and facilities for people with disabilities. Unfortunately, we would seem to be still some way off ensuring that disabled people

have full and equal access to all services and facilities. While the Equal Status Act 2000 prohibits discrimination by those providing goods and services, there is evidence that exclusion and inequalities still

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ISSUES

Access too few areas?

A fitting venue: Special Olympians enjoying the user-friendly facilities at Croke Park. Philip Quinlan, who works with Spinal Injuries Ireland suggests that music venues should take a leaf out of the GAA, FAI and IRFU books. The picture on bottom right tells its own story.

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exist. Philip Quinlan, who works with Spinal Injuries Ireland, was a keen cricketer, golfer and rugby player before breaking his neck in an accident. He is now a wheelchair user but still maintains his interest in sport and music. One of the main problems he finds in the venues that provide areas for disabled people, is that the site is often too far away from the stage. He is also worried about the slope of some ramps, as he has taken several tumbles out of his chair because the gradient was too steep. He suggests that music venues should take a leaf out of the GAA, FAI and IRFU books. Philip commended them on the services they provide for people with disabilities especially in providing half-price tickets to disabled people and their PAs for football matches and free tickets through the rugby ticket allocation system.

Outdoor gigs and music festivals seem to present the most problems for disabled people. Both Selina and Philip tell harrowing stories of negotiating difficult, uneven terrain when travelling from the car park to concert site and recall rain-lashed, windswept, open viewing platforms that provided no shelter or escape from “typical” Irish festival weather. Selina remembers one exceptional gig at Marley Park a couple of years ago when the area for disabled people was a three-sided structure with a roof. She also mentions an enterprising Carlow man who has invented a trailer-like attachment for his quad bike which he uses to transport disabled people around tourist sites. “Why not employ someone like him to ferry people with disabilities backwards and forwards from car parks to festival sites? They have courtesy buggies for VIPs, why not have transport like this for those who REALLY need it?”

In addition to wheelchair users, there are



people with other disabilities who often experience difficulties with access to venues. Mary Cahill-Kennedy is Equality Officer with Fine Gael and is visually impaired. “Physically negotiating steps and uneven ground can be a big problem”, she says. “Features such as lighting strips under steps and attention generally to the whole area of lighting is important to facilitate visually impaired customers. Then there is the whole area of people with intellectual or learning disabilities – people who sometimes have difficulty reporting the discrimi-

nation they encounter.” This section of the disabled population receives less attention because often, people with intellectual disabilities don’t even get as far as the door of venues. Some of those who do, reveal sad, unpleasant experiences when they felt that they were often turned away because they looked or spoke in a certain way

Olan McGowan, National Advocacy and Media Co-ordinator with the Irish Wheelchair Association and presenter of RTÉ radio programme, *Outside the Box*, has a lot to say about access issues. “I am



'Small gig venues are not great. Many of them are upstairs with no likelihood of lifts being installed.'

Olan McGowan, IWA

with no likelihood of lifts being installed." When asked about his decision to quit the music business, Olan says: "Amongst the reasons why I gave up the business is the fact that most of the venues and studios I needed to get into were inaccessible once I became a wheelchair user."

Clearly, more needs to be done to put supports in place to promote the participation of people with disabilities. When disabled people are not able to participate, they can seem invisible and services are designed and delivered which continue to exclude them. It is crucial that accessibility issues are mainstreamed so that they become integral to the provision of services and are not just an 'add-on'. There is generous FÁS funding available for Disability Awareness Training for staff and according to many disabled festival attendees, this is one area that needs urgent attention. Venues and entertainment companies need to develop disability policies and have disability access information clearly displayed on websites. With one in ten people in Ireland having some kind of disability, venues are often unknowingly excluding a huge number of potential customers. As one disabled music lover said, "My money's as good as the next man's and I want to go to the same places and do the same things as my mates. Why is that made so difficult for me?"

Over to you, venue owners.

deeply disappointed with the new Disability Bill which has been wrongfully lauded by the Government as the best disability bill in the world," he said. He believes that legislation is vital if full participation of disabled people is to be enjoyed.

As a music executive with Sony, Olan was a regular visitor to music venues throughout Ireland but following a diving accident in 1995, he is now a wheelchair user himself. "Small gig venues are not great," he says. "Many of them are upstairs



€100 Crossword

Fill in the puzzle below and send it to Crossword Competition, Communications Department, Rehab Group, Roslyn Park, Sandymount, Dublin 4 before February 28th. There is a special €100 prize for the first all-correct answer drawn. The winner of last edition's crossword was Jackie Hughes, Drumcar, Dunleer, Co Louth.

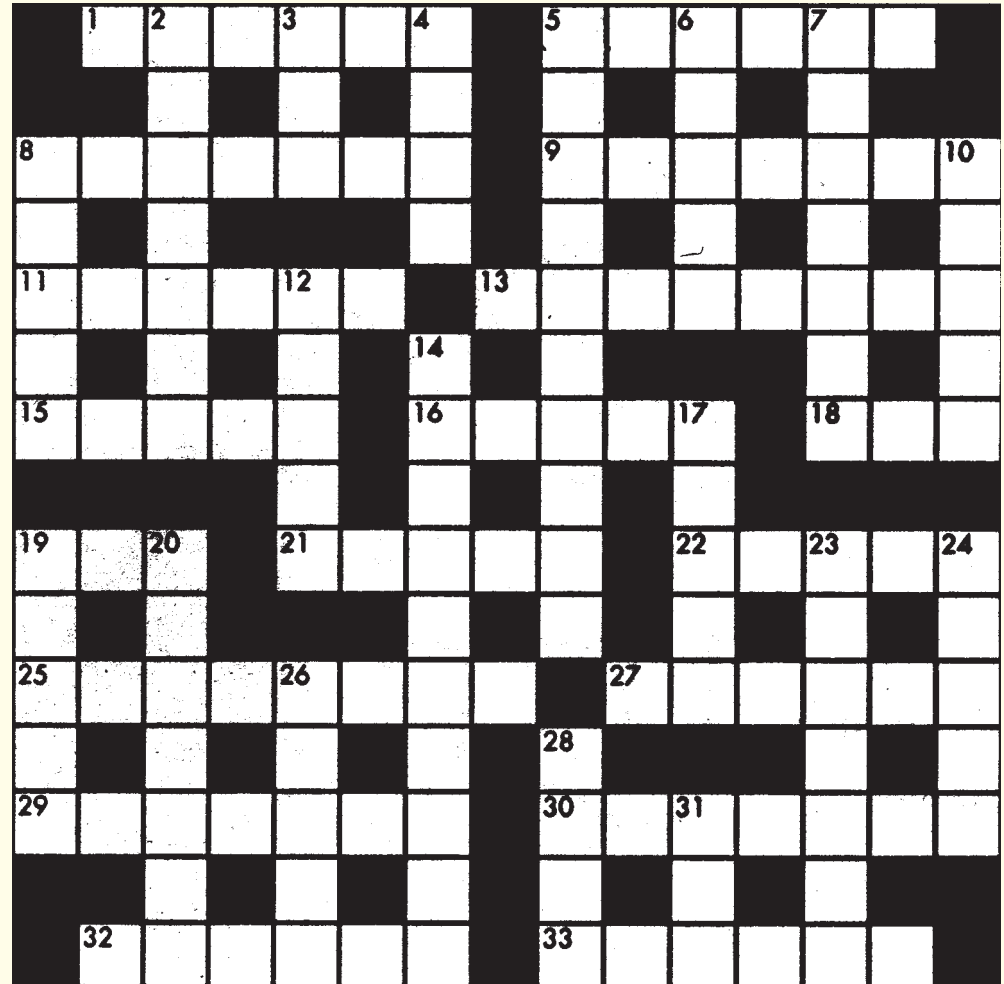
ACROSS

- 1 Amsterdam's river (6)
 5 Tasmanian capital (6)
 8 African xylophone (7)
 9 Falls between Lake Erie and Lake Ontario
 (7) 11 Governing council of ancient Rome (6)
 13 Name of ancient Spartan general, also a character in "A Midsummer Night's Dream"(8)
 15 Greek holiday island known as Héirira in modern Greek (5)
 16 Actor Jeremy, star of "The French Lieutenant's Woman" (5)
 18 Dull-coloured puffbird (3)
 19 Soccer club which plays at The Hawthorns (inits.) (3)
 21 Carla Lane comedy TV series set in Liverpool (5)
 22 Abraham's biblical son (5)
 25 Monastic order, branch of the Roman Catholic Cistercians (8)
 27 Herald of the Greek gods (6)
 29 Spanish form of Richard (7)

- 30 Venue of 1966 Olympic Games (7)
 32 County containing the towns of Poole and Wareham (6)
 33 "--- Girl. 1979 hit for Blondie (6)

DOWN

- 2 Samuel Coleridge's was ancient (7)
 3 & 12 Down. Midget Charles Stratton's better-known pseudonym (3,5)
 4 Tragic Shakespearean King(4)
 5 His last film was "On Golden Pond" (5,5)
 6 See 24 Down
 7 Ray, six times world snook-



- er champion (7)
 8 See 19 Down 10 Scottish island lying east of Kintyre (5)
 12 See 3 Down
 14 He lost to Kasparov in the 1993 world chess championship (5,5)
 17 26 Down's river
 19 & 8 Down. Handel's celebrated aquatic composition? (5,5)
 20 Corsican capital (7)
 23 Former republic of the Soviet Union bordered by Georgia and Azerbaijan (7)
 24 & 6 Down. Holiday area of north eastern Spain

- (5,5)
 26 City served by Orly and Charles de Gaulle airports (5)

- 28 Asian country, capital Vientiane (4)
 31 Farmer TUC leader Murray (3)

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Ph: _____



Above: Members of 'Ability' at the RehabCare Stand during the Ploughing Championships in Carlow. Left: Gerry Adams chats to Martin Lacey and friends at the launch of the CD.



RehabCare Carlow goes on the record

A talented group of singers from RehabCare Carlow have proved they have the *X Factor* with the launch of their debut CD, dedicated to highlighting the abilities of people with disabilities.

The group, aptly named 'Ability', launched their two track CD at the All-Ireland Ploughing Championships in Co Carlow at the end of September.

The songs – *We are Able People* and *There's a Place for Everyone* – were written specially for the seven-member group by Mary Brennan, musical instructor at the RehabCare Carlow centre in Graiguecullen.

The production of the CD is part of the new music education programme at the centre. Said Community Services Manager, Eamonn McSteen: "It's

Copies of the CD have been sent to all the radio stations throughout the country, whilst Ability also played their new tracks live at the Carlow People of the Year Awards.

wonderful to see the enthusiasm with which the clients have embraced this project and the positive impact it has had on their levels of confidence. The ability and talent is there, it just needs to be nurtured and encouraged, not only in music but in every aspect of life."

The CD was recorded free of charge by Martin Lacey Studios in Graiguecullen. "We can't thank Martin enough for his con-

tribution to this project," says Eamonn McSteen. "Not only was it his idea to record a CD, but he also brought the equipment into the centre so as to put the clients at their ease when they were recording. Martin also did the backing for both songs."

Following its launch at the Ploughing Championships, the *Ability* CD is now on sale to members of the public at Rainbow Records, Carlow or by contacting the centre 087 6595630. The cost of the CD is just €5 and all proceeds from the sale of the CD go back into creation of programmes within RehabCare.

Copies of the CD have been sent to all the radio stations throughout the country, whilst Ability also played their new tracks live at the Carlow People of the Year Awards in November.

Further information is available from: Eamonn McSteen at 059 913 2266.

Nellie Casey



It was with great sadness that the staff at the Care Trust learnt earlier this year of the death of Nellie Casey, one of their most dedicated collectors.

Over many years, Nellie could be seen on her bicycle, in all types of weather, riding around Tralee and surrounding areas, collecting money for the CRC/RTB pools.

Nellie's involvement with CRC/RTB pools began in the mid 1960's and she continued to collect money for Rehab until she was forced to retire three years ago following a stroke. Nellie's involvement in the pools became very much a family affair. Her husband Tom helped to count the money and keep an eye on the finances, while many of her ten children became involved, collecting money for the pools from different parts of Tralee. In fact, Nellie's daughter, Eileen, still collects money in the town every week, taking over her mother's collection route, visiting households that have been subscribing to the pools and supporting Rehab for generations.

Nellie's support for the Rehab Group didn't stop with just the collection of pools money. Over the years, she was involved in many fundraising activities raising thousands of euros for Rehab's activities in Kerry.

Nellie thoroughly enjoyed the social element of her job. She loved meeting people, stopping in for a cup of tea and a chat, and made many friends during the years she spent collecting for Rehab. People in Tralee still talk fondly of Nellie as a 'fine lady'.

We extend our deepest sympathies to Nellie's family and her many friends.

tribute

Have you a story? Let us know



Do you have a story that needs to be told? The Mediability project currently offers full time media training in print, radio and television to people with disabilities.

Over the coming months our producers will be developing a number of television and radio documentaries and we would like your help in our search for ideas and story-based topics.

We are looking for strong human interest stories which give an authentic insight into life in Ireland today. They may be warm, uplifting or simply compelling stories which are relevant to a broad family audience. They may reveal a strong sense of community in the face of adversity.



Perhaps the story has never been told or maybe it is still unfolding over time. If you know of a story that would make an excellent television or radio documentary and

would like to discuss it you can call Mediability project co-ordinator, Dan Dwyer, in the strictest confidence on 087 9796826.