

**Third Annual Report
August 2013 – August 2014**

August 2014

The Advocacy Initiative

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The Advocacy Initiative

The Advocacy Initiative (AI) is a three-year community and voluntary sector project that promotes understanding, awareness and effectiveness of social justice advocacy in Ireland. By creating the conditions for stronger social justice advocacy, the Initiative will strengthen policy responses to existing and emerging challenges in addressing poverty and social exclusion, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable society.

The Advocacy Initiative has its origins in discussions at the Centre for Non-profit Management (TCD) summer school in 2008. There followed a broader debate amongst actors within the Community and Voluntary Sector that led to the formation of the Steering Group. The Steering Group developed a proposal for collaborative action to examine the status of community and voluntary sector advocacy in Ireland, and in August 2010 published a report that drew on discussions and analysis by and with a broad range of stakeholders. This project report identified a need for deeper engagement to promote understanding, awareness and effectiveness of social justice advocacy in Ireland. In 2010 with support from The Atlantic Philanthropies the Steering Group defined and articulated a three-year programme of work aimed at promoting the concept, practice and efficacy of social justice advocacy as a central feature of civil society. The implementation of this programme began in August 2011. This report represents a synopsis of the activities in the second year of this programme and an analysis of the key learning points.

The Advocacy Initiative has set out an ambitious objective and work programme. The project of reframing the relationship between the community and voluntary sector will continue long after the project concludes. The Advocacy Initiative aims to be a catalyst for future innovation, evaluation and strengthening of social justice advocacy in Ireland.

Theory of Change

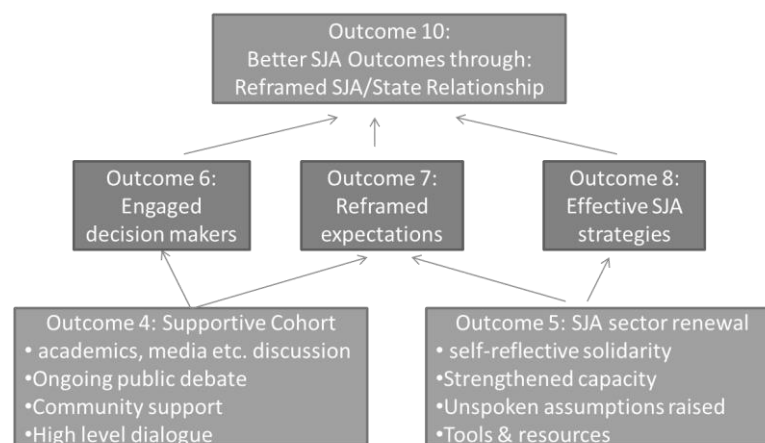
During its first year The Advocacy Initiative undertook to develop a Theory of Change model. The Initiative's Theory of Change is described below and summarised in Figure 1.

The **ultimate objective** is to influence policy, law and practice in a manner that brings about improved social justice outcomes. This is above the 'accountability line', meaning The Advocacy Initiative can at best contribute only modestly: achieving this objective is subject to several additional factors. However, the AI feels that a *necessary precondition* to this long-term objective is the **reframing of the relationship between the social justice advocacy sector and state actors** requiring both sides to think differently. It is envisaged that this will:

- be grounded in social solidarity
- enhance the prospects for influencing law and policy in positive directions
- enable more effective advocacy strategies

Furthermore, the AI believes that it can *discernibly influence* this outcome i.e. that it can contribute to a reframing of the relationship between the social justice advocacy sector and state actors. Reframing the relationship is an ongoing and ambitious project that will continue long after the project has concluded.

Figure 1: Summary of top-level Theory of Change objectives and preconditions



There are, in turn, three main pre-conditions to this. First, that there exists an **engaged group of relevant policy makers and influencers**, broadly defined, with sufficient knowledge, understanding and motivation to support the legitimacy and potential benefit of social justice advocacy, to keep abreast with issues arising and to consult with other stakeholders as required. This group must also be capable of exerting a distinct influence.

Second, is that **expectations regarding their mutual relationship are significantly reframed** on the part of both the SJA sector and state actors. In the absence of this, it is unlikely that the relationship can be improved in a constructive direction.

Third, that the **SJA sector produces more effective and constructive advocacy strategies, ideas and options** while engaging with policy makers and stakeholders, that can lead to better results. The sector must implement these in a manner that sympathetic policy makers can use within their political and policy environments.

In realising these three preconditions for reaching the objective of a reframed relationship between social justice advocacy and the State, the Initiative's activities will focus on achieving five key outcomes:

1. **Fresh evidence and knowledge on the social justice advocacy environment is available**
2. **There is on-going self-reflection and knowledge exchange**
3. **There is a capacity building framework in place and strategic initiatives underway to develop capacity amongst social justice advocates**
4. **There is an active supportive cohort for social justice advocacy**
5. **There is renewal of the social justice advocacy sector**

Activity Report

The following summary of activities refers to the first four outcomes or preconditions described above. These are outcomes which are directly associated with the activities described in the implementation plan.

1. Fresh evidence and knowledge on the social justice advocacy

Building on the 2010 Project Report a key focus was the development of a body of knowledge and evidence about social justice advocacy. The ambition of The Advocacy Initiative is to deepen our understanding of social justice advocacy and the context in which it operates.

In the first year the AI: adopted a working statement on social justice advocacy; commissioned a Mapping Study on Social Justice Advocacy; recruited a team of researchers to undertake a study that would explore the perceptions of social justice advocacy amongst policy-makers and policy-implementers; began the planning process for a project on the public funding and social justice advocacy; and commissioned a public opinion poll. During its second year The Initiative focused on drawing to a close much of its research programme. In our second year we published the mapping study, two public opinion polls, the perceptions study, and the first part of the funding study.

In the third year the Initiative completed its research programme and published:

“Are we paying for that?” - Government Funding and Social Justice Advocacy (2014)

This study explored the funding relationship between the state and voluntary and community organisations engaged in public policy advocacy in Ireland from the perspective of the voluntary and community sector. It found relationships on a continuum from the inhibition and suppression of advocacy to active and positive support for advocacy work.

The Regulatory Environment for Social Justice Advocacy in Ireland (2014)

This study offers an overview of the regulations, both formal and informal, which affect the social justice advocacy environment in Ireland. It also anticipates the challenges that will be posed for the sector with the introduction of legislation in relation to the regulation of lobbyists and the Charities Act 2009.

The Electoral Acts and social justice advocacy (forthcoming August 2014)

The overall object of this project is to situate the relevant provisions of the Electoral Acts in the broader regulatory environment, and to pave the way for a shared analysis of recommendations for change.

Pulling together: A synthesis of the work of The Advocacy Initiative 2010-2014 (2014)

This analysis is a synthesis of the broad range of reports, research and activity undertaken by the Initiative. There are six key sections: What is social justice advocacy? What we did? Who does social justice advocacy? What was the learning? What next? Resources.

According to the final evaluation of the Initiative:

“The research and studies undertaken covered the full territory anticipated, in some cases going further than had initially been planned. The quality overall was very high, and virtually all of it was original, based on primary data and original analysis... In terms of future relevance, the research can also be seen as establishing benchmarks both quantitative (the *Mapping Study*, the *Opinion Polls*) and qualitative (the *Perceptions Study* and especially the *Funding Study*) likely to be of ongoing and future interest to the academic and research communities as well as to the SJA sector itself.”

2. On-going self-reflection and knowledge exchange

A key objective of the Initiative is to promote self-reflection and knowledge exchange amongst social justice advocates, and between social justice advocates and other policy stakeholders.

A key work area of the Initiative in years one and two is the facilitation of a national self-reflection process. Over the first 12 months this included a number of distinct activities: organisation of two Knowledge Exchange Forums; and dialogues with the Steering Committee. During the second year this programme of work continued with two more Knowledge Exchange Forums, further sessions with the Steering Committee and the role out

of a series of local reflections opportunities. An additional event was organised on philanthropy and social justice advocacy, as well as small scale briefings on the funding study and the public opinion polls (2). In year two the third and fourth KEFs were organised, along with a series of Steering Committee dialogue opportunities. We also began a series of local reflection events.

In our third year the Initiative completed this programme of work including:

Local events

Completing a series of 11 local events with a broad range of partners:

- Making Sure All Voices are heard in Dublin 12 organised and hosted by Rathmines Pembroke Community Partnership.
- Launch and discussion of the book 'Paid For – My Journey through prostitution' by Rachel Moran organised and hosted by Doras Luimní (Limerick).
- Advocacy - whose role is it anyway? Organised and hosted by Meath Equality, Rights and Anti-Poverty Network.
- Disconnect between policymakers and C&V sector. Organised and hosted by Limerick Active Citizen Network.
- Thriving & Surviving in Changing Times Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board.
- Are our hands tied? Organised and hosted by Clare Active Citizenship Network (Clare)
- Artists for Civic Action- using theatre to advocate for social justice and influence public policy. Organised and hosted by the Smashing Times Theatre Company (Dublin).
- Creating Safe Communities where Children Can Flourish. Organised and hosted by the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC).
- Campaigning and Advocacy: The experience of home care campaigning. Organised and hosted by the Carers Association (Dublin).
- Knowledge Exchange Workshop. Organised and hosted by the National University Galway.
- 'Our Community - Our Voices' Launch of a Human Rights Based Approach toolkit to inform advocates Organised and hosted by Dundalk Simon Community (Louth).

Knowledge Exchange Forums

Nearly 250 people signed up for the fifth and sixth Knowledge Exchange forums on the themes of collaboration and visualising advocacy. These events continued to be extremely warmly welcomed and were a key focus for the Initiative. A specific characteristic of these events was their capacity to reach new actors and generate new networks and opportunities.

Final Conference – 'Breaking Through: The Future of Social Justice Advocacy'

The Initiative held its final conference in July 2014. Over 160 people signed up for this event which launched the legacy strategy and included a very successful panel of speakers from diverse stakeholder groups. The focus was the six key learning themes identified in the synthesis report, and the conference provided an opportunity for the sector to reflect on the future of social justice advocacy. The event also launch our legacy website and legacy video.

Regulating advocacy

Following the participation of four members of the Initiative in an introduction to Theory U training organised by The Presencing Institute in the UK, the Initiative undertook to develop a process to examine the future of the regulation of social justice advocacy.

This two day residential process is due to take place in October 2014, and will address the question 'What type of regulation of social justice advocacy will contribute to a better society?' The purpose of these two days will be to collectively generate a vision or visions of the regulatory environment for advocacy. Using a framework that encourages creativity and learning from the future as it emerges, we hope to end the meeting having identified two to three ideas that can help in testing the type of regulation of social justice advocacy that will contribute to a better society. We are inviting a broad range of stakeholders from different walks of life. The invitees have been carefully selected on the basis of the different perspectives and experiences that they bring to this conversation.

Dialogues meetings with civil servants

Building on earlier engagements with civil servants and policy-makers the Initiative organised three meetings with government department to discuss the outcomes of the Perceptions Study. Meetings were held with the policy committee of the Department of Social and Family

Affairs, the community, environment and local government sections of the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, and the Charities Regulation Unit of the Department of Justice. There was a warm response to this research with very engaged debate with all the civil servants in attendance.

Electoral Acts

Following concern within the sector as to the impact of the implementation of the Electoral Acts on social justice advocacy The Advocacy Initiative facilitated a discussion in April 2014 on this subject and a sharing of information across a range of organisations. From this meeting a group of six organizations have come together to pursue a small research project in relation to this subject (due August 2014).

According to the final evaluation of the Initiative:

“The process of knowledge sharing, especially in the form of KEFs and of local events, was promoted vigorously and with significant participation by the wider social justice advocacy sector both nationally and locally. The large number of people attending indicates that they were fulfilling a need and the online survey results confirm this”

3. Capacity building framework in place and strategic initiatives underway

The 2010 report identified the need for capacity changes on both sides of the policy making process, a key ambition for the Initiative is to support capacity development particularly amongst social justice advocates. In the first year The Initiative developed a training guide, which maps existing training available; a resource section on the website; and specific material on e-advocacy. During the second year focus shifted more towards the development of this programme of work and in particular on developing the capacity framework and evaluation framework projects, along with continuing to build a body of online resources.

In our third year we completed the programme of work concerned with capacity building and delivered a number of core tools:

www.assessyouradvocacy.ie

This online tool is designed to help support community and voluntary sector organisations and coalitions a) measure their advocacy capacity, b) identify activity areas that need to be strengthened and c) identify indicators to measure progress. The tool will be developed and disseminated by the legacy partner Barnardos.

Evaluation Indicators

This tool provides a framework to enable advocates and their organisation to identify their own indicators for effectiveness. The purpose of these indicators is to support those doing social justice advocacy answer the question: How do we know our advocacy is working? The indicators were developed through focus group discussion with experienced social justice advocates working across a broad range of areas and involved in reflecting on advocacy through their participation in the Initiative. The tool will be developed and disseminated by the legacy partner Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI).

Guide to regulating advocacy

This study offers an overview of the regulations, both formal and informal, which affect the social justice advocacy environment in Ireland. It also anticipates the challenges that will be posed for the sector with the introduction of legislation in relation to the Regulation of Lobbyists and the Charities Act.

We continued to add to the resource sections on the website, and to update the training guide. The Knowledge Exchange Forums on collaboration and creative strategies also provided important opportunities for knowledge sharing and skills development.

4. There is an active supportive cohort for social justice advocacy.

There are two specific activities in the implementation plan associated with developing an active and supportive cohort for social justice advocacy amongst a range of stakeholder groups. The first is to create greater awareness and support for social justice advocacy

(grassroots campaign). The second, which got underway in year one, is to engage in on-going high level dialogue with key stakeholders. The work plan anticipated the establishment of an **expert group of different stakeholders** in the social justice advocacy process (civil servants, elected representative, academics, media, trade unions etc). The Initiative took the decision to broaden this process of engagement, in the first instance undertaking engagement processes with the various stakeholder groups individually.

In our final year we built on the process of engaging with the various stakeholder groups by developing opportunities for dialogue with three key government departments. In addition the panel at our final conference invited a variety of stakeholders to address the key challenges for the future. The Steering Committee continued to reflect on the outcomes of these processes.

A key outcome of this work was the development of the collaborative project on regulating advocacy discussed above. This process will involve the charity regulator, civil servants, politicians, business stakeholder, media as well as community and voluntary sector actors. A full report will be made available, and it is the intention of the initiative to capture this process as a possible model for future dialogue.

An additional element which supports the development of self-reflection across the stakeholder spectrum is the inclusion of a **blog** on The Advocacy Initiative's website. In the first year four guest blogs were published, the second year saw an additional nine blog entries. In our third year we published eight blogs:

- Songs that changed Ireland: What is your No. 1? (Anna Visser)
- Failure & Getting Better - Presentation at the Social Inclusion Forum (Anna Visser)
- Advocacy - A Dual Perspective (Gerry Mangan)
- What does the future hold for government funding and social justice advocacy? (Senan Turnbull)
- Participant responses from "Are we paying for that?" - Government funding and advocacy seminar
- It's time to demand our fair share (Teresa Marshall)
- Lords in UK must reject threat to charity campaigning (Felix Spittal)
- Advocacy cannot exist without participation (Clodagh O'Brien)

5. Supporting Developments

Beyond the specific activities of the work plan, The Advocacy Initiative has built a core of supporting infrastructure. Informing these developments has been a commitment to the project/temporary nature of the Initiative, and an ambition to build the longer-term sustainability of the envisaged outcomes beyond the specific life of the Initiative.

Support Structures

The Steering Committee is responsible for the overall management of The Advocacy Initiative. In the second 12 months the Committee met four times. The Steering Committee is currently comprised of:

1. Brid O'Brien, Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
2. Diarmaid O'Currui, Carmichael Centre
3. David Lynch, Community Workers' Cooperative
4. Frances Byrne, OPEN
5. Ivan Cooper, The Wheel
6. Joyce Loughnan/Mike Allen, Focus Ireland
7. June Tinsley/Catherine Joyce, Barnardos
8. Kathleen O'Meara, Irish Cancer Society
9. Kieran Murphy/Caroline Fahey, Society of St Vincent de Paul
10. Joan O'Donnell/Martin Naughton, Disability Federation of Ireland
11. Niamh Garvey/Lorna Gold/Selina Donnelly, Trocaire
12. Niamh Randall, Simon Community National Office
13. Noeleen Hartigan, Amnesty International Ireland
14. Noeline Blackwell, Free Legal Advice Centre
15. Orla O'Connor, National Women's Council of Ireland

16. Sheila Nordon, Irish Charities Tax Reform Group
17. Siobhan O'Donoghue, Community Platform
18. Tanya Ward/Edel Quinn, Children's Rights Alliance

The Project Management Group is now comprised of:

1. Brid O'Brien, Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
2. Eugene Flynn, 54 Degrees
3. Gerry Mangan, Individual Organisation
4. Ivan Cooper, The Wheel
5. Kieran Murphy, Society of St Vincent de Paul
6. Mike Allen, Focus Ireland
7. Joan O'Donnell, Disability Federation of Ireland

The Project Management Group met 9 times over the 12 month period.

The Initiative has established a series of ad hoc **reference groups** which offer on-going support and guidance to the various projects. Reference groups have been active in the areas of evaluation, communications, Knowledge Exchange Forums, working statement, funding study and the mapping study.

The Initiative adopted a '**membership**' statement which described the levels of possibility participation in the Initiative. Anyone committed to social Justice Advocacy is welcome to get involved. At the beginning of this phase of the Initiative over 250 people had expressed an interest or participated in events. As of August, this database stands at 1,300 (up from 960 in previous 12 months), predominantly representing individuals within the community and voluntary sector, but also those from other stakeholder groups.

The part-time **staff team** consists of the Director (Anna Visser), CE Administrator (Celine Walsh), and Communications Officer Clodagh O'Brien. The office will close in August 2014.

Communications

Following the adoption of a communications strategy, developed by the communications reference group, the Initiative has put in place a communications structure. Including a website, newsletter and media outreach capacity.

During our third year the website developed into a resource site for social justice advocates. Since launching in 2012 The Advocacy Initiative has had 10,000 unique visitors, half of which were returning visitors. After the homepage, the training section remained the most popular page on the site. Seven 'Advocacy Post' newsletters were circulated in the third year.

The Initiative has engaged with the wider media to support the implementation of its work programme. Media coverage achieved included articles in the Irish Times (5 articles and a series of letters), The Irish Examiner (2), the Irish Independent (1), the Evening Herald (1), Thejournal.ie (2), Be the Change (2) and the Irish Social Worker Journal (1).

There is a high level of interest in the Initiative as evidenced by engagement with the activities described above, this has also led to a number of invitations to speak about the work of the Initiative and participate in external events. The Initiative was contacted by researchers and gave presentations of our findings at a range of external events including the EU Peer Review on Social Inclusion (Belgium), the Annual Social Inclusion Forum, and a UNESCO Child and family research Centre. A paper will be presented at a University of Limerick conference on non-profit management in October 2014. The Initiative was also invited to participate in a broad range of civil society events and did so when this complemented our work agenda.

Legacy planning

The Advocacy Initiative never intended to exist beyond 2014. This was a moment in which the sector could reflect on its past, assess its practice and consider its future. It was an opportunity that was grasped by many with both hands. The Advocacy Initiative opened up many possibilities and there was a clear demand for some of the learning and spaces to continue to have meaning for the sector which is why the Steering Committee devised a legacy strategy.

Following a selection process, seven legacy partners were identified to take on specific projects and initiatives in the coming three years (to 2017). Each of these projects is funded in a small way from the original three year budget. There is no overall coordinating or oversight mechanism for these projects, but the legacy website will act as a central reference.¹ It is up to each partner to identify the ongoing value and relevance of each project and to shape it accordingly, and to reach out and involve a broad range of social justice advocates.

Some of these projects may not capture the attention the sector over the whole three years, but we suspect many will. Those that are of value will thrive and those that are no longer relevant will stop. We do not have plans beyond 2017, but we hope some these projects will seed long term collaborations and ongoing reflection amongst social justice advocates.

Legacy	Legacy Partner
<p>The Advocacy Initiative legacy website The website will be a portal to the learning and research generated by the Initiative and will provide an ongoing resource for social justice advocates.</p>	<p>The Wheel www.wheel.ie Contact: ivan@wheel.ie</p>
<p>Are we getting there? Identifying indicators for social justice advocacy This tool and worksheet will support social justice advocacy organisations to develop indicators to measure the impact of their social justice advocacy.</p>	<p>Disability Federation of Ireland www.disability-federation.ie Contact: joanodonnell@disability-federation.ie</p>
<p>www.assessyouradvocacy.ie This online questionnaire offers an anonymous resource which facilitates you to take stock of your advocacy capacity. It assesses basic capacities as well as a diverse range of advocacy strategies and tactics.</p>	<p>Barnardos www.barnardos.ie Contact: Catherine.mjoyce@barnardos.ie</p>
<p>Opinion Polling The Initiative commissioned two public opinion polls on social justice advocacy. A number of the specific questions asked proved of deep interest to the sector. This legacy project will see the ongoing polling of a small number of the most relevant questions in order to provide a more developed understanding of public opinion on advocacy. The results will be disseminated.</p>	<p>Focus Ireland www.focusireland.ie Contact: mallen@focusireland.ie</p>
<p>The Knowledge Exchange Fora (KEFs) The bi-annual KEFs proved one of the most popular and useful activities of the Initiative. There is a strong demand to continue to facilitate such spaces for cross sector exchange and networking. There are two key strands to this legacy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three organisations will each organise one thematic KEF. • 2-3 Forums will focus on e-campaigning and online strategies. These events may seed the emergence of an e-campaigning forum in Ireland. 	<p>Carmichael Centre www.carmichaelcentre.ie Contact: diarmaid@carmichaelcentre.ie</p> <p>Community Platform www.communityplatform.ie Contact: robin@eapn.ie</p> <p>The Wheel www.wheel.ie Contact: ivan@wheel.ie</p> <p>54 Degrees (e-campaigning forum) www.54degrees.com Contact: eugeneflynn@54degrees.com</p>

¹ The legacy partners are planning to form an informal working group to continue to coordinate this activity to 2017.

Final Evaluation

As part of its overall evaluation programme in May 2014 the external evaluation Sean O'Siochru undertook a final evaluation. As part of the evaluation he initiated a short survey of all those who had been involved in The Advocacy Initiative - the findings of the survey are summarised below.



In commissioning this final evaluation the Steering Committee chose to complement the synthesis analysis by focusing on the Initiative itself as a process and project, seeking to identify what was unique about how it worked, and how these characteristics influenced its activity. The final evaluation can be viewed on www.advocacyinitiative.ie

