

## Opening statement to Disability Matters Committee, Ballyfermot/Chapelizod Disability Action Collective – April 8, 2024

The Ballyfermot Chapelizod Disability Action Collective is a grassroots, disabled person-led DPO that has brought together disabled people, their parents and carers and the wider community, including public representatives, to discuss issues facing disabled people in Ballyfermot/Chapelizod for over ten years. With the support of the Ballyfermot/Chapelizod Community Partnership, we have held a number of events, including story slams, the ‘Have Your Say’ discussions linking local experiences to the UNCRPD and, most important, performances by the ‘Smashing Barriers’ Theatre Group. Ballyfermot, like many disadvantaged areas, has a higher level of disability than the national average at 24% and we have worked hard to bring together people with a wide range of impairments, backgrounds and experiences. Some themes have emerged from our consultations with our members and the community.

### Public Transport

Public transport from our community has always been a problem, but is getting worse as buses are removed from the system. To get to some hospital appointments, for example at St. Vincent’s, people may have to take up to seven buses. People often have to resort to taxis, which is expensive. Accessible transport is expensive and often difficult to schedule. This particularly affects younger disabled people, who may have to access different kinds of services in multiple locations, and who want to engage in different activities, like sports or other groups.

### Physical infrastructure

It can be very difficult for people with a mobility impairment to physically get around our community. In many cases, the lifts are broken or absent and some, like the kissing gates at the park, completely prevent wheelchair users from entering the park. This in turn disables their children, because they can’t play in the park as a family. Lack of access to recreational spaces has negative effects on people’s mental and physical health. Another problem is non-enforcement of parking laws, so that parked cars can block ramps and even footpaths without being towed. Disabled parking spaces often require users to get out into the traffic side of the road and then travel a long distance to the nearest dipped curb.

### Supports for independent living

Many of our members report not being entitled to home supports or only to very limited home help. They also describe long waits for adaptations to their homes for wheelchairs or other supports. The costs and the way that grants are awarded can make certain devices or adaptations prohibitively expensive.

### Participation in the community

All of the above issues, but particularly transport, often prevent disabled people in Ballyfermot/Chapelizod from participating in the social and cultural life of our community. This can be because the inconvenience of trying to attend these events puts people off or because the event is taking place in an inaccessible location, like the first floor of a pub without a lift.