

## **NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION WORKSHOPS/BRIEFING SESSIONS**

**DATE - 23, 24 and 25 June 2010**

**VENUE - The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children (Dublin), The Townhall Theatre (Galway), The Crawford Gallery (Cork)**

## **SUMMARY**

### Speakers:

In Dublin Gerry Godley and Marcella Corcoran-Kennedy gave the briefing.

In Galway Fergal McGrath and Colm Croffy gave the briefing.

In Cork Gerry Godley and Willie White gave the briefing.

## **DUBLIN BRIEFING**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Gerry Godley thanked all in attendance and gave an introduction in which he noted the positive achievements of the NCFA in relation to the campaign's original demands. The NCFA had originally campaigned against recommendations highlighted in the McCarthy Report, which included severely cutting Arts Council funding and dissolving the Film Board, Culture Ireland and possibly the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, as well as fighting for the retention of the artist's income tax exemption scheme. While all of the demands were met the 5.6% cut to Arts Council funding as announced as part of the 2010 budget, though a lower cut than previously anticipated, has still had serious ramifications for the sector. Because of this the NCFA has continued working over the last 9 months and now we're facing into budget 2011 and we need to gather our collective strength again. Gerry then explained how, during a meeting with the wider group of the National Campaign for the Arts members this year, an idea to gain real visibility in terms of our public representatives and the media was put forward. This became the National Day of Action - a day in which arts workers around the country would meet with their TDs while at the same time various arts events would be happening to engage both the public and the media.

### **PRESENTATION**

Marcella Corcoran-Kennedy from Offaly gave a presentation which included an introduction of her own work in Offaly (county councillor from 1999 - 2009 and chair of Birr Theatre and Arts Centre) and a case study of the lobbying work carried out by the Offaly arts workers constituency group last year, which she set up, as part of the NCFA. She made a number of points which included -

- The Importance of local media: every week there was something in the local papers and on radio relating to the campaign including pieces written by local celebrities such as Mundy, and news stories referring to the movement in Offaly.

- The use of (free) online communications - Social communication channels such as Facebook enabled the Offaly constituency group to gain an extra 150 signatures for last year's petition. By joining your Facebook group page you'll be kept update to with actions and achievements.

- Talking to all political parties: Talk to ALL political parties regardless of your own political affiliations. Politicians expect to be contacted so don't let them down! In Offaly everyone from Town Councillors, County Councillors, the County manager, key national politicians and senior council staff were contacted in some way - i.e. by letter, meetings, etc.

A SWOT analysis of the National Day of Action was then opened to the floor.

STRENGTHS that were perceived included -

- 1) Bringing it back to the people/public: Ireland loves the arts - we are Europe's top cinemagoers; Recent benchmarking study shows 26% of households in Ireland bought tickets from 1 or more arts organizations in 2009.
- 2) An on and off-line petition could open up the cause to audiences and community arts groups. Petitions could be available on the NCFAs website (as last year) but also be available at summer arts and music festivals, in bookshops and in arts centre, gallery and theatre foyers.
- 3) We can build on the success of last year's campaign (though there is a necessity to move from the more positive approach of last year to recognition that things are currently very bad for the sector).

WEAKNESSES perceived included -

- 1) A lack of clarity around our goals and demands
- 2) A lack of understanding of the real situation surrounding the lives of artists - Peter Daly made the point that this is an industry that is very lean and in which a vast majority of workers do not own their own homes, have full-time work or a regular income.
- 3) Some arts workers may not join the campaign because they never get funding anyway
- 4) The campaign appears to be quite performance-centred. Need to get other art forms on board.

OPPORTUNITIES perceived included -

- 1) The inclusion of community and amateur arts groups which helps to push the point that the engagement in culture throughout the country is extraordinary.
- 2) In relation to weakness no. 4 above, it was suggested by Janice McAdam that as most people who work in the arts know other workers from other art forms we can share the responsibility of inviting one or two of those workers to join the campaign.

THREATS PERCEIVED included -

- 1) That funding for the arts is seen as an indulgence rather than an investment.
- 2) The argument is distracted by other issues such as the artist's tax exemption and therefore we all need to have full information regarding these issues so we can answer successfully and move back to the current issues.
- 3) No-one gets the opportunities lost through emigration - this needs to be emphasised.

Ideas regarding the arts 'events' that could be organised to mark the day include -

- 1) Presenting a petition of over 100,000 signatures of people who support the campaign's demands to Minister Hanafin (Dun Laoghaire constit.) on the day.
- 2) A recording of a venue house announcement of an artist with a recognisable voice (such as Joseph O'Connor) which would give usual details and include a quirky message re the NCFAs demands. This would run in all venues the week of the 17 Sept.
- 3) A big action outside the Dáil which will represent the numbers of arts workers/citizens affected by the arts in Ireland - i.e. 100,000 balloons, opened umbrellas, etc.,
- 4) NCFAs postcards with printed demands to be sent to TDs on the week on 17 Sept.
- 5) Invite politicians/councillors to the Fringe Festival Toolbox Event on 17 Sept
- 6) Ask theatre-makers to mount a series of 10 minute plays around the NCFAs demands which would run during the week of 17 Sept.

## GALWAY BRIEFING

## **INTRODUCTION**

Fergal Mc Grath welcomed and thanked the many who attended. Setting the context for the meeting, he outlined a brief history of the campaign to date - In January 2009 Theatre Forum had decided the best way to protect arts funding was to act more strategically, think longer term and to create a base in every constituency which would seek to inform and influence political representatives on all sides and at all levels - Councillors, Senators, TD's - re the true value of the arts. The sector had to fill the political gap left by the inability of the Arts Council to communicate or fight its corner. The first meeting with local representatives took place in Wexford at the time of the TF Conference in June. The subsequent publication of the McCarthy report in July, and its threat to cut Arts Council funding and to eliminate the Film Board, Culture Ireland and even the Department led to a national mobilisation across the arts sectors. A campaign was mounted which managed to maintain a constructive and positive tone, which highlighted the value of the arts and the role they could play in any recovery of our economy and identity and which managed to avoid being viewed as just a campaign by another sectional interest group - all of which had engaged the political decision makers. However, Fergal reminded everyone that 2010 was the first of three harsh budgets - we might not have the equivalent of the 'bounce' that was provided by Farmleigh and so we had to prepare to fight another day to prevent senseless and damaging cuts adding to the woes arising from the Arts Council's cuts earlier this year. To focus the campaign and to make lobbying easier, it was proposed that this year we would again have a number of key 'demands' or asks including that the arts not be cut again next year, the creation of a dedicated cultural tourism fund (detail to be yet thought out) for arts and culture projects, the protection of local authority arts budgets and a number of local issues relevant to respective constituencies.

## **PRESENTATION**

In his own introduction, Colm Croffy, Director of AOIFE, made the point that the National Day of Action is a way to reconnect policy makers with the concept that there are arts workers who are also voters in every constituency in the country. He also noted that the NCFA is a long-term campaign and that the NDoA is a short sprint within the marathon. He outlined the hopes for the NDoA as being that a mix of arts workers in each constituency meeting with their TDs on that day (or, if not possible, during the week leading up to that day) to discuss the issues as highlighted by Fergal above. There will also be a series of 'events' organised by arts workers to raise the profile of the NDoA and the NCFA demands with the public and the media. A national media campaign will be led by Siobhan Colgan, though there must also be a local level of media for which Siobhan will give support and prompts. It's hoped that national TV, radio and news print will all engage with the action. Colm also noted that within the local campaigns it's important that all politicians including county and city councillors as well as county managers are included in press releases, letters, etc, that are sent out.

A discussion was opened to the floor and started off with comments on the 2011 NCFA demands. Max Hafler asked where the connection between professional artists and arts workers and the art that is created through community and youth groups was and stated that it's important to include all people who have access to the arts in our campaign.

A point was made that cultural tourism is a very broad subject and that the people who worked in tourism drove that issue and perhaps the value of the arts lay elsewhere. It was suggested that we should not redefine ourselves to suit the funding source. Fergal agreed but said that the cultural tourism issue is being used and we are learning the language around it to emphasis the idea that you can't have cultural tourism without culture.

There followed a discussion around using the language of politicians, as evident in the workshop information packs that had been handed out, within our own campaign. Lelia Doolan recommended that we should take account of the fact that we are about the arts

and not politics and should therefore move away from such terms as 'the smart economy'. Christian O'Reilly pointed out that the language that's surely convincing to politicians is the language of economics and gave an example of how, when he worked in disability in the early 1990s, advances were only made when an economist was brought in to argue how much the sector was worth in economic terms. However, he added that it's important that we, as a group, agree on the message we're trying to bring to government. A further point was made that we must not alienate the public with whom we have a real relationship and so a simpler language may help us to drive home the truth that arts make a real difference to the quality of people's lives. Fergal and Colm both advised that the pack provided actually suggested people use their own language when meeting with or writing to their local representatives. It was then noted that based on what was being said around the room it seemed that arts workers should really be tapping into who we are as a community and perhaps use artists, such as Pat McCabe, to use their own unique voice to make a case for the arts. Fergal agreed, adding that this had happened successfully during the media campaign of last year. A point was raised that it wouldn't be useful for only famous people to be used within the campaign and this was agreed on by all.

John Nee claimed that there was perhaps a feeling that artists and arts workers were being asked to support major organisations such as the Arts Council, even though many of them don't and will never be funded by such organisations. He noted that no other profession has workers who work unpaid and that the point must be made that we are subsidising the country, not just the sector.

Further points that were made during the meeting included -

- 1) The importance of registering on Facebook so that people can be kept abreast of activities
- 2) When meeting with politicians get written acknowledgment of support/condemnation of issues
- 3) We're at this meeting because we appreciate it's a day for us so we must commit to seeing our politicians on the 17 Sept.
- 4) Set up a forum on boards.ie so that we can continue interacting with one another and the wider community of artists and arts workers who weren't able to make it to the workshops

Ideas regarding the arts 'events' and the media push that could be organised to mark the day include -

- 1) Themed 'flash mobs' in different constituencies
- 2) Inviting politicians to be 'artists for a day'
- 3) Ask RTE to have a day of arts on the NDoA
- 4) A protest march with placards, drums, banners, etc
- 5) Something similar to the 'Dirty Look at the Dáil' Day which was organised last month by an artist in Dublin
- 6) A poster or printed out page detailing what the NDoA is about posted in all arts venue, galleries, bookshops, etc, so that the public are made aware of the issues .

The meeting concluded with Fergal and Colm asking (and receiving) volunteers to help drive Galway East and Galway West arts workers groups, while the delegates from Leitrim and Mayo both agreed to build their constituency groups too.

## **CORK BRIEFING**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Gerry Godley gave an introduction which included background information on the work of the NCFA to date. He noted that if the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism had been dissolved as per the recommendations of the McCarthy Report, Ireland would have been the only country in the EU 27 without senior arts representation in government. He further highlighted that of the 240 recommendations made in the McCarthy report, 80 have already been carried out and while this campaign is not about that report he made the point that just because the recommendations for the arts weren't carried out doesn't mean that we can be assured that things are going to get better or easier for the community. He mentioned the five key 'asks' the NCFA is making on the National Day of Action (see Fergal McGrath's introduction in Galway) and also pointed out that as well as arts workers all working together on a local level on Friday 17 September, the following week will see Culture Night and a further NCFA event on Tuesday 21 September, which is a Cultural Briefing for policy makers.

## **PRESENTATION**

Willie White, director of Project Arts Centre, Dublin, led the presentation with some background details of how the idea for the arts workers constituency groups came about: Playwright Gavin Kostick had the notion that if arts workers lobbied their TDs from where they lived rather than as a sector, then they might be listened to more readily. He noted that during last year campaign action approximately 25 to 30 politicians were met and that the ambition now was that all our politicians would be met by arts workers by the National Day of Action. He mentioned how during an early meeting between North Dublin arts workers constituency group and a FG TD they was told that there wasn't a policy around arts because the focus was all on the economy. Feeding into the economic argument is thus a good way to get politicians to regard the arts seriously. Willie further claimed that while last year's campaign was energising we as arts workers really need to communicate more effectively with our politicians.

A discussion opened up to the floor in which a point was made that because there is a fallacy that there's money in the private sector available to the artists which can compensate for a lack of government funding, we have to approach politicians with a definite and clear strategy. Gerry Godley noted that this is a time that's ripe with opportunity to drive policy agenda. He claimed that arts and culture are being folded into discussions about education, taxation, health, etc, and we have to start talking about these issues within a broader artistic language so as to show how the arts benefits all areas of society. He added that a fundamental part of our argument must be that funding the arts is for the public good. He also said that the longer term aim of the NCFA was almost about getting away from the 'fetters' of the arts - the sentiment is always very positive but the understanding of how the work actually gets made, the idea of process rather than product, is still misunderstood.

Claudia Woolgar from Source arts centre in Tipperary said that it was necessary to get the 'non-believers' and those who are confused about how the arts plays a role in their lives, onboard with the campaign. Mags O'Sullivan claimed that it was important to highlight the fact that the art permeates most peoples' lives, that if a child picks up a fiddle to learn how to play it then they are participating within the arts. She added that we must get that point across and be careful not to get swept up in a language where those simple but effective points get lost.

Independent Cork City Cllr. Kieran McCarthy, who was present at the meeting, said that we must listen to what the politicians are saying in response to our demands. If economics was mentioned then we have to become part of the economic debate. Rhetoric, while it was employed usefully in Farmleigh, will only get us so far. He suggested that we need to come up with something more tangible such as how the arts can create more 'real' jobs, etc. Allin Gray added that we need a blunt approach showing how money can be saved by keeping arts workers in their jobs rather than putting them on the dole. He cited figures from the Indecon Report in a letter which he as general manager of the Irish Association of Youth Orchestras, sent to the then Minister for Arts, Martin Cullen

TD, and the Minister for Finance, Brian Lenihan, last November, noting the above (full details on <http://corkarts.org/?p=182>)

It was suggested that different arguments and different ways of talking about issues should be used and often this depends on which politicians are being met. We should be ready to adapt to these different situations. Una Carmody noted that the lobbying process is very straightforward: Following a meeting with the TDs they then write a letter to the minister saying they've met this group and these were the issues discussed. The more noise the Minister hears the sooner she/he will start to listen.

A query as to whether we would be carrying out arts activities on the 17 Sept was made and Siobhan explained that a further part of the action on that day was to create a series of 'events' which would raise the campaign's profile both publicly and within the media. Constituency groups needed to come up with ideas for these events but they would then be folded into a nationwide media campaign.

The discussion returned to the notion of meeting TDs with various people then volunteering to drive particular constituency groups -  
Amy Prendergast in Cork North East  
Síle Ní Bhroin and Eoin Ó Hannracháin in Cork South Central  
Síle Ní Bhroin and Allin Gray in Cork North Central  
Claudia Woolgar and Tracy McCormack in Tipperary South  
Gemma Carcaterra and Joanne Beirne in Limerick

Wille made the point that it only takes a couple of people to meet with each TD but that they should have a list of known arts workers living within their constituency. Mary McCarthy and Allin Gray also suggested that politicians from all parties and key influencers in other communities such as the business community should also be met in the lead up to the NDoA.

END.

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