

CHARITY MATTERS



Listening and hearing are two different things. We often listen but do not hear and we often hear but we are not paying attention. LISTENING can be defined as “to pay attention to someone or something in order to hear what is being said, sung, played, etc. or to tell a person to listen to what you are saying or to hear what someone has said and understand that it is serious, important, or true”. You may well ask what is the relevance of “listening” in the world of community, voluntary and charitable organisations?

A couple of weeks ago, I attended The Wheel AGM, Annual Conference, Master Classes, Expo & Network Dinner in Dublin. The Wheel is a leading support and representative network for the community and voluntary sector representing at this time over 1,300 members. I have been a member for many years and have used my membership to further my knowledge and understanding of the sector.

My mission in attending was many fold; to hear the latest developments within the sector, to hear about new initiatives, to listen to the array of speakers on hand, to share best practices with like-minded individuals but above all, to listen to the people and to identify the organisations that are helping to shape the future of our sector. John Farrelly, recently appointed as CEO of the Charities Regulatory Authority (CRA) and Deirdre Garvey, CEO of The Wheel are pivotal in that respect.

John Farrelly, in his address to the delegates, stated that his focus for the remainder of 2016 would be to ensure that the register of charities was fully complete as per legal requirements. He broadly discussed plans for the CRA from 2017 onwards which included the likely impact of legislation on the sector and the need to further educate board members on their responsibilities. He recognised and emphasised the wonderful work being undertaken by charities and community groups around the country which he stated must be delivered within the confines of legislation and good governance and with the full support of the public. He asked us to take away one word from his presentation, namely “compliance” and I heard that loud and clear!

Deirdre Garvey spoke on a number of occasions throughout the few days in a variety of contexts. She presented The Wheel’s vision for the future which includes plans to significantly grow and develop the range of supports and services it provides to the sector; to continue to offer a robust suite of training programs and to grow its presence in the regions significantly in the coming years. Ms. Garvey also spoke about developing leadership excellence and maximising collaborative working across the sector. In all, the essence of what I heard from her related to governance, training, building sustainable communities and the sharing of best practices.

Referring back to my opening remarks where I asked “what is the relevance of listening in the world of community, voluntary and charitable organisations”? It is essential that we, the collective in our region, listen to and take note of the developments and massive changes being experienced within our sector. It is vital that we develop our leadership skills and create effective communication strategies to engage with our stakeholders and the public in general. I do not make such statements lightly considering we are in an era of reducing budgets, pressure on staff and services and increasing legislation. However, saying “we didn’t know” or “we don’t have the time” will not help the development of the sector or build public trust. Our leaders and board members must be efficient and effective with the use of their time in order to deliver the strategies that will drive the sector forward. To do that, we must listen and “hear” what is being said.



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