



Full text of speech delivered by Monica Hynds, OUTHouse Chairperson on the occasion of the visit of An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, to OUTHouse on 16 July 2007.

On behalf of the users, volunteers, staff and board of OUTHouse I am delighted to welcome An Taoiseach to OUTHouse at 105 Capel Street.

This is a pivotal time for Irish society, our community and this centre, and we are pleased that the Taoiseach has chosen now to pay us an official visit.

OUTHouse took shape in 1994, at a time when the AIDS crisis was reaching a peak and homosexuality had just been decriminalised. At that time our community had no home.

Following public meetings a group of people came together with a vision to develop a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender resource centre that would provide a focus for activity and for the development of services. Few outside that group expected it to come to much.

In less than a year we moved from sharing half of one small office to renting three floors of a building with the support of funding from the Eastern Health Board. Thus OUTHouse began operations.

OUTHouse became a vibrant, active community centre where established groups like Gay Community News, Dublin Pride and the Lesbian & Gay Film Festival operated, and many new groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous & Narcotics Anonymous formed. Activities ranged from musical evenings and belly dancing classes to arranging soccer and rugby matches. The siting of the Health Board's 'Gay Men's Health Project' in the centre, was of key importance. Above all, the centre was and is a safe and welcoming space for users.

Dublin was changing, more people realised it was possible to live full and happy 'out' lives and that there was support available to assist them to do that. We realised it was time to move to a bigger and more permanent home that could respond to the needs of our growing and increasingly diverse community.

So, we started meeting funders and those who could advise and help us to develop. The Taoiseach met us at his office in Drumcondra and discussed our plans, he showed a clear understanding of what we needed and how we could go about achieving our goals.

With the renewed confidence that meeting gave us, and with the continued support of staff, volunteers, funders and friends within the community, we moved ahead and in 2001 we got a mortgage and purchased this building. Back in 1994, no-one could have imagined that in 7 short years OUTHouse would have come so far.

Now it is 2007 and we have another big plan. Last year service users, volunteers, staff and Board members developed a vision for the next 10 years, which we called OUTHouse 20 16, and in the coming months we will publish this strategy. It is ambitious, but just as achievable as our first plan.

HIV prevention and supports around isolation and addiction are still core to OUTHouse provision. Despite the positive changes in society many in the community still grapple with low self-esteem, isolation and suicidal ideation.

In recent years, youth services have been developed by BelongTo, transgender service development has begun and a sports forum has convened. These represent the first steps in a new phase for OUTHouse.

OUTHouse 2016 envisages a resource that addresses the entire life cycle of those in our community. Buying this building did not give us a fully accessible space but was an important step towards that goal. This year, when the basement is finished, OUTHouse will be a partially accessible space. Our plans include moving to a new building conforming to the highest standards of Accessible Design so that we can provide a space where all members of the community can access all services.

A current priority is the development of services for older members of our community. What happens to people who have lived fulfilling 'out' lives when they are faced with needing residential care? How do they identify places where they can be themselves? What facilities are needed for those who wish to remain active in the community? OUTHouse plans to develop services for older members of the community, ideally involving access to healthcare services, integration with broader community activities and promoting the development of appropriate housing and medical care.

Another priority group are families. Whether protected, or even recognised, in law, there are gay families all over this country. OUTHouse plans to further develop facilities and resources to support gay families in raising their children in a happy and healthy environment.

Ireland has become a country of immigration not emigration. In the past many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people left Ireland to seek better lives abroad. Some died alone and isolated.

While much remains to be done in Ireland, people are now coming here, seeking better lives, and like Irish people did in community centres in New York and other cities across the world, new arrivals escaping discrimination are coming to OUTHouse.

Our vision for OUTHouse 20 16 involves a purpose built centre that is fully accessible, encompassing a full medical facility serving the entire community and addressing all life stages. New services will be developed; initially targeting youth, elder, family and migrant group needs.

There will be a specific focus on well-being, augmenting existing support services with opportunities for sport, arts and culture; enhancing the general health and well-being of centre users.

While OUTHouse serves the LGBT communities specifically, it is also part of the local area, and will continue to offer access to services to the local community.

As with everything that happens in OUTHouse, these developments will depend on community involvement. Happily, OUTHouse has bucked the modern trend of volunteer apathy and we are lucky to have a strong and active volunteer base. This is central to our ability to rapidly respond to emerging needs, and while we rely on funding to maintain core services, we have proven time and again that we can do this in a thrifty and efficient manner. Our funders to whom we are very grateful are listed on this poster.

We have engaged as active citizens with other voluntary bodies and with various government agencies and departments to arrive at where we are today. However, we are acutely aware of the outstanding gaps in service provision and we look forward to working in partnership with agencies to deliver much needed services to our community.

We will build on our strengths, enhance our networks and proceed as a model for community centre development. Those involved with OUTHouse have demonstrated their capacity for active citizenship and volunteerism; we hope for and anticipate a time when we can all be treated as full citizens and equal members of Irish society. We look confidently, and hopefully, to the Taoiseach and his programme for Government to facilitate and support these developments.

Thank you.