



Opening Remarks by Stephen O'Hare, Executive Director

Launch of HIV Ireland MPOWER Programme

Thursday 20 February 2020

Good evening everyone. It is a pleasure to welcome you to the launch of MPOWER Community Outreach Programme, on behalf of HIV Ireland.

I am so pleased that we have attracted a full house here in the truly sumptuous, meditative, ethereal, grandiose surroundings of IMMA and this magnificent exhibition, PROTEST by Derek Jarman. Thank-you Sean for this wonderful invitation.

When we talk about our vision for MPOWER and what we hope it can achieve, I am very conscious, particularly in light of our distinguished speakers, and our surroundings here, of the weight of history and expectation in the room, on the walls, in the hearts and minds of everyone here, and those who are not here.

Adam will speak about the nuts and bolts of the initiative so, if you'll indulge me, I might use this time to get a bit philosophical and perhaps a tad metaphorical about MPOWER.

MPOWER is a new initiative, that's true, but it has been developed against a backdrop of hard graft, hard times, learning by doing and no small amount of success. It has a new brand, a new identity, a new mission. Fundamentally however, our intention is that is reflective.

It has been designed to reflect the needs and expectations, the innovation, the hard work and volunteerism, the activism and the desire for meaningful progress on supporting and empowering sexual health and wellbeing within this community.

The key components are, of course, testing, outreach, information and support, but it should be more than the sum of its parts. It can be an identity, it is a philosophy, and it is even named for its underlying value.

But it can also be viewed as something almost tangible - a vehicle. I say that with a nod to the symbolism and metaphor surrounding us this evening. As a nod to the artist's world.





MPOWER *is* a vehicle. You can drive it. You can open the door, climb in, recline into the bucket seats, grab the wheel and steer your own course. That's what it is designed for.

Our role is as key bearer and fine tuner. Our job is to maintain a well-oiled, roadworthy machine.

But you are the driver. You have the power at your feet. Take it for a drive. Put miles on it. Tell us how well it corners. Bring it in for fine tuning from time to time. Let us upgrade it.

Ultimately it should be ready when you need it. Take it out. Be the power behind it.

Adam has a long list of people to thank on our behalf but If I can, I would like to briefly thank one or two notables.

To our funders, Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme, for enabling us and trusting us to take this programme forward. Thank you, Janice and Maeve.

I pay tribute to our MPOWER partners and volunteers who display a tireless energy and commitment and to our staff whose drive and determination to improve the lives of people living with HIV and achieve our collective goals is every day evident.

I wish to thank our board of Directors who maintain us, fine tune us and who give generously of their time and expertise also as volunteers.

Finally, I'd like to thank Adam and his team, Mark and Diego, for the vision and for putting on the road something that I hope, we hope, can best be described as the Cadillac of community-based HIV initiatives.

Thank you very much.

