

Create Strategy Launch

Independent Senator Colette Kelleher has been working for the past three decades to advance the rights and supports for children and young people, people who are homeless, people with disabilities and dementia in Ireland and the UK. She held Chief Executive roles at Alzheimer Society of Ireland, Cope Foundation, Cork Simon Community and Daycare Trust. Colette was an adviser to Margaret Hodge MP and was appointed to the Seanad by An Taoiseach in May 2016.

Colette attended the University of Southampton and UCC and holds a Bachelor of Social Science, a CQSW and an MBA, and recently became a Practitioner in Change and Consulting at the Tavistock Institute. She is currently studying for a Masters in Family Therapy at Clanwilliam Institute. Colette lives in Cork City and is married with two grown up children. She is a recent convert to the gym and healthy living.

Collaboration is your essence, your *raison d'être*, your primary task. To my mind all art is a collaboration, acknowledged or not.

I went to an exhibition of Bridget Riley's work recently. I was amazed at the beauty and the precision of her work. I was bowled over that such work could be the work of one person. I went into one of the last rooms of the exhibition and found that like Hockney and many others, Bridget had a team of collaborators around her.

I have recently started writing some poetry. None in public realm but shared with friends and others. Much if it draws on family and friends, my unwitting collaborators.

Few of us do anything all by ourselves. I take inspiration and encouragement from the words of the anthropologist Margaret Mead; "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has"

Working collaboratively has been a hallmark of how I have gone about my work in the Seanad and indeed is the hallmark of the Civil Engagement Group, of which I am a member. Always always working with and through others.

This too is a core value of Create and why I was so very happy to support your important work and to be here with you in my home city this evening. Create, through the medium of collaborative arts promotes, supports and facilitates collaboration and co creation with a social purpose. For social justice. Create connects people and art. Artists with people who may by class, community, culture, communication mean, are disconnected. Hard to reach. Excluded. Silent. Silenced. Vilified.

I have some sense of the power of your work.

When I worked in Cope I saw the power of collaborative arts in action. Championed by Eoin, Paul, Derval, Eamon and many others. I learned so much from our late and much missed friend Herman Marbe and how he connected with Ita, Ailbhe, Con and so many, many others, facilitating the most wondrous opening up and expression from people who might have been 'locked in' and locked away from the world

Connecting and communicating through arts, though the body and senses when words are not an available medium or even limbs to hold brushes to paint or write.

I see the power of music in the life of my little grandnephew Conor. He is almost 3 and as well as an amazing personality, a smile that lights up a room and a lip you could hang a pot off when he is unhappy, with the sharpest hearing ever, who has a rare condition which is life limiting. His response to music and smell is a joy to behold. Music is and will be an important part of his life, a big connector and connection with the world to him and from him.

I have seen art especially music cutting through fogs of memory which can be a result of dementia. I have been so moved to see people recalling words of songs when no other words or memories come. I saw the power of filmmaking in Cork Simon in a project funded by Cork 2005, where people experiencing homelessness and filmmakers collaborated. It was often a frustrating process. People involved often taken away by other pressures in their lives and coming in and out of the filmmaking process. So, this collaboration was flexible and alive to that, starting in one place finishing in another. A lovely film emerged and was shown in Capital cinema, now no longer here. Would be nice to see that film again.

Outside of Cork I recall Brian Dignam work in St Paul's Finglas where I worked as a Community Worker in 1980's, connecting with young people on the margins. Out of school. In trouble. I recall a woman called Cheryl and a photography project in Jeremy Corbyn's North Islington constituency. It was a project with girls, living locally and from very different backgrounds explored together their identity & sexuality very beautifully and candidly, facilitated by the Community Centre I worked in. A beautiful collection of photographs ensued.

Last year I saw some exquisite work exhibited in the Crawford Gallery by women of Glounthane some living in Ashbourne House, some living in the village, all collaborating together and connecting through art. Earlier this year I was bowled over by the 'I am Traveller' exhibition in the Museum of Country Living, a major collaboration between Traveller community and Rosa Meehan and others in the museum, recording and exhibiting our precious Traveller culture and heritage.

Each of us will recall so many examples that have the power of connection, expression and transformation through collaborative, co-created art. Cork is a very vibrant place for collaborative arts, as are other places. So, it's great that we have Create, a national body to promote and support this.

So, I commend the Arts Council and its backing for the work of Create. I trust that it will support the great plans & projects in the Strategy we are launching this evening. On behalf of Create and our civil society I thank Ann O'Connor for her belief & commitment to the collaborative arts in society.

There is much talk in my workplace of the Brexit Budget. The dreaded 'B' word might put a strain on public funding & the arts is often near the top of the queue for cuts.

I am very happy to be an advocate for art that reaches out to marginalised people, seldom heard and vulnerable voices. I will be keeping a watchful eye on the budget and what is and is not prioritised. I am an ally. I am happy to do what I can.

So, congratulations Create and many good wishes. Thank you again for asking me to be here and wishing you a fair wind to the important transformational work, rooted in social justice & solidarity, that you do. Long live the arts. Long live the collaborative arts and the good they do.

Senator Colette Kelleher
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