

INDEPENDENCE IN THE DRUGS SPACE



Crainn (which means 'tree' in Irish) has been active as a community since some time in 2010. It started as an online platform for Irish drug users to connect with each other in a non-stigmatised space. Crainn aimed to facilitate and encourage a rational conversation around drugs, drug use and the policies surrounding drugs.

By 2021, our group had grown to around 30,000 members. This marked for us the beginning of our ongoing public drug policy reform campaign which is calling for a radical reshaping of Irish drug policy.

Our project revolves around bringing the conversation around drugs to the wider public, representing the under-represented non-problematic drug users, medical cannabis patients and those victims of the criminal justice system.

We have always been an independent organisation. We are in receipt of zero funds, have no employees and run our campaigns on a frugal budget. Our committee is made up of volunteers from diverse backgrounds such as the healthcare sector, the educational sector, business and agriculture.

Our campaign is driven by the lived experience of the drug users that we speak to and engage with on our platforms every day. For example, one of our most successful campaigns was to bring awareness to contaminated cannabis - after we heard first-hand reports from our members about being hospitalised or experiencing emergency situations.

This blend of independence and being interconnected with an active and engaged community has meant that our campaigns stay relevant and informed. This approach also involves trust and is not easy to replicate.

The vast majority of our community is made up of what would be termed as non-problematic or recreational drug users. Official bodies in Ireland consider these drug users 'hard to reach' due to their low admission rates into services.

For us, though, there is nothing 'hard to reach' about our community and we are willing to share information, experiences and views to better Irish drug policy.





With independence comes a certain level of isolation. We are nowhere near the National Oversight Committee and have no ties with the bodies that implement Irish drugs policy.

We have made some strides in informing the ongoing national and political debate, which unfortunately required much strenuous hard work. We have given input to the Oireachtas' Joint Committee on Justice, and many of our recommendations to that committee have made it into their official recommendation to the Government.

Some of these recommendations included the decriminalisation of drug use across the board, the legalisation of home-cultivation of plant based drugs (such as psilocybin mushrooms or cannabis), alongside a number of harm-reduction measures including mobile overdose prevention sites, heroin assisted treatment (HAT) and drug-checking services.

We were invited to make a presentation to the Citizens' Assembly on Drug Use in September of this year (2023). We used the short time available to discuss the developments relating to cannabis policy reform across the world and which of these moves would be best suited for Ireland.

In this sense, despite a level of isolation from the decision making table, we feel that there is a clear role for independent voices in drug policy at the moment. Independent voices are coming from the grassroots and are carried by an active community of people behind them. UISCE is an example of this.

These voices offer fresh perspectives, are not afraid to push the envelope and provide valuable insight into the real-world workings of Ireland's far-reaching drug policy.