The Reminiscences
of Cathal Kerrigan

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PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Cathal Kerrigan conducted by Arlene Crampsie on April 30, 2018.

This interview is part of the Atlantic Philanthropies Archive Project. Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed by the narrator.
Today is the 30th April 2018. My name is Arlene Crampsie and today I am interviewing Cathal Kerrigan for the DRI Atlantic Philanthropies Oral History event. Cathal, thank you very much for agreeing to be here today and could I get you to confirm on the recorder that you give consent to this recording.

Kerrigan: Absolutely, It’s a pleasure absolutely, I’m very happy to give the consent and to be part of this project to record the value of the Atlantic Philanthropies contribution to GLEN and to LGBT life in Ireland.

Q: Great, so can I maybe start off by getting explain about the organisation that you work for?

Kerrigan: Well I am currently I am employed as a librarian. I qualified as a librarian, way back in 1983 in UCD. I am now working back in my home institute, where I did my primary degree in UCC. Since 2003, I have been working in UCC library as a liaison teaching librarian.
Q: Ok and what project did you work on that was related to Atlantic Philanthropies?

Cathal: After, when I came out at [aged] nineteen or twenty in 1974 luckily the Irish Gay Rights movement had been founded and I was involved as an activist from then. Up to, I suppose 1993, after that I have taken more a relaxed role but for those approximate twenty years. I was very active. I was involved in founding the Cork branch of IGRM (Irish Gay Rights Movement) and the Social Centre there in 1975. I was involved in Cork with a group of people like Kieran Rose, Arthur Leahy and Donal Sheehan in the Cork Gay Collective and we founded, set up, the First National Gay Conference which was held in Cork in 1981, Spring of 1981. That was a seminal event. Because at the conference we got speakers over from the Gay Left, there was a Gay Left at the time in London. Nigel Young was his name and other speakers and we had over 150 people from all over Ireland, North and South attending. We had workshops and plenary sessions where a record of what was discussed was passed and it was the first major discussion among a whole wide range of lesbian and gay men in Ireland. Trans issue wasn’t really covered back then. But the outcomes of those workshops, the resolutions and perspectives, people agree, were highly influential to the agenda for the Irish LGBT Movement throughout the 1980’s and into the early 1990’s. Sorry, I don’t want to go on too long but that was the background. Then I moved to Dublin to study and got involved in further activism.

So, I was involved in setting up the Dublin Lesbian and Gay Collective. We were instrumental in calling the Fairview March (in 1983) at a time when Declan Flynn was killed in Fairview Park (September 10th, 1982). The four people who were found guilty, who
accepted, pleaded guilty the judge gave them suspended sentences. As a result of that we had
the march against violence against women and LGBT people and that was very successful,
and it led to the first Gay Pride in Ireland.

We were also involved in setting up Gay Health Action in 1985 which was to fight aids. I
was in Dublin in that time in 1988, in fact my memory was that it was late 1987, when
Kieran Rose, who had been in the Cork Gay Collective with me and had been living and
working in Cork, got a job in Dublin City Council and he moved to Dublin. I think it was
about 1986, the following year, and he had already set up a group called Gay Rights at Work.
Really he was the group. We were all members of it every three months he'd call a meeting
and we’d start writing letters or lobbying our unions etc. But my recall of it is that after one
of these meetings we were having a drink, I think it might have been just Kieran and myself
left or maybe it was also Christopher Robson and one or two others. But Kieran started
talking about the fact that the judgement of the David Norris case expected the following year
in 1988 and that it would be very important—it was likely we expected that judgement to be
positive. But the problem then was getting the Irish Government to act on it, and he felt it was
very important that the Gay movement be ready to take that opportunity on and to put
pressure on the government. I was persuaded by that and so was Christopher Robson even
though there was a huge amount of work to do with Gay Health Action.

When I told Arthur Leahy that I was going to be involved in Gay Health Action and setting
up this new group he was kind of critical and said people were dying from aids and this was
just a legal technicality. So, I said no its not we’ve been fighting on aids on for three years
and what has happened is some government departments and some people are using the
criminalisation of homosexuality to not do work on Aids, not fund us doing work on aids so
the law was a direct impediment. We really do need a positive change.

So, we got involved then in setting up GLEN in 1988. I was involved very actively for the
next five years until 1993. In 1992, I was a bit burnt out and moved to Amsterdam, but I
stayed involved with GLEN because I was lobbying the local Dutch Gay organisation and the
European International Lesbian and Gay Association, ILCA. So, that was my involvement;
from 1988 to 1993 so it was before Atlantic Philanthropies funding became involved directly.
So, I don’t have direct involvement with the Atlantic Philanthropies funding of GLEN

Q: OK, Just to clarify for someone listening from the outside, GLEN what do the initials
stand for?

Kerrigan: Gay and Lesbian Equality Network. So, again, Kieran Rose has got to get credit for
this. When you are trying to lobby for change you have to come up with names for the
groups. We started out before even this discussion in 1987, we had started out seeing that
there was a need to build broad support for change so we had to founded a group called
Unite for Change, Unite being the idea the Gay movement at that stage was somewhat
fractured there were different groups and there wasn’t co-ordination. We felt there needed to
be a focus for co-ordination. We also felt that that was too amorphous a name. Then we had
another name change, we became, ‘the campaign for the rights of lesbians and gay men’, it
didn’t trip off the tongue. So then in 1988 as I say Kieran sent around the proposal. Myself
and Christopher bought into it and a lot of other people bought into it and specifically he
needed somebody who had status as a kind of neutral figure in the Gay community and the
chair of what is now called Gay Switchboard—at the time it had a different name it was called Tell a Friend—was Don Donnelly. Kieran and I met with Don and he agreed wholeheartedly to be the facilitator for the first meeting. That meeting was actually held in, he and his partner ran a B+B (Bed and Breakfast). Don had another career as an accountant. His partner ran a B+B, Donal. We met in the living room of the B+B.

There were about twenty-five people representing various Gay organisations. Gay switchboard, The Dublin Lesbian and Gay Collective. The National Lesbian and Gay Federation some of the lesbian and the youth organisations etc. We all sat around, what we did it was a whole day working. There was a plan that there would be different working groups. One of the discussions during that day was we need a name. I recall it was we do these things the way politico’s do them. OK we said what do we need the name to cover? It should ideally say we are Gay and Lesbian. It should say what are we looking for. So what are we looking for? This was very important because at that stage in Ireland in 1988 a lot of people would have said, “listen be reasonable don’t be over ambitious”, but it was Kieran who said, “Listen. You can’t be a little bit equal. You can’t say you believe I am equal, but I’ll accept something less at the moment. I don’t think I should sit at the back of the bus. I think I should be able to sit anywhere, sit at the front. But I’ll accept sitting in the middle if you’ll agree to that. You can’t do that”. We said ok, equality, so we had that and then it was Kieran who said GLEN. We said what’s that and he said Gay and Lesbian Equality Now. Then someone said we’re not now. It’s like a chat we’re actually a grouping, a federation a network. Gay and Lesbian Equality Network and that became very important for a couple of reasons. One is that the acronym resonates in Ireland because we have the glens of Antrim, Wicklow GLENs, ‘down from the glen’. We have the positive atmosphere of green. Green is positive. So, this is very important because a lot of politics when you are agitating for change very often its defence
you say, ‘stop this’, ‘stop this discrimination’ and ‘end to this’, ‘no to this’. To actually have something positive, from the very beginning, Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, GLEN had that concept and it ended up with in the end with the same sex Marriage Referendum where in 2015 we won presenting a very positive, not just GLEN, a broad range of people; LGBT noise, the youth. The young people of Ireland who pushed that agenda. But that positive thing of support, love was there from the very beginning in 1988, with the name of GLEN itself.

Q: So, it sounds like it was a very exciting time to be involved in the movement could you tell a bit about what it felt like— what it is was like for you to be involved in the movement?

Kerrigan: It was exciting, but we had no money. We did have jobs and so what happened is was GLEN was funded initially by, I mentioned there were twenty-five or six of us in a room. There were about five or six of us who took out standing orders, you know, £50 a month out of our salary to fund, give some resources to GLEN. We had no money from anywhere. It was exciting but it was also difficult because there had been lots of divisions. I mentioned that for instance, the Dublin Lesbian and Gay collective had initiated the Fairview March but that had created tensions with the larger organisation, The National Lesbian and Gay Federation which saw themselves as the main mover so we had to try and heal those and say we wanted this organisation to work for everyone’s benefit and to be a co-ordinator for everyone. Not just a sectional one.

We also had to build bridges with David Norris. David Norris was the primary focus of Gay change in Ireland in the 1970s and early ‘80s. He had been elected to the Seanad, so he was a big public figure. He was somebody the parliamentarians, the Senators and TDs, members of
the Dáil were meeting all the time. So he was the leadership face of the movement and also he had taken the case to Europe and when he started the case ten years earlier, ten years earlier! in 1978 he had got the support of Mary Robinson and Mary Mc Aleese, both of whom were very skilled lawyers but also both of whom went on to become President of Ireland subsequently. Mary Robinson in the 1990s, 1990-97 and Mary McAleese afterwards from 1997 to 2011.

What David Norris did and the people around him at the time was if we drafted a law for the parliamentarians it may make it easier for them to support it. But that law was drawn up in 1977-1978 and it was drawn up with Ireland as an ex British colony, a lot of the laws are English and in fact as we kept saying the law that actually criminalised gay men in Ireland was originally a British law but we didn’t get rid of them when we got our freedom, we just carried them over. So, they drafted a law with the very best intentions and in 1977, 78 it wasn’t bad. To say, well they are probably going to look to England, the law that’s in England which had been enacted ten years earlier which was 1967. But that law did not decriminalise homosexuality. In fact it never has, our law in 1993 became more progressive because its decriminalised homosexuality. In England what they did, the 1967 law makes it acceptable or legal to be gay under certain circumstances but there’s still kind of restrictions. But based on that, they kind of made a copy of that law and that had a different age of consent for people etc. So, we were worried that that would be resuscitated, that would be the easy option so we felt that wouldn’t give us equality it would give us less than equality. So, it was exciting. But it wasn’t easy.
Kieran and Christopher met David Norris and presented the whole idea to him and he said he’d give it a try and see how it works out if it doesn’t work out folks I’ll have to make my own running on this. But otherwise, you know, and we fed into very successfully over the next five years, we gave him documents and briefings and we met departments and he found that we did a good job as lobbyists, and he worked for an office. Also with the LNGF we patched up relationships to the extent that they provided—we had no money—the free office facilities in the Hirschfield Centre so they provided us there. Now, in 1992, there's actually a document in the National Library archives, the Irish Queer Archive, which was a report we did back to the community four years later. And in that I actually drafted that report for Kieran, Christopher and the others, and Brenda and a few others. That report is about twelve pages long, but one part of it is the finances. So, if you go in there, you can actually see it says we actually took out a loan from the bank to get a Mac computer. So, we were very far ahead thinking, but that was the thing, which we're going to be able to use this to buy a Mac computer with the five hundred pounds we borrowed and then started repaying it out of the standing orders. Largely, a few gay man in Dublin were funding GLEN at that stage. And so it was it was fun, but it was difficult because we had nothing like literally that's as I say without the LNGF providing benefit in kind now called ‘free office facilities’ [in the Hirschfield Centre, Temple Bar]. We then had our computer there, which we allowed them to use. So that was a quid pro quo. But we had our meetings there, etc. We also had one of the people who got involved was Eoin Carroll who was a young economist and he was working with Nexus which was an economic consultancy, which did lot of work for the European community project and knew all about European community funding and also did projects on a non-commercial basis with community groups.
So they had a very strong social commitment. And they provided us with facilities they would allow us to use the photocopying facilities etc. I myself did—I’m going to put this on record as I’m probably safe now to do so. At the time I mentioned earlier that I moved to Dublin in 1981. In 1982-83, I was a library trainee in Trinity library and that allowed me to go on to do my years postgraduate in librarianship in UCD. And in 1983, I qualified as a librarian and I got a job as a librarian for AIB, Allied Irish Bank, the largest bank in Ireland at the time, in their headquarters in Ballsbridge setting up a small one person library for them, but servicing the top management, the chairman and the CEO and a whole range of top management etc. And I was very excited, so I was doing that at the same time as I was doing all this other stuff. But there I had access to good photo coping facilities as so there was stuff that was done for GLEN as well like that that report I mentioned would have been printed off from the Mac computer and then I would take it into AIB and stay back half an hour or so with this fast, wonderful photocopier that would magically do double sided and stapling! this was phenomenal in the late 80s!. You have to believe me, but it was and getting this done as a freebie! So, AIB sort of sponsored us involuntarily and unknown! So, it was very exciting, but very difficult as well, because we had no resources and we were fighting an uphill battle.

Q: So obviously what the lack of funds and then the involvement of Atlantic Philanthropies must have been a bit of a game changer for GLEN?

Kerrigan: Transformed completely. So, one of the things is that GLEN achieved a lot. So, we would with those little resources, manage to achieve the phenomenal result of the 1993
decriminalisation of homosexuality, which was a levelling of the playing field, and equality at that level. So, that was fantastic. But there were lots of other tasks to be done to get real equality which is to bring in positive changes, not just to take away the negative. So, over the 90s and the early noughties, the last twenty five years, GLEN was fighting for all those details, taking them on one by one, but also trying to build in the community because GLEN had a perspective as well that it wasn't enough—we had lobbied for law reform, and that you might say is a very high level lobbying because you're just lobbying the decision makers, the politicians, the legislators—but the other one for GLEN was that it had a vision. I’ll come back to this one, it's important, I keep stressing this. It had a vision, a coordinated vision of saying equality is more than just taking a negative law away and it's not just about putting a few laws on the books. It's also about changing the system, systemic change within how the civil service operates and treats LGBT people with the supports that are provided and ensuring, embedding those supports in all the schemes. So that LGBT people would be treated just like anybody else; If they were youth, youth projects would include LGBT people, if it's in schools, that the education in schools would include LGBT. That for communities there was a dire need; lots of problems with immigration, because a lot of LGBT people didn't feel at home, in Ireland they felt prejudice, discriminated against. A law might be changed but changing people's attitudes. That law was changed by the legislators but the opinion polls that had been taken for the previous five years showed a growing increase in the number of people—number of adults—who believed that the law should be changed—to decriminalise, we still didn't have a majority when the legislators passed that.
So, people's minds and hearts needed a lot of work. And also a lot of supports and that meant you needed to do a lot of work to lobby the decision makers and to get the system changed. You need to provide evidence, you need to provide support and you need to provide it in a way that the system is used to dealing with and will take account of. For that you need qualified people who can go out there and find the material. We didn't, couldn't employ anybody.

GLEN had no employees until Atlantic Philanthropies provided the funding. That allowed GLEN to employ four or five people who were highly skilled, qualified LGBT people. Some of them came back from abroad or had gone to London because they felt they couldn't make a career here. And then they found the opportunity to work on LGBT material here. It is dangerous naming any people! but two names come to my head, I mean, surely others will get named fully as well, but Brian Sheehan and Ciarán McKinney. And there are others who I can't remember off top my head, but they were very skilled. They had full third level qualifications. They had experience in London and the US and Australia and in Ireland, they had worked in the civil service. So they were coming with those skill sets. They also had nothing else to do, they were being paid to do this. They could do it full time and we could commission research with the money—the funding—from Atlantic Philanthropies that transformed GLEN because in the past okay, it was exciting you're doing great stuff but you were working full time for AIB and then you were cycling into town with your illicitly photocopied bits of paper to do GLEN stuff at night in the NGF, in the Hirschfield Centre, and then you were organising conferences, you were going into town, to the Dáil to lobby. So, what you were doing was taking a half a day off work to do that, etc. It was all very much
‘mix and gather’ trying to do it. And secondly, you were trying to do the research yourself. I was using my librarian skills to do research because I had access in AIB to the stockbrokers, reports, etc. Also trying to use all that information—that was available to people in the financial sector—to bring together information about what wherever we could find about LGBT peoples—the ‘pink pound’ contribution to community in the real sense. We weren't just people talking stuff we were part of it, we were funding society, etc. But to do that, it was very difficult. And so when you had these people who were then able to fund projects. For instance, one of the groups we were able to hire was Nexus who had the skills. We hired them and said, “We need you to [work] on poverty among the LGBT community. Why is it that poverty would be higher among LGBT people?” And so make comparisons with say travellers and with asylum seekers and people from working class areas to the stratification of the LGBT community. You might say, well, it sounds like a lot of you were very skilled and very middle class. What about all the working class? What about all the less skilled LGBT people? So, we were aware of that and saying that's what needed to change, we needed systemic change in Ireland but that could only be done by changing the laws, the structures and the opinions of the legislators, but also of the bureaucrats to use that term, civil servants, some people find (word) bureaucrats offensive, but it's not meant to be.

So, that's a long expression of saying yes, it was transformative because it allowed GLEN to step up and leap forward from being an organisation that was trying to get material and very much at a sort of hand to mouth, to actually focus its efforts very concretely, to get people in who had the skills to hire in and spend the money to create the resource information that would actually was then used to actually argue for all those things.
And when it came to later on in the noughties, looking for civil partnership, and then same sex marriage. It was being able to make the argument by doing research and reports into LGBT families, alternative families, lesbians with children. Gay men who wanted children, gay fathers, because they were in heterosexual relationships and then came out or whatever others married into situations. So, it was transformative. Yes, I hope I get that across. So, I'm speaking not from direct involvement, as I say, but I fully supported it initially. I went in 1992—I got a bit burnt out after all that twenty, eighteen years of political activism—I went to Amsterdam, I stayed involved with GLEN from a distance lobbying, as I say, the European branch of ILCA [International Lesbian and Gay Association]. But when 1993 when the law was passed, I must admit, and I remember having coffee, or a beer with Ciarán about a year and a half later in 1995 when I was back on holiday and I, “you know, when the law was passed, it was like I was free, literally free of political commitment to was like I had done my work I could now just enjoy. I could just be a gay man in Amsterdam, just relaxing enjoy going to the gay pride but not organising it”, so that's what I was doing there until 1999.

And then I came back to Ireland, initially in Galway, and then in Cork. I stayed in touch with GLEN but I wasn’t back involved with it but I did see close up a lot of the work that was done in particular—obviously again, it's very topical—around the issue of AIDS etc. because you know, there was a scandal—that even though the law has changed so you might say okay, 1993 the government have been persuaded that changed the law and gay men were now legal but in 1985 you’d have to found Gay Health Action. Christopher Robson was involved as well as Bill Foley, Mick Quinlan, Brenda Harvey, Arthur Leahy, Donal Sheehan
in Cork. and a whole range of other people and we were fighting. We were denied funding for leaflets because of the legal situation, but then what happened is that in 1990, GLEN ran out of steam. We had helped found an AIDS Alliance which kept on going, which was a broader movement. But there was no gay specific organisation. GLEN saw that in 1994-95, that this was a real lack. And what was scandalous is the government had set up— as governments a National Aids Strategy Committee. So there was a National AIDS Strategy Committee in Ireland, which had no openly gay representative— no representative from the gay community. In 1994, 1995, eight years after GLEN was founded, fifteen years into the epidemic, this was scandalous, and we had battered our heads against the wall from 1985 to 1990. So, GLEN set about it, they commissioned reports and they lobbied the government and a representative of the community was then appointed. And those reports were put into the strategy to say that it needed to be more focused.

Now unfortunately, what happens over time with AIDS thankfully no longer a life-threatening disease by and large—well it is for some small number of people but by and large not. But what's happened is the focus has loosened a little bit. And so we need to refocus government and that's where the tanks will come at the moment now because of course Atlantic Philanthropies, funding has finished and due to other circumstances, we don't need to go into another kind of crisis; GLEN itself is wrapped up. So now the gay community, sorry I need to be more politically correct—I'm showing my age here— the LGBTQI community need desperately to be more organised, and to make sure that the government does gets refocused on the needs of AIDS.
Q: So, I'm guessing from what you're saying, but without putting words into your mouth. Do you feel like there's a need for a replacement philanthropic body to fill that void that Atlantic has left or?

Kerrigan: Well, there's a need for funding. I would love to think, for instance, one way I would love to see it happen if you're asking my dream, My dream would be that the LGBTQI community in Ireland—the people in Ireland like myself—that we would have an organisation there to replace GLEN, that would have the confidence of all of us. And that like initially when GLEN was set up in 1988, and I was one of the members. I don't want to name others now because if I name one and don’t name the other couple [of names] it would be unfair, but there were people I know who were making a contribution every month by standing order, whether it was twenty pounds or fifty, forty pounds. I would love to see the community self-fund, that is the best way forward for us. If I could see that that would be a dream. That would be the utopian dream. That we ourselves the gay men of Ireland, lesbians of Ireland, to the trans people, the intersex, the queer people, etc, that all of those with an income enough to be able to in some way contribute with self-funding partner or organisation to lobby for us.

But in the absence of that—and even if some of that is possible, it may not be totally possible to fund an organisation from that—then philanthropy funding would be good. And maybe even moderately good as well this time will be if we can get the community [funding] so you might end up with matching funding, or even a tripartite system. You've asked me a question now; I'm really going off into my dreams. But you might have a tripartite you might
say, well, maybe that could be actions where you could have the community would fund some maybe a third or a quarter. Maybe philanthropy might fund a quarter and then government might fund the other half, so that it would be a kind of a shared funding situation. But yes, there is a desperate need for focus on resources. What the Atlantic Philanthropies intervention in GLEN showed is that if you have a good organisation, if you have an organisation which has vision, and which has got a focus for its work, and is able to do that work and able to take the funds and use them in a really focused strategic and positive way and direct them, then it transforms the possibilities. And that's why it could again.

Q: Can I ask then, I suppose, were there challenges with the Atlantic Philanthropies funding when your vision as for the community to fund itself?

Kerrigan: Yes, yes. Because the funding was based on a vision from the Atlantic Philanthropies association, body. Chuck Feeney in setting it up, had made it hands off so that he provided the funds. But he selected a board of trustees who would be the visionaries and they were the ones who kind of vetted organisations etc. So, for instance, way back. I know the university sector, so we've had experience of Atlantic Philanthropies as well in the university higher education sector where Atlantic Philanthropies put in resources because the trustees were told by researchers and by planners in Ireland and by the people could politically, see strategically said, “research needs to be funded in Ireland, but the government isn't funding higher education where the research is done”. And they said one of the key needs is now you can get most of those material, if you have the money for databases, you can actually get the research done on the computer, if you can subscribe to these international
databases of journal articles and research. And that was through the university libraries. So that funding came in and my colleagues—I wasn't there at the time I was abroad—in the 90s they did that. It provided a huge transformation, now there was a huge shock when that stopped because Chuck Feeney did make a regulation that he didn't want anybody becoming dependent on philanthropy this was meant to be seed funding. And it was meant to say the real responsibility lies with government, government needs to fund this. We want to show what is possible so that the government will step in and see the benefit of it and do the funding. And so what happened is—sorry I’ve gone off on another project now—but what happened in that area [Universities] was the funding ceased. There was panic, because suddenly the researchers found they couldn't get access to the information. And they said, What's going on? The University Library said, “Well, we don't have the funds, the funds have been stopped. So now the suppliers won’t supply, it's a commercial operation unless you pay”. The government then through Science Foundation Ireland had to step it. We then reached another crisis. This all happened during the Celtic tiger years, which was great because there was money, but then with the austerity and the collapse of the Celtic Tiger, the collapse of the economy in 2008, 2009 there was a repeat of that. Now what we've had to do is, as a result of this, what's happened, I'm just saying from my librarian experience, the university librarians got together, the seven of them with the RCSI, the eight of them made a consortium and said “we’ve got to show the government that we can get the best deal for the country rather than individually”. And that is called our Irish Research e-Library and that is now negotiating. It gets funding from the core fund allocation but that is of course less than what we would ideally like. So, there have to be difficult choices to try and get the best from them. So that's an example. Sorry going off on a tangent, forgive me,

Q: It’s still a relevant one.
Kerrigan: going off the tangent of a narrative project that I thought of it. So in the same way now, there's almost like a panic in the LGBTQ community because it was great to have, it was like five years of funding, I think from Atlantic Philanthropies, it was very substantial we're talking something like five million or ten million I can't remember but it was very substantial and allowed a lot of the hiring as I say four or five people, payments for projects. Those people have all gone I mean they have careers and working on this has helped. So now understandably they've got to go off there's no funding to pay them. GLEN itself has gone into crisis and has subsequently had to close-down. So, when the funding came in, there was a problem because I suppose to name it; there was a democratic deficit. Philanthropy is great, but it is not democratic. And the most democratic way to fund organisations is obviously self-funding that's what I mentioned and if you actually self-fund you control it and the people who run as leaders, the second most democratic way is when the government fund it out of our taxation because this central taxation should be used to fund for the good of society. And the idea then of philanthropy is, not to replace the government, and this is where Atlantic Philanthropies principles, so to speak. I'm not speaking from them. So, I don't know, I'm making all this up, so you'll have to correct me if I'm wrong. But one of their core principles is that our philanthropy should not replace the responsibility or displace the responsibility of the core funders for it and the core funder in this case very often will be the government. And that was the case in the higher education and the data bases, etc, research information, and it's here as well in terms of the gay community.
But I don't know if that answers it. And the problem is, unfortunately the danger is, like I mentioned the 1988 we set up Gay Health Action, sorry 1985 we set up Gay Health Action. What happened in a lot of gay organisations dealing with AIDS in America, Britain, and Europe and it happened I suppose to some extent here with GLEN was the professionalisation. Where you have people from the community, activists who are active in organising it. What happened then is, look there's money provided from the government or there is money from a charitable foundation. So, for instance, things like the AIDS Hilfe [Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe] in Germany so for instance the Elton John aids foundation in America, Britain and internationally etc. And the Princess Diana funds, they will provide funding, The Terence Higgins Trust, but what would happen then is they would employ professionals, very often, people had been gay activists but then they become professionals. They're now working for a board, they're not the activists who feel ownership anymore. Now they feel they are employees in a way and the people who were the ownership get distant.

And that happened with GLEN. It's one of the reasons why you know there is that crisis at the moment. GLEN, when I mentioned that 1992 report that I wrote, drafted for Kieran and Chris well we all wrote it, I was the one hitting the keys and typing it all and printing it off. So, I remember it very well and when I looked back at it recently, I was just very proud of it. I said this is amazing, if you look at those twelve pages, we cover all the topics that GLEN covered for the next twenty-five years. We were already talking about education and about health and about systems. But that was presented as what we called ‘a report back’ because we could never pretend that GLEN was democratic. I always said GLEN was semi democratic, almost quasi democratic. I mean, we couldn't hold a public meeting and say we're going to have a representative of the whole LGBT community in Ireland and get them in person. So, what we had was; we’d publicise the meeting but we’d try to get representatives from any and every LGBT organisation in Ireland and we got a lot of them and then we
would say we'd say to them, “Well, look, if there are objections to what we're doing, if we're doing something wrong, now's the time to speak”. And so that's how we maintained a kind of legitimacy among the community. What happened with the funding for GLEN was then that it was like, well, it's very hard to explain to these people what we're doing so the board became the kind of representative of the community. But the board didn't report back to any kind of public meeting. That's part of the thing, I would say the structures you need to learn. There wasn't an AGM the way you might say, well, AGMs are pretty much formalities for AIB and Bank of Ireland and you know, Apple. Zuckerberg and Facebook, when they hold a AGM like there's not going to be real change but it does give people a chance from the floor to speak out and say,” I'm concerned about this or some of us don't like that”. And you get some feedback. The board of GLEN tended to be you know, people in the community of standing but they weren't reporting back. And that showed up with the civil partnership and I have to say that I supported GLEN at the time. I remember, this is going back about five years ago now when GLEN from the very beginning way back in 1992 we had this idea of civil partnership we said we wanted for economic reasons inheritance etc. Hospital visiting rights. So we did that. We had that idea, I thought that civil partnership would be a better way personally because our idea with that it would be broader than just marriage. It would actually be not just for two gay men it could actually be for a niece and an uncle. The niece was taking care of him so that she could be left the house without taxation because she'd be the next kin and that kind of partnership. We were pushing all that but then the younger people had moved on and changed. And the people in GLEN were older like me and LGBT Noise were the name of groups. And there were some older people like Ailbhe Smyth, and I respect her you know, not all of us in that generation went down that line. Ailbhe Smyth and a few others were out there with young people and they said, “This isn't enough. This isn't good enough. This is not equality”. And I had the argument put to me, in fact, very
emphatically, because I was talking to the LGBT society, the students in UCC at that time about five, six years ago, and they I talked about the history then about GLEN and then they asked me, “What do you think about same sex marriage?”, I said, “Well, to be honest, I'm not interested in marriage myself, the concept, I'm an old kind of hippie old Marxists’ think that we don't need contracts to make relationships. It's just so long as we take care of children.” And they were saying, “But hold on a second, you said when you founded GLEN, that Kieran said, ‘Well, you can't be a little bit equal. You're either fully equal or you're not.’” So I was hung on my own petard. I had to say, “Okay, intellectually, I have to accept that you're right and I'm wrong. So therefore I support same sex marriage”. I even canvassed for it! So, you might say that's hypocritical, how could you canvass for something you don't want yourself. So, that's the nature of the game.

So, what happened was, that was a rising from the ground, the grassroots outside of GLEN and it did cause difficulties. There was a kind of public display of anger when at a Gay pride March. Kieran and Ailbhe were both speaking and Ailbhe was promoting same sex marriage. And Kieran was speaking and started saying that civil partnership was the thing to go for now. And he was kind of jeered and booed, which was unfortunate. But that was an expression of popular discontent that in fact, the leadership can become distant from the people it's meant to be leading. And that's a danger. If your funding is coming from outside, and if you feel we're doing the best we can, we're doing very good job. And they did and they were, but you still have to be answerable to the people you're serving. And you have to remember you're serving the people, and that's the danger with money. Even philanthropic.
Q: Would you say the legislative changes that were enacted would have happened anyway, without philanthropic funding or was the philanthropic funding necessary?

Kerrigan: Kieran and I had a chat as well in 1995 when I was back in Dublin we had lunch and a chat and one of the things I remember, I don't know if he remembers, but I remember sticks in my mind saying, “you know,” he said, “I've got a great fear that the community will miss this opportunity. It was fantastic, ‘93 the Gay Pride, we were celebrated, from being the kind of boring politicos always going on about lobbying, now suddenly, we were the heroes”. He was feted in the George [pub in Dublin]. He made a speech, which was unthinkable, people going to listen to political speeches but, eighteen months later there's still a euphoria there. But he said, “I'm afraid that now's the possibility, we need to push forward and if we don't, an opportunity will be lost”. So, I think that's a very real fear that, when you achieve change, there's a kind of sense of people getting exhausted it took all this energy let's just enjoy it now. And we get back to work later. And so I think that sorry to answer your question. No, I think that it wouldn't have happened inevitably, nothing is inevitable. Everything is caused.

Anybody who tells you, it always seems inevitable afterwards. So, I know talk to people who say, “Ah but it was inevitable that they were going to change the law in ‘93”. And I say, no, it wasn't and how they were going to change the law was not inevitable but also, I know, because I was involved. Like in spring of '93 in March, I have I put the papers in the Irish Queer Archive in the National Library. Kieran and Christopher were on the phone to me and said, “Listen, we're in trouble here, the word coming in from the Department of Justice is that they're going to go for a different age of consent and a limited kind of law and we're
really worried about this and they're trying to delay again, and we’re worried. So, we're thinking of challenging them in The European Court of Human Rights, but we need someone. You can’t challenge in a metaphorical way, you have to do it in a very physically way, you have to say this person is discriminated by this, will you be this person?” So, I spoke to the solicitor involved I talked to him and he went off and drafted this document which he sent to me, which actually outlines how I was suffering as a result of the delay in changing this etc. How I had to go to exile, I was working in casual work in Amsterdam, living in a couple of attic rooms, which was all true. But I was enjoying it, but when you read it, it sounds like I'm there banging my head every day! But the thing is, that's how you do it. But then there was a sudden change and it was the continuous pressure and GLEN bringing in the inquiry, etc. and getting Maire Geoghegan Quinn to change her mind and sudden change. But it needs all those pressures. So, it wouldn't have, no it would not have happened, definitely not have happened inevitably. And secondly, it would not have happened as well or the way it did. without all those resources. That's why we need to recognise that. The government needs recognise that. But more importantly right now, the young people, ‘young people of Ireland’ out there listening to me, if you're listening to me in your 20s and 30s, as you begin your careers, you need to fund your own LGBT organisations. Yes, the government needs to pay, we’re taxpayers and they need to pay. But you can't leave it up to the government. You can't trust the goodwill of others. The community itself must fund its own organisation to lobby, not necessarily to pay for, but to lobby and to draw in philanthropic resources where appropriate, when appropriate. And that's what the resources want because that's the thing for Atlantic Philanthropies, and the board of Atlantic, the trustees and Chuck Feeney to say, Well, if you have that. If you know you're helping people, but they're not dependent on you and this is the key and so it was problematic, I think it did cause problems, it has caused problems. But it does show it did make a huge change was
vital, and a lot of things wouldn't have happened without it. And we all know, you know, I can't start enumerating all the laws, but you know, the changes in youth policy, the change in community policy and GLEN went beyond and was very conscious, I wasn't directly involved, but in the core of GLEN was a very strong (sense) we just didn't want to claim our little patch of land and say, well, let everybody else sort themselves. We believed from the very beginning in equality, that equality for us, can only be really substantially securely founded in a society that is equal for everyone. And that the idea that you can say oh we gay men are going to be equal and then we can leave all the Roma and the Travellers and the women in a community centres or being abused etc and not be funded and the rape crisis, no. So, GLEN did support work with asylum seekers, obviously LGBTIQ but LGBTIQ, Roma, etc and Travellers and a whole range. So we tried to broaden it across, knit it across to say it is of many parts and each part has its own integrity. But it's only when it knits together that it becomes an equal society and it's by knitting together, that it becomes strong, all those fibres knitting together of equality and the different strands.

Q: That's brilliant. Is there anything else you'd like to put on the record or anything else about your experiences that you think should be recorded as part of this?

(pause) I don't think so it's always you know; it's always afterwards you think I should have said this and that. At the moment having talked on like this, I don't think so I suppose it’s just that I myself, I should say, I would have been thirty years ago, a more dogmatic, left wing socialist Marxist. And I would have said, philanthropy, you know, has no role, we live in a society, our taxation should fund all this. And philanthropy is just wealthy people who have gained a lot of money, using their money then to try and make themselves popular or make
themselves respectable. So, that would have been my cynical view of it. I'm now sixty-three, I still think that Marxism is a core, and sets the core questions for our society. I accept there's been a lot of mistakes and that communism was a failure in the twentieth century. But I suppose, and maybe I'm just a classic older person getting mellow and getting, you know, softer in my old age, but I think there's a role for everything. I think that it's not either or. I think it's right that there should be questions asked, I mean, that if somebody is donating, I mean, you know, that inappropriate tax avoidance shouldn't be used by people if they're doing that, then it's not fair. If the ordinary person is paying their fair share of taxes, so should everybody else no matter how wealthy they are, that just because you can afford to employ people who are very clever to help you avoid and you can say, well, it's not illegal. may not be illegal, but neither is it ethical and that's it and also for governments, we know you've just seen us with the sorry, I'm going to a particular example, I've seen of it, the Dutch government being forced to tell it rail fund to withdraw funds from Ireland, which it was legally doing, investing in order to avoid taxation in the home country in the Netherlands, so that was a corporate body. So we need a world that is not just equal in that way, but equal in its transparency that we see that we all are part of this, and we can all have a role to play. But we need to play that ethically. And I think that is a big challenge because it is always a challenge. I also think that, as I said there during the GLEN thing one of the problems is that democracy is very difficult. And you can't be fully democratic in a Community Association or something because you depend on who's going to turn up? And you need people to do things. You can't just wait for everybody to come along, or it can't have just one or two voices, vetoing everything. So, democracy is difficult. But I think that you need to make the effort to make sure because that's how you strengthen real change and the security of it long term, though it is time consuming and it can be exhausting at times going back over the same discussions with new people when they come in. But unless you do that, those new people
don't come in and then you end up being a small group in the end or isolated. No matter how much good you do, you then may actually find that it can be counterproductive that can be counterproductive. So, those are my morals, or my moralising and that's terrible, who am I to moralise? You know, but it's about trying to see lessons from, as you say, when you look back on a project like this to see the wonderful achievements, but also say, how can it be done better? How can it be done in the future? And what are the lessons? nothing is perfect, and we need to improve everything all the time.

Q: that's a great place to leave it. So, I'll say thank you very much for all that Cathal, it was wonderful.

Kerrigan: It's a pleasure. It's been a pleasure.

[End of Interview]