

Keynote – Dr. Michael Barron
Creating New Spaces
- Nordic Network for LGBTQ+ Research on Health and Living Conditions Conference
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Queer Optimism in Hard Times: Memory, Power and the Future of Community-Led Change

The story of LGBTQ+ change in Ireland is often told through milestones and moments. The deeper story is about power: how it is built, who holds it, and what it takes for communities pushed to the margins to claim it for themselves. The progress we have seen was never inevitable. It was organised, contested, and led by communities who refused to be spoken for.

In this talk, drawing on *How Ireland's LGBTQ+ Youth Movement Was Built: Civil Society in the Pursuit of Social Justice*, Dr Michael Barron reflects on what that journey can teach us now. He shares personal and collective learning from over 30 years of activism, including what helped build power, where compromises were made, what worked, and what might be done differently.

At the centre is a simple idea. Minority communities need space, resources, and confidence to advocate for themselves. When that space is weakened, through funding pressures, institutional capture, or the quiet reshaping of agendas, something essential is lost.

We are now living through a period where anti LGBTQ+ narratives are more organised, more visible, and more normalised. Disinformation is shaping public debate. The ground is shifting again.

This talk looks ahead. It asks what it takes to hold onto community power in this context, how to support new and emerging activists without asking them to start from scratch, and how to stay connected to a sense of possibility, to queer optimism, even when conditions are hard.