

Cumhacht

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WORKWAY - THE WAY FORWARD

PwDI is to play a central role in Workway, the new IBEC/ICTU partnership initiative designed to promote employment of people with disabilities. PwDI is represented on the National Steering Committee and will help co-ordinate five Regional Networks early in 2003. It is envisaged that the Networks will be established in Donegal, Galway, the Midlands, Cork and Kerry.

Despite significant economic and labour market growth, the unemployment level among people with disabilities remains unacceptably high. Workway aims to tackle this problem by raising awareness and addressing barriers to increase the employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

PwDI Chief Executive Michael Ringrose, a member of the National Steering Committee, said he was confident that Workway will make a major impact in promoting employment for people with disabilities. Already, he said PwDI was in the process of drawing up a number of proposals to help train people for interviews and employment.

Two Project Co-ordinators, Mairéad Conroy (West, North West and Midlands) and Elaine McGrath (South/South-West Region) have been appointed to co-ordinate and support the operation of the Regional Networks. These facilitators will also undertake research into the local vicinity, build up awareness, harness local resources and develop effective local promotion and communication strategies to achieve the aim of the Workway project. They are supported by two Project Administrators, Martha Nic Giolla Bhríde in the North-West and Siobhán MacSweeney in the South.

One of the first stage projects will identify the barriers to employment of people with disabilities and actively promote employment opportunities through direct engagement and effective collaboration, combining national and local level resources within a partnership approach.

The seven objectives of Workway are to:

1. Raise awareness,
2. Explore skill availability and labour shortage,
3. Identify barriers to employment from employer and disability perspectives,
4. Involvement of all parties in finding practical solutions,
5. Impart information to assist with the integration of people with disabilities,
6. Link in with existing networks,
7. Inform public policy makers and service providers of the implications for developing employment and a training service.

On launching the Workway initiative for Donegal, at the Mill Park Hotel, Donegal Town, the Minister for Social and Family Affairs Mary Coughlan, gave it her full support saying: "I am happy to support and endorse the Workway initiative not least because it is testimony to the tangible benefits of the partnership approach; partnership between employers, employees, the wider community and Government agencies, including my own Department. I am confident Workway will have many positive outcomes, not just for people with disabilities, but for employers and for the economy as a whole."

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Elaine McGrath can be contacted at 021 – 450 9623
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At PwDI National Office, the contact person is Joan Henchy who is co-ordinating Workway initiatives. Joan can be contacted on 087 – 252 4985 or at jhinchypwdi@eircom.net

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Editor: Tim Ryan



Pictured at the launch of Workway in Donegal were (l-r): John McCarter Workway; Martha Nic Giolla Bhríde, Workway; Mary Coughlan TD, Minister for Social and Family Affairs; Mairéad Conroy, Workway and James McCleane, PwDI



A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON



Nigel Brander

May I firstly wish each and every one of you a very Happy and Peaceful New Year!

2003, the European Year of People with Disabilities is upon us and we must grasp the opportunity, not just to continue with awareness programmes, but to make every section of the community accept that people with disabilities are full members of our society and are prepared to fully partake in every level.

I believe a lot has been done over the last few years in the area of awareness, but we are still seen as a marginalised group. We have all seen the lists - colour, travellers, race, age, religion as well as disability. We all must now firstly accept every disability, come together and make it plain that across all sections of our community regardless of colour, race, age, religion or traveller, community disability affects all of us. We must rally together in the coming year to tell every level of society that we expect now, to be fully accepted in society, given the tools to start as equals and to be fully included so we may all live to our full potential. We do not want anymore "special", "different" or "marginalised" tags but simply the tools to start as equals and the benefits other citizens expect as a right.

This year, 2003 EYPD, we must also look to our European partners for best practise in all fields and, through communication, we can learn at every level to make this country the European leader in fully accepting citizens with disabilities as full and inclusive members of society.

Whether it is in early learning, education, employment, medical, social or community living, access must be available to everybody. I do not use the word "access" lightly. It is a huge area, not just physical but a right to use any service, in a format congruent with your needs in an environment suitable for your needs, in the community where you live.

As people with disabilities, we must also accept the responsibilities that are associated with full inclusion, the 'ups' as well as the 'downs' of life. After listening to our members and especially at the recent Youth Beyond Disability seminars, I believe that the vast majority of people with disabilities are not just looking forward but are shouting for the opportunity to live in a fully inclusive society.

I can assure all of you that I will do everything in my power to get our message across. So please enjoy this newsletter and enjoy the year ahead. Together, let us all make 2003 a year to remember, a year of change and Acceptance.

Nigel Brander
Chairman

LIAM DOWLING - AN APPRECIATION

Liam Dowling, the late National Board member for Cork city can be described as one of natures' true gentlemen, a big man with an even bigger heart. He was first and foremost a family man, he loved the outdoor life and was an avid hill walker (as you would expect from any Kerry man), a cyclist who also loved sailing and photography.

Liam trained first as a psychiatric nurse and then as an occupational therapist. His working life was spent as an occupational therapist at Our Lady's Hospital, Cork. While there, he set up the Killeen Workshop (for people with enduring mental illness) and was manager of it for many years until he became ill earlier this year. Liam was not satisfied with working 9 - 5 Monday to Friday, he always gave more than was expected and a lot of this work went unnoticed except by those with mental illness who benefited from his kindness and generosity. On many Sundays, Liam would collect a group from the various hostels in the hospital

minibus and head for West Cork or Kerry for the day.

Liam had boundless energy and made time for everyone, a very rare gift. He was involved in many voluntary organisations, including Cork Mental Health Association and especially Schizophrenia Ireland, both locally and nationally, and was instrumental in setting up Schizophrenia Ireland in Cork. Liam was the only voice for people with schizophrenia and their relatives for many years and was an active member of their lobbying group until recently. Liam, acting as an advocate for people with mental illness, put his full energy and expertise into the setting up of PwDI in Cork City in 1997 and was Secretary of the Cork City Network and its National Board representative until his illness.

On the back of the door in Liam's office was the following, which describes Liam to a tee

A Friend Like You
Author Unknown

*There's lots of things
With which I'm blessed,
Though my life's been both Sunny
and Blue,
But of all my blessings,
This one's the best:
To have a friend like you.*

*In times of trouble
Friends will say,
"Just ask... I'll help you through it."
But you don't wait for me to ask,
You just get up
And you do it!*

*And I can think
Of nothing in life
That I could more wisely do,
Than know a friend,
And be a friend,
And love a friend... like you.*

Everyone who met Liam was touched by his gentleness and compassion and he will be greatly missed by all.
AOC



CARPE DIEM! (Seize the Day)

By Michael Ringrose, Chief Executive, PwDI



The New Year is upon us. This time it carries with it a special designation and description. It is called the European Year of People with Disabilities (EYPD). What does it mean? What can we expect?

We can expect extra news features on disability issues. We can expect to see photos in the media of

people with disabilities engaged in a variety of activities. We can expect to see individual accounts of extraordinary endurance, sacrifice, resilience, courage and achievement. We can also, expect to read and hear of individuals who have been left out and remain on the margins or, are indeed, virtually totally excluded from the opportunity to participate in economic, educational, social or cultural activity.

We will all, I expect, marvel at the athletes who will come to this country and join with our own country men and women in participating, in the Special Olympic Games. We will, I expect, pay tribute to and honour all those who will make it happen. Many will devote their spare time and use their holiday leave to work with the Special Olympics in a true and admirable spirit of real volunteerism. They are each and all to be heartedly commended.

But, what about afterwards?

Disability will not go away at the end of this special year. It will remain as a feature and fact of life for an estimated 360,000 in this country alone. The cost, in purely economic terms, is not known. Shame. The unrealised economic costs and benefits which would accrue by enabling and supporting the inclusion of people with disabilities in productive economic and social activity, is also unknown.

If this EYPD is to have tangible results and remain as a significant year for people with disabilities, then the Ministers with responsibility in each relevant Department – Finance; Justice, Equality & Law Reform; Social & Family Affairs; Transport; Communications; Health and Children; Education & Science; Enterprise Trade and Employment, (it is difficult to exclude a Department that does not have the opportunity of making a significant difference) - should make a commitment to get it right this time.

The framing of the new Disability Bill presents the opportunity to commit to best practice and create, in Ireland, a centre of excellence in all matters relating to disability issues. Carpe Diem! Seize the day and the year will take care of itself.

Michael Ringrose
CEO

DISABILITY AND POVERTY

By Kathleen O'Connor, Leitrim National Board Member

Every community has its share of people with disabilities. Anyone can become disabled at any time. Disability does not respect age, gender or class. People with disabilities are marginalised, excluded and discriminated against. They lack basic human rights.

Poverty is both the cause and the consequence of disability. Policy and practice aimed at reducing poverty exclude people with disabilities. Some estimates state that 1 in 5 people have a disability. Therefore, every family in this country is touched by a disability of some kind.

It is not realistic to expect ordinary people to be able to develop sufficient knowledge and skills to deal with disability. They need help and resources.

The cost to society of not including people with disabilities can only be estimated. This need not be the case. The inclusion of people with disabilities does not need additional specialist requirements. It just needs people involved in projects to consult with people with disabilities as they are the experts in the field of disability. They live with their disability each day and know what is required in any given situation. All projects should ensure not to erect any barriers so as to exclude people with disabilities.

Poverty increases disability and disability, in turn, leads to increased levels of poverty and so it is a vicious circle to break. Society must get rid of negative attitudes.

Disability is a human rights issue. The priorities for people with disabilities are food, shelter, family life, clothing, a decent income and full participation, just the same as anyone else.

If we use existing local resources, we are capable of dealing with 80 per cent of people with disabilities. People themselves and their families should be enabled to create their own solutions. There will, of course, be costs in training and awareness-raising but these will be offset by the long-term benefits to society.

Disability will always be with us and it is a mistaken belief that it can be prevented. We are all vulnerable to becoming disabled. Prevention is not an option. If people with disabilities are not supported and resourced, their human rights are abused and the waste of human potential will continue.



Kathleen O'Connor





AGM CALLS FOR ACTION

There were calls for action on a number of fronts to assist people with disabilities at the at the Second Annual General Meeting of PwDI, held in the Tullamore Court Hotel on Saturday, November 30th. There was a large turnout, with almost all counties represented.

The meeting was chaired by the Deputy Chairperson, Paul Hogan in the absence of the Chairman, Nigel Brander, who was in hospital undergoing an operation. The meeting was addressed by Michael Osmond, Director of the Barcelona Project. However, most of the three-hour session was given over to debating the 37 motions tabled for discussion. Time constraints demanded that debate was brief in most cases.

Among the motions approved were:

- That the Government abolish the means test and ensure that people with disabilities be treated as individuals when applying for benefits and entitlements (Cavan Network)
- That the medical criteria for the mobility grant for people with disabilities be changed (Mayo Network)
- That the Government remove all restrictions from the Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) scheme and the VRT scheme be made available to all people with disabilities or their primary carers immediately as of right (Cavan Network)
- That the fine for misuse of disabled parking spaces should be increased from €19 to €100 (Roscommon Network)
- That the grant for housing adaptations be index linked (Louth Network)

In relation to PwDI, a motion from Kilkenny Network was passed calling for a single membership application form but this procedure must first be cleared by the Revenue Commissioners.

Kilkenny Network also proposed that the Articles of Association be amended to include members under the age of 18, their carers or family and this, too, was approved unanimously. A similar motion from Wicklow Network was endorsed.

The meeting supported a proposal from Donegal Network which urged that PwDI lobby the Minister for the Environment & Local Government to bring in the necessary legislation under the Commission Report on the Status of People with Disabilities, to ensure car parking for people with disabilities and to instruct all Local Authorities to enforce the allocation of 1 in 26 spaces to people with disabilities.

A motion from Monaghan Network calling for, where possible, each Network to have its own office, with the basic equipment necessary to provide information and support to its members was adopted.



Wexford delegates at the AGM (l-r) Pat Denton, Colin Levingstone, Rosemary McLeod, Patrick Murphy, Catherine Denton, Bried O'Sullivan and Catherine Quigley. Front: Bridget Tait-Murphy, National Board member

AGM 2002 GOOD PROGRESS FOR PwDI

The following is a summary of the remarks of PwDI National Chairman Nigel Brander to the second AGM in Tullamore.

It has been a busy year in a lot of respects with the Disability bill, which I hope I can honestly say that all of us were glad to see withdrawn and finally a worthwhile consultation and expert process set up. As an organisation, we are represented on the Legislation Consultative Committee and pushing it forward to ensure a new rights based Disability Bill will come sooner rather than later.

We have also just finished four very worthwhile Youth Seminars. I would personally like to thank all of you who gave of your time to attend these seminars. We got some very positive feed back. I would also like to thank all the staff in the national office for their hard work in organising the seminars. They were a great success and were professionally put together. These Seminars were a pre-ambule to a major National Seminar which will take place next October. In January, we will be publishing a full report, based on the discussions at the Seminars and this will be presented to Government.

PwDI, at national level and local level, have been invited to sit on a large number of different committees ranging from Health, Justice, EDF, Local Councils as well as FAS, Comhairle and many more. I was unaware that so many committees existed!

The National Board in its first full year of existence, has been feeling its way, so to speak but I can tell you that we are now all working together, with some ups and downs, while getting to grips with the work in hand. We now have our 3-year strategy

document and a financial management policy in place. Our Memorandum and Articles of Association are being reviewed which will be put to regional meetings of the Networks as soon as completed.

2003 being the "European Year of the Disabled" is one that we must grasp with both hands. Over the last few years, a lot has been done in the area of awareness but equal acceptance is still a long way off. Next year, we must get the message out that we no longer just want the country to know we are here but we must insist on full inclusive acceptance in every walk of life. I hope every Network will play their part in the coming year. At national level, we are organising the visit of the European Disability Tour Bus to Ireland. We will be able to confirm the dates with you very shortly.

Taking a phrase from our political leader, we have come a long way but there is still a lot more to do. It can be very easy to complain and disagree but we must bear in mind that none of us knows everything. However, we do our best. If you disagree with something please never be afraid to let us know but you must also tell us which direction we should be taking to include all of us.



At the AGM were Waterford delegates (l-r): Tom Caulfield, Tom Power, Teresa-Anne Foley and Alfred Marks



Monaghan delegates at the AGM included (l-r): Sharon Kelly, Trisha Kernaghan, Paddy Cunningham, Anne Callan, Gabrielle Fleming, National Board member. Front: Anne Keenan



CEO OUTLINES YEAR OF ACTIVITY AT NATIONAL LEVEL

The Chief Executive of PwDI, Michael Ringrose, outlined the many of the successes and ongoing activities undertaken at national level to the AGM. The following is a summary of his remarks:

As I stated in our most recent Newsletter, much has been accomplished but there is still much to do. I want first to give you an indication of what degree of progress was made in relation to the Motions which were put forward for action last year.

Strategy

A consultation process took place during the year with the Networks and the final document was approved and passed by the Board. The document is in the process of being published.

A Strategy for Equality

The implementation of the Strategy for Equality is the subject of almost all discussions at the political and departmental levels. It is central to the discussions at the Disability Legislation Consultation Group, at the National Standards Advisory Group, at the Director of Equality Investigations Users' Group, at the Barcelona Steering Group and all consultative and advisory forums at which PwDI is represented.

Promotion and Publicity

PwDI now produces this newsletter, "Cumacht" on a quarterly basis. Circulation includes all Government Departments, Ministers, T.Ds. Senators, other disability organisations, the media and, of course, all our membership. The contributions from the Networks and all disability-related organisations are critical to its success and we are most appreciative of the support and co-operation of the Networks and members who contribute to its production.

Membership

The necessity to build membership is a priority and we had some considerable success in some areas. There are currently 500 applications in hand, mostly arising from the participation at the recent youth seminars. The credibility of Network Committees and the organisation, as a whole, depends on the extent to which PwDI represents all people with disabilities in each county area and throughout the country.

Corporate Identity

The corporate identity was developed and is now used in all promotional literature and presentations.

Research

We have been in consultation with the NDA and have assisted in collaborative research with them. Increasingly, we are using two staff members, one in the research and communications area and the second in developing sources of funding to facilitate network development.

Finance

In my role as Chief Executive Officer, I have comprehensively addressed the question of establishing "best practice" in relation to the financial affairs of the Company, in consultation with the Institute of Public Administration. The Report was presented to the Board at its meeting in October and approved. Adherence to best practice in this area and the application of openness, transparency and accountability in all financial transactions is a standard that we must all accept and promote.

I have also been actively engaged in endeavouring to secure additional funding from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and other relevant sources.

We have submitted funding applications to Comhairle, the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs and to EU Funding Programmes in specific project areas.

Organisation

Training has already been provided to National Office Staff, Chairpersons and Board Members with a view to creating awareness of the responsibilities applicable to each and to creating consciousness of responsibilities under company law and adherence to the highest professional standards.

Equality of Representation

Every effort continues to be made to ensure equality of representation, at all levels, within PwDI and in all activities conducted under its name. This was reflected in the recent Youth Seminars.

Support for People with Disabilities

PwDI continues to work with individuals and organisations who are engaged in advancing the issues relating to people with disabilities. Our objective is, not only to support and engage with other organisations, but also to establish and maintain the position of lead partner in the arena.

PwDI is the representative organisation on the Director of Equality Investigations Users Group. It is also represented on the Barcelona Steering Committee, the Disability Legislation Consultative Group, the National Disability Authority Standards Committee and a host of other advisory and steering groups.

Medical Card

The position regarding the medical card is, like many other issues, the subject of constant lobbying at official and unofficial levels and will continue to receive attention.

Access

Following the recent Youth Seminars, we lobbied the Minister for Transport on the issue of applying the Penalty Points System to misuse of areas reserved for parking for people with disabilities. The Minister has agreed to have the matter examined.

We are in the process of developing an initiative for Employer Bodies, with a view to developing and creating of greater awareness and opportunity for employment of people with disabilities. We will be in a position to outline the project within the next few weeks. We continue to work with the Workway Project, which is a combined initiative of IBEC and ICTU with a view to creating greater employment opportunity for people with disabilities and PwDI are represented on the Steering Group.

Ombudsman

The suggestion regarding the appointment of a person with authority, to liaise between public bodies, (as proposed by Roscommon Network last year) is now subject to full consultation in the DLCCG.

Youth Seminars

I should like to take the opportunity to thank all those who helped to organise and support the four Regional Youth Seminars. They were very successful and the feedback has been extraordinarily encouraging. They represented a truly grass-roots consultation with the people who matter and served as a reminder to all that without such discussion and listening to our membership, we are not going to be in a position to guide this ship safely home.

Many thanks, to those of you who continually support the effort to build a strong, inclusive, representative organisation. Thank you also for your personal support and encouragement to me over the past year.





"Youth - Beyond Disability"

HUGE TURNOUT AT PwDI SEMINARS

Over 1,000 people attended the recent PwDI Seminars on the theme "Youth- Beyond Disability". The Seminars drew delegates from a wide spectrum of people with all disabilities and supporting agencies.

Each Seminar consisted of a Guest Speaker, four young speakers and a series of Workshops. The Workshops closed with a final feedback session. All sessions were recorded and a major report is currently being drafted for submission to the Government as part of PwDI's contribution to the European Year of People with Disabilities. The report will be published and copies will be sent to all networks and participants. A summary of the report will be published in the next issue of *Cumhacht*.

The Seminars will form the basis for a major National Conference in Dublin Castle on Friday, October 10 this year which President Mary McAleese has been invited to open. The Conference will be addressed by a number of key national and international speakers.

The Regional Seminars were held at the Landmark Hotel, Carrick-On-Shannon (October 31), the Ormonde Hotel, Kilkenny (November 6), the Nuremore Hotel, Carrickmacross (November 13) and the Rochestown Park Hotel, Cork (November 19).

The Guest Speakers were Enda Kenny TD, Leader of Fine Gael (Carrick-On-Shannon), Garda Colm Cullen (Kilkenny), Mary Davis, Chief Executive of the 2003 Olympic World Summer Games (Carrickmacross) and

Mary Grogan, Offaly Centre for Independent Living (Cork).

Each Seminar also heard a presentation from a representative of the National Children's Office.

A highlight of the Seminars was the very interesting and descriptive accounts of living with a disability outlined by the young speakers.

The speakers included Una Lawlor, Niamh Hyland, Arun Asan, Julianne Gillen and Kevin Harrison (Carrick-On-Shannon); Anna Shinnors, Lyndsey Purcell and Alan Duffy (Kilkenny); Jane McDermott, Mark McCaffrey, Mark Fitzsimmons and Sean Muldoon (Carrickmacross) and Susan O'Callaghan, Mary Nugent, George Dineen, Brian Aylward and Nicky Fitzgibbon (Cork).

PwDI Chief Executive Michael Ringrose said he wished to pay tribute to the many people who helped make the events such a success. These included the Workshop facilitators, rapporteurs, carers and many others who gave so freely of their time.

"The Seminars drew many more delegates than we had anticipated and proved very worthwhile in helping to outline a vision for the future needs and aspirations of our young people with disabilities" he said.

FINE GAEL LEADER CALLS FOR URGENT ACTION

The Fine Gael Leader, Enda Kenny TD, has called for urgent action to tackle 'the social crisis that comes from the continued marginalisation of people with a disability' and has pledged to keep the Government under pressure to live up to its promises. He made his comments when he addressed the PwDI Seminar, 'Youth- Beyond Disability', in Carrick-on-Shannon.

'I believe there should be no barriers to inclusion,' he said. 'I believe that it is the political and moral duty of the State to enable and to encourage, in every way possible, independent living for everyone with a disability. That's why I propose that at the very minimum, the State should recognise the additional financial cost of a disability.'

'Moreover, I believe that moves should be made immediately to correct the injustice whereby a carer is precluded from the Carer's Allowance if he or she is in receipt of another State benefit. It beggars belief that a mother, caring for her child who has a disability, is no longer entitled to the Carer's allowance if she becomes a widow receiving the Widow's Pension.'

Lifelong education

'The Education for Persons with a Disability Bill 2002 will be taken in the Dáil soon. This rights-based legislation is

something that we in Fine Gael have advocated for some time. It is both welcome and long overdue. Vital though it is, I regret that it provides for educational needs of children from 3 to 18 years only. Surely, education must be a life-long experience for all and appropriate education for people with disabilities must be a priority.

'I know from my recent meetings with disability groups that extensive consultations are underway on the shape of new legislation. I promise my support and that of my party to ensuring that the best possible legislation is produced, passed and implemented. It is only through comprehensive and mandatory rights-based legislation that change can be guaranteed.'

'Many of these service changes are detailed and promised in the Government's Health Strategy - "Quality and Fairness" and the Primary Care Strategy "A new direction". The Government assured us that the strategy will be implemented in full. It's time they told us when that will happen. Incremental developments, dependent solely on economic growth, will not resolve this crisis,' Mr Kenny said.



LOCAL AUTHORITIES UNDER 3 PER CENT QUOTA

A number of local authorities are still not meeting the 3 per cent quota for the employment of people with disabilities, the Minister for the Environment & Local Government, Martin Cullen TD, has confirmed to Meath Fianna Fáil deputy Johnny Brady in a written Dáil reply. Member Networks are urged to lobby their local authority members and officials to ensure the minimum quota is met. Here is the full text of the reply. Please note the figures relate to January last.

Minister for the Environment and Local Government: On the basis of annual staffing returns submitted to my Department by the local authorities, the number of people with disabilities as at 1 January 2001 in each local authority employed, the latest figures available, and the percentage expressed in whole-time equivalents, WTEs, is set out in the following table:-

County Councils	Number	% of WTE	County Councils	Number	% of WTE
Carlow	5	1.84%	Monaghan	1	0.27%
Cavan	4	1.13%	Offaly	5	1.27%
Clare	24	3.03%	Roscommon	14	3.14%
Cork	52	2.44%	Sligo	12	2.42%
Donegal	4	0.45%	South Dublin	4	0.33%
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	27	2.20%	Tipperary (NR)	5	1.12%
Fingal	43	3.38%	Tipperary (SR)	18	2.94%
Galway	19	2.24%	Waterford	13	2.72%
Kerry	54	4.64%	Westmeath	8	1.83%
Kildare	10	1.32%	Wexford	19	2.70%
Kilkenny	15	2.88%	Wicklow	6	0.93%
Laois	12	3.24%	CITY COUNCILS		
Leitrim	3	1.15%	Cork	50	3.83%
Limerick	23	3.23%	Dublin	267	4.37%
Longford	6	2.50%	Galway	3	0.58%
Louth	18	2.90%	Limerick	27	5.13%
Mayo	54	5.12%	Waterford	21	6.80%
Meath	15	2.48%	TOTAL	861	2.96%



Siobhán Lawlor, a speaker at the Youth Seminars being presented with an Anna Neilson sketch by PwDI Chief Executive Michael Ringrose



Fine Gael leader Enda Kenny makes a point at the Carrick-On-Shannon Seminar



At the Cork Seminar were (l-r): Denise Condon, Ellen Butler, Imelda Kelly, Mary Murphy. Front: Angeline Collins



A section of the large number of delegates at the Kilkenny Seminar



MY TIME IN THE KERRY NETWORK



Margaret Corcoran

Margaret Corcoran has recently secured a job in a Solicitor's Office in Tralee. The job arose directly as a result of some very useful training in the Tralee PwDI Network Office under the Community Employment Scheme. Here Margaret outlines her experience:

Hello everyone, I'm Margaret Corcoran. I have been Receptionist for the Kerry Network of People with Disabilities since November 2001. I have recently commenced a new job in a Solicitor's office in Tralee. I was sorry to have to leave the Network but I had to move on, as it was, unfortunately, not a permanent position.

Before I commenced work for the Kerry Network I had been unemployed for a number of years so I feel that this job turned my life around. I was getting out and meeting people and feeling better about myself. Initially, I had two weeks work experience in the Network office organised by Brennan Consortium employment services. Then, luckily for me, a vacancy came up for a Receptionist until the following August, on the Community Employment Scheme. This position was offered to me and I was delighted to accept it.

As well as being Receptionist for the office, I was also involved in general office administration, assisting colleagues and welcoming clients coming into the office looking for information and attending and contributing to various meetings regarding disability issues. I also did an Information Technology Course in the FAS training centre in Tralee, which I passed and got my City & Guilds certification. This course was paid for by FAS as part of my training on the Community Employment Scheme. I hope to do the more advanced ECDL course in the near future.

In my job in the Kerry Network I gained valuable experience working in a team situation. Initially, when I

started I was too nervous to pick up the phone but with the patience and support of the other members of the office, I soon became more competent. As a result, I had the courage to get out there on the jobs market again after a number of years unemployed. Also I have made a lot of useful contacts during my time in the Network and a lot of friends too!

Kerry Network has a very interesting library which covers all sorts of disability related topics and is open to the public anytime to come in to get information. I found the Network publications also very interesting. Working in the Kerry Network also familiarised me with our partner organisations and made me aware of all the good work going on in Kerry and around the country for people with disabilities.

Working in the Kerry Network has been good for me in so many ways. It was a nice working environment and I made many friends who all wished me every success in my future career and had every confidence in me. I hope to take a continued and active involvement in the work of the Kerry Network in the future by keeping in touch and doing some voluntary work.

On a final note, I would like to say a special word of thanks to the FAS Supervisor, Helen FitzGerald who was very patient with me especially in the beginning when I was very nervous and lacking in confidence. She gave me a lot of support and encouragement all the way and I feel that as a result, I am a more confident person and a better worker and my experience in the Kerry Network Office stands to me now in my new job.

So thank you to all my friends in the Kerry Network and hope we will keep in touch in the future.

Best wishes,
Margaret Corcoran

WATCH OUT FOR THE EYPD BUS!

PwDI is co-ordinating the tour of the EYPD bus which will visit Ireland in June/July. The bus is scheduled to be here from July 2 to July 9.

The bus, which will be open to the public, will spend some time in Dublin before visiting a number of counties up and down the country where networks will be organising activities. More details in the next issue of *Cumhacht*.

For further information contact Geraldine Moylan at 01 872 1744 or email geraldine@pwdi.ie



PwDI PARTICIPATES ON COMHAR

PwDI is now represented on Comhar, the National Sustainable Development Partnership, which was established in 1999. Its terms of reference are to advance the national agenda for sustainable development, to assist in devising suitable mechanisms and to contribute to the formation of a national consensus in these areas. The National Chairman is Dr John Bowman.

Comhar works in three year cycles and representation is divided into five pillars. PwDI has a seat on Pillar 4 which covers the Social/Community area and NGOs.

ROSCOMMON NETWORK MARKS EUROPEAN DAY

Roscommon PwDI Network held a special one-day Conference on December 3 to mark European Day of People with Disabilities.

The Seminar consisted of presentations from disabled people as well as representatives of related agencies including the National Training Development Institute, FÁS, the Brothers of Charity, Supported Employment, the IWA and the Special Olympics. Approximately 200 people attended.

Roscommon PwDI member Martin Rush chaired the Conference which was officially opened by Marion Keegan, Manager of Disability Services with the Western Health Board.