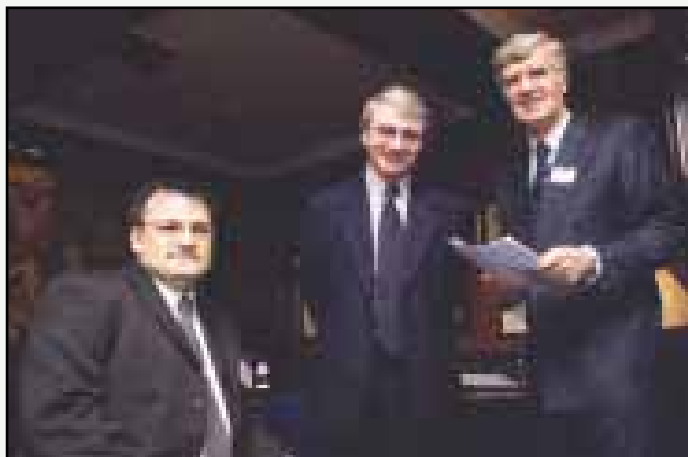


MINISTER LAUNCHES STRATEGY 2003 – 2006 AND YOUTH – BEYOND DISABILITY REPORT



Pictured at the PwDI launch were (l-r): Nigel Brander, National Chairman, PwDI; Willie O'Dea TD, Minister of State, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and Michael D. Ringrose, PwDI Chief Executive

The Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform, Willie O'Dea TD launched the PwDI Strategy 2003 - 2006 and the Youth - Beyond Disability report on March 26.

The attendance included Dr Maurice Manning, President of the Irish Human Rights Commission; David Staunton T.D. Chairman of Fine Gael Parliamentary Committee on Disability; Clare O'Connor, Chief Executive of the National Disability Authority; Dr. Arthur O'Reilly, Chairman of the National Accreditation Committee as well as representatives from a number of Government Departments. The launch provided PwDI with an opportunity to highlight its concerns on a number of current issues. This prompted a positive response from the Minister, who confirmed his commitment to enacting the Disability Bill before the summer.

Speakers at the launch included PwDI National Board Chairman Nigel Brander, Strategy Consultant Bob Perry, PwDI Chief Executive Michael Ringrose as well as Minister O'Dea.

International Conference

In his remarks, Nigel Brander spoke about the importance of both the Strategy Document and the Youth report. He said the Youth - Beyond Disability report will form the basis for a major international conference to be held in Dublin Castle on September 2. This Conference will be officially opened by President Mary McAleese and will be addressed by a number of national and international speakers.

PwDI Chief Executive Micheal Ringrose outlined how disabled people are suffering at the hands of some local authorities, who are rejecting applications for grant aid for house modifications. He described the plight of disabled people living at home who had borrowed money to alter their houses on the advice that the grant would be forthcoming only to discover that their application had been refused.

Separate Voice

He added that the people PwDI represents are looking for nothing more than basic living amenities, such as access to proper washing and toilet facilities. Mr Ringrose concluded by urging the Government to grant the disabled in Ireland a distinct voice in the next round of partnership talks. "The granting of a separate voice to people with disabilities in the Third Pillar would be a major step forward in the giving of full recognition to this sector," he said.

On the Youth - Beyond Disability report, Mr Ringrose stated that the the areas covered in the document, namely education, employment and leisure and recreation facilities, addressed only some of the many problems that face young people with disabilities. He urged government departments, local authorities, professional bodies and others to study the report carefully, saying that disabled people "do not seek any special treatment, but merely to be afforded the same rights as everybody else."

Have you got news?

Cumhacht is published quarterly. If your network has news you would like included in the next issue, please e-mail to: Margaret@pwdi.ie or post to: The Editor, Cumhacht, Richmond Square, Morning Star Eve., Dublin 7
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A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN



I was delighted to be part of the launch of our first Strategic Plan 2003 - 2006 and the launch of the report of our Youth - Beyond Disability seminars on Wednesday, March 26. If you have not

read them, they are worth reading. Our strategic plan sets out where we are going and if we all carry on with the commitment and enthusiasm shown so far, I have no doubt we will achieve our goals.

Spring is upon us and the sun is shining, but the uncertainty is still with us - cuts in services, grants suddenly having draconian measures applied in different areas. I am told to stop people with disabilities applying for them so local government can save money! Medical card restrictions are being applied in different parts of the country. There are different views on the new disability legislation. But let's not get too down beat. The Disability Legislation Consultation Group's report "Equal Citizens" is worth reading and seems to have been well received in all sectors. We are confident that this document will guide the Minister in his deliberations and facilitate the delivery of rights-based legislation.

With the European Year of People with Disabilities, the upcoming Special Olympics, the EYPD Tour Bus (2nd July - 11th July) and the International Youth Seminar on September 2, we must get the message across and change the attitudes of the way society looks at people with disabilities. We must never

let it be forgotten that we, people with disabilities, are full citizens and we must accept nothing less.

We must keep reminding society and our legislators that to break down barriers and provide basic services to allow people with disabilities to live with human dignity may cost at the outset but, with realistic timeframes, the benefits soon outweigh the costs, giving people with disabilities real jobs and getting them off state benefits. Providing adaptations and safe, acceptable living standards in the home also frees up service provision. Providing an independent cross-departmental needs of assessment, as a right is the first step to bringing us a level playing field.

With the new Disability Legislation due and hopefully an EU Directive on Integration Policies for People with Disabilities, let's hope we have a much brighter second half of 2003.

No longer must we accept that as soon as funds are tight, people with disabilities are the first to lose out. We, at national level, will continue to lobby for change, change attitudes and influence society at national level. But, equally important, we must never give up the work at local level. We must all continue to change opinions and influence society. To change public attitudes is the key to a full and inclusive society.

Nigel Brander
Chairman

DISABILITY SECTOR SHOULD HAVE A DISTINCT VOICE IN PARTNERSHIP TALKS

The disability sector of society should have separate and distinct representation in the Voluntary Pillar of the Social Partnership, the Chief Executive of People with Disabilities in Ireland (PwDI), Michael D. Ringrose has said.

"The new Agreement will last for 18 months and I am calling on the Government to grant the disability sector a distinct voice in the Voluntary Pillar in the next round," he said. "It is estimated that there are 360,000 people or one in every 10, who have some form of disability. Clearly, such a sizeable sector should have its own voice at the Partnership talks. The fact that this is such a vulnerable sector makes the case all the more compelling."

Mr Ringrose said that the disability sector felt totally left out of the recent partnership talks and that their voice was not listened to in this year's Budget or in the provisions of the Finance Bill. Many areas in the sector have insufficient funding for this year and it was critical that they be given a voice at national level where agreements are hammered out and agreed. "This year two major events are happening," he said. "It is European Year of People with Disabilities and many events are taking place to mark its significance. Secondly, the Special Olympics World Summer Games are taking place in June and there will be huge international focus on Ireland.

SLIGO

Draft Development Plan criticised by Sligo Network

The members of the Sligo Access Committee, having studied the Draft Development Plan, were dismayed to find no specific reference to accessibility for the disabled, and other persons in anyway incapacitated, in the text of the plan.

This omission is surprising in light of the fact that Sligo Borough Council and Sligo County Council were amongst the first signatories in Ireland to the Barcelona Declaration. This document states that the signatories will "promote and ensure the access of disabled persons to cultural, sporting and recreational activities and, in general, to participatory co-existence with the community."

PwDI's Sligo Network insists that the city needs to be made accessible for citizens and tourists alike.

The Book "Buildings For Everyone" published by The National Disability Authority contains detailed information on catering for the needs of all citizens.



THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE...

By Michael D. Ringrose, Chief Executive, PwDI

At the Ashling Foundation Conference in Dublin Castle on April 30, the

Tánaiste, Mary Harney TD, eloquently addressed the issues around access to employment encountered by people with disabilities. In the course of her address, the Tánaiste mentioned, amongst other relevant concerns, that the cost of disability needs should not be a disincentive to the person with disability and operate as a constraint. She went on to say, and I appreciate I am paraphrasing, that a person with a disability has a right to participate fully in the social and economic development of society. One could be justifiably heartened and pleased that the issues were so well understood and so strongly articulated by such a prominent and important figure in the State.

It is therefore, in contrast, interesting to read that the Minister for Justice, Michael McDowell TD, in a paper delivered to a conference on Irish Culture and the Law recently, stated his opposition to any legal or constitutional moves which would give the courts the power to adjudicate on social and economic rights. The Minister was, in fact, stating his objection to any moves

which would entitle people to seek the support of the courts in vindicating their rights to health, educating, housing or other social benefits.

This is rather strange to say the least, especially following the objections to the provisions of Section 47 of the Disability Bill that resulted in the entire Bill being so hastily withdrawn. Minister McDowell argues that social and economic rights could not be compared to civil and political rights.

It is, however, difficult to understand how one could optimise the value of the latter without adequate access to the former. How can one be expected to exercise the civil right to vote if, for example, the building is inaccessible or there is no appropriate accessible transport from the residence to the voting station? Is it not reasonable to assume that one could exercise a more discerning vote if supported by an adequate education system? Or should that remain the preserve of those whose economic positions enable them to afford education and facilitate the re-introduction of the old Marxist chants about power and privilege remaining in the hands of the economically powerful classes?

It seems the Minister's comments bring

the debate about where Ireland wants to position itself back into the dark and dismal past. Where are the notions about social inclusion? Where are the concepts that drove and inspired the Equality Legislation over the past few years? What is the point of establishing the Human Rights Commission, if it is to have no role in influencing, or strengthening, social and economic as well as other rights? What is the point of the Irish Government signing up to the United Nations Standard Rules for the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities or any conventions, if it has no real intention of ultimately ensuring that such rights will form part of Irish Law?

The Disability Legislation Consultation Group, which was established to assist in advising the Minister has, after long discussion, research and debate, presented the document, "Equal Citizens" to the Minister. It is confidently expected it will encourage, inspire and enable the Minister to significantly mark the European Year of People with Disabilities with ground-breaking legislation and will lead the existing and emerging European States, with a model of best practice in establishing the rights of people with disabilities.

WATERFORD

Network Seminar

Waterford Network is holding a seminar on 'The Consequences of Disability in Ireland,' in the Woodlands Hotel, Dunmore Road on Tuesday, June 17.

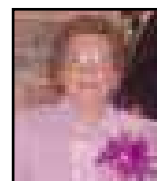
The schedule is as follows:

- 09.30 am **Registration**
 10.00 am **Introduction:** Tom Power (Chairman, Waterford PwDI)
Opening Speeches: The Mayor of Waterford City, Councillor Oliver Clery
 The Minister for the Environment & Local Government, Martin Cullen T.D.
 10.30am **Speeches by people with Disabilities:** David Sheehan, Mary Nugent, Orla Dempsey, Lorna Jane Murray, Breda Flavin and Tom Caulfield
11.10 am Tea / Coffee break
 11.30am Cathy Sinnott (The Hope Project) on Education
 12.00pm Eddie Breen (Waterford City Manager) on the Environment
 12.30pm Fiona Crowley (Amnesty International) on Mental Health Issues
1.00pm Lunch
 2.00pm Aisling Reidy (Irish Council for Civil Liberties) on Legislation and Equality
 3.30pm Summary and Concluding Remarks by Micheal D. Ringrose, PwDI Chief Executive and Nigel Brander, PwDI Chairman.

For more information contact :

Laura O'Connor, PwDI Waterford, ph. 058 23740, email, pwdi@cablesurf.net

ANNE WINS A PEOPLE OF THE YEAR AWARD!



Congratulations to Anne Callan, Secretary of the Monaghan PwDI Network, who has received a "People of the Year" award

from Co. Monaghan Bank of Ireland and Rehab.

People of the Year awards are given to people who have made an outstanding contribution to their community, to those who "make a difference".

Anne is an active member of Castleblaney Care Association and the Community Alert Association and PwDI are honoured to have her on board. Well done from all at PwDI.

DISABILITY BILL TO BE PUBLISHED AT 'EARLIEST OPPORTUNITY'

The Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform Willie O'Dea T.D. has assured PwDI of his commitment to publishing a Disability Bill "at the earliest opportunity".

The Minister was speaking at the launch of PwDI Strategy 2003 - 2006, and the PwDI Youth - Beyond Disability Seminars Report on March 26 March in the Burlington Hotel, Dublin.

The following is a summary of his remarks.

'The PwDI Youth seminars, which were held in October and November of last year, were funded by my Department as an initiative under the European Year of People with Disabilities. I believe they provided an important forum for discussion of the issues affecting the lives of young people with disabilities in Ireland. A high profile advertising campaign, which included local and national press and radio coverage, was run before the seminars and I think that the positive feedback, which is provided by this report, is a testament to the success of the whole venture.

Among the many important issues discussed were education, employment, recreation and leisure facilities, and I think it is important that the key comments made, both by policy makers and the other attendees at the seminars have been compiled in this report. I believe it will provide much food for thought for anyone concerned with disability issues and, indeed, in relation to the development of a truly inclusive society in Ireland.

Equality Legislation

I understand that some discussion at the seminars focussed on the provision of services in the context of the equality legislation which has come into force in recent years. I believe everyone will acknowledge the importance of the statutory prohibition on discrimination provided by the Employment Equality Act in relation to access to employment, training, and employment progression as well as the Equal Status Act in relation to the supply of goods and services. My department provides a focal point for disability equality policy and legislation

development and this role involves liaison with the Equality Authority in relation to its responsibility for working towards the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equal opportunities for people with disabilities.

In this context it is interesting to note that just over 5% of the 998 new cases taken under the Employment Equality Act in 2002 related to disability issues and are mainly in respect of access to employment, conditions of employment

The members of the committee represent disability organisations, the Social Partners, Government Departments, and the media. My Department is represented on the Committee, which is focusing on four particular themes for the Year - Awareness Raising, Youth and Disability, Rights, Partnership and Responsibilities, and Employment. The committee is supporting a wide-ranging programme of projects nationwide, to highlight the aims of the Year.



Minister of State Willie O'Dea TD speaking at the launch

and provision of services. Disability represents the third highest category for new cases being brought under both Acts. These two pieces of legislation have been a key success in our efforts to create a more inclusive society and equality of access to employment is vital to facilitate social and economic independence for people with disabilities, to empower people to realise their full personal potential and make their own individual contribution to the community life.

EYPD 2003

These issues are particularly relevant for us in 2003, which is the European Year of People with Disabilities. Ireland, and our EU partners are working together to create awareness about disability issues among the population at large and, more importantly, to promote awareness of the right of people with disabilities to equal opportunities and protection against discrimination. The National Disability Authority is chairing the national co-ordinating committee, which is co-ordinating events for the year in Ireland.

Special Olympics

Of course, this year has an added significance for Ireland, as the Special Olympics will be held here in June. The games will bring thousands of competitors from around the world to our shores and we are fortunate to be the first country outside the USA to host the event. This is a magnificent opportunity for the thousands of Irish people who have volunteered their time and expertise to interact with people with disabilities on an unprecedented level.

This special Year gives us an opportunity to reflect on the achievements we have made, and more importantly, what we must do in the future to make Ireland a truly inclusive society for all our people. This is an ongoing learning process for everyone, not just for people with disabilities and their families or representative organisations like PwDI. This process will include sharing information with our European neighbours on models of good practice and I know that PwDI are playing their part in this context with other representative organisations in Europe.

STRATEGY 2003 - 2006



Strategy Consultant Bob Perry addresses the gathering at the Burlington Hotel

Strategy 2003 - 2006, PwDI's first ever strategic plan, was launched by the Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform, Willie O'Dea TD on 26th of March.

Defined as a "road map for the organisation," by its author Bob Perry of Perry Consultants, the Strategy Document lays out the goals of the PwDI, and explains how the organisation hopes to attain these goals over the next four years.

The document was published after a process of extensive consultation, involving questionnaires, regional meetings, individual consultations, comment period on the final draft, follow-up meetings with networks and, finally, approval by PwDI's National Board.

Lobbying, Communication, Training, Education, Employment, Research, Promotion, and Membership are shown as PwDI's priority areas. The document sets out how PwDI proposes to approach and improve these areas.

In the area of Lobbying Strategy 2003 - 2006 suggests the following objectives:

- * To have a rights-based Disability Bill approved
- * To gain increases in Disability Pension and other allowances
- * To gain better access to public places for people with disabilities
- * To increase access to housing, education, and employment.

In the area of Communication it suggests:

- * Designing protocols for the handling and streamlining of information

Continued from page 4

Disability Bill

Before concluding, I want to assure you of the commitment of the Government to advancing the participation of people with disabilities in society. While there is no doubt that there have been some major improvements in recent years we still have areas where there are significant barriers to full inclusion in society, including attitudinal barriers to progress. In this regard, the Government is determined to bring forward a disability bill at the earliest opportunity and this follows the completion of the consultation process that was initiated last year. It is the Government's intention that the new Bill will be enacted this year as a concrete demonstration of our commitment in this European Year of People with Disabilities.

We all have much work to do to create a society, which not just tolerates diversity of abilities, but actively values the richness contained in this diversity and opens opportunities to allow each of us to give expression to our individual gifts. Organisations such as PwDI have a crucial role in advancing

- * Establishing a website for information, communication and on-line forums
- * Facilitating regional meetings

In the area of Training and Education it proposes:

- * Educating the policy makers
- * Co-ordinating training for members
- * Fostering change

In the area of Research the Strategy promotes:

- * Collaborating on research projects
- * Gathering Best Practices
- * Promoting new research in areas of economic and social aspects of disability

Finally, Strategy 2003 - 2006 suggests Promotions and Membership would be improved through:

- * Promotion of the organisation
- * Enhancing the image and awareness of PwDI
- * Enlisting the support and contributions of individuals, their parents, and carers.

In order to implement the overall strategy, the Document states the following steps will need to be taken:

- Secure additional resources and competencies
- Collaborate with existing organisations that share PwDI's objectives and goals
- Reconfigure the staff and structure at National Office to ensure effective and efficient services to networks and Board
- implement a Quality Management System that will allow PwDI to effectively communicate roles, remits, and responsibilities and to measure outputs.

The Strategy Document not only articulates the objectives, which PwDI hopes to achieve, it represents the united front of PwDI. The support of the organisations members and the strength of their convictions is what lies at the foundations of this document. It is through the combined efforts of the PwDI's members that the objectives, laid out in this document, will come into fruition.

the work towards this goal, which I believe, will produce real and genuine benefits not just for people with disabilities, but for society as a whole. It is my hope that PwDI will progress from strength to strength in the coming years and I feel sure that the organisation can make a very significant contribution in advancing the interests and welfare of people with disabilities by working in a co-operative and holistic way with statutory agencies and other organisations.

I would like to express my hope that, at the end of this European Year of People with Disabilities, there will be many other successful projects such as the Youth and Disability Seminars that we can reflect on. The voice of young people needs to be heard and the PwDI are to be congratulated on giving focus to that voice through the seminars and now, this report. I am most grateful for the opportunity you have given me to launch the report and the new Strategy Document. I look forward to continuing to work in partnership and co-operation with PwDI.'

'YOUTH – BEYOND DISABILITY'



At the launch were (l-r): Michael Ringrose, PwDI Chief Executive; Nancy Smyth, Carlow National Board member and Dr Maurice Manning, President, Irish Human Rights Commission

During October and November last year, PwDI hosted four regional seminars on the theme 'Youth Beyond - Disability'. The objective of the seminars was to identify the issues affecting young people with disabilities. This was achieved through the contributions from Guest Speakers and from eighteen young speakers who spoke of their experiences, hopes, and aspirations. The speakers were followed by a workshop, which included all the delegates. These were used to explore further, the issues of concern to young people with disabilities in relation to Education, Employment, Recreation & Leisure Facilities.

The following is a summary of the conclusions of the report.

Education Workshops

The educational experiences of the young people at the seminars varied between those who attended mainstream schools and those who attended special schools. Both groups had positive and negative comments to make about the particular system that they had taken part in and they were able to highlight the barriers facing people with disabilities, in each of the options.

The education workshop pointed to ill-equipped schools and a general lack of understanding of disability issues. The barriers experienced by people with disabilities included an inability to access education for young people with disabilities, a lack of educational facilities, skilled staff and resource material for both students and teachers due to a lack of resources. It was felt that a lot of the emphasis was being placed on an individual's disability rather than on the person as a whole.

The system of psychological testing was also criticised due to its inconsistency as was the abandonment of students with disabilities after the Junior Cert. There is a need for individual educational plans, which travel with the student all the way through the education system.

Oral System

The fact that deaf children's schooling is solely focused on the oral system, was widely condemned. This, it was felt,

decreases their employment opportunities. The Finnish educational system and St Killian's School for young people with disabilities in Cork were both held up as models of good practice in meeting the educational needs of young people with disabilities. There were many suggestions made of ways to overcome these educational barriers. These included:

- * Confidence building training to encourage people with disabilities to become active participants in their own learning
- * Mandatory inclusion of disability awareness training for teachers
- * Mandatory inclusion of disability-awareness training for children in the school curriculum. Children with better awareness can teach as well as be taught
- * Accessible recreational outlets for socialising with peers
- * A standardised policy towards people with disabilities in



Margaret Ameho, PwDI National Office; Val Kerr, Louth Network and Marie Kerr at the launch of the Pwdl Strategy and Youth – Beyond Disability Report

every school

- * Equality and education legislation should be enforced
- * People with disabilities should have the option to take all subjects throughout their educational careers
- * Examinations should be set at different levels. The English language can be difficult to understand for people with learning disabilities
- * Research needs to be conducted to establish the numbers, needs, issues, and models of best practice in relation to the participation of people with disabilities in a variety of educational settings and contexts
- * An informed career guidance officer should be available to all students in second level schools
- * The forthcoming Disability Bill must be rights based.

The workshops went on to discuss the next steps that PwDI should take in order to move the educational issue forwards. These ideas included making people aware of their rights in relation to education and training and how to exercise them in relation to both the Equal Status Act, 2000 and the Employment Equality Act, 1998. The need for a directory of resources/information to be compiled was also highlighted, as was the need for more co-ordination between government departments so that two way communication could be established and the need for inclusion for all in both mainstream and special schools.

'YOUTH – BEYOND DISABILITY'



Cath Waugh, Donegal Network; Oliver Durkin, Sligo National Board member and David Stanton TD, Chairman Fine Gael Parliamentary Disability Committee.

Employment Workshops

As with education, the experiences of the delegates varied in terms of accessing and retaining employment. Many of the delegates had never been employed on a full-time or part-time basis. During the Employment Workshop, a number of barriers were identified by the young delegates as preventing complete inclusion in the workplace. These were access problems, information and support issues, communication difficulties and a lack of equal opportunities. The delegates felt that employers had a lack of information and were using health and safety and insurance costs as an excuse not to employ people with disabilities. The Government was cited as creating problems due to their lack of commitment to fulfilling their three per cent quota of people with disabilities working in the public sector. There is also a problem with State benefits as their removal or reduction was stated as a disincentive to work.

Barriers

The suggestions made to overcome these barriers included:

- * Dropping the label and the word 'Rehab'
- * Training and Education should be provided for all employers and co-workers on disability-awareness and equality. The importance of meaningful work, as distinct from token employment, was highlighted
- * Educate employers and people with disabilities about the provisions of the Employment Equality Act 1998, i.e. it would be "reasonable accommodation" to expect the allocation of more time to people with disabilities, who are required to undertake entry examinations and interviews for employment
- * An increase in inter-agency meetings and information sessions between FÁS, Government Departments and local groups of people with disabilities to improve and increase information, awareness and communication at local level
- * Create awareness of the information and support available to both employers and people with disabilities to assist people in getting employment or going back to work through the Department of Social and Family Affairs, Comhairle and FÁS

- * Development and retention of on-the-job training schemes such as the FÁS Community Employment Scheme
- * More people with disabilities should be employed in the disability sector itself. A three per cent quota was suggested
- * Monitoring and reporting of the number of people with disabilities employed in the public sector. All those public sector employers who have fulfilled the quota of people with disabilities should be acknowledged

The delegates suggested that PwDI should lead and support an awareness campaign to promote the employment of people with disabilities while identifying and investigating a number of models of good practice in relation to the successful employment. It was also agreed that PwDI should support people with disabilities to become actively involved in their local Networks as well as developing contacts with the trade unions to highlight a range of training and employment issues for people with disabilities. The delegates felt that PwDI should use Dáil deputies and other public representatives to ask relevant questions about employment issues in the Dáil, while regularly updating its members on the numbers and types of cases taken in relation to disability under the Employment Equality Act, 1998 and the Equal Status Act, 2000.

Recreation and Leisure Workshops

Many of the delegates at the workshops felt that with the constant struggle for equality in education and employment, they would rather stay out of recreational activities than have to fight for their rights in what is supposed to be a relaxing pass-time. But they also pointed out that recreation is very important and can give a person a sense of freedom and independence that they may not gain elsewhere.

In the Recreation & Leisure Workshops, the barriers identified were problems with access due to the lack of awareness and education among architects and designers as to providing adequate services and accessible facilities in buildings. Too often, the focus is only on wheelchair-users and does not include the visually impaired or people with hidden disabilities. In relation to swimming, it was felt that public pools with access for people with disabilities are not available throughout the country and those pools that have a hoist



Jane McDermott from Dundalk, Co. Louth, one of the speakers at the Youth-Beyond Disability Seminars was at the launch in the Burlington Hotel.

'YOUTH – BEYOND DISABILITY'

system in place generally do not have them in operation.

There were difficulties also with the lack of funding given to providers to adapt their facilities and many delegates felt that there are attitudinal barriers in society due to lack of education and awareness. Many explained that pub and nightclub-owners used safety and insurance as excuses not to allow people with disabilities admittance. It was also pointed out that there is a lack of support for people with disabilities as there are not enough personal assistants or staff with disability-awareness training employed in many of the recreational facilities.

The delegates also felt that transport and parking facilities are inadequate as are transport services. For example, there is a need for access to taxis for the deaf, including mobile text facilities and more signs on buses and trains for the visually impaired. Parking Bays were also singled out as being inadequate and a rare commodity in many public and private areas.

Ways to overcome Barriers

There were a number of ways that the delegates felt these barriers could be overcome:

- * Existing legislation needs to be implemented
- * Existing policies and structures should be used to disability-proof the implementation of actions and measures at local level
- * Funding and resources at local level are inadequate. Partnerships should be created between the public and private sector
- * Children in school need awareness-training in relation to playground activity and sports. This is important now due to the growing numbers of children with disabilities going to mainstream schools
- * A "Friendship Club" should be established to support play e.g. a "Best Buddies" programme
- * People with disabilities should be encouraged to socialise when taking part in recreational activities
- * Links with mainstream youth organisations should be developed to encourage more inclusion of young people with disabilities



Eddie Crawford, Cath Waugh and James McCleane, all from Donegal PwDI Network pictured at the launch

- * Disability-awareness programmes should be sponsored and promoted by IBEC, the Chambers of Commerce and Local Authorities. There is a need to have specialised training made more accessible for individuals who work in the leisure area
- * Individuals working in the leisure area should be properly trained. Awareness programmes should include the active involvement of people with disabilities
- * The Mobility Allowance Payment should be extended to all people with disabilities and the accessible kneeling buses that are used in Dublin, should be available countrywide, on both Bus Eireann and private operator routes
- * More use should be made of technology such as websites to keep people better informed
- * A national survey should be undertaken on all recreational facilities. Access Groups should tackle access at all levels and for all types of disabilities
- * Local Area Access Audits on facilities need to be undertaken using a standardised access audit tool
- * Standards of access to Play Areas are needed
- * Planning permissions should be subject to ensuring that proper facilities are included prior to building
- * Illegal parking in disabled parking spaces needs enforcement of legislation and should include shopping centre car parks

Publicity Campaign

The delegates felt that there is a need for the PwDI to run a publicity campaign to highlight Best Practice on how to provide recreation and leisure services that are accessible to all. They also felt that PwDI needs to give lead to organisations facilitating services for young people with disabilities and to seek representation on the National Sports Council and the County Strategy Sports Committees throughout the country.

Personal Supports

The Seminars and workshops also dealt with issues about personal and family supports. The young deaf speakers commented on the lack of Sign Interpreters, saying that nine times out of 10, interpreters are not available at short notice. There are only 25 qualified available interpreters to cover Ireland's 4,000 ISL users. The speakers also talked about the importance of support and encouragement, giving examples of how they had been helped or hindered by others. There were also some speakers who were attending Third Level education and they highlighted the lack of accessible accommodation for young people with disabilities and added that the attitude of some landlords towards people with disabilities was appalling. The delegates who took part in the workshops were hopeful that the report would make a difference, and that it would not "gather dust on a desk." But, they also believe that if all the different parts of the disability sector joined together, as they did for these workshops, that their combined voices would be harder to ignore and they could help to remove some of the barriers that people with disabilities are faced with in Ireland today.

WATCH OUT FOR PwDI'S WEBSITE!

In the beginning of the 21st Century, new technologies, including the Internet and the World Wide Web have great potential to improve the lives of many across the globe. PwDI is keen to take advantage of the technologies available and to include everybody, especially people with disabilities, in the information society.

For the past six months, PwDI has been working on a website for the organisation which will be launched shortly. The site will feature information on PwDI and the networks as well as on areas of action such as disability legislation, housing and education. Indeed, network involvement is important and all networks will have their own page on which to publish information. On the website you will also find the latest newsletter, press releases and an area where you can have your say, "Speakout!"

We are working with ESB IT Solutions, who are responsible for development, as well as Ennis Information Age Services who will provide accessibility and usability consultancy to make sure everybody, regardless of disability or experience, can use the site. Although assistive technologies are available, we must make sure the web service is designed so that the assistive devices can use it, not to mention those who might be new to technologies with little previous experience.

Gold Standard

The PwDI website aims to comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) AAA level - the gold standard for maximum accessibility, without using a separate text-based site.

In a recent report, Dr Barry McMullin of DCU found that at least 94% of Irish websites studied failed to reach even the minimum WCAG-A standard, the minimum standard that any website must reach to be considered accessible for any significant disability groups. Looking at accessibility from a technical point of view, Dr McMullin discovered that the majority of websites were impossible to use for anyone with even moderately impaired vision or with restricted mobility. The sites did not allow for the use of assistive technologies or alternative ways to perform tasks, for example, to use the site without a mouse.

In addition, to technical concerns, most sites also lack the most basic of accessibility features: logical and consistent navigation as well as clarity of language and content - all features that

would make everyone's experience of the internet more enjoyable... ..

PwDI's website hopes to show that accessibility is and should be best practice: an accessible website does not have to compromise standards of professionalism, content or style. In order to make all websites fully accessible, Dr McMullin's report recommends launching a public awareness campaign, developing new technologies which conform to WCAG accessibility guidelines, standardising education and training to include accessibility for people with disabilities and setting explicit legislation with legally enforceable standards of accessibility.

This is only the first part of the project. In due time, we are hoping to have a larger information centre online with more functionality and interactivity. The website is a welcome addition to already existing communication channels and I hope our members, as well as the public, will find it useful.

For more information on PwDI's website or if you would like to have your voice heard in the "Speakout" section, email mira@pwdi.ie or call 01 8721744.

USEFUL LINKS:

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines <http://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT/>
 NDA Irish IT Accessibility Guidelines <http://www.accessit.nda.ie>
 WARP: Web Accessibility Reporting project Ireland 2002 Baseline Study
<http://eaccess.rince.ie/white-papers/2002/warp-2002-00/>
 New Connections - A Strategy to realise the potential of the Information Society, March 2002
<http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/viewitem.asp?id=1153&lang=ENG>
 Towards full citizenship of persons with disabilities through inclusive new technologies
http://cm.coe.int/stat/E/Public/2001/adopted_texts/resAP/2001xp3.htm

WESTMEATH NETWORK IS ALIVE AND WELL!

Since the foundation of the Westmeath Network in 1996, its main focus has been to establish the networks profile with the "Local Decision Making Agencies", those organisations which can make a positive impact on the lives of People with Disabilities.

So far, the members have been successful in their aim and are now represented on the following: The Physical, Sensory, and Intellectual Disability Midland Health Board Committees and working groups. Westmeath County Council, "Local" Community and Enterprise Foras in Athlone and Mullingar. Westmeath County Development Board. Westmeath County Council "County" Community and Voluntary Forum. Westmeath Equal Partnership Board. Westmeath Community Development Ltd. Partnership Board and Disability Working Group. Westmeath Territorial Employment Pact Board. Westmeath Social Economy Working Group.

COURTS SERVICE TO PROVIDE ACCESS FOR DISABILITY USERS

The development of a programme to provide appropriate facilities for disabled court users is one of the strategies included in the Strategic Plan for the Courts Service published recently. Strategic Plan 2002 - 2005 was prepared by the Courts Service which is chaired by Supreme Court judge Mrs Justice Susan Denham, who is the Chairperson of the Courts Service.

The Strategy for Implementation promises :

- * To continue and constantly review a programme for providing access for disabled users to new court buildings and those being refurbished
- * To initiate a structured programme for such access to existing building stock



MY AMERICAN ADVENTURE!

Garry Toner (37), who is a wheelchair user, is a part-time student at Queen's University. A native of Armagh city, he recently attended a meeting of Monaghan PwDI Network to discuss disability from a Northern Ireland

perspective. In March, he attended a Conference "Technology and People with Disabilities" in Los Angeles. Here he writes about his trip for Cumhacht.

I went to Los Angeles last year to attend the conference 'Technology and People with Disabilities'. The ABC Millennium awards sponsored me, along with my colleague Finbarr Fleming, my father and Finbarr's nephew, to compare attitudes towards disability in the USA and Ireland.

I use an electric wheelchair, so you can imagine the difficulties I had organising this trip. One of my main concerns was getting my chair stowed safely on the aircraft, ensuring no damage was done to the delicate controls. Dublin Airport was fine. They were very helpful but unfortunately when arriving at Los Angeles Airport they seemed to have no regard for my situation. They tried lifting the chair, which is impossible, as it weighs approximately 16 stones. Eventually, after a lot of hassle, they allowed my father down the ramp to show them how to push the chair. Inevitably, after all the manhandling, the chair was damaged slightly. Thankfully, I was able to use it after a few adjustments.

Excellent attitude

Our hotel was very accessible and the staff were very helpful. Their attitude towards disability was excellent as they were not patronising or condescending. The Conference was shared between two hotels, the Marriott, and the Hilton. They were quite close to one another, within easy walking distance. If

someone couldn't manage, there was a shuttle bus service provided. The Conference itself was really amazing, with a world of information, and a chance to actually try the equipment on display. We had different workshops to attend every day. Each morning, Finbarr and I decided which to attend, as there was little point in going to the same workshop. We had great difficulty in deciding, as some of them clashed with one another. However, we managed to cover quite a few.

Personally, I found the exhibition incredible. I tried a number of Assistive Technology devices, from a head mouse using only a dot on your forehead to a computer that worked solely by eye movement. There were also a number of high-tech devices to help people with disabilities live more independently, particularly for people with sight impairments.

Getting around in Los Angeles was a lot easier than at home. The public transport system is completely accessible. Each bus has either a ramp or hoist and under Federal Law 580 (a,) seats must be vacated for disabled or elderly passengers. This allows two wheelchairs to be safely clamped in place, with seat belts to secure the user. We had numerous trips on buses at very little cost, as disabled people travel for half price. A typical journey of 5 miles cost around 30 US cents, about 18 cent in euro. Another interesting feature was how the misuse of disabled parking bays is dealt with. There is a standard fine of \$1000 for anyone parking without a permit! Authorities here could consider a similar policy.

On the social side, we went to Hollywood, by bus, the day after the Oscars, to see if we could spot any film stars or get a contract for a movie! No such luck!

Finally, I would encourage anyone out there who has a burning ambition to travel, no matter what his or her disability, to give it a go. If Finbarr and I can do it, so can you.

NATIONALITY MOBILITY CENTRE

Driving Tuition and Assessment Service

Managed from Clane, Co. Kildare, this service is aimed at providing people with a physical disability the opportunity to learn to drive or to return to driving.

All instructors are trained and experienced in working with people with physical disabilities and in the use of adaptations in cars. The Centre has automatic cars with adaptations based in the following locations:

Clontarf, Clane, Kilekenny, Wexford, Navan, Mullingar, Cork, Limerick, Cashel, Ennis, Tralee, Galway and Letterkenny.

For more details contact the National Mobility Centre at 045 - 893094/893095 or e-mail: maats@iwa.ie

LOUTH

Meeting sought with Local Council

Louth PwDI Network is seeking a meeting with Drogheda Borough Council to discuss the issue of parking bays for Disabled Persons. PwDI is urging the local council to take on board the recommendations as laid down in the 1996 Commission Report on the Status of People with Disabilities. These state that one in twenty-five parking spaces should be designated for use by cars driven by disabled persons.

Drogheda has the largest population in Louth so by rights it should also have the largest numbers of 'disabled only' parking bays. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Not only does Drogheda fall far short of smaller towns, such as Ardee, it's parking bays are not always in suitable locations, due to the huge number of steep roads and streets in the central area.

Louth Network would also like to remind people that it is illegal to park in designated 'disabled only' parking spaces without a permit, a sentiment echoed by the Waterford Network, who are lobbying their local TDs for the implementation of Penalty Points for this type of illegal manoeuvre.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES



At the PwDI launch in the Burlington Hotel, Dublin were (l – r) Cath Waugh, Donegal Network; Dr Arthur O'Reilly, Chairman, National Accreditation Committee and Martin Naughton, Centre for Independent Living.

Women with disabilities must at all times be central to the development of responses to violence and abuse and must be supported to take leadership on this issue. This is the central message of a new publication by the National Disability Authority and Women's Aid entitled 'Responding to Violence against Women with Disabilities'. The purpose of the booklet is to encourage and support frontline services in addressing the issue of violence against women with disabilities, by profiling the issue, reducing anxiety amongst service providers and stimulating dialogue on the issue.

The booklet outlines steps involved in developing a good practice response by both disability and other organisations addressing violence against women, including statutory, voluntary, and community service providers. It also includes useful contact information to support such organisations in progressing this work.

Women's Aid and the NDA

Women's Aid and the National Disability Authority have collaborated since 2001 to address violence against women with disabilities.. The booklet builds on previous seminars and research.

The report states that women and men with disabilities experience a range of violence and abuse in different settings. It is important to understand both the

forms of violence and abuse and the contexts in which they occur. These include

- * medical settings (inappropriate medical procedures such as forced medication or ECT),
- * institutions, care services, day centres and schools (rough handling, over medication, locking people in rooms, sexual and physical abuse), and
- * family and intimate relationships (physical, sexual, psychological, financial abuse, abandonment and neglect, denial of sexual and gendered identity).

Barriers

Barriers to accessing protection and support, which have been identified include:

- * difficulties in naming and identifying abuse
- * lack of acknowledgement and affirmation of the sexual needs, rights and lives of people with disabilities
- * isolation
- * experience of disempowerment and low self-esteem
- * questioning of credibility
- * services' lack of knowledge, skills and understanding
- * services' lack of physical access
- * practitioners minimising or denying abuse and violence of people with disabilities
- * lack of access to advocacy, particularly in closed environments.

The booklet encourages organisations to start taking action on violence against women with disabilities immediately, and highlights that good practice can be developed even within existing resources.

Steps

Steps for disability organisations include:

- * prioritising the safety and well-being of a woman who discloses experience of violence and abuse
- * developing gender equality policies and practice
- * consulting with women with disabilities as to what response is needed from the organisation
- * ensuring all staff and volunteers receive training on the issue of violence against women.

Steps for organisations addressing violence against women include:

- * beginning or continuing dialogue with women with disabilities about disability equality issues and consulting with them, as to how services could be made accessible to women with different disabilities
- * including women with disabilities in your organisations by recruiting disabled women as staff and volunteers
- * ensuring equal access and equal outcomes for women with disabilities. This includes:
 - * carrying out a disability equality proofing process
 - * producing information that is easily understood by women who may have literacy difficulties
 - * producing materials in Braille, large print and on audio tape
 - * developing helplines for women who are deaf and hearing impaired by using fax, texting and minicom where appropriate and safe for the women
 - * recognising the importance of outreach services to women with disabilities

The booklet, seminar report, and 'Violence against disabled women' are available from: Women's Aid Tel: 01-8684721 E-mail: info@womensaid.ie. The booklet can be downloaded from the following web sites: www.nda.ie and www.womensaid.ie

GET ON BOARD!

Ireland Hosts the EYPD Bus Tour

PwDI are delighted to co-ordinate the EYPD Bus visit to Ireland from July 2 to July 9. This is a great opportunity to promote disability awareness around the country.

The Bus started its Euro-wide journey in Greece in January and, by December, will have visited the 15 EU member States.

PwDI feel that it is important that this visit be used to highlight the day-to-day problems of disabled people as well as their struggle with inequality. But, PwDI also wishes to celebrate all the gifts and achievements of people with disabilities.

The following are the dates and venues for the Tour.

| | |
|----------|----------------------------------------|
| July 2nd | Earl Street, Dundalk, Co.Louth |
| July 3rd | Blanchardstown Shopping Centre, Dublin |
| July 4th | Newbridge, Co. Kildare, (morning) |
| July 4th | Kilkenny, (afternoon) |
| July 5th | John Rogers Square, Waterford |
| July 6th | Cork City |
| July 7th | Eyre Square, Galway |
| July 8th | Sligo, (morning) |
| July 8th | Letterkenny Co. Donegal, (afternoon) |

Disability organisations throughout the country are working with our network co-ordinators and there will be a full range of information on the European Year of People with Disabilities available on the bus.

There will also be a number of fun activities organised for children and families. These will include face painting, street entertainers, balloons, music and dance, art exhibitions, painting competitions, awards ceremonies etc.

Watch your local newspaper over the next few months or tune into your local radio for up-dated information on the progress of the bus and any events connected with it.

So, come and join in the celebrations when the bus is in your town.

Further information contact:

Geraldine Moylan at PwDI National Office,
Ph: 01-8721744, email: geraldine@pwdi.ie

PwDI CALLS FOR WORKING GROUP ON WITHDRAWAL OF BENEFITS

PwDI has called for the immediate establishment of a cross-party Working Group to review the reduction of benefits for people with a disability who take up work.

PwDI Chief Executive Michael Ringrose said of particular concern was the withdrawal of medical cards from people with a disability who take up work.

"Such a situation is an immediate disincentive to work and is totally unfair to a vulnerable section of society," he said. "At present, any person with a disability who earns more than €120 per week loses some benefit. This situation needs to be redressed without delay.

"However, this is an issue that crosses a number of Government Departments," he added. "It has implications for the Department of Health & Children, Social & Family Affairs, Enterprise, Trade & Employment and, of course, Finance. It is unjust that people with a disability who secure employment can lose their medical card or other entitlements because of their condition. The Government should establish a Working Group to review the situation."

Mr Ringrose said he welcomed recent comments by An Tanaiste, Mary Harney TD that she intends to take action on the issue. Such a move by the Government to remove this obstacle would be most appropriate during the European Year of People with Disabilities.

"FÁS research indicates that the loss of a medical card to people with a disability is a disincentive to taking up work," he added. "But the possession of a medical card is clearly something that may be essential to many of them."

Mr Ringrose added that given the fact that one in every 10 people suffers from some form of disability, it behoves the Government to act as a matter of extreme urgency on this issue.

Mr Ringrose also expressed disappointment at reports that the Irish Government had opposed a proposal at the EU's Council's Working Group on Human Rights that would enshrine the rights of people with a disability in international law.

He called on the Government to reverse this position and to become a leading advocate for the world's estimated 600 million vulnerable sector.

ATTITUDE!

The longer I live, the more I realise the impact of attitudes on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company... ..a church... ..a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past... we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is OUR attitude. I am convinced that life is 10 per cent what happens to me and 90 per cent how I react to it. And so it is with you... ..we are in charge of our ATTITUDES!"

Charles Swindoll
(submitted by Monaghan Network)