



## **FÁS Disability Policy and Development Unit Newsletter June 2006 Issue 7**

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### **Education Equality Initiative 2- The Kerry Deaf Adult Learning Programme**

The Kerry Deaf Learning Programme is a collaboration between Kerry Education Service (the VEC in Kerry) and Kerry Deaf Resource Centre. The Programme is funded under the Education Equality Initiative and supported by Leargas

Prior to the commencement of the EEI Programme the Deaf Centre had sourced specialised equipment and resources that in turn enabled and empowered Deaf Irish Sign Language users to participate in local education courses albeit in an ad-hoc and occasional manner.

It was in fact, this ad-hoc and occasional manner of Deaf Adults participation in Adult and Further Education that resulted in a more in-depth analysis and subsequently an application for support under the Education Equality Initiative. Pertinent to the application was that the Education Programme would be Deaf Led, would include Deaf related Curriculum and employ, where possible, Deaf tutors.

KES and KDRC recognised the necessity for a Partnership approach if developing the capacity of Deaf adults to participate in an education programme was to become a reality. This included the exploration of existing Deaf Related modules, exploring Accreditation options, developing the capacity and confidence of the Deaf Learners and creating a realistic opportunity to influence local and national policy on Adult Education provision for Deaf Students.

The successful application to EEI resulted in the setting up of a Management Committee with representation from KDRC, KES, Deaf Learners and IT Tralee. This management committee manage, advise, evaluate, guide and support the project. A full time coordinator was employed to implement the objectives outlined in the 3 year plan.

#### **The Participants**

The target group for this project are 18 Deaf adults who are affiliated to the Kerry Deaf Resource Centre and have requested appropriate educational opportunities to be provided locally. The 18 participants have a minimum primary level education.

## **Teaching Methodologies and Course Content**

Irish Sign Language is used as the medium of communication throughout all modules and training. The utilisation of technical aids such as videoconferencing, video/DVD and other suitable IT is integral to the process. The project has developed Deaf related resources including: Irish Deaf Community, Culture, Irish Sign Language, and Linguistics of Irish Sign Language, module descriptors, lecture notes, articles and other reference materials.

This project is a specific application of the resources necessary to implement culturally appropriate educational material to Deaf Adults who use ISL as their first language. A number of the modules are based on the British model developed by the Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People. CACDP is a UK Awarding Body accredited by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), offering a wide range of qualifications in communication methods commonly used by Deaf, deafened, hard of hearing and Deaf-blind people and in Deaf Awareness including awards in Irish Sign Language. The UK model is being used as there is currently no accredited culturally appropriate curriculum in Ireland.

The Programme also includes workshops and courses that lead to a greater awareness of equality and empowerment issues for individuals and for the learners as a Deaf Group. All course content was decided through consultation carried out by the Programme coordinator. The Education Programme is voluntary. Childcare support enables learners to participate in the programme but no other allowances are paid. The learners attendance was close to 100% and indicative that the philosophy of this project was inclusive.

## **Outcomes and Conclusion**

The Programme is currently in its final phase. The coordinator, learners and Management Committee are participating in an externally appointed evaluation process and organising a Conference for October 2006 as they continue the day-to-day running of the programme.

Many lessons have been learned and the outcomes of the Evaluation Report and Conference should be considered when developing Deaf Educational Policy. This programme is community based and Community Education has been identified as an essential element in a plan to alleviate educational disadvantage.

The Kerry Deaf Education Programme has taken the opportunity to explore the value of Adult and Community Education, the model has been developed and the lessons learned have been recorded. The fear for all is "What next"? There is a need to move forward to an integrated system of education and the VEC's are excellently placed to provide a wide spectrum of interlinked educational opportunities which would benefit groups which have experienced educational disadvantage. Ideally, the programme would exist to progress Learners to Level 5 on the National Framework for Qualifications in Ireland and to ultimately progress to Third Level Education.

For further details on the project, please contact: Catherine White, Project coordinator, Kerry Deaf Resource Centre, 4 Gas Terrace, Tralee. Tel: 066-7120399. Fax: 066-7120386. TEXT Mobile 087-9064230 email [kerrydeaflearn@eircom.net](mailto:kerrydeaflearn@eircom.net) website [www.kerrydeaf.com](http://www.kerrydeaf.com)

Catherine White – Kerry Deaf Learning Programme

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## **GET AHEAD – Surmounting Barriers to The Employment Of Disabled Graduates**

GET AHEAD is an offshoot of AHEAD, (The Association for Higher Education Access and Disability). AHEAD actively promotes equal access to third level education for students with disabilities. GET AHEAD was formed out of the National Forum of Graduates with Disabilities to assist graduates from third level education into employment and is a partner in the recently launched WAM project (Willing, Able, Mentoring). WAM is an EQUAL funded project which aims to provide new graduates with some invaluable work experience.

Many graduates face the hurdle of convincing a prospective employer that they are suitable for the duties of an advertised position, even if they have little or no work experience to support their application. This presents a particular difficulty for graduates with a disability who may have had few opportunities to work while an undergraduate.

WAM , a new EQUAL sponsored initiative, is administered by AHEAD and the focus is whereby a series of employers, not alone provide the work experience, but also appoint a mentor for the disabled person while with their company. Companies involved in the project include such major players in the employment field as the Civil Service, Hamilton Osborne King, Irish Life & Permanent, FÁS, Bank of Ireland and IBM. Other partners include GET AHEAD, Access Ability, the National Learning Network, and Dublin City University.

The placements will last for six months and applicants are currently being selected for the first cycle which will start shortly. A second six month cycle will commence in early 2007 and recruitment for this will begin in the autumn.

AHEAD and the WAM project held a recent conference on including graduates with a disability in the workplace on May 4<sup>th</sup> in DCU. Some 130 people were present, including representation from the business, public policy and education sectors and also many disabled graduates. The keynote speaker was the internationally renowned business leadership guru René Carayol. Carayol emphasised that managers should manage a little less and lead a little more. His contribution met with near unanimous approval and anyone who has the opportunity to hear him in person will not regret doing so.

During the afternoon of the conference there was a choice of four workshops. One of these was on the subject of employment legislation and was facilitated by Shivaun Quinlivan, Lecturer in Law, NUI Galway. A point made by Ms Quinlivan offers some hope that employment opportunities for disabled people in the public service will improve appreciably, not just for disabled job seekers, but maybe for those with significant disabilities. She supported her contention by how she interpreted the definition of 'disability' in the Disability Act 2005. The definition has received some criticism for being too restrictive. However, and maybe ironically, when it comes to public service employment it may actually work to the advantage of job applicants with significant disabilities. Heretofore, some employees in the public service with minimal disabilities may have been included by their employer to fulfil the requirement that 3% of public service employees must have a disability. Such employees will no longer comply with the quota criteria if the Disability Act definition is used.

Another part of the WAM project is the first national survey of disabled graduates currently being undertaken in collaboration with GET AHEAD. With the cooperation of the Disability Support Units in third level colleges, this has now commenced. Graduates who left college in any of the years 2002, 2003 and 2004 will be contacted, in total confidence, to ascertain

what had happened to them since graduation. GET AHEAD is particularly keen that all who are contacted take a little time to provide the information requested. The results of this survey will not only inform the WAM project but also inform decision makers in the education field on gaps in services for disabled students and graduates for the foreseeable future.

The Annual Get Ahead conference is scheduled to take place on Wednesday November 15<sup>th</sup> in the National College of Ireland. This annual event will focus on several themes including motivation and personal development for graduates themselves. The conference will include international speaker - Maggie Van Denheuve, who will talk about a new psychological approach in the workplace, a British comedienne - Francesca Martinez, taking a wry look at including disability and a former GET AHEAD Graduate now working for the BBC.

There is also to be a series of Public lectures about disability issues titled 'Disability in Contemporary Ireland'. Speakers will include William Binchy and Maurice Manning. The first lecture is on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 4.30pm – 6.30pm followed by a networking cheese and wine reception in UCD.

GET AHEAD is part funded by FÁS and is keen to make contact with graduates and students with a disability. If you wish to enquire more about the up and coming series of lectures and conference feel free to contact Tina Lowe at [tina.lowe@eircom.ie](mailto:tina.lowe@eircom.ie) and (01) 7164396. Furthermore if you would like further information on the WAM project please contact the WAM coordinator, [pauline.ryder@ahead.ie](mailto:pauline.ryder@ahead.ie) and (01) 7164396.

Seamus Moriarty – DPDU

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## **Comhairle - Developing Advocacy Services for People with Disability**

### **What is Advocacy?**

Advocacy is the process of speaking up for oneself or having a capable and unbiased person speak on your behalf. Sometimes this can be done informally through family and friends, sometimes it can be done through a voluntary organisation and sometimes a professional advocate may do it. There are different types of advocacy but they are all based on the idea of claiming entitlements on an equal basis with everyone else and having a fair chance to take part in society. The term advocacy may be new but advocacy itself is not. People have always spoken up for themselves, spoken on behalf of other people and represented the needs of groups of people.

### **Who needs advocacy?**

We may all need advocacy at some life-stage. However vulnerable and socially excluded people may particularly benefit from advocacy support. People with disabilities in long-stay institutions, particularly those with severe disabilities, with limited or no verbal communication or with no next of kin and people subject to involuntary detention orders would be a particular priority group for the provision of advocacy.

As life becomes more complex and more services have to be accessed through filling out forms, literacy difficulties become a serious barrier to claiming rights. The lack of statutory entitlement to some services can lead to a degree of inequity and social inequality, in itself, can be a barrier. People who are disadvantaged may be more dependant on social services to meet fundamental needs. They may lack the confidence to approach services or may receive an inadequate level of service through lack of resources, understanding or unconscious prejudice.

## **Comhairle**

Comhairle is a statutory agency operating nationally and regionally. They support the provision of information, advice and advocacy through a range of channels including the Citizen's Information Services, Oasis website, Citizen's Information Phone Service and the Relate newsletter amongst others.

Under the Comhairle (Amendment Bill) 2004, Comhairle will be given a remit to provide a Personal Advocacy Service (PAS) in the shape of independent advocates for people with disabilities. These advocates will have statutory powers to support their clients. Comhairle is preparing for this remit by piloting projects which will demonstrate ways of working this out in practice. The Minister for Social and Family Affairs has undertaken to enact the Bill before this year's summer recess.

In 2004, Comhairle undertook research (Developing an Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities, 2004) which set out a three-part framework for advocacy services covering the PAS, a Community and Voluntary Disability Advocacy Programme and a Community Visitors Programme.

By the end of this year, Comhairle will be funding up to 30 community and voluntary organisations to employ independent representative advocates across the country for a minimum of two years to support people with disabilities. Examples of funded organisations include Carlow Centre for Independent Living, Inclusion Ireland and the National Representative Council of the National Learning Network. See the Comhairle website for further details.

Comhairle has also supported and continues to support the development of other advocacy initiatives including advocacy training, advocacy publications and materials and advocacy activities.

Davin Roche – Comhairle

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### **Third Series of Three 60**

The third series of this programme, devoted to raising awareness and understanding of disability, went to air again on RTE 1 Monday evening July 3rd at 7.30pm. As it has done in the past two years, it will continue for nine weeks with the last programme in the series scheduled for late August.

The first programme opened with a segment on a football team where all the players have cerebral palsy (CP). They are due shortly to participate in the European CP football championships. Watching the players, their skill at covering the field and controlling the ball during play, one would be hard-pressed to guess they had any disability. Any misconceptions about inability are kicked offside very quickly. This segment was certainly a surprising and uplifting beginning to the new series.

The second segment in the first programme introduced the viewer to the Jack and Jill Foundation and the support it offers to families who have a child with severe developmental delay. This foundation was set up by the Irwin family following the death of their baby son Jack who lived for 22 months. He had been born a healthy baby boy but suffered trauma two days after birth, while still in the hospital, and this resulted in severe brain damage and multiple physical disabilities. Their painful experience led them to form the foundation in an attempt to ensure that no other family would have to go through what they endured alone.

The programme scheduled to air on the 10th of July features the problems still being faced by people in Belarus following Chernobyl. Despite being 20 years on from the disaster, its legacy remains. In the programme we meet an Irish man, David, who wants to adopt Alexi, a 14 year old boy from Chernobyl. Alexi is one of the lucky ones in that he lives with his grandmother Anna and has visited Ireland several times. However, her concern for his future is evident and she is anxious to see him adopted. Unfortunately, the Belarusian government have clamped down on international adoptions and so this is more difficult now than a few years ago.

Spread over the series, there are six programmes themed around areas related to employment. These are programmes Four, Five, Six, Seven and Nine. In programme four, June's experiences and how she has found a focus in her life, through employment, are featured. The second half of this programme is devoted to Anthony and his story on how his life has changed by working as a Gym Instructor and DJ. Programmes seven and nine focus on dealing with acquired disabilities and the accommodations required to return to the labour market. Meanwhile in Programme five – Austin's story – the spotlight is on his life as a busy GP and how much he achieves despite his disability, including his mission in promoting primary care services for the homeless and drug users.

For the remainder of the series, there will be shows featuring areas as diverse as fashion to fishing; addiction to autism, gifted children to guide dogs. As in the previous series, this is a very worthwhile way to spend a half hour each Monday evening over nine weeks.

Joan Kavanagh – FÁS Social Inclusion

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