



FÁS Disability Policy and Development Unit Newsletter July 2004 Issue 3

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Three 60 (RTE 1)

Three 60 is a new television series which explores and challenges attitudes about disability in Ireland through a wide range of stories from all around the country, and is sponsored by FÁS and the Rehab Group. It is presented by Trinity College lecturer and Audioscope presenter Bethan Collins.

Three 60 features a broad range of human-interest stories such as narcolepsy, stammering, teenage sexuality or agoraphobia. The series also explores attitudes on the ground to disability with our regular correspondent Donal Toolan who talks to a broad array of individuals ranging from transition year students to media consultant Terry Prone. It also features pieces on people with disabilities in the workplace, be they entrepreneurs or employees. Each episode of **Three 60** finishes with focus on a particular issue facing individuals with disabilities such as Health apartheid, the costs of disability, the benefits trap, or stigma and mental health.

Three 60's principal aim is to create in the public mind a very new way of looking at disability that moves away from our traditional assumptions to a more holistic approach. **This eight episode television series started on Monday, 28 June at 7.30 pm and will continue to run in this time slot until 16 August.**

Workway (Phase II)

Workway 1 was an initiative that aimed to increase awareness and promote the employment of people with disabilities in the private sector. Employers, trade union representatives, people with disabilities and service providers, worked in partnership on four regional networks, to develop local and pragmatic solutions to the barriers facing people with disabilities. They developed targeted promotional campaigns, produced practical and accessible information tools, built a comprehensive web site

www.workway.ie and contributed to the IBEC/ICTU Workway Guidelines on Employment and Disability. These guidelines are currently available on this web-site.

Workway (Phase II) is a new and exciting project that aims to build on the work that was done in Workway (Phase I). This is a one-year project, jointly managed by IBEC and ICTU and funded through FÁS. Through the regional network structures the project aims to:

- Develop a Pre-Employment Template to address the deficits identified at pre-employment stage.
- Develop a Disability Training Module to be integrated into established training programmes.
- Pilot and refine joint IBEC/ICTU Workway Employment and Disability Guidelines.
- Develop a one stop interactive information and employment web-site.

Alan Chapman, Manager, Disability Policy & Development

Assist Ireland – Assistive Technology Database

One of Comhairle's strategic goals is to develop an Assistive technology Database and related telephone helpline as an integrated online source of information on technical aids and appliances for people with disabilities in Ireland.

The core objective of this is the provision of a comprehensive resource, containing relevant information on products, suppliers and resources related to disability and daily living. This online information repository is being developed in consultation with disability organisations, support services and service providers throughout Ireland and further a field.

Content

There are two main content classifications, Information and Products /Suppliers which work in parallel and interconnect with each other. The content is user-centered and includes information relating to people's daily living in the areas of Communication, At Home, Education, Health, Leisure, Employment and general entitlements.

The Products and Supplier classification focuses on aids available for everyday activities. This classification includes specific content related to Blind & Low Vision, Built Environment, Communications, Computers, Deaf & Hard of Hearing, Clothing, Footwear, Eating & Drinking, Healthcare, Home Furniture and Fittings, Housekeeping, Personal Care, Recreation, Leisure & Sports, Seating, Transport, Walking/Standing devices, Workplace and Wheeled Mobility.

Usability and Accessibility

Throughout the development process, 3rd party expert user and accessibility testing, involving people with a range of disabilities, has taken place to ensure that the system is user friendly and provides the highest quality of assurance. The project reaches the highest level of industry standards for the world-wide-web.

Consultation and Promotion

In 2003, Assist Ireland participated in 3 major exhibitions/conferences and liaised with lead agencies in assistive technology such as the Disability Living Foundation (DLF) UK and AbleData USA.

In 2004, work is continuing to gain important feedback and advice from all potential stakeholders. All interested parties have been asked to participate in a consultative group for the future development of Assist Ireland. Content evaluation and regional user group testing will take place in June/July.

The official launch of the project will take place later this year when a sufficient level of content has been generated for the database.

Michael Clyne, Comhairle

Disability and the Cost of Living

The cost of living for people with disabilities is generally higher than for the rest of the community. If you can't drive or use the bus, then travel by taxi costs more than the same journey would for other people. Other areas where the cost of living is higher for people with disabilities include medicines, home help and personal care, or higher heating bills. So the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities in 1996 recommended a Cost of Disability Payment to level up the standard of living for people with disabilities.

In April this year, the National Disability Authority (NDA) published research from economic consultants Indecon on how much extra it costs to live when you have a disability. Internationally, the findings are that people with severe disabilities spend a minimum extra of €40 a week. The scale of the extra cost of living is related to the severity of the difficulties people experience. A survey of 250 people with different disabilities for the report confirms that transport, heating, electricity, medicines, care and disability aids are likely to add to their cost of living. While there are data problems in separating disabled households separately from other families, a statistical exercise looking at families on short and long-term sickness payments suggests their cost of living could be up to a quarter higher than the average.

The National Disability Authority concludes that the case for a Cost of Disability payment is strong, and sees this as a basic equality issue. Such a payment would put the living standards of people with disabilities on a par with others at the same level of income. Sweden and the UK both pay special allowances to people with significant levels of disability towards extra costs related to their disability. If a Cost of Disability payment is intended to equalise living standards, it would not be appropriate to means-test it over the normal spectrum of incomes.

There are some state schemes, which address some of these cost areas, however there are many gaps and anomalies. For example, entitlement to free disability aids is linked to the medical card so a disabled person in a job is unlikely to qualify. Similarly, disabled people in work are over the income limit for Mobility Allowance – although they need to make regular daily journeys in and out to work and may have higher transport needs than those not in work. These schemes need to be rationalised and the gaps plugged as a first step in addressing the higher cost of living for those with a disability.

Secondly, there needs to be a policy decision about which extra costs of disability should be met through direct provision of services and which through a cash payment. As an illustrative exercise, the NDA suggests that a weekly payment of €40 paid to those with maximum disability, and a scaled down payment to those with lower levels of disability, could cost about €168 million a year.

The National Disability Authority looks forward to a lively public debate on the issue of a cost of disability payment, which will help inform future policy decisions on this important area.

Eithne Fitzgerald, NDA

NUI Certificate in Equality Studies in Training and Development

The Certificate in Training (Special Needs), was developed by NRB (National Rehabilitation Board) and NUI Maynooth in 1993, and has served as a highly regarded qualification for trainers within the field of vocational training for people with disabilities. In June 2000, FÁS took over responsibility for this course as part of the transfer of services in June 2002, FÁS and NUI Maynooth set up a working group to review this certificate in light of developments in the sector and in society in general over the past decade.

It was decided to discontinue the Certificate in Training (Special Needs) and to replace it with two separate certificate level courses the:

- existing NUI Certificate in Training and Continuing Education, and
- new NUI Certificate in Equality Studies in Training and Development.

These two certificates will continue to meet the needs of trainers who work with disabled people with the skills and knowledge pertinent to their training environment while at the same time attending to the equality agenda that forms the broader context for disability issues. The NUI Certificate in Equality Studies in Training and Development, as a stand alone certificate, will also serve to enhance the competencies of other trainers and adult educators who work with social marginalised groups including community groups, youth services, etc. who also require a set of skills and knowledge that will need to take account of the needs of a diverse user base.

The first pilot(s) for this course will commence in October 2004, and will be located in Dublin and Kilkenny. A second pilot will be run in January 2005 and is specifically targeted at participants who declared an interest in both the NUI Certificate in Training and Continuing Education and this NUI Certificate in Equality Studies in Training and Development.

Further information may be obtained by contacting Helen McKeown at Helen.M.McKeown@may.ie

GET AHEAD

Third level education options for students with a disability have increased dramatically over the last decade or so. It is estimated that there are now some 800 graduates who have a disability. While far from perfect, educational supports available to students in our universities and Institutes of Technology have endeavoured to keep pace with these developments.

It would be nice to say that employment opportunities for such graduates have increased correspondingly but surveys have shown that unemployment rates for graduates with a disability are far greater than for their able bodied colleagues.

Rather than bemoan the situation, graduates with a disability, under the umbrella of GET AHEAD have joined forces to address the issue. Under the motto of "by, for and with graduates" the organisation sees itself as a network of graduates working together to change attitudes and practices regarding disability in the Irish employment market. While not a service provider, GET AHEAD will act as a catalyst to change attitudes and offer much needed peer support to colleagues. GET AHEAD is part funded by FÁS.

As part of this process, GET AHEAD hosted its first regional launch in conjunction with the University of Limerick on 14th June. It attracted a large audience of students and graduates with a disability, also present were employers from the region. It is hoped that further such events will take place regionally in the future.

GET AHEAD is now keen to make contact with graduates with a disability nationwide, with a view to setting up a regional structure and support network. Contact with GET AHEAD can be made at e-mail: ahead@ahead.ie or (01) 4752386 where Tina Lowe will be delighted to give you further information. Also the AHEAD website at www.ahead.ie offers further information.

Seamus Moriarty, FÁS Disability Policy and Development Unit

NDA Towards Best Practice

The NDA sponsored Towards Best Practice series of reports is an attempt by the organisation to draw together an analysis of the range and numbers of services available to people with a disability and point a way forward where gaps and failings in service are most evident. Three reports were commissioned from consultants experienced in their particular areas. They each cover the NDA's priority areas of Health, Transport and Further Education, Training and Employment.

The **Towards Best Practice Report on Further Education, Training and Employment**, is valuable for all people seeking a good summary of the legislative and policy context i.e. why service provision has developed the way it has and the various schemes operating for people with disabilities. Previously those interested in this area may have had to search in many different reports to find this information.

Also, contained in the report are some international perspectives from Australia, the USA, Canada and Denmark, countries with generally good track records in this area and with some similarities to the Irish policy situation. Some interesting ideas from these countries include a "one stop shop" providing a range of community services for people with a disability, including a thorough assessment of the person's training and employment requirements, the substantial use of supported employment initiatives, resulting in people with severe disabilities being placed in the open labour market in the US and in Denmark and high levels of data collection in Canada.

The centre piece of the report, flowing from the policy analysis and the review of present practice in Ireland, as well as comparisons to the four other countries cited above, are the 29 recommendations that end this report. Many of the recommendations have implications for FAS and other statutory organisations, including the NDA. Consultation is ongoing with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, FAS and other organisations so that the next report in this area can hold up Ireland as having achieved best practice and a model for other places.

Enable Ireland

National High Tech Assistive Technology Training Service

Enable Ireland is a national organisation providing a range of services to people with physical disabilities, and recognises the importance of supporting people with physical disabilities in the use of a wide range of assistive technologies (AT). In order to ensure that service users across the country can benefit from AT, we have prioritised AT training as a key component in advancing our knowledge, skills and experience.

Enable Ireland's National High Tech AT Training Service focuses on the development of accessible AT training modules and courses for all of Enable Ireland's stakeholders (e.g. staff, adult service users, parents, carers) as well as for the wider AT community (other service providers, educators, trainers, employers, etc). A key activity of the service is the delivery of an **Accredited AT Training Course (Dublin Institute of Technology)**.

This is a two-week course targeting all potential stakeholders in AT including adult users, staff both within Enable Ireland and beyond, employers, families, personal assistants, funders, and others. This two week course will include modules on: Service Delivery, Computer Access, Augmentation Communication, Educational Software and much more. The course is accredited by Dublin Institute of Technology and course graduates are awarded a CPD certificate.



The dates for the 2005 course are March 7th – 11th and May 30th – June 3rd 2005 in Enable Ireland, Crumlin, Dublin 12. For further information please contact: Siobhan Long on Tel: 01 499 2357 or email: slong@enableireland.ie to book your place.

Siobhan Long Enable Ireland

Just A.S.K.

Eastern Vocational Enterprises Limited (E.V.E.) in collaboration with FÁS and IBEC, launched an innovative practical guide called Just A.S.K. for employers and employees focusing on mental health issues in the workplace.

Mental health difficulties are the fastest growing health conditions according to the World Health Organisation (2001). One in four people will experience mental health difficulties in their lives, which means that up to 25% of the workforce may be in this situation right now! The Mental Health Commission (2002), estimate that over 700,000 Irish people will be affected.

The handbook aims at answering the questions, which arise for both employers and existing or potential employees regarding mental health issues in the workplace. It was developed in collaboration with FÁS, IBEC, The Irish Advocacy Network, Schizophrenia Ireland, the South Western and Northern Area Health Boards, St. Ita's Hospital Rehabilitation team, SIPTU, IMPACT and most importantly, people who shared their experience of mental health issues in their lives.

Commenting on the experiences of people with mental health difficulties, Dr. Margaret Webb, General Manager EVE Limited said: “Stigma and ignorance are, unfortunately, still major barriers to successful employment for people who experience mental health issues in their lives. They have abilities, skills and knowledge, which they can bring to the workplace if they are just given the chance. All they need are simple accommodations and supports, which are ultimately the same flexibilities employers are now considering in light of the recent focus on work-life balance policies”.

Dr. Webb further explained that the workplace of the future would reflect the diversity of our social landscape of which mental health difficulties are an integral part. “**Just A.S.K.**” challenges employers and employees to look at the **Accommodations, Supports** and **Knowledge** they require to work in partnership, so that people with valuable **Abilities, Skills** and **Knowledge** can obtain and maintain employment, regardless of their mental health issues. For both employers and current/future employees it’s a Win-Win situation!

For further information please contact:

Dr. Margaret Webb, General Manager, E.V.E. Limited, 01-6719664, 087-2597852
Queries: Frank Cameron, Area Manager, E.V.E. Limited, Occupational Services,
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