

COMMUNITY INCLUSION INITIATIVE



Evaluation

Contents

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Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to welcome the publication of this evaluation report on the Community Inclusion Initiative.

This publication provides us with a review of the work of the Community Inclusion Initiative, which sought to support families experiencing disability by providing a range of supports to both parents and children. It identifies the valuable role Family Resource Centres play in providing community-based supports in meeting the particular needs of disabled children and their families. It also highlights the effectiveness of collaboration and partnership at local and regional level.

The central vision of the Community Inclusion Initiative is that individuals and families will have greater opportunity to participate in and contribute to the life of their community. The evaluation has shown that the Initiative has greatly enhanced the active participation and inclusion of families experiencing disability.

Social participation has come to the fore in international and national discussions on promoting the rights of people with disabilities to participate in all aspects of mainstream society. The UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which entered into force in 2008, reflects the growing significance of social participation in society and is based on the principles of non-discrimination, participation and inclusion in society, equal opportunities and accessibility.

I would like to congratulate both DESSA and the Caha Centre in supporting families in the South Kerry and West Cork region and wish them continued success in their social inclusion work.

Brian Crowley
MEP

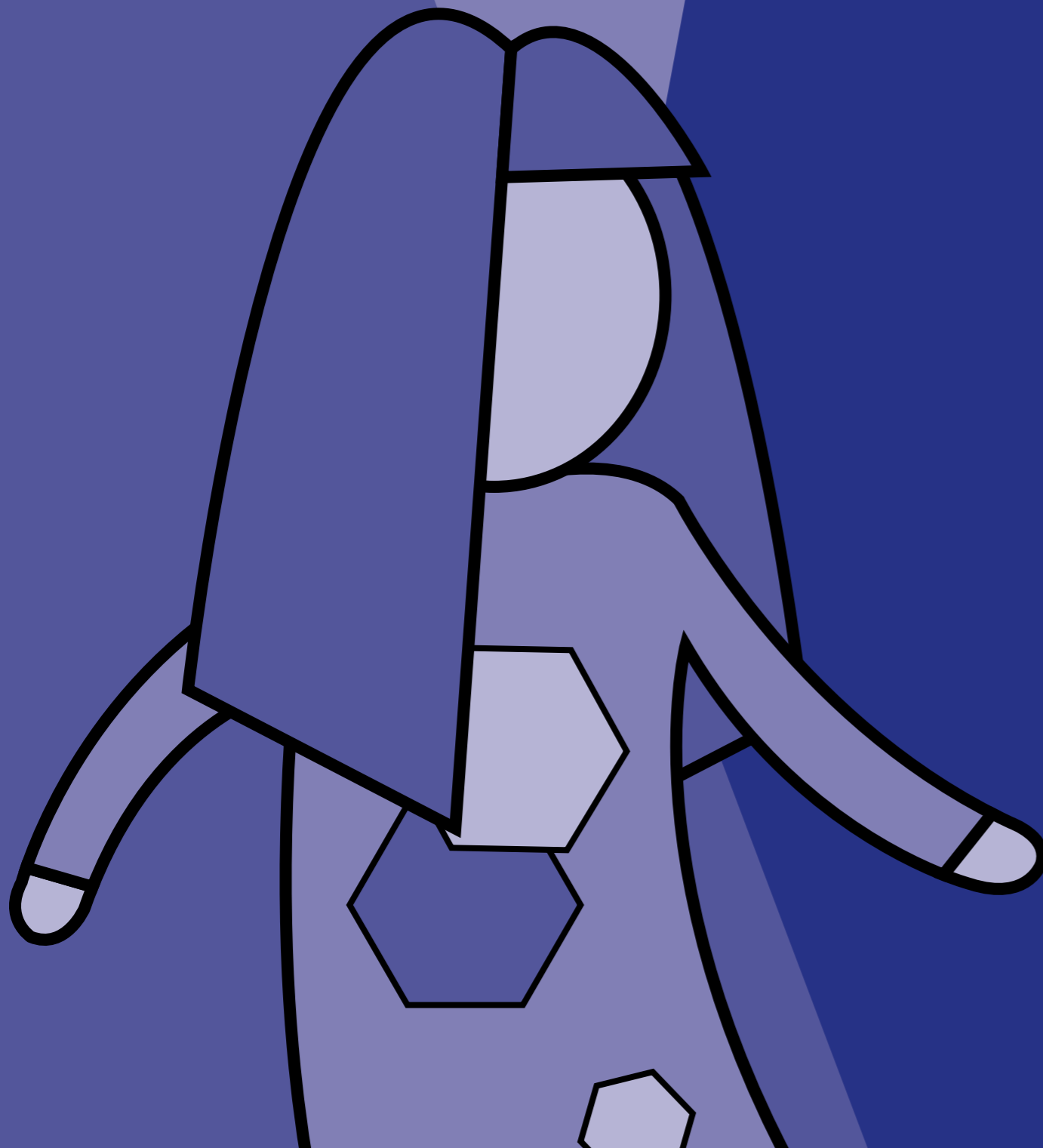
Introduction

In March 2007, DESSA and the Caha Centre, Adrigole, met with a group of parents of disabled children from the Beara Peninsula to discuss their support needs as parents and explore the possibility of establishing a parent's support forum. As a result of this meeting DESSA and the Caha Centre worked together in facilitating this group of parents to establish a peer support structure. The Community Inclusion Initiative was developed as a result of this work and was financially supported by the Family Support Agency.

Working as a national organisation, DESSA's mission is to support the inclusion and active participation of disabled people in Irish life through community development methodologies. DESSA works with organisations like the Caha Centre which provides essential social services and supports to people living on the Beara Peninsula.

The overall focus for the Community Inclusion Initiative is that all children, irrespective of ability, have a right to access the same opportunities in life. The reality, however, is that disabled children have limited opportunities in accessing and participating in mainstream childcare, play and community settings. Family Resource Centres can play a role in opening up such opportunities for disabled children and their families to participate in a more inclusive way within their communities.

We are delighted with the outcomes of this Initiative: the establishment of the parent's peer support called Family Support & Inclusion Network; the delivery of Childcare Inclusive Policy & Practice training to staff and volunteers of FRCs; and the promotion and awareness-raising of the rights of families experiencing disability to have equal standing in their communities.



We would like to acknowledge the work of John Loughrey, Clive Barton and Rory Kirby.

We would like to sincerely thank the Family Support Agency for their financial assistance and support in the development of this project.

Most of all we would like to thank the parents who make up the Family Support & Inclusion Network for their commitment and contribution to this work.

Alice Griffin, DESSA and Helen Quinn, The Caha Centre

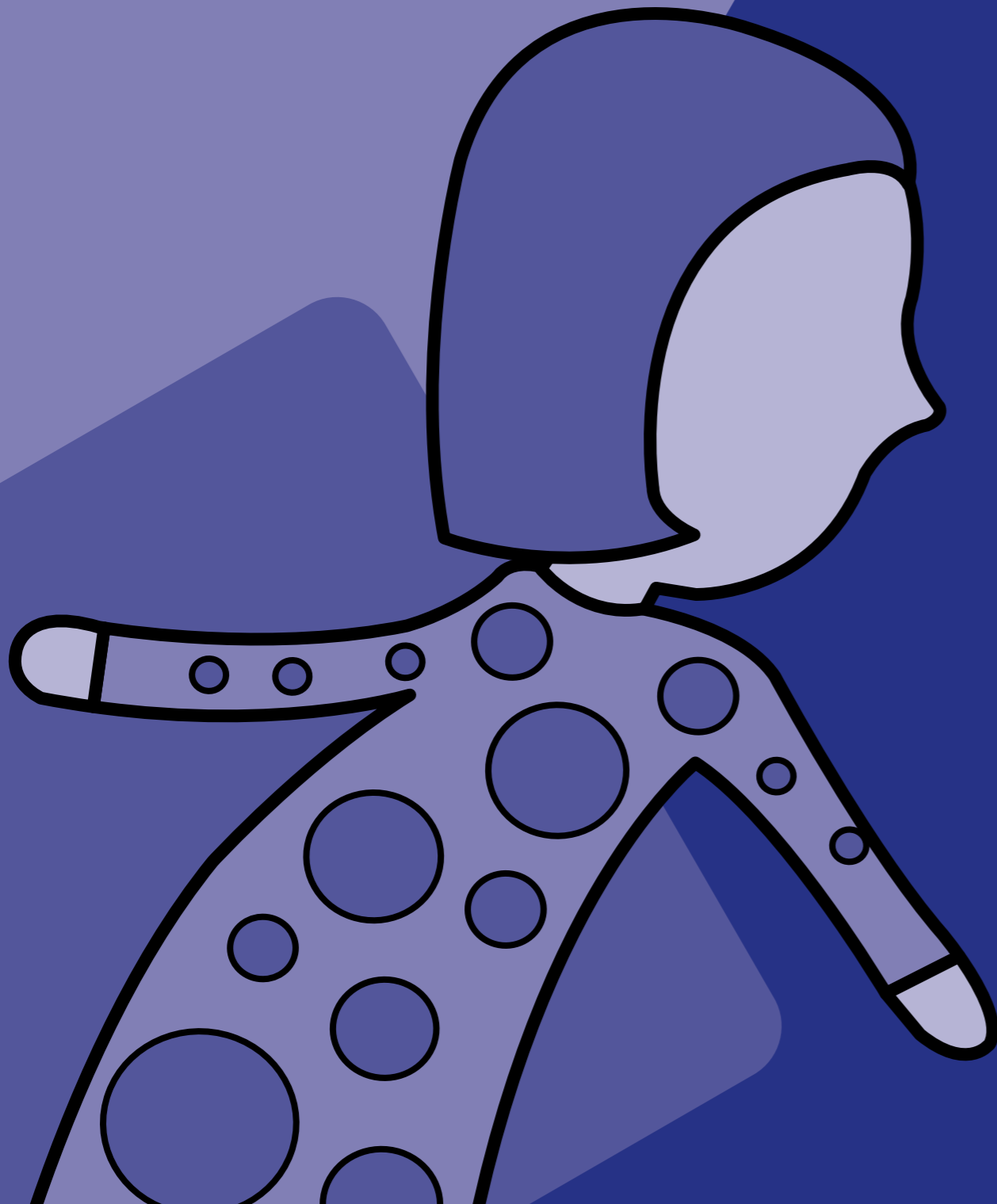
Background

Introduction

DESSA, the Disability Equality Specialist Support Agency, was established in 2001 to work within the Community & Voluntary Sector in the area of disability rights. Working as a national organisation, DESSA's mission is to support the inclusion and active participation of people with disabilities in Irish life through community development methodologies. Underpinning DESSA's strategic plan is an inclusive equality framework, setting out three areas of action – capacity building, policy development and networking – within which support is given to community development organisations to facilitate inclusive actions.

Prior to June 2007 the Caha Centre identified the need for specialist support for parents of children with disabilities on the Beara Peninsula. It is well recognised that living on the Beara Peninsula is difficult in itself due to isolation and the lack of local infrastructure and statutory support services. It follows therefore that parenting a child with a disability in this setting brings added and more difficult challenges. In recognition of this and of its own in lack of capacity to provide this specialist support, The Caha Centre sought the support the Disability Equality Specialist Support Agency (DESSA).

The resulting meetings between the two led to the development of the Community Inclusion Initiative in West Cork and South Kerry. DESSA and the Caha Centre then met with a group of parents of children with disabilities from the Beara Peninsula to discuss their needs as parents and to explore the possibility of establishing a parents' forum as part of the project. The overall aim of the project was to support the eight FRC's in the West Cork and South Kerry region to take a proactive approach in supporting families of people with disabilities. The Community Inclusion Initiative was funded by the Family Support Agency through the Family & Community Services Resource Centre Programme.



Policy Context

The National Development Plan recognizes the need to devise strategies for the meaningful inclusion of people with disabilities and talks about the “deepening and widening of the Government’s commitment to the policy of mainstreaming as provided under the Disability Act, 2005”. Clearly there are a number of key departments who have an identified role to play in mainstreaming and have commenced rolling out action plans to realize this. The National Development Plan also through its local and community development programme acknowledges the need to work towards enhanced social inclusion for identified disadvantaged groups and again mentions people with disabilities as a target group. It spells out that its strategic goal” is to enable communities themselves to identify and address issues and challenges in their own areas”.

Over the past number of years, DESSA has begun to play a significant role in devising strategies on the ground with FRCs that demonstrate models of practice to creating community pathways for people with disabilities and promoting social inclusion. The Community Inclusion Initiative entails the establishment of a Parents Inclusion Forum – a peer support network for parents of children with disabilities, the delivery of training supports to both parents and staff and volunteers of FRCs and the development of a best practice model among FRCs in the region with regard to inclusive childcare and play provision.

It is recognised that the development of disability specific work within a community development perspective is relatively new. This brings with it both a sense of excitement which comes with furrowing new ground and the inevitable challenges of creating a different context to view the involvement of people with disabilities in community life. In all aspects of development work it is seen as good practice to pause and reflect on the work that has occurred to date. This evaluation will bring together all the stakeholders involved in our work, which includes families experiencing disability, FRC project staff, FRC voluntary management committee members, County Childcare Committee staff, training programme participants, and our funders – the FSA.

The Community Inclusion Initiative

The Community Inclusion Initiative¹ aims to establish a peer support structure for parents of children with disabilities and to develop a model of good practice for the inclusion of children with disabilities within community-based childcare and play settings which contribute to the overall mainstreaming of children with disabilities within their communities.

The Parents Inclusion Forum entails the following elements:

- Establishment of a Parents Peer Support Network
- Audit of existing childcare and play within FRC’s² provision *vis a vis* the participation of children with disabilities
- Delivery of Inclusive Play and Policy Training within an Equality Framework for FRC staff and volunteers
- Delivery of ‘5 Ways to Empower your Child’ Training to parents.

A key feature of this project is the establishment of formal working relationships between DESSA, the eight FRCs in the region and the two development agencies, West Cork Community Partnership and South Kerry Development Partnership in promoting the social inclusion of people with disabilities at a regional and local level.

The central vision for the Community Inclusion Initiative is that individuals and families will have greater opportunity to participate in and contribute to the life of their community thereby making those communities more understanding and accepting of diversity.

The timescale for this project was 12 months starting in November 2007.

¹ Inclusion means everyone having the right to choose to take a full part in all local services - and in being equally welcomed and able to do so. Inclusive provision is open and accessible to all and takes positive action in removing disabling barriers so that disabled and non-disabled children can participate.

² There are 8 FRCs in the region with the Caha Centre, acting as the lead local partner.

Evaluation Aims

1. To review and make recommendations on the overall Community Inclusion Initiative in relation to its potential to become a community development mainstreaming strategy.
2. To review key elements of this work – the Family Support & Inclusion Network and their ongoing needs and the Childcare Inclusion Training Programme.

Key Tasks and Responsibilities

1. Examine the impact of the Childcare Inclusion Training Programme in terms of the engagement, empowerment and capacity building of FRC staff & volunteers to offer inclusive childcare and play settings.
2. Examine and identify the specific challenges relating to the establishment of the Family Support & Inclusion Network and make recommendations on best practice.
3. Identify the resources, technical support and expertise required to maintain the ongoing development of the Family Support & Inclusion Network. Examine and make recommendations regarding the optimum partnership element of this work.

Methodology

- Assessment of key elements of the Community Inclusion Initiative
- Working in collaboration with the Review Working Group³
- Facilitating consultative review meetings with key stakeholders and providing regular updates to the Review Working Group

Anticipated Outcomes

- Assessment of the efficacy of this project
- Identification of key recommendations in relation to the future of this work

³ The Review Working Group comprises DESSA and the Caha Centre

Childcare Inclusion Training Programme

The Childcare Inclusion Training Programme was designed to raise awareness among staff, management committee members and volunteers of FRC based Childcare Services and South Kerry and West Cork.

The course would be delivered over five sessions and would include the following content:

- Disability Equality
- Legislation and Policy
- Inclusion/Segregation/Integration
- Child Well Being and Play
- Indicators of Quality in Play and Childcare
- Risk Assessment
- Exploring Current Policy and Planning for Change
- Key Elements of Inclusive Practice
- Building Relationships to promote inclusion

The programme was delivered by a member of the DESSA team who has many years experience of working directly with children and is widely practiced in the delivery of tailored training and supports to staff in early years and family support settings.

Staff from six of the eight FRCs in South Kerry and West Cork participated in the training, along with representatives from the Kerry County Childcare Committee (KCCC). In total, there were 11 participants on the training, with 9 attending from FRCs and 2 from the KCCC.



Evaluation Framework

Evaluation of the Childcare Inclusion Training Programme was conducted in two stages:

Post-Training Evaluation conducted by the Trainer

This was done in the form of a questionnaire which can be found as Appendix 2 in this document. The full text of responses from participants to the post-training evaluation can also be found as appendix 3 of this document.

Training Impact Evaluation by the Independent Evaluator

This involved a visit to each of the individual Childcare Services to observe changes in management, structure and layout of the services, as well as the completion of a questionnaire with members of staff who participated in the training. This questionnaire is available as Appendix 4 of this document.

Post-Training Evaluation

The post-training evaluation asked the participants to describe their key learning points from each of the 5 sessions they attended. It then went on to ask participants to give additional feedback, such as what they liked or disliked about the course, what they might change in terms of practice, and what new knowledge they might share with colleagues.

Below is a summary of feedback given in relation to the key learning points from each sessions.

Session 1

Subject Matter: Disability Equality; Legislation and Policy; Inclusion/ Segregation/Integration

Feedback from participants of the first training session indicated that they were made aware of the need to focus on the abilities of a disabled child, and to look pro-actively at what was possible, as opposed to first thinking about what would not be possible or what barriers existed.

Participants put emphasis on the importance of this change in perspective and attitude, and indicated that they found this enabling and empowering as childcare workers.

Equally important was the need to see the individual child, and not to remove choices or skills through assumptions. A key part of this was allowing for choice even where an element of risk occurred.

Session one also gave participants a sense of the need for inclusive policies which contained appropriate language and reinforced the above approaches.

Session 2

Subject Matter: Child Well Being and Play; Indicators of Quality in Play Childcare; Risk Assessment

Feedback from session two suggested that the key learning points for participants were primarily around allowing children to participate in the identification of risk, and giving children a voice in relation to their play environment.

Participants stated that it is important to let children explore for themselves, and to say what they like and dislike. The importance of risk taking in child development was emphasised.

Session 3

Subject Matter: Exploring Current Policy and Planning for Change

Participants in session three learned the importance of up to date, appropriate policies for their childcare service to reinforce good practice.

The need to be aware of the constant changes in policies generally and the need to reflect these changes at local level were mentioned, as was the need for inclusive language and practice to be recorded.

Participation by all parties in policy development, including children and adults, was also reinforced.

Session 4

Subject Matter: Key Elements of Inclusive Practice

Session 4 gave participants a very clear sense of the need to build positive relationships with all children and their families.

Details referred to included the need to use positive greetings, and using the name of the child at all times. The SPLICE programme was referred to as a positive tool, and a description of SPLICE can be found as Appendix 5 in this document.

Session 5

Subject Matter: Building Relationships to promote inclusion

Participants of session 5 indicated that they had learned the importance of team work in developing positive relationships with children and parents, and in the general development of their service. This included recognition of strengths and weaknesses within the team and action planning.

Advertising the services in an inclusive manner, and the practicalities of developing promotional materials was also an important learning point for participants.

Having given feedback on their key learning points from each session, participants were asked a number of specific questions. These questions and their responses are outlined below.

What was the best thing about this Training?

Participants had many positive things to say about the training. Most went away with a whole new understanding of the area of inclusion and disability, and saw children with disabilities in a whole new light. They sited this change of attitude and understanding generally as vitally important.

Some stated that the awareness of effective policies, and the understanding of how to create them as very valuable. Others felt that the practical exercises and the concrete learning that happened was very important.

Team work within the course, and the sharing of knowledge and experience was also cited as one of the best things about the training programme.

What was the worst thing about undertaking this training?

In the aftermath of the course, negative participant feedback mainly focused around organisational aspects of the training, rather than content. One participant found the time commitment difficult, while a number were unsatisfied with the standard of food available for lunch at the venue.

Some participants also felt that one fellow participant was permitted to dominate the discussions, and that the ground rules had been consistently broken in this regard.

Was there anything you would have liked to have done differently?

The main difference participants felt could have been made was that the course could have been more condensed and done over fewer sessions. While suggestions were made to have more input from people with disabilities, and to have hard copy notes in advance of the sessions.

How will the learning from this course change your practice/work?

Participants said that they would be more aware of the need to be inclusive, and to pass this learning on to their colleagues. They listed many different aspects of their services in which they intended to have an impact, including organising events, building positive relationships with children and families, and advertising their service.

How will you share what you have learned from this course with colleagues?

Participants listed a number of methods by which they would pass on the information they had learned, including at staff and subgroup meetings, by amending policies and procedures, in handbooks and newsletters, and by presenting the slides used by the tutor during the course.

What more do you need to support the development of inclusive policy and practice in your work?

A range of suggestions were also made in terms of further support needed, including information and learning about specific disabilities, follow up courses with up to date information, and possibly a site visit from DESSA to advise on policy and practice.

Please tell us anything else you would like us to know about your experience of participating in this training course:

Participants really enjoyed the course, and found it very informative and enlightening. They gave very positive feedback on the tutor, and her style of delivery. They felt that the course was practical and allowed them to go back and make changes in their services. Feedback in this section was very much in relation to how positive an experience attending the course was, and that they would very much like to attend future courses which extended their knowledge base in this way.

Training Impact Evaluation

Of the six Family Resource Centres who attended the Childcare Inclusion Training Programme, four were visited by the independent evaluator, one gave feedback by completing the questionnaire and returning it through email, while the sixth family resource centre has since ceased to operate.

Of the five FRCs participating in the evaluation, two are undergoing major renovation under the EOCP grant funding and were not currently operational. They were however able to participate fully in the evaluation by relating their learning to the development of their new services and the planning of their new facilities.

Below is a summary of the interviews conducted and changes recorded as a result of the training received.

Policy and Inclusion

Of the five FRCs participating in the evaluation, four currently have children with disabilities registered with their service, while all five have amended their policies to reflect their learning from the training. This was either in the form of developing a new policy specifically on inclusion, or by amending existing policies to ensure they are inclusive by their nature.

All five gave clear statements about the benefits of including children with disabilities in their childcare services. These can be summarised as:

- Inclusion would mean that children with disabilities are seen as much a part of the community as any other child.
- Inclusion is better for all children as it normalises difference, and enables children with disabilities to move on into mainstream education.
- Other children learn acceptance and tolerance, and removes stigma.
- All parents are encouraged that the service is inclusive.
- Inclusion promotes awareness and understanding for all who attend the service.

Challenges and Barriers to Inclusion

The main challenge for FRC based childcare services to be inclusive was one of resources. While they have children with disabilities registered with and attending their services, they saw a lack of resources for specialist assistance as a significant barrier. Some of the aspects of the services impacted upon due to lack of resources mentioned by staff were:

- The need for extra support and backup, depending on the nature of the disability (such as Special Needs Assistants, appropriate toys etc)
- The ability to completely evacuate the building in case of a fire
- The ability to give all children the attention they need, i.e. time constraints

Despite these perceived barriers, no service had turned a disabled child away from their service since attending the training. They state very clearly when asked that all children are welcome in their service, and that they would adopt a proactive approach to ensuring all children were catered for. In this sense, the staff were aware of the need for the service to change and adapt to meet the needs of every child.

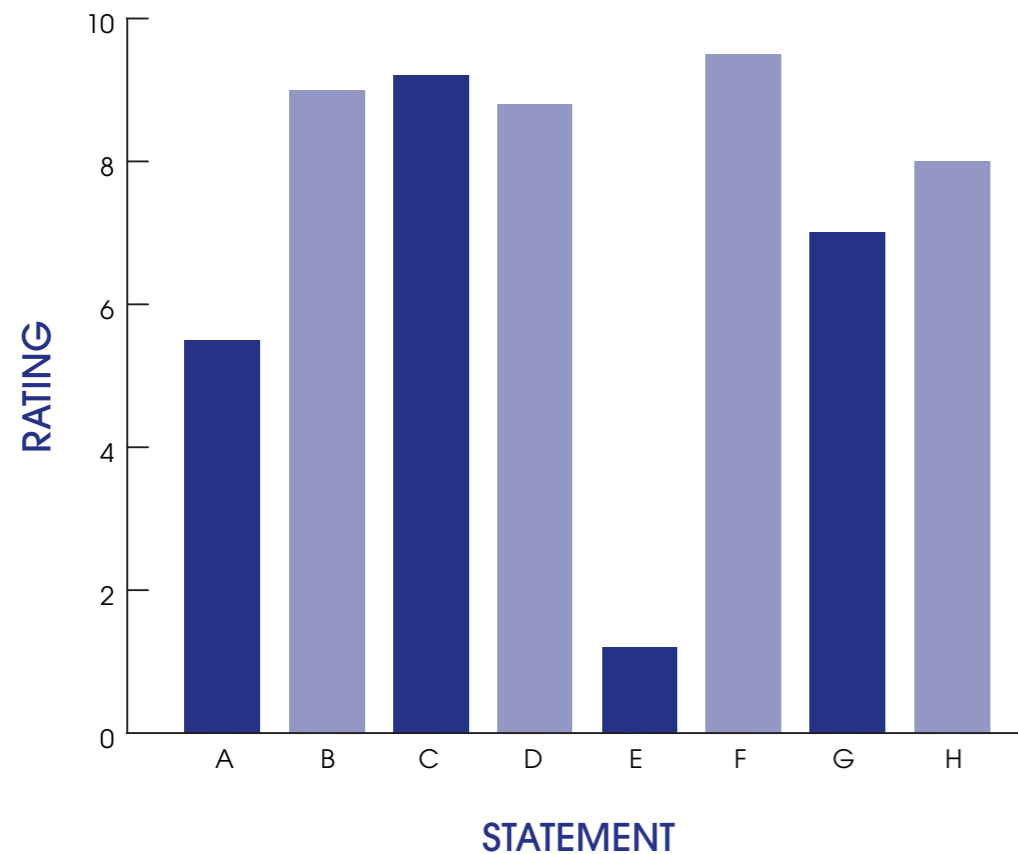
Impact of the Training on the Service

All of the staff who attended the training had passed the information and knowledge they had gained on to others in their services, including colleagues, managers and co-ordinators, and management committee members. The two services which are currently being redeveloped had used their learning to inform the development of their new services, from policy development to the physical planning of the facility. Other services had also amended policies, or developed new policies, had changed the physical layout of their rooms, and had changed the structure and method of their activities. Other one off changes included the addition of a disabled car park space, the production of leaflets which advertise the service as fully inclusive, the purchasing of new toys and resources and a change in the handbook for parents.

Service Self Assessment

The final page of the questionnaire used with the four childcare services interviewed was a self assessment survey which asked participants to gauge their responses to a set of questions relating to the inclusion of children with disabilities in their services. In each instance they were asked to agree or disagree on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being disagree strongly, and 10 being agree strongly.

The following graph shows the average result of their responses.



Key to Statements

- A** To include a disabled child in my service, I undertook substantial changes in the layout and organisation of my service.
- B** I have a policy on inclusion and it means that my service and all my policies are inclusive.
- C** The policies I created can have a significant impact on children’s potential to participate in my service.
- D** I update myself & staff regularly in the correct language to use in conversation & on notice boards to ensure no person is inadvertently offended.

- E** Including disabled children in my service has meant a lot more work and my staff don’t have the time.
- F** I have advertised that my service welcomes disabled children.
- G** Regular monitoring & evaluation of my service is conducted
- H** I regularly network with other similar services to share information, support and advice with other similar services to share information, support and advice

Summary

Overall, the impact of the training was very evident. The most significant impact of the training seemed to be in the attitudes and approaches of those who attended. The awareness raising aspect of the training has been very significant, with one participant referring to the training as “enlightening”, while another called it a “wake up call”. Others stated that they now realised how easy it is to accommodate children with disabilities in their services, and how important it is for children with disabilities to have a sense of their independence.

Participants also stated that it gave them a renewed confidence in their abilities and made them realise that they were capable and comfortable in their work with children with disabilities.

All participants stated that they really enjoyed the training, that it has had, and will continue to have a big impact on their services, and how they as individuals carry out their work. The services they represent would like all their staff to access the training, as well as receive follow up training which included information on specific disabilities.

A stylized illustration of a hand with a prosthetic arm. The hand is rendered in various shades of blue and purple, with a thick black outline. The fingers are spread, and the prosthetic part of the arm is visible. The background is a dark blue gradient with some lighter blue shapes.

Family Support and Inclusion Network (FSIN)

The Family Support and Inclusion Network is a group of parents of children with disabilities in West Cork and South Kerry, and has been established as the Parents Peer Support Network element of the Community Inclusion Initiative.

Evaluation Framework

The evaluation of the FSIN was conducted through a review of materials produced by the network and consultations with key stakeholders.

Review of Materials

Materials reviewed for the evaluation included publicity materials for the network, and a DVD produced by the network.

Consultations

The consultations consisted of a focus group with the parents engaged in the network and an interview with the facilitator of the network.

Review of Materials

Publicity materials for the FSIN show that a lot of work has gone into the development the group, and that its initial growth has involved clearly defining the purpose of the group and how it would meet this purpose.

A publicity pamphlet designed by the group clearly advertises the network as a community inclusion group in West Cork and South Kerry. The fact that the network is led by parents is clearly stated, as are the hopes and aspirations of the group. The pamphlet asks parents if they would like to meet with other parents who are working to support their children's needs, and provides contact details.

The pamphlet states that the network aims to “develop our children’s potential through securing adequate resources and by supporting each other”. They state that they are striving to “create a society where our children and their families are accepted, treated equally and have the right to services and supports, enabling them to meaningful and fulfilling lives”.

The group has a very clear mission printed on its materials, which is:

The mission of the Family Support and Inclusion Network is to:

- Combat exclusion experienced by families whose children’s needs have not been met
- Create a truly inclusive society in which our children grow and become equal citizens
- Create opportunities for our children to participate to the fullest extent in Irish society

We do this by consulting with and responding to the specific needs of families by organising clinics and guest speakers, having coffee mornings, exchanging information, creating a library of resources and providing training.

Also outlined are a set of broad strategies for how this mission will be delivered:

- Information provision and exchange, and support for parents
- Education and awareness raising
- Delivery of services as appropriate

The pamphlet then goes on to describe exactly what the parents in the network define as social inclusion. This is outlined as:

- Meaningful job
- Independence
- Happiness
- Real participation
- Have opportunities and choices
- Develop positive organisation
- Support structures
- Changing perceptions
- Community welcoming

A DVD about the FSIN has also been produced by the Caha Centre which features parents who are participating in the FSIN and provides information on what the group does.

In the DVD, parents talk about the fact that they did not know each other before the group began, and that they had felt isolated as parents of children with disabilities. The group provided an opportunity to get together with people who were in a similar situation, and to get support and information.

The parents featured speak very clearly about the benefits of the group, both to themselves and their children. They feel that their activity in the group has enabled them to provide awareness and education in the community, and therefore made it more possible for their children to be socially included.

They give examples of events they have organised and attended which have given them the information and skills to support their children’s development. They say that they have been able to impact on services, and in some cases deliver the service or programme themselves, in a way which has meant their children have access to things they might ordinarily have had to wait several years for.

Parents say that the FSIN has been “empowering”, and had “changed our lives”.

Below is a sample of some of the comments made by parents in the DVD about the FSIN:

- The group was great support and help
- It was fantastic to think that there was people with similar issues in the local area
- This group has given me that bit of support and has given me valued information that I needed for my child to help her along her way
- Only for the group I would be lost
- You can lift up the telephone and talk to other people in the group that you know has gone through things like you to discuss issues
- The group is a great benefit to the community
- We have great social mornings
- We have formed links with other organisations
- As parents we feel like we have more power to do other things
- We feel we have a role
- Every parent in the group has really invested time and effort because they know how relevant our activities are to our children and the benefits are direct
- Quiet enjoyable and we can also bring our children along as well
- More confident as people and a lot happier with the situation
- We have put in place measures that are necessary
- It's been a really empowering thing to do
- It has changed our lives
- It has been a huge benefit
- Another social aspects to my life which is brilliant
- With our group we have been able to access and do other things
- It is important that we keep going the way we are going
- When we reflect over the past year with the group, we would be in a very different situation without the group
- The group has been a huge benefit

Consultations

The consultations to a large degree mirrored the information provided in the DVD. Parents were very open in their feedback, the difficulties they have faced and the impact of the FSIN for them.

They said that they had not known each other before they had joined the group, and that once they had joined, they found great comfort in talking and sharing with other parents who were experiencing similar barriers in accessing services and social opportunities for their children.

The group has organised a number of events to date. This has empowered the parents both as individuals and as a group. The parents all say that they have learned and developed in themselves as a result of this activity, and of having to research options, contact various agencies and individuals, plan venues and make events happen. Some of the events have had an international aspect. Events the group has organised include:

- Early Intervention Clinic
- Downs Aid Visit (from Portsmouth UK)
- Neuro-Developmentology Clinic
- Computer Classes
- Five Ways to Empower Your Child Workshop
- CEO Downs Syndrome Ireland Visit
- Right of Children in School in the EU Talk

Most parents talk of the group as being important because of the support they are able to give and receive. They ring each other when having a bad day and need someone to talk to, when they are facing a particular barrier for their child, and when they are about to engage with an agency to talk over their approach and get advice and guidance.

For this reason, parents say that they are a lot more confident in dealing with agencies.

The group has also been proactive in designing and making their own resources for their children. They are able to share ideas, develop teaching and learning tools and use the learning from talks and workshops they have attended. The computer class has proved useful for this reason.

The parents say that participating in the FSIN has been “very empowering”, and that they feel like they are a “pioneering” group. They say that being empowered brings conflict with agencies and state bodies in representing their children, and used the schools as an example, and that they feel “braver” in challenging the exclusion of their children as a result of the work they have done together.

Parents of children with disabilities who are not participating in the FSIN often come to those who are for advice and guidance on issues facing their children.

Having spent some time with the group during the consultation phase of the evaluation, it was clear to the evaluator that the FSIN is a very driven group.

While the group has clearly been very successful in terms of its original purpose, and the parents involved with the group are very positive about the impact it has had on their lives and the lives of their children, it also faces a number of challenges.

The group is currently made up mostly parents with Downs Syndrome children, and they are aware of the need to expand the group membership to include a wider variety of disabilities in order to avoid the group be perceived as a Downs Syndrome support group.

There are a number of parents in West Cork and South Kerry who would like to be able to attend the FSIN, but are unable to because the distances they need to travel to access the group. Other parents are unable to attend because of difficulties accessing childcare while the group meets.

Work commitments also mean that some parents cannot attend. The current members of the group say that this is particularly true of fathers, as they

are often at work when they group meets, usually in the farming and fishing industries. As a result the group is made up almost entirely of mothers. This extends to the care of their children generally according to group members, as work commitments for fathers mean that caring responsibilities fall to the mothers.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for the group is in changing the prevailing attitudes in their community. According to the group, the community has a high level of acceptance of children with disabilities, but a very low level of expectation. They say that the work of the group in challenging this has become so broad and time consuming, that a full time worker is needed to support the group and work on initiatives which promote full inclusion.

The FSIN has now applied for funding under the Credit Union Community Chest Grant for its “Project Together Now 2009”, in which it proposes to create a resource library of books and equipment for parents of children with disabilities, provide targeted courses and workshops, organise recreational activities and the engagement of an Education Liaison Officer to enable better communication between parents and schools.

The group now feels that it needs to devise aims and objectives and funding for next year, and has some clear ideas on the future work of group. These include addressing inclusion in the community, legislation workshops and an education liaison officer.

Summary

Overall, the FSIN has been a great success for those for whom the initiative was intended to have an impact, the parents of children with disabilities.

The parents have found the group to be an excellent support mechanism, and this has had a tangible impact on their lives and the lives of their children. The group has given an outlet for the frustrations of parents of children with disabilities, and offered direction in their struggle for the inclusion of their children. The parents attending the group have achieved

a great sense of empowerment as a result of their involvement and achievements, and are more confident about challenging exclusion as a result.

The FSIN has a strong sense of its own development and the direction it needs to take in the future. In order to achieve this, continued support is crucial, with resources made available to enable the group to grow, and to have an increasing impact on the inclusion of children with disabilities in their community.

Community Inclusion Initiative

Introduction

As outlined at the beginning of the report, the Community Inclusion Initiative aimed to establish a peer support structure for parents of children with disabilities and to develop a model of good practice for the inclusion of children with disabilities within community-based childcare and play settings which contribute to the overall mainstreaming of children with disabilities within their communities.

This entailed the following elements:

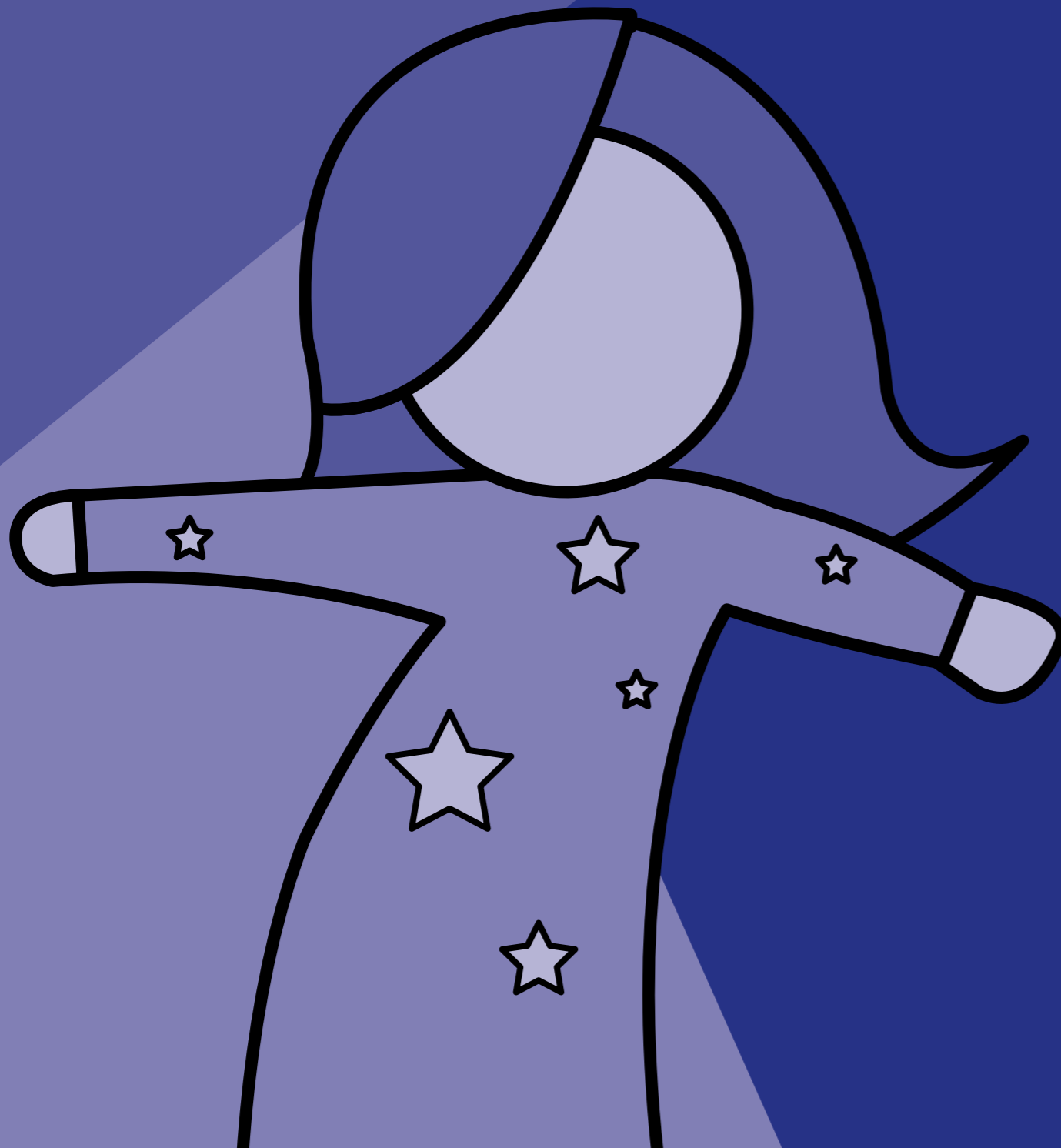
- Establishment of a Parents Peer Support Network
- Audit of existing childcare and play within FRC's provision vis a vis the participation of children with disabilities
- Delivery of Inclusive Play and Policy Training within an Equality Framework for FRC staff and volunteers
- Delivery of '5 Ways to Empower your Child' Training to parents.

Of the four elements outlined above, three have been delivered successfully, while the audit of childcare provision has yet to be undertaken.

Evaluation Framework

In evaluating the potential of the overall Community Inclusion Initiative to become a community development mainstreaming strategy, the results of the specific evaluation of its two main components, the Childcare Inclusive Training Programme and the Family Support and Inclusion Network, are coupled with consultations with a number of key agencies active in West Cork and South Kerry on issues relating to disability specifically and social inclusion generally.

The results of the evaluation of the two main components are outlined above. The following section will address the results of the consultations with the key agencies. Included in this will be a review of the partnership element of the Community Inclusion Initiative.



Partnership Approach

A key part of the Community Inclusion Initiative has been the partnership element of the initiative. The Caha Centre, as a Family Resource Centre, is tasked specifically with engaging and supporting people with disabilities and their families as part of its work programme. This work includes disabilities of any kind, including physical, intellectual and learning disabilities.

The approach of the Caha Centre is in line with the social model of disability. This model asserts that it is society that disables people with impairments by the way in which it is organised and by the conventions and priorities it displays, and that disability is a direct consequence of people's attitudes and the way things are organised. The focus therefore is not on rehabilitating the individual with a disability, but on rehabilitating society and the environment, in order to make it accessible and create inclusion for the person with a disability.

In doing this work, they identified a local need and sought the support of a specialist agency, namely the Disability Equality Specialist Support Agency (DESSA), funded by a number of national agencies (including the Family Support Agency) to develop and deliver social inclusion initiatives to people with disabilities and their families.

The drive and commitment of a local community based organisation in partnership with the expertise and resources of a national agency has been paramount to the initiative's success. This direct support by a specialist agency has allowed a Family Resource Centre to respond to local needs in a specific, relevant and appropriate way.

Consultations

The consultations consisted of one-to-one and telephone interviews with the following agencies:

- Kerry County Childcare Committee
- Cork County Childcare Committee
- West Cork Community Partnership
- South Kerry Development Partnership
- Co-Action West Cork
- South Kerry Child Well-Being Committee
- Family Support Agency

Agencies consulted welcomed the Community Inclusion Initiative as a progressive and important advancement in the inclusion of children with disabilities in their communities. Among all, there was a consensus that the work carried out under the initiative should be broadened to include all geographical areas and all sectors in Counties Cork and Kerry. An example of this was the extending of the Childcare Inclusion Training Programme to all childcare providers, and the inclusion of the training content in FETAC standards.

A number of the agencies were working on the barriers for children with disabilities already, while others were planning to work in the area in the future.

- West Cork Community Partnership had supported an advocacy service for people with disabilities in the past, P4D, which has since ceased to operate due to a lack of resources. The area of children with disabilities will form a "huge" part of its agenda in the future and will be included in its future strategic plan.
- Both County Childcare Committees have supported and established training for childcare providers on the inclusion of children with disabilities.
- The HSE currently supports groups of parents of children with disabilities through its community work department.

- The South Kerry Child Well-Being Committee has including children with disabilities in its three year strategy, and has established a Learning Support Unit to provide educational supports to children with disabilities. It also intends to establish parent support networks.
- Co-Action West Cork delivers services and is directed by parents, and would welcome an independent voice from parents.
- South Kerry Development Partnership has done a lot of work to develop childcare services, including their approaches to children with disabilities, and would welcome a new initiative to support in this area.
- Kerry Social Inclusion Measure Group has chosen the area of disability as a priority for its work plan in 2010

Given that all the agencies consulted as part of the evaluation are involved in social inclusion generally, and the area of disability specifically, there was a very strong willingness by all to support the continuation and extension of the Community Inclusion Initiative.

This willingness to support the initiative extended to:

- Willingness to manage delivery of the programme if funding was made available
- Willingness to support a third party to deliver work by making funding available as part of a larger budget
- Ability to support another project to deliver the initiative by providing experience, information and support
- Willingness to partner up with another agency and provide resources to deliver the initiative

Given this high level of willingness to continue and expand the initiative, there is huge potential for a collaborative approach by all agencies currently working in this area to roll out the Community Inclusion Initiative in counties Cork and Kerry.

Summary

Overall, the Community Inclusion Initiative has achieved three from four of its key objectives.

- The Family Support and Inclusion Network has been established and is growing in both momentum and potential.
- The Childcare Inclusion Training Programme has delivered challenging and practical training on the inclusion of children with disabilities in childcare services to a number of FRCs.
- The “Five Way to Empower Your Child” training has been delivered to parents, who have used this learning to develop their own resources and impact on the development of their children.
- The Audit of FRC Childcare Provision has not begun, but could form part of an expanded continuation of the Community Inclusion Initiative, engaging with childcare providers outside of FRC provision, with the potential for subsequent training delivery.

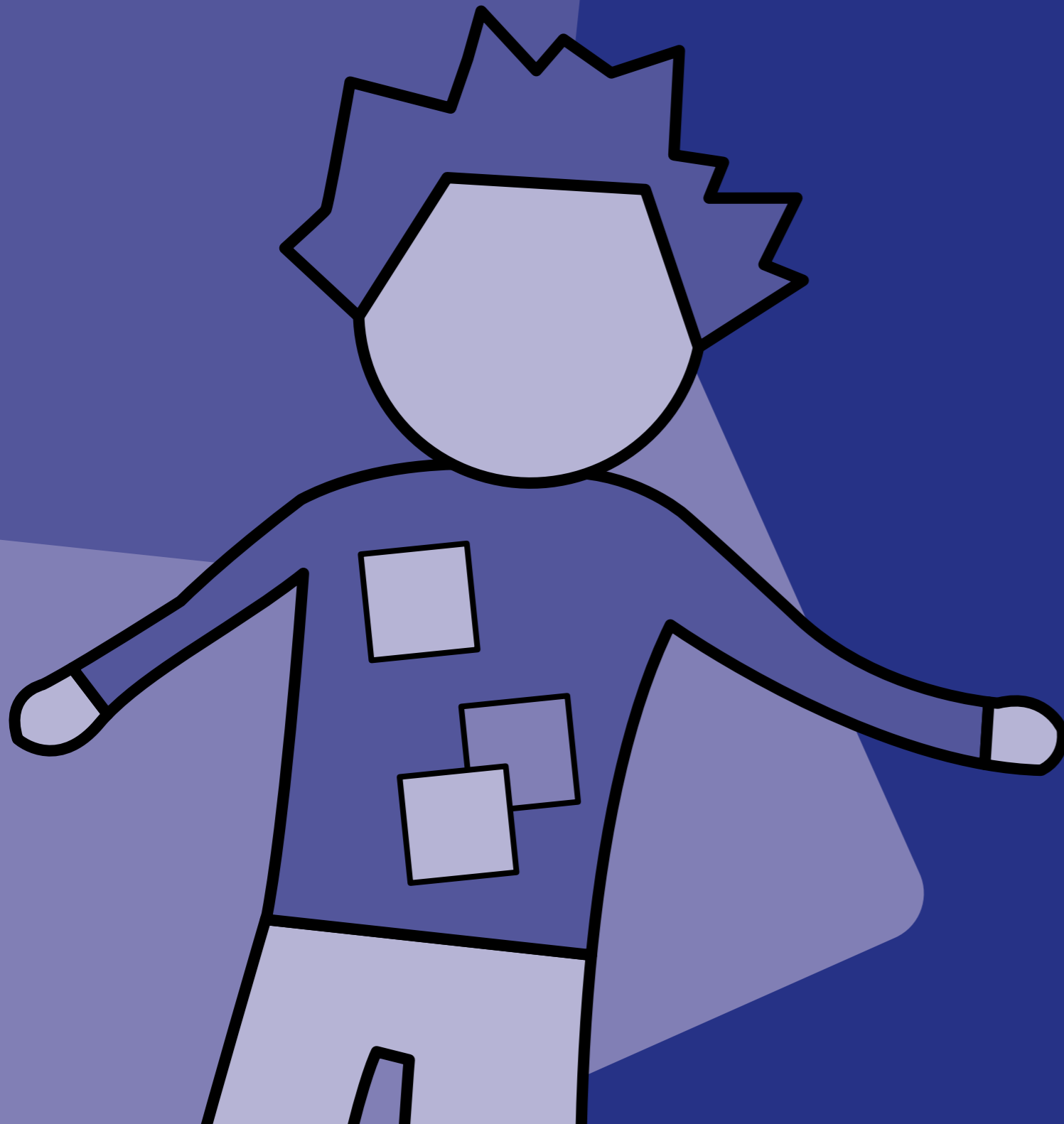
There is little doubt that both the agencies consulted and those who participated in the initiative see it as progressive, and have both a desire and a commitment to see it continue and expand.

The commitment of available resources and expertise from all the agencies in the south west, in a planned and co-ordinated partnership approach, could see the Community Inclusion Initiative become embedded as a community development strategy for the inclusion of people with disabilities in their community.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

1. The Childcare Inclusion Training Programme was very successful in challenging the current ways of working within FRC Childcare provision in West Cork and South Kerry in relation to the inclusion of children with disabilities.
 - i. Participants saw the training as progressive and as offering practical solutions to overcoming barriers to inclusion
 - ii. The training raised awareness and effected a significant change in attitude in those who attended towards children with disabilities generally, and their own role in being inclusive specifically
 - iii. The participants all stated that the training has had a significant impact on their services, from the design of buildings and room layout, to the range of resources and activities available in their service
2. The Family Support and Inclusion Network was very success in bringing parents together to impact on the inclusion of their children within their community.
 - i. The FSIN provided an excellent support mechanism for parents of children with disabilities
 - ii. The FSIN has been very empowering for parents and has motivated them to civic activism
 - iii. The work of the parents attending the FSIN has had a significant impact on their children's development
 - iv. The work of the FSIN has begun to have a positive impact on the perception of children with disabilities in the wider community



3. The Community Inclusion Initiative has proved itself to be a progressive and successful initiative in establishing models of good practice for the inclusion of children with disabilities in their community.
 - i. The Community Inclusion Initiative has provided tangible and direct outcomes for both children with disabilities and their parents
 - ii. The Community Inclusion Initiative has had a practical and long term impact on childcare provision within FRCs in West Cork and South Kerry
 - iii. The Community Inclusion Initiative has used effective partnership working to address local need with the support of national expertise
 - iv. As a result of the Community Inclusion Initiative, the lead partner, the Caha Centre, has seen an increase in the number of families of children with disabilities accessing mainstream services within the centre.

Recommendations

1. The Childcare Inclusion Training Programme is offered to all childcare providers in counties Cork and Kerry.
2. The existing FSIN is offered continued support both in financial and human resource terms, while similar groups are established and supported in other geographical areas across the region, with a regional network of FSIN considered.
3. A regional agency partnership is established to design and deliver the roll-out of the Community Inclusion Initiative across counties Cork and Kerry through a mutually agreed Lead Agency.
4. Existing resources under social inclusion headings for the area of disability are committed, including finances, human resource and expertise.

