



DESSA

ANNUAL REPORT

2009

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Chairperson's Address

Since its establishment in 2001 DESSA has successfully supported the inclusion of disabled people in Irish society through community development activity. DESSA continues to fulfil its brief, namely, to enhance the capability of community development organisations, CDPs and FRCs, to develop actions and ways of working to ensure the active involvement and inclusion of people with disabilities in community life.

The 2009 Annual Report details the varied work carried out with community development organisations – CDPs and FRCs – and also outlines work with other organisations from county and city childcare committees, partnership companies to statutory agencies and local government.

2009 was a challenging year for DESSA. Given the reduced resources to the community & voluntary sector and changes within the Community Development Programme, DESSA sought to clearly identify the value and impact of its work and successfully lobbied for the continued inclusion of the organisation within the new Local & Community Development Programme.

The number of programmes and activities undertaken with CDPs and FRCs increased significantly. Innovative programmes such as the Community Inclusion Initiative, supporting families experiencing disability, was completed in the south of the country and entailed an independent evaluation of the work. A pilot Steps to Mainstreaming Participation Programme was initiated in the south east region and the innovative Parent Advocacy Programme was developed in Dublin. The first ever accredited Community Development & Advocacy course took place in the south eastern region training 11 community development practitioners on the value of advocacy as a tool of social inclusion.

Our partnership work continued to develop and in 2009 we saw new collaborations. The Parent Advocacy Programme was developed in conjunction with An Siol CDP, Stonybatter where 14 parents were trained to act as advocates for their children. Another partnership activity with Europa Donna Ireland, a patient-led advocacy group of survivors of breast cancer continues to grow. In October 2009 CDPs and FRCs nationwide engaged in Breast Health Day by organising awareness raising activities promoting breast health.

I would like to thank the staff of DESSA as well as my colleagues on the Board for their dedication to DESSA's work. Their commitment has contributed to the success of our work both with disabled people and community development organisations. I would also like to thank our funders, the Citizens Information Board, Family Support Agency, and the Departments of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs and Social & Family Affairs for their ongoing support and commitment to DESSA. Our work, in promoting the greater inclusion of disabled people in Irish life cannot be valued, promoted or encouraged enough.

Through our social inclusion work DESSA has made a real difference to the lives of individuals with disabilities. Despite the uncertainty in the Irish economy at present and the continuing challenges associated with changes within the community & voluntary sector, DESSA is now more than ever committed to playing its part in ensuring that the rights of people with disabilities to participate in their local communities are upheld. I look forward to the continued challenge of this work in 2010.

Jacqui Browne

Chairperson March 2010

About DESSA

Overview

The rationale for DESSA is to support the work of community-based organisations in learning about disability, devising strategies for including people with disabilities, implementing actions and generally striving to ensure equality for disabled people within their work and within their organisations. Established in 2001 we provide a wide range of supports, information, advocacy and technical guidance to the community & voluntary sector.

The Vision of DESSA

People with disabilities will fully participate in local community development activities.

The Mission Statement of DESSA

DESSA will pursue the active involvement and full participation of people with disabilities in society by delivering strategic supports to all elements of the Family & Community Services Resource Centre Programme and the Community Development Programme.

Key Strategies

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. These areas of action – capacity building, policy development and networking – were the key strategic objectives of the organisation in 2009;

Strategy 1: To enable, support and provide capacity building strategies within community development organisations and with people with disabilities within local communities.

Strategy 2: To undertake relevant policy development to raise awareness of disability issues within the community & voluntary sector.

Strategy 3: To build sustainable alliances within the community & voluntary and disability sectors, working in partnership towards the inclusion of people with disabilities.

Our Year at a Glance

- Supporting 8 FRCs and 9 CDPs in the implementation of the **Steps to Mainstream Participation Framework** facilitating 266 people with disabilities participating since 2005
- Completion of commissioned evaluation of the Steps to Mainstream Participation Framework
- Delivery of a **representative advocacy** service to 170 people in the south east region¹
- Design and accreditation and delivery of the training course **Community Development & Advocacy** to 5 FRCs and 3 CDPs in the south east region
- Agreed plan to deliver the Community Development & Advocacy course to 22 FRCs in conjunction with the FRC Eastern Region Forum in January 2010
- Completion of the **Community Inclusion Initiative** in South Kerry and West Cork including the delivery of advocacy training to the Family Support & Inclusion Network
- Completion of independent evaluation of the Community Inclusion Initiative
- Participation of 8 FRCs and 6 CDPs in the celebration of **Breast Health Day** in conjunction with Europa Donna Ireland
- Supporting the development of a model of good practise for the inclusion of disabled children in **Doras Bui CDP** through the **Family Wall Project**
- Participation in EDeNn, the **Equality and Diversity Early Childhood National Network**
- Design and delivery of a **Parents Advocacy Programme** in conjunction with **An Siol CDP**, Dublin
- Submission of position papers '*Promoting the equality and social inclusion of disabled people in Ireland: DESSA, Disability and Community Development*' to the Departments of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs and Social & Family Affairs
- Facilitation of **Sligo Partnership's Disability Network** which promotes access and inclusion for disabled people through Sligo CDPs and FRCs
- Documentation of work with Sligo Partnership as a model of future work within the Local & Community Development Programme.

¹ Funded by CIB under the Community & Voluntary Sector Advocacy Programme for People with Disabilities

Our Strategic Vision

Following a review of our work in 2009, DESSA, identified the need to develop supports in three key areas - Advocacy, Mainstreaming Participation and Supporting Families – thus enabling people with disabilities live fuller and active lives and participate on an equal basis in Irish society. DESSA continues to use capacity building, policy development and networking as the way in which to implement these new strategies.

To date, DESSA has provided information; guidance and practical support to CDPs and FRCs enabling these organisations address both disabled people's specific needs, and wider social issues of discrimination and exclusion. This section details how DESSA and community development organisations nationwide have worked together to develop innovative social inclusion programmes that support the equal and active participation of people with disabilities in Irish life.

Advocacy

The need for advocacy for and by people with disabilities is reflected in the Comhairle Act 2000 and the Comhairle Amendment Act 2004 as part of the National Disability Strategy.

In 2007 DESSA successfully accessed funding support from the Citizen's Information Board (CIB) through its Community & Voluntary Sector Advocacy Programme to develop the Community Advocacy Project (CAP). The aim of CAP is to use the Family Resource Centre (FRC) model as a means of providing an independent representative advocacy service to people with disabilities and their families within the south-east region. In 2009 this initiative was extended to CDPs in the south east region.

DESSA defines advocacy as a process that involves supporting, enabling and empowering vulnerable persons to access their rights and entitlements in a safe environment based on confidentiality, trust and respect (DESSA Advocacy Position Paper, 2009).

Since 2008 this project has supported 170 disabled people and their families in accessing an independent, professional and inclusive advocacy service within their local communities (DESSA Annual Reports to CIB). The Community Advocacy Project does not have a specific target group based on disability type but is inclusive of all disabled members of the community. To date, however, the majority of service users supported are individuals experiencing mental health difficulties. The nature of the caseload is varied however a significant element of the work of the Advocate has been in the area of social welfare issues followed closely by requests for support in accessing appropriate health services.

Assistance surrounding cases relating to housing and education has also been sought.

A key aspect of this work has been the development of a training programme 'Community Development & Advocacy', accredited by Sligo IT, to support staff and volunteers of community development organisations to gain an understanding of advocacy as an effective tool of social inclusion. In 2009 11 community development practitioners from 9 FRCs and CDPs undertook this training.

Mainstreaming Participation

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 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.

STEPS Programme

The Steps to Mainstreaming Participation Framework (Steps) is a programme supported by the Departments of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs and Social and Family Affairs and the Citizens' Information Board (CIB). Introduced in 2005, Steps is a framework which is based on the principle of activation of individuals and groups in specific geographical locations and the promotion of greater participation by both people with disabilities and CDP project staff, in promoting the awareness of the rights of people with disabilities. It aims to enable disabled people to develop the skills, experience and confidence they need to engage actively with and participate in their communities and access mainstream opportunities in training, education and employment.

Through the various elements of the framework Steps works to:

- 1 increase disabled people's participation in public, civic and community life by delivering strategic supports (training, networking, advocacy and mentoring) at local level through local community development organisations
- 2 provide those local community development organisations with the capacity and supports necessary to co-ordinate the programme at local level.

The elements of the Steps programme are:

- 1 a series of training programmes designed to introduce disabled people to their local community and develop practical skills to enable participation
- 2 the development of advocacy and mentoring supports enabling disabled people achieve personal life goals within a mainstream community development context
- 3 capacity building among community development practitioners in disability equality
- 4 the development of a model of mainstreaming (See Figure 1).

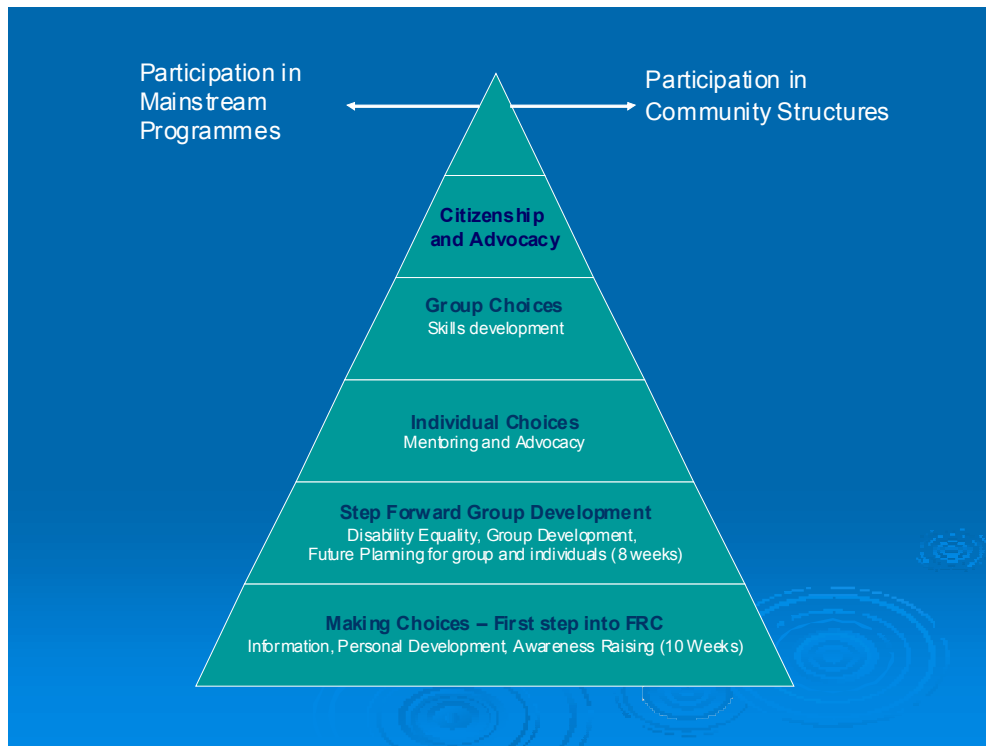


Figure 1: Steps to Mainstreaming Participation Framework

In 2009 DESSA supported 8 FRCs⁽²⁾ and 9 CDPs⁽³⁾ in the implementation of the Steps to Mainstream Participation Framework, facilitating 266 people with disabilities participating in their local communities since the programme began in 2005.

In 2009 an independent evaluation was completed of the Steps to Mainstreaming Framework which had been implemented in the West, Mid West and North Western regions

² Ballina FRC, Breffni FRC, Tubercurry FRC, Loughrea FRC, Hospital FRC, Southhill FRC, NA Calai FRC and Raphoe FRC.

³ Tuam CDP, Na Calai CDP, Ballybane CDP, Galway; East Clare CDP, Clare; Lady of Lourdes and West Limerick CDP, Abbeyfeale, Limerick; Cosgallen CDP, Mayo; North Leitrim Women's Resource Group, Manorhamilton, Leitrim; and Northside CDP, Sligo .

of the country. The evaluation found that local CDPs and FRCs have had considerable success in reaching out to include and involve people with disabilities and their families in remote rural areas, villages and in disadvantaged city housing estates. With relatively small grants, community development organisations have brought an estimated 100 persons into contact with mainstream services through specially adapted courses which accommodated their circumstances. While a small number went on to further education or a job, the majority of participants wanted more time and more exposure to opportunities outside their homes. Social and personal isolation was identified in the evaluation as a strong sentiment among participants with disabilities and support staff.

Steps Programme Pilot in South East region

A pilot Steps Programme was initiated in the south east region in 2009. The objective of this pilot is to implement the programme and develop guidance documents and toolkits for FRCs and CDPs who wish to undertake this work in the future. A key feature of this pilot programme is engagement with disability service providers from the programme's outset. This work will continue in 2010.

Other Mainstreaming Activities

DESSA provides technical support to the Sligo Leader Partnership mainstreaming Disability Network which promotes access to community participation through Sligo CDPs & FRCs. Alongside Sligo Leader Partnership mainstreaming Disability Network, DESSA are also facilitating a monthly bridging youth club at Northside CDP, Sligo for disabled teenagers working towards accessing their local youth clubs and is a collaboration effort with the Partnership, Foroige and North Connaught Youth Services.

DESSA and Sligo Leader Partnership have secured funding for a summer 2010 Arts Camp for disabled teenagers and their siblings and are currently working with Sligo IT Student Placement Service to design and schedule the summer camp activities.

Supporting Families experiencing disability

DESSA regards CDPs and FRCs as playing a pivotal role in developing locally based and integrated responses to the particular needs of families experiencing disability. DESSA has developed a number of social inclusion initiatives for families experiencing disability in conjunction with CDPs and FRCs. DESSA continues to focus on supporting the meaningful inclusion and equal participation of children and families experiencing disability, by providing information, advice and training to practitioners, parents and policy makers.

Community Inclusion Initiative

In 2007 DESSA developed the Community Inclusion Initiative in the South Kerry and West Cork region and the work of this project was completed in 2009. The Community Inclusion Initiative 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.

Disabled children and their families have a right to access mainstream childcare and play and leisure activities within their communities. Research has shown that participating in mainstream childcare, play and community settings, benefits children with disabilities enormously. Many children, however, have limited experiences in accessing and participating in these settings. Many children continue to attend specialist support services which can reinforce marginalisation from their communities and lead to high levels of social isolation for parents. It was within this context that the Community Inclusion Initiative was developed.

The Community Inclusion Initiative entailed the:

- 1 Establishment of a Parents Peer Support Network in the Beara Peninsula
- 2 Delivery of Inclusive Play and Policy Training within an Equality Framework for community development staff and volunteers in the south Kerry/west Cork region and the
- 3 Delivery of '5 Ways to Empower your Child' Training to parents.

This work is presently being mainstreamed through a regional Child Well-Being Strategy

which is led by the South Kerry Development Partnership and reflects a key recommendation of an independent evaluation of this work to establish a regional agency partnership to design and deliver the roll-out of the Initiative across counties Cork and Kerry.

Parent Advocacy Programme

Through our work with community groups and family support organisations, DESSA recognises that there is an ongoing need for parents of disabled children to have opportunities to meet with each other, to access appropriate information and to understand the social model of disability, as it applies to their own and their children's experiences. In addition, parents want to acquire knowledge and develop useful strategies to engage constructively on behalf of their children, when accessing health, education and support services.

To this end during 2009, DESSA embarked on a process of designing and delivering a new Parent Advocacy programme aimed at equipping parents to become effective advocates for their disabled children. Material for the programme was based in part on parent workshops which were held in 2007 and 2008 and expanded to address the needs and interests of parents as expressed through DESSA's work in this area.

An initiative was developed with An Síol CDP in Dublin 7, involving a group of parents who had set up a 'friendship club' for their children. Thirteen mothers and one father (parenting a total of fifteen children experiencing disability) opted to take part in the pilot programme which was delivered during October, November and December 2009.

It is planned to roll out this programme in conjunction with CDPS and FRCs in the south and south eastern regions in 2010.

Training and Support

EDeNn (Equality and Diversity Early Childhood National Network)

DESSA is an active participant in the EDeNn Network, which promotes equality and celebrates diversity in early childhood care and education, in both training and practice. The Network promotes the right of every child to participate as equal and active citizens in early childhood care and education settings, free from all forms of discrimination.

DESSA facilitated a training session on disability and inclusion, as part of the first ever *Diversity and Equality Training of Trainers Course in Early Childhood Care and Education*. As a result of this course which was developed and delivered by *Pavee Point*, fourteen trainers are now available to deliver a FETAC accredited training module to settings in Cavan, Clare, Cork, Donegal, Dublin, Kildare, Kilkenny, Limerick, Mayo and Waterford.

Family Wall Project

Throughout 2009, DESSA worked with nine childcare staff and the childcare manager in Doras Buí a CDP in Dublin 17, to facilitate the implementation of a family wall project. This was part of an initiative supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, through the *Equality and Diversity Early Childhood National Network*. A number of settings participated, in Dublin, Kildare, Clare, Mayo and Cork. An evaluation of the project was conducted by Dr. Matthias Urban, of the Early Childhood and Profession International Centre for Research, Studies and Development, Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg, in late 2009. Findings and outcomes from the process will be presented at a seminar in early 2010 and published in full.

Staff in Doras Buí found the family wall provided a very valuable practice tool, to promote awareness and acceptance of diversity, to encourage language development among children of all ages and to enrich parental involvement in their setting. They have decided to continue to use the family wall as key element of their work with children.

Information and Advice

Phone queries and requests for information continued to be received in 2009 from existing childcare providers and those wishing to develop services aimed at being inclusive of disabled children. *DESSA's Manual of Best Practice* is available to individuals, settings, and academic institutions, on request.

A workshop examining legislation, policy and disabled children's rights in education was delivered to the Family Support and Inclusion Network, based in the Caha Family Resource Centre, Adrigole, West Cork in July, 2009.

DESSA provided information to the National Disability Authority on potential implications for disabled children's access to early years' services, of the 'Free Pre-school Year' scheme, which was introduced by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in 2009.

Networking and Inter-agency Collaboration

Dublin City Council Play Plan Committee

DESSA represented the *Dublin City Council Disability Sub-group* on the committee which was established in 2007 to develop a play policy for Dublin city, on the basis that 'there will be tangible outcomes for individuals and society when children's play needs are met (*Consultation Paper on Play Policy, Northern Ireland*)'. The committee comprises representatives from Government Departments, the Health Service Executive and youth and early year's organisations.

Following a detailed audit of play facilities in Dublin city and a series of meetings during 2009, the committee produced a draft plan with the following objectives:

- All agencies will sign a Play Protocol to identify their commitment to ensuring the availability of quality play environments for all children in accordance with the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC);
- A Strategic Play Committee will work towards Dublin City becoming a child and play friendly city;
- A city wide co-ordinated approach will be taken to the development of good quality play opportunities in the city and defending children and young people's right to play;
- A distinct area of the city will be chosen to develop as a child friendly and play friendly area;
- Best practice nationally and internationally will be examined and evaluated.

DESSA became the first organisation to 'sign up to' the protocol formally supporting the Play Plan for Dublin City.

County & City Childcare Committees

DESSA continues to engage with County and City Childcare Committees throughout the country promoting awareness of best practice in mainstream childcare inclusion and the delivery of training supports to childcare workers.

Legal & Administrative Information

DESSA, the Disability Equality Specialist Support Agency is a company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital.

Directors	Jacqui Browne (Chairperson) Brian Miller (Treasurer) Michael Gogarty (Secretary) Martin McBride Anne Kelly Martin Kelly Kevin Stanley
Company Number	360818
Registered Office Lane, Dublin 8	Unit 3A, The Distillery Building, Fumbally Court, Fumbally
Auditors	Hayden Browne, Grafton Buildings, 34 Grafton Street, Dublin 2
Solicitors	John Gaynor & Co. Ltd, 42 – 46 Thomas Street, Dublin 8
Bankers	Ulster Bank Ireland Limited, College Green Branch P/O Box 145, 33 College Green, Dublin 2

Financial Information
