

Promoting Positive Community Attitudes

Overview

In September 2015 DESSA received funding from the Department of Justice & Equality under the Disability Awareness Grant Scheme 2015. The aim of this funding programme is to promote initiatives to support disability awareness.

The project aimed to enable people with disabilities experience social inclusion in the same way as other members of the community by creating positive attitudes among community development practitioners. Central to this aim was competency building of staff and volunteers working in Family Resource Centres¹ in understanding disability, the barriers experienced by people with disabilities and in responding to their needs in an inclusive manner.

The project had four components :

- Completion of a scoping exercise within FRCs to ascertain existing attitudes, supports and services to disability and capacity of staff and volunteers
- Development of a Social Inclusion Positive to Disability Charter for FRCs
- Delivery of regional educational information sessions about disability equality and perspectives on disability
- Creation of opportunities for volunteering and social contact between people with and without disability within FRCs;

The project was delivered in partnership with the FRC National Forum, the national representative and peer support body of Family Resource Centres (FRCs) throughout Ireland.

The original project target audience was Family Resource Centres, however this was broadened to include organisations connected to FRCs in recognition of their social inclusion work.

¹ Family Resource Centres (FRCs) are organisations involved in anti-poverty and social inclusion initiatives in their communities and have a clear focus in identifying and responding to the needs of all children and families

The main achievements of the project were

- Engagement with 34 FRCs in the completion of a scoping exercise on the capacity of staff and volunteers of FRCs in including people with disabilities and their families within FRC activity.
- Report on the findings of the scoping exercise '*Disability and Social Inclusion in FRCs: A Scoping Exercise on the Inclusion of Disabled People in Family Resource Centres*'.
- Dissemination of technical guidance documents on access and current disability policy and legislation issued to FRCs participating in the scoping exercise.
- Delivery of 8 social inclusion and disability equality workshops in Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Kildare, Kerry and Dublin.
- Development and dissemination of a **Community Inclusion Charter** and Inclusion Guidance document to 109 FRCs through Ireland and other organisations engaged in this project².
- Development of a social inclusion best practice model with youth services in Leitrim.
- Strategic direction to DESSA in responding to and meeting the future capacity requirements of FRCs and other organisations with a social inclusion remit.

² Local Development Companies, Youth Services, Childcare Committees, Advocacy and Peer Support Groups

Background

As a national community development organisation, DESSA's aim is to create a society where everyone with lived experience of disability and their families can participate equally as full citizens. Combating social exclusion and promoting equality are the foundational principles upon which DESSA stands.

DESSA believes that disabled people and their families are first and foremost members of their local communities and have the same rights as all other citizens to enjoy community life and live as they so choose.

DESSA has been working within the community & voluntary sector and with FRCs since 2003. Community development organisations like FRCs have an important role to play in advancing the active participation of disabled people within their local communities and society at large.

However, lack of knowledge, competence and understanding among community development practitioners, both staff and volunteers, can make disabled people's access to mainstream community services and opportunities difficult.

Combined with this Perceptions of people can greatly affect inclusion in their communities and their capacity to live life as equal citizens. Holding negative attitudes can lead to people maintaining a social distance from disabled people, excluding them from social networks leading to increased social isolation and exclusion.

This project, 'Promoting Positive Community Attitudes to People with Disabilities' sought to address these issues. Through the provision of training and technical guidance to FRCs and other community development organisations, DESSA attempted to challenge existing attitudes, inform & education and build capacity and skills to bring about positive change.

Project Overview

The focus of this project was on challenging and changing perceptions of people with disabilities as being in need of care and control, as recipients of supports and services to seeing people with disabilities as equal community members and as contributors to community.

Project Aim

The overall aim of the project was to enable people with disabilities experience social inclusion in the same way as other members of the community by creating positive attitudes among community development practitioners.

Creating positive attitudes means supporting FRCs to develop an understanding of disability as a human rights issue and developing an equality perspective acknowledging that all people have the same value in society and, accordingly, have a right to be accepted and treated as equal citizens.

Project Objectives

- Identify the barriers to people with disabilities participating in and contributing to FRC activities
- Develop a positive to disability/social inclusion standard to which all 109 FRCs will commit
- Enhance awareness and build the capacity and competence of community development staff and volunteers to actively include people with disabilities in the work of FRCs and develop a practical understanding of disability and social inclusion
- Create opportunities for volunteering and social contact among those with and without disabilities through FRCs

The overall planned outcome of this project was that that FRCs would be confident, competent and committed to creating real opportunities for disabled people to be actively included in and availing of community life.

