

# **Disability Equality Specialist Support Agency**



**2016 Annual Report**

**March 2017**

**Registration Number 360818**

**Charity Number CHY 16068**

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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.

2016 was a very busy year which brought both changes and challenges to the organisation and it is with great pleasure to report another year of excellent achievements and performance by DESSA.

I am delighted to report that we successfully secured funding through the Dormant Accounts Fund to pilot an innovative project called Community Inclusion, Capacity & Connection: A Community Development Approach to Local Area Co-ordination. This project, which will come to an end in 2017, entails supporting 50 people with disabilities to develop Personal Advocacy Plans supporting them to identify their needs & achieve their goals and aspirations.

Our work under the Scheme to Support National Organisations, our core funder, continued in 2016. This funding stream, managed by Pobal and issued by the **LINDA check** Department of Environment, Community & Local Government provides multi-annual funding to national organisations and has enabled DESSA to deliver frontline services and will continue until June 2019.

DESSA plays a vital in responding to the needs of disabled people and their families at a local community level. 2016 saw the continued implementation of our family support work through provision of training and advocacy to over 100 parents of children and young people with disabilities.

Another key achievement in 2016 was the implementation of the Promoting Positive Attitudes project which was funded by the Department of Justice & Equality. This project entailed the provision of disability equality training to 60 staff and volunteers of community & voluntary groups and the publication and dissemination of a Community Inclusion Charter and Inclusion Guidance document to over 150 community organisations.

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, families and community development organisations. I would also like to thank our funders, **LINDA** .....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.

*Jacqui Browne*

March 2017

## **About Us**

### **Purpose**

Our purpose is to create a society where everyone with lived experience of disability and their families can participate equally as full citizens.

### **Vision**

Our vision is that community development organisations will be inclusive of people with disabilities, creating opportunities for their full and equal participation in society.

### **Mission**

Our mission is to pursue the active involvement and full participation of people with disabilities in society by delivering strategic capacity building supports to the community development sector and disabled people.

### **Our Story**

Established in 2001 DESSA is a national community development organisation. DESSA provides a wide range of supports, information, advocacy and technical guidance to the community & voluntary sector in relation to disability and social inclusion. DESSA also engages in

front line service delivery to people with disabilities and families through a number of social inclusion programmes. DESSA has three areas of action - advocacy, mainstreaming participation and supporting families - within which support is given to individuals, families and community & voluntary organisations.

Since 2003 DESSA has been facilitating direct and local contact between community & voluntary organisations and disabled members of their communities and has developed and delivered innovative programmes such as the Childcare Inclusion Programme, the Community Advocacy Programme, the Community Inclusion Initiative, the Steps to Mainstreaming Participation Framework and the Supporting Families Social Inclusion Strategy.

DESSA is unique in developing disability specific work within a community development context by supporting people with disabilities and their families, in accessing a range of mainstream supports and services at a local community level, so they can empower themselves to make choices and have control over their own lives. Building the capacity of community organisations to include disabled people is central to their social inclusion remit.

## Accomplishments in 2016

**Provision of information and representative advocacy** support to 10 parents of disabled children and young people .

Implementation of the project, **Community Inclusion, Capacity & Connection: A Community Development Approach to Local Area Co-ordination**

- Development of Personal Advocacy Plans for 50 participants
- Delivery of mentoring support and training to 5 participants
- Provision of training in equality and mainstreaming to over 40 community development and youth organisations.
- Delivery of attitudinal and equality training to 60 staff & volunteers of community organisations.
- Delivery of disability equality attitudinal training to 6 project partner organisations.

Provision of technical support and development of **Mainstream Disability Network** in Leitrim.

Implementation of the **Empowering Parents Programme** to 83 parents in Kildare, Kerry, Galway and Donegal.

Facilitation of the **Getting Included Network** in south county Dublin involving 10 community organisations, eight disability service providers and a Local development Company.

Participation in the HSE VfM Transforming Lives Process **Working Group 3 on Effective Participation in Decision-Making**.

Implementation of the project, **Promoting Positive Attitudes**

- Development and dissemination of a Community Inclusion Charter to 150 community organisations.
- 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'*.
- Delivery of 8 social inclusion and disability equality workshops in Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Kildare, Kerry and Dublin.

## **Comment on DESSA Actions 2016**

Underpinning DESSA's strategic plan is an inclusive equality framework, setting out key strategies – advocacy, mainstreaming participation and supporting families experiencing disability– within which support is given to disabled people and community organisations thus enabling disabled people live fuller and active lives and participate on an equal basis in Irish society. Networking, capacity building and policy development were the means with which these strategies were implemented.

Strategy 1: Advocacy – To support individuals and families to self advocate in relation to their rights and to develop the capacity and understanding within community organisations of advocacy as a tool of social inclusion.

Strategy 2: Mainstreaming Participation – To support individuals to access everyday services within their communities and enable community organisations facilitate the active and equal participation of disabled people in community life.

Strategy 3: Supporting Families experiencing disability – To develop and deliver a family support model of engagement between community organisations and families.

DESSA was successful in securing continued funding under the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) from mid-2016 until mid-2019. As part of DESSA's core remit this entails the delivery of direct training, advocacy and information support services to individuals and families with lived experience of disability and to organisations supporting them.

DESSA also develops the capacity of organisations in the Community & Voluntary sector to enable people with disabilities and families to actively engage in community life. It is a social inclusion strategy, the aim of which is to provide opportunities for people with disabilities to participate fully in the social, economic and civic life of their communities. Providing capacity, informing, dispelling myths and challenging attitudes and assumptions are all part of this frontline service delivery.

## Snapshot 1 Promoting Positive Attitudes

This 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 Centres in understanding disability, the barriers experienced by people with disabilities and in responding to their needs in an inclusive manner.

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 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 project.
- 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.

The project was funded by the Department of Justice & Equality under the Disability Awareness Grant Scheme.

## Snapshot 2 A Community Development Approach to Local Area Co-ordination

**‘Community Inclusion, Capacity & Connection’** is a social change project recognising that people with disabilities are first and foremost members of their local communities, have rights, including the right to access and enjoy community life like all other community members and live life as they so choose.

This project is about supporting people to achieve, do and be in life in the ways they choose. It is about enabling and supporting people to move beyond having a presence in the community to actively participating in the community and developing leadership and collaborative roles. It is also about building the capacity of local community infrastructure.

The specific objectives of this project are

1. To support individuals with disabilities, including individuals with autism, to identify and achieve personal goals
2. To create self-sustaining peer support models
3. To strengthen individuals and families with lived experience of disability through information provision, self advocacy skills development and leadership training
4. To build the capacity of community to proactively identify, create and offer opportunities to individuals and families
5. To develop cross sector collaboration, education and understanding of inclusion work

50 individuals have been supported through this project to identify and realise their goals in life. Over 40 organisations have received disability equality training and more than 60 staff and volunteers within local community development organisations have developed the capacity and competence to create inclusive opportunities for local disabled people.

This project will be completed in 2017.

This project is funded under Measure 5 Local Area Co-ordination of the Dormant Accounts Fund

