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# Annual Report 2018

## Chairperson's Address

*Creating non-disabling communities and building capacity – this has been the focus of DESSA in 2018. Established in 2001 DESSA is about promoting disability rights in Ireland. The purpose of DESSA is to create a society where everyone with lived experience of disability and their families can participate equally as full citizens.*

*2018 was a busy year for DESSA. We continued our work in supporting families experiencing disability by training over 80 parents in self advocacy. Our interagency work with the HSE Transforming Lives process led to the publication of Ordinary Lives in Ordinary Places: Plan for Effective Participation in Decision Making. This plan supports the active engagement of people who use services in the design, delivery of monitoring of those services.*

*I am happy to report we secured funding from TUSLA for the implementation of an innovative project with Waterford Children & Young People's Services Committee called Capacity for Inclusion. This is a social justice project supporting those working in children and young people's services to develop their capacity and competence in understanding and removing the barriers to disabled children and young peoples' participation.*

*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 with disabled people, their families and the wider community & voluntary sector. In particular, I would like to welcome our new directors, Anne Colgan, Geraldine Graydon and Pat Wylie to DESSA.*

*I would also like to thank our funders, the Department of Rural and Community Development and Pobal for their ongoing support and commitment to DESSA.*

*On behalf of DESSA, I welcome the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and look forward to continuing our work in promoting and championing the rights of disabled people and families, influencing and changing community attitudes and building effective and sustainable partnerships for inclusion.*

**Jacqui Browne Chairperson**  
**April 2019**

## About Us

### Vision Statement

Ireland is an inclusive and non-disabling society, a place where disabled people can fully participate, contribute and achieve their goals and aspirations.

### Mission Statement

To pursue the active involvement and full participation of disabled people in society by creating inclusive and non-disabling communities. We do this by delivering strategic capacity building supports to the community & voluntary sector and to disabled people and their families.

### Our History

Established in 2001 DESSA is a national community development organisation and is unique in developing disability specific work within a community development context. DESSA is about promoting disability rights in Ireland, creating a society where everyone with lived experience of disability and their families can participate equally as full citizens. We do this by to eliminating barriers to enable disabled people to reach their potential and participate fully in their community.

DESSA's core remit 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 works to develop the capacity of organisations in the Community & Voluntary sector to create non-disabling communities.

## 2018 Achievements – Year at a Glance

Delivery of Inclusive Policy and Practice training to 22 staff in children and young people's services through the **Capacity for Inclusion** project in partnership with Waterford Children & Young People's Services Committee

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

Dissemination of information about work, education and training activities, and the **delivery of talks, presentations and programmes** to over 500 individuals and families experiencing disability, FRCs, LDCs, disability service organisations and parent peer support groups

Participation in the HSE VfM Transforming Lives Process Working Group 3 on Effective Participation in Decision-Making and publication of **Ordinary Lives in Ordinary Places: Plan for Effective Participation in Decision Making, 2018**

Facilitation of the **Getting Included Network** in south county Dublin involving 10 community organisations, eight disability service providers in partnership with South County Dublin Local Development Company

Delivery of advocacy skills training through the **Empowering Parents Programme** to 85 parents in Kerry and Dublin

**Facilitation and advocacy support** to Sligo Parents & Guardians Cregg Services and Kerry St. John of God's Family Representative Group

## Our Strategies

The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, which was ratified by Ireland in March, 2018 is the framework within which DESSA implements its goals and objectives.

Implementation of all DESSA actions is guided by a set of principles which is concerned with building positive relationships and partnerships between disabled people, their families and community.

These principles are Human Rights; Social Justice & Equality; Empowerment; Inclusion; and Respect.

### Goals

#### **Goal 1 Best Practice Advocacy**

Promoting and championing the rights of disabled people and families through strong advocacy

#### **Goal 2 Community Engagement and Social Inclusion**

Influencing community attitudes and awareness and increasing organisational capacity and competence

#### **Goal 3 Partnership and Collaboration**

Building effective and sustainable partnerships for inclusion

#### **Goal 4 Strong Accountable Governance & Management**

Improving systems and processes of governance, transparency & accountability

# Snapshots of DESSA Work

## Capacity for Inclusion

Funded by Tusla under the QCBI fund, this partnership initiative with Waterford Children & Young People's Service Committee is about building inclusive communities in which all children and young people are enabled to realise their civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights.

The project entails:

- Supporting staff in agencies working with children and young people in developing their understanding and skills of inclusion and disability equality through the delivery of accredited Level 7 training and
- Developing an Inclusion Policy Framework to address disability issues and guide the development of best practice measures.

### Key Messages

- Disability is a human rights issue to be mainstreamed into all programmes for children and young people.
- All people who work with or on behalf of children must become informed about disability as a human rights issue, and understand the social model perspective which focuses on barriers posed to persons with impairments by their environment, rather than their bodily impairment.
- Agencies must proactively involve and enable disabled children and young people to be heard in service planning, delivery and review.

# Snapshots of DESSA Work

## Empowering Parents

Supporting parents to acquire the knowledge and skills to effectively advocate on behalf of their children.

Empowering Parents is a six week course which aims to encourage parents to think differently about their child's disability, to see new possibilities and adopt new approaches in realising their children's rights. It also aims to enable parents to get the most from public services and access supports within their local community, by building their confidence and advocacy skills.

In 2018 over 80 parents across Ireland participated in the DESSA advocacy programme Empowering Parents. To date over 1,000 parents have engaged in this programme. DESSA delivers the programme in partnership with a range of organisations including ETBs, disability services, local development companies, family resource centres and advocacy organisations. DESSA currently has a service level agreement with Kerry ETB to deliver three programmes in Kerry annually.

### Key Messages

- Inclusion benefits all children and families.
- Access to a childcare or play setting is a right for all children.
- Parents of children with impairments are the natural advocates for their children.
- Parents need support to better articulate their concerns about the inclusion of their children and feel more confident about being able to overcome barriers created by disability.

