

When you think about accessibility within your organisation and community you need to think about:

- **How do you let people know what is going on in your centre?** Do you provide information in alternative formats (in large print, on tape, in Braille) as well as in ordinary print? Do you use a sans serif font (like this one, without “tails” on the letters, e.g. Arial) at least 12 point in size? Do you use matt paper (glossy paper is harder to read)?
- **Do you provide disability awareness/equality training for your staff and volunteers?** Are they all aware of the accessibility features of your premises and services?
- **Do disabled people know that they are welcome to join in your organisation’s activities?** When they come to you, do you ask about their needs? How do you facilitate them?
- **When you are planning activities and services, do you think about how people with disabilities can participate?**
- **When you hold meetings, do you make sure that deaf and hard-of-hearing people can join in?**
- **Do you make sure that the language you use and the pace of meetings don’t exclude people with intellectual disabilities?**
- **How effective is your consultation with disabled people?** How could it be improved? Do local disabled people have any unmet needs that your organisation might be able to address?

Mainstreaming

This is the process by which your organisation ensures that disabled people can fully participate and be supported to do so within any type of structure or services intended for the general public. Mainstreaming disability into inclusive community development is the process of assessing the implications for disabled people of any planned action, policy or programme. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of disabled people an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of your work so they can benefit equally and that inequality is not perpetuated.

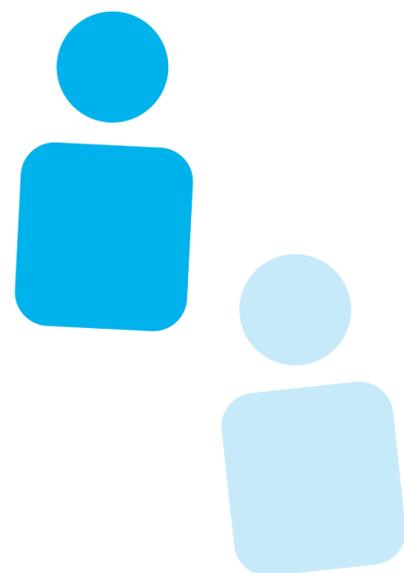
Mainstreaming needs to be accompanied by specific measures to ensure equality of opportunity, such as disability proofing so that people can enjoy their rights.

Disability Proofing

This is the term given to the practice of checking whether policies and practices adequately address the needs of disabled people. It is important to consider the impact of any policy or practice on disabled people and to ensure your organisation does not inadvertently create barriers that prevents people’s participation.

Disability equality proofing is a basic tool of community inclusion, seeking to actively promote achievement of equality. Some things to consider when applying a disability equality process within your community:

- Are disabled people directly involved in the development of the policy or practice?
- What are the needs, experience and concerns of individuals and how can needs be best met?
- Does the policy or practice we have decided upon meet these needs?
- Have we built the experience and perspective of disabled people in to the monitoring of outcomes and evaluation of the policy or practice?



The Community Inclusion Vision



DESSA, *Disability Equality Specialist Support Agency*, is a national community development organisation working to promote the active and full participation of disabled people in Irish society.

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This publication is funded by the Department of Justice and Equality under the **Disability Awareness Funding Programme 2015** Promoting Positive Attitudes to People with Disabilities



Community Inclusion Positive to Disability Charter

A guidance document for community organisations



What is the Community Inclusion Positive to Disability Charter?

This is a guidance document to support your organisation to ensure the full and active participation and contribution of disabled people and their families in local community activity. It identifies the key features of community inclusion and the things to consider when promoting and enabling inclusion.

Who is this for?

Staff and volunteers within Family Resource Centres, Local Development Companies, Child and Youth Services and all other community organisation that hold a social inclusion ethos.

Why Sign the Community Inclusion Positive to Disability Charter?

- Publicly expresses a commitment to improving quality of life and outcomes for disabled people and their families.
- Builds on local partnerships to promote equality and remove barriers to disabled people's effective participation.
- Creates a community wide commitment to supporting active citizenship and equality.
- Promotes the human rights perspective that all people have the same value and rights.

Inclusion as a Human Right

Inclusion is the full and active participation of disabled people and their families in ordinary places. It promotes the idea that all people should be freely and openly accommodated without restrictions or limitations of any kind. Inclusion is about people being enabled to live full lives and communities being accepting of diversity. Inclusion means change.

Human rights are fundamental to overcoming disabling barriers and promoting inclusion.

A human rights approach should ensure positive processes and outcomes for disabled people including treating people with dignity and respect and ensuring that society no longer disables its citizens.

Developing a community development process of inclusion within your organisation means responding to diversity. It recognises that diversity is a fact of life and that differences are normal within society. Differences are due to a range of factors, some universal, some cultural and some due to specific contexts. Inclusion therefore, is about society changing in order to accommodate difference and combat discrimination amongst its members.

Simply put, inclusion is about valuing all individuals, giving equal access and opportunity to all and removing discrimination and other barriers to involvement. It is also about supporting an individual to move beyond having a presence in one's community to actively participating and contributing to it.

The UN Convention on the Rights of persons with a Disability (CPRD), which Ireland signed up to in 2007, reinforces inclusion as a human right.

Taking an Inclusive Local Community Development Approach

Making local community development inclusive is vital to ensure equal opportunities and to promote full participation. Community development is about enabling those who experience exclusion to work together in shaping a more just and equitable society. It is also about empowering individuals to develop knowledge, skills and capacity so they can collectively influence positive change.

Inclusive community development is a process that should lead to the goal of an inclusive community.

The elements of inclusive local community development include:

- Maximising the participation of disabled people, as community citizens to participate in the planning, implementation and monitoring of inclusive actions.
- Raising the capacities and competencies of disabled people to order to increase this participation.
- Making community stakeholders aware of disability and supporting them in changing their understanding and adapting their practices in accordance with the rights of disabled people to be treated equally.
- Promoting mainstreaming of disability in community activities, so that outcomes target disabled people and other citizens equally.
- Developing capacity, competence and technical resources to meet the needs of disabled people with specific impairments.

The Key Features of Inclusive Community Organisations

Your organisation should consider the following key features in making inclusion a reality:

- The organisation has a vision of what it wants to do; inclusive policies, procedures and practices for how to achieve this; and a process of monitoring and evaluation to see how well it is doing.
- Through their attitudes and behaviour, staff and volunteers demonstrate how unremarkable it is that disabled people are part of a wide cross-section of the local community engaging with the organisation.
- Each person has opportunities to actively participate in formal and informal consultation, using their chosen communication methods, so that they can express their views and opinions on activities, services and supports of the organisation.
- All staff and volunteers have had rights-based training around disability and other equality and diversity matters; and reflect on how their own attitudes may impact on disabled people and their families.
- All staff and volunteers have or are developing the necessary skills to communicate effectively with individuals, in particular with those who have complex needs
- The organisation understands the need to change practices and, above all, attitudes; and demonstrates a positive 'can-do' attitude to solving problems, consistently promoting the benefits to everyone of an inclusive culture and environment.

Things to consider in making your community organisation inclusive

Understanding Disability

Much confusion and debate exists in relation to definitions of disability and terminology and how this reflects our understanding. DESSA supports use of the term 'disabled person' in acknowledgement of society's role in disabling people. This is the preferred term used by disability activists and disabled people's organisations worldwide.

There are two main ways of thinking about disabled people and disability issues. They are known as the **medical model** and the **social model**:

MEDICAL MODEL

According to this traditional way of thinking about disability, the exclusion of people with disabilities from everyday activities results from their impairments. For example, people with disabilities may be unable to go to the cinema because their physical disability prevents them from walking up steps or their hearing impairment means that they cannot hear the soundtrack. According to this way of thinking the exclusion of people with disabilities is inevitable, unless society decides as an act of charity or goodwill to make the environment more accessible.

SOCIAL MODEL

According to this way of thinking about disability, the exclusion of people with disabilities from everyday activities is the result of the way in which society organises itself. For example, people with mobility impairments will be able to go the cinema if there are no steps or if the cinema has a lift, and hearing impaired people will be able to enjoy a film if the cinema has a loop system. According to this way of thinking, the exclusion of people with disabilities is not inevitable. People with disabilities have the right to participate and it is up to society to organise itself better so that they can be included.

In a society which sees disability through the **medical model**:

- things are organised to suit the non-disabled majority
- disability is seen as something that deviates from the norm
- anything that is done to facilitate the needs of people with disabilities will be seen as "special" or as a concession or an add-on extra
- non-disabled people make all the decisions about what disabled people need.

By contrast, in a society which sees disability through the **social model**:

- everyone has the right of access to the places and services of their choice
- disability is seen as part of the continuum of everyday life, as something normal. For example, small children, older people, pregnant women and many others cannot run very fast. Some athletes can run like the wind. That range is normal in any population. The lines that we draw with "normal" on one side and "not normal" on the other are arbitrary and change over time and place.

Accessibility

Disabled people face a multitude of obstacles in the environment. Accessibility means that everyone has equal access to the built environment with no discrimination based on one's level of ability. A barrier free environment is a key factor in promoting social inclusion, improving participation and mobility and is a requisite for a truly inclusive society. However, access is more than just about the physical environment. It is also about people having access to local services, information and means of communication that enables inclusion.