



DESSA Annual Report 2017

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Chairperson's Address

DESSA was established in 2001 to work with community development organisations in promoting the inclusion of disabled people within a community development context. Specifically, DESSA's brief is to enhance the capability of the community & voluntary sector to develop actions and ways of working to ensure the active involvement and inclusion of disabled people in community life.

2017 was a year of change and growth for DESSA. Key actions included building the capacity of parents and families; delivering Disability Equality and Competency training; developing strategic partnerships; and supporting implementation of disability policy in the community.

A record number of 600 individuals – people with lived experience of disability, parents, staff and volunteers within community development organisations and staff within disability service organisations engaged in training and availed of a range of supports delivered by DESSA during the year.

DESSA developed strategic partnerships with Kildare Library Services, Kerry Education Training Board, Galway Autism Project, Grangegorman Area Based Childcare Network and Waterford Children and Young People's Services Committee. This partnership work allowed us to support over 100 families throughout the year.

The innovative Local Area Co-ordination project, supported by the Dormant Accounts Fund, has proved to be hugely successful in creating real opportunities for social inclusion for individuals with disabilities and in building community capacity in County Leitrim. The project was completed in June 2017.

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 like to say a special word of thanks to Peter Kearns, who managed the Local Area Co-ordination project which ended in 2017. Peter's skills and experience made DESSA the unique organisation that it is – responsive, strong on values and effective.

I would also like to thank our funders 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.

I look forward to the continued challenge of this work in 2018.

Jacqui Browne Chairperson

About Us

Our 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 the community & voluntary sector will be inclusive of disabled people, 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 & voluntary sector and to disabled people and their families.

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 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 Inclusion Initiative, Steps to Mainstreaming Participation Framework and the Supporting Families Social Inclusion Strategy, and more recently, Local Area Co-ordination in Leitrim.

Since 2014 DESSA has actively participated in the HSE Transforming Lives programme of reform of disability services and is a member of Working Group 3 tasked with developing a participation framework for disabled people's engagement in the design and delivery of services.

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.

2017 Achievements – Year at a Glance

Dissemination of information about work, education and training activities, and our programmes to 500 people with disabilities and families experiencing disability, FRCs, LDCs, disability service organisations, parent peer support groups and other relevant organisations

Provision of information and representative advocacy support to 8 parents of disabled children and young people.

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

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

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

Implementation of the **Empowering Parents Programme** to 56 parents in Leitrim, Kerry, and Dublin.

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

- Development of Personal Advocacy Plans for 52 participants
- Provision of training in equality and mainstreaming to 80 staff and volunteers in over 40 community development and youth organisations.

Establishment of **strategic partnerships and alliances** with Galway Autism Partnership, Waterford Children & Young People's Services Committee, Kerry ETB and Grangegorman Area Based Childcare Network

Developing and embedding an **inclusive policy and practice framework** as a model of work with Waterford Children & Young People's Services Committee

Our Strategies

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 is core-funded under the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) 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. Providing capacity, informing, dispelling myths and challenging attitudes and assumptions are all part of this frontline service delivery.

DESSA will also continue to support community organisations to develop an awareness of Government policy on disability and engagement in policy implementation through information provision, training and facilitation of established policy fora. It is essential that the community development sector is fully informed on current Government policy, in particular the Transforming Lives process and the National Disability & Inclusion Strategy.

Snapshot 1 A Community Development Approach to Local Area Co-ordination

‘Community Inclusion, Capacity & Connection’ (the LAC project) was 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.

It was 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 was also concerned with building the capacity of local community infrastructure.

The project has been hugely successful in creating real opportunities for social inclusion for individuals with disabilities and in building community capacity in County Leitrim. 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 80 staff and volunteers within community and disability organisations have developed the capacity and competence to create inclusive opportunities for local disabled people.

The impact of this project on individual LAC participants and mainstream community structures is enormous. For example, 5 LAC participants (across disability) were elected as officers to a local user-led disability forum, Leitrim Disability Network. These are now participating in Leitrim Local Authority Public Participation Network. 4 LAC participants completed the St. Angela's NUIG Access & 3rd-level Foundation Course in Sligo. One LAC participant has become a youth leader with Carrick-on-Shannon Girl Guides.

Through the LAC project DESSA was able to facilitate a process of community engagement by educating the community & voluntary sector on disability policy, by linking service users to mainstream community services and by developing a planned process of engagement between community development organisations, disability service providers and the HSE.

This project which was funded under Measure 5 Local Area Co-ordination of the Dormant Accounts Fund, was completed in June 2017.

Snapshot 2 Mainstreaming Participation - The Getting Included Network

DESSA's development and facilitation of the Getting Included Network in south county Dublin is a key action in supporting disabled people's access to mainstream community based activities and opportunities.

The Getting Included Network is a collaboration between community organisations and disability service providers to create opportunities for disabled people to be better connected to their communities and to access mainstream supports and services.

The Getting Included Network has three priority objectives:

- To undertake appropriate and relevant training, education and awareness raising for Network members
- To facilitate community organisations and disability service providers sharing information and best practice
- To be pro-active in influencing policy at local, regional and national levels

Key activities include training, policy briefings, showcasing community inclusion in action and developing joint projects.

Member organisations of the Getting Included Network include: Cheeverstown House Day Services, Peamount Health Care, NCBI, WALK and Stewarts Hospital, South County Dublin Partnership, Lucan Disability Action Group, Whitechurch Community & Youth Centre, the WEB Project, Ballyboden, Fettercairn Community & Youth Centre, Fettercairn Estar Management, Brookfield Community & Youth Centre, Ballyboden FRC, Greenhills & Walkinstown Network and South County Dublin Disability Interest Group.

In 2017 the Network met with the New Directions National Implementation Working Group to discuss their work and the role of community development in promoting inclusion and the effective implementation of New Directions.

Snapshot 3 Developing and embedding inclusive policy and practice in Waterford Children and Young People's Services Committee

Disabled children and young people are first and foremost children, with all the rights, needs and aspirations of all children and young people. Ensuring their rights are met requires providing services for them that are in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Government's policy commitment to equality and social inclusion reflected in *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: National Policy Framework for Children & Young People 2014 – 2020 (2014)*.

For the agencies in children's services incorporating and developing inclusive practice can be challenging at many levels. The culture of individual organisations, capacity and competency of individual committee members and differing views on what constitutes inclusion can create barriers to effective inclusive policies and practices.

DESSA are supporting Waterford Children and Young People's Services Committee to undertake an inclusion learning process to identify and address the key issues impacting on children and young people who are disabled or who have complex health needs and to adopt as best practice a strategic approach to social inclusion enabling children and young people the opportunities to live ordinary lives.

Key elements of this process include:

- Developing a common understanding of inclusion
- Reflecting on attitudes towards disability, assisting critical reflection and the development of new thinking
- Assessing and critically reviewing current practice and actions
- Developing an Inclusion & Disability Equality approach to the work of Waterford Children and Young People's Services Committee
- Developing an Inclusion and Disability Equality policy

Such a process will inform review of the current Waterford Children and Young People's Plan 2016 – 2018, ensure good practice in the development of future plans and provide guidance and leadership to other Children's Services Committees.

