

Access Inside Out: A Guide to Making Community Facilities Accessible



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

'Access Inside Out : A Guide to Making Community Facilities Accessible' was commissioned by DESSA in response to the need to support Community Development Projects and Family Resource Centres in ensuring their projects are fully accessible to people with disabilities. The Guide was written by Maureen Gilbert and DESSA would like to sincerely thank Maureen for her expertise and commitment to this project.

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- *Fionnuala Rogerson* *Architect*

A sincere thank you to all members of this committee.

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FOREWORD

As President of the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland it gives me great pleasure to welcome the publication of 'Access Inside Out: A Guide to Making Community Facilities Accessible'.

This publication provides us with a valuable opportunity to learn about effective ways of including disabled people within our communities and marks an important step in improving access to community resources for people with disabilities.

Disabled people are recognised to be one of the most disadvantaged groups within our society and continue to experience considerable barriers in accessing and participating in social life. This is due, in part, to an unfriendly and inaccessible built environment. People's accessibility to their surroundings is central to their active participation in society and is a required condition of quality of life.

The RIAI is committed to promoting a barrier free built environment and integral accessibility. Through the work of our task force on accessibility and inclusive design we provide information to architects on best practice in incorporating these principles into their project. In addition we make regular submissions to government on the potential initiatives to improve accessibility in all aspects of Irish society.

I would like to congratulate DESSA on creating a comprehensive resource for the community and voluntary sector, which, I am sure, will enable community projects to take a more active role in advancing accessibility issues.

Anthony Reddy
President RIAI



AN INTRODUCTION TO DESSA

Established in 2001, DESSA, the Disability Equality Specialist Support Agency is a national support agency working with community development organisations. DESSA's purpose is to promote the active participation of people with disabilities within their local communities through their involvement in community development organisations and activities. Community development organisations, such as Community Development Projects (CDPs) and Family Resource Centres (FRCs), play a vital role in ensuring the inclusion of vulnerable groups and individuals who experience marginalisation in Irish society. It is DESSA's mission to support such organisations in challenging the barriers that prevent the inclusion and participation of disabled people through the provision of training and technical support.

An accessible barrier-free environment is the first step in fulfilling the right of people with disabilities to participate on an equal basis in society. **'Access Inside Out : A Guide to Making Community Facilities Accessible'** will provide those working in community development, both staff and volunteers, with a practical resource to assist them in ensuring their premises and activities are open to people with disabilities.

Alice Griffin
Manager DESSA



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

These are the most important abbreviations used in Access Inside Out: A Guide to Making Community Facilities Accessible. All are explained fully where they are used in the text.

<i>AAI:</i>	Architectural Association of Ireland
<i>CDB:</i>	City/County Development Board
<i>CDP:</i>	Community Development Project
<i>CIL:</i>	Centre for Independent Living
<i>DESSA:</i>	Disability Equality Specialist Support Agency
<i>DFI:</i>	Disability Federation of Ireland
<i>FRC:</i>	Family Resource Centre
<i>NAD:</i>	National Association for Deaf People
<i>NDA:</i>	National Disability Authority
<i>Part M:</i>	Building Regulations Technical Guidance Document M
<i>Regs:</i>	Building Regulations
<i>RIAI:</i>	Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland
<i>TGD:</i>	Technical Guidance Document

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Introduction

What this publication is about

'Access Inside Out: A Guide to Making Community Facilities Accessible' aims to help Family Resource Centres (FRCs), Community Development Projects (CDPs) and other small, community-based organisations to ensure that their premises are accessible and welcoming to all people with disabilities living in their local areas. The range of issues to be taken into account and the raft of legislation, technical guidance, guidelines and resources available on this subject can make it hard to sort out what to do and where to start. 'Access Inside Out: A Guide to Making Community Facilities Accessible' offers community-based projects:

- some ways of thinking about access and disability issues in general
- information about what the legislation and regulations mean and how they apply to community-based projects
- information on what access-related issues to consider when planning a new premises or making changes or improvements to your existing premises
- help on how to get the best from your architect and other design professionals
- ideas for low-cost and no cost ways to improve access for people with disabilities at any time, not just when planning major changes or renovations
- information on helpful organisations and publications.

What this publication is not

'Access Inside Out: A Guide to Making Community Facilities Accessible' does not go into detail about how community-based projects can provide access to their programmes and activities. It is mostly about how to provide physical access.

'Access Inside Out: A Guide to Making Community Facilities Accessible' is not a substitute for the detailed legislation and guidance which govern or have a bearing on the provision of access for people with disabilities. Neither is it a substitute for getting appropriate professional advice or guidance. Crucially, it is not a substitute for building relationships with local people with disabilities and seeking their assistance in making your project more accessible.

Neither is 'Access Inside Out: A Guide to Making Community Facilities Accessible' just another set of guidelines that will make community-based projects feel even more confused, uncertain and harassed. Instead 'Access Inside Out: A Guide to Making Community Facilities Accessible' is intended to be a quick guide to what you need to know about what's out there in the area of access for people with disabilities. The idea is to demystify the topic so that it is easier for community-based projects to do the right thing without wasting time or making costly mistakes.

Want to know more about providing access for people with disabilities to your services and activities?

- Talk to the Disability Equality Specialist Support Agency (DESSA) (see page 56)
- Contact the Equality Authority (see page 56)
- Contact the National Disability Authority (NDA) (see page 57).

Why provide access for people with disabilities?

The enactment of equality legislation and the Building Regulations, the Special Olympics, TV programmes on disability issues and a host of other factors have raised the profile of people with disabilities in Ireland. Crucially, improvements in access to streets and buildings mean that more and more people with disabilities are out and about and visible in the ordinary daily life of communities throughout the country.

But consideration for the needs and requirements of people with disabilities is still too often an afterthought, or is thought to be too expensive to justify. There are hardly any people with disabilities round here, some people say, and they wouldn't come here anyway. We could go to lot of expense and trouble and no-one would come. Alternatively, some people say, if we make our premises and services accessible we will be overwhelmed by people with disabilities and we won't be able to cope. Another group of people community-based projects among them say, we would like to provide access for people with disabilities but we don't know what is involved or where to start. We don't want to spend what few resources we have only to find that we did the wrong thing.

JUST IN CASE YOU NEED SOME ARGUMENTS AND AMMUNITION:

- People with disabilities comprise at least 10% of the population
- The term "people with disabilities" refers to people with mobility, sensory and intellectual impairments as well as those with mental health difficulties (despite the image most people have of "disability", wheelchair users are a minority of all people with impairments)
- There are people with disabilities of all ages and in all walks of life in all communities

- That means that whatever community-based projects do to provide better access for people with disabilities will benefit a wide range of people, including some who don't think of themselves as disabled. For example, parents accompanied by small children, older people, women in the later stages of pregnancy and people with temporary impairments, such as a broken leg, are all facilitated by more accessible buildings
- Given access and the provision of appropriate reasonable accommodation (see page 15), people with disabilities can join in all community-based activities. If you exclude them, whether deliberately or by omission, you are depriving your organisation of their talents and contribution
- Along with all other service providers, community-based projects are required by law to offer access for people with disabilities (see pages 14-17). People with disabilities can seek redress if their needs are not met.

Still need to be convinced?

As well as reading the rest of this publication you could:

- talk to people with disabilities in your area
- visit the websites of the organisations listed on pages 56-57
- visit the NDA library (see page 57)

How to think about disability

There are two main ways of thinking about people with disabilities 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 more recent 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 (see page 41). 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.

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 people with disabilities 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. For example, a person might be considered very able by their family but be called stupid at school.

A society which sees disability through the social model will not regard features put in place to provide access for people with disabilities as special concessions. They will just be a seamless part of how things are done and will form an integral part of all planning and development.

HOW IRELAND IS THINKING NOW

Ireland is in the process of changing from seeing disability through the medical model to seeing it through the social model. Legislation like the Equal Status Acts 2000-2004 and the Building Regulations is intended to ensure that people with disabilities have full access to the places and services of their choice.

Community-based projects, with their emphasis on equality and development, will be drawn naturally to the social model of disability. However, because Ireland worked out of the medical model for so long, you may feel that you don't know enough about disability to know what to do. Having been educated in schools that did not include people with disabilities, and having worked in jobs which did not include people with disabilities, many non-disabled people feel worried about their own "ignorance" and concerned that they may say or do the wrong thing or make mistakes that will be hard to correct. Contacting and consulting with local people with disabilities can help to overcome these misgivings.

Want to know more?

As well as reading the rest of this publication you could:

- visit the websites of the organisations listed on pages 56-57
- get a copy of *Ask Me: Guidelines for effective consultation with people with disabilities*. Download it free from **www.nda.ie** or get a free copy from the NDA (see page 57). It is available in ordinary print, large print, on tape, on diskette and in braille.

How to think about access

As previously discussed, until recently design features which benefited people with disabilities were seen as an add-on optional extra. For example, architects designed buildings to suit non-disabled people and then (maybe) thought about how they could be accessed and used by people with disabilities. Inevitably this meant that these "special" design features stood out and were often ugly.

INCLUSIVE DESIGN

In the past few years thinking has changed. People began to think about how to design so that everyone can participate on an equal basis. The aim became to provide inclusive design. This is an approach to designing which ensures that buildings, products and services can be used easily by the greatest number of people, irrespective of age or ability. Inclusive design is sometimes called design for all or universal design. Whatever name is used, this way of thinking aims to create places, products and services which are:

- useful to all kinds of people
- flexible
- simple and easy to use, regardless of the user's ability, experience, knowledge, language skills or level of concentration
- perceptible (easy for everyone to make out, even in tricky conditions)
- tolerant of error (aren't hazardous and don't have bad outcomes if used wrongly)

and also:

- require little physical effort
- are easy for everyone to get at.

(Adapted from <http://www.designireland.ie/resources.asp?cid=225>)

UNIVERSAL RIGHT OF ACCESS

Linked to the concept of inclusive design is the universal right of access. Building for Everyone: Inclusion, Access and Use (NDA, 2002), the main Irish sourcebook of accessible building and external design, says that this means simply that "everyone can make full use of the buildings and environments they live in, work in and visit". Applied to building design this means that "the user is at the centre of the issue and process, not the building or the designer. In this approach, accessibility, central to the process from the outset, can become invisible [and] properly integrated".

Building for Everyone says that the principles of design that flow from this way of thinking are:

- access: everyone should be able to get into buildings and environments. They should be able to approach and enter unaided, with ease and without embarrassment
- use: everyone should be able to use buildings and external spaces with equal facility. The design and management of buildings and external spaces must not make them more difficult to use for one person than another
- enjoyment: everyone deserves the right to enjoy their surroundings
- safety: everyone has the right to live, work and relax in safe surroundings. The design and management of buildings and external environments must make them safe for every person
- consideration: everyone deserves equal consideration from those who commission, design, construct and manage buildings and environments. Consideration costs nothing.

Why these ideas are important for community-based projects: And how to put them into action

Community-based projects are concerned with equality. Building for Everyone points out that, "If the needs of a group of people are not considered in the design of a building or environment [for example, a playground], then that group is denied equality with those whom the building or environment is designed to suit. There is no principle that would defend the denial of rights simply because the owner, designer, contractor or manager of a building hasn't considered them or mistakenly thinks that it is too difficult or expensive to provide for them".

While nearly everyone, community-based projects, design professionals, the Government, the general public would agree with those statements, the reality is that often they are not put into practice consistently. Community-based projects which are serious about including people with disabilities could:

- adopt a statement which includes a commitment to universal access and inclusive design
- ask the manager of the project to take responsibility for ensuring that it is adhered to by everyone in the organisation.

Most importantly, when the project is selecting and working with design professionals, builders and others, it could use its statement of commitment to ensure that these principles are at the heart of the contract they draw up and the design and delivery of the building work that is being done.

Want to know more?

As well as reading the rest of this publication you could:

- buy a copy of *Building for Everyone* from the NDA (price €45) or borrow a copy from your local library (make sure it's the 2002 edition)
- visit the NDA Library (see page 57) to look at *Building for Everyone* and many other books on accessibility
- visit www.riai.ie, the website of the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI), and look at the pages that refer to design guidance for accessibility and inclusion. Many of the guides they reference are free to download, but a lot are aimed at architects and are quite technical.



**How equality legislation applies
to community-based projects**

How equality legislation applies to community-based projects

Achieving equal access is an important aspect of the two main pieces of equality legislation in operation in Ireland:

- the Employment Equality Acts, 1998-2004, which relate to community-based projects as employers
- the Equal Status Acts, 2000-2004, which relate to community-based projects as service providers.

Both kinds of equality legislation are rights-based. They both prohibit discrimination, harassment and victimisation on nine grounds: gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community. Community-based projects whose premises are accessible to people with disabilities are on their way to meeting their obligations to people with disabilities under both types of legislation. This publication concentrates on the Equal Status legislation, although some features are common to both kinds of law.

Want to know more about your obligations as an employer?

- Read the Equality Authority's explanatory booklet Employment Equality Acts 1998 and 2004. Download it free from www.equality.ie or get a free copy from the Equality Authority (see page 56). It is available in ordinary print, large Print, on tape, on diskette and in braille.

Your obligations under the Equal Status Acts

The Equal Status Acts, 2000-2004 say that providers of goods and services, including community-based projects:

- must not discriminate against people with disabilities, including people with mobility, sensory, mental health and intellectual impairments
- must accommodate the needs of people with disabilities through making reasonable changes in what they do and how they do it where, without these changes, it would be very difficult or impossible for people with disabilities to obtain those goods or services unless it costs more than a nominal cost.

It is important to note that the law says that service providers, including community-based projects, must make **reasonable** accommodations, as these changes are called. The only defence they can use if they fail to do so is that "it costs more than a nominal cost". There is no upper limit on what you can spend, and the law allows you to take positive action in favour of people with disabilities. You can take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that people with disabilities can use your premises and services. It is important to remember that the law covers access to services - all the things that projects do - as well as to buildings.

The idea is that people with disabilities can access the same services as everyone else. The law doesn't require you to provide extra services just for people with disabilities though you can if you like!

What is meant by nominal cost exemption?

- Community-based projects, like other service providers, are not obliged to provide special treatment or facilities where the cost involved is greater than a nominal cost. Nominal cost exemptions depend on the circumstances of each case. A recent Irish employment case considered "nominal cost", stating that it "may not be the same for every employer or enterprise and that the term may be interpreted in a relative sense. What is nominal for a large enterprise employing thousands of people will not be the same as that of a small business with two or three employees".
- Making your premises and services accessible is a reasonable accommodation.
- Studies in the US show that more than half of accommodations made for people with disabilities cost nothing. See pages 36-45 for examples.

Think about this!

If you hold activities in other premises, such as community centres, church halls and hotels, they too must be accessible to people with disabilities. If you hold your activities in inaccessible premises, people with disabilities will not be able to participate on a basis of equality with other people, and you will be in breach of the legislation. If you think that hearing-impaired people may attend your activities, be sure to find out if there is an induction loop system in the premises, or else hire one, as well as getting a sign interpreter to come along to facilitate the participation of deaf people.

Want to know more about your obligations as a service provider?

- Read the Equality Authority's explanatory booklet Equal Status Acts 2000 and 2004. Download it free from ***www.equality.ie*** or get a free copy from the Equality Authority (see page 56). It is available in ordinary print, large print, on tape, on diskette and in braille.

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**How the Building Regulations
apply to community-based projects**

The basics

Like all legislation and official regulations, the Building Regulations, 1997-2000 and their associated technical guidance (see page 22) can seem off-putting to non-specialists. Don't worry, community-based projects don't have to be able to quote and interpret these documents in detail. You just need to know what your obligations are and be able to draw your architect's and builder's attention to them if necessary. Architects and builders generally refer to the Building Regulations just as "the Regs", so that's the term to use if you want to sound like you are in the know!

The Building Regulations are not just about standards for people with disabilities. Their primary purpose is to provide for the health, safety and welfare of people in and around buildings. They cover all aspects of building construction ventilation, fire safety, the quality of building materials etc.

THE BUILDING REGULATIONS APPLY TO:

- the construction of new buildings
- extensions and material alterations to existing buildings
- certain changes of use of existing buildings.

They apply only to buildings and the access route to them (e.g. from the car park or the boundary wall of the site to the main entrance) so they do not deal with paths, car parking, playgrounds or other outdoor parts of your site. For more information on these important aspects of access see page 27.

It is important to remember that the Building Regulations and their associated technical guidance, like many building codes around the world, do not guarantee the universal right of access (see page 10). They are minimum standards:

- They specify the least people must do, not the best or the most. Some of the standards are quite skimpy. For example, they assume that wheelchair users have neat, manually-operated chairs, whereas a lot of people have motorised or larger-than-average chairs.
- They do not cover all aspects of buildings. They concentrate more on getting into and around buildings and out again, especially in emergencies than they do on detail design or on using what is available within them.
- They do not specify how the design of buildings can assist people who have impairments such as intellectual disabilities and mental health difficulties. They define people with disabilities only as "people who have an impairment of hearing or sight or an impairment which limits their ability to walk or which restricts them to using a wheelchair".

Because of these facts most service providers have to go beyond the Building Regulations to be sure of providing reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities.

Important!

Even if your premises are subject to the Building Regulations you must still comply with the Equal Status Acts. On the other hand, your building might comply with the Building Regulations but your services might still be in breach of the Equal Status Acts. This is because the Building Regulations are minimum standards relating to building design, while the Equal Status Acts are rights-based, are much broader and work from the notion of universal access (see page 15).

What the Regs say

The Building Regulations are divided into a number of sections. The one which refers to access for people with disabilities is Part M. As previously noted (see page 15), Part M's definition of people with disabilities is narrower than that in the Equal Status Acts, which means that compliance with the Regs is not necessarily the same as the provision of reasonable accommodation.

The aspect of each Part of the Building Regulations which people have to comply with is called the Requirement. It is a very short description of what is required. There are three sections to Part M:

- ***M1: Access and use***
Adequate provision shall be made to enable people with disabilities to safely and independently access and use a building.
- ***M2: Sanitary conveniences***
If sanitary conveniences are provided in a building adequate provision shall be made for people with disabilities.
- ***M3: Audience or Spectator facilities***
If a building contains fixed seating for audience or spectators, adequate provision shall be made for people with disabilities.

Technical Guidance Documents

The Building Regulations are accompanied by Technical Guidance Documents, commonly known as TGDs, which give guidance on how to construct a building so that it complies with the Regulations. If works are carried out in accordance with the TGDs, they are automatically in compliance with the Regulations (but not necessarily with the Equal Status Acts).

When architects and designers talk about "Part M" they are usually referring to the Technical Guidance Document which accompanies the part on accessibility. The TGD which accompanies Part M:

- sets minimum standards for dimensions, such as the width of doorways and the correct placing for grab rails in toilets
- sets minimum standards for the provision of accessible facilities, for example, the number of wheelchair spaces to be provided in an auditorium with fixed seating
- contains drawings and plans which give examples of how to design doorways, steps, corridors, bathrooms etc. so that they comply with the Regs. This doesn't mean that everywhere has to look the same, however. You can use any design you like, so long as it provides access to at least the same standard.

Checking for compliance

If you put up a new building, add an extension or do other works which are covered by the Building Regulations, a Building Control Officer may be sent by the local authority to check that everything complies with the Regs. In some local authority areas this person may also be an Access Officer. In either case, if your building works do not meet the criteria you will have to make alterations.

Want to know more about the Building Regulations?

- Log on to **www.environ.ie** and, starting with "Building Standards" on the left, follow the links to download Building Regulations 2000 Technical Guidance Document M or buy a print copy from Government Publications Sales Office, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2
- Talk to your local authority's Access Officer
- Visit the NDALibrary (see page 57).

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**Reaching the parts that the
Building Regulations don't reach**

Reaching the parts that the building regulations don't reach

As previously discussed (see pages 19-23) complying with the Building Regulations alone won't necessarily guarantee that people with disabilities will be able to use your services, buildings and facilities. For example, they don't deal with the external environment or give detailed guidance on playground design or other specific facilities. They are only concerned with the building fabric, not how premises are fitted out or how you can make your services easier for people with disabilities to use.

Building for everyone

There are many books, websites and organisations that can provide community-based projects with information and ideas about accessible premises. Most of them are aimed at bigger public and private sector organisations or at architects and designers. Many are quite technical.

In Ireland the most easily understood and substantial source of information on accessible design is Building for Everyone. Although it is aimed mostly at architects and other designers Building for Everyone is intended to be understood by and useful to building managers, maintenance supervisors and other people who are not design professionals. The various sections of Building for Everyone deal with:

- the consequences for design and management of various kinds of impairment
- the different roles and responsibilities of designers, builders, managers etc.
- inclusive design in the external environment (see below)

- inclusive design of buildings
- some advice about particular building types, furniture and fittings
- managing and maintaining buildings for maximum accessibility
- retro-fitting and refurbishing buildings.

The information in Building for Everyone is intended to be applicable to many kinds of building and settings in the external environment. Other publications and websites have extra detail which is useful to designers.

External environment

Community-based projects do not have to be concerned with most aspects of the external environment. Streets, parks, beaches and forests are not your responsibility! You may, however, want to make sure that they are accessible to the people with disabilities in any groups you may be taking to these places. Building for Everyone will help you to know what to look out for.

The aspects of the external environment which most concern you lie within your boundary wall. Your premises may include paths, parking spaces, a playground or a garden. If so, you will need to make sure that they provide reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities.

Want to know more?

- Building for Everyone has information on all of these aspects
- Visit www.ncaonline.org/playgrounds for more detailed information on playgrounds. Follow the links to very useful publications and articles. Documents like this from the US (see others below) use imperial measurements (feet and inches) rather than the metric system, so can be a bit confusing. This site (www.ncaonline.org) also has information which would be useful to community-based organisations which involve people with disabilities in outdoor activities, camping etc.
- Read the Design Solutions Package part of Creating Inclusive Child Care Facilities. DESSA has a copy, or you can order it (cost \$10) via www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/pubs/childcare.htm

It is also important to consider how people with disabilities get to your building from the street. For example:

- How accessible is the route from the nearest bus stop or other public transport?
- Are the pavements level and in good order, with little risk of people tripping?
- Is there a dished road crossing (that is, with a slope instead of a kerb, and marked with tactile bumpy paving that tells people with visual impairments that they have reached a crossing)?
- If it's a busy road, is there an audible crossing signal to assist people with visual impairments?
- If you don't have your own parking area, is there a suitable disabled person's parking place nearby?

Want to know more about what to look for in your area?

Read chapter 5 of Building for Everyone.

If the features you want are not there or if they need upgrading you can talk to your local authority about providing them. Most local authorities have signed up to the Barcelona Declaration, a Europe-wide agreement to facilitate the requirements of people with disabilities, so they should be committed to providing reasonable accommodations. Contact the Access Officer or Roads Department first.

Providing reasonable accommodation to your services

As previously noted accessible premises don't automatically guarantee accessible services. Wittingly or unwittingly there may be barriers in place which prevent people with disabilities from using your services on a basis of equality with others.

Providing reasonable accommodations within your services is a whole subject in itself. Can people with disabilities find out about your activities? Can they join in what you do? The section in this booklet headed What do people with disabilities need? (see page 38) details one simple way of looking at this.

HERE ARE A FEW AREAS TO THINK ABOUT:

- How do you let people know what is going on in your community 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)?
- Can you facilitate people with disabilities in small ways, like providing easy-grip pens to people who need them?
- 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 people with disabilities know that they are welcome to join in your project'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 the meeting don't exclude people with intellectual disabilities?
- How effective is your consultation with people with disabilities? How could it be improved? Do local people with disabilities have any unmet needs that your project might be able to address?

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**Dealing with architects
and designers**

Dealing with architects and designers

Most architects, designers and builders are aware of the requirements of Part M, although they may be less familiar with the Equal Status Acts and their implications for design. This section aims to help community-based projects ensure that they get the best results from the professionals with whom they engage.

The suggestions below deal only with the accessibility aspects of working with architects and designers. There are lots of other general aspects to consider, of course.

CHOOSING AN ARCHITECT OR DESIGNER

- Make sure that they are properly qualified.
- Make sure that they are a member of RIAI (Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland) or AAI (Architectural Association of Ireland).
- Make it clear from the beginning that accessibility is a key concern of your organisation and that your commitment is to inclusive design that goes beyond the requirements of the Building Regulations. Assess their reaction to this!
- Ask them about the accessibility features of other, preferably similar, projects that they have done. Ask if you can go to see them.
- Ask them what resources on accessibility they use. Do they have a copy of Building for Everyone? What do they think of it? Are they aware of BS 8300:2001, an important British Standard on access for people with disabilities. What do they think of it?
- Ask them if they have been on any courses about inclusive design or access for people with disabilities.

BRIEFING AN ARCHITECT OR DESIGNER

- Give them a copy of your statement of commitment to universal access (see page 10)
- Be as clear as possible about how your premises will be used, how often, by whom and for what, not just now but in the future. For example, you may have no children with disabilities in your after-school group at the moment, but you may intend to in the future
- Encourage them to explore how to make sure that your aspirations are translated into bricks and mortar by:
 - if they haven't already got them, getting copies of key documents such as Part M, Building for Everyone, other publications on accessibility, relevant British Standards etc.
 - visiting www.riai.ie/public/downloads/accessibility05.pdf to get a list of standards and publications relating to creating and auditing access for people with disabilities in the built environment
 - using the resources of the NDA Library
- Explain that you want the architect or other project manager to pay particular attention during the construction and fitting out stages to ensure that no changes are made on-site that might compromise the accessibility features of the building.

WORKING WITH AN ARCHITECT OR DESIGNER

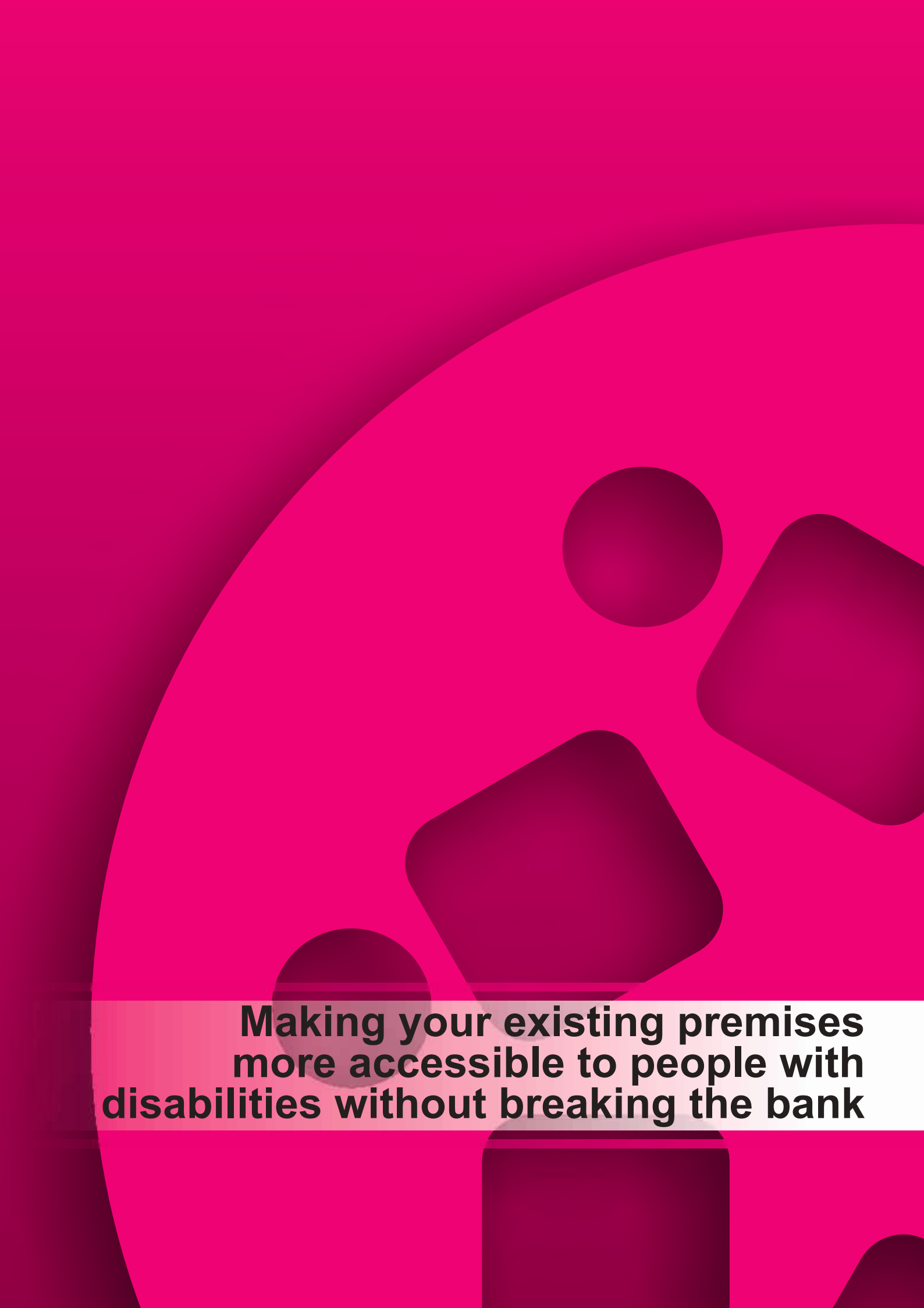
- Ask as many questions as you need to. Unexpected difficulties arise in every building project and it is important to resolve them as quickly as possible.
- Let the architect or other project manager deal with the builders. Too many cooks spoil the broth!
- Get "access" put as a heading at every site meeting with the builders, like they already do for health and safety.

Want to know more?

Read the following booklets, available free from RIAI (see page 57):

- Working with your Architect (aimed at home owners)
- A Client's Guide to Briefing and the Building Process, especially pp 3-6, which explain the stages involved in a small project, such as the kind likely to be undertaken by community-based organisations, and what to expect from architects at each stage
- RIAI Cost Data Guidelines.

Although these booklets are not aimed at community-based projects they contain general information that would be useful to anyone who is embarking on a building project.

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**Making your existing premises
more accessible to people with
disabilities without breaking the bank**

Making your existing premises more accessible to people with disabilities without breaking the bank

Your community-based project may not have the opportunity to move to new premises or to do substantial renovations to the ones you have. This doesn't mean that there is nothing that you can do, however. Many reasonable accommodations cost little or nothing and can be done quickly and easily. Others can be incorporated as part of your usual maintenance routines. Even if your building has steps up the front and tight space inside there are improvements that you can make. This section gives you some examples of ways that every community-based project can make existing premises more accessible to people with disabilities without spending money that you haven't got.

Working out what to do

It can be hard to know where to begin when you have only a few resources and a long list of things that you want to put right.

The best way to start is by consulting with actual and potential users of your services who have disabilities about what difficulties they encounter when they try to access your premises and services. Local disability groups can be helpful too, especially in assisting you to get better information on the number of people with disabilities in your area and the issues that affect them. (Obviously, consultation with people with disabilities is the best place to start if you are planning a new building.) Don't confine the discussion to the problems, people with disabilities are also likely to have a lot of ideas about solutions.

An access audit will help you to work out what may need to be done and how best to do it. Access auditing aims to establish how well a particular place performs in terms of access and ease of use by a wide range of potential users, including people with disabilities. It is a skilled job and is best done by a qualified person.

Want to find a qualified access auditor?

Your local access group (see page 50) or the Access Officer in your local authority may be able to help you to locate a suitable qualified person. The NDA is compiling a list as we go to press, so try the NDA Library on **(01) 608 0433** to see if it is available yet.

Can't afford a professional access auditor? See page 46 for information on what else you can do.

Unless you can afford to do everything on your list you will have to decide on your priorities:

- If you have a reasonable amount of money, a useful order of priority might involve making sure that people with disabilities can:
 - get into your premises from the outside (and back out again, especially in an emergency)
 - access and use the main services that you offer
 - use the toilet (and shower or bathroom, if you have one)
 - use any other facilities that you might have.
- Consider both piecemeal and radical approaches to the work. It might be that in the long run you would be better off reorganising the whole space rather than tinkering around at the edges.
- If you have very little money, do whatever gives you the best value for money by facilitating the people with disabilities who are already using your services or who you know would use them if they could.

What do people with disabilities need?

People with disabilities differ, of course, and not everyone will be facilitated optimally by everything you do. Clear space in a big hall is helpful to wheelchair users, for example, but can be disorientating for visually impaired people. Consulting with people with disabilities and then taking advice from a design professional is the best way to ensure that you reach the best solutions.

HERE'S ONE WAY OF GETTING A HANDLE ON WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE:

- Make a list of all your services and the places they are held in.
- Would a person with a mobility disability encounter any problems accessing and using those services, rooms and environments?
- If not, hurray! If so, write them down, then see if you can identify some solutions, or if you need expert help to do so.
- Go through the process again in relation to a person with a visual impairment, a person who is deaf or hard-of-hearing, a person with intellectual impairment and a person experiencing mental health difficulties.
- Think about both adults and children with disabilities, and both women and men.

You may be surprised to find that there is a great deal that you can do to improve people's access to and use of your premises and services, and that it needn't cost the earth. See the boxes on page 42-45 for a few examples.

Specific impairments have particular consequences for the design and maintenance of buildings and the external environment. Here are some general issues which may be relevant to your community-based project:

PEOPLE WITH MOBILITY IMPAIRMENTS MAY:

- have difficulty with long distances, steps, steep slopes
- be unsteady on their feet and liable to slip or trip
- find it hard to open doors, especially heavy ones
- have greater space requirements than non-disabled people
wheelchairs and walking frames are rigid objects which can't breathe in to squeeze through a narrow space!

So think about your premises, layout, furniture etc.

PEOPLE WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD-OF-HEARING MAY:

- need to see important information that other people might just hear this is especially important in emergencies (see page 41)
- need to be in a quiet place with good lighting in order to lip-read
- need to use an induction loop system (if they use a hearing aid) or Sign interpreter (if they use sign language) in order to join in.

So think about your layout, how you give information, how you run activities etc.

PEOPLE WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS MAY:

- bump into things which block their path including doors left half open, boxes stored in corridors, unprotected undersides of stairs etc., so tidy up now!
- benefit from a good level of lighting, with no glare or confusing shadows, and task lighting if they are doing something that needs it
- be able to find their way better with colour contrast indoors, kerb edging on paths outdoors etc.
- need to hear important information that other people might just see
- benefit from tactile information underfoot, like textured rubber matting to indicate doorways, or colour-contrasting strips on top and bottom steps, all of which assist safe navigation.

So think about your layout, colour contrast, furniture, how you give information etc.

PEOPLE WHO HAVE IMPAIRED HAND FUNCTION MAY:

- find it hard to operate some kinds of taps, doorknobs, dimmer switches etc.
- People who have breathing difficulties may find they get worse in dusty environments or where certain kinds of paint, wood preservative or cleaning agents have been used.

PEOPLE WHO HAVE INTELLECTUAL IMPAIRMENTS MAY:

- find complex places confusing and may benefit from logical layout, clear signs with symbols as well as words etc.
- People who have mental health difficulties may also become confused or distressed in unfamiliar surroundings.

What is a loop system?

A loop is just that - a loop of insulated wire fixed around a designated listening area and connected to a power source, an amplifier and a microphone. When someone talks into the microphone the sound goes into the amplifier, which then sends the sound round the loop. Hearing aid users in the area of the loop who switch their aids to the "T" position can then receive the amplified voice without interference from all the background noise being amplified too.

Loops come in all sizes, from very small ones worn round the neck, useful for individuals, to others which fit round the edge of a room, such as a meeting room or auditorium. They can be fixed or can be hired for temporary use at events.

Want to find out more? Contact Deaftech, the technology service of NAD (National Association for Deaf People) on **www.nadi.ie** or call **(01) 8723800**.

Something for (next to) nothing

In the boxes below there are some ideas for useful things that any project can do to make its premises and services more accessible to people with disabilities. They are just examples. There are an endless number of small adjustments that you can make that will have a significant effect on accessibility.

The examples are all very general. Thinking about your specific circumstances is very important, for example, exactly where in your particular premises you position a photocopier so that a wheelchair user can operate it.

One thing you should certainly do is check your health and safety statement and policy to make sure that they deal with people with disabilities who use your services. Make sure that your escape routes are usable by people with disabilities and that any alarm system incorporates flashing lights (to alert people who are deaf or hard of hearing) as well as bells or other sounders. Include people with disabilities in any fire drills you may have.

Want to make a difference but haven't got a cent?

Here are some useful things that your project can do that cost nothing:

- redraw the parking bay nearest your entrance so that it is the right size for someone with a disability (if you have no parking bays of your own, ask your local authority to provide one in the street outside your premises)
- reposition leaflet displays, photocopiers and other equipment so that they are in the range of 450-1300mm off the floor the range in which most people can reach things easily

- next time you are painting, make sure that the doors are in a contrasting colour to the walls people with visual impairments will be able to find their way around your premises more easily
- reorganise the furniture so that there is a clear route through rooms and round your premises that way people who need more space to move around or who can't see things which might be in their way will be able to get around independently
- put up a notice beside the entrance saying that your staff and volunteers are ready to help any people with disabilities who may need assistance to access your premises and services (and that you welcome feedback about what you can do better)
- carry out a maintenance audit by making sure that everything you have is working properly and is maintained in the best possible state
- eliminate trip hazards inside your premises by tidying up, attending to unstable furniture, tears in flooring etc.
- clear the pavement outside your premises of bikes, bins and anything else that might get in people's way
- make sure that the cleaning agents you use aren't toxic and don't make people's asthma or breathing difficulties worse
- mark emergency exits clearly
- put together Personal Emergency Egress Plans for any people with disabilities on your staff or who are regular visitors to your premises (contact the NDA to find out how to do this).

Want to make a difference but have less than £100 to spend?

Here are some useful things that your project can do that cost next to nothing:

- put down textured rubber matting to indicate to visually impaired people that they have reached a doorway
- put a visually contrasting strip on the top and bottom step of flights of stairs to show people with low vision that they have reached the end of a stairway
- make sure that you have some seating with arms, it's easier for people with mobility impairments to get into and out of
- put your information leaflets on tape. All you need is someone with a clear speaking voice and a double tape deck. Information on tape is useful for adult learners and people whose first language is not English, as well as people with disabilities
- arrange disability equality training for your staff, volunteers and/or management committee
- subvent a staff member or volunteer to go on a sign language course
- visit a project like yours that has more experience of providing reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities
- replace failing light bulbs and/or upgrade your lighting
- get rid of door saddles

- improve your signage. (DESSA has a document called Template: Access Handbook which gives some very clear examples. Sign Design Guide in the NDA Library is also good.)

If you can do so much on so little, imagine what you can achieve with a few thousand euro!

Very basic DIY access checks

If you can't find or can't afford an access auditor you could:

- get a competent architect to assess your premises using an existing access checklist and either Building for Everyone or BS 8300:2001
- do some very basic checking yourselves, in consultation with people with disabilities.

CAUTION!

No access checklist is perfect. They are all slightly different. New ones come out all the time and they are constantly being updated. Some are easier than others for non-professionals to understand.

In addition, most access checklists use terms like "easy to use" and "adequate", which can be hard to judge. Some aspects of access auditing are very technical, for example, checking the correct distance and relationship between grab rails and other items in wheelchair accessible toilets. Others are mostly common sense, such as checking that door handles are easy to use (round ones are difficult, big lever handles are relatively easy). If you decide to do some DIY access checks, read Building for Everyone first. The website of Centre for Accessible Environments in the UK (www.cae.org.uk) also has information on access auditing.

A few quick tips:

- Want to check if a door or other space is wide enough to admit a wheelchair? Get cardboard boxes from the supermarket, flatten them out and cut out a piece 750mm wide and 1250mm long. This is the minimum space that a user of an average manual wheelchair needs. If it fits through the door without bending or scraping at the edges you are probably OK but remember that:
 - in a doorway a clear opening space of 800mm (with 25mm free space on either side of your cardboard) is about right if doors are too wide they can create other problems, depending on where they are situated
 - many people use larger than average or motorised wheelchairs
 - if someone is pushing the chair the space requirement is 1600mm long
 - an independent wheelchair user needs a space 1800mm square to do a full turn, and 1500mm square to do a three-point turn someone being pushed needs more space than that.

The good news is that any space that accommodates wheelchair users is big enough for everyone else, too. People who use crutches and people accompanied by guide dogs are among those who need lots of space along with people wheeling double buggies etc.

- Want to know if a wheelchair user can reach something? Sit down and try yourself but remember that many people with mobility disabilities don't have full reach or good grip. Lots of other people have difficulty in bending.
- Best tip of all? Involve people with disabilities in doing the checking with you but remember that everybody's requirements and abilities are different, so always get professional advice on key issues or before committing resources to building works.

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Conclusion

Conclusion

If 'Access Inside Out: A Guide to Making Community Facilities Accessible' has done its job well, you are now a bit clearer about how issues of accessibility and reasonable accommodation affect your community-based project. You probably still have a lot of questions though perhaps even more than before you started (different ones, we hope). So how can you get some support?

- Talk to DESSA
- Talk to the NDA
- Talk to your local authority Access Officer
- Make contact with local access groups, if there are any in your area. These are voluntary groups of people with disabilities, design professionals and others who aim to ensure improved access for people with disabilities in local areas. They may well be able to help you with many aspects of your accessibility plans. The Access Officer in your local authority will know if there are any groups in the area, and how to contact them and will themselves be a good source of support.
- Your local occupational therapist (employed by the HSE) may also be able to help, especially with regard to choosing equipment and fittings.
- Make contact with other community-based projects which have gone through this process. DESSA may be able to help you to locate them. Read about the experiences of Tralee CDP on pages 53-55.

- Use your local networks and contacts through Community Forums, County/City Development Boards (CDBs), Community-Based Networks, Centres for Independent Living (CILs), Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI), Partnership companies, regional support agencies etc. to find out what other people have done and to enlist their help and support.
- Read some of the resource material and/or contact the organisations listed throughout this booklet.

Let DESSA know how you get on. Your experience will be very useful to others.

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**Real life access planning:
access at Tralee CDP**

Real life access planning: access at Tralee CDP

Tralee Community Development Project began life in a sheet metal shed with a two-bar heater and strip lighting. In a way life was easy in those early days. Everyone had their own key to the premises, it was easy to mind because there were no assets to speak of and maintenance was no problem the building was so grotty nothing seemed to make that much difference so we weren't really hung up on the cleaning and repairs!

Nine years later we are sitting in what can only be described as a flagship for accessible community buildings. We have bought the premises. Originally we were tenants on the ground floor. Today we occupy two floors. Our building is also a major asset belonging to the community. So now groups do not have their own key, cleaning and maintenance is a full time job, and depreciation is an issue we have to plan for in the future. To protect our premises we require a caretaker, who is funded through a CE scheme thanks to FÁS. Even keeping that resource in place is a piece of work. But having a helpful person who is also discreet and sensitive on site is a support perhaps particularly in the case of people with mental health issues.

So if we are in the business of community development, why, you might ask, are we now running a building and taking on all the administration and management work that is required to run it well? The answer to this is very simple...THIS IS AN EQUALITY MEASURE. We are not in the business of managing buildings. But we are very definitely in the business of inclusion, enabling and encouraging participation in project and community life. We also aim to work in line with best practice. We wanted to build a project (not just bricks and mortar) that would meet the needs of all people but paying particular attention to the needs of people with disabilities, older people, parents and families.

Since Tralee CDP opened in 1996 we have had people with disabilities engaging with us as voluntary management members and as group participants. From the start this gave us the chance to observe at first hand people's experience of using our building. When it came to designing our refurbished premises we also had people using the centre to consult with.

Before meeting our architect we drafted a questionnaire which was given to all groups and project users. We went to huge trouble to make sure that we met the needs of people with a wide range of impairment or other needs (such as parents with buggies etc.). We spent a lot of time on the comfort, health and safety of project users. The information we got from the questionnaire raised concerns about things such as fire escapes, access to the first floor, what type of room size the different groups would need.

When we met the design team we set a few basic quality standards. The guiding principle was universal design for use by all (the tool was Building for Everyone). We also insisted that we would not open the first floor until our lift was installed and operational. In fact we ended up opening the ground floor nearly two years before the first floor. This phased approach to our development meant that it took longer but we got it all done to the highest standard and access did not suffer due to funding or time constraints.

Getting things right at the design stage is vital. Any changes afterwards result in additions to the original contract price. Once the bricks and mortar have been planned for, then all wiring and location of power points, telephones and other such equipment requires careful planning. The next stage is the positioning of furniture, filing cabinets etc for ease of movement around the place. Finally don't forget smaller items relating to day-to-day use by people with disabilities. For us this meant training and investigation into the right kind of toys and equipment for our new crèche, appropriate learning resources for our after-school homework club, and simple things like clipboards that people can use for writing in small group sessions. Training for all staff, management and volunteers is also a vital part of the equation.

Tralee CDP started out this journey with the very best of intentions and quite a bit of experience in working with people with disabilities. But despite our best efforts we still got some things wrong!

We recently discovered that our front entrance is lethal. A past project user called in recently only to find that there is a very slight incline at the front door and the door itself is very heavy. She uses a large and heavy motorised wheelchair. She could have rolled back out in front of traffic. Shock and horror! How could we have made this mistake?

So, using hindsight, our advice to anyone developing an accessible building is:

- The most important thing to realise is that people with the same impairments can have very different needs. So invite a wide range of people in to talk to you before you draft up any plans with your design team.
- Make sure you get the right architect. Pick someone who has experience of access issues. Ask to talk to past clients and visit their premises to see the quality of the work.
- Visit as many other accessible community buildings as possible. Ask people what is the best and worst thing about their building.
- Take your time. If you make mistakes you will have to live with them for ever!

Sharon Browne
Tralee CDP

RESOURCES

Comhairle

Hume House,
Ballsbridge,
Dublin 4.

Tel: 01-605 9000

Fax: 01-605 9099

E mail: comhairle@comhairle.ie

Web site: www.comhairle.ie

DESSA

Fumbally Court,
Fumbally Lane,
Dublin 8.

Tel: 01-416 3548

Fax: 01-453 6861

E mail: info@dessa.ie

Web site: www.dessa.ie

DFI

***(Disability Federation of
Ireland)***

Fumbally Court,
Fumbally Lane,
Dublin 8.

Tel: 01-454 7978

Fax: 01-454 7981

E mail:

info@disability-federation.ie

Web site:

www.disability-federation.ie

Equality Authority

2 Clonmel Street,
Dublin 2.

Tel: 01-417 3336

Lo call 1890-245545

Fax: 01-417 3331

E mail: info@equality.ie

Web site: www.equality.ie

Forum of People with Disabilities

24 Hill Street,
Dublin 2

Tel: 01-878 6077

Lo call 1850-367867

Fax: 01-878 6170

E mail: info@fpd.ie

Website: www.fpd.ie

NAD (National Association for Deaf People)

35 North Frederick Street,
Dublin 1.

Tel: 01-872 3800

Fax: 01-872 3816

Fax/Text: 01-878 3629

Videophone: 01-817 1400

E mail: nad@nadp.ie

Website: www.nadi.ie

RESOURCES

National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI)

Whitworth Road,
Drumcondra,
Dublin 9.

Tel: 01-830 7033

Lo call: 1850 33 43 53

Fax: 01 830 7787

E mail: info@ncbi.ie

Website: www.ncbi.ie

NDA (National Disability Authority)

25 Clyde Road,
Dublin 4.

Tel: 01-608 0400

Library: 01-608 0433

Fax: 01-660 9935

E mail: nda@nda.ie

Web site: www.nda.ie

RIAI (Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland)

8 Merrion Square,
Dublin 2.

Tel: 01-676 1703

Fax: 01-661 0948

E mail: info@riai.ie

Web site: www.riai.ie

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