

Capacity for Inclusion

The aim of this project is to support members of the Waterford Children and Young People's Services Committee to develop and embed as best practice a strategic approach to social inclusion enabling children and young people with additional needs the opportunities to live ordinary lives.

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 staff and differing views on what constitutes inclusion can create barriers to effective inclusive policies and practices.

This project aims to change that. It seeks to give practitioners the capacity and competence to understand the key factors that impact on a disabled child or young person's access to equal opportunities in Irish life leading to their increased independence, social and community participation. It also seeks to develop a co-ordinated approach in enhancing capacity and competence in prevention and early intervention for children and young people with disabilities and their families by developing a shared understanding of inclusion and disability equality.

The Innovation

Disabled children are one of the most marginalised and excluded groups of children, experiencing widespread violations of their rights. Their experience – lack of opportunity, social isolation, discrimination and bullying are caused, not by their conditions, but are a consequence of a lack of understanding and knowledge, of ignorance and outdated views of disability.

Ireland's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) requires agencies to focus on the rights of children and young people with additional needs. Evidence from across the world demonstrates that it is possible to remove the barriers that serve to exclude and marginalise disabled people, and to build inclusive societies in which all children and young people are enabled to realise their civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights.

According to UNICEF "*the greatest barriers to inclusion of children with disabilities are stigma, prejudice, ignorance and lack of training and capacity building*".¹ Knowledge and understanding of the barriers and challenges faced by children with disabilities is essential if their rights are to be realised. This is what **Capacity for Inclusion** is about.

¹ Children and Young People with Disabilities Fact Sheet, UNICEF, May 2011

This is a social justice project underpinned by the following principles:

1. Disability is a human rights issue to be mainstreamed into all programmes for children and young people.
2. 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. These include the attitudes and prejudices of society, policies and practices of governments, and the structures of the health, welfare, education and other systems
3. Agencies must proactively involve and enable disabled children and young people to be heard in service planning, delivery and review. The voices of disabled children themselves have frequently been excluded, as research has focused on the perspectives of parents, professionals and other adults.²

Project Objectives and Key Elements

1. To promote awareness of Capacity in Inclusion across agencies working with and on behalf of children and young people.
2. To support staff in agencies working with children and young people in developing their understanding and skills of inclusion and disability equality through **training**.
3. To develop an **Inclusion policy framework** to address disability issues and guide the development of best practice measures.

Key features of the project entail the following:

1. Design & delivery of accredited training (Level 7 module Concepts & Paradigms of Disability, St. Angela's College, Sligo) to Waterford CYPSC members
2. Development of model of best practice for other CYPSCs based on learning
3. End of project seminar showcasing work

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² LIFE AS A DISABLED CHILD: A Qualitative Study of Young People's Experiences and Perspectives, ESRC Research Programme