

Disability and Social Inclusion in Family Resource Centres

A Scoping Exercise on the Inclusion of People with Disabilities
in Family Resource Centres

Final Report 2015



DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND LAW REFORM
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Section 1

Introduction

Background

The National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2016 – 2019, a framework of positive action measures to support participation by people with disabilities in Irish society reinforces the Government's commitment to social inclusion. Family Resource Centres (hereafter FRCs) play a pivotal role in advancing local mainstream participation. Due to their local presence they are ideally placed to consult with disabled people and their families. FRCs also facilitate the identification of local access needs and ways of addressing these needs with disabled people and their families and enable their participation, as community members and citizens.

DESSA, the Disability Equality Specialist Support Agency is a national community development organisation DESSA providing a wide range of supports, information, advocacy and technical guidance to the community & voluntary sector in relation to disability equality and social inclusion & mainstreaming. DESSA also engages in front line service delivery to people with disabilities and families through a number of social inclusion programmes. DESSA has three areas of action - advocacy, mainstreaming participation and supporting families - within which support is given to individuals, families and community & voluntary organisations.

This report *Disability and Social Inclusion in Family Resource Centres: A Scoping Exercise on the Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Family Resource Centres* explores the experiences, challenges and support needs of community development practitioners in advancing the full and active participation of individuals who experience disability and their families in local community life.

The report is part of a project called Promoting Positive Community Attitudes to People with Disabilities which DESSA initiated in 2015 with funding support from the Department of Justice & Equality under the Disability Awareness Programme 2015 Promoting Positive Attitudes to People with Disabilities.

The aim of this project is to challenge and change perceptions of disabled people as being in need of care and control to seeing them as citizens and as being contributors to community. The project seeks to support staff and volunteers working in Family Resource Centres to develop an understanding of the issues and barriers experienced by people with disabilities and to create real and effective opportunities for disabled members of communities to actively participate in and contribute, if they so wish, to local community life. The project is ultimately concerned with enabling social inclusion and supporting FRC staff and others working in community development to be animators of this process.

FRCs are organisations involved in anti-poverty and social inclusion initiatives in their communities and have a clear focus in identifying and responding to the needs of children and families, including those who experience disability, by providing accessible, appropriate and timely supports. There are 109 FRCs funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs through the aegis of TUSLA, the Child & Family Support Agency and operate within the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme of Tusla.

This research was undertaken in partnership with the FRC National Forum, the national representative and peer support body of FRCs throughout Ireland. It aims to promote and assist FRCs and the children and families they support and work with through support, quality education & training programmes and research that respect and enhance FRCs capacity to improve family wellbeing. The findings of this report set out to promote community awareness and activities that effectively enhance FRCs capacity to improve wellbeing of and with disabled people and their families.

Aims & Objectives

The research informing this report aims specifically to examine the capability of staff and volunteers of FRCs in including people with disabilities and their families within FRC activity.

The objectives of the research are

- To identify the extent to which disabled people avail of services and activities provided by FRCs.
- To ascertain the capacity of staff and volunteers of FRCs are in meeting the inclusion support needs of disabled people.
- To identify supports which DESSA can provide to FRCs in meeting the inclusion requirements of local disabled people.

Methodology

The methodology chosen for the research was a survey and entailed the completion of a self-administered questionnaire by FRCs. The questionnaire was disseminated by post and e mail to 106 FRCs. The questionnaire included a set of theme-based questions for which each FRC were asked to set down their views and experiences. In some instances FRCs completed the questionnaire via telephone contact with DESSA administration. The questionnaire findings provided an overall picture of the extent of disabled people's engagement in FRCs and provided an opportunity to identify the main barriers to inclusion.

The survey took place with FRCs listed on the FRC National Forum's database. The survey was circulated to 106 FRCs. 34 responses were received and this accounts for a response rate of 32%¹.

As stated earlier, this study is part of a project called Promoting Positive Community Attitudes to People with Disabilities. In undertaking the research and this subsequent report, we aim to identify and respond to the key disability and inclusion requirements of FRCs in creating a competent and knowledgeable community development sector that will proactively include people with disabilities in the work of FRCs. The results of the research will contribute to the content of training programmes and publications concerned with effective social inclusion for and with disabled people and their families.

Report Structure

The report is presented across three sections: Introduction; FRCs and Social Inclusion: Experiences and Challenges; and Observations and Recommendations. Following the conclusion of this section, Section 2 outlines the feedback from the scoping exercise with FRCs. The final section of the report, Section 3, brings together the key points made throughout the scoping process with FRCs and makes a number of key social inclusion recommendations.

¹ See Appendix 1 for list of participating FRCs

Section 2

FRCs and Social Inclusion: Experiences and Challenges

Introduction

The research aims to explore the work of FRCs with disabled people. In doing so this section examines the range of activities and supports that disabled people access within FRCs. Included in the scoping exercise was the need to recognise the capacity of staff and volunteers of FRCs to meet the effective access and participation requirements of disabled people. DESSA also felt it was important to recognise the specific support needs of FRCs in increasing disabled people's participation and engagement their local life course and community choices.

This section is based on 34 self-completed questionnaires and the findings are presented under the following headings:

Participation in FRC Activities

Barriers to Participation

Skills and Knowledge of FRCs

Support Requirements and Capacity Building of FRCs and DESSA

Participation in FRC Activities

All of the FRCs who took part in the survey engaged in a wide range of family support activities and all indicated in their answers that disabled people had been encouraged to be effective participants in these activities.

The main activities mentioned included:

- Classes and training courses for adults in computers, childcare, cookery, arts & crafts, pre-employment programmes and self-advocacy,
- Parenting programmes
- Back to education programmes
- Counselling and support
- Family support
- Personal Development
- Information, advice and drop in
- the provision of support groups for various social groupings or those with a similar family support need. These include older people, parents, women, Men's Shed etc

Many FRCs stated that they are open to all people irrespective of ability. Several also noted that they are not in an accessible premises, but due to budgets and their renting status, they are not in a position to make the FRC more accessible to disabled people.

Some FRCs intimated that they offer access to the mainstream and cater for all persons in their communities but are limited in terms of those groups with additional access requirements or what some FRCs called ‘special’ needs. Other FRCs identified specific activities such as advocacy for parents of disabled children and young people and social activities for people with mental health access support difficulties.

Several FRCs highlighted collaborations with disability service providers such as St. John of God’s and Irish Wheelchair Association. This usually involved FRC premises being used for disability provider day services and where 'clients' might also get involved in the FRCs own activities such as gardening.

Barriers to Participation

The FRCs were asked in the scoping exercise to outline what in their view are the main barriers to providing supports to disabled people, their families and carers. From the scoping exercise, the two main barriers noted are the lack of funding & resources and the lack of accessible premises. The main finding was followed by a recognised lack of information & competence and fear & a lack of confidence in facilitating local disabled people.

Additional barriers include inaccessible transport services and FRCs perceived lack of capacity to engage with the access requirements of individuals with complex needs. (see table 2.1 below)

Table 2.1 Barriers to the provision of supports and activities within FRCs

Barriers	% of responses
Physical access/suitable premises	(11) 32%
Lack of information/training	(8) 23.5%
Lack of funding/staffing/resources	(12) 35%
Fear/lack of confidence	(8) 23.5%
How to target and engage	(1) 3%
Unaware of disabled people living in the community	(1) 3%
Transport	(2) 6%
Other	
Limited capacity to support individuals with complex needs	(2) 6%

Skills and Knowledge Requirements of FRCs

While the scoping exercise enquired on the barriers to working with disabled people, this issue was also approached in another way - by asking FRCs to suggest what are the main skills and knowledge that could support FRC staff/volunteers (existing or required) that assist in working and including disabled people and therefore in overcoming barriers. Their responses were more enthusiastic in terms of ‘what could be’ with local disabled people.

Table 2.2 Skills and knowledge to effect successful engagement and support

Skills and Knowledge	% of responses
Knowledge and understanding of how to work with disabled people and training in disability equality, accessibility, policy, inclusive childcare, and advocacy	(19) 56%
Specific impairment related knowledge	(2) 6%
Dedicated skilled staff	(2) 6%
Links and networking capacity with advocacy groups, disabled people’s organisations, disability service providers and health agencies	(2) 6%
Information on rights and entitlements and awareness of external supports	(2) 6%

The findings tell us that a large proportion, 56% of FRCs view having effective skills and knowledge as the main areas of support requirements to work for and with local disabled people. This includes also having knowledge not just about disability but also, crucially, about various types of impairment.

Several FRCs also identified the following skills or knowledge resources and supports: lobbying and advocacy skills, policy & legislation and networking.

FRCs were also asked to identify specific supports they require in order to better provide supports and services to disabled people and their families. These included:

- Information on Policy and Legislation
- Advocacy Support
- Information and training on Access

Overall, these issues give a good idea of the content and direction of future training, knowledge and information support requirements of FRCs. DESSA's scoping exercise has given FRCs a thinking platform to identify knowledge barriers & gaps in order to enhance their capacity to effectively include disabled people and their families in their work practice.

Understanding different types of impairment was cited as a deficit among staff and volunteers in some FRCs. This is a fundamental point and underlines the recognition on the part of the FRCs about their lack of knowledge beyond simply the physical or sensory impairment to learning/intellectual and mental health conditions and their perceived related issues.

In keeping with this theme of knowledge barriers and deficits, FRCs were asked to outline their level of knowledge of each broad category of impairment on a scale, where 1 represented “good knowledge” and 5 indicated “no knowledge”.

Table 2.3 FRC Knowledge of Disability Category

Disability Category	1	2	3	4	5
	“good knowledge”			“no Knowledge”	
Physical	(4) 12%	(12) 35%	(19) 56%	(1) 3%	0
Sensory	(3) 9%	(14) 41%	(14) 41%	(7) 20.5%	0
Intellectual/Learning	(2) 6%	(13) 38%	(16) 47%	(6) 18%	0
Mental Health Difficulties	(3) 9%	(14) 41%	(12) 35%	(5) 15%	(1) 3%

The first thing to note is the large proportion of answers indicated in the middle or average range of impairment identification. The largest proportion of FRCs within this range suggest they have recognition and perceived knowledge of physical impairment. This finding would be expected to rate well relative to other forms of impairment due to its visibility and identified presence within local communities and wider cultural 'disability' references. The second highest proportion of impairment identification responses from FRCs suggested they have some knowledge in relation to people with intellectual or learning difficulties followed by knowledge in relation to individuals with sensory impairments.

Support Requirement and Capacity Building of FRCS and DESSA

Over the past number of years, DESSA has begun to play a significant role in devising strategies on the ground with community organisations that demonstrate models of practice to creating community pathways for disabled people and promoting social inclusion. This work has been based on collaboration and partnership, on innovation, and on the recognition that disabled people are first and foremost members of their communities and not just users of separate or ‘special’ disability services.

DESSA has worked with FRCs since 2003 providing technical capacity in relation to the inclusion of disabled people and their families within FRC venues and in their family support work. As part of this scoping exercise and as means of directing DESSA in the future FRCs were asked to identify what they saw as the role of DESSA and the supports DESSA could effectively provide. The main scoping exercises responses are captured below. (Table 2.4)

Table 2.4 Nature of support required from DESSA

Supports required from DESSA	% of responses
Training in Policy and Legislation	(5) 15%
Training in Disability Equality Awareness, Disability Proofing, Advocacy and Accessibility,	(8) 23.5%
Partnership building with statutory agencies and disability service organisations	(2) 6%
Strategies to target, communicate and facilitate engagement of impairment specific groups of individuals within FRCs	(6) 18%
Representative advocacy service	(3) 9%
Information on rights and entitlements, local services and awareness of external supports	(3) 9%
Accessing funding	(6) 18%
Other	
Network FRCs to share good practice and peer support	(5) 15%
On-site support	(2) 6%

The issue of training and the general acquisition of disability equality led knowledge, skills and inclusion strategies along with assistance in securing funding are the three key areas of support required from DESSA. Opportunities for FRCs to network with one another, share learning and best practice is also a key area within which DESSA could play a facilitating, guiding and mentoring role.

FRCs were specifically asked to identify their interest in participating in the following training seminars offered by DESSA:

- Accessible Communication - An Introduction to Plain English 10 FRCs (29%)
- Making Community Facilities Accessible 26 FRCs (76%)
- An Introduction to Disability Policy & Legislation 33 FRCs (97%)

The responses shown indicate a high level of capacity building and on-going support assistance for information and technical guidance on both policy & law and accessibility.

All 34 FRCs, when asked, expressed an interest in signing a Community Inclusion Positive to Disability Charter.

Section 3

Observations and Recommendations

Observations

This report has presented the findings from research with FRCs that explored disability issues in the context of FRC work. The development of disability specific work within a community development framework is relatively new.

It is DESSA's opinion that FRCs play a pivotal role in advancing the active participation of disabled people in local community development activity. They have demonstrated this in the range of activities offered to people with disabilities and their endeavours to ensure all community members, irrespective of ability, access all services and activities within FRCs. It is vital that the role of FRCs in promoting inclusion within local geographical and issue based communities be acknowledged and their social inclusion work supported.

Research Objective 1

To identify the extent to which disabled people avail of services and activities provided by FRCs.

It is interesting to note that all 34 FRCs who completed the scoping exercise offer access and include people with disabilities in mainstream activities within their centres and some deliver disability specific programmes. The overarching view expressed by FRCs is that they are open to all prospective users of the FRC however the extent of disabled people's engagement and active participation is unclear.

The key barriers to inclusion identified by FRCs were a lack of access to funding & resources to enable inclusion and inaccessible premises.

Research Objective 2

To ascertain how skilled and knowledgeable staff and volunteers of FRCs are in meeting the support needs of disabled people.

Overall, the findings have established that FRCs have some knowledge about disability. They know more about physical disability than the other types, particularly mental health issues.

How FRCs identify and work with disability mainstreaming access issues and requirements, what are the issues and how they are respond, are all key points of learning for FRCs if they are to enhance the inclusion of disabled people.

In terms of support needs identified, training or more precisely, a programme of training, is one of the clearest ways emanating from the research for FRCs to enhance the inclusion of people with disabilities and their families. Alongside this is the need for assistance in accessing additional resources.

It is important to note that inclusion does not necessarily cost more. Sometimes it is about changing policies and procedures and outlook rather than requiring additional staff or making structural changes to premises. This identified need for additional funding, underpinned by a belief that inclusion costs money, highlights for DESSA the requirement for specific training or guidance on what is meant by social inclusion.

Research Objective 3

To identify supports which DESSA can provide to FRCs in meeting needs.

FRCs were clear in their feedback as to how DESSA should support them in their inclusion work and suggested the following elements:

- Supporting FRCs to build partnerships and alliances with statutory agencies and disability service organisations
- Delivery of training, the content of which will include
 - Attitudinal training
 - Equality Proofing
 - Legislation and Policy
 - Accessibility
- Ongoing role in information provision, networking and policy development including dissemination of policy updates
- Provision of technical guidance in relation to access, engagement & consultation and strategic planning
- Support with funding applications and identification of funding sources

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to enhance FRC capacity to support people with disabilities active participation, engagement and contribution to community life.

1. *Disability Equality Competency Training*

This is a core support could be tied or incorporated into FRC regional and national events and should cover a wide range of topics, information and skills. Key elements and approaches would include:

- disability equality informed capacity building exploring community and social inclusion led perspectives on disability
- address and explore the role of FRCs in providing family support to families experiencing disability
- include delivery by disabled people where applicable
- look at how to research and map the needs and numbers of disabled people in the catchment areas of FRCs
- show FRCs how to network and who to network with in respect of people with disabilities and the disability sector
- show how to include disabled people in consultation and planning processes and in review, monitoring and evaluation systems
- how to lobby and advocate

2. *Equality Continuum & Policy Proofing*

Having a practical understanding of disability equality is an important tool in enhancing inclusion within FRCs. Application of the equality continuum and policy proofing is one such approach. This look to analyse the barriers to the inclusion of disabled people across a number of stages: equal opportunity; equal access; equal participation; and equal outcome or benefit.

This approach will go along way toward enhancing the inclusion of disabled people in FRCs. This will also provide a basis for a wider disability equality proofing of the services and activities of FRCs.

3. *Building Alliances and Networking*

The research identified that some FRCs needed support in making connections with other agencies and stakeholders in the community. DESSA's work in establishing local disability networks and providing on-going technical-support is a key way in which FRCs, disabled people and their families and disability organisations can work together at the local level. How to network and who to network with is an important aspect of building alliances. This is particularly relevant given the vision of New

Directions which is concerned with the provision of quality day services for adults with disabilities that is underpinned by the principle of community inclusion.

4. *Information Provision*

Ongoing support of the work of FRCs in including disabled people is a critical ingredient of its long-term success. To achieve this, DESSA could circulate FRCs with periodic (monthly or quarterly) information, updates and important resources for their work with people with disabilities. This will include guidelines, latest developments in policy issues such as the National Disability Social Inclusion Strategy and the Transforming Lives Programme. Part of information provision is that DESSA are in a position to provide advice and support to FRCs in respect of the queries also.

Appendix 1

Scoping Exercise Participating FRCs

Clare FRCs

Killaloe/Ballina FRC, Main Street, Killaloe, County Claire, Tel: 061-374741

North West Clare FRC, Ardnaculla, Ennistymon, County Clare, Tel: 065-7071144

Shannon FRC, Respond Community Building, Rineanna View Estate, Shannon, County Clare, Tel: 061-707600

Cork FRCs

Adrigole FRC, The Caha Centre, Adrigole, Beara, County Cork, Tel: 027-60909

Le Cheile FRC, Mallow Community Campus, Fair Street, Mallow, County Cork, Tel: 02242439

Donegal FRCs

Cara House FRC, 2 Mount Southwell Place, Markey Square, Letterkenny, County Donegal, Tel: 074-9123986

Raphoe FRC, William Street, Raphoe, County Donegal, Tel: 074-9145796

Dublin FRCs

Artane / Coolock Resource & Development Centre, 55 Gracefield Road, Artane, Dublin 15 Tel: 01-8512289

Ballyboden FRC, 29 Whitechurch Way, Ballyboden, Dublin 16, Tel: 01-4935953

Ballyfermot FRC, Lynches Lane, Ballyfermot Road, Dublin 10, Tel: 01-6264147

Fatima Groups United, F2 Centre, 3 Rueben Plaza, Rialto, Dublin 8, Tel: 01-4534722

Quarryvale FRC, Shancastle Avenue, Quarryvale, Clondalkin, Dublin 24, Tel: 01-6230264

St Andrews FRC, 114-116 Pearse Stree, Dublin 2, Tel: 01-6771930

St Matthews FRC, 5 Drumfinn Park, Ballyfermot, Dublin 10, Tel: 01-6268370

School Street/Thomas Court Bawn FRC, School Street, Dublin 8, Tel: 01-4547018

Galway FRC

Solas FRC, Main Street, Headford, County Galway , Tel: 093-36446

Kerry FRCs

BUDS FRC, Benmore, Ballyduff, Tralee, County Kerry , Tel: 066-7148883

South West Kerry FRC, 18 Main Street, Caherciveen, County Kery, Tel: 066-9481000

Shannow FRC, The Cloisters, Abbeydorney, Kilflynn, County Kerry , Tel: 066-7198018

Kilkenny FRCs

Newpark Close FRC, Newpark Close, County Kilkenny, Tel: 056-7723309

St Canices Community Action, St. Josephs Road, County Kilkenny, Tel: 056-7751998

Leitrim FRC

Breffni FRC, Breffni Crescent, Carrick On Shannon, County Leitrim, Tel: 071-9622566

Limerick FRCs

Hospital FRC, Knockainey Road, Hospital, County Limerick, Tel: 061-383884

Southill FRC, 267-268 Avondale Court, O'Malley Park, Southill, County Limerick, Tel: 061-440250

Longford FRC

Lus na Greine FRC, Main Street, Granard, County Longford, Tel: 043-6660977

Offaly FRC

Arden View FRC, Arden View, Tullamore, County Offaly, Tel: 057-9320598

Roscommon FRC

Family Life Centre, Knocknashee, Boyle, County Roscommon, Tel: 071-9663000

Sligo

Ballymote FRC, Keash Road, Ballymote, County Sligo, Tel: 071-9197818

Tipperary

Millennium FRC, Glengoole, Thurles, County Tipperary, Tel: 052-9157992

Waterford

Sacred Heart FRC, Community Buildings, Richardson's Meadow, Old Tramore Road, Waterford, Tel: 051-306728

St Brigid's Family & Community Centre, 37 Lower Yellow Road, Waterford, Tel: 051-375261

Wexford

Gorey FRC, 4 Charlotte Row, Upper Main Street, Gorey, County Wexford, Tel: 053-9489017

Southend FRC, Seaview House, Maudlintown, County Wexford, Tel 053-9126027

Raheen FRC, Raheen, Clonroche, Enniscorthy, County Wexford, Tel: 051-428805