



**DESSA**

Disability Equality Specialist  
Support Agency

# Annual Report 2020

## Chairperson's Report

Like so many organisations within the community & voluntary sector, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic brought many challenges to DESSA. I am happy to report that we met these challenges head on.

2020 was a year of change and adaptation and one that required us to be creative and innovative in our disability inclusion work.

Despite the restrictions imposed on us I am delighted to report that we are successfully reaching targets set in our year social inclusion strategy, *'Enabling Participation and Contribution 2019 – 2022'*. Following a steep learning curve we redesigned and delivered our training programmes online and staff acquired new skills in implementing work plans and projects whilst working from home.

In 2020, we worked with the DPO Coalition, an alliance of disabled people's organisations (DPOs), in the preparation and implementation of a number of consultation and focus group meetings with disabled people regarding the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. With support from the Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission we are supporting the DPO Coalition in their work to develop a Shadow Report to the UN CRPD Rights Committee. We look forward to continuing this work in 2021.

My sincere thanks to our staff, Alice Griffin and Linda Howe for their ongoing work and commitment to advancing DESSA's work. I would like to acknowledge and thank my colleagues on the Board and Committees of DESSA for the important contribution and commitment they have made to the effective governance of the organisation.

I would also like to thank our funders, the Department of Rural and Community Development and Pobal for their ongoing support and commitment to DESSA. Thanks also to our project funders in 2020, the National Lottery, the Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission, the Community Foundation of Ireland and Tusla.

And finally, to all the people who worked with us during the year by participating in our webinars, training programmes and projects a big thanks to you too.

The past year has reminded us that even if the future is uncertain, it is by working together that we continue to effect change for the better.

***Jacqui Browne***

## About Us - who we are what we do

Established in 2001 DESSA is a national community development organisation and is unique in developing disability specific work within a community development context. DESSA is about promoting disability rights in Ireland, creating a society where everyone with lived experience of disability and their families can participate equally as full citizens. We do this by eliminating barriers to enable disabled people to reach their potential and participate fully in their community.

DESSA's core remit entails the delivery of direct training, advocacy and information support services to individuals and families with lived experience of disability and to organisations supporting them. DESSA also works to develop the capacity of organisations in the Community & Voluntary sector to create non-disabling communities.

### **Vision Statement**

Ireland is an inclusive and non-disabling society, a place where disabled people can fully participate, contribute and achieve their goals and aspirations.

### **Mission Statement**

To pursue the active involvement and full participation of disabled people in society by creating inclusive and non-disabling communities. We do this by delivering strategic capacity building supports to the community & voluntary sector and to disabled people and their families.

## 2020 Achievements – Year at a Glance

Participation of 51 staff and volunteers from children and young people's services, youth organisations and community development groups in **Inclusive Disability Policy & Practice** in Donegal and Wexford

Ongoing support to the parent advocacy organisation, the **St. John of God Family Forum Group**, representing parents of adult day service users in Co. Kerry

Participation of 53 Family Resource Centres in a **nationwide consultation** of FRC staff training needs

Delivery of **disability inclusion and advocacy training** to 36 FRC staff

Adaptation of all DESSA training programmes for **online delivery**

Delivery of advocacy skills training to 38 parents through the **Empowering Parents Programme** in Dublin, Kerry and Kildare

Implementation of **Governance Compliance Strategy**

### Partnerships & Collaborations with

- DPO Coalition
- Donegal, Dublin and Wexford CYPSCs
- Dublin South City Partnership
- FRC National Forum
- Getting Included Network
- Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind
- Kerry Education & Training Board
- South County Dublin Partnership
- St. John of God Family Forum Group

**Dissemination of information** on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

**Project Funders** include Tusla, the Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission, the Departments of Children & Youth Affairs and Rural & Community Development, National Lottery, the Community Foundation and Pobal.

## **Our Strategies**

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was ratified by Ireland in March, 2018 is the framework within which DESSA implements its goals and objectives.

Implementation of all DESSA actions is guided by a set of principles which is concerned with building positive relationships and partnerships between disabled people, their families and their community.

These principles are Human Rights; Social Justice & Equality; Empowerment; Inclusion and Respect.

## **Our Goals**

### **Goal 1 Best Practice Advocacy**

Promoting and championing the rights of disabled people and families through strong advocacy

### **Goal 2 Community Engagement and Social Inclusion**

Influencing community attitudes and awareness and increasing organisational capacity and competence

### **Goal 3 Partnership and Collaboration**

Building effective and sustainable partnerships for inclusion

### **Goal 4 Developing our Services**

Securing sustainable revenues

### **Goal 5 Strong Accountable Governance & Management**

Improving systems and processes of governance, transparency & accountability

## Snapshots of DESSA Work

### Inclusion for Families

Inclusion for Families is a capacity building project which aims to support families experiencing disability by training Family Support Workers and other FRC staff as disability inclusion advocates. This is a partnership initiative between DESSA and the FRC National Forum, the representative body of Family Resource Centres (FRCs) nationwide.

Elements of the project include research, training, networking and information provision to families.

Training in disability equality, advocacy and inclusion is being delivered to staff working within FRCs across Ireland. The aim of this training is to give FRC staff the capacity, confidence and know-how to effectively engage with and support parents of young disabled children.

#### Key Outcomes In 2020

- ❖ **53 FRCs** participated in a national consultation to determine participants' training needs and ascertain level and nature of experience in supporting families of disabled children.
- ❖ **33 FRCs** participated in a Webinar in October 2020 to showcase the project, present the findings of the research and discuss the Inclusion for Families training programme.
- ❖ **32 FRCs** involving 36 staff members participated in three Inclusion for Families training programmes to develop the competence and skills in supporting parents of disabled children.
- ❖ **3** Inclusion for Families training programmes planned for 2021.

The **Inclusion for Families** project is supported by the Community Foundation of Ireland's Early Childhood Ireland National Pyjama Day Fund.



## Snapshots of DESSA Work

### Realising Rights!

#### Supporting implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

DESSA are supporting the DPO Coalition on the development of a Shadow Report to the UN in relation to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The DPO Coalition is an alliance of disabled people and disabled people's organisations which was established in 2020 to develop and submit a report to the UN CRPD Rights Committee on Ireland's implementation of the Convention.

The Shadow Report will identify and highlight the barriers and issues of concern that prevent disabled people in Ireland from enjoying their human rights. The report will be submitted to the UN CRPD Rights Committee in 2021.

#### Project Impact

- ❖ **Support the development and the work** of the DPO Coalition
- ❖ **Enhance advocacy** efforts in Ireland by raising awareness about human rights issues and, through consultation, developing grassroots participation.
- ❖ **Provide accurate information** on disabled people's lived experience of disability in Ireland.
- ❖ **Educate civil society** on a human rights based approach to disability.

This work is funded by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.



Coimisiún na hÉireann  
um Chearta an Duine  
agus Comhionannas  
Irish Human Rights and  
Equality Commission

This project is supported  
under the Irish Human  
Rights and Equality  
Commission Grant Scheme

# Our Board, Staff & Legal Information

DESSA, the Disability Equality Specialist Support Agency is a company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital. DESSA is also a registered charity with the Revenue Commissioners.

## Directors

Jacqui Browne (Chairperson Appointed 30<sup>th</sup> April 2019)

Brian Miller (Treasurer Appointed 30<sup>th</sup> April 2019)

Pat Wylie (Secretary Appointed 30<sup>th</sup> April 2019)

Martin Kelly

Susan Carton

Geraldine Graydon

Anne Colgan

## Staff

Alice Griffin, Manager

Linda Howe, Administrator

Company Number

360818

Charity Number

CHY 16068

Registered Office

Thomas Court Centre, 26 Hanbury Lane,  
Dublin 8

Auditors

Hayden Brown, Grafton Buildings, 34  
Grafton Street, Dublin 2

Solicitors

John Gaynor & Co. Ltd., 42 – 46 Thomas  
Street, D 8

Bankers

Ulster Bank Ireland Limited, College Green  
Branch, P/O Box 145, 33 College Green,  
Dublin 2