



**DESSA**

Disability Equality Specialist  
Support Agency

# Annual Report 2021

*Disability Rights are Human Rights*

## Message from the Chairperson

2021 has been an exceptionally challenging year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing restrictions. Responding to these challenges, I am happy to report a year of excellent achievements and performance by DESSA. We have continued to adapt our work practices and innovate enabling us to fulfil our vision and mission as set in our social inclusion strategy, *'Enabling Participation and Contribution 2019 – 2022'*.

2021 saw the continued implementation of our family support work through the provision of training and advocacy to parents and guardians of disabled children and young people. This work was complemented by the capacity building of family support staff in collaboration with Family Resource Centres and Children & Young People's Services Committees.

Our commitment to partnership was reflected in our ongoing support to the DPO Coalition, an alliance of disabled people's organisations (DPOs), and the establishment of new collaborations, such as the Kildare Inclusion in Schools project (KISp) with Kildare Local Authority and County Kildare Advocacy Network.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities continues to be the driving force which frames and guides our work in DESSA. Through our training and advocacy work we have raised awareness of the Convention and supported staff and volunteers within the Community and Voluntary sector to develop capacity in effective disability rights advocacy.

My sincere thanks to our staff, Alice Griffin and Linda Howe for their ongoing work and commitment to DESSA. I would like to acknowledge and thank my colleagues on the Board of DESSA for their dedication and commitment.

On behalf of the Board of DESSA, I would 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 2021, the National Lottery, the Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission and Tusla.

And finally, to all the people who engaged with and supported us during the year – thank you.

***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 to eliminating barriers to enable disabled people to reach their potential and participate fully in their community. Our work is based on the belief that people who experience disability are individuals with rights, not objects of charity.

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.

## 2021 Achievements – Year at a Glance

Participation of 16 staff and volunteers from Wexford CYPSC members - children and young people's services, youth organisations and community development groups in **Disability Equality**

Ongoing support to the parent-led advocacy groups – Involve Autism; Kildare Autism; St. John of God's Family Forum, Kerry

Participation of 15 family support workers in the **Disability Inclusion & Family Support project** in partnership with Dublin City South CYPSC.

Delivery of advocacy skills training to 50 parents through the **Empowering Parents Programme** in Dublin and Kildare

Online adaptation and delivery of **DESSA training programmes** to over 300 individuals

36 FRC staff and volunteers completed the **Inclusion for Families** training project in partnership with the FRC National Forum

Implementation of **Governance Compliance Strategy**

### Partnerships & Collaborations with

- DPO Coalition
- Donegal, Dublin and Wexford CYPSCs
- Dublin-based Local Development Companies
- FRC National Forum
- Getting Included Network
- Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind
- Parent-led Advocacy Groups
- Kenmare Family Resource Centre

**Dissemination of information** on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to over 1,000 people with lived experience of disability

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

## **Our Strategies**

Combatting social exclusion and promoting equality are key principles upon which DESSA stands. In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, we believe that disabled people and their families are first and foremost members of their local communities with the same rights as all other individuals to enjoy and contribute to community life. This Convention 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

### The DESSA Empowering Parents Programme

#### Empowering families through effective advocacy and capacity building

The goal of DESSA's work in supporting families is to ensure that disabled children and young people receive the support and opportunity to enjoy the same quality life outcomes as their non-disabled peers.

Empowering Parents aims to support parents and guardians to acquire the knowledge and skills to effectively to access rights and entitlements on behalf of their children and to understand and influence policy in relation to service provision.

Training in disability equality, advocacy and policy & law is delivered to groups of locally-based parents and guardians in partnership with civil society organisations including parent-led advocacy groups.

#### Key Outcomes in 2021

- 50 parent and guardians participated in the Empowering Parents Programme
- 8 partnerships established in the delivery of advocacy support and capacity building to families. This includes collaborations with Dublin South City Partnership; Dublin City Childcare Committee; Children & Young People's Services Committees in Dublin, Donegal and Wexford; the Family Resource Centre National Forum and FRCs nationwide; HSE Disability Services Kildare; Involve Autism; and Kildare Autism Network.

## Snapshots of DESSA Work

### **Kildare Inclusion in Schools Project (KISP)**

#### **A partnership initiative between CKAN, DESSA and Kildare County Council**

The Kildare Inclusion in Schools project seeks to support County Kildare schools to become positive to disability. Disability equality awareness in schools is extremely important because it educates students so they may become better citizens.

This project aims to

1. Create positive understanding and awareness of disability and disability equality amongst children and young people.
2. Provide students with practical skills in ensuring their schools are accessible to all, with particular reference to physical accessibility and inclusive communications.

Key Outcomes in 2021

- Delivery training to 24 Transition Year (TY) students in Newbridge Holy Family Secondary School as part of the project pilot.
- Completion of 5 access audits in Newbridge town by TY students
- Development of the draft KISP Toolkit and the KISP Train the Trainer programme for project partners.
- Project participation in Kildare Disability Week

## Snapshots of DESSA Work

### Disability Inclusion and Family Support

#### A Collaboration with Dublin City South Children and Young People's Services Committee

Disability Inclusion and Family Support is a capacity building project which aims to support families experiencing disability by training members of Dublin City South CYPSC working in family support as disability inclusion advocates.

The project entailed consultation with CYPSC members and the design and delivery of tailored training to family support workers. The vision of this project is that competent, informed and skilled family support workers will be able to support families of disabled children in accessing services, supports and opportunities within their local communities and in being included like all other community members.

A key feature of the project entailed educating participants on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its application to supporting disabled children, a named target group within the Convention.

This work is guided by the belief that inclusion doesn't just happen. The realisation of disabled children's rights and entitlements to quality life outcomes requires the support of a competent, informed and confident workforce.

#### Key Outcome in 2021

- 15 Family Support Workers participated in a 10-session online training programme to develop their competence and skills in supporting parents and guardians of disabled children and young people.



# 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> March 2021)

Brian Miller (Treasurer Appointed 30<sup>th</sup> March 2021)

Pat Wylie (Secretary Appointed 30<sup>th</sup> March 2021)

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



pobal



**An Roinn Forbartha  
Tuaithe agus Pobail**  
Department of Rural and  
Community Development

government supporting communities

DESSA work is supported by the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO), funded by the Government of Ireland through the Department of Rural and Community Development