

# **Bringing Disability Inclusion to Where People Live**

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**Seanad Election Manifesto 2016**

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## **Introduction**

Local authorities have a key leadership role to play because people with disabilities live in local communities. Every issue is important to those affected by it, but the issue of disability is vital to Ireland's long term sustainability. The policies and supports which governments put in place to contend with the challenges posed by disability will impact at some stage on every single family in this country.

This manifesto is in two parts, Section A provides context, and Section B highlights some of the key social policy areas that need to be delivered at a local level so that people with disabilities can live ordinary lives in their community, in the same way that the non-disabled population do.

If, with your support, I get elected I will concentrate my efforts on developing an inclusive local community, one in which people with disabilities and their families can participate in and influence the inclusive development of the communities in which they live.

A key feature of this is equality of access to mainstream resources, facilities, and opportunities. In an inclusive environment the individual living with disability is recognised as an equal citizen who can choose to live a life of his or her choosing, among his or her peers, in a community of his or her choice, in the same way that those not living with disability can.

I am seeking your support so that together we can:

1. Give the 600,000 people with disabilities a voice.
2. Keep the pressure on to ensure ratification of the UN CRPD and its delivery at local level.
3. Assist and facilitate members of the Seanad and Dáil to support the disability movement and to progress disability inclusion at local level where people live.
4. Work to ensure full participation for people with disabilities in the local community.
5. Ensure that disability is included in all mainstream plans at local and national policy levels.

## Section A: Context

### What Recovery?

People with disabilities and their families experience multiple disadvantages in Ireland and recovery for them has yet to take hold. Services and supports for people with disabilities were severely depleted during the recession, and people with disabilities continue to live with the impact of the decisions taken by successive governments. Barriers to inclusion remain despite repeated commitments to people with disabilities. Their experience has been that they have had to fight for every bit of progress.

I will work to reverse the negative impact the recession has had on people with disabilities, families, and carers. I will work with all local authorities, the Dáil and the Seanad in order to achieve this.

### Some Facts and Figures about People with Disabilities

- 13% of the population reported having a disability in 2011, that is, nearly 600,000 people. This does not include families, carers, and friends of people with disabilities.
- Disability is a societal issue, not a sectoral one. At some stage in all our lives, disability / illness / conditions will have an impact on our health and well-being.
- People with disabilities are more likely to be living in consistent poverty than the general population, 13% compared to 2% for those at work.
- People with disabilities had the lowest average annual disposable income (with the exception of students) in 2014, €24,914 compared to €54,430 for those at work.
- Almost half of people with disabilities incur extra costs due to illness or disability.
- Among people with disabilities generally, 43% have not progressed beyond primary education. This compares with 19% of adults.
- 30% of people with disabilities were active in the labour force in 2011, which is less than half that of the overall population.
- Over one-third of people with disabilities, and almost two thirds of younger people in the 18 – 34 age groups would like to work if the circumstances were right.

## Leadership at Local Authority Level

Recent policy reforms now position local government as the primary vehicle of governance and public service at local level, and include elements which highlight the need for more inclusive policy making and for local authorities to secure greater citizen engagement and involvement in these processes<sup>1</sup>.

If elected, I will be in a position to support this process by providing advice and guidance on the best ways of including people with disabilities as part of the citizen engagement process. I will also provide support and guidance on the main disability policies, and on how disability relates to mainstream public policies, their implications and what is required to ensure their delivery at local level. These policies include:

- The new National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) 2016 – 2019.
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD)<sup>2</sup>.
- Framework Policy for Local and Community Development<sup>3</sup>
- Introduction of a public sector equality and human rights duty<sup>4</sup>

While an integrated, ‘whole of government’ approach has repeatedly been called for, and has been recognised as critical, experience has demonstrated it has not always been delivered. Achieving cohesive policy making across departments, agencies, and local structures is challenging. Involving communities in planning and decision-making in respect of those policies, interventions, programmes, and actions that affect them is another key requirement. At local level, supporting an integrated, coherent approach is to be achieved through County/City Local Economic and Community Plans that are adaptable to changing needs and which clearly identify the outcomes they aim to achieve. Electing me to the Seanad will mean that this work can be further progressed at local and national levels.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Putting People First: An Action Programme for Effective Local Government (2012); Local Government Reform Act 2014

<sup>2</sup> Ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) will have implications on local and national policy planning and delivery. The NDIS will be a key vehicle for delivering on commitments under the Convention when it is ratified in Ireland.

<sup>3</sup> Our Communities: A Framework Policy for Local and Community Development in Ireland.

<sup>4</sup> Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 provides for the introduction of a public sector equality and human rights duty. Such a duty requires public bodies to consider the human rights and equality impact of their policies, services, procedures and practice and to ensure that the promotion of equality and human rights becomes a core part of the way in which the organisation operates and conducts its business, rather than an add-on or a reaction to incidents of discrimination or human rights violations that arise. Equality and Rights Alliance Campaign (2015) A New Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.

## **Local Authorities' Responsibilities in relation to Disability**

Local authorities deliver services of particular importance to the population as a whole, including disabled people. These services include for example:

- Housing
- Planning - roads, pedestrian crossings, footpaths, and public facilities such as libraries, parks, and other amenities
- Education and training supports

Delivering on the objective of promoting and pro-actively encouraging equal opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate in the economic, social, and cultural life of the community is both the goal and the challenge<sup>5</sup>.

People with disabilities and their families have an expectation that mainstream public services are person centred and available to them in a coordinated fashion, and that their necessary specialist services are resourced and available as needs demand, and are situated in their communities. Set out below are some of the key areas relating to people with disabilities' inclusion and participation in their communities.

I will bring my expertise in these policy areas as well as in public service reform over the past two decades to support this work.

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<sup>5</sup> Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2006:14) Sectoral Plan, Stationary Office, Government of Ireland  
Bringing Disability Inclusion to Where People Live, 24/3/2016

## **Section B: Practical Social Inclusion Outcomes for People with Disabilities, and their Families**

There needs to be delivery of practical social inclusion outcomes for people with disabilities that reinforce incomes and maximise education, employment, and other inclusion opportunities. Actions must equally focus on children and young people, adults of working age, and older people.

Local authorities are responsible for the delivery of inclusive services relating to housing, planning, and further education, and they equally have a responsibility to provide leadership and act as the central 'hub' for engagement with other public bodies, including government departments, HSE etc., as well as the disability movement.

### **LOCAL PLANNING**

People with disabilities live and want to work and socialise in their local communities. They are equal citizens and require the same general services and supports as everybody else. They need housing, transport, adequate access to shopping, banking, and leisure facilities, to schools, further training, and employment opportunities etc.

The participation and engagement of people with disabilities in mainstream planning and their inclusion as equal citizens in all aspects of community living needs to be planned for, and then fully implemented.

Local government reform has resulted in new structures, including the establishment of Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) in each local authority administrative area<sup>6</sup>. LCDCs have various responsibilities including local and community development funding, implementation of local and community development programmes, as well as driving meaningful citizen and community engagement in this process. A key function of these committees is to prepare the Local Economic and Community Development Plans (LCEDPs) which must include, amongst others, measures to support social inclusion of marginalised groups, to support training and employment creation, to provide community facilities, and to support the capacity of local communities to improve their quality of life.

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<sup>6</sup> The Local Government Reform Act 2014, enacted on 27 January 2014, gives legislative effect to the commitments in 'Putting People First' including the establishment of LCDCs in each local authority administrative area.

- Local elected representatives have a responsibility to ensure that people with disabilities can participate in all aspects of decision making and planning in their local areas.
- The issues for people with disabilities must be automatically included in all the existing and future local plans and developments.
- The National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) 2016 -2019 must be referenced and incorporated within local planning and decision-making structures.
- Local government should work in a coordinated manner with all local key stakeholders in developing and delivering more integrated plans at local level, in particular with the HSE, Department of Social Protection, and other statutory and voluntary agencies operating locally.
- Local planning must also adhere to the objectives contained in Article 19 of the UN CRPD, which focuses on living independently and being included in the community.
- New community representation structures as outlined in the Report of the Working Group on Citizen Engagement must offer local people, including people with disabilities, real opportunities to be actively engaged in consultations and the development of plans. The objectives of the NDIS and the UN CRPD must be reflected in the planning and delivery of local services.

## HOUSING

The policy focus in housing has been on de-institutionalisation, and on striving to make the local community accessible for people with disabilities<sup>7</sup>. There are currently approximately 3000 people living in congregated settings, while at the same time there are many more people with disabilities living in unsuitable accommodation, including people who cannot move into accommodation as adults, as well as people who are unnecessarily going into nursing homes or other residential settings.

The **National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability 2011 - 2016** provides the overarching framework for achieving the long term goal of people with disabilities having appropriate housing to live full and independent lives. While the Strategy has worked well on a number of levels, problems continue to exist. The key issue is a shortage of social housing generally and community-based accommodation for people with different types of disability.

Accessible housing needs to be matched with the appropriate supports to allow people to live independently in their own homes.

Planning housing for disabled people must take into consideration the need for inter-agency working. For instance, it will be very difficult for a person with significant support needs to live in a house in the absence of the necessary health and social services to allow them to live independently. There is little benefit in having a ramp fitted to a house with accessible footpaths and an accessible bus, if, for example, a person has no access to a Personal Assistant (PA) service to get them up in the morning.

Assessment and allocation practices continue to differ significantly between local authorities. Experience has shown that housing for people with disabilities must be effectively mainstreamed to make a difference. In the planning and development of housing, all sources of housing supply, and not just specific housing supports<sup>8</sup>, need to factor in people with disabilities' specific individual needs. This is dependent on leadership to develop efficient procedures.

Better information is also needed on unmet need and on allocations. This information would support local authority decisions on reserving units in new supply projects.

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<sup>7</sup> HSE (2011) Time to Move on from Congregated Settings. A Strategy for Community Inclusion. Report of the Working Group on Congregated Settings.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) funding.

## **EDUCATION**

The Education and Training Boards (ETBs) were established in July 2013, and provide training and education programmes in communities across the country. The majority membership of their boards comprises the members of the Local Authority. Their development offers an opportunity to ensure participation in the meaningful implementation of the National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) 2016 – 2019 at local level.

Local authorities have a responsibility, and particularly in relation to Education and Training Boards they have an opportunity, to drive progress in the mainstreaming of educational services for people with disabilities and to ensure that clear targets are set to allow for monitoring this progress.

## **COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SUPPORTS**

The next government must prioritise the building of Ireland's community disability services. This vital work will require a whole of government approach to achieve the goal of providing supports including social and health supports as close as possible to a person's home.

The Personal Assistant (PA) service is critical for people with disabilities, and there continues to be a substantial unmet need for these services across the country. Other examples of urgent community needs include accessible primary care team services, as well as neuro-rehabilitation supports at community level to enable people with acquired brain injury to live meaningful lives.

## SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Children with disabilities are more likely to come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds compared to the rest of the population<sup>9</sup>. Children with disabilities have a right to an educational experience equal to that of their peers, and while children's services in general are developing in a more integrated fashion, disability services still stand apart.

The National Disability Inclusion Strategy needs to become aligned with the UN CRPD articles on education (article 24) and health (article 25). Key policy areas include the implementation of the EPSEN Act 2004, and its alignment with the Outcomes Framework of the Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People aged 0 – 18 years. Awareness and understanding of the HSE's Programme on Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People aged 0 – 18 years remains patchy, and there exists fear and uncertainty amongst parents of children with disabilities during this transition phase in disability services for children.

A key concern is to ensure that the needs of children with disabilities are catered for in mainstream children's services, including, for example, Tusla's Children and Young People Services Committees (CYPSC), and the Children's Linkage Groups of Public Participation Networks (PPNs).

## GROWING OLD WITH DISABILITY IN THE COMMUNITY

With age, the level of disability increases<sup>10</sup>. However, if people want to, they can continue to live in the community with the right type and level of supports. This is where older people want to be, and it is where their families want them to live. Too many people with disabilities, many of them younger people, are being 'forced' into residential care because the resources are not sufficiently targeted at community living. A focus on access, mobility, suitable housing, transport, health and social services will also ensure that as we age with a disability or become disabled in older age people can continue to live and participate in the family and community life.

<sup>9</sup> Banks, J., Maitre, B., and S. McCoy (2015) Insights into the Lives of Children with Disabilities. NDA, ESRI.

<sup>10</sup> For example, the percentage of the population aged 85 and over who have a disability is 72.3 per cent. Census 2011 Profile 8 Our Bill of Health - Health, Disability and Carers in Ireland.

## TRANSPORT

Almost 50% of people living with a physical disability experience difficulty with going outside the home alone<sup>11</sup>. The availability of accessible transport is essential for people with disabilities to engage in community life, education, and employment. It can have a significant impact on quality of life. The current public transport infrastructure, most notably in rural areas, is a significant barrier for people with disabilities to inclusion in community life. In fact, one in four people with a disability do not use public transport for accessibility reasons<sup>12</sup>.

The lack of access to suitable public transport for people with disabilities forces them to make arrangements for private transport, having in some cases to use their own income or savings while in others having to rely on borrowings from friends / family or loans. A nationally representative survey carried out in 2015 showed that travel costs to access health and other social services was the second highest cost for people with disabilities after health and therapy services. Almost half the sample incurred extra costs related to their disability, and of these 24% related to travel costs<sup>13</sup>.

Examples of some of the Barriers:

- Most inter-city rail and bus providers require 24 hours' notice if wheelchair users plan to use their service.
- Only 56% of Bus Éireann's coach fleet is deemed wheelchair accessible<sup>14</sup>.
- Lifts are frequently out of order, and staff shortages mean that there is often nobody at a station to assist a person with a disability.
- Bus stops, stations and surrounding footpaths are frequently insurmountable, with accessible buses only available on a limited number of routes.
- In relation to taxis, as of April 2015, only 5% of licensed vehicles were accessible<sup>15</sup>.
- Transport subsidy schemes, including the Motorised Transport Grant (MTG) and the Mobility Allowance, have been closed for over two years and the MTG totally abolished.

There is a need to develop an accessible integrated transport policy for people with disabilities to ensure they can fully participate in society. The role of local

<sup>11</sup> CSO (2006) National Disability Survey

<sup>12</sup> Watson, D. & Nolan, B. (2011) A Social Portrait of People with Disabilities in Ireland. ESRI.

<sup>13</sup> iReach Insights an independent Market Research Agency during the period of 15th to 28th November 2015 using the iReach Consumer Decision Research Panel which delivered 1,000 responses from adults in Ireland aged 18+ and is nationally representative by age, region, gender and social class. This research has a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 3%.

<sup>14</sup> Paschal Donoghue TD replying to question by Gerry Adams TD on 17th November, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> NTA (2015) Vehicle Licences county and category, 20th September 2015.

government in the provision of integrated local transport solutions must be examined within this process. Local authorities have an interest in seeing that people with disabilities can be as mobile and independent as possible.

## **Conclusion: Local Authorities as Leaders for Local Inclusion**

The local authority is the provider of and otherwise the planner of many public services, while it is also the one public authority that encompasses the whole of the lives of people. People live in a local authority area and therefore it has an interest in the whole of their lives.

Local authorities must provide a leadership and change role in their dealings with other public entities towards the achievement of coordinated public and social services. We have set out here the areas where local authorities have a responsibility (local planning, housing, and education), and also some areas (community services and supports, services for children with disabilities, supporting older people and transport) where they must take a leadership role and interest in order to progress outcomes for people with disabilities.

Effective cross-agency working is critical to ensure that children and adults with disabilities can make smooth transitions from school to further education, adult services, or employment. So too is it critical in the provision of supports and of housing to enable independent living, and in facilitating participation in further education and training, as well as in the labour force.

I will support the inclusion of people with disabilities and their families through working for 'a whole of government' approach, which will lead to seamless outcomes for people with disabilities and their families, as well as the involvement of communities in planning and decision-making in respect of policies that affect them.

I am seeking your support so that together we can:

1. Give the 600,000 people with disabilities a voice.
2. Keep the pressure on to ensure ratification of the UN CRPD.
3. Assist and facilitate members of the Seanad and the Dáil to support the disability movement and to progress disability inclusion at local level where people live.
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