



Annual Report 2004 - 2005

Chairperson's Statement

This is my third time writing the Chairperson's Statement for Disability Action's Annual Report, which gives me an opportunity to reflect on the progress of the development of disabled people's rights during my time as Chair. There certainly has been significant legislative progress with this year seeing the introduction of the final set of rights under the Disability Discrimination Act. It is perhaps these rights, dealing with the removal of tangible barriers, that may have the greatest effect on public, private and voluntary sector service providers.

Additionally, the introduction of the Special Education Needs and Disability Order, although coming into Northern Ireland three years later than to Great Britain, is welcome in that it provides some protection to disabled children and young people in the vital area of education.

However, much remains to be challenged as disabled people, in this the 21st century, continue to face restrictions on their basic human rights in the areas of family life, health and social care, social security, education, employment, housing and personal mobility. Disabled people tell us every day of the indignity and exclusions that they face and the disability sector needs to address this situation in everything we do.

Increasingly we must also deal with government policy in relation to the voluntary and community sector and the need for increasing efficiency and better delivery of service in a restricted funding environment. Disability Action, as a membership organisation must find ways to support our members, the vast majority of whom are small and purely 'voluntary' receiving no grant income at all.

We look forward to the challenges ahead.

Ken Roulston
Chairperson

During the reporting period Disability Action staff provided a high level of service to people with disabilities, their families and carers as well as to the wider community in Northern Ireland. By also supporting the public, private, voluntary & community sectors we are helping to bring positive changes to everyone on our community.

Access

2004 saw the implementation of part three of the Disability Discrimination Act and the Access Unit gave advice on over 1,000 technical queries. The Unit was heavily involved in the promotion of the new duties and participated in many talks, seminars and conferences to raise awareness of the legislation. The Unit also launched a 'Basic Self-Audit Checklist' in association with the Southern Group of Building Control to assist small service providers to assess their premises for physical accessibility.

Members

The work we carry out with our members is essential in gathering opinion on issues that affect people with disabilities in Northern Ireland. We continue to provide information through D.A. News and a range of other methods and over the next few years the development of our website will become key to improving how we communicate with our members.

Information & Policy

Our Information and Policy Unit provides specialist advice on disability issues and continues to be one of the most important services we offer. This year our Information Service, through our head office and outer offices responded to over 15,000 queries on a wide range of issues from benefits to accessible holidays and travel. The Information and Policy Unit also produced ten information leaflets focusing on a range of issues including benefits and accessible holidays.

ICT Suite

A fully equipped ICT suite was completed in September 2004 at our Belfast office and furnished with assistive technology designed to support those with visual impairments, learning disabilities and those with limited mobility. The suite provided the perfect training environment for participants in our new Career Advancement Programme (CAP).

Career Advancement Programme

In total 24 participants took part in year one of the Career Advancement Programme (CAP), enabling them to take more control of their careers and increase their confidence in their ability to undertake a wider range of tasks in the working environment. CAP has also been developed to address the under representation of disabled people in more senior employment positions.

Mobility Centre

The Mobility Centre has seen a large increase in the number of assessments undertaken with the figure rising to 560. The Centre has also further developed the driving school, with two part-time instructors now working in the Belfast area and one in the North West. Two new Nissan Micras have been adapted for use by the driving school.

Employment Support

Our Employment Support team this year supported 181 employees, with six employees progressing to open employment. We wanted to ensure equality of opportunity for employees currently working in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and consulted all the employees on the scheme. The views of the employees were forwarded to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) along with Disability Action's response to the DFP's Consultation on its Recruitment Code.

Training Support

The Training Support Service supported 400 trainees on the Jobskills Programme with over 50% of trainees moving into employment or further training. The Unit also provided advice to trainees on over 370 benefits issues.

Support Works

During this period Disability Action was successful in gaining two years of European funding to work with young people with significant learning disabilities on Jobskills. The programme, called Support Works, will offer 30 trainees one-to-one support in working towards Essential Skills and National Vocational Qualifications. Two learning support workers are based in Disability Action's Belfast and Derry offices.

Work Preparation Programme

We were also successful in our bid to deliver the Work Preparation Programme (WPP) in the Derry and Strabane Targeted Initiative areas. WPP is a 12 week programme for people with disabilities to help them to improve their employability.

Transport Service

Our Transport Service undertook 6619 Group Transport trips and carried 31,297 passengers on the door-to-door service. Four replacement buses were leased and a development plan was put in place for the extension of door-to-door services into South and East Belfast.

Independent Living Exhibition

In May 2004 the Independent Living Exhibition (previously called the Mobility Exhibition) took place at the Odyssey Arena. There were over 50 exhibitors and the event attracted more than 4,000 visitors over two days.

Community Development

Community Development's key success was the establishment of four Disability Alliances with over 90 disability organisations signing up throughout Northern Ireland. The Unit was also involved in setting up the Step-ability Project in Derry, the main aim of which is to support people with disabilities and their carers to complete education and training programmes and progress to higher/further education or employment.

Diversity Matters

As the Diversity Matters Project entered its final year, a briefing paper on Hate Crimes was successfully launched on the day the legislation came into force in Northern Ireland. The Take the Challenge Make the Change training programme was updated and the training delivered to a number of organisations. New funding was sought for a programme named Diversity Works and seven of the original nine partners are to be involved in the new project.

Focus Consultancy

Focus continued to deliver a range of training courses that help challenge and change attitudes. A total of 108 sessions were delivered and 1,620 people trained throughout the year. The OCN accredited Capacity Building Programme continued this year with groups of disabled people from throughout Northern Ireland completing the course.

Fundraising

Our Fundraising Unit activity, during this year, included nomination as Forestside Shopping Centres Charity of the Year and overall the partnership raised £15,000. The Unit was also responsible for raising £50,000 to equip and furnish the ICT suite.

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