

Realising Equality through Active Participation



The Minister for Equality, Aodhán O'Riordain TD, opened our Realising Equality through Active Participation (REAP) event on 3rd December 2014. In the following speech, he discussed the importance of empowerment and of securing equal rights and opportunities for all, and in building person-centred models of support for people with disabilities. He also commended us at Áiseanna Tacaíochta (ÁT) for our work in making Independent Living and Direct Payments a reality for people with disabilities. Addressing some questions from the audience after his speech, Minister O'Riordain stated that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) should be ratified within a year, and that Ireland still needs to update legislation and the outmoded language within it.

Speech by Minister Aodhán O'Riordain | REAP, 3rd December 2014

Are we all feeling radical this morning?

This is a time of major change in the delivery of disability services in this country. We have embarked on a transformation programme that will put the citizen at the heart of everything we do.



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Áiseanna Tacaíochta is a registered company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital. It is registered in Dublin, Ireland; Number 489250. It has been granted tax exemption by the Revenue Commissioners in Dublin, and has a charitable tax exemption number: CHY 19324.

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In all aspects of disability services, the emphasis is changing from a system which was concerned with inputs, outputs and cost-efficiency to a model of service which is focused on achieving outcomes, ensuring quality and measuring cost-effectiveness.

Meeting the needs of the individual; the individual is at the heart of our disability services. We are at the start of a journey migrating from a segregated group-delivered service to a person-centred and individually-chosen supports model; a model that is designed to enable the individual to live a normal life in society and give support for community-based living, with maximum independence and choice.

Implementation of the Value for Money Review of Disability Services will mean a seismic shift in how disability services are funded and provided, shifting choice and control from professionals and administrators to where it rightfully belongs, with the individual with a disability and his or her family. Services and supports will be delivered with greater efficiency, transparency and accountability.

A number of demonstration projects have already been or are in the course of being implemented to support this commitment. Just over 100 of these demonstration projects have been grant aided by a non-profit organisation, the Genio Trust, with funding provided by the Health Service Executive (HSE), and they will provide a substantial contribution towards the transition to a person-centred supports model.

We are here today to hear about the success of ÁT's innovative project which was launched in 2010, a Direct Payments model which gives people with disabilities that are involved in this project - also known as Leaders - real choice and control over their own services. We will hear from some of the Leaders today, regarding their experiences and how their model is empowering them to take control of their lives and to actively pursue their ambitions.



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One of the key objectives of this government is the reform of our disability services so as to provide the best possible outcomes for all people. My colleagues, Minister Varadkar and Minister Lynch in the Department of Health, committed to moving towards an individualised budgeting model and are supportive of the projects which are exploring different ways of doing this. The move towards the development and implementation of a national individualised budgeting framework raises legal and practical issues, requires careful consideration and planning, and will take some time before it can be rolled out. The next step will be to evaluate the various forms individualised budgeting may take, and identify the solution or combination of solutions best suited to this country.

I would like to commend ÁT on their excellent work to date, on their engagement with government, and on their vision to make Independent Living and Direct Payments a reality.

Just to make a personal point if I might, because, as Sara [Burke, chair of REAP] has said, I'm only a few months in this job, and I freely admit that the area that you are engaged in is not an area that I have a huge history with. But I do know what a sense of inequality means, and Sara mentioned my work in the Direct Provision area. I'm involved now in the whole area of commemorations, and I made this point to Martin [Naughton, director of ÁT] before and we had a discussion about it; about, you know, the decade of commemorations, the 1916 Rising, maybe the restatement of what we believe in as a country.

And if we look at the 1916 Rising or the Proclamation of the Republic or what happened a hundred years ago as a history lesson, then we've really lost an opportunity. Because deep inside that document, if you read it - the Proclamation -



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it commits to giving equal rights and equal opportunities to all the citizens of Ireland. And we have to really have a long and deep and profound discussion with ourselves as a country: what are our ambitions? Do we want to be the best little country in the world in to do business? Or do we want something a little bit more profound that actually means something for the next hundred years?

There's words in here like empowerment, and I sometimes think that certain sections of our society don't realise how powerful they are, but they've been told or given – or, I don't know, been told or made feel as if - they are disempowered or they don't have power. Now I've spent, the reason I got involved in politics, I spent 11 years teaching in a disadvantaged school with some of the most incredible children that I've ever come across, but they were made to feel as if they weren't powerful. And inequality, what it does to you, it gets inside your bones and it's very difficult to shake it.

So, let's not have a country of lesser people. Let's not have a country of disempowered people. Let's not make our ambition to be the best little country in the world to do business. Let's make a country which actually lives up to that ideal of having equal rights and equal opportunities for all of our citizens.

Thanks very much. I hope you have a great day.



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