



# Speaking up for Advocacy

## What's happening in the Community & Voluntary Sector Advocacy Programme in 2008?



**Launch of Longford Advocacy Partners - Disability service, April 2008:** Mr. Peter Kearns, Advocacy Consultant, who launched Longford Advocacy Partners - Disability (L.A.P.-D.) project with representatives from the Citizens Information Board, Co. Longford Citizens Information Service (lead agency) and the L.A.P.-D. Steering Committee.

This is a consolidation year for the Citizens Information Board (CIB)'s community and voluntary sector advocacy programme. Three years of funding have resulted in forty six projects with almost all having their advocate (or advocates) in place. Several hundred people with disabilities have benefited from this new service and the programme as a whole has been a valuable learning experience for CIB. As you will see from our photographs a series of projects have had official launches over the past six months.

An interesting new development in 2007 was the siting of a few projects in residential services – six such projects now exist, with the advocate employed by an external body in

order to ensure independence from the service in the event of difficult issues arising. Ever since the publication of *Strategy for Equality in 1996*, long term residential services have been highlighted as having the greatest need for independent advocacy.

A number of projects are run by Citizens Information Services (CISs) – these give the advocate the opportunity to draw on the CIS's expertise on welfare rights and to route information queries in that direction. Partnerships and voluntary agencies are also involved with the Centres for Independent Living and the Irish Wheelchair Association each heading three projects and different Area Partnerships involved in several others. Several projects involve two agencies – for example, in Westmeath there is a partnership between PwDI and a HSE service. All projects have a Steering Group and, in a new move in 2007, two agencies are now directing two projects – one community, one residential – in the same area.

Training for advocates and Steering groups has been a priority for CIB from the beginning. Already in 2008 two training sessions have been organised, one on reflective practice and a second on case management and recording. Both were well received and more training is planned later in the year. Many advocates are also undertaking the Higher Certificate in Advocacy through Sligo and through Waterford Institutes of Technology.

A sample of C&V programme projects has already been evaluated and a major evaluation will take place in 2009-2010 when decisions on the future direction of projects will take place.

## Launch of Advocacy Projects

Many C&V projects have a launch event to publicise their project. Below are some photographs from recent launches.

### Launch of BRÍ (Acquired Brain Injury) Advocacy project



*Senator Maria Corrigan, Michael Clavin, Marilena di Costa (BRÍ), Barry Andrews T.D., Minister of State, Susan Shanahan (CIB), Sarah Campbell (BRÍ), Mairead Ruane (CIS).*

### DESSA Community Advocacy Project – SE area – Waterford Launch



*Dick Hickey, Susan Shanahan, Jacqui Browne, Martin Cullen T.D., former Minister for Social & Family Affairs, Kay Teehan, Eileen Fitzgerald, Una Tobin & Chris Glennon.*

### Western Mentoring Project



*Anne Leahy, Helen Lahert, Yvonne Fahy, Donal Conlon DSFA, Noel Earley, Nora Maloney, Judith Hulgraine and Peter Kearns.*

## Self Advocacy – new projects and a report from the Interagency Advocacy Movement (IAM)

The Citizens Information Board (CIB) recognises that empowerment of people with disabilities to speak for and represent themselves is a very important aspect of advocacy. The CIB Advocacy Guidelines recommend that clients be assisted “to be as autonomous as possible, even if this is initially more time consuming than direct representation” and acknowledge that “many people with disabilities are well equipped to make their own decisions, given the requisite information and advice”. Developing self advocacy among groups and individuals is an important part of encouraging equality and participation among people with disabilities. Representative advocacy and self advocacy can usefully complement each other.

The CIB has funded 6 self advocacy projects to date which cover a wide spectrum of disabilities and project types. In one project 16 deaf students trained as peer advocates with the Irish Deaf Society. The Interagency Advocacy Movement – which straddles a number of intellectual disability services – involved 16 service users, 10 support staff, 6 Occupational Therapy students and 11 management staff as set out below. In Galway the Mentoring West project trained four physically disabled people as mentors to support other disabled people to participate in community development activities.

The aim of the innovative IAM project is to upskill service users to be ‘advocacy champions’ i.e. agents of change, by developing a culture of advocacy within their own organisations. This programme has three levels of training. The first provided training for champions/service users supported by mentors/staff and focused on developing the champion’s skills. An interesting facet of this training was the involvement of the Occupational Therapy Dept., Trinity College Dublin. The photo (on page 3) shows the Advocacy Champion graduation ceremony in December 2007.

The second level of training was aimed at the mentors/staff and was provided throughout the different agencies. The third level of training – also cross-agency – focussed on management teams in order to help them reflect on their values and understanding of advocacy. The workshops were facilitated by Gogarty Consultancy and Inclusion Ireland and explored how embedded advocacy is within organisations – this led to the development of agency-specific Advocacy Strategic plans. Champions are encouraged to participate in decision making in meaningful ways and to build a culture of empowerment and inclusion.

Under 2007 funding a further three projects are now underway in Wexford Community Partnership, Rathmines Community Partnership, and with the Disability Equality Specialist Support Agency in Galway.

## Personal Advocacy Service delayed

The start-up date for the Personal Advocacy Service (PAS) which was expected in 2008 has been postponed to an appropriate time in the future as part of a range of Government measures announced recently in response to the current economic downturn. PAS is the statutory service named in the Citizens Information Act and will be run directly by the Citizens Information Board. In the Dáil debate on the

Government announcements the Minister, Mary Hanafin T.D., stated that the advocacy service remains a priority and that funding will continue for the Community and Voluntary sector advocacy projects. Already in the six months from January to June, these projects have dealt with 1,000 clients on a variety of issues



### ***IAM Project participants:***

*Natasha Moloney, Jennifer Costello, Emer McGowan (all from Sunbeam House Services), Sara (TCD, OT student), Jason Kearns, David Kearns, Roy Hinch (SJOG, Carmona Services).*

## L.A.P.-D Comes to Longford



Longford now has its own L.A.P.-D – though it's not quite the same as its better known counterpart in the

City of Angels. Co. Longford Citizens Information Service (C.I.S.) officially launched the Longford Advocacy Partners – Disability (L.A.P.-D) project on Friday, 11<sup>th</sup> April 2008 with a well attended event whose Keynote Speaker was Mr. Peter Kearns, Advocacy Consultant and Lecturer at Sligo IT. He gave an interesting and personal account of Advocacy within the social model of disability. An early user of the service, Mr. Mervyn Stewart also spoke of his positive experiences when using the service.

“We aim to provide a professional advocacy service to assist people with disabilities in the county to access services relevant to their individual needs, such as health, housing, social welfare, education/training etc. and it is a free, independent, confidential and impartial service which is available on a one-to-one basis”, Valerie Maguire the advocate said.

**She can be contacted at 043 41069 at Longford Citizens Information Centre, Level One, Longford Shopping Centre.**

## Evaluation of the Advocacy Resource Officer (ARO) Programme

The ARO project is going from strength to strength and in order to assess its effectiveness an evaluation report was commissioned in 2007 from Michael Browne. It is based on an evaluation of four pilot projects within Citizens Information Services (CIS) partnerships where an Advocacy Resource Officer works with information providers to enhance advocacy work in CIS. The role of the Advocacy Resource Officer (ARO) is to develop, support and train CIS staff in the principles and practice of providing advocacy as part of an overall service and contribute to the development of a national model of advocacy within the CIS network.

Positive outcomes include:

- Development of protocols for identifying and progressing advocacy cases;
- Development of a Case Management/Recording system;
- Joint working between two to three CISs;
- Identification of advocacy training needs and provision of required training;
- Development of reporting systems;
- Information providers undertaking more advocacy work.

Problems were seen as:

- Increased work pressure on CIS information providers because of time consuming nature of advocacy work;
- finding time for required training;
- Difficulties in accessing expertise on complex cases.

The evaluator's general view was that the ARO programme provides a worthwhile and effective means of building capacity for quality advocacy work among CIS information providers. When training is complete, the ARO may have a valuable role as a resource person – establishing support mechanisms, providing advice, and maximising learning from experience, as well as taking a prominent role in new and/or particularly challenging cases.

The Citizens Information Board is the statutory body which supports the provision of information, advice and advocacy on the broad range of social and civil services to the public. It provides the Citizens Information website and supports the voluntary network of Citizens Information Services and the Citizens Information Phone Service.

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## Skills Used In Welfare Rights Practice

*Extract from Neil Bateman's book*

- Interviewing and listening
- Record keeping
- Managing time and self
- Researching the law and sometimes a service user's circumstances
- Clarifying key relevant facts in real life situations
- Interpreting and applying legislation and guidance
- Improving self development skills
- Keeping up to date with changes and developments in social welfare and related areas
- Presenting the best case – orally and in writing
- Utilising persuasion skills combined with a rights based and legal approach
- Developing assertiveness and tenacity
- Knowing one's limits, seeking help, asking for a second opinion and knowing when to let go
- Developing campaigning and lobbying skills
- Developing publicity and promotional skills to encourage full uptake of benefits.

From Neil Bateman's *Practising Welfare Rights* published 2006 – slightly abridged

## We've Moved

The Citizens Information Board has moved its headquarters to a fully accessible building at Georges Quay House, 43 Townsend St. Dublin 2, where there will be consultation rooms for advocates when the personal advocacy service begins.

## How is your external supervision? – A safe haven for advocates

In professions like social work, counselling and advocacy external supervision is a useful support for the individual practitioner and is now seen as part of good practice. Many advocates go for periodic sessions of external supervision which allows them a safe space to become more reflective about how they deal with clients and the personal issues which particular cases may bring up for them.

In a collection of essays edited by Jacki Pritchard (*Good Practice in Supervision 1995*) Elizabeth Ash looks at the qualities needed by a supervisor and the need to take account of feelings.

The Ideal Supervisor:

*A warm wall – to give me support and firmness and to bounce off ideas*

*A deep well from which I can draw strength and wisdom*

*A helicopter ready to winch me out of danger*

*A pilot to make sure I steer the right course through difficult waters*

*A harbour master to ensure...safe haven in times of storm and stress*

*The images were produced by a number of experienced practitioners and trainers at a workshop. Obviously they represent the ideal!*

From *Good Practice in Supervision* edited by Jacki Pritchard

## Áthas

Áthas is a new project providing creative arts therapy services to people with a physical, intellectual, emotional, mental health and/or sensory disability. Creative arts therapies are offered on an outreach basis to groups and individuals. It is based in the midlands.

To learn more about the project, you can contact: Annemarie Ní Churraíin at 057 8624525 /087 1252184

Áthas is funded under the Enhancing Disability Services Programme by the Dept of Justice, Equality & Law Reform.