

Submission by Destined to the Inquiry into post Special Educational Need Provision in education, employment and training for those with Learning Disabilities.

Destined is a support organisation for people with learning disabilities in the North West area that was established in 2002. Its mission statement is 'Access to Citizenship through Empowerment - Promoting Social Inclusion' and it has an ethos of inclusion for its members. This ethos is reflected by representation on the Board of Directors which has twelve members, nine of whom have a learning disability and three without who are there to support the Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. There are 7 full time staff employed by the group – two have a disability, 23 volunteers support the Destined activities throughout the year and there are 8 volunteer members who provide peer support to the less able members with a learning disability.

Destined works on the concept that its members should have the same equality of rights and opportunity as everyone else in the community, they may require extra support to participate.

Destined was established to address the needs of young adults with a learning disability, many of whom had spent up to 15 years in the safe routine of a school environment but who afterwards had become isolated in their homes without any appropriate services. It has developed a two strand approach to its operations, the first gives its members the skills and self-confidence to participate in society and the second is to support the community to be pro-active in the process of integration and social inclusion.

Destined supports 120 people with learning disabilities who are resident in both the urban and rural areas of the North West region. It operates from two centres - one in Feeny, County Derry and the other in Great James Street in Derry City. It delivers programmes over seven days each week with sessions in the morning, afternoon and evening, all year round.

The organisation has received recognition as the only organisation in the North West delivering the Bamford Review recommendations; it has won the Best Health Project category of the National Lottery Awards on BBC 1 television and won the Ulster category in the Star Awards for Adult Training with support from NICVA.

Terms of Reference:

1. There are limited choices and opportunities in the Derry City Council area for people with learning disabilities on leaving full time schooling. There are a number of agencies and organisations in the city providing services to adults (18+) with learning disabilities including:

Statutory Sector

WHSC	(Day Centres)
NWRC	(Further Education/Transition Course)

Community & Voluntary Sector

Mencap	(Employability Training)
Challenge	(Cookie Company producing novelty biscuits)
Stage Beyond	(Focus on Drama)
Something Special	(Focus on Music)
Lilliput Theatre Co.	(Focus on Drama)
Playtrail	(Focus on Environmental Projects)
Destined	(Focus on Social Inclusion)

People with learning disabilities generally are not able to access mainstream FE programmes or mainstream training programmes such as Steps to Work or YES due to the lack of support services. Destined is unaware of any individual with learning disabilities accessing university degree course.

The community and voluntary organisations are under resourced to provide the necessary training and education services the sector requires, even though they are best placed in many instances to provide the services.

In terms of Destined less than 25% of its income comes from the statutory agencies.

2. Destined is a representative organisation in the sector with its members and families being an integral part of its structure, so it can reflect their views confidently.

As an organisation that promotes social inclusion for people with learning disabilities into mainstream society it believes that all programmes, courses and services should be made available to its members as well as everyone else.

To fully embrace this ethos of genuine inclusion it will mean that services need to build in flexibility and be adaptable to meet the needs of the participants. This is particularly pertinent for organisations accrediting course.

It will require a planning process to be developed at key stage 3 in schools to determine the career path of the students to ensure that they are not reacting

to what is available in limited choices but that they have made very clear choices for the future.

The C&V sector needs to be resourced to provide support mechanisms to both the individuals and to their families. Each individual should have a budget attached to them to resource their personal development which may be used to engage a personal mentor.

3. Destined services have been recognised as best practice and the group has won an Aontas all-Ireland award for its innovation in training as well as adapted Governance training and ILM Management qualifications.

It has developed its own courses in Literacy, Numeracy and ITC to address the lack of basic skills of its membership. The organisation has worked in close partnership with the North West Regional College (NWRC) and OCN to develop a model of practice that has had excellent learning outcomes.

The group also delivers soft outcome training focusing on independent living, personal development and social skills.

All of this has been delivered in the absence of any structured government resourcing.

It would be proposed that this good practice is replicated and resourced throughout the sector.

4. In a recent life style survey of the Destined membership it was revealed that from a sample of 70 people only two were in employment –one part time and that all were in receipt of some form of welfare benefit. Although almost half had completed an employability training programme this did not lead to actual employment. At present 11 are attending two courses in mainstream further education with the assistance of student support services and peer mentoring support.

Some of the barriers to people with learning disabilities accessing mainstream education, training and employment include a lack of skills as follows:

- Verbal communication skills
Literacy/Numeracy skills
- IT literacy
- Independent Travel
- Money Handling
- Self Esteem & Self-Confidence levels.
- One to One Supports

- Accessible Facilities
 - Signage
 - Inflexibility of Course Design
 - Social Inclusion Attitudes.
 -
5. Traditionally the provision of support for organisations delivering services in the learning disability sector has come from the Health Trusts. Since the Bamford Report was adopted as a Government priority the responsibility for ensuring the roll out of the Vision was to be that of all the Departments. The reality is that in the main the Health Trusts are still the primary organisations taking responsibility for support services.

Since it was established Destined has received an element of core funding from WHSCT, small amounts of year on year funding subject to a competitive application process from WELB Youth Service and a two year funding package from DARD.

There needs to be systematic and continuous resourcing across all Departments.

Dermot O'Hara
Manager
Destined Ltd
45, Great James Street
Derry BT48 7DF
02871362424
d@destined.ie