

Robin Swann MLA  
Chairperson  
Committee for Employment and Learning  
Room 375  
Parliament Buildings  
Stormont  
Belfast  
BT4 3XX

Our ref: COR/54/2014

Xx February 2014

Dear Robin,

Thank you for your correspondence of 23 January 2014 in relation to the Inquiry into post special educational need provision in education, employment and training for those with learning disabilities in NI.

This response addresses what my department is doing in relation to point 1 of the Inquiry terms of reference, "To examine the current range of choice and opportunities available for those with Learning Disabilities on leaving full time schooling".

My Department offers a range of provision which may benefit, directly or indirectly, those with learning disabilities:

### **1. Supporting People Programme**

The main aim of Supporting People is to develop housing support services that will enable vulnerable people to access accommodation suitable to their needs and help them fulfil their capacity to live as independently as possible.

Supporting People is a policy and funding framework for people in either supported accommodation or for those who can live in their own homes with assistance. The programme was introduced throughout the UK in April 2003 in order to support vulnerable people in different types of accommodation and tenure in ways responsive to their needs.

The Department's aim is to maintain a programme of on-going housing support services to enable approximately 17,500 people, including people with a learning disability to live independently in their own homes.

Housing Support Services are delivered by a range of voluntary and community and other housing organisations and are tailored to suit the needs of the individual.

The services are not primarily aimed at providing further education however in developing a person's ability to develop life skills, the supporting people programme can assist in accessing relevant educational services.

A list of Housing Support Services available to people with a learning disability and details of the budget for 2012/13 including a high level analysis of the vulnerable client groups assisted is provided at Annex 1.

## **2. Neighbourhood Renewal Programme**

The Neighbourhood Renewal Programme aims to reduce the social and economic inequalities which characterise the most deprived areas. It does so by making a long term commitment to communities to work in partnership with them to identify and prioritise needs and co-ordinate interventions designed to address the underlying causes of poverty.

Funding may be considered for those with learning disabilities where a priority need for action is identified within local Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans and where resources are available.

## **3. Volunteering**

A key priority of the DSD Volunteering Strategy is to ensure that any volunteering organisation which makes an application for funding must demonstrate how it can provide support to increase volunteering by people with disability.

The DSD Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan “*Join in, get involved: Build a better future*”, endorsed by the Northern Ireland Executive, seeks to create conditions that will enable volunteering to flourish and, in particular, to ensure that volunteering is representative of the diversity of the community.

Embedded within the strategy is a commitment to enhance accessibility and diversity and specific actions have been identified to support, encourage and monitor how people with all types of disabilities become involved in volunteering.

Research shows that people with disabilities are underrepresented in volunteering and DSD has made it a priority within its Strategy that everyone has an opportunity to volunteer.

DSD provides a range of funding support by way of:

- Volunteering Infrastructure funding;
- Volunteering Innovation Projects; and
- Small Grants Funding.

DSD currently fund a number of innovative volunteering projects which, although not aimed at post special education, directly support people of all ages who may have a disability. Some of the projects focus particularly on children and youths with learning disabilities and have a long term aim that those who are involved and participate will go on to be adult volunteers. Examples of these projects are included at Annex 2.

## **4. Benefits support**

There is a wide range of disability-related financial support, including benefits, tax credits, payments, grants and concessions which may be available to individuals with learning disabilities and their families. These include Disability Living Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance which offers personalised support and financial help, so individuals can do appropriate work, if they are able to. It gives access to a specially trained Employment Service Adviser and a wide range of further services including employment, training and condition management support.

I trust you will find this information helpful

Yours sincerely

**NELSON McCAUSLAND MLA**  
**Minister for Social Development**

## **SUPPORTING PEOPLE PROGRAMME**

### **List of Housing Support Services available to people with a learning disability**

- (a) provision of general counselling and support including befriending, encouraging social intercourse, advising on food preparation, reminding and non-specialist counselling where this does not conflict with similar services provided as personal care;
- (b) assistance with the security of the dwelling required because of the needs of the service user;
- (c) assistance with the maintenance of the safety of the dwelling;
- (d) assistance and supervision on the use of domestic equipment and appliances;
- (e) assistance with arranging minor repairs to and servicing of domestic equipment and appliances;
- (f) provision of life skills training in maintaining the dwelling and curtilage in appropriate condition;
- (g) assistance in how to engage with individuals, professionals and other bodies with an interest in the welfare of the service user;
- (h) assistance on access to the provision of equipment and adaptations to cope with disability;
- (i) advice or assistance in personal budgeting and debt counselling;
- (j) advice or assistance in dealing with relationships or disputes with neighbours;
- (k) advice or assistance in dealing with claims to social security benefits and other official correspondence relevant to sustaining occupancy of the dwelling;
- (l) advice or assistance with resettlement of the service user;
- (m) advice or assistance to enable a service user to move on to accommodation where less or more intense support is required;
- (n) advice or assistance with shopping and errands where this does not conflict with similar services provided as personal care;
- (o) maintenance of emergency alarm or call systems;
- (p) responding to emergency alarm calls, where such calls relate to any housing support

service, in accommodation designed or adapted for and occupied by elderly, sick or disabled people;

(q) controlling access to individual resident's rooms;

(r) cleaning of resident's own rooms and windows;

(s) providing for the costs of resettlement services;

(t) encouraging social intercourse and welfare checks for residents of accommodation supported by either a resident warden or a non-resident warden with a system for calling that warden where this does not overlap with similar services provided as personal care or personal support;

(u) arranging social events for residents of accommodation supported by either a resident warden or a non-resident warden with a system for calling that warden.

### **Supporting People Budget Allocation by client group**

The budget for the 2012/13 year was £61m and a high level analysis of the vulnerable client groups assisted through the Supporting People programme is detailed below:

<b>Client Population</b>	<b>2012/13 Budget (£)</b>	<b>%</b>
Addictions	3,262,451	4.9%
Autism	140,940	0.2%
Criminal Justice	2,175,689	3.3%
Domestic Violence	3,897,351	5.9%
Ethnic Minorities	181,132	0.3%
Homeless	12,609,790	19%
Homeless/Criminal Justice	265,028	0.4%
Learning Disability	12,631,572	20.7%
Mental Health	10,074,694	16.8%
Multiple / Complex Needs	505,422	0.8%
Older People	8,978,326	18.1%
Physical Impairment	2,486,978	4.0%
Young Vulnerable People	3,751,854	5.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>60,961,227</b>	

**EXAMPLES OF VOLUNTEERING PROJECTS WHICH DIRECTLY SUPPORT PEOPLE OF ALL AGES WHO MAY HAVE A DISABILITY**

**Supported Opportunities and Local Volunteering towards Equality (SOLVE)**

This is an innovative volunteering project developed in partnership with North West Volunteer Centre and Liberty Consortium. Liberty Consortium is a community organisation which operates the Playtrail, located within the grounds of two special schools in Londonderry. There are key four elements to this project:

1. A person-centred approach to involving young people with a disability;
2. Recruitment of a team of volunteer peer mentors to support the volunteer with a disability;
3. Support to a range of organisations offering volunteer placements; and
4. Involvement of family/ carers through turn up and try and one off volunteering activities.

This unique project is a valuable way of encouraging young people with a disability to play a more active role in society.

**SOLAS**

The SOLAS project 'Champ Youth' is an innovative programme which attempts to address the gaps in the provision of social activities for children and young people with Special Needs using a joined up community based approach.

Its overall aim is to build a network of Champ Youth Clubs across Northern Ireland which specifically cater for young people between the ages of 10 and 16 with a special needs disability, providing a much needed social outlet for them.

While this project does not specifically target post special educational need the aim is to encourage participants to use their experience and continue in a volunteer capacity.