

SUBMISSION

AGENDA

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Services I would like to see in place**
- 3. To address barriers to high quality provision**
- 4. Identify the barriers to coordination across departments**
- 5. Current provision by FE Colleges, etc.**

Submission to Inquiry into Post Special Educational Need Provision in Education, Employment and Training for those with Learning Disabilities.

1. Introduction to Person Submitting

- 1.1 I am the parent of a young lady of 32 years who has the condition Down's Syndrome. I wish to impart my experience through schooling, training and employment throughout her life so far, in the hope that it might be useful to future planning.
- 1.2 **Schooling:** In 1986 my daughter was accepted into the local primary in Dublin where we lived at the time. She was one of a class of 30 with no classroom assistant for the first few years. In 1995 she progressed to secondary school where she passed English, Home Econ and Art in Junior Cert Exam and then five subjects in the Leaving Certificate Applied (equivalent VGCSE).
- 1.3 **Employment:** My daughter had 2 mornings paid employment with Irish Life Investment Managers and was offered a permanent job in their Bank. This was declined as we were relocating to Newry for family reasons. In 2005 Mencap sourced a work placement in a College where she worked voluntarily for four years and now, for the past four years, has 6 hrs paid employment under the Permitted Employment Scheme, attends an Essential Skills course one day a week and is unemployed for the remainder of the week at home.

2. Services I would like to see in place

Recommendations:

Schooling:

- 2.1 As there is a broad spectrum of Learning Disability in the population there needs to be a child centred approach. If a child shows the potential to benefit from mainstream education this should be facilitated, with the help of classroom assistance.
- 2.2 Each child should be educated to his/her full potential whether in mainstream or special education. Often in Special Education Schools low expectations hamper the development of some children, and the fact that there are usually no exams involved can lead to a lax system of education.
- 2.3 Where possible children with LD should have some inclusion in mainstream education as they would benefit from the interaction of typical children and the typical children would benefit from experiencing people with LD.

Post School Provision:

For people in the Mild/Moderate range of LD

- 2.4 Firstly, the Committee should **Research** the type of employment that people with Learning Disability have been successfully employed in, eg., retail, certain administration duties, postal duties, hairdressing, catering, etc.
- 2.5 Secondly, **Train** young people with LD in these particular work types **to a very high standard with Certification**. The standard of Certification must reach the equivalent of the typical person in that particular job. Training should continue as long as is feasible for each individual.
- 2.6 Then **Source** employment for them with their accreditation to back them up.
- 2.7 **State and Semi-State bodies** should be required to employ at least a 3% quota of **people with LD** (not just specifying people with disability as minor physical disabilities are always given preference). It would not cost the State any more as people with LD would have money deducted from their benefits but would enjoy the social outlet and the self-esteem involved with having a paid job.
- 2.8 In such paid employment a person must be allocated to support the employee with LD so that they are not left unsupported in the workplace.

Currently it is almost impossible to get a placement let alone paid employment.

- 2.9 **The Provision of Other Training Courses** in Drama, Music and the Arts should be explored. Some Universities in ROI provide these and have been doing so successfully for a number of years. Universities have also held courses in Citizenship & Advocacy for young people with LD which are very useful and enhance self-esteem. Provision for travel for young people to attend these courses would need to be looked at.

Just a Note: Northern Ireland is the **only place** where people with LD **do not** have a free travel pass (only a half pass is provided and this only covers travel in NI so when travelling to ROI they have to pay full fare). The UK and ROI have free travel for people with LD (and this also covers travel to NI).

For people in the more Severe range of LD

- 2.10 Research the possibility of providing a Workshop situation which would source easy repetitive work from outside companies as was done successfully in the past.
- 2.11 Provision of other activities, such as walks, dancing, painting, drama, music, etc. would be useful to provide for the social needs of people with LD.

3. To address barriers to high quality provision

To address the barriers is one of the most difficult in Northern Ireland where there is greater **adulation** of intellectual and academic achievement than in the ROI or UK.

Recommendations:

- 3.1 **Positive promoting of the achievements** of people with LD and their success in the workplace.
- 3.2 **More recognition in the media** of achievements, both academic and Special Olympics.
- 3.3 Parents encouraged to engage their children in community activities.

4. Identify the barriers to coordination across departments – regionally and locally and make recommendations

- 4.1 Coordination across departments is very important, there is currently no coordination even within departments at the moment, as parents receive letters requesting the same information from different sections of the SSA. I would not be in a position to identify these barriers but I expect where there is a will to do this it could be achieved, especially with all the technology at the fingertips.

5. Current provision by FE colleges, etc.

- 5.1 **Every FE college should have the same suitable courses** that can be accessed by people with LD. Current provision by FE colleges is patchy, with more suitable courses being available in some towns/cities than others.
- 5.2 These **courses should be broadened** to include physical activity, social, the arts, drama, music, etc. and communication skills as well as educational skills.
- 5.3 **Out of term activities** would also need to be put in place.