

The Joint Committee on Disability Matters

Meeting of the Committee to celebrate the UN International Day of Persons with Disabilities and discuss *why disability matters*.

Thursday December 3rd 2020

Thank you for inviting me here today to speak with you. My name is Marie Devitt and I am the Pathways Coordinator in the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities or TCPID as it is mainly known. My role involves developing and maintaining our business partner relationships and collaborating with businesses to find ways to support our students and our graduates.

I would like to use this opportunity today to tell you about the TCPID and more importantly about the incredible graduates who have come through our programme. While the topic today is 'Why disability matters' I would like you to see 'Why **Ability** is really what matters'.

I would like firstly to give you some brief background about the TCPID. We are based within the School of Education in Trinity College Dublin. We run a two year, full time Level 5 Certificate course for students with intellectual disabilities. The course is called the Certificate in Arts, Science and Inclusive Applied Practice and covers a wide range of modules over the two years. The aim of the course is to provide students with a broad education within a third level environment and to equip them with the necessary skills and confidence to move beyond Trinity into further education or employment, depending upon their individual ambitions.

We have a very small, but dedicated team of six working in the TCPID and we are supported by teaching staff from across Trinity and other universities. We have subject experts teaching our students who also teach on Masters and PhD programmes. This not only provides our students with fantastic subject expertise but also provides fellow university colleagues with an insight into the educational ability of students with intellectual disabilities.

We are also supporting the development of similar programmes around the country so that this is not just something for Dublin and the surrounding areas. The key to this is to have dedicated government funding for a whole of Republic of Ireland initiative, building on the existing partnerships that we have established in the TCPID.

For the purpose of my Statement today, I have decided to focus on how our business partners are supporting our students and graduates to show their ability and to be fully included within the workplace.

Our partners work with us in numerous ways, by providing work placements, mentoring, paid internships and in some cases, permanent employment.

Our students complete a work placement module in their 2nd year. This work placement runs for one day per week over 8 weeks. The aim of the module is to give students an insight into how companies operate and how employees should behave within a professional employment environment.

Once students complete their course in Trinity, they are given the opportunity to participate in a graduate internship programme and to develop key employment skills through paid internship roles. This internship programme is only possible thanks to the support of our business partners.

In addition to placements and internships, our business partners have offered training workshops for our graduates to help them to prepare for the world of work. During October and November alone, our partners provided over 20 online graduate workshops. Workshop topics included, professional office communication skills (for example professional emails / phone calls / online meetings), employment contracts, earning a salary for the first time, budgeting, disability allowance and managing the associated earnings restrictions, registering with revenue, preparing for interviews, talking about your own skills, and many other topics.

The key to the success of the work placements and internships is the preparation and planning that takes place for months in advance of the start date. Myself and my colleagues Barbara and Lara work closely together with each of the businesses to ensure that we find the right match for each role that is proposed. We also work closely with the students and graduates to uncover what they would like to achieve and what their career goals might be. This is done as part of ongoing Occupational Therapy supports which are key to our programme. We work closely with the students, graduates and businesses throughout the entire process.

As a result of the very careful advance planning and support, the placements and internships have been very successful. I am very proud to let you know that since we started our graduate internship programme in 2017, 12 of our graduates are now in permanent employment with companies including EY, PayPal, Arthur Cox, Cpl Resources, Fidelity Investments and Avolon. We also have a number of graduates who are currently working on extended contracts, so we hope to see more permanent roles over the coming years.

The impact of having one of our students or graduates within a company has been hugely positive. The individuals themselves have grown in confidence and have felt truly included and valued. The businesses have also given us hugely positive feedback from their own experience. We have been told that our students and graduates have brought such enthusiasm, positivity and determination, which has had such a positive impact on the overall morale within the team. The experience has given companies a real sense of what inclusion really means.

It is incredibly humbling for us to see the transformation of our students over the course of their time with us. The growth in confidence and the development of skills and knowledge is so powerful to see. All the team feel very lucky to get to work with such fantastic young people on a daily basis. We also feel lucky to work with amazing business partners who have gone beyond this being simply a Corporate Social Responsibility initiative to businesses creating an environment of real inclusion within their organisations.

I would like to share some quotes from some of our graduates to help to give you a small sense of the impact that getting a permanent job has had on their lives:

Dairine O'Rourke, permanent employee in Fidelity Investments: *"I am thrilled to have a permanent job. That's what I always wanted because now I am like my friends and cousins who are working. I love the work because it's mostly on Excel and I also like going out on the nights out with my colleagues! I am really proud of myself to have a permanent job. It is my dream come true!"*

Paula Conradie, permanent employee in PayPal: *"This is why I love working in PayPal. I love to work at the reception because I get to meet loads of different people in the mornings. I love working upstairs in the fraud department on the computer. My colleagues are very kind and show me lots of new ideas. We also laugh a lot. My colleagues and I have lots of meetings. Actually, most of the day is sometimes just meetings. I love to put my clothes out for work for the next day and decide on colour combinations. Most people just wear jeans and hoodies at PayPal so I think I could be the best dressed employee."*

Marian O'Rourke, permanent employee in Cpl Resources: *"I started working in Cpl Resources in October 2018. I was really welcomed when I started there. Everyone is lovely to me. I am very happy in Cpl and proud to work there. I really enjoy the work and I am confident with what I do. Getting a permanent job was the best thing that ever happened to me!"*

Stephen Ryan, permanent employee in Ernst and Young: *"On my birthday on the 19th of August I got the best news that I could possibly have hoped for. I was offered a permanent position in EY! I am only looking forward now, as in the last two years I have only got good news on top of good news. I can't wait to see what the future holds. I want to say to any person who has a disability to keep working to learn and to achieve your true potential. It might take you a bit longer but people with disabilities have what it takes to succeed. Always continue to try different things as you never know where your talents lie."*

As you can see, our partners are helping us to change lives and to make a real difference to the way that society views intellectual disability. We have started to see a real shift in how society embraces difference. We are all different and we all have our strengths and our weaknesses. The key is to focus on people's strengths and to support them to be the best that they can be. It is so important for society to focus on **Ability** and to give people the opportunity to show what they can do, to support them in learning and developing and to believe in them.

On this UN International Day of Persons with Disabilities, I would like to leave you with this message: It is not the disability that defines someone, but rather their **Ability** and to be given the chance to be included in all aspects of society.

Thank you!

For further information, please contact:

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