

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters

7th October 2021

Opening Statement on the provision of sport and physical activity for people with disabilities in Ireland in line with Article 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

Niamh Daffy, CEO Cara-Sport Inclusion Ireland



“The social side of it is so important, to feel that you are part of a team. Each week having your routine of going off to a club. Fulfilment, Empowerment, you are part of something”.
Sport Inclusion Disability Charter- Focus Group Participant

Sport and physical activity are central to the fabric of life in Ireland. Perhaps now more than ever there is a growing awareness and understanding that peoples' lives can be enhanced through participation in sport and physical activity, especially by improving health and wellbeing, increasing social interaction and empowering people to be the best they can be. As citizens of this state, people with disabilities deserve to have equal opportunities to experience the benefits that participation in sport and physical activity can bring. This we believe is a basic human right.

Chairperson and members of the committee, I am delighted to be joining you today along with my colleague, Odhrán Doherty, to outline to you some key developments in disability sport and inclusive physical activity over the past number of years. While there have been many positive developments in the provision of sport and physical activity opportunities for people with disabilities, with a number of organisations doing great work, research indicates that individuals with a disability are far less likely to participate in sport, volunteer for sport, be a sports club member or attend a sporting event than those without a disability.

Cara-Sport Inclusion Ireland is a national pan-disability organisation designated to provide leadership and support across policy and programme development specific to the participation of people with disabilities in sport and physical activity. Our organisation aligns with and supports the objectives of the National Sports Policy, Sport Irelands Policy on the Participation of People with Disabilities in Sport, the National Physical Activity Plan, Healthy Irelands Framework and the National Disability Inclusion Strategy. With a vision of "Putting Disability Sport and Inclusive Physical Activity at the Heart of our Nation" our work is focused on reducing the gradient that exists in respect to the participation of people with disabilities in sport and physical activity.

Central to our organisation is the voice of people with disabilities and in December 2019, in partnership with Sport Ireland, we launched Irelands first-ever Sports Inclusion Disability Charter, developed through collaboration and in consultation with people with disabilities. The Sport Inclusion Disability Charter sets our 5 principles which people with disabilities have identified as key to ensuring organisations adopt an inclusive approach to their programmes and sport offerings. Over 1400 organisations have signed the Charter pledging their commitment to providing people with disabilities with increased opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity.

In building on the principles of the Sport Inclusion Disability Charter, we continue to work very closely with the network of Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) and their Sports Inclusion Disabilities Officers providing support, resources, inclusive training, coordination of national initiatives and most recently the roll out on the Xcessible Programme which provides a three staged resourced pathway for LSPs to adopt an overall inclusive culture across their organisation. Currently all Local Sports Partnerships are completing the bronze stage of the Xcessible Programme.

We have seen a most notable increase in the number of National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) committing to providing people with disabilities with opportunities to participate in their sport. Over the past three years, we have supported NGBs in the delivery of inclusive training workshops to their Board, staff and volunteers; provided guidance in programme design and developed and implemented an Xcessible Programme for Inclusion for National Governing Bodies of Sport, with 6 sports organisations currently completing the bronze stage and three progressing through the silver stage.

Building capacity across the sports sector has been a key priority for Cara. With the support of Sport Ireland and in collaboration with a number of key organisations, we have designed a range of inclusive training workshops targeting the sport, health, education, fitness and

outdoor sectors. Throughout 2020 and 2021, at a time when we were all faced with many challenges, we adapted our approach and through the design and development of an online inclusive programme, we delivered a total of 235 workshops to 3600 participants.

While acknowledging the many challenges that were experienced across all sectors due to Covid 19, many opportunities were presented and the move to online delivery of training has certainly broadened our reach across a number of sectors.

Once such opportunity has been a collaborative partnership with Sport Ireland and the HSE in the design and delivery of an online physical activity education programme for people with disabilities. 'Active Healthy Me' is currently being delivered across 20 Adult Day Services and later this year will be launched for national roll, available to adult day services and residential settings throughout 2022.

At a time when outdoor recreational activity has gained a higher profile, through funding support from Sport Ireland, we have recently appointed Ireland's first-ever Inclusive Outdoor Coordinator who will work in collaboration with the sector to increase awareness, access and opportunities to outdoor recreational environments and activities for people with disabilities.

Before the pandemic, we were starting to see a gradual improvement in the participation of people with disabilities in sport and physical activity across Ireland. There were certainly more opportunities opening up, more awareness across the sector and increased cross-sector collaborations. In our efforts to address some of the challenges presented as a result of the pandemic, we are delighted to be part of a National Disability Sport forum comprised of representatives from Special Olympics Ireland, Irish Wheelchair Sport, Paralympics Ireland, Vision Sport Ireland and the Local Sports Partnerships, where we recognise the work in hand to overcome the extra challenges brought by the pandemic and together with our partner organisations, we want people with disabilities to be at the heart of our nation's recovery.

As we move forward in developing a new strategy for Cara, a strategy which will be insights led and will set out an ambitious 10-year vision for our organisation, we look forward to working with you and your departments in continuing to support the programme for government and national policy objectives.

Now at a time where sport and physical activity has gained a higher platform of importance, we must seize this opportunity and re-evaluate, not only how we can continue to embed the principles of inclusion across the sport and physical activity sector, but also expand our reach and our supports across the education, health and disability sector. More importantly, we must continue to engage with and listen to the needs as identified by people with disabilities so we can collectively ensure the necessary infrastructure and supports are in place to achieve our vision of putting disability sport and inclusive physical activity at the heart of our nation.

I would like to thank both the government and the committee for the support to date. Thank you to all members of the committee for your time today and I welcome any questions you may have.

Additional Information:

Contact Information:

Niamh Daffy- ndaffy@caracentre.ie

Odhrán Doherty-odoherty@caracentre.ie

Cara Sport Inclusion Ireland Strategy

https://caracentre.ie/cara-about-us/cara-strategy-2019_2021/

Cara Sport Inclusion Ireland Annual Report

<https://caracentre.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Cara-Annual-Report-2020-WEB.pdf>

Sport Inclusion Disability Charter

<https://caracentre.ie/sport-inclusion-disability-charter/>

