



## St. Joseph's Foundation

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### **Cathaoirleach, Teachta Daila agus Seanóirí**

I express my sincere gratitude for the opportunity to address this Oireachtas Committee hearing today, shedding some light on matters pertinent to our sector, those we support and the work of this important committee. Our focus is on the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in our communities, and of our collective responsibilities to respond to the needs of those individuals.

The Disability Act of 2005 stands as a beacon of progressive legislation, designed to protect the rights of people with disabilities. However, its practical application often falls short, leaving many without appropriate housing and compromising their well-being and dignity. It is imperative that we reassess the implementation of this Act to ensure its intended goals are met.

The Health Act of 2007, crafted to enhance the quality and safety of health and social care services, must also be scrutinized in the context of housing for people with disabilities.

### **Inclusive Communities and Local Area Coordination (NDIS Action 74)**

Our journey towards inclusive communities, anchored in NDIS Action 74, finds its foundation in the Disability Act 2005. The principles encapsulated in these national legislations are further reinforced and expanded upon by the UNCRPD, which Ireland ratified in March, 2018. Article 19 of the UNCRPD, emphasizing the right to live independently and be included in the community, resonates profoundly with our national commitment to inclusive communities.

However, challenges persist, primarily in the form of limited awareness and understanding of NDIS Action 74. Locally, the Community Services Programme, serves as an exemplary model. This program, aimed at empowering communities and fostering social inclusion, aligns with the UNCRPD's emphasis on the active participation of persons with disabilities in community life

## **Increasing Universal Design Housing**

The call to increase Universal Design Housing is enshrined in the Disability Act 2005. However, the financial barriers associated with implementing universal design principles necessitate innovative solutions.

Drawing inspiration from successful grant schemes is crucial in addressing these challenges. The SEAI Deep Retrofit Program, founded on principles of energy efficiency, offers insight into how financial incentives can drive positive change in the housing sector.

## **Reviewing the Suite of Housing Adaptation Grants (Housing for All)**

We must urgently review the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme, which underscores Ireland's commitment to responsive and adaptable policies. Locally, the Dormant Accounts Fund, offers an avenue to access funding. Redirecting resources towards programs fostering social inclusion aligns with both our national and international commitments to promote the active involvement of persons with disabilities in community life.

## **Supporting Social Inclusive Communities**

Our dedication to supporting socially inclusive communities, aligns inherently with the Department's (DCDIY) principles of non-discrimination, equality of opportunity and inclusion in Article 5 of the UNCRPD. However, fragmented efforts pose a challenge to the realization of fully inclusive communities.

To amplify our efforts, we can explore an existing framework that facilitates collaboration between communities and organisations and expand upon the successful models for building socially inclusive communities e.g. the success of mixed ability sports. This collaborative approach promotes international inclusion thus ensuring that no one is left behind.

## **Housing for All / State of Housing in Europe 2023**

As we participate in the Housing for All initiative and consider the State of Housing in Europe 2023, Ireland's commitment to the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People (2022-2027) is crucial.

This Strategy marks a pivotal step towards fostering inclusivity and accessibility within the housing sector. The strategy serves as a blueprint for fostering collaboration between government bodies,

private entities and advocacy groups, encouraging a holistic approach to accessible housing. At its core, the strategy underscores the significance of adequate funding for its successful implementation.

One primary obstacle is the retrofitting of existing structures to meet accessibility standards. Adequate funds are required to make homes universally accessible. Furthermore, investing in specialized housing units and innovative assistive technologies will be instrumental in providing tailored solutions.

Embracing this opportunity not only transforms the physical landscape of housing for persons with disabilities, but also symbolizes a commitment to building a more equitable and inclusive society

### **Consideration of Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS).**

The Capital Assistance Scheme, a cornerstone of Ireland's commitment to accessible infrastructure, aligns closely with the UNCRPD's emphasis on accessibility in Article 9. However, challenges persist, particularly in relation to inconsistencies across Local Authorities, thus impeding widespread implementation and utilization of available funds. Simple solutions can be drawn from some existing and very successful grant schemes, like the Sports Capital Programme.

In conclusion, as we navigate the intricate web of Ireland's Disability Policy and Legislation, let us recognize the connection of our national laws with international commitments like the UNCRPD. By aligning our strategies and drawing inspiration from successful models both locally and globally, we can create a future where inclusivity and accessibility are not just ideals but fundamental rights enjoyed by all citizens, regardless of ability.

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to building a more inclusive Ireland.

Michael Hegarty,  
Chief Executive Officer.  
6<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

