

**enable
ireland**

Disability Services
Life With No Limits

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29 June 2020

Ms Aileen Fallon
Committee Clerk (Work Programme)
Special Committee on Covid-19 Response
Houses of the Oireachtas Service
Kildare House
Dublin 2

Re: The Impact of Covid-19 on Organisations Providing Services for People with Disabilities

Dear Aileen

Thank you for your letter of June 16th addressed to our Chairman, Donal Cashman, inviting us to make a written submission on the topic of people with disabilities and the disability sector.

I attach Enable Ireland's submission on the Impact of Covid-19 on our organisation.

This submission is on behalf of Enable Ireland, but we also form part of the group submissions made by TDAC, The Disability Action Coalition.

Yours sincerely



John O'Sullivan
CEO

ENABLE IRELAND - THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ORGANISATIONS PROVIDING SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES 26/6/20

Introduction

The outbreak of COVID-19 has presented a very significant challenge to organisations providing services for people with disabilities. We are entrusted with the care of many vulnerable adults and children with physical & sensory disabilities. Providing that care, while simultaneously protecting the people who use our services from the virus, has been our number one priority since the outbreak began in February 2020.

Our organisation has risen to that challenge. Working in close partnership with the HSE and other agencies, we have ensured that Public Health guidance and best practice has been implemented in all our services. This, and the commitment of our trained and dedicated staff, has protected many of our vulnerable citizens from the dangers posed by the pandemic.

Covid-19 response for people with a disability

Our strategy in the face of the outbreak has been to protect our most vulnerable people and to deliver as many services as possible in a safe manner, by developing creative and innovative responses, some of which are summarised below:

- All our residential service users have been cocooned throughout. We have been able to source sufficient PPEs to date, availing of both HSE support and independent sources.
- Our respite services remained open for high priority service users/ emergency placements.
- Our day services wound down as required in mid- March and we are offering community based and technological supports on an individual basis.
- All our children's services have retained core teams in each region to support high priority/urgent cases.
- Our Assistive Technology Team continued delivering valuable training materials online and our seating service remained open for emergency service for repairs and urgent cases.
- Our family support services continued where families were happy to do so and we put in place new packages of support for families in crisis, as identified by the HSE.
- Internally, we have redeployed staff towards our residential services and supported community living services and externally, we redeployed staff to the HSE and private nursing homes.
- We also provided accommodation to the HSE for a Community assessment hub.

To date, we have had no infection in any of our services that remained open throughout the pandemic.

The success of technology in providing clinical and social supports has been one of the positive outcomes in recent months. Staff have excelled in creating a range of innovative resources for service

users and families. Technology has been used to maintain contact with service users and families and carry out planning meetings, training, clinical programmes and social activities.

During this time, we initiated a pilot project in our adult service to develop a Virtual Service Centre, a five-day full-time programme offering a range of training, leisure and social activities for our adult population. The response to this pilot programme, which was developed in partnership with Microsoft, has been extremely positive and it will become a feature of our day service provision in the post Covid-19 environment. The pilot evaluation is now complete. A copy of the Service Brochure is attached.

Impact of Covid-19 on daily life, services and carers and families of those with disability

A significant majority of our services users, mainly in day and clinical services, opted not to engage directly with our services, hoping to avoid infection. This created the situation where our vulnerable adults and children were at risk of isolation from their services and became fully dependent on families some of whom are elderly. The impact on health and well-being and mental health has been significant for some. Recent evidence indicates that as restrictions are easing, children, adults and their families are requesting a resumption of their services and have an expectation that services will be available to them now in the same format as they were previously. The reality is that there is and will be significant pressure on us to deliver and this is against a backdrop of waiting lists having grown while new ways of working are being developed and implemented. There will be significant pressure in relation to assessment and diagnostic work in context of meeting timeframes in Children's services. Families who temporarily declined respite, day or home support services are now desperately in need of a break. The challenge of managing social distancing, complying with revised infection control guidelines and having access to adequate supplies of appropriate PPE will have an impact on the level of service that will be available to individuals. There is a requirement now to review individual service plans in the context of revised service models, compliance with health and safety and in line with resources available

Impact on the disability sector

A significant challenge for our organisations arises from our status as a S39 organisation. The issue is not so much about Enable Ireland seeking to become a S38 organisation but the need to revise S39 criteria and make it fit for purpose. The application of the legislation changed radically during the previous recession in 2010. There were understandable reasons behind this. However, the spirit and intention of S39 and how it had been applied (including S65 of previous Health Act) was lost. The scope of the organisations funded under this clause, is far too broad. It ranges from very large to very small non-profit organisations and it is further complicated by the inclusion of "for profit" sector. One size doesn't fit all. Recent examples of how our status has challenged us include:

- The delayed phasing in implementing pay restoration for Section 39 organisations, with no arrears payable, has meant that our staff have lost considerable income in comparison to their public service colleagues, who have already had the majority of their pay restored. These losses range from €5,839 to €24,869 over this period.
- The non-funding of employers pension contribution under pay restoration, even though the same contribution in respect of the remaining salary is funded by the State. We are unable to make up this shortfall.

- We are unable to be an employer of the Children's Disability Network Manager posts under the PDS programme. We have to second staff from HSE/S 38 organisations to take up this role in Enable Ireland, despite us being the largest organisation in the delivery of children's therapy/clinical services in PDS outside of the HSE.
- In recent years, we have been unable to access flu vaccination programme in the HSE. It has been suggested that we set up our own vaccination programme. In my view, this is poor value for money and goes against the stated aim of Section 39, which is to *give assistance to any person or body that provides or proposes to provide a service similar or ancillary to a service that the Executive may provide.*

The work around the Catherine Day report and the work of the newly established forum will plot the roadmap to a better relationship between State and our sector. This work will take some time however and the issues identified above are immediate threats to our sustainability and we ask therefore that they would receive urgent consideration by this committee.

John O'Sullivan
CEO
29 June 2020.