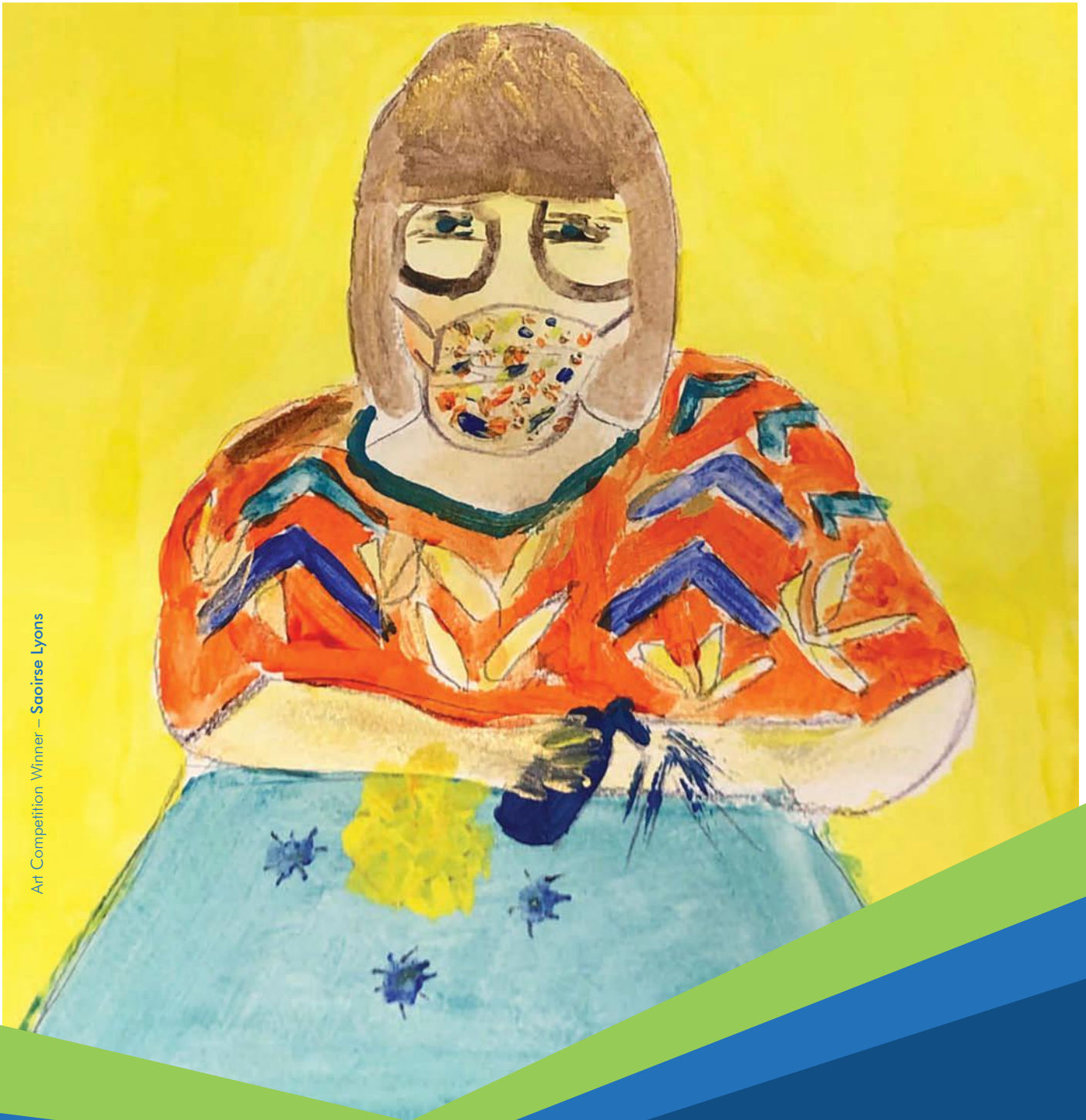




enabling people with disabilities



Art Competition Winner – Saoirse Lyons

# Annual Report 2020

## Our MISSION

We empower people with disabilities to live self-directed lives in an equal and inclusive society. Each person is supported and valued within an environment which promotes their overall autonomy, health and wellbeing, and enables them to reach their potential.

## Our work is guided by eight CORE VALUES

- Independence
- Partnership
- Openness
- Integrity
- Accountability and Transparency
- Participation in Community Life
- Person Centredness
- Rights Based Approach

## Our VISION

**Ability West is dedicated to enabling people we support to realise their goals and ambitions.**

**We will deliver on this vision by:**

- Placing the fundamental rights of the people we support at the centre of our activities and promoting those rights
- Empowering each person we support to live self-directed lives and to play a meaningful role in all aspects of community life
- Listening and then developing a variety of options that can be used flexibly to meet their identified needs
- Developing the skills and dedication of our staff in a supportive and motivating environment
- Working in active partnership with the people we support, families, staff, our voluntary supporters and the broader community
- Campaigning at local, regional and national level to resource and realise our vision to achieve these aims.



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## St. Joseph's Training Centre News

2020 was a very different kind of year in St. Joseph's Training Centre. Despite the lockdowns and restrictions our trainees have had some great achievements.

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Acknowledgements

**In a year that saw unprecedented changes to the world we live in due to the global Covid-19 pandemic, I am very pleased to advise that Ability West, as an ‘essential service’, continued to provide services to the children and adults we support, albeit at reduced levels in some cases.**



Kevin Newell, Chairperson

When the pandemic was declared in Ireland in mid-March 2020, Ability West responded promptly by activating our Critical Incident Response Team, developing a business continuity plan and contingency plans in order to keep things running as smoothly and productively as possible during this emergency. The Board of Directors continued to meet in a virtual environment throughout 2020.

Our frontline staff and back office teams worked incredibly hard during the year, often under significant pressure and I would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank them for their dedication and commitment to the people we support. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance we received from the Health Service Executive, Health Protection and Surveillance Centre, and the Department of Health during 2020.

The Board of Directors of Ability West began reviewing the Constitution in

late 2019 to ensure that it would be fit for purpose into the future. In recent years, it has been increasingly difficult to encourage new volunteers to get involved with our branch and regional structure, and as a result, our Constitution was revised to remove these structures and apply an already existing structure which would provide a new conduit to the Board of Directors, i.e. the Family Forum. The revised Constitution was accepted by the Charities Regulator in March 2020 and the Constitution was ratified at the AGM in July 2020. I would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank all branch and regional members for their many years of volunteerism with this organisation. Ability West was built on a grassroots structure and has survived and thrived for nearly 60 years because of the efforts of so many in our local branches and regions. This organisation would not be here today without the persistent and tireless work of these volunteers and we

**Chairperson's**  
**REVIEW**

are so grateful to them for their support through the years.

Ability West has prepared its financial statements in accordance with generally accepted accounting practice and the Companies Act 2014. The full audited accounts for 2020 are available on our website: [www.abilitywest.ie](http://www.abilitywest.ie). Please refer to the Directors' Report later in this report which provides details about our structure, governance and management.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the annual board visits were immediately ceased in March 2020. Those visits that had been undertaken in early 2020 were reported into the Board. The Directors are looking forward to the resumption of visits which will happen when it is safe to do so.

The Board of Directors reviewed our compliance with the Charities Governance Code during the year and has completed a Compliance Report which outlines how Ability West complies with the 6 principles and 49 standards within the code.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Kevin Flavin and Ray Kelly who retired as Directors during 2020. During Kevin's tenure he was also Chairperson

of the Finance Committee, member of the Audit and Risk Committee, a role which he still undertakes today, and he has also been a Patron Representative on two Boards of Management of schools for whom we are patron, one of which he still holds. During Ray's tenure he also served as Chairperson of the Board and Nominations Committee for three years, and as Trustee of the Pension Scheme, a role he still holds today. Both Kevin and Ray were prominent members of the Galway City Branch for many years, and their commitment, support and volunteerism to this organisation is very much appreciated. I would also like to acknowledge and thank Mr. Frank O'Connell who resigned as a Director during the year. Frank served for over two years on the Board and I am grateful to him for his expertise, input and volunteerism.

Like so many charities Ability West's fundraising efforts were hugely impacted by the pandemic. We took the time to review the role and future of fundraising and we look forward to rebuilding our fundraising programme in the years ahead. We are very grateful to those who continued to support us during the year.

Ability West works closely with our funders, the Health Service Executive, the Departments of Education and Skills, and Social Protection, and we are very appreciative of their ongoing support and assistance.

I would like to sincerely thank all our Directors, for their commitment and contributions during the year. I would also like to thank Audrey Pidgeon who was Interim Chief Executive from January 2020 until her appointment as Chief Executive in September 2020. I would like to congratulate Audrey on her stewardship of this organisation through what has been a very challenging and incomparable year. Finally, I would like to thank the Senior Management Team, all managers and staff for their dedication to the children and adults we serve.

**Kevin Newell, Chairperson**



Residents of **Seacrest Services** were delighted to take delivery of a new Peugeot Boxer in 2020

## In February 2020 we first became aware of Covid-19 or Coronavirus through the media; the situation rapidly changed with the World Health Organisation characterising Covid-19 as a pandemic on 11th March.



Audrey Pidgeon, Chief Executive

On foot of updated guidelines from the Department of Health regarding vulnerable groups, Ability West made the very difficult decision to close our day services from 16th March for an initial two week period, and regrettably this was extended in line with national Public Health guidance to late August 2020. Only services deemed essential could continue, i.e. residential and prioritised respite services. The pandemic changed all aspects of our management and operations including our approach to risk assessment, service delivery and resource management. We adapted our models of support in an attempt to maintain contact with individuals whose services were disrupted. Some of these changes included:

- **Regular phone contact with families from day service staff and multi-disciplinary team members**
- **Phone and video supports from multi-disciplinary team members to individuals and families at home where required**
- **Frontline staff from day services were redeployed within our services**
- **Prioritised approaches to 'day respite' to those most in need, where possible and in keeping with Public Health guidelines and with the limited resources available**

Ability West's Critical Incident Response Team was mobilised early in the pandemic to respond proactively and effectively manage the potential risks to service users and staff. We worked closely with the HSE, Public Health and Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) teams in the Galway region to ensure that health and safety precautions were upheld. All decisions were based on risk assessments which were rigorously reviewed and updated throughout the year, along with contingency plans. We regularly communicated with service users, parents/families and staff; we developed and shared social stories about Covid-19, hand hygiene, easy read information guides, leaflets, and videos to support people during what was an unparalleled year in service provision. Ability West was very fortunate to receive many donations of PPE at a time when there were international shortages, which reinforced the stocks we could access on the market or via the HSE. Mandatory training on the effective use of PPE was introduced for all staff to ensure that service delivery remained as safe as possible.

In 2020, Ability West had two outbreaks of Covid-19 in residential services; our contingency plans were utilised to good effect and our prompt response, with the support of the HSE and Public

Health, enabled us to identify casual and close contacts, and carry out in-house testing with a rapid return on results. We had isolation units in place which ensured that the outbreaks were contained and managed safely. To date in 2021, we have had three outbreaks and I am pleased to advise that these have been contained and everyone involved has remained safe and well.

We continue to be challenged by the pandemic, however in Quarter 1 of 2021 we have seen the commencement of the vaccination programme for staff and people we support. Ability West participated in a campaign with the National Federation of Voluntary Service Providers to advocate for individuals in our services to be re-categorised to a higher priority for the vaccination. We also engaged with local Public Representatives and the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters to highlight the importance of having a clear and comprehensive plan to vaccinate people with disabilities, staff in disability services and family carers who are taking on a keyworker role. Service users over 65 years of age received their vaccinations in February 2021 and the majority of frontline staff have received their first vaccine, with a limited number of staff having had both. In April 2021, all staff and people we support from the age of 16 years upwards have been offered at least their first Covid-19 vaccination.

There are many people, companies and groups deserving of our thanks and acknowledgement and you will see same later in the report. I would like to

acknowledge the children and adults we support and their families for their efforts in what has been an extremely difficult year. Their resilience and patience has been second-to-none as we get on the road to recovery. I would like to sincerely thank our frontline staff for the immense work they have done and continue to do during this unprecedented crisis. Our staff faced significant pressures during the various waves of Covid-19 and we are so grateful for their dedication and support to the individuals availing of our services. There was and continues to be a huge amount of work taking place behind the scenes in terms of contingency planning, provision of essential multi-disciplinary supports and service continuity and I would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank our office-based teams in this regard. I would also like to acknowledge the support of our Home Sharing families who were in a position to continue providing essential home sharing placements. The continuity of these services is greatly appreciated, not only by the people they support but also by their families, and Ability West.

Schools under the patronage of Ability West have also been affected greatly by the pandemic. Schools were closed from March to September 2020 and again from January to March in 2021. Many pupils and families have suffered as a result of national school closures.

Notwithstanding the pandemic, business as usual had to be maintained insofar as possible. In May 2020 the Senior Management Team and I reflected on our Strategic Plan 2019-2023, and given

the unanticipated change in direction of disability services, we re-evaluated if the strategic goals were still appropriate. There was unanimous agreement that the vision and mission statements of Ability West still hold. The current status brought about by the pandemic is that Ability West retains the same values and is still passionate about delivering services and supports to people with an intellectual disability. However, the environment and context within which services are provided have changed. A summary of outcomes achieved is detailed later in the Directors' Report. A copy of our strategic plan is available on our website: [www.abilitywest.ie](http://www.abilitywest.ie).



**Meena Feeney and Joe Starr,**  
Ballinfoyle, getting creative during  
the pandemic, June 2020

A 1% efficiency target (€264,380) had been identified by the HSE at the start of 2020, however, this decision was reversed in July 2020 which was very welcome. The final core funding allocation from the HSE (Community Healthcare West) for 2020 was €27,820,160, which inter alia included: the full year effect of new funding provided in 2019, pay restoration, the provision of services for 2020 school leavers and sundry other funding adjustments. Additionally, we gratefully acknowledge the HSE's support for providing specific funding to alleviate the effects of the pandemic under the headings of technology, home supports and staff repatriation to day services.

We were fortunate to have a number of fundraising events held on our behalf during 2020 and there are further details on these later in this report. Unfortunately, fundraising was greatly impacted due to the arrival of the pandemic, however we took the opportunity to review the role of fundraising in the organisation and work on this is ongoing.

Ability West continued to be challenged during the year by the changing needs of people we support, including supporting an ageing population and issues such as: reduced mobility, cognitive changes and general age-related conditions. Additionally, we are seeing more children and adults who require intensive supports for complex needs, and an increasing number of families who are struggling to provide this. In 2020 Ability West responded to crisis cases for which funding has not been secured. Our services are consistently challenged to meet ever-increasing non-pay costs, most notably the rising cost of insurance, motor fuel, heating, and the ongoing maintenance of our buildings/vehicles. The Office of Government Procurement (OGP) Framework continues to be utilised in order to achieve value for money on contracts such as utility costs, hygiene and cleaning supplies among others.

We were delighted to receive confirmation of funding of €200,000

under the Strengthening Disability Services Grant Funding through the Department of Health and Health Service Executive. We were successful under two proposals; Strand 1: 'Improving person-centred delivery in line with Transforming Lives' and Strand 3: 'Initiatives towards building sustainable organisations'. Both of these projects will commence in 2021 and will make significant improvements to current best practice and assist the organisation in meaningful strategic planning for the future.

Ability West achieved a better than breakeven financial result in 2020 which was primarily as a result of restricted service provision arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. The financial statements for 2020 were completed using the Financial Reporting Standard FRS102 and drafted cognisant of the Charities SORP (Statement of Recommended Practice).



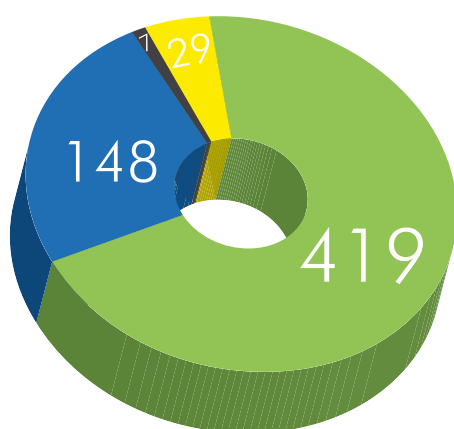
**Ministerial Visit to Ability West Tuam Services August 2020**  
 l-r: **Audrey Pidgeon**, Chief Executive, **Anne Rabbitte**, Minister of State for Disabilities  
 and **Gerry Haslam**, Assistant Director of Client Services



During 2020, Ability West provided the following services albeit in various guises during the Covid-19 pandemic:

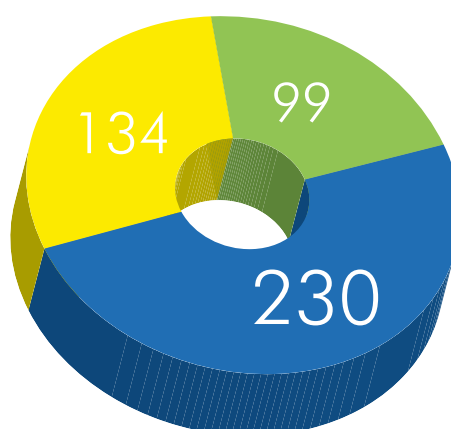
### Number of Individuals availing of School/Day Services Places

- Special Schools
- Day Services
- Rehabilitative Training
- Other



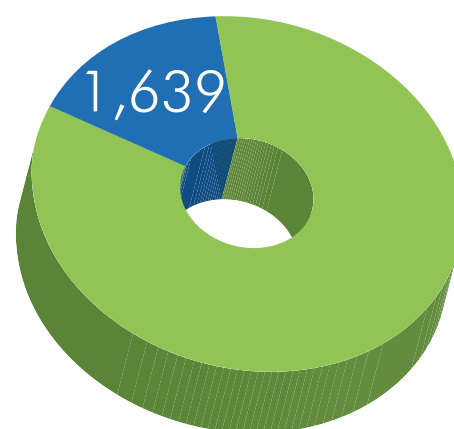
### Number of Individuals availing of Residential, Respite and Community Support Services

- Respite (centre based, shared living, contract families)
- Community Support
- Residential



### Residential Respite Nights provided in 2020

- Adults
- Children



\*It should be noted that capacity was diminished due to Covid-19

We welcomed new service users and staff to services and teams in 2020 and we are delighted that they have settled in well in their respective placements and roles. We also said goodbye to a number of service users and staff and we wish them well in the future.

### ADVOCACY COUNCIL

The council celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2020 and although the celebration was a quiet one, it provided an opportunity for the council to look back on achievements and consider their work into the future. One significant amendment was a change of name from the 'Service User' Council to the 'Advocacy' Council, which is more reflective of their role in Ability West. The council members continued to meet in 2020 albeit in a virtual environment. The Senior Management Team and I met with council representatives in November to discuss challenges, new proposals and ideas. Many thanks to John Farragher who chairs the council and to the members for their continued work in promoting choice for individuals availing of our services. Thanks also to facilitator, John Howard, for his absolute commitment to improving the lives of the people we support. I would like

to acknowledge Niamh McGauley, former council facilitator, for her work and support to the council members. Niamh has left the organisation and we wish her all the very best in the future.

### CAPITAL UPDATE

A Capital Projects Priorities Group was set up by the Board of Directors in late 2019 and comprises members of the executive and non-executive, with the purpose of reviewing priority areas for development over the coming years in terms of geographic locations, models of services, renovations to existing buildings and upgrading our transport fleet. Work is ongoing in this regard.

During 2020 we undertook essential maintenance and renovations in a number of our buildings which we managed to fund from efficiencies achieved and ring-fenced fundraised monies. These inter alia included: installation of French doors in two bedrooms for emergency egress in residential services, renovation to toileting/showering facilities, boiler replacements, kitchen replacements in residential services, repurposing works to provide additional capacity, new shelving and storage units installed in a number of day

services, and roof repairs in a day service. We were also very fortunate to receive a grant from the SSE Airtricity Community Grant to install a new kitchen in our Meitheal Centre, Moycullen, and we thank them for their support.

We continued to receive great support from the participants of the Community Employment Scheme, TÚS and Galway Rural Development Rural Social Scheme who undertook external painting works and power washing of buildings throughout the year. Your work is very much appreciated.

### NEW COMMUNITY HUB

A new community hub was set up in Tuam to accommodate a number of school leavers and I am pleased to advise that everyone has settled in well. The hub operates in line with the HSE's New Directions Interim Standards which embrace the premise of contribution and participation in the community. Well done to all involved in setting up this new service. A second community hub has opened in Mountbellew following renovation works in late 2020. Well done to all and best wishes to everyone availing of services in the hub.

## TRANSPORT

During 2020 seven new vehicles were added to our fleet for the Sean Mulvoy Hub, Avalon Respite, Dunamace, Holly, Sandyvale and Seacrest Residential Services in Galway City, and St. Dominic's Residential Service in Tuam. The purchase of these vehicles was possible through a combination of efficiencies achieved and funds raised/donated. Ability West also submitted three applications for Clár Funding for buses for Clifden, Dunmore and Mountbellew. Our application for the replacement bus for our Clifden services was successful and in early 2021 we were delighted to replace the 2008 bus, with mileage of over 300,000km, with a brand new vehicle.

## HOME SHARING IN ABILITY WEST

This year we would have celebrated the 35th anniversary of Home Sharing in Galway. The service developed from a few committed families in 1985 to today offering thousands of respite nights to numerous children and adults with an intellectual disability. 'Home Share Galway' is a joint partnership between Ability West and our colleagues in the Brothers of Charity Services Ireland – West Region, and it currently has 110 home sharing families across the city and county. Regrettably, we have been unable to celebrate this significant milestone but we hope to do so in the coming year. There is an article later in this report giving additional details about this programme.

## PUBLICATION

A 'Future Planning' Resource Pack was developed by our Social Work Department in 2020. This resource pack aims to give information to families about Ability West's respite and full-time living services and to support families with making plans for the future. This document is available on our website: [www.abilitywest.ie/resources](http://www.abilitywest.ie/resources).

## VOLUNTEERS

We have a very active volunteer programme and our many volunteers did not disappoint when we sought their help to bring virtual events to individuals at home. There was great creativity with

a weekly 'Live at 11' show, fitness classes, music and cookery sessions becoming important fun opportunities to connect service users online. There is an article later in this report on our volunteers. Sincere thanks to all of you and we very much look forward to the day when we can welcome you back into our services.

## EXTERNAL THIRD PARTY ACCREDITATION

### *I.S.EN 9001:2015*

Ability West has a Quality Management System aligned to this standard and we maintain accreditation with this ISO standard. An audit by the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) is expected in 2021.

### *Excellence Through People 1000:2017*

Ability West was audited by NSAI in March 2020, just in advance of the declaration of the pandemic. I am pleased to advise that we were awarded the Gold Standard award under this framework. Well done to everyone involved, and particular thanks to Cathal Esler, Director of Human Resources, and his team who assisted with the audit. A further audit (remote) will be held towards the end of March 2021.

### *Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA)*

Ability West has 29 designated centres registered with HIQA, i.e. all current residential and respite services. During 2020 there were 25 inspections carried out by HIQA. Re-registration paperwork was commenced for three designated centres in 2020, all of whom have been successfully re-registered. Sincere thanks to the Persons in Charge, their teams, and staff from Client Services, Finance, Human Resources and Quality and Compliance, who all contribute towards compliance with the national standards. Further detail is provided later in the Quality and Compliance report.

### *ISO 31000:2018*

Ability West has aligned its risk management processes to this standard which provides a framework for integrated risk management.

## *QQI Accreditation for Trainees*

St. Joseph's Training Services (includes all locations of rehabilitative training in Ability West) is accredited to provide QQI programmes to service users availing of our three year training programme. Despite the pandemic, a total of 65 portfolios, covering Levels 1 and 2, were submitted and all were successful in either major or minor certifications. Well done to all involved.

## OVERSEAS VISITOR

We were very pleased to welcome Michael Shain, Executive Director of NAPD (New Advances for People with Disabilities), an organisation based in California, USA, who visited Ireland in February 2020. We were delighted to facilitate a visit to our Croílar Service, and it was a good opportunity to share learning among both organisations. This year we have been working on setting up a pen pal initiative between service users in our respective organisations and the feedback to date has been positive.

## OUTLOOK FOR 2021

With the Covid-19 vaccination roll-out underway we are hopeful that we will be able to facilitate increased numbers returning to day services. We are also anxious to ensure that we can increase our respite night provision and restore our community supports to pre-Covid-19 levels.

We are looking forward to improving our person centred planning processes in 2021 which will have a positive, direct impact on the individuals availing of our services.

Progressing Disability Services will commence in 2021, which will be a change to current multi-disciplinary therapy supports to children attending our services and schools. It will also impact the staff who will be moving teams as part of this transition. Ability West will continue to work with our colleagues in the HSE, with staff, children and families in our services to support as successful a transition as possible. We will continue in our roles as Patron of Special Schools and in the provision of respite and short breaks to children who attend the schools under our patronage.

## BEREAVEMENTS

We were saddened by six service user bereavements in 2020: John Joe Doherty, Ciara Donnelly, Martin Joyce, Patrick (Parry) Moore, Martin Shaughnessy and Ethan Smyth. Many service users, their families, staff, Board Members and volunteers also experienced bereavements and we extend our deepest sympathies to them. May they all rest in peace.

## CONCLUSION

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our Chairperson, Kevin Newell, and the Board Members for their guidance and support during the year. I would again like to acknowledge the children and adults we support, their parents, carers and families for their ongoing co-operation, particularly during these difficult times. Thanks to the Directors and Assistant Directors of Client Services, Finance and Human Resources,

Department Heads, Managers, Unit Directors, all staff, Community Employment Scheme, TÚS and GRD Rural Social Scheme participants, School Principals and staff, and all volunteers for their huge contributions to our services in 2020. I very much appreciate the commitment and dedication you have shown over the past year and in my first year in post as CEO.

I would like to thank Anne Rabbitte, Minister of State at the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and at the Department of Health. The Minister is a great advocate for people with disabilities, both prior to and since taking up her ministerial role, and we very much welcome and acknowledge her ongoing support and commitment to improving the lives of people with disability in Galway and across the country.

I would also like to thank the HSE, in particular Breda Crehan-Roche, Chief Officer; Community Healthcare West; John

Fitzmaurice, Head of Disability Services; General Manager, Alma Joyce; Managers, Breda Garvey-Cecchetti, Mary O'Donnell and Laura Rochford, and Head of Finance, Liam Fogarty, and all of their respective teams who provide ongoing support and assistance to Ability West. I would also like to thank the many statutory, non-statutory and voluntary service providers that we work with for their ongoing co-operation and assistance.

This pandemic will continue to challenge us in 2021 but I am confident by working together we will see the safe return to our services and supports.

**Audrey Pidgeon, Chief Executive**



## COMPANY STRUCTURE

**Ability West is a company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital; and is also a registered charity.**

Ability West has a Constitution which was most recently revised in 2020. This governing document outlines how Directors are elected and co-opted to the Board. All Directors have a maximum term of office of nine years, i.e. three consecutive terms of three years. The right mix of skills and experience is considered for the composition of the Board to ensure its effectiveness as a Board and that it is representative of stakeholders' interests.



**AGM 2020 l-r: John McHugo, Director of Finance, Audrey Pidgeon, Chief Executive and Kevin Newell, Chairperson**

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2020

**Mr. Kevin Newell**, Chairperson and Co-opted Director

**Mr. Sean McGrath**, Vice-Chairperson and Co-opted Director

**Mr. Dermot O'Neill**, Company Secretary, Hon. Treasurer and Co-opted Director

**Ms. Breda Dolan**, Co-opted Director

**Mr. Michael (Mick) Finnerty**, Co-opted Director

**Mr. Cormac Flynn**, Co-opted Director

**Mr. Kevin Flaherty (Ó Flatharta)**, Co-opted Director

**Mr. Michael (Anthony) O'Connor**, Co-opted Director

**Mrs. Mary O'Mahony**, Co-opted Director

**Mrs. Denise Ryan**, Co-opted Director

**Mr. Darragh Sheehy**, Co-opted Director

**Mr. Kevin Flavin** (retired July 2020)

**Mr. Redmond Kelly** (retired July 2020)

**Mr. Frank O'Connell**, (resigned August 2020)

## During 2020 the Board of Directors met 10 times, attendance was recorded as follows:

Name	Jan	Mar	Apr	Jun	Jul (13/07)	Jul (20/07)	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Breda Dolan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mick Finnerty	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓
Kevin Flavin	✓	✓	✓	✓	Retired 13/07/2020					
Cormac Flynn	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓
Ray Kelly	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Retired 20/07/2020			
Sean McGrath	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kevin Newell	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Frank O'Connell	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Resigned 14/08/2020			
Anthony O'Connor	X	X	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Kevin Ó Flatharta	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mary O'Mahony	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dermot O'Neill	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Denise Ryan	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓
Darragh Sheehy	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X

The Chief Executive is not a member of the Board, and both the Chief Executive and the Recording Secretary are recorded as 'in attendance' at Board meetings.

Each Board meeting agenda has standing items which inter alia include: Declaration of Conflict of Interest/Loyalty, Minutes, Matters Arising, Chairperson's Business, Chief Executive's Report, Financial Update, Appointments/Remuneration, Any Other Business and Evaluation. Other items are added to the agenda depending on business requirements at any given time.

The Board of Directors ensures that

the vision, mission and core values of the organisation are upheld and realised through our strategic plan and service plans. The Board is collectively responsible for the operations of the organisation and devolves responsibility for the conduct of business to the Chief Executive, who in turn delegates through the line management structure. The Chief Executive accounts for her stewardship of the organisation at each Board meeting.

Within the Board's broad governance role are a number of specific roles that are exercised, including: approval of the strategic plan, preparation of annual financial statements, and reporting to members at the AGM. The reserved functions of the Board are: the recruitment and appointment of the Chief Executive, approval of the annual budget, policy approval, acquisition and disposal of company assets, and overall corporate governance.



**Kevin Newell**, Chairperson, presenting service user artwork to outgoing Board Member, **Ray Kelly**



**Audrey Pidgeon**, Chief Executive, presenting service user artwork to outgoing Board Member, **Kevin Flavin**

## The Board of Directors is supported by a committee structure which deals effectively with specific aspects of the company. These are:

### AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

Purpose	Membership	Mar 2020	Sep 2020	Dec 2020
The role of this committee is to ensure that effective arrangements are in place for governance, risk management and internal control within the organisation. Membership consists of Board and former Board Members and an external, independent member. Meetings are held biannually or more frequently if required.	<b>Jack King</b> , Chairperson	✓	✓	✓
	<b>Kevin Flavin</b> , Secretary	✓	✓	✓
	<b>Cormac Flynn</b>	✓	✓	✓
	<b>Gerry Walsh</b>	X	X	✓

### FINANCE COMMITTEE

Purpose	Membership	Jun 2020	Sep 2020	Nov 2020
The role of this committee is to keep the financial management of Ability West under review. Membership consists of Board and former Board Members and members of the Senior Management Team. Meetings are held at least three times per year or more frequently if required.	<b>Kevin Flavin</b> , Chairperson (resigned 8 Jun 2020)*	✓	–	–
	<b>Dermot O’Neill *</b> commenced as Chairperson	✓	✓	✓
	<b>John Mc Hugo</b> , Secretary	✓	✓	✓
	<b>Breda Dolan</b>	✓	✓	✓
	<b>Páraic Lawless</b>	✓	✓	✓
	<b>Audrey Pidgeon</b>	✓	✓	✓

### NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

Purpose	Membership	Dec 2020
This committee is tasked with the core responsibilities of managing the recruitment and appointment process for new Board Members, and succession planning for the Board of Directors, cognisant of diversity in terms of gender, skills and areas of competency. These meetings are held as required.	<b>Kevin Newell</b> , Chairperson	✓
	<b>Cormac Flynn</b> (appointed Jul 2020)	✓
	<b>Dermot O’Neill</b> (appointed Sep 2020)	✓
	<b>Audrey Pidgeon</b> (in attendance)	✓

## QUALITY AND SAFETY BOARD COMMITTEE

Purpose	Membership	Sep 2020	Dec 2020
<p>This committee oversees the development of the quality and safety programme by the executive/Senior Management Team; ensures policies and processes clearly articulate responsibility, authority and accountability for quality, safety and risk management across the service; secures assurance from the executive/Senior Management Team on the implementation of the quality and safety programme and the application of appropriate governance structure and processes, for example: risk escalation, including monitored outcomes through quality indicators and outcome measures; secures assurance from the executive/Senior Management Team that Ability West is conforming with all regulatory and legal requirements to assure quality, safety and risk management. These meetings are held biannually.</p>	Kevin Newell, Chairperson	✓	✓
	Breda Dolan	✓	✓
	Mick Finnerty	✓	X
	Kevin Flavin (retired Jul 2020)	✓	–
	Cormac Flynn	✓	✓
	Ray Kelly (retired Jul 2020)	✓	–
	Frank O’Connell (resigned Aug 2020)	✓	–
	Anthony O’Connor	X	✓
	Kevin Ó Flatharta	✓	✓
	Mary O’Mahony	✓	✓
	Dermot O’Neill	✓	✓
	Sean McGrath	✓	✓
	Denise Ryan	X	X
	Darragh Sheehy	X	✓
	Audrey Pidgeon	✓	✓
Eileen Costello-Conneely	✓	✓	
Cathal Esler	✓	✓	
Orla Haddigan	✓	✓	
John McHugo	✓	✓	

## VISITING COMMITTEE

Purpose	Membership
<p>This role of this committee is to visit all services provided by Ability West. It provides an opportunity for Board Members to see our services (facilities) and to engage with service users, managers and staff. A report highlighting various aspects of each service and service delivery is provided to the Chief Executive, so that any issues raised during visits receive attention. Reports are provided to all Board Members and these are reviewed at the following Board meeting with any feedback being provided by the Chief Executive. Visits in 2020 had commenced, however were paused in response to national Public Health restrictions. Seven visits were completed prior to the pandemic being declared in mid-March 2020; it is envisaged that the visits will recommence in late 2021 or as soon as Public Health guidance allows.</p>	All Board Members

## EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT

The executive management in Ability West comprises of the Chief Executive and the Senior Management Team, the members are as follows:

Chief Executive, **Audrey Pidgeon**  
(appointed September 2020)

Interim Director of Client Services,  
**Orla Haddigan** (January 2020)

Director of Finance, **John McHugo**

Director of Human Resources,  
**Cathal Esler**

Recording Secretary, **Carol A. Browne**



### Senior Management Team

**I-r: Cathal Esler**, Director of Human Resources, **Orla Haddigan**, Interim Director of Client Services, **Audrey Pidgeon**, Chief Executive, **Carol A. Browne**, Recording Secretary, **John McHugo**, Director of Finance

**The Board of Directors meets with the Senior Management Team biannually to discuss various aspects of operations and service delivery along with reviewing the Corporate Risk Register and progress on the Strategic Plan 2019-2023.**

## STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

### Constitution

Ability West is a not-for-profit organisation providing services and supports to over 600 children and adults with an intellectual disability across Galway City and County. The company is governed by a Constitution, which was most recently revised in 2020. Proposed changes were submitted to the Charities Regulator in early 2020 for approval. These changes were reflective of the difficulties encountered in recent years in recruiting volunteers to support the grassroots structure in Ability West. It was agreed that the replacement of the regional/branch structure would be to one which would link directly with families via the Family Forum. The proposed changes to the Constitution were approved by the Charities Regulator in March 2020 and ratified at the AGM held in July 2020. These revised changes do not impact on the principle objective of the Constitution which are:

*To benefit the community through the promotion and/or provision of the highest possible standard of service, support,*

*treatment, training, education, general welfare of persons with disability, in their own communities and the giving of advice, guidance and support to parents/guardians and family members of persons with disability.*

The company provides services and supports through rehabilitative training, day services, residential and respite care, short breaks, home sharing and contract families, community supports, volunteers, work placements and multi-disciplinary supports, including: speech and language therapy, physiotherapy, positive behaviour support, occupational therapy, social work and psychology. These supports are in place to empower people with disabilities to live self-directed lives in an equal and inclusive society.

There have been no changes to the principle objectives since the last Directors' Report.

### Appointment of Directors

The first Family Forum each year will nominate two unrelated family representatives to the Board, taking into consideration the skill mix of the Board and expertise required. Both individuals will meet the criteria of 'family member' as defined in the Constitution. A 'family member' means the parent, grandparent, legal guardian, sibling, spouse of a sibling, child of a sibling, aunt, uncle, spouse of an aunt or uncle, or child of an aunt or uncle of a service user. The nominees are formally elected at the AGM in accordance with the

Articles of Association. Other directors are co-opted having regard to the optimum skill mix and expertise of the Board.

### Recruitment, Induction and Training of Directors

The Board of Directors, supported by the Nominations Committee, has been actively renewing its membership over the past few years, taking into account a balance of the abilities needed to tackle the wide-ranging responsibilities of the Board. Cognisant of this, the existing Board Members' skill mix comprises of expertise in technology, legal, construction, engineering, finance, education (intellectual disability), human resources, management and marketing. Given the voluntary nature of the role, Ability West has recruited new directors through Volunteer Galway and Boardmatch.

Comprehensive induction training is provided for new directors upon commencement of their term in office. This training inter alia includes: briefing on the Constitution and company structure, the strategic plan, corporate and clinical Governance, Charities Governance Code, Guidance for Charity Trustees (Charities Regulator), Code of Conduct for Board Members; Conflict of Interest and Conflict of Loyalty Policies.

The Code of Conduct is reviewed, approved and signed off annually by Board Members. Additional training (internal/external courses/webinars) is also provided to directors and in 2020 a number of



Directors completed training which inter alia included: Board Roles and Responsibilities (Carmichael), Charities Trustees Panel Discussion (The Wheel), Role of Directors and Corporate Governance Best Practice (IBEC Networks/Byrne Wallace). The Chairperson and Chief Executive jointly attended training specific to their roles (Boardmatch) and the Company Secretary attended training about the Role of the Company Secretary in a Company Limited by Guarantee (Carmichael).

### Organisational Structure and Decision Making

Ability West is governed by the Board of Directors who are elected in accordance

with the company's Constitution. The Directors are non-executive members of the company, who receive no remuneration for their services, and they represent diverse skills, expertise and backgrounds. The Board of Directors meets 10 times per year and collectively has non-executive responsibility for how the organisation operates currently and what it achieves over the long-term.

The Board of Directors delegates the day-to-day management of Ability West to the Chief Executive, who is in turn supported by a tiered management system that identifies clear lines of accountability and responsibility at each level.

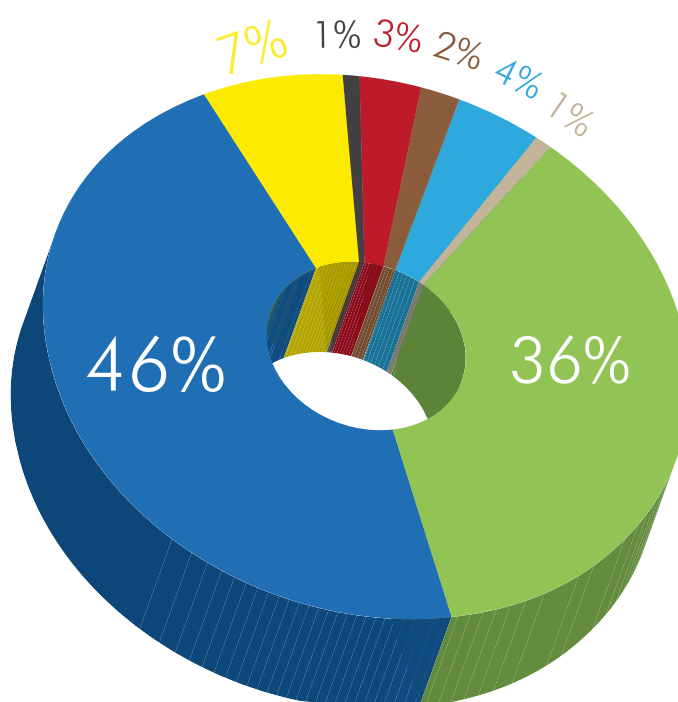
The Board recognises the value of high standards of corporate governance and

to this end is supported by various Board Committees (as noted earlier). These committees are responsible for overseeing particular aspects of the work of the company and report directly to the Board.

Ability West recruits suitably qualified staff for positions within our service to ensure that high quality service provision is maintained. Our service delivery is based on a Social Care service provision methodology. Adherence to legislative requirements and best practice, particularly in the areas of equality and equal opportunities, records management, Garda vetting, accreditation and qualification validation where applicable, are important aspects of our recruitment function.

### Staff Breakdown

- Senior Management
- HR/Finance/Admin
- Organisational Services
- Client Services/  
Multidisciplinary Teams
- Special Schools
- Day Services
- Residential Services
- Respite Services



Ability West has a vibrant volunteer programme which augments the programmes delivered in our services. Volunteers undergo a comprehensive screening and training process. There is an update on volunteers later in this report.

### Risk Management

The Directors have assessed the major risks to which the company is exposed, in particular those relating to its operations

and finances, and are satisfied that systems and procedures are in place to mitigate exposure to major risk. Management of risk is viewed by the Board as a corporate governance priority and the company has a robust Integrated Risk Management Policy and Procedure in place which is reviewed every three years, or more frequently if required. This policy was most recently revised and approved by the Board of Directors in November 2020. The Directors review the Corporate Risk

Register at least four times a year, or more frequently if required, and there is ongoing financial monitoring both internally and externally by the HSE. While Ability West does not currently have a formal Reserves Policy, the organisation prudently manages the financial resources provided by the HSE through an annual Service Arrangement, and other income sources, to accumulate limited reserves to cope with future funding/expenditure variations from both a revenue and capital perspective.

The company's internal control systems are supported by policies, procedures, protocols and guidelines covering all aspects of the work of the organisation.

### Governance Standards/Compliance

The Board of Directors reviewed its compliance with the Charities Governance Code at meetings held from September to December 2020. The Charities Regulator's Compliance Record Form was finalised and approved in advance of January 2021. This code will be reviewed on an annual basis with reporting to the Regulator commencing in 2021.

AbilityWest is committed to complying with the Guidelines for Charitable Organisations Fundraising from the Public which was issued by the Charities Regulator in 2017. A number of robust policies and procedures were developed to support fundraising and these are reviewed every three years, or more frequently if required. Ability West complies with the Charities Institutes Ireland 'Triple Lock Standard' ensuring transparent reporting, best practice in fundraising and good governance.

Ability West is registered on the Register of Lobbying which is maintained by the Standards in Public Office Commission and we complied with the submission of lobbying returns during 2020.

A Central Register of Beneficial Ownership was established in 2019 as a further measure to assist combatting money-laundering and

terrorist financing. Ability West filed our beneficial ownership information on the Central Register, which is maintained by the Register of companies, and we continue to update this register as relevant.

During 2020 the Board of Directors completed the Health Service Executive's (HSE) Annual Compliance Statement for Section 39 funded agencies in respect of 2019. This statement was signed by the Chairperson and a Board member and submitted to the HSE in advance of the end of July deadline. The Annual Compliance Statement for 2020 is due for submission by the end of May 2021.

The Annual Financial Monitoring Report for 2019 was completed and signed by the Chief Executive and the Director of Finance and submitted to the HSE in May 2020. The 2020 report will be submitted to the HSE before the end of May 2021.

The annual budget is approved by the Board of Directors. Management accounts, including comparisons with the annual budget programme, are reported to the Board on a regular basis by the Chairperson of the Finance Committee. The approval of staff appointments/remuneration is a standing item on Board Meeting agendas.

It is Ability West's policy that all staff and volunteers, including members of the Board, operate subject to best practice recruitment policies and Garda vetting procedures. All staff and volunteers are made aware of their responsibilities to protect those they support through

adherence to national policies, e.g. Children First and Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse.

Ability West implements the processes and systems of the HSE's National Safeguarding Policy to ensure that individuals availing of our services are educated and protected from all forms of abuse. The company has a 'zero tolerance' approach to any form of abuse and promotes a culture which supports this ethos.

Ability West reports all concerns of abuse to the HSE Safeguarding Team on an ongoing basis. This is done through preliminary screenings and safeguarding plans which are completed and reviewed by our Designated Officer and overseen by the HSE Safeguarding Team. In 2020, 43 preliminary screenings were completed and submitted to the HSE Safeguarding Team.

Ability West has a robust performance management process for all staff. Performance objectives/KPIs are agreed at the start of each year between staff and their line manager alongside supports to staff in achieving these goals. Two staff development/support meetings are held during the year to review progress against KPIs. In the event that staff struggle towards achieving KPIs a Performance Improvement Plan can be introduced to formalise and support the employee back to the expected standards.



Celebrating Halloween in Garbally Oaks, October 2020  
l-r: Dervla Allen, Jack Darragh and Patrick Flynn

## STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING OBJECTIVES IN OUR STRATEGIC PLAN 2019-2023

**Our strategic plan provides a roadmap for services, supports and the organisational development of Ability West. It outlines the destination that we wish the organisation to arrive at in 2023. The plan will ensure that Ability West is best placed to achieve our vision and mission in the most effective, efficient, fair, equitable and person-centred manner.**

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, Ability West re-evaluated if our vision, mission and strategic goals were still appropriate.

There was unanimous agreement that the vision and mission statements of the organisation still hold. Ability West retains the same values and is still passionate about delivering services and supports to people with an intellectual disability. However the environment and context within which services are provided have changed, for example:

- The goal of sustainable resources has taken on a new interpretation with the impact on fundraising in 2020.

- The goal of community inclusion is now challenged by the National Framework for living with Covid-19, due to the restrictions of movement and the element of choice being taken away in this respect.

The pandemic has brought about uncertainty about what will happen in the foreseeable future, so rather than setting annual targets, planning will take place on a quarterly basis until such a time as predictability in resourcing, staffing and service delivery has resumed.

There are eight strategic goals:

**ORGANISATION'S CULTURE  
CHANGE MANAGEMENT  
EFFECTIVE TEAMS  
MEANINGFUL OUTCOMES  
COMMUNITY INCLUSION  
SECURE SUSTAINABLE RESOURCES  
CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT,  
MONITORING AND EVALUATION  
COMMUNICATION**

## Progress on achieving the objectives of these goals is as follows:

Goals	Aims/Outcomes	2019	2020
<b>Organisation's Culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role model the values of Ability West in all our work</li> <li>• Audit the culture of our services to ensure that we are delivering on our ethos</li> </ul>	<p>A cultural audit was completed and a new policy implemented.</p> <p>Monthly employee recognition programme commenced.</p>	<p>Due to unprecedented demands on service planning plans to reassess the audit were paused. There is however ample evidence through our work and actions across our services that our values have been very strong this year across our frontline services, office-based staff and management.</p>
<b>Change Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that services and supports reflect best practice and are underpinned by person centredness, individualisation, choice and self- determination</li> <li>• To utilise person centred planning to inform and mould our model of service delivery so that meeting individuals' preferences and needs is central to service planning and delivery</li> <li>• Ensure we have the ability to be flexible, nimble and adaptive in meeting the requirements and changing needs of the people we support</li> <li>• Be a learning organisation, with ongoing development informed by need and anticipated demand</li> </ul>	<p>Policy reviewed to define Person Centred Planning.</p> <p>KPIs established, audit tool developed and audit commenced in 2019.</p> <p>Analysis of Person Centred Plans (PCPs) to inform PCP process going forward.</p> <p>Trends of needs identified in day, residential and respite services. Future needs to be identified through schools/ school age teams.</p> <p>Changing needs of service users identified on an ongoing basis and business cases as relevant submitted to the HSE.</p> <p>Mandatory training targets monitored and met through 2019.</p>	<p><b>Re-shaping Day Services Framework</b></p> <p>A working group was established to review the re-shaping of services and the ways to best meet people's needs. Work is ongoing.</p> <p><b>Respite and Home Sharing Structure</b></p> <p>A review of the structure of respite, short breaks, community support and home sharing was undertaken. The existing team is effective and fit for purpose.</p> <p>Additional funding for a new project 'Realóg' was received from the HSE in 2020; this provides in-home and community support for a period of time for families in need of additional support due to complex support needs.</p>
<b>Effective Teams</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement performance management throughout the organisation</li> <li>• Invest in training and ongoing development of staff</li> <li>• Develop a staff wellbeing strategy</li> <li>• Celebrate and disseminate good practices and good news stories</li> </ul>	<p>New performance appraisal process rolled out in first full cycle of performance management process.</p> <p>Wellbeing strategy developed reflective of best practice within resources available in order to enhance employee wellbeing; Wellbeing Team established and wellbeing initiatives rolled out during 2019.</p>	<p><b>Online Training</b></p> <p>A significant amount of mandatory training was moved online to protect employees' health and safety, and also ensure that we could meet our training requirements.</p> <p>Planning commenced to introduce an online induction course for new employees and volunteers.</p>

Goals	Aims/Outcomes	2019	2020
<b>Effective Teams continued . . .</b>		<p>Three employees sponsored to undergo Social Care degree programmes.</p> <p>Launch of publications and sharing good news stories/ achievements across services, via circulars, and all digital platforms.</p>	<p>Additional work on re-organising services, ongoing risk assessment and management, updating health and safety guidelines and individualising them to specific teams and services put significant pressure on teams who are already busy with the usual day-to-day service operations and compliance. A capacity review was undertaken across teams to support the additional workloads in order to ensure continued effectiveness during the pandemic and to protect the health and wellbeing of all staff.</p>

<b>Meaningful Outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement holistic quality PCPs that are meaningful and enable the person to achieve their goals and ambitions</li> <li>• Encourage and enable people to participate in community activities and contribute in a meaningful way to the wider society and environment</li> <li>• Enable people to have positive relationships, stay connected to their families and community</li> </ul>	<p>Individuals are supported with their PCP, and an audit of PCPs is in progress.</p> <p>School leaver process reviewed and a day service review commenced in 2019.</p> <p>New Transition Support Plan with a focus on developing relationships – pilot with school leavers.</p>	<p><b>Re-imagining Person- Centred Plans</b></p> <p>A review of PCPs in all services in light of the Covid-19 pandemic was completed to ensure that outcomes remain meaningful.</p> <p>A bid for funding was successful under the 'Strengthening Disability Services Fund' for a consultation on Person Centred Practice in Ability West services. This funding will provide for an audit of Person Centred Practice in our services, develop a renewed approach to same with an accompanying software tool for monitoring purposes, and training across staff teams. A project manager will be recruited on a temporary basis to oversee the co-ordination of the project and to establish systems that will sustain the learning achieved in our services.</p> <p><b>Modes of communication to maintain relationships</b></p> <p>Planning for an Ireland-USA Pen Pal initiative for people of our services and those of NAPD commenced.</p>
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Goals	Aims/Outcomes	2019	2020
<b>Community Inclusion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to grow our volunteer and friendship opportunities</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for people to use their gifts and abilities, enhancing experiences – happiness, pride and a sense of belonging</li> <li>• Build community partnerships that are positive and create value</li> <li>• Lobby for change at local, regional and national level so that people can take their rightful place in society free from barriers and enjoy equal citizenship</li> </ul>	<p>Continued roll-out of the Best Buddies programme and volunteer events.</p> <p><b>Employment path for people with disability:</b> Recruitment to AW receptionist role</p> <p>Engagement with the National Federation of Voluntary Service Providers through its various committees, fora and national campaigns; Robust budget campaign in advance of Budget 2020; Represented at the HSE Strategic Leadership Group (Springtime Children's Services) to represent the needs of children availing of our services; Engagement with the HSE Head of Disability and General Manager for Disability Services</p> <p>Quality and Compliance Membership on Disability Federation of Ireland HIQA Forum Representative Group – seek to influence policy development.</p> <p>Manager of Ancillary Services on the Galway County Council Disability Housing Strategy Group.</p>	<p><b>Engage with National Federation of Voluntary Service Providers and other relevant fora</b></p> <p>Expression of interest submitted to join the Board of the National Federation of Voluntary Service Providers.</p> <p>Ongoing engagement with the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) and Proactive Carers Group. Ability West is the proposed named Enterprise Mentor for a PhD study on access to residential services for people with intellectual disabilities under Article 19 of the UNCRPD.</p> <p><b>Increased community partnership</b></p> <p>Ability West engaged with a local service in Portumna who have offered the use of their community building to extend the delivery of day services during the pandemic.</p>
<b>Secure Sustainable Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will work to secure sustainable resources on an ongoing basis</li> <li>• Maximise our profile, explore and target income diversification</li> <li>• Obtain best value in all our dealings</li> </ul>	<p>Ongoing work with economies achieved.</p> <p>E-tendering ongoing.</p>	<p><b>Income Diversification</b></p> <p>Worked with external consultant to develop a new community fundraising strategy for Ability West. Work is ongoing.</p> <p><b>Fostering relationships with HSE, NRVSP, etc.</b></p> <p>Continued relationship fostering with funding bodies and umbrella groups, and to keep informed of new initiatives and funding opportunities. A number of successful submissions made for additional funds made available in 2020, and have had approval for proposed expenditure in Q4.</p> <p><b>Unfunded business cases to be submitted to HSE</b></p> <p>Unfunded services provided by Ability West have been highlighted to the HSE in Service Arrangement Review Meetings, and business cases for same have been submitted.</p>

Goals	Aims/Outcomes	2019	2020
<b>Continuous Quality Improvement, Monitoring and Evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will ensure that we comply with all legislation and regulations</li> <li>We will carry out audits and monitor against plans and targets to ensure continuous improvement</li> <li>We will develop service plans which deliver on this strategic plan and monitor and evaluate for impact on achieving our Vision and subsequent culture change</li> <li>We will organise focus groups on relevant topics, develop surveys to seek views and feedback</li> </ul>	<p>Ongoing compliance with legislative requirements</p> <p>Various audits undertaken during 2019, including those under regulation and standards; Ongoing development of audit tools to monitor specific areas of service delivery</p> <p>Family Forum held in May 2019</p>	<p>Ongoing compliance with legislative requirements</p> <p><b>Ability West's status as an Approved Housing Body (AHB)</b></p> <p>Ongoing discussion with the Housing Agency and the Department of Housing to explore the options open to Ability West as an AHB ahead of new statutory regulations coming in January 2022.</p> <p>Family Forum held in November 2020</p>
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We encourage communication at all levels, good communication is a vital part of our work and we will use various platforms and technology for communicating with our stakeholders</li> <li>Social media will be utilised to promote our work and share good news stories</li> <li>Multi-directional communication will be open and transparent between all stakeholders, with an emphasis on trust, respect and honesty</li> </ul>	<p>Ongoing communication with all stakeholders – via email, letters, social media platforms (internal/external), intranet and internet</p> <p>Meetings commenced with frontline teams to discuss communications issues/ challenges</p> <p>Services encouraged to provide material for social media outputs; enhanced our social media presence during 2019 with increased followers across all channels</p>	<p><b>Ongoing work with Core HR</b></p> <p>Significant work to upgrade our Management Information system. It is intended that this will also provide a message board for all staff</p> <p>Continued engagement across our social media platforms with increased followers on all channels</p> <p><b>Advocacy Council</b></p> <p>The Senior Management Team met with the Chair and Facilitator of the Advocacy Council. Meetings to continue twice yearly and a number of actions and themes will be progressed</p> <p><b>Focus Groups (Family Forum/ Advocacy Council/Staff/ Volunteers)</b></p> <p>We will endeavour to increase effective and meaningful engagement with all stakeholders. The Family Forum resumed in November 2020 through an online format, with very positive feedback</p>

**Company Solicitors**

Kieran Murphy & Co., 9 The Crescent, Galway, H91 W6T7

**Bank**

Bank of Ireland, 22 Mainguard Street, Galway, H91 TX21  
 Bank of Ireland, Eyre Square, Galway, H91 D6X9  
 AIB Bank, Lynch's Castle, Galway, H91 W400

**Auditors**

FCC Chartered Accountants & Registered Auditors,  
 3rd Floor, Lismoyle House, Merchants Road, Galway, H91 KPY0

**Registered Office**

Ability West, Blackrock House, Salthill, Galway, H91 R254

Ability West is a Company Limited by Guarantee, registered No. 41317 and is registered with the Revenue Commissioners as a Charity under Registration No. CHY6306. Ability West is approved for the Scheme of Tax Relief for Donations to Eligible Charities and other Approved Bodies under Section 848A Taxes Consolidation 1997 under Tax No. 2237226Q.

AbilityWest is a registered charity under the Charities Regulatory Authority, Registration No. 20011161. The organisation has a Quality Management System, ISO 9001:2015 accredited, and is accredited to Excellence Through People, 1000: 2017, National Standards Authority of Ireland.

Éirim an Iarthair is a registered Business Name under the Registration of Business Names Act, 1963, Registered No. 335139.

Ability West is an equal opportunities employer.

This annual report was project managed by Carol A. Browne, Communications and Executive Office Manager, and co-ordinated by Paulette Cully, Administrative Officer, Executive Office.

**Legal and  
 Administrative**  
 INFORMATION



## QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE UPDATE

*By Eileen Costello-Conneely, Quality and Compliance Manager*

The quality of services and supports is monitored and reviewed on a continual basis in Ability West to ensure we have oversight in terms of trends, areas for improvement, shared learning and taking an overall integrated risk management approach to quality and compliance. Ability West complies with a wide range of legislation, regulations and standards throughout areas of corporate governance, management, services and supports. Some of these areas include company legislation, charities legislation, employment legislation, health and safety legislation, codes of practice, Statutory Instruments 366 and 367, national standards for residential and respite services, the HSE Interim Standards for day services, and national policies and procedures such as Children First and Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse.

Ability West has a Quality Management System in place, encompassing all

services and supports, which provides a framework for overall integrated quality management. This is accredited by the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) to the international standard ISO 9001:2015. The organisation established risk management processes, aligned to the standard ISO 31000:2018 which is a framework for integrated risk management. We have successfully maintained certification to the HR standard 'Excellence Through People 1000:2017', which is accredited by the NSAI.

The Quality Management System identifies areas of good practice, areas that need improvement and progress on same, taking an overall integrated risk management and continual improvement approach. This is achieved in many ways, for example: undertaking audits, analysis of results of such audits and reviews, external inspections, feedback, complaints, accident/incident records,

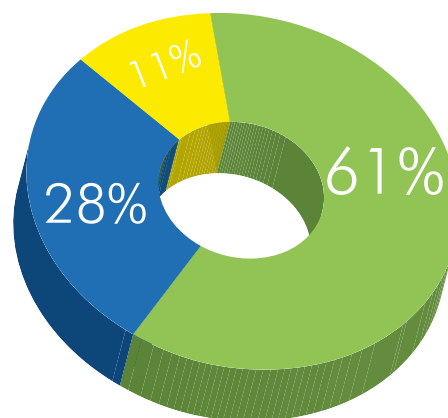
statutory notification records and reviews through a number of fora such as Senior Management Team Management Reviews and Quality and Safety Committees.

### HEALTH INFORMATION AND QUALITY AUTHORITY (HIQA)

Ability West complies with the HIQA National Standards for Residential Services for Children and Adults with Disabilities, along with the applicable legislation, i.e. Statutory Instrument (S.I.) 367. The standards and legislation are applicable to our residential and respite services and we have 29 designated centres registered with HIQA. Twenty five inspections were undertaken by HIQA during 2020 and inspection reports can be accessed on HIQA's website or by contacting the individual designated centre. Results in terms of compliance levels are as follows:

### Compliance Levels – HIQA Inspections 2020

- Compliant
- Substantially Compliant
- Non-Compliant



# Quality and Compliance UPDATE

## Compliance levels (taking account of compliant and substantially compliant) from inspections over the past five years are as follows:

HIQA INSPECTIONS					
Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Compliant and Substantially Compliant	59%	67%	95%	92%	89%

When considering the overall statistics for 2020, our compliance levels are in line with levels outlined in the 2019 HIQA Annual Overview Report on the inspection and regulation of disability services, where it is noted that non-congregated settings had a compliance level of 91% (taking compliant and substantially compliant into account).

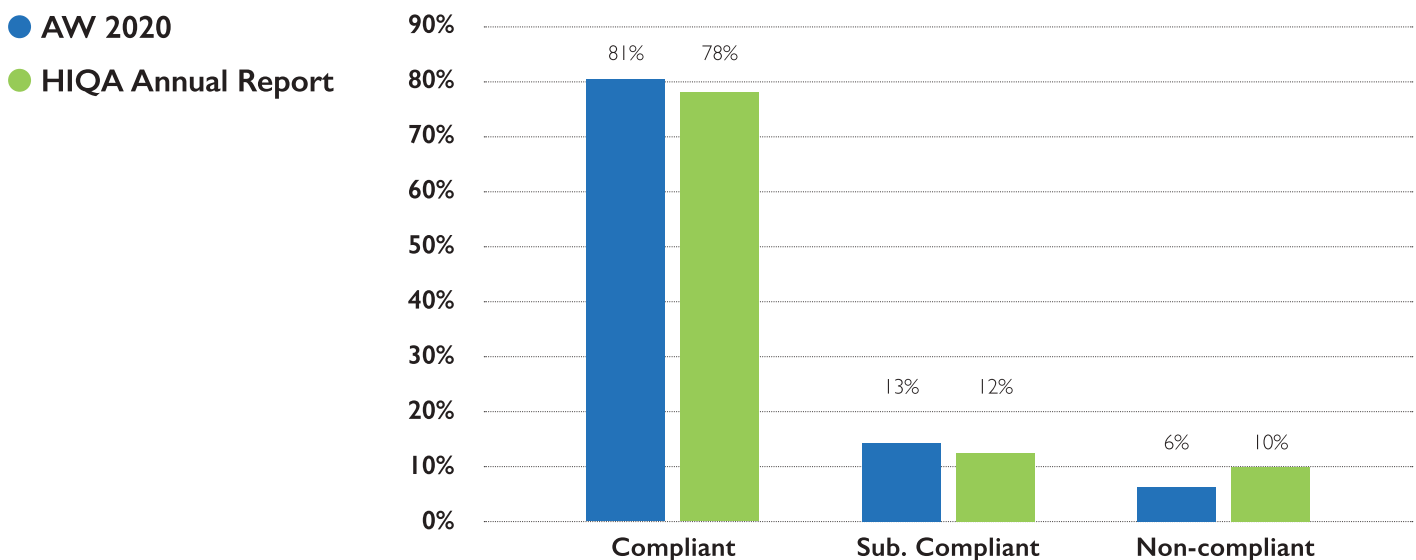
We have maintained our Key Performance Indicator linked to our Quality Objectives in terms of compliance with S.I. 367 and HIQA Standards of aiming for a minimum of 65% compliance by Q4 2017, and we have consistently achieved this. However, this would be seen as a minimum requirement and our expectation would

be to achieve much higher levels and work is ongoing in this regard.

In some areas, however, when one compares our results with the HIQA 2019 Annual Overview Report for similar type settings; Ability West compares favourably, with comparisons provided hereunder:

## Regulation 8 – Protection

### Comparison of Regulation 8 results - Ability West Inspections 2020 v. HIQA Inspections 2019 in designated centres in Ireland



During 2020, we achieved good compliance levels in a number of significant areas, for example, Regulation 5 – Individualised Assessment and Personal Plans, with 88% compliance (compliant and substantially compliant). This area covers much of the social care needs of service users, relating to person centred planning, activities and goal setting. Another area where we achieved excellent compliance

levels was Regulation 27 - Infection Control, with 100% compliance. This is a significant achievement and reflects our robust processes in response to Covid-19 during 2020. We also achieved an overall compliance level of 100% in fire precautions which compares favourably with the 2019 HIQA overall report for similar type settings, where the level of compliance was 77%.

Notwithstanding these results, some areas requiring improvements were identified, including; risk management (achieved 83%), residents' rights (achieved 75%) and also in the areas of governance and management. Robust action plans were put in place to address these issues and increase compliance levels going forward.

## HSE INTERIM STANDARDS FOR DAY SERVICES

Day services continue to work on EASI tool completion and action planning. EASI tool is used as a self-evaluation process, providing an opportunity to confirm areas where the day service is meeting the interim standards and plan actions to address gaps, if any, in systems and processes; along with identifying additional opportunities for improvement. Work is progressing in this regard.

## INTERNAL AUDITS

The quality of services and supports continues to be monitored in a variety of ways, including by undertaking Provider Led Audits (PLAs) and a comprehensive audit schedule is in place in this regard. Audits continued to take place during the year, with all designated centres undergoing at least one audit, and many having two. Due to Covid-19 restrictions and outbreaks in some services, further audits were carried over for completion in early 2021. Audits were carried out either on-site or remotely; they included opportunities to speak with service users and staff and review records. Audits carried out on-site were undertaken in compliance with national guidelines for infection prevention and control. Outcomes from audits are shared with individual services and the line management.

We continue to develop the processes for audits, in line with outcomes from HIQA inspections, developments by HIQA, and in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Our audit template was revised during 2020 and includes a number of key areas of Regulations from S.I. 367. Greater emphasis is placed on governance and management, risk management, infection prevention and control, and service users' overall quality of life. Areas for improvement in the action plans includes SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timebound) goals. The audits covered areas such as quality of life for service users, continuity of care and supports, and continuation of choice in activities for services, particularly during the pandemic. There was an overall focus during audits on effective governance and management, service users' rights, risk management and contingency planning, which were some areas identified from HIQA inspections.

There was good demonstration of contingency planning particularly in relation to Public Health guidelines and this was reflected in HIQA inspections, i.e. 100% for Regulation 27 on infection prevention and control. On review of our provider led audits this is reflected under Outcome 07, Health and Safety and Risk Management, and while there were some areas for improvement with regard to risk management, the area of infection prevention and control was managed well and evidence provided of this.

An audit programme on Person Centred Plans (PCP) commenced in Q4 2019 and was completed in Q1 2020. 92% of PCPs audited were in compliance with our policy and procedures. Further work continues on the quality of plans and goals for the people we support. Our successful proposal for funding under the Strengthening Disability Services Fund – Improving Person Centred Delivery in line with Transforming Lives, will have a hugely positive impact on person centred planning into the future and will enable Ability West to continue improving services in line with our strategic plan goal of Meaningful Outcomes.

## QUALITY AND SAFETY COMMITTEES

Ability West has a Quality and Safety Board Committee which meets biannually, with the purpose of driving quality improvement and providing assurances that there are appropriate and effective governance structures, processes, standards and oversights in place with regard to quality and safety.

We also have a Quality and Safety Executive Committee with the purpose of overseeing and evaluating the comprehensive quality and safety programme, with associated structures, policies and processes, and this is underpinned by an integrated risk management approach. This committee reviews various statistics and analyses in terms of trends and areas for improvement. A significant piece of modification work was completed on our Quality Management Information System (QMIS) by this committee which will improve reporting, the identification of trends, etc. In 2021, we are focussing on quality improvements and improving our compliance levels, particularly with

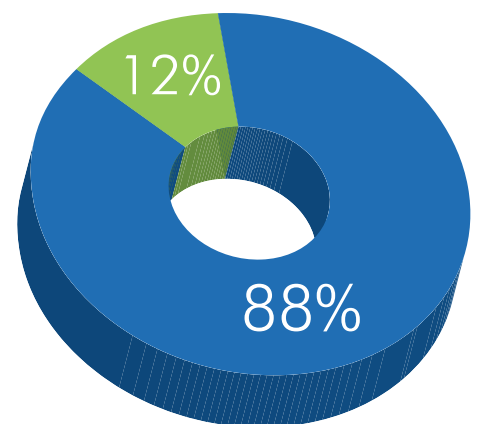
regard to compliance with regulatory requirements and standards for designated centres.

## FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS

Ability West welcomes feedback and complaints, and information about how to make a complaint or provide feedback is available in all services. We utilise the QMIS to record feedback, manage complaints and analyse same. This feeds into the overall processes for review, improvements and shared learning. Total feedback recorded for 2020 was 18, the majority of feedback received were compliments about the quality of services and supports, most of which came from family members. There was also positive feedback in relation to supports during the pandemic.

A total of 58 complaints were received during 2020, 88% of these have been resolved, with the remaining 12% open and ongoing. Complaints came from a variety of sources such as service users, family members and staff advocating on behalf of service users. The range of complaints included: dissatisfaction with some element of services and supports, access to respite, alleged inappropriate behaviour, transport conditions and effective communication.

## Complaints Resolved/ Unresolved 2020



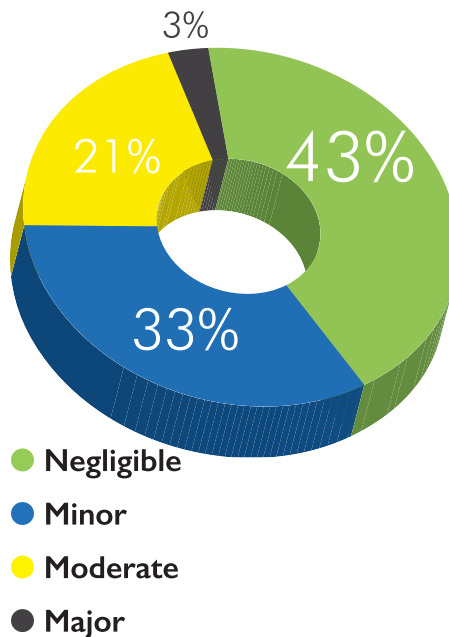
- Resolved
- Unresolved

## HEALTH AND SAFETY

Our Quality Management Information System (QMIS) is a management tool, with a specific module to record incidents. The total number of incidents recorded in 2020 was 3,093, which is a decrease of 718 incidents on the previous year. 'Behaviours that Challenge' represent the highest number of incidents during the year; however there was a significant reduction on the previous year. The second highest category was 'other', which is a difficult category to analyse and as a result, modifications were made to the incident module to eliminate this category. Infection control incidents were the third highest, which is unsurprising given the Covid-19 pandemic. Medication incidents were the fourth highest category, however on review of these, a good deal of the incidents are errors external to Ability West which were identified by services and therefore, categorised as 'near misses'.

A breakdown of the severity levels recorded on QMIS in 2020 is detailed hereunder. In 2019 the major incident category was 3.8%, which reduced to 3% in 2020.

### Incidents on QMIS – Category of Severity Levels 2020



The overall results in terms of learning, areas for improvement and management of risk are shared through the line management structure.

Ability West reports incidents to the State Claims Agency via the National Incident Management System (NIMS). We report on incidents which are coded on QMIS as moderate, major or catastrophic. We must also notify suspected or confirmed cases of Covid-19 to the State Claims Agency through NIMS. Ability West is currently not delegated to the State Claims Agency's General Indemnity Scheme and as such is only presently required to report service user related incidents. However, Ability West would welcome inclusion under the General Indemnity Scheme.

## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND DATA PROTECTION

Ability West complies with Freedom of Information and Data Protection legislation, with processes in place in this regard. The organisation has a Freedom of Information Publication Scheme in place which can be accessed through our website. Data Protection policies and procedures are also in place.

FOI and Data Protection Statistics 2020		Total
FOI Requests		10
Internal Reviews		1
Subject Access Requests		0
Subject Access Requests – Under Administration Access by HR		2
Data Breaches – Data Protection reported to Data Commission Office		1

Data breaches reduced significantly from 5 in 2019 to 1 in 2020. This shows increased awareness about data protection within the organisation.

## RESTRICTIVE PRACTICES AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Ability West has both a Restrictive Practices Committee and a Human Rights Committee in place. Both committees are significant elements of the organisation's processes, particularly in terms of promoting rights in line with our vision and mission statement and our strategic plan. These committees met regularly during 2020 to review and consider referrals.

Both committees promote a restraint-free environment, minimisation of rights restrictions, and best practice approach with the guiding principles in the event of restrictive practices being deemed necessary, i.e. that they are the least restrictive practice, only used as a last resort and ensuring that they are always legitimate, safe, minimal, and for the shortest period of time.

## COVID-19 PANDEMIC SITUATION

Since the pandemic was declared in March 2020, a range of processes have been put in place in Ability West as part of a risk management approach and in order to deal with and respond to an ever-changing situation. This included the mobilisation of the Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT), who met and continue to meet regularly in order to discuss, review, plan and respond to Covid-19 related issues; including but not limited to service openings, closures, resumption of services, guidance documents, and vaccination roll-out. The Chief Executive continues to provide updates to services, families and staff at regular intervals.

Overall measures considered during the pandemic included contingency planning at both local and organisational level, capacity assessments, infection prevention and control measures and guidelines, review of personal protection equipment and adequate supplies. Work is ongoing in relation to supports for service users in terms of day, residential and respite services and trying to maintain a good quality of life for all, taking an overall risk management approach while adhering to national guidelines. Other developments included the review of national guidance and their impact on services, publishing of Return to Work Response Plan, publication of procedures on working remotely, and review of our policies and procedures and their impact to ensure compliance with the national guidelines. All measures are continually reviewed, taking a risk management approach, with contingency planning and preparedness to the forefront.

There are processes in place with regard to notification and monitoring of Covid-19 cases, particularly in terms of preparedness and infection prevention and control processes. A number of authorities have to be notified of suspected or confirmed cases, i.e. Public Health (all services), the State Claims Agency (all services), and HIQA (for designated centres). A process

has been set up in this regard through the QMIS. Public Health must be notified on a daily basis of suspected and confirmed cases and their status, as is the case with HIQA.

In the event of a Covid-19 outbreak, an Ability West Response Team (AWRT) convenes immediately, and the CIRT will facilitate its formation. The AWRT is chaired by the Director of Client Services/a Delegate. Members include an Assistant Director of Client Services, Person in Charge/Unit Director, Assistant Director of Human Resources, staff member with nursing expertise, Head of Social Work, Quality and Compliance team member(s), administrative support and other personnel as required. The AWRT monitors the outbreak, provides oversight of management of the situation, and declares the outbreak over. The AWRT oversees numbers of ill people (staff and service users), spectrum of symptoms, dates of infection, and discusses and ensures implementation of advice from Public Health where possible. For each of the outbreaks declared in Ability West an AWRT was established and records maintained of meetings.

Ability West has four Lead Worker Representatives in the organisation and one of their key roles is working collaboratively with management to ensure, insofar as reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of staff in relation to Covid-19, and to promote good infection prevention and control strategies. They also have a role in terms of a pathway being available to escalate any unresolved concerns at frontline level, within the existing line management structures. The Lead Worker Representatives meet regularly with members of the Quality and Compliance Department; and have also put forward some queries to the CIRT, all of which were responded to. This is a very beneficial process in terms of having another valuable communication link to frontline staff for queries. The Lead Worker Representatives have been supported with training for this role.

## INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk management is an integral part of overall services and supports, and our policy and procedure in this regard describes the processes, using the standard ISO 31000:2018 as a framework for integrated risk management. Our processes were reviewed and we updated our policy and procedure in Q4 2020, providing more guidance on risk registers and their review, identified through HIQA Inspections and our Provider Led Audits.

Each service has a centre risk register and risk assessments, detailing risk treatment, along with individual risk assessments for service users. If it becomes apparent that a particular situation poses a risk that may not be able to be carried in the service, then this is escalated through the line management structure. Specific risks are entered, as relevant, on the Corporate Risk Register, which is the recording tool for the management of identified corporate risks, informed by more detailed local risk analysis at middle and frontline management levels. Risks are also identified through complaints, inspections, audits, pandemic status, and review of services and supports. The Chief Executive's Office, Senior Management Team and Quality and Safety Committees oversee this. The current public health situation is being very well managed, with contingency planning in place at organisational and frontline levels. Our quality management systems provide a good structure in terms of addressing areas for improvement, which have been identified through our processes, such as HIQA Inspections, Provider Led Audits and complaints.

In conclusion, we continue to strive to achieve high standards of service and supports for service users, and would like to compliment all staff members on their continued endeavours and hard work in this regard, particularly during a very challenging 2020.

## ADVOCACY COUNCIL UPDATE

*By John Farragher, Chairperson and John Howard, Facilitator*



### Advocacy Council

**I-r Paul Cannon, Mary Joyce, John Farragher, Chloe Conneely, John Howard, Niamh McCauley and Matthew Brennan**

2020 was not the year anyone envisaged. It was to be the year the Advocacy Council was planning to celebrate its 10th anniversary. It was an extremely difficult year for all service users in Ability West. We recognise with heartfelt compassion and empathy the difficult changes that were forced upon everyone. If nothing else, we all learned the enormous value of relationships and communication.

Notwithstanding the difficult year we had, we decided to change from a 'Service User' Council to an 'Advocacy' Council which better reflects our role and the work we do.

The Advocacy Council has continued to maintain and forge allegiances with other advocacy groups within Galway and nationwide. We have recently become champions of Galway National Parks City, a wonderful project championed by a wide community of people who see Galway as an environmentally sustainable city that everyone can feel a part of and contribute towards. It is an excellent platform to develop community participation and encourage valued social roles.

We have to give special thanks to our Advocacy Champions, who represented everyone from day and residential services during the year. They made great use of technology in this changed world by reaching out to their peers, keeping them connected, represented and informed.

Looking forward, we welcome the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and along with other advocacy groups we will be monitoring progress carefully to make sure that those rights are upheld.

# Advocacy Council UPDATE

## VOLUNTEER UPDATE

By Linda Keane, Volunteer Programme Manager



### Volunteer Fair February 2020

Mayor of Galway, **Cllr. Mike Cubbard** joined staff, service users and friends in the Galway Bay Hotel as part of the **2020 Volunteer Fair**. I-r: **Ian Haverty**, Snipe Resource Centre, **Cllr. Mike Cubbard**, Mayor of Galway and **Linda Keane**, Volunteer Programme Manager

2020 started off great! There were a lot of wonderful people in our community coming forward to volunteer and engage with Ability West. The venues for the Ability West Fashion Show, not to mention the much anticipated Best Buddies Ball, were also booked, so 2020 promised to be a busy year. January and February were hectic months preparing for the 'Best Buddies Got Talent' Show. There were a lot rehearsals before the auditions. In February, Ronan Lardner, our MC for the night launched the event and our judging panel, made up of our heroes from Connacht Rugby, Stephen Kerins, Jarrad Butler and Paul Boyle, critiqued the 13 acts who put on an amazing display. This was a fantastic event, raising over €1,500. Congratulations and thanks to all involved. We had decided to make this an annual event but for now we will see what happens.

Recruitment of volunteers is a process involving a number of steps and various factors to consider, including what the volunteer would like to get from the experience, so that a successful match can be made and a positive experience is had by all involved. An interview is held, three references and Garda vetting are obtained before attending training and commencing the volunteer placement. Training was held in early March for the latest volunteers and we had been looking forward to making introductions and commencing the volunteering process.

The annual Best Buddies Friendship Walk, an event organised by the Best Buddies NUIG Society, took place on the campus of NUIG at the start of March. Again, we were fortunate to be supported by players from Connacht Rugby for the trek. However, just over one week later our world changed with the Covid-19 pandemic affecting all our plans. Volunteers could no longer visit centres and see their friends, plans for events were put on hold and introductions postponed for the foreseeable. There was a lot of disappointment, especially when the Best Buddies Ball was cancelled.

In April 2020, Volunteer Ireland hosted a webinar on the Fundamentals of Virtual Volunteering and through this we found new and exciting ways of engaging volunteers with the people availing of our services. In May we launched our first Virtual Volunteering sessions, starting with music and yoga. The Zoom calendar was soon expanded to include activities such as cookery and gym classes. People not only enjoyed the activities but they had time to catch up with friends. We were delighted that our Annual Summer Fitness Camp went ahead in August, albeit virtually. Barry Foley, Occupational Therapist put the participants through their paces



**Best Buddies** from GMIT displaying their talents at the **Best Buddies Got Talent Show**

and everyone enjoyed the satisfaction of taking part in challenging workouts. Later in the year, we launched our 'Live at 11' show on Monday mornings, hosted by Stephen Joyce, with a rotating co-host to give people an opportunity to present. This show gave everyone opportunities to engage by making music requests, sending in birthday wishes and sharing stories from their service. It also became a platform for the Advocacy Council to provide updates and to discuss issues of concern. We were fortunate to have a number of well-known guests on the 'Live at 11' show, including Minister Anne Rabbitte, Marc Roberts, Sean Keane, Stephen Kerins and Ollie Turner. All our guests enjoyed the experience and we thank them for giving us their time.

It was a difficult year for everyone involved in the Best Buddies Programme, and everyone missed seeing their friends. The greatest hardship was losing our very special Best Buddy, Martin Joyce. Martin was a wonderful character and he was a valuable and memorable member of the Best Buddies family. Best Buddies will not be the same without him.

We look forward to 2021 being a year of new opportunities and making new friends. We would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all volunteers who give so generously of their time.

# Volunteer UPDATE

## A TRIBUTE TO ETHAN SMYTH (2002 – 2020)

*By the Staff in Children's Respite – Holly Services*

**E** is for Energetic. Ethan was always full of energy, he kept all staff on their feet, and was always full of mischief. Everyone knew when Ethan had arrived as he greeted us with his own famous personalised handshake.

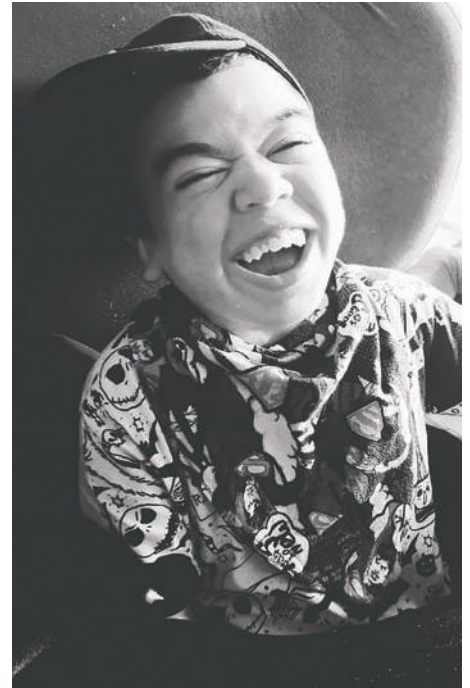
**T** is for Thankful. We are grateful to have known Ethan and appreciate the joy he brought into our lives. His infectious laugh that brought a smile to all our faces. Ethan was a character that everyone was drawn to; everyone who came through the doors of Holly Services - staff, relief staff and students loved him.

**H** is for Hero. Ethan will always be our hero. He fought so hard like his fellow superheroes and he never gave up throughout his short but fulfilling life. He loved watching Spiderman and Marvel Superheroes with delight on his face while letting out an almighty laugh.

**A** is for Angel. As Ethan left this world in September 2020 to rest above with the angels, many fond memories were left behind. We have an angel looking down on us and protecting us all. Ethan is pain free and now flies with his uncle whom he loved dearly.

**N** is for Never forget. Ethan will always be in our hearts. The joy he brought to everybody's lives, his Mum, Geraldine, Dad, David, his brothers, Daniel and Jack, and their dog Lola. We will also never forget Ethan's Grandparents, Jim and Florence, who were regular visitors to respite with the other children calling Jim 'Grandad' too. Ethan's love was contagious and he was loved by so many people. Ethan we will never forget you!

*Forever in our Hearts*



Ethan Smyth RIP

ETHAN  
SMYTH



## A TRIBUTE TO PATRICK (PARRY) MOORE (1962– 2020)

*Rosanne Monaghan, St. Francis Day Service*



Parry (Patrick) Moore RIP

Parry was born on 21st October 1962 to Maggie May and Avey Moore from Dunmore, Co. Galway. He lived at home with his parents and sisters and only accessed short respite breaks when he was an adult and his parents had grown older.

In 2001, Parry was offered a part-time residential placement in Macotar Lodge and a day service in St. Francis, Kilkerrin. However, Parry continued to spend a lot of time at home being cared for by his mother with the help of his sisters. Parry was non-verbal but communicated very well using body language and facial expressions.

Parry taught us many things most importantly, that speech was not necessary to get to know or grow to love someone. Parry so loved by his family, his friends in Macotar Lodge and St. Francis and by the staff in both services. Everyone looked out for him and ensured he was happy and well protected in a safe and cosy environment.

Parry was a very gentle person who liked to go for short outings in his wheelchair on warm days or go to the pub with his friends, where he enjoyed a small Guinness. Parry liked good food and he loved the heat; his very favourite thing to do was to sit by the window in his comfortable armchair in Macotar where he could soak up the sunshine. He also loved to snuggle up in the heated waterbed in the multisensory room in St. Francis. At home, Parry liked regular naps and he loved to cuddle up on the couch by the fire with his mother.

When the Covid-19 pandemic took hold in March, Parry stayed at home

with his mother, his sister Margo and her family, and from June staff from the day service occasionally supported Parry. We experienced first-hand the warmth, kindness and love that surrounded Parry at home.

Parry spent time in hospital in November but never regained that lost ground. He was so happy to return home to the care of his family. Despite their best efforts Parry began to slowly fade in December. He continued to be enveloped in their love and care throughout Christmas. On St. Stephen's day, family friend, Fr. Fergal Cunnane, called to minister to Parry. Maggie May and her family sat with Parry while Fr. Fergal assisted and supported them in celebrating Parry's life and helped to comfort them as they prepared for life without Parry. Parry died later that night in his beloved mother's arms and with his family by his side. Rest now dear Parry, your work in this life is done.

***Parry's family would like to thank all the staff, past and present, for the kindness and care shown to Parry over the years. They will be forever grateful.***

Parry (Patrick)  
Moore

## A TRIBUTE TO MARTIN JOYCE (1989 – 2020)

By Nuala Mellon, Snipe Resource Centre



Martin Joyce RIP

Martin was a very happy, outgoing and talented young man, with a great sense of humour. Martin was passionate about everything he did and had been involved in dance groups, bowling, basketball, modelling in the fashion show, the Ability West Best Buddies programme, Special Olympics, and was DJ for the Snipe disco. Sadly, Martin passed away in March 2020

and his many friends and the staff in Snipe have really missed him this past year. We speak about him every day and share our treasured memories of Martin. He was an amazing man who will be dearly missed by all in Snipe and his memory will always live in our hearts. May he rest in peace.

All Martin's friends in Snipe have amazing memories of him which we share with you:

“Martin was a lovely lad and my best friend, he was great at everything and we used to share being the DJ”

“I remember us having fun at the Best Buddies Ball”

“Martin used to tell good jokes”

“He was always happy, and had a great smile”

“I liked to hear him laugh”

“Martin was so proud to be an Uncle to Conor”

“I remember Marty dancing in the room to ‘Can’t Stop The Feeling.’ He was good”

He always said good morning to everyone”

“His personality would fill a room”

“Such a charming man”

# MARTIN JOYCE

## 35TH ANNIVERSARY OF HOME SHARING

*By Angharad Langford, Homesharing Co-ordinator*

Home Sharing was established by Ability West in 1985 as a pilot scheme to offer eight children a holiday away from home. The aims of this initiative were to give the children a holiday, to give families a break from providing continuous care and to create greater awareness of disability within communities. The service was co-ordinated by Mary Hearne, Ability West Social Worker, and within a three year period the service evolved from a once-off summer project to a year round respite service meeting a variety of needs. The service had increased to 116 summer placements and 75 short break placements throughout the year. In addition, Mary had developed a comprehensive guide on how to recruit, train, assess and support Home Sharing families, and to support other service providers to implement a similar service in other areas. Home Sharing was further developed in response to the increased needs of families during the 1990s, and in the 2000s Ability West and the Brothers of Charities Services Ireland – West Region developed the service on an interagency basis, which is now known as 'Home Share Galway'.

In January 2007, funding of €500,000 was provided by Pobal under the Enhancing Disability Services Programme and a two year Contract Family pilot scheme

was established to provide home-based respite services to people with high-level needs. This scheme sought to build on the already established short break Home Sharing families; where families provide a placement in their home to a person for an overnight or weekend stay each month. Pobal recognised the potential for children and adults with a disability to participate in their communities with the support of Home Sharing Contract Families. It was also recognised that some individuals availing of centre-based placements or waiting for a place in a respite centre, may be able to avail of a Home Sharing Contract Family placement as an alternative.

Genio funding was sought to develop Shared Living in 2013 with the premise that the Shared Living family would make their home available to an adult with an intellectual disability on a full-time basis, as a member of their family. The person may spend time during the month with their own family, another Home Sharing family, or perhaps in centre-based respite, but their main residence is with the Shared Living Home Sharing family.

The HSE Social Care Division set up a steering group and undertook a review of Home Sharing nationally in 2015. The following year the HSE National Guidelines and an Expert Group Report on Home

Sharing was published. This project helped to secure HSE funding to implement resources to appropriately support Home Sharing families. The resource included 20 posts nationally, including Social Workers and Home Sharing Co-ordinators. There are currently 110 Home Sharing families, supported by Ability West and the Brothers of Charity across Galway City and County, providing 154 placements to people with an intellectual disability. Home Share Galway is one of the most successful and well established Home Sharing services in Ireland and is now widely recognised as an alternative to short breaks respite and as a full-time living option for people using our services.

2020 marks 35 years since the inception of Home Sharing in Galway and we are very grateful to the families in our communities who continue to offer their care, commitment and homes to people with an intellectual disability. The Home Sharing team had planned a gala celebration to celebrate and honour our present and past Home Sharing families, and former staff who were instrumental in establishing this service. Regrettably, due to Covid-19 restrictions, this was not possible in 2020, however, we will look forward to celebrating this significant milestone in the future.

# 35th Anniversary OF HOME SHARING

## MEITHEAL CENTRE UPDATE

*By Stephen Togher, Meitheal Centre*



**Meitheal's New Kitchen and Laundry Facility**  
I-r: Pat Tarpey, Colum McNabb and Fiona Dinneny

Despite the challenges posed by Covid-19 over the past year, we were delighted to see the development of our new kitchen and laundry facilities. This was a much needed development for all in the centre as it not only provides a suitable environment for the provision of meals and snacks, but also provides opportunities to the young people attending the centre to develop their culinary and independent living skills.

This was a real team effort and we have many people to thank, including Audrey Pidgeon, Chief Executive, and the Senior Management Team, the Moycullen Branch, families and the local community, John O'Sullivan, SSE Moycullen Wind Farm Funding and Gerry Geoghegan, Landlord. We would also like to thank Pierce Butler;

Darragh Cunningham, Jason Kearns, Peter Burke and Lucia McMahon for their support.

We owe special thanks to Pat Tarpey for the significant contribution made by him; Pat was involved at every stage of this project, from initial planning, through to installation and finish. His knowledge, expertise and co-operation have been exemplary and his support was very much appreciated by everyone in Meitheal.

We hope to celebrate this development in 2021 when it is possible to do so, and in compliance with the appropriate guidelines.

Stay safe and we look forward to your visits in due course.



**John Linnane and Matthew Forde** presenting **Croilar's Christmas Creations tree** which was showcased in the Galway City Museum in December 2020

# Meitheal Centre UPDATE

## POETRY BY COLUM McNABB

*Meitheal Centre, Moycullen*



Colum McNabb

Colum McNabb, who attends the Meitheal Centre, is non-verbal and his chosen form of communication is RPM-rapid prompting method. RPM uses a stencil/letter board to enable the user, facilitated by a supporting person, to spell out words. Through the use of RPM, Colum has been able to demonstrate his intellect, understanding and capacity to make his will and preference known.

Colum also uses a keyboard for communication, with the goal of having a type/text to speak device. He began to write poetry during the first lockdown and has brought reading pleasure to many with his creativity, sophisticated vocabulary and insight. Colum wrote the following brilliant poem during 2020.

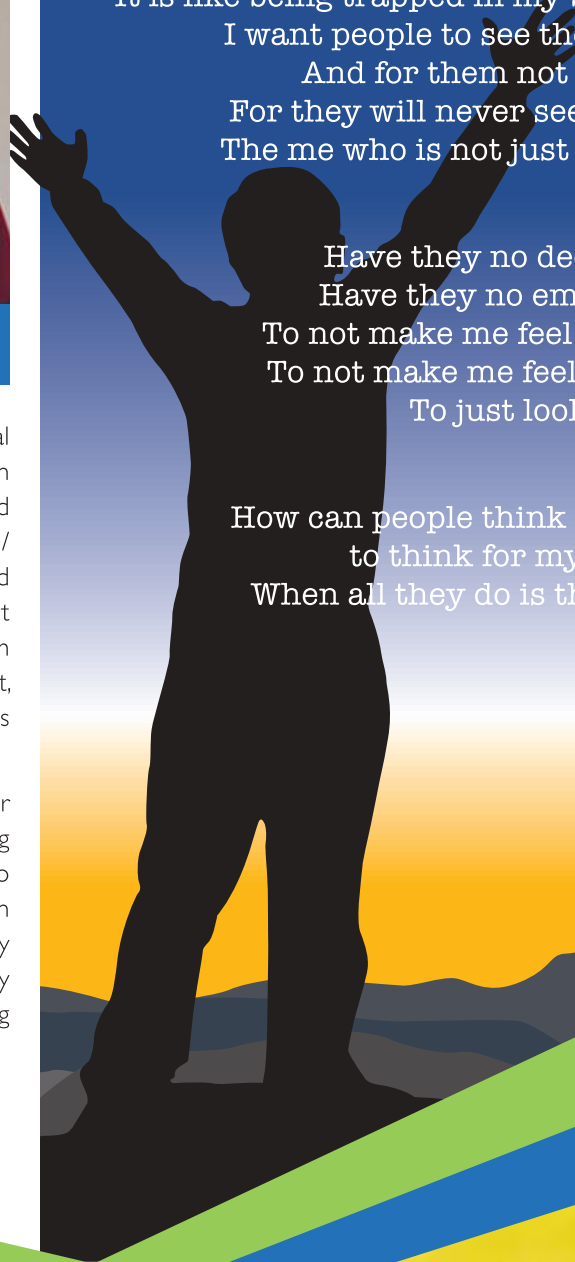
### Disability and Me

What it is like to have a disability I was asked?  
It is like being trapped in my body with no escape.

I want people to see the person I am  
And for them not to stare,  
For they will never see the real me,  
The me who is not just my disability.

Have they no decency?  
Have they no empathy?  
To not make me feel their eyes,  
To not make me feel their pity,  
To just look.

How can people think I am not able  
to think for myself?  
When all they do is think for me.



Poetry by

COLUM McNABB

## COIS NA COILLE UPDATE

By Clár Ni Cheidigh, Lorraine Hession and Therese Feeney



Cois na Coille Christmas Wreath

When the first lockdown happened in March 2020, we were all shocked and surprised. Covid-19 makes us sad and we wish it was all over. It made us feel down and at the start we were really bored and worried about what was going to happen. We were not allowed to leave our homes and we really missed going to Cois Na Coille and seeing all our friends. To make ourselves feel better we did things like going for walks, reading and artwork to keep us busy. We really enjoyed the Zoom classes, taking part in activities such as yoga and music. All the staff kept in touch with us, ringing us on the phone and sending us out things to do; like numeracy and literacy worksheets etc. but we missed our friends, the staff and doing things together in Cois Na Coille.

We missed out on a lot of things in 2020 including: meeting up with our families, the Best Buddies Ball, the fashion show, cooking every week, going swimming or to town with our friends for coffee, our fundraising coffee morning in Cois Na Coille, and our Christmas Social with all our friends from Snipe. We loved dressing up, getting our hair done and especially loved the dancing! We are really hoping that all these amazing events can return in 2021.

We came back to Cois Na Coille in August, everyone agreed returning to Cois Na Coille felt great, and we were delighted to be back with the friends and staff we know and missed. It feels a bit different here now. It is much quieter and there are a lot less people coming in every day. We like it now that it is quieter, but we do miss our friends.

The highlight of 2020 for us, aside from returning, was having a socially distanced mask-wearing Christmas lunch to say goodbye to staff member, Anne Howley, on her retirement. We had a week of goodbyes and thanks with cakes, banners and many happy memories shared (and lots of tears too!). We really miss Anne and hope she will be able to call in to see us once Covid-19 has disappeared.

We made Christmas wreaths and table centrepieces in December and with lots of team effort, Christmas music and hard work, we received orders for over 40 wreaths; we were all very proud of our achievements. Lorraine reports that having her own wreath on the door this Christmas was very special and she was very proud to be able to tell family that she made it at work. It is something we really enjoyed and hope to do again next year.

We are really looking forward to Covid-19 being over. In 2021 we are looking forward to parties, dancing, bowling and heading into town to meet our friends and have a coffee, seeing all our family who we have missed over the last year. The most important thing is that everyone stays safe and healthy.

# Cois Na Coille UPDATE

## PALACE FIELDS UPDATE

*By Breda Nicholson and Staff at Palace Fields*



**Breda Nicholson** from  
**Palace Fields** creating Salt Dough  
Christmas Decorations

In November 2020, Madeline, Vera, the staff and I talked about doing a Christmas project. We researched online for ideas and decided to make salt dough decorations. We came up with the idea of posting the decorations to our friends in other residential services in Tuam to cheer them up during these hard times. We were all sad as we could not have visitors or visit our families due to Covid-19 restrictions so this was a way of staying connected.

We purchased the ingredients and made two batches of salt dough. We used cookie-cutter shapes like hearts, Santa hats and snowmen, and used a straw to cut holes so we could attach a ribbon to the decoration for hanging on the tree. We baked them in the oven on a low heat and then painted and decorated them in Christmas colours. We listened to Christmas Carols while we worked and got into the Christmas spirit. We wrapped them up in bubble wrap so they wouldn't break and posted them for free as the government said packages to residential services didn't need stamps and we posted them just before Christmas. We got lovely phone calls to thank us for the gifts. It made us feel good that we had made others happy.



**Madeline Collins** from  
**Palace Fields** creating Salt Dough  
Christmas Decorations

**Palace Fields**  
UPDATE

## SNIPE RESOURCE CENTRE UPDATE

*By Nuala Mellon, Snipe Resource Centre*



**Caroline McDonagh**  
being awarded with a  
**Barbicide Covid-19 Certificate**

In preparation of the re-opening of the Pretty Fingers Salon in Snipe, Caroline McDonagh and Caroline Boyle received BARBICIDE Covid-19 Certification after completing an online course in July 2020 for the Professional Beauty Industry. Congratulations to both!

Snipe Resource Centre and staff from Medtronic have been involved in the Science and Technology Fair in NUIG for a number of years, however due to Covid-19 the fair did not happen in 2020. Together we looked at another way we could keep science alive and in December Medtronic held a science demonstration and quiz over Zoom with the service users. This was a really enjoyable event and our thanks to Medtronic for organising this event.

There was a huge amount of work done creating Christmas wreaths, gifts and cards in preparation for selling in late November. A lot of fun was had and we were very pleased with our sales. Thanks to everyone who supported our work.



**Caroline Boyle**  
being awarded with a  
**Barbicide Covid-19 Certificate**

**Snipe  
Resource Centre  
UPDATE**

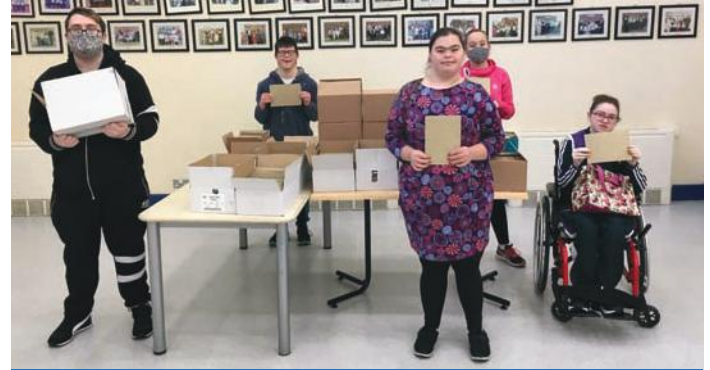


## ST. JOSEPH'S TRAINING CENTRE NEWS

By Matthew Ellis, Manager



Students from **St Joseph's Training Services** receiving their QQI Certificates in February 2020. Graduates were presented with their QQI certificates before their families, peers and staff



Students from **St. Joseph's Training Centre** volunteering as part of the SVDP Christmas fundraising efforts.

l-r **James Diviney, Francis Carr, Gabriele Simonkeviciute, Emily Cummins and Nicole Small**

2020 was a very different kind of year in St. Joseph's Training Centre. Despite the lockdowns and restrictions our trainees have had some great achievements. In 2020, 65 QQI certificates were awarded to our trainees for all their hard work, 44 at Level 1 and 21 at Level 2. Certificates were achieved for: Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking, Personal Safety, Personal Care, Non-Verbal Communication, Using Technology, Data Handling, Visual Art, Food Choice and Health, Relaxation Techniques and Health Related Exercise.

We were delighted to hold presentations in February, and our graduation in July, which although was a smaller than usual event due to restrictions, it was still a fantastic opportunity to celebrate the achievements of trainees who completed their training in 2020: Kawthar Yahya, Karl Flaherty, Zeeshan Ahmed and Stanlyn Joy Hirang. Congratulations to all.

We missed helping out in our local community gardens so we started our own lockdown garden. We grew lots of vegetables: courgettes, cabbages, kale, beetroot, radish, turnip, onions, garlic and lettuce. We grew herbs like lemon balm and parsley. When working in the garden we learn about maths, science and nature and it is lovely to use our own vegetables to make nice healthy soups. Plus it is relaxing and a good way to keep fit while getting our daily dose of vitamin D. We are looking forward to growing even more vegetables and also flowers in 2021 as Galway City Council have provided us with a grant to buy a polytunnel. Sincere thanks to the Council and key partners Healthy Galway City and Healthy Ireland for their support.

Our trainees participated in the Galway City Council's "Christmas Creations" initiative in December. This was a wonderful, fun and festive project facilitated by Phillida Eves, Creative Multisensory

Educator and Artist based in Galway, and Anna Kapusta, our Art Instructor. Our 'disco' Christmas tree lit up the Training Centre and added to the great party atmosphere at Christmas.

In December we were successful in our application for funding from the GRET B Mitigating against Educational Disadvantage Fund to invest in Digital Technology for Training Services. This funding is helping trainees communicate and access their communities digitally, as well as being a vital support as trainees work towards QQI Certification. The technology purchased will be a significant part of training services for years to come and we acknowledge the support of GRET B in this regard.

# St. Joseph's TRAINING CENTRE

## SEAN MULVOY HUB UPDATE

*By Service Users and Staff*

### Community Support

Cuan O'Brien and Oliver Flanagan commenced community support activities in 2020 and they have built a strong friendship with individual and shared interests. Oliver and Cuan display mutual respect in their turn taking when making choices and plans. They have maximised their independence and personal development while increasing their social engagement and inclusion within the community. Oliver and Cuan's health and wellbeing has benefitted hugely with both displaying continuous improvements in their fitness levels and mental health. Oliver and Cuan are having fun, are engaged, included, more independent and happy!

Oliver says "I started community support in October and it has changed my life for the better. Before this I did not have these opportunities to experience true community life and it makes me feel revived, rejuvenated and relaxed."

Cuan says "Since starting community support in October I enjoy walking and getting exercise in the outdoors. I like to go out for dinner and coffee but because of restrictions we get take-away meals instead, which I choose myself. When

Covid is over, I am looking forward to going to the cinema, bowling and shopping. Having community support makes me feel good because I get to do things that I love".



**Cuan O'Brien and Oliver Flanagan**

### New Beginnings

*By Kawthar Yahya*

I started my journey at the Sean Mulvoy Hub at the end of June 2020. I came to the day service from St. Joseph's Training Centre and I was very happy to join because I felt it would give me opportunities to learn new things and to meet new friends. I started to avail of the service during Covid restrictions and although everything

is quiet, I have managed to take part in the art competitions and I was selected to be an Advocacy Champion for the Sean Mulvoy Hub.

Being an Advocacy Champion means a lot to me, because I have a chance to make things better for my colleagues and friends in the centre. I take part in regular meetings with the Advocacy Council through Zoom calls, and then I let everyone know in the centre what is coming up.

I enjoy art, because it lets me express my creativity and I can make things, like birthday cards for my friends and family. I can also relax while painting pictures and drawing. I also take part in competitions. I took part in the IDS-TILDA Christmas Card competition and, as I was a finalist, I was rewarded with an outstanding achievement in art!

I think Covid restrictions haven't stood in my way to learn new things in 2020.



**Advocacy Champion,  
Kawthar Yahya**

# Sean Mulvoy HUB UPDATE

## PARENTS PLUS SPECIAL NEEDS PROGRAMME (PPSEN) 2020

*By Anne Cleary, Psychologist*

The Special Needs Programme 2020 is a practical evidence-based course for parents of adolescents with an intellectual disability. Parents of children with an intellectual disability can face challenges, especially during the adolescent years. The Parents Plus Special Needs Programme (PPSEN), designed by the Parents Plus group, was developed in partnership with parents who have a teenager with special needs aged between 12 and 18 years old. The programme was piloted in Spring 2020 with a group of 13 parents who have adolescent students attending schools for whom Ability West is patron. The course focused on supporting parents in: managing behaviour and emotional problems; dealing with

puberty, sexuality and relationships; reducing their own stress as parents; supporting all relationships in the family; building self-esteem and confidence; advocating for their child or adolescent; supporting education and development; and preparing their child for adulthood and future transitions. The course also provided an opportunity for parents to strengthen their links with other parents.

The course was facilitated within Ability West by Anne Cleary, Psychologist, Jennifer Reid, Social Worker, and Catherine Rice, Assistant Psychologist. The programme was scheduled to run over seven weeks from January to March 2020 (we completed six weeks prior to the closure of schools), with a final

session planned for 2021 when Covid-19 restrictions have eased.

Our sincere thanks to John Sharry, Parents Plus, who provided training and resources for the programme and the Galway Education Centre who provided a central location for the course to be held.



**Enda Carty** delivering a PPE donation from **Bravo Charlie Tango – Bikers Coming Through**. Sincere thanks to Enda, the motorcyclists and everyone who supported this initiative in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic.  
l-r: **Peter Burke**, Ability West and **Enda Carty**

**Parents  
Plus Special Needs  
PROGRAMME**

## FUNDRAISING UPDATE

By John McHugo, Director of Finance



Receiving a cheque for **Best Buddies** and **Tuam Services** from the proceeds of the **Comedy Fest** held in 2020. I-r: **Audrey Pidgeon**, Chief Executive, **John Farragher**, Receptionist, **Orla Haddigan**, Interim Director of Client Services, **Amanda Larkin**, Event Organiser, **Patricia Donohue**, Volunteer Department, **Linda Keane**, Volunteer Programme Manager and **Michael Duke**, Fundraising and Community Development Officer

The Covid-19 pandemic had a severe impact on our fundraising income for 2020. In total our fundraising income for 2020 amounted to €47,994 compared to €150,901 in 2019.

Many of our traditional fundraising events such as our annual Golf Fundraiser in Galway Golf Club could not go ahead due to Government restrictions. However, we are extremely grateful for the numerous

donations and contributions received from various businesses and individuals. This ongoing support is very much appreciated, particularly during a year that was financially challenging for many.

Our friends from the former Galway City Branch again organised the Menlo Walk which took place in February and this resulted in a donation of almost €4,000. We also gratefully acknowledge a donation of €2,000 from the former Killascobe Branch.

As in previous years, fundraised monies are utilised towards the purchase of buildings, motor vehicles and equipment which are essential to the delivery of high-quality services.

A sincere thank you to each person who organised a fundraising event for us during 2020 and to everybody who donated and supported us.

Hopefully 2021 will be a better year for all and we look forward to your continued support. Please continue to check our various social media platforms for details of events.



Pat O'Donnell receiving a cheque for **Snipe Services** from **Deepak Ltd.**

# Fundraising UPDATE



**Dermot Callanan**, FCC Chartered Accountants & Registered Auditors and **Audrey Pidgeon**, Chief Executive, at our 2020 AGM

The Company's Auditors, FCC Chartered Accountants and Registered Auditors, reported, without qualification, that the 2020 financial statements gave a true and fair view of the company's affairs and of its results for the year and were properly prepared in accordance with generally accepted accounting practice and the Companies Act 2014.

The audited accounts were approved at a meeting of the Board of Directors held on 31st May 2021 and were signed on behalf of the Board of Directors by

*Mr. Dermot O'Neill*

and

*Mr. Michael Finnerty*



**John Lyons** receiving his **Trinity College Certificate** and Newbridge silver pen after winning the Trinity College 2020 IDS-TILDA Christmas Card Competition. John's winning artwork was selected from over 750 entries as the winning 2020 Card

A full copy of the audited accounts 2020 is available on our website:

[www.abilitywest.ie](http://www.abilitywest.ie)

**Audited**  
ACCOUNTS

**Ability West would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the many organisations, community groups and individuals for their support and assistance during the year. Regrettably, we cannot name you all but we would in particular like to mention:**

- Department of Health; Health Protection and Surveillance Centre; Health Service Executive and local HSE Staff, in particular Disability Services and Public Health
- Departments of Education and Skills; Social Protection, Rural and Community Development.
- Galway City and County Councils and respective Public Participation Networks
- Galway City Council and Phillida Eves, Creative Multisensory Educator and Artist for their support with the Christmas Creations initiative in December 2020
- Galway Rural Development (GRD) - A number of our services availed of the GRD, Rural Social Scheme and TÚS Schemes in 2020. We are very grateful for the tremendous work the scheme participants do in our services.
- Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRETB) - Mitigating Education Disadvantage Fund
- Healthy Galway City and Healthy Ireland
- SSE Airtricity – Community Grant for our service in Meitheal, Moycullen
- The Joyce Family from Knocknacarra for their very generous donation of equipment

It would be remiss of us not to mention the individuals and businesses that donated PPE to us, particularly at a time when there were many shortages locally, nationally and internationally. Your support went a long way to assisting our fight on the frontline as we protected the children and adults availing of our services. We sincerely thank you for your support:

**AW Shannon**  
**Boston Scientific**  
**Bravo Charlie Tango and Enda De Bruin**  
**Casla Homecare**  
**D. Lynch & Sons Ltd**  
**Disability Federation of Ireland**  
**GMIT**  
**Heroe's Aid**  
**Inland & Coastal Marina Systems**  
**Kings Head**  
**Medtronic Ireland**  
**Micil Distillery**  
**Nelipak**  
**Newtown Kids Creche**

**Nostra Technologies Limited**  
**NUIG**

**Portwest**

**Suzie Mahony Designs**

**Teagasc**

**Gort Community School**

**GS Medical**

Our thanks to colleagues in statutory, non-statutory, voluntary service providers, and umbrella groups who have supported us throughout the year.

Special thanks to all our staff whose commitment and dedication to the people we support has been second-to-none. Sincere thanks to our Board Members and all volunteers who continued to support us in many ways throughout 2020.

Finally, we would like to thank the children and adults we support, their parents, carers, family members for their patience, resilience and generosity, for what has been a difficult, exhausting and challenging year. We know there were some highs but many lows during the year and we will work with you to enhance the initiatives supporting service delivery, towards bringing about a return to centre-based service delivery insofar as possible in 2021.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



1. Aiden O'Connor from Sean Mulvoy Hub 2. Participants in the Annual Best Buddies Friendship Walk at NUIG which took place in early March 2020 3. Staff from Mullins Care Plus Pharmacy, Salthill, who held a raffle over Christmas 2020, presenting a cheque to John Feely, Finance Staff Officer 4. Cheque presentation from the Best Buddies Got Talent Show. l-r: Francis Carr, Linda Keane, Laura McBrinn, John Farragher and Chloe Keleghan 5. Paul Mulry, Snipe Resource Centre with a selection of the Christmas Gifts 6. St. Joseph's Christmas Tree as part of Galway City Council's 'Christmas Creations'

Pay	Ability West Galway	DATE	January 2021
From	Mullins CarePlus Pharmacy Salthill		€ 2,100



enabling people with disabilities

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