



DISC (Disability & Inclusion Steering Committee)



December 2022

Wicklow Disability Access and Inclusion

TOOLKIT FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS

Foreword

We are delighted to introduce this disability and inclusion toolkit for community and voluntary groups in County Wicklow. We hope it illustrates Wicklow County Council's firm commitment to making the county a more inclusive and accessible place to live, work and visit.

The toolkit was developed by the Disability and Inclusion Steering Committee (DISC) of Wicklow County Council. This Steering Committee includes people with disabilities, representatives of disability organisations, elected councillors from each of the five Municipal Districts and other representatives.

To develop this toolkit, the committee consulted with community and voluntary groups through the County Wicklow Public Participation Network, and with people with disabilities and those close to them. We would like to thank everyone who participated in the consultation, and the Steering Committee itself for putting this toolkit together.

The toolkit includes advice and suggestions on inclusion across all aspects of group activities, along with some case studies to show what is possible, and signposting to further information.

2 We hope that this toolkit will be a useful resource for all community and voluntary groups to become as welcoming and as inclusive as possible.



Tommy Annesley
Cathaoirleach



Brian Gleeson
Chief Executive,
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Foreword

You sometimes hear community groups saying, “oh, we’ve never had someone with a disability ask to join.” But when I was younger, there were groups I would have loved to join, that I knew weren’t accessible to me. I wouldn’t have had the confidence back then to ask for the changes I needed.

It wasn’t until I was well into adulthood that I realised it wasn’t me who had the disability – it was the environment. Everywhere around me, somebody else was deciding where I go, what path I take, which door I can use. And ultimately, that means that someone else is deciding your whole life for you. Everyone should be able to participate equally in the community, and it was through campaigning for equal participation that I got into local politics.

We know that many community groups are working to be as inclusive as possible, and we have highlighted many really positive examples throughout our toolkit. We hope that this toolkit will encourage community groups and other organisations to become more open and inclusive, and provide them with the confidence to implement the changes needed for inclusion. Ultimately, our vision for the County would be one where everyone can participate in every aspect of community life, and where the focus is on ability and valuing everyone’s skills equally.



Miriam Murphy,
Independent Councillor,
Wicklow County Council and member of the
Disability and Inclusion Steering Committee.

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INTRODUCTION

About this toolkit

County Wicklow has a wealth of wonderful community and voluntary organisations. Some allow people to get to know each other while sharing a skill or improving the community around them; others focus on a particular sport or outdoor activity.

By their nature, community groups are open and welcoming, but are sometimes unsure of how best to be inclusive and accessible to all. This toolkit provides some practical tips, examples and checklists to work through, so that groups can assess for themselves any changes that might need to be made. We have divided the toolkit into three sections: on inclusive communications; building design and accessibility; and group management and planning of activities.

We have used the **social model of disability** to inform our toolkit. This model says that disability is caused by the way society is organised, rather than by a person's impairment or difference. It looks at ways of removing barriers that restrict life choices for people with disabilities. When barriers are removed, people with a disability can be independent and equal in society, with choice and control over their own lives. These barriers may be in the environment, but also include our attitudes, and other social barriers to full participation in society.

Universal design can be seen as the logical follow on from this way of thinking. Universal design means the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for additional adaptation or specialised design. A simple example would be to use levers rather than knobs when installing door handles, as levers can be opened with an elbow or closed fist. This benefits people with limited strength in their hands, but also people carrying shopping or children, or people who wish to minimise risk of infection. Of course, we may still need additional adjustments, or assistive technology, for particular groups of people with disabilities.

The policy background

In Ireland, the [Disability Act 2005](#) means that public services have an obligation to accommodate (that is, make adjustments for) people with disabilities, and the [National Disability Inclusion Strategy](#) undertakes to build more disability inclusive and welcoming communities. At international level, Ireland has also signed up to the [UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(UNCRPD\)](#). Among other things, this says that States like Ireland must ensure that [community services and facilities](#) for the general population are available on an equal basis to persons with disabilities and are responsive to their needs.

A note on language

In this toolkit, we use the term **‘person with a disability’**. Our steering group prefer this term as it puts the person first, and is the language used in key policy and legal documents. Other people in the disability rights community prefer ‘disabled person’ as it acknowledges that people are disabled by barriers in the environment and society. We have used the term **‘autistic person’** as this was the term preferred by our steering group.

Some principles for inclusion

Be open

Just because a person with a specific disability has never asked to join your group or use your service, doesn't mean that they wouldn't like to. Consider advertising your group/activity with a message like the following: "We try to make our group as welcoming and accessible to everyone as possible. If you need extra support to access our group, please contact us and we will do our best to assist you."

Develop an Action Plan

Using the guidance in this toolkit, start to think about where the barriers in your own group might be. Develop a list of actions, and give them each a priority. You may find that some very small changes can make a big difference, while other changes may take more time and investment.

Ask for advice

Everyone's needs are different. If someone with a disability is in your group, or asks to join, ask them what you can do to make participation easier. Consider also having people with disabilities informally 'audit' your services and activities. For example, you could have an autistic person help you with a [sensory audit](#), or a wheelchair user advise you on the accessibility of not just your entrance and toilets, but also your reception and kitchen areas.

Focus on what people have to offer

Remember, being more inclusive benefits you and your group as well as the person with a disability. One group really appreciates the needlework of a member with an intellectual disability, as our [case study of Kiltegan Women's Shed](#) shows. That person who happens to have a hearing impairment might also be an expert on IT systems. By making your group as accessible as possible, you are widening the pool of talents and viewpoints available to you.



CASE STUDY

Kiltegan Women's Shed

Kiltegan Women's Shed was set up to help women in and around the rural West Wicklow village to socialise again after Covid. "We wanted to have something to help people get back out there," explains Stacey Power, who co-founded the Shed along with Erin Byrne. "We meet every week, have a cup of tea and a chat, and learn something new."

The Women's Shed is open to all women in the community, and several of their members attend from the nearby Lalor Centre, which provides training and support for people with intellectual disabilities. "With Women's Sheds, the idea is that all the members share their skills with the group. And so it's not just about including people with disabilities, it's about tapping into what they have to offer the group."

For example, Claire's passion is tapestry. She was able to share her skills with the Women's Shed. "It was great for her," says Stacey, "as she is normally very quiet. And the ladies were really impressed with her work."

8 Stacey has some simple advice for community groups looking to become more inclusive. "Make sure that it's written on all of your flyers, adults in particular would be worried thinking: 'maybe this isn't for me?' And the people running your group should have some disability awareness training, just so that you understand people a little bit better."

PART ONE

INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

Tips for face-to-face communication

- Speak clearly, at a normal volume. Don't shout, or over-exaggerate your words - this can make it difficult for D/deaf people to lip-read.
- Use simple language, and avoid jargon and acronyms. Pause to allow the person to confirm understanding, or to ask questions if they haven't. Be aware that some people need longer to respond, so give them the time and don't interrupt.
- Speak to the person directly, not to their support worker or carer if they have one with them.
- Try to be on the same level as the person you are talking with - this is particularly important for wheelchair users and deaf people.
- Don't lean on or touch someone's wheelchair without permission. Don't pet or touch a guide dog without permission.
- When communicating with D/deaf people, try to walk around to face them rather than approaching them from behind. You can wave your hand or lightly tap them on the shoulder to get their attention. Try not to stand with the light behind you, as this may make it hard to lip read if you are in shadow.
- When communicating with blind or visually impaired people, introduce yourself when you say hello ("Hello Becky, it's Hannah!").
- If you would like to offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted, and then ask for instructions on how to help.
- Again, if you aren't sure what to do in a particular situation, ask! Each person is individual, with different preferences and needs.

How to write documents or text on your website

[Plain English](#) (or plain language) is a way of writing and presenting information that helps someone understand it the first time they read or hear it. As with universal design, this benefits all of us. The following are some principles drawn from Plain English guidelines, and from other sources on web accessibility and clear print.

Use short sentences and simple language.

Don't use jargon, and try not to use abbreviations or acronyms.

Use a clean, clear font. 'Sans Serif' fonts are better than 'Serif' fonts. Arial, Verdana and Tahoma are good choices, and 11 or 12 point size. For websites, it should be 12 to 14 point font.

Use 1.5 line spacing, and align your text to the left. Don't use 'justified' text – it looks neater, but it is harder to read because the spacing is not even between words.

For longer communications, whether documents or websites, break it up using bullet points and sub-headings. Use the automatic headings functions in documents and websites, as they will work with screen readers to help identify relevant content.

Use **bold** to emphasise a key point in your text, not italics or underlining. But do not use bold instead of an automatic heading, as it will not work with screen readers.

Images can be helpful for some people in understanding a document or a webpage, but make sure that they are relevant to the text.

Use the 'alternative text' function in Word or on a website to describe your image.

Use the 'accessibility checker' in Word to check your document.

Use high contrast. For documents, black text on a white background is usually best. For webpages, use either a light background (white or yellow) with dark text (black or dark blue) or a dark background with a white text. Putting an image behind your text can make it harder to read.

If you are developing a new website, please ensure that it meets [web accessibility standards](#).

A word on WhatsApp

Nearly all of the groups who responded to our survey use WhatsApp to communicate with members. WhatsApp and other messaging services have accessibility features which make it suitable for people with vision impairment, but message groups can be overwhelming for neuro-divergent people, people with an intellectual disability, or people not used to technology. Here are some tips that can make using WhatsApp more accessible.

Check whether all new members of the group are comfortable using WhatsApp, rather than assuming. There are privacy concerns around messaging services, and group chats will not work for everyone. If someone needs help installing WhatsApp on their phone, there is an easy read guide on the [Learning Disability England](#) website.

Check if you have their permission before adding a new member to a messenger group.

Set some ground rules, and send them out as a welcome message in the group to each new member. For example, you might ask that people only send messages that are relevant to the group activities, and that are relevant to everyone in the group. If people want to create a separate group thread for social chat, they can do that too.

Voice notes may be easier for visually impaired people or those who have literacy difficulties.

It isn't easy to add alternative text to a picture on most messaging apps, so be cautious about forwarding pictures - for example, a screenshot of a poster for an event. If you do send a picture, make sure you send all the information that it contains in a message in text form.

Sources used and more information on communication

- Tips on face to face communications were taken from: the [NCBI website on engaging with a person who is sight impaired](#); the [Irish Deaf Society \(last video on page on deaf awareness training\)](#); [AslAm: Do's and Don'ts of Autism-Friendly Practice in Public Services](#); [Mencap UK Communicating with people with a learning disability](#); and the [NDA Toolkit on Making your Services More Accessible](#).
- The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) provide a [range of services and resources](#) for writing in plain English. Their [editing and training](#) services are highly recommended for community group staff.
- The government's [Customer Communications Toolkit](#) for the Public Service, and the [Plain English Style Guide of the Public Service](#) may be useful for more formal, service providing community groups.
- Employers for Change have an [Inclusive and Accessible Communications Toolkit](#) on their website.
- The EU Web Accessibility Directive requires that public bodies ensure their **websites and mobile apps** comply with internationally recognised accessibility standards. The Irish Computer Society and the National Disability Authority run a [series of webinars](#) on the directive and how to create accessible web content. While the directive is not directly applicable to community and voluntary groups, the webinars could be useful to community groups, especially around content creation.
- The European Disability Forum also have a [good guide on web accessibility](#).
- The Easy Read guide to WhatsApp is from [Learning Disability England, which provides a series of guides to help with technology](#), including Zoom.



CASE STUDY

Arklow Rowing Club



Cormac and Adrian at the Irish Championships
Picture by Sam Johnston Photography

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A few years ago, Adrian Keogh was looking for a new challenge. He is a keen sportsman, and has always been active with his local GAA club. He had been captain of the senior hurling team in Kiltegan GAA before a workplace accident in 2014. Now a wheelchair user, he coaches the junior hurling team, but “I was looking for something a little bit different” he says, “something that would get me out of the wheelchair for a few hours.”

Rowing seemed like a good option, but there were too many accessibility challenges in the first clubs he contacted. “Then I got in touch with Arklow Rowing Club. All their equipment is on the ground floor, so no ramps were needed. I could access everything I needed independently as soon as I got out of the car.”

Adrian started off with coastal rowing, where the seat is fixed, but then was interested in trying out offshore rowing. In offshore rowing, however, the seat slides, making it unsuitable for an adaptive athlete like Adrian. Cormac, Adrian, and Carraig Art Ironworks worked together to create a fixed seat, which could be easily fitted and removed from the boat, so that the boat can be used by any rower.

In 2021, Adrian made history by being the first adaptive athlete to participate in Offshore Rowing racing in Ireland, when he and Cormac competed in the Offshore Men's Doubles in Wicklow. They went on to compete in the Irish Offshore Championships in Bantry later that year. "We missed out on the finals, but I was the first ever adaptive athlete in the race, and we were competing alongside Olympians!" says Adrian.

PART TWO

BUILDING DESIGN AND ACCESSIBILITY

Choosing, constructing or renovating a building

We know from our survey that many community and voluntary groups do not own their own buildings. However, all **new** buildings in Ireland must comply with minimum accessibility standards (Part M of the Building Regulations, currently 2010 edition) and all **public** buildings must be retrofitted to those standards.

The checklist below gives you some considerations to **ask** building owners if you are deciding where your group might meet; to **encourage** the owner of the building where you meet to consider; and to **ensure that you consider** when constructing or renovating your own building.

- Is the building fully accessible and easy for wheelchair users and people with reduced mobility to use, including entrances, reception area, all levels, toilets and kitchen area?
- Are toilets large enough for users of power wheelchairs?
- Are wheelchair users able to access the building through the same entrance as everyone else?
- Are doors and corridors wide enough, and is the floor firm and level throughout? Are doors easy to open?
- Is the signage inside and outside the building clear and consistent, and are there quiet spaces provided in the building for those who need them?
- Is there public transport nearby?
- Is there parking for people with disabilities as close to the building as possible? Is there a set down area close to the building entrance?

- Are there dropped pavements near to the building entrance, and do they have tactile markings to show that they are there?

- Day-to-day operations of buildings

There are many smaller modifications and every day maintenance that community groups can do to improve access and inclusion. You can use the checklist below, together with the suggestions above, to conduct regular audits of the building that you use, and to ensure that everyone in your group is aware of how to improve access and inclusion in day-to-day operations.

Outside your building

- Keep pathways and pavements clear of obstacles and furniture, and free from moss or mould. Make sure hedges are kept trimmed.
- Ensure that any cracks in pavements outside your building are repaired as soon as possible.
- Consider providing a bench outside for group members and passers-by, but make sure that street furniture does not obstruct access or passage. The [National Disability Authority's Buildings for Everyone External Environments booklet](#) has advice on how to design and place external seating.
- Make sure that no-one parks in front of dropped pavements, and that there are not obstacles in the way of the dropped pavement.
- Make sure that your entrance is well signposted and welcoming.
- Use lighting to highlight your entrance after dark, but avoid floodlights if possible as they create glare.

In the building

Ensure that signage is clear, consistent and easy to understand (see the section on communication for more details).

Ensure that spaces for moving through, including corridors, are clear of obstacles.

Provide seating, especially in reception areas and close to toilet facilities, and make sure that there are clear spaces alongside seats for buggies, wheelchairs, assistance dogs and bags.

Glass doors should have distinct permanent markings on them. You can find advice and examples on this from the [National Disability Authority's Building for Everyone](#) series, in Booklet 2 on entrances and horizontal circulation.

Ensure that any mats are firm (deep pile is harder for wheels to navigate), level, and firmly secured to the floor to prevent slippage.

The 'colour temperature' of lights should be as close to natural light as possible. Flickering lights should be replaced immediately.

A designated 'quiet space' can be very useful for anyone experiencing overwhelm. This should be located away from noisier rooms, and from external noise, like traffic.

Have a dedicated cleaning supplies room - do not store supplies in the accessible toilet!

Use signage whenever floors are wet.

- Ensure policies, procedures and equipment are in place and available on your website to facilitate safe evacuation for everyone. You may need a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) for any persons that regularly use your building to who require assistance. A template is available on the [Health and Safety Authority's website](#). If you do need to evacuate someone with a disability, ensure that you take advice from them on how best to assist them to evacuate with dignity and without causing them injury or distress.

- Do a simple sensory audit - walk through your building and think about: lights (are they too bright or too dim?); sounds (hand dryers or alarm systems?); and smells (is there a café?). There may be some things that you can easily change. It will also be helpful to let autistic people know of any sensory challenges in advance.

Sources and more information on buildings

- All new buildings, building renovations and building extensions in Ireland must comply with **minimum requirements for access and use**, as set out in Part M of the Building Regulations (2010) and the accompanying [Technical Guidance Document M](#). These latest regulations came into force in 2012. In addition, **any public buildings** (a library, for example) being used by a community group should either have been built or retrofitted to the 2010 Part M standards.
- Ideally, **facilities should go beyond the minimum standards of Part M**. For example, the [Irish Wheelchair Association](#) has highlighted buildings and spaces that are not covered within Part M, such as play areas and swimming pools, and examples of where Part M requirements do not meet the needs of users of large and/or powered wheelchairs.
- Some buildings in Ireland now have [Changing Places](#) facilities, which are much larger accessible toilets with a changing bench and hoist. In 2022, the Government ran a [public consultation on a proposed amendment to Part M](#) to ensure that Changing Places toilets are installed into larger, publicly used buildings. If a change is made, you should always be able to find the [latest version of the Part M Technical Guidance Document on the Government website](#).
- The National Disability Authority, [Building for Everyone: A Universal Design Approach](#) is a series of ten booklets on designing, building and managing buildings and space for access and use by all people. Many of the tips on day-to-day operations of buildings are drawn from this, but it also has detailed advice on how to undertake larger building works.
- We also drew on [AsIAM's Handbook for Public Servants](#) for some tips around sensory processing.



CASE STUDY

Greystones Tidy Towns

Greystones Tidy Towns won a Gold Medal in 2022, and key to their success is the involvement of all members of the community. “We host an annual Family Fun Day,” says Marie McCooey, Greystones Tidy Towns Chairperson “and one year the Triple A Alliance, which provides support for families affected by autism, asked us if we would consider having a dark tent, a quiet space where kids could go if they felt overwhelmed. It had honestly never dawned on me that some kids might need that.”

The relationship with Triple A grew from there. “We worked together to plan a Sensory Garden in a neglected corner of Burnaby Park,” says Marie. “The garden features raised beds so people with mobility issues can enjoy them, and an arbour seat which is enclosed, helping some people feel cosy and safer. The memory wall is there to encourage inter-generational dialogue about Greystones in the past and to encourage conversation with those who may have memory loss through age or accident.”



Greystones Sensory Garden

22 Another Greystones Tidy Town initiative looks at the physical accessibility of the town. Adam Calihman, vice-chair of the Tidy Towns committee, maintains a citizen-surveyed map of Greystones, and anyone can submit a trouble spot by [filling out a simple form on their website](#). “The long term goal is to provide safe, accessible routes through the town for kids, cyclists and people with limited mobility,” says Adam. “We are very open to all kinds of public-led initiatives,” he adds. “You don’t have to be on the committee to come to us with a good idea!”

PART THREE

GROUP MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING OF ACTIVITIES

Our survey with community groups indicated that they were particularly interested in having further information about how to plan for inclusiveness in the operations of the group, including management of the group, and in planning for activities, events and outings. The management of all groups should be as inclusive as possible, and should facilitate the participation of community members regardless of their ability.

Recruitment of staff, volunteers, members and board members

Ensure that it is clear on your website, social media and written documentation that your group welcomes the participation of people of all backgrounds, ages and abilities. [Shoreline Leisure Centre](#) in Greystones have a great example which you can find if you search 'Bray Disability Access' on their website.

Ensure that your recruitment and promotional material are **clearly written** and use inclusive images and language. Indicate that you are open to making **what accommodations you can**.

Consider recruiting through targeted channels - in the newsletter of a local disability support group, for example.

Your recruitment process should be friendly and not too formal. Many volunteers become involved because someone asked them to, so be sure to reach out to people you know that might be interested. It can be useful to have a one-to-one chat with any potential volunteer before they start, to make sure that they understand the role and that you know what you might need to put in place to support them in that role.

For those community groups who have paid staff, there are a range of initiatives to support employment for people with disabilities, including wage subsidies and funding accommodation for staff with disabilities (see under Sources and more information below). The [Employability service Wicklow](#) should be able to advise you on what your group could apply for.



Some volunteers, staff and group members may need a bit of extra support at the beginning. Consider assigning a mentor from within the group.



Offer [disability inclusion training](#) to your staff, volunteers and board members. You can find more information about where to find training in 'Sources and more information' below.



Consider creating a [social narrative](#) to help people understand your group. A social narrative (also known as a social story) describes a new experience. It can help neuro-divergent and other people to become more familiar with your group, including where it meets and what is expected of group members or volunteers. The Rathdrum library has [two examples of social stories](#) on their homepage. Conducting a sensory audit (mentioned In Part Two on building design and accessibility above) will help you to develop your social narrative.



Acknowledge that some people's disabilities may fluctuate, and they may be more able to engage at some times than others. If this is the case for someone in the group, look for ways for people to engage that doesn't require them to be there at a particular time each week, for example.



Meetings and activities

Try to hold your meetings at a regular time and venue, and give participants advance information about the meeting, including where it will be and when it will start and end, as well as any documents or other materials that will be discussed.

Ensure that your meeting venue is [universally accessible](#) and [maintained for accessibility](#).

Have an agenda for your meeting, and stick to it. It's OK to remind people to stick to the topic under discussion. Use [our tips on face to face communication](#).

Online meetings can work well for many people, but make sure that you check in advance that everyone is familiar with the online tool that you are using, and that the format you use works for everyone attending. For example, some non-verbal participants may prefer to use the chat, whereas the chat can be difficult to follow for people using screen readers.

It is usually better to have everyone online, or everyone face to face, than to run a hybrid meeting where some people are in the room and others online.

Try to integrate the participation of people with disabilities into the mainstream activity, and ask those wishing to participate what accommodations they might need. Where this is not possible, try to have an alternative activity that is accessible to people who cannot participate in the mainstream one. What you will be able to offer will depend on the nature of your activity.

- Consider offering courses for people with specific disabilities by partnering with a local disability support group. Consider in advance how this can lead to people with disabilities becoming more integrated into the general activities of the club.



THINK CREATIVELY!

For example, Cian O’Neill, who is a wheelchair user and passionate about hurling, worked with RehabCare and Fergal Og’s to create a disability hurling team, where two able-bodied players are asked to use wheelchairs for the game. Cian is also a coach for the under-9s team at Fergal Og, and comments: “Many of the kids have never seen someone in a wheelchair with a hurl. I love breaking down those barriers and showing them what people can do.”

Events and outings

26 The above section considers regular meetings and activities for community groups, while this section looks at how to plan for occasional events and outings.

- Make sure that you consider the accessibility of the venue or attraction in advance of the visit. For an indoor event, you can ask the building manager questions using the [list of things to consider in a building](#) detailed in Part Two above.

- If possible, the organiser should visit the venue in advance of the outing. You will be able to assess [how well the building is maintained](#) as well as [its design](#) (using our checklists in Part Two).

- Wicklow Tourism have organised a number of accessibility visits in conjunction with the Wicklow Sports Partnership, where people with disabilities check the accessibility of various attractions. The [report of their visit to Glendalough](#) is on their website, while [a trip to Bray Bowl can be found on Facebook](#). [Beyond the Trees](#) in Avondale has a Changing Places toilet, and is fully wheelchair accessible on its Treetop Walk and Viewing Tower. It has a sensory garden, and people can bring along a carer or support worker free of charge.

- For outdoor events, Cara (Sport Inclusion Ireland) have a [set of useful checklists](#) to ask about beaches, playgrounds, waterways, parks and trails. There is a [free beach wheelchair available at Brittas Bay](#) from June to mid-September. It must be [booked by contacting Wicklow County Council](#).

- Sensory gardens are usually designed to be accessible to a wide variety of people. As well as the [Greystones Community Garden featured in our case study](#), there is a [sensory garden in Glendalough](#), and in the [Tearmann Community Gardens in Baltinglass](#).

- Consider the timing of your visit as well as the location. For example, neuro-divergent people, or people with brain injuries, may struggle with the crowds at a busy time. Plan your visit accordingly.

Sources and more information on management and planning

- [EmployAbility Wicklow](#) and [IMPACT Bray & North Wicklow](#) can give you advice on inclusive recruitment and employment practices and the supports available to you as an employer to make accommodations for paid staff who have a disability and also link you in with potential candidates for any vacancies you may have.
- [Employers for Change](#) also provides user friendly information for employers on recruitment and disability in the workplace on their website. They also provide [free online disability awareness seminars](#), and link to a number of other providers of disability awareness training. The [Government Disability Awareness Support Scheme](#) provides funding for private sector employers to undertake such training.
- Volunteer Ireland worked with partners in seven other European countries to create [a toolkit on Volunteering as a Tool for Inclusion](#), including, but not limited to, people with disabilities.
- The [Public Service document on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion](#) may be a useful resource to draw on in considering management and planning. This document includes a 'maturity model' which helps public sector organisations establish which stage of the process towards greater equality, diversity and inclusion they are at from 'compliant' to 'leading'.
- For online meetings, the National Disability Authority have provided [a supplement to their Communications toolkit](#) with some tips. [The European Disability Forum](#) also has some tips for online meetings.
- AsIAM provides [guidance on understanding and creating social narratives](#) on their website.
- The [Disability Bray](#) website also has a host of useful information and links, including on work, education and training and recreation and social activities.



CASE STUDY

Wicklow Parkinson's Choir

Every Monday morning at 11.30am, the Wicklow Parkinson's Choir meet in Ashford Community Centre. "The voices of people with Parkinson's can grow quieter and less intelligible over time. But singing on a regular basis really helps with all of the symptoms of Parkinson's," explains Dara MacMahon, the choir director. "People with Parkinson's often tend to withdraw from their regular social activities. The choir offers a relaxing, supportive environment, where they can be with other people who understand what they are going through."



Dara MacMahon directing the Parkinson's Choir.

Valerie McCoy explains how she came to join the choir. "I had been very involved in the community, but then I was diagnosed with Parkinson's, and I dropped out of things for a while. It was through my community contacts that I heard about the Wicklow Parkinson's Choir, and I am so glad that I did. Dara is a wonderful leader, she focusing on what we are able to do, rather than what we are not able to do."

The choir also provides a bridge for participation in wider community activities. For example, they participate in joint concerts with Ashford National School, and perform at Wicklow Sings, a festival of community choirs.

Although the choir is primarily for people with Parkinson's, their family and friends, they also welcome anyone who would like to "volunteer their voices" to support the group. Members of Unity Gospel Choir have recently started to sing with the group, a new initiative that is working really well. If you are interested in finding out more visit: www.daramacmahon.com

Appendix: Methodology and consultation

This toolkit was designed and developed by the Disability and Inclusion Steering Committee with the support of consultant Hannah Grene. The toolkit was informed by the result of a County Wicklow survey of people with disabilities, their carers and families carried out in summer 2022 in preparation for County Wicklow's forthcoming Disability Strategy. This was supplemented by a small survey of community and voluntary groups in County Wicklow, and a number of follow up interviews with community group leaders and disability activists. Our grateful thanks to all those who participated.

The members of the Disability and Inclusion Steering Committee are:

Mary Anne Lyons	Disability Activist
Jenny Curran	Disability Activist
Ann Healy	Family Carer & Activist
Cian O'Neill	Disability Activist
David Leigh	Disability Activist
Mary O'Neill	RehabCare, Arklow
Kate Byrne	St. Margaret's Disability Service
Aisling Foran/Sinead O'Hara	Triple A Alliance
Ciara O'Donnell	Disability Activist and Wicklow Co Co staff member
Christine Pelz	HSE Mental Health
Michael Nicholson	Director of Services, Wicklow County Council
Clodagh Whelan	Access Officer and Age Friendly Programme Coordinator, Wicklow Co Co
Clara Jenkinson	Sports and Disability Inclusion Officer, Wicklow Sports Partnership
Laura O'Callaghan	Disability Officer Wicklow County Council and Disability Federation Ireland / DISC Facilitator

Theresa O'Brien	Housing, Wicklow County Council
Michelle Rogers	Bray Area Partnership
Fionnuala Curry	Wicklow Children and Young People Services Committee (CYPSC)
Helen Howes / Grainne Quinn	County Wicklow PPN
Kay O'Connor	County Wicklow Partnership
Fred Verdier	Wicklow Tourism
Cllr. Miriam Murphy	Elected member representing Arklow Municipal District
Cllr. John Mullen	Elected member representing Baltinglass Municipal District
Cllr. Aoife Flynn Kennedy	Elected member representing Bray Municipal District
Cllr. Grace McManus	Elected member representing Bray Municipal District
Cllr. Melanie Corrigan	Elected member representing Bray Municipal District
Cllr. Gail Dunne	Elected member representing Wicklow Municipal District



CASE STUDY

Bray Emmets GAA

In early 2022, Bray Emmets GAA club launched its All Stars Programme for children with special needs. “Three of our four children are in Bray Emmets GAA Club and love it. I started thinking, why shouldn’t there be something for our 12 year old, Ewan, as well?’ explained Jenny Lackey, who along with her husband Rob and other Bray Emmets volunteers got the programme going. Ewan has an intellectual disability and is autistic.



Bray Emmets All Stars, pictures by Jenny Lackey

Like most volunteer initiatives, “if you wanted it, you should be prepared to get involved yourself”. However, they knew the club would be open to it, and the chairperson and other club officials were engaged and supportive in the process.

The GAA club and the All Stars programme are mindful of the needs of each of their members. The All Stars application form draws on draws on the [Cara Autism in Sport Passport](#). “So we gather information about how a child prefers to communicate, or what things might bother them, like noisy places..”

They considered training on a Sunday morning, which would be quieter, but “we didn’t want to be hidden away from the rest of the club.” Instead, they train on a Saturday morning, but after the main club training, and in an enclosed area. “I wear my Bray Emmets All Stars jersey and go to see my friends on Saturdays. We play lots of running games and then we drink juice and eat biscuits in the clubhouse!” explained one All Stars member.

Bray Emmets All Stars have been able to connect with other programmes around Co. Wicklow, including getting together with Blessington All Stars for joint sessions. They are happy to offer advice to any club considering establishing an All Stars programme.

If you would like support to implement the advice given in this toolkit, please contact:

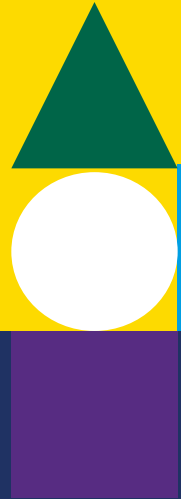
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**An Roinn Leanai, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige**
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth