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Community and Disability Newsletter



Issue six - February 2026



February 2026: Message from PJ Cleere



Welcome to **Issue Six** of our **Community and Disability Newsletter**.

When Budget 2026 was announced, we said it was a budget of two halves. While funding of vital services was enhanced, we also discussed the impact of the budget on people with disabilities themselves and the lack of any new Cost of Disability measures.

It was very distressing to learn that the Budget took up to €1,400 of real cash out of people's pockets. We immediately knew this would have a devastating impact, especially over winter. Since then, DFI and our partners have been working tirelessly to try and turn this around.

We told the government we are happy to pursue the development of a long-term Cost of Disability payment, but we have been at pains to point out that disabled people need financial support right now. It is not a luxury, it is an emergency. We know that every day so many people with disabilities are having to decide between the basics of eating or heating their homes. That is the stark reality they face in 2026.

The government continue to indicate that they are not for turning on the need for a winter payment of €400. In this edition we remind you all about the march for the Emergency Disability Payment of €400 which takes place on 28 February. We are delighted that so many organisations, civil society organisations disabled people and supporters will be marching together in solidarity.

We understand it can be difficult to participate in these kinds of events. We would simply ask that as many people as possible come along. This is not confined to persons with disabilities or organisations. This march is for everyone to show their support.

In this edition we also bring you up to speed on the work of the team, across the self-advocacy programme, local government and our recent participation at the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Infrastructure and National Development Plan Delivery.

As a reminder to everyone, Make Way Day has been brought forward to 29 May from this year. Please get in touch if you need resources. There is also information about training and other opportunities coming your way in 2026.

Finally, we are delighted to introduce our newest Intern Sophie Meegan who will be working with us until the summer.

We hope you will enjoy the newsletter and please feel free to offer feedback or ask for further information. Contact pjcleere@disability-federation.ie

Regards,

PJ Cleere
Development Manager
Lead DFI Community Development Programme
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March with us on 28 February to demand a €400 Emergency Disability Payment



Over the past few months, we have been working alongside disabled people, our colleagues and the wider community to highlight the reality of the "Cost of Disability." We have presented the data, stood outside Leinster House, written submissions, and met with Ministers to call for a €400 Emergency Winter Payment to replace the vital supports stripped away in Budget 2026.

And while we seem to have won the public argument, the Government's response has been to double down. They have asked disabled people to wait until 2027 for a permanent solution.

But poverty does not pause. With utility arrears rising and inflation still biting, the financial cliff-edge they have created is dangerous. Disabled people are up to €1,400 worse off this year, forced to choose between heating and eating.

That is why, on **Saturday, 28 February**, we are taking our message to the streets.

A growing movement

We are proud to lead this national protest alongside our partners at the **Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA)** and **Access for All**. But we are not doing it alone. This campaign has become a national movement.

We are thrilled to welcome the support of an incredible coalition of allies and member organisations standing shoulder-to-shoulder with us, including:

- Clare Leader Forum
- Blanchardstown Centre for Independent Living
- Disability Power Ireland
- Independent Living Movement Ireland, ILMI
- Dyslexia Ireland
- Affordable Ireland
- Ataxia Foundation of Ireland
- Irish Senior Citizens Parliament
- Care Alliance Ireland
- ChildVision
- Cheshire Ireland
- Cottage Autism Network Wexford
- ADHD Ireland
- Acquired Brain Injury Ireland
- Cerebral Palsy Foundation
- National Council for People with Disabilities
- Voices for Change
- Inclusion Ireland
- Muscular Dystrophy Ireland
- Irish Society for Autism
- Aontas
- WALK
- Rehab Group
- National Women's Council
- Vision Ireland
- Parkinson's Ireland
- Polio Survivors Ireland
- MS Ireland
- Enable Ireland
- North Tipperary Disability Support Services.

The voice of disabled people

The voice of disabled people is crucial to this campaign. Disabled activists from across the country have shown their support in the lead up to the protest. We have a number of activists on [our social platforms](#) outlining why this demand is necessary. See Damien below highlighting the urgency of this campaign.



A call for allies

A protest is a numbers game. A small gathering is easily ignored; a large crowd cannot be looked away from.

We know that for many disabled people, attending a protest is a massive logistical and physical burden. Between a lack of accessible transport and the physical toll it takes, many simply cannot make it.

That is why we need our allies to fill the space for those who cannot be there. If you are physically able to do so, we are asking you to be there. Bring your partner. Bring your housemates. Bring your neighbours. Bring your friends.

The Plan:

- **When:** Saturday, 28 February. Arrive at 1 pm at the Garden of Remembrance. We should reach Customs House by 1.45pm for those who want to join there.
- **Where:** Garden of Remembrance, Parnell Square, Dublin 1.
- **The route:** A slow-paced, accessible 1.5km march down O'Connell Street (flat and paved), finishing at The Custom

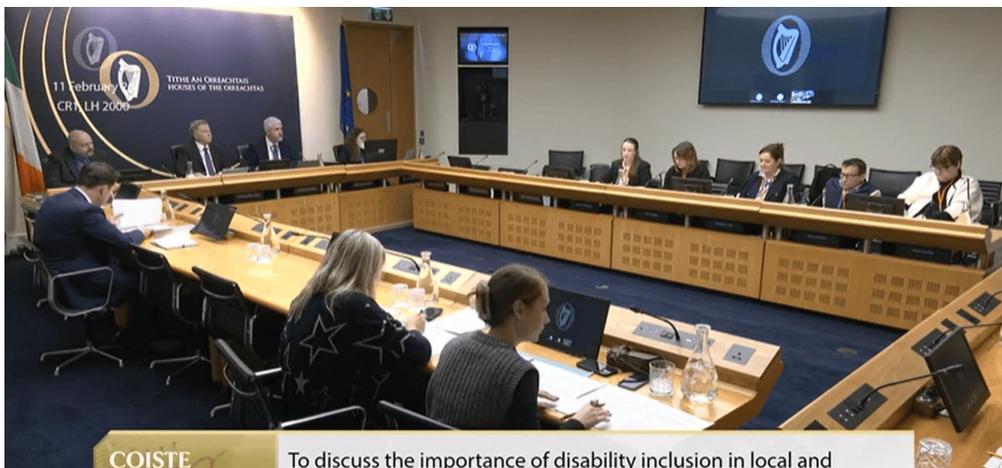
House. (If you wish to support but cannot march, you can meet us directly at the Custom House).

- **The demand:** A visible, united call for an immediate €400 Emergency Disability Payment.

This is a significant moment for the movement. Let's turn up, let's be loud, and let's make sure they can't look away.

For more details on parking, accessibility, and our campaign demands, [read the full update on our website here](#).

DFI at the Joint Committee on Infrastructure and National Development Plan Delivery



On 11 February, DFI and IWA appeared before the Oireachtas Joint Committee on infrastructure and National Development Plan Delivery. Committee members had invited us to speak about the role of disabled people in consultations and planning development.

Our colleagues Laura O Callaghan and Emer Begley represented DFI and were delighted to share the participation of our members from IWA, Rosaleen Lally, Joan Carthy and John Fulham.

Participants highlighted the need for the active on-going participation by people with disabilities and their representatives in consultations.

They emphasised that people with lived experience must be part of co-design and be active participants in all decision affecting their lives, from the very beginning.

They must not become passive consultants, asked to react or add to plans strategies or documents half completed before they have any input. This is most important, when it comes to the implementation

of strategies and plans at national regional levels and especially in their local communities.

The level of active participation by relevant stakeholders is the measure of success for implementation. Structures and arrangements which foster greater participation by people in their local communities must continue to grow and offer real opportunities for consultation and engagement.

Likewise we made the point that the role of Access Officer needs to be full-time with more structured approaches to disability inclusion countrywide.

See Emer and Laura's opening statements here:



Launch of The EASPD In-Habit Project



DFI is proud to be part of IN-HABIT a this three year EU project commencing in 2026.

Access to safe, affordable, and accessible housing is more than just a convenience, it is a fundamental human right and the cornerstone of living with dignity. Yet, for many people with disabilities across Europe, the search for a home that truly meets their needs remains a daily struggle.

The [IN-HABIT project](#) has been launched to change this reality, moving beyond traditional models toward a future of true community inclusion.

Building capacity for change

The core mission of IN-HABIT is to strengthen the "know-how" of those who shape our living environments. By working directly with housing providers, disability service providers, and families, the project aims to develop housing models that are:

- **Accessible:** Designed for everyone from the ground up.
- **Affordable:** Ensuring that financial barriers don't prevent independent living.
- **Inclusive:** Promoting non-segregation and meaningful participation in local neighborhoods.

A powerful European partnership

What makes IN-HABIT unique is its diverse consortium. The project brings together a massive range of expertise from across Europe, including:

- **Housing and service providers** who manage the day-to-day delivery of homes.
- **A network of cities** focused on local implementation.
- **User-led and family-led advocacy groups** ensuring that lived experience is at the heart of every decision.
- **European networks** to help scale these solutions across the continent.

Whether you are a policymaker, a service provider, or an advocate for disability rights, the advancement of inclusive housing solutions affects us all. We encourage our members to [follow the IN-HABIT project](#) as it works to reimagine housing for everyone.

"Housing is the foundation of independence. Let's make sure that foundation is accessible to all."

**News Updates:
What's coming up in the next few months?**

NEWS

UPDATE



Welcome to our Community Team Intern Sophie Meegan

Sophie is from County Louth and is a third-year student at the University of Galway studying Politics and Geography with Human Rights. Sophie has a strong interest in disability rights and advocacy, and joined DFI for her student placement.

Sophie is working with the community team and reports that she is truly learning what a bottom-up approach to human rights looks like in practice. She is very passionate about the work and actively listening to and learning from, people with lived experience.

It's a great pleasure to welcome Sophie on board and she is already involved in very exciting and important work on the ground. Sophie will be with us until the summer and we are very grateful to have such a great colleague as part of the team.

Self-Advocacy Leaders Network

The next meeting of the Self-Advocacy Leaders Network is expected to take place on 2 April on MS Teams from 11am to 1 pm. Invitations have been sent. If you are not receiving mail about Network meetings and you are responsible for leading self advocacy in your organisation, please contact PJ Cleere on pjcleere@disability-federation.ie .

Self-Advocacy Toolkit in person workshops.

Whether you are new to self-advocacy or already using the DFI Self Advocacy Toolkit, these in-person workshops are for you. We will be holding at least three such workshops for members in three locations, Galway, Dublin and Cork this year. The first session will be in Galway in late April and notice of the final date will be circulated to you all. so do keep an eye on e mails.

The workshops will be a participative space where those of you who use the toolkit, either as a step by step resource, or as a reference in your work, will have the opportunity to discuss how you use it, share any positive experiences or highlight any challenges you have encountered. It will also be a space for you to share any learning or new ideas about what might be included in the toolkit going forward.

Media and Spokesperson Training

The ever popular media training is being offered again to our members. It is anticipated this will take place in the latter part of June. Again you will be notified in due course of the exact date and location, which is expected to be in Dublin. More to follow.

That's all for this edition. I hope you found it of interest. If you have any queries or would like to follow up on any aspect of the articles please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Make Way Day

Make Way Day is DFI's campaign for national access awareness. Until this year it has been held on the last Friday in September.

In response to requests from members to reconsider the date, DFI have started the year by changing Make Way Day to the last Friday of May, which this year falls on the 29th. So this year Make Way Day takes place on **29 May**.

For a few years now, members have commented that September has increasingly become a very busy time of year. Organisations are busy with their own pre-budget campaigns, and in some cases, it is also the time when members hold their own fundraising or awareness campaigns as well.

The month of May was recommended to us as the most preferable, and so this year, we notified our members, partners and stakeholders of the change.

All 31 local authorities and local community groups continue to support the Make Way Day. Our colleague Pierce Richardson is leading the campaign this year. If you need any information about how to get involved, or if your organisation needs stickers, or other resources, please contact Pierce at

Piercerichardson@disability-federation.ie

Invitation to share your news and self-advocacy stories

As always you are welcome to contribute to the newsletter. If you have a story about your self-advocacy work or work in mainstream community, and you would like to share it, or if you have plans for an activity, or need to let members know about an upcoming event, please contact me about getting your contribution included in the following editions.

Best wishes PJ

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For more on all of the content featured in our newsletter see www.disability-federation.ie.

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Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) is the national support organisation for voluntary disability organisations in Ireland who provide services to people with disabilities and disabling conditions.

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