



Disability Federation of Ireland

Community and Disability Newsletter



DISABILITY FEDERATION
OF IRELAND

Issue Seven - July 2026

July 2026: Message from PJ Cleere



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

First of all, thank you to all our members, stakeholders, partners, and colleagues who turned out again for **Make Way Day**. This year's national DFI Access Awareness campaign was launched in Carlow County Council, and enjoyed a wonderful turnout by activists

in every county. The campaign continues to go from strength to strength, and we were particularly delighted with this year's turnout given that it was the first to take place on the new date, 29 May.

This edition we bring you news of exciting developments in DFI's campaign to make the **Access Officer** role a full-time position in every local authority in the country. We provide an update on the campaign and its progress to date, and we're excited about the possibilities this offers as we continue to expand and deepen the campaign going forward.

We also bring you updates on the **In-Habit Project**, filling you in on progress to date, and what is coming next.

There is information too from the **Self-Advocacy Programme**, along with exciting news of the development of a new eLearning Programme for frontline staff. You'll find links to two short surveys, for leaders of self advocacy and front line staff, to help us identify how we can better support you on your self-advocacy journey.

We hope you will enjoy this edition of the newsletter, and please feel free to offer feedback or ask for further information.

Regards,

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Make Way Day 2026



Friday 29 May marked Make Way Day 2026. Make Way Day is a national campaign, held annually to highlight the everyday obstacles that make public spaces harder to navigate for people with disabilities. Obstacles may include cars parked on footpaths, wheelie bins left out, overgrown hedges and sandwich boards outside shops.

This year's campaign took place on a new date. We moved it from its traditional late September slot to give the issue of accessibility clear air away from the Budget, with the added bonus of better weather for outdoor accessibility audits. Members, partners and the public turning out in strength across the country.

Local activists marked the day with action across the country.

Carlow leads the way

While the day's energy was visible at events around the country, Carlow led the way with a launch event at Carlow County Council alongside local community groups including:

- Carlow Public Participation Network (PPN)
- Carlow Centre for Independent Living,
- Delta Sensory Gardens
- Special Olympics Ireland.

Dublin PPN

Dublin PPN's Disability Thematic Group marked the day with an event at Finglas Youth Resource Centre, forming part of Dublin City's "A Thriving City for All Festival 2026", which shines a light on barriers to social inclusion for people with disabilities and other communities across the city.

Kilkenny turned awareness into direct action.

Kilkenny Access Group staged a demonstration at MacDonagh Train Station, focused on a lift that has never worked since it was installed during the shopping centre development in 2007. The protest called for the lift to be brought into service, drawing local media coverage of both the demonstration and the wider Carlow and Kilkenny activity.

Offaly's county council backed the message directly

Offaly County Council asked residents to keep footpaths clear of cars, vans, wheelie bins, kegs, sandwich boards, overgrown hedges and bikes tied to railings, framing it as a simple way for the county to work together on accessibility.

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown tied the day to longer-term work

The council marked Make Way Day alongside members of its Disability Consultation Group, which brings together Enable Ireland, the Irish Wheelchair Association and Vision Ireland. An Cathaoirleach Jim Gildea and chief executive Frank Curran both spoke about accessibility as a shared responsibility, and the council pointed to a new Access Strategy currently in development.

Cork kept the conversation going after the day itself

In a follow-up [Irish Examiner column](#), Michael Moynihan spoke with Johnny Murphy, chair of the Cork Access Group, who said the city has lost roughly ten disabled parking bays in recent years, between pedestrianisation on Tuckey Street and changes on the South Mall and Morrison's Island.

He pointed to MacCurtain Street as proof of what's possible when accessibility is built in from the start, contrasting it with Bishop Lucey Park, where the Cork Access Group wasn't consulted during a €7 million redevelopment that he says now excludes wheelchair users on its stone surfacing.

This only scratches the surface of the incredible support from local authorities, community organisations and individuals across the country.

Additional content

Nationally, DFI CEO Elaine Teague featured in a video marking the day, and our press release carried the voice of disability advocate Gary Kearney, grounding the campaign's core message in lived experience. He reiterated that this isn't about pointing fingers at any individual, but about asking everyone to pause and consider whether something as small as a wheelie bin or an A-board is getting in someone's way.

See Make Way Day 2026 campaign video here:



See Elaine's video here:



Looking ahead

Make Way Day only works because of the people who show up for it, including local councils, PPNs, CILs, member organisations and individual advocates who took the time to get out, spot an obstacle, and share it.

Thank you to everyone who made this year's campaign a success.

A significant step forward for accessibility in local government



Following sustained advocacy by DFI, councils including Galway City, Carlow, Dublin City, and most recently Waterford have committed to creating full-time Access Officer roles. They join Fingal County Council who made the access officer role full-time in 2021.

Why local authorities matter

Local authorities play a crucial role in the delivery of key obligations under the UNCRPD. They are central to the delivery of housing, roads and public realm space and can support the inclusion of disabled people in local decision-making and communities.

Inconsistent progress across councils

At present, City and County Councils vary significantly in their efforts, largely because there is:

- a lack of statutory funding or resources dedicated to initiatives targeting local implementation of UN CRPD
- an absence of full-time Access Officers in the majority of local authorities
- failure, in many areas, to develop consultation mechanisms to ensure the voice of disabled people is included at local level.

A role undermined by under-resourcing

The Disability Act 2005 legally obliges local authorities to appoint an Access Officer. However, a significant number surveyed as part of our '[Bridging the Gap](#)' research stated that their role is an “add-on” to their full-time positions, often without a defined job description.

A lack of formalised and consistent training was also reported. This has resulted in a lack of focus on disability within local authorities and a weakening of their responsibilities, which undermines the effectiveness of the role.

Responding to Bridging the Gap

The appointment of fulltime access officers represent a direct response to recommendations outlined in DFI's Bridging the Gap report. The report, launched in February 2025, highlighted the need for stronger local authority capacity to address barriers faced by disabled people in everyday life. By investing in a dedicated role, councils are taking practical steps to ensure accessibility is embedded across the services they provide.

Irish Wheelchair Association's Access Is No Joke

The Irish Wheelchair Association's (IWA) Access Is No Joke campaign helped shine a spotlight on the real-world consequences of inaccessible environments and services. Through advocacy and public engagement, the campaign reinforced the message that a full-time access officer was needed to progress disability rights at local level.

The growing number of local authorities committing to full-time Access Officers demonstrates what can be achieved when evidence-based policy recommendations are combined with strong advocacy.

It also sends an encouraging signal to other councils across the country that a dedicated role is both necessary and achievable. While there is still work to be done to ensure every local authority has the resources and structures needed to support disabled people effectively, these appointments represent meaningful progress.

**Inclusive housing and accessibility for belonging,
independence and transformation**



IN-HABIT is an Erasmus+ project built around a simple idea: everyone deserves a place to call home. Yet across Europe, many people with disabilities still face major barriers to accessible, affordable housing and the personalised support needed to live independently in their communities.

DFI and seven EU partners are six months into this three-year project which promotes inclusive and community-based housing for disabled people.

Our aim is to strengthen the capacity of housing professionals, service providers, and local authorities who may lack the tools, knowledge, or coordination needed to deliver inclusive housing solutions. Through training, good practices, digital tools, and policy dialogue we aim to highlight inclusive housing solutions and person-centred support models.

Our approach involves targeted communication and collaboration between housing providers, social services, policy makers, people with disabilities and their circle of support. We focus on improving access to housing information and services alongside evidence-based recommendations to support inclusive housing policies.

Over three years, IN-HABIT will deliver practical tools and knowledge to support more inclusive housing systems across Europe by providing:

- A collection of good practices in inclusive housing and person-centred support models.
- Training programmes and materials to strengthen the skills of housing professionals, service providers, and local authorities.
- A digital hub (MyService) providing guidance and resources to help disabled people and their circle of support explore housing options.
- Policy recommendations to promote more inclusive housing policies.

[The IN-HABIT newsletter is available here.](#) You can subscribe [here](#)
Find out more about [DFI's involvement with the IN-HABIT project here.](#)

Self-Advocacy Leaders Network



The DFI Self-Advocacy Leaders Network brings together leaders, advocates, policy staff, participation officers and coordinators from across the disability sector to share learning, identify priorities and strengthen support for self-advocacy throughout Ireland.

The Network provides an opportunity to connect with colleagues, exchange ideas and experiences, influence future developments, and work collaboratively to advance self-advocacy and the rights of people with disabilities.

Network meeting – 25 June

Our most recent DFI Self-Advocacy Leaders Network meeting took place on Thursday, 25 June at 11.00am online.

The session focused on employment and disability-related payments, a topic of significant interest to self-advocates, families and organisations across the sector.

We were delighted to welcome:

- Fionn and Jonathan Angus
- Representatives from the Department of Social Protection

The meeting also included a lively discussion, with questions and the sharing of experiences and challenges from across the sector. you can [see the presentation here.](#)

Help shape future self-advocacy supports

We are currently developing a new Self-Advocacy eLearning Programme for Frontline Staff and beginning work to establish a Frontline Self-Advocacy Network later this year.

These initiatives aim to strengthen the knowledge, skills and confidence of staff supporting people with disabilities to exercise choice, have their voices heard and participate fully in decisions that affect their lives.

Two short surveys

To ensure this work reflects the needs of the sector, we are asking for your support with two short surveys.

1. DFI Self-Advocacy Leaders Network survey

This survey will help shape future network meetings, priorities and areas of focus.

Complete the survey: [DFI Self-Advocacy Leaders Network – Member and Stakeholder Survey – Fill out form](#)

2. Self-Advocacy eLearning training needs survey for frontline staff

We are asking organisations to share this survey with relevant frontline colleagues. Feedback will directly inform the design and content of the new eLearning programme.

Complete the survey: [Self-Advocacy eLearning Training Needs Questionnaire for Frontline Staff – Fill out form.](#)

We need your help

As part of this work, we are also asking organisations to provide the names, roles and email addresses of frontline staff who support people with disabilities in day-to-day practice.

This will help us build connections across the sector, ensure staff are informed about training opportunities and support the development of the new Frontline Self-Advocacy Network.

Why join the network?

By becoming involved in the DFI Self-Advocacy Leaders Network, you can:

- Share and learn from good practice across the sector
- Connect with colleagues working in similar roles
- Contribute to national discussions on self-advocacy
- Influence future priorities, resources and supports
- Help strengthen opportunities for people with disabilities to have their voices heard.

We welcome participation from staff working in leadership, management, advocacy, policy and coordination roles and staff working in our member organisations.

Interested in getting involved?

If you would like to learn more about the DFI Self-Advocacy Leaders Network, attend an upcoming meeting, join the network, or discuss how your organisation can contribute to this work, please get in touch.

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



E-Learning: Disability Awareness and Equality Training

Our new E-Learning Disability Awareness and Equality Training programme is in the final editing stage. We'll be sharing launch details soon. Keep an eye on our social media for updates!

Frontline staff - information we need from you

We are currently developing a new Self-Advocacy eLearning Programme for Frontline Staff and are also beginning work to establish a Frontline Self-Advocacy Network later this year.

To support this work, we are asking each organisation to provide:

- Names, roles and email addresses of frontline staff who support people with disabilities in day-to-day practice.

- If you are the relevant contact yourself, simply provide your own details.

Please note that frontline staff completing the training needs survey will also be asked to provide their name and email address so that we can follow up directly where appropriate.

Share your news and self-advocacy stories

As always, you are welcome to contribute to the newsletter with updates on projects you may be involved in with the community. If you have a story about your self-advocacy work that you would like to share, or you have plans for an activity, please contact me about getting your contribution included in the following editions.

That's all for this edition. I hope you find 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.

Best wishes,
PJ

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