

# VISION FOR CHANGE – REPORT OBJECTIVES & RECOMMENDATIONS

## IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS REPORT

PERIOD ENDING: DECEMBER 2009

### ***VISION – Working in Partnership with Service Users, facilitating recovery & community reintegration***

#### **Objective:**

#### **Service User Participation**

**3.2** *Advocacy should be available as a right to all service users in all mental health services in all parts of the country.*

Progress to date:

In 2004 the Citizens Information Board (CIB) began the process of engaging the community and voluntary sector in the provision of advocacy services to people with disabilities. A total of 46 projects are currently funded to deliver representative advocacy services to people with disabilities. The overall focus of the programme is on representative advocacy for people with disability. Projects either operate within a specific geographic area or are focused on a particular disability type. Each of the projects poses different challenges, some requiring more intensive work with smaller caseloads while others have larger caseloads with shorter periods of client contact.

The caseload breakdown per year is as follows:

- 2006 – 744
- 2007 – 1,322
- 2008 – 2,087
- 2009 – 2,583

The Citizens Information Board is monitoring the programme to ensure that the projects are operating in accordance with the Board's advocacy guidelines. It is planned to undertake a full evaluation of the Community and Voluntary Sector Advocacy programme in 2010.

The Citizens Information Board also provides advocacy through the Citizens Information Services focusing on access to services, welfare entitlements and employment rights. This type of mainstream advocacy is also open to people with disabilities and the Community and Voluntary Sector Advocacy programme is creating close links with the Citizens Information Services to ensure that people with disabilities are encouraged and supported to use the mainstream services where possible.

The advocacy capacity within the Citizens Information Services was strengthened through the provision of Advocacy Resource Officers who worked to build the capacity of information providers to advocate on behalf of clients. Nine Advocacy Resource Officers were in operation across the Citizens Information Service network. Contracts for these workers expired during 2009. A review of advocacy in citizen information services commenced in 2009 and will be completed in 2010.

The Citizens Information Act, 2007 provides for the establishment of a Personal Advocacy Service. All Sections of the Act, with the exception of part of Section 4 and all of Section 5, came into force on 30 March 2007, when the Citizens Information Act 2007 (Commencement) Order 2007 was signed. The remaining

parts of Section 4 and all of Section 5 are subject to a commencement order.

Funding of €2.6 million was provided in 2009, bringing the total funding for all advocacy services to €8.7 million for the period 2005 to 2009. The post of Director of the Personal Advocacy Service was sanctioned by the Department of Finance in December 2007 and the CIB completed the recruitment process early in 2008; however due to budgetary constraints it has not been possible to proceed with the service to date and savings of €1.2 million were generated.

**List any problems encountered with implementation of recommendation:**

**Corrective Action:**

The CIB is monitoring the Community & Voluntary Sector Advocacy Programme to ensure that the projects are operating in accordance with the Board's advocacy guidelines and a full evaluation of the programme will be completed in 2010.

In addition, a review of Advocacy in Citizen Information Services commenced in 2009 and will be completed in 2010.

These evaluations will inform the delivery of future advocacy services.

**Objective:**

**Belonging & Participating: Social Inclusion**

**4.4** *Measures to protect the income of individuals with mental health problems should be put in place. Health care access schemes should also be reviewed for this group.*

Progress to date:

Social protection of the population in general is provided by the Department of Social and Family Affairs through a combination of insurance based payments and assistance based payments targeted at need. These payments include the range of schemes for people with illness and disability, of which there are currently over 246,000, recipients. The insurance-based payments are Illness Benefit, Invalidity Pension and the Occupational Injuries schemes while the means-tested payments are Disability Allowance and Blind Pension. Persons with incapacities that could be classified as mental or psychiatric illness may be eligible for these schemes, subject of course to satisfying the relevant qualifying conditions.

Government policy as regards social welfare rates is guided by the commitments in the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016: Building an Inclusive Society* (NAPinclusion) and the *Social Partnership Agreement Towards 2016*. The target set in the NAPinclusion - to maintain the relative value of the lowest social welfare rate at least at €85.80, in 2007 terms, over the course of this Plan, subject to available resources' Budget 2009 provided for increases of €6.50 per week for all recipients aged under 66 and these increases came into effect in the first week of January 2009. This brought the lowest rate of payment to €204.30, an increase of 3.3%. In Budget 2010, it was announced that rates payable to persons aged under 66 years of age would be reduced by amounts ranging from 3.5% to 4.2%. This now brings the lowest rate of payment to €196 per week, a reduction of 4.1%. However, the lowest rate of payment next year for those between age 25 and 66 will be €10 higher than in 2007. In arriving at the rate reductions, account was taken of the increases given in the 2009 Budget and the cost of living decreases which have been a factor for the past year. Prices dropped by an average of 4.5% over 2009 as a whole and continuing deflation is also projected for 2010. There were no reductions for all pensioners aged 66 and over and more than 420,000 children in welfare dependent and low income families were fully protected from reductions in Child Benefit. In addition, payments such as the Half Rate Carers Allowance, Half Rate Jobseekers and Illness payments have all been fully retained and other supports such as the non means tested Respite Care Grant worth an additional €1,700 annually for Carers will also continue to be paid next year. Improvements in the fuel allowance schemes announced in Budget 2009 were also unaffected. Domiciliary Care Allowance

which is paid to help parents or guardians of a severely disabled or ill child who is under 16 years of age and needs extra care remains unchanged at €309.50 per month.

In December 2007 a once off funding of €15,000 was provided to Mental Health Ireland, under the scheme 'Grants for the Development and Promotion of Information and Welfare Rights', for the production of Information Leaflets on social welfare entitlements. An Information Leaflet on Social Welfare Benefits and Entitlements for Persons with a Mental Illness was published by Mental Health Ireland and launched by the Minister for Social and Family Affairs on 01 December 2008.

List any problems encountered with implementation of recommendation:

**Corrective Action:**