

Submission by Inclusion Ireland to the Monitoring group for A Vision for Change, 19th November 2009

Inclusion Ireland is the largest national organisation representing and promoting the rights of people with an intellectual disability and their families. Inclusion Ireland has a membership of over 160 affiliated organisations throughout the country and hundreds of individual members..

There are over 26,000 people with an intellectual disability in Ireland. The vision of Inclusion Ireland is that of people with an intellectual disability living and participating in the community with equal rights as citizens to live the life of their choice to their fullest potential. The mission of Inclusion Ireland is to be the independent advocate of people with an intellectual disability and their families and to ensure that they have their voices heard and are not isolated or segregated.

Slow Progress

Government must urgently address the provision of mental health services to people with an intellectual disability. The third report of the Independent Monitoring Group on the Government's mental health policy *A Vision for Change* has stated

“Three years into implementation, a comprehensive implementation plan is still not in place and the [Independent Monitoring] Group is very disappointed by the slow rate of progress.”¹

Inclusion Ireland fully endorses the view of the Independent Monitoring Group.

Inappropriate accommodation

In 1984 Government policy clearly stated in “Planning for the Future” the need for separate facilities for people with an intellectual disability and people with a mental illness. In 2006 *A Vision for Change* recommended that this practice would end. However, today, 319 persons with an intellectual disability remain in psychiatric institutions (HRB, 2008) *50% of these are persons aged over 55. Furthermore there are 772 people living in former psychiatric hospitals and other HSE institutions.* (DOHC 2008)

It is totally unacceptable that 25 years later this practice is still occurring. The Mental Health Commission report published earlier this year (3rd April) highlighted the fact that long stay patients at St. Luke's Hospital in Clonmel with an intellectual disability were sharing accommodation with patients with mental illness. Despite six residents with an intellectual disability leaving the hospital in 2006, 29 people remain.

This report into St Lukes is very worrying on many levels not just the shared accommodation. Of great concern was the lack of resources and staff expertise to deal with people with intellectual disability leading to an over reliance of long term treatments with benzodiazepines as well as a complete absence of therapy provision. A situation that is not only found in this particular hospital.

¹ Vision for Change Monitoring Group, Third annual report, April 2009

A high-level steering group was established in 2007 by the HSE to examine the issue of congregated settings, (including former psychiatric hospitals and de designated units)

The group has been asked to make recommendations to guide future policy. Inclusion Ireland is represented on this group. A report of this group is due by the end of 2009 and must form the basis for an implementation plan to close congregated settings within a defined timeframe.

Funding

Since 2006, over €51 million has been allocated to implement *A Vision for Change*. However, almost half of this money (€24 million) was used to meet 'overriding obligations of the HSE to live within its approved allocation'.² The diversion of development funding allocated for mental health services in 2006 and 2007 away from its intended purpose to meet budget deficits elsewhere indicates the vulnerability of mental health services in good times as much as bad.³

The millions realised from the sale of lands should be used for the development of Mental Health Services. This money has already been pledged to finance new modern developments including fully-staffed multidisciplinary Community Mental Health Teams (CMHTs). These teams will have a significant role to play in transferring people out of institutions.

A Vision for Change recommended the establishment of 28 of these Community Mental Health Teams (CMHTs) to meet the needs of people with intellectual disabilities. Currently the provision stands at 12 teams. Moreover, there are currently only 23 Whole Time Equivalents (WTEs) across these teams compared to the 4242 WTEs required based on the recommendations of *A Vision for Change*.⁴

Inclusion Ireland is concerned that the current Programme for Government makes no reference to implementing *Vision for Change*.

The National Mental Health Service Directorate, as recommended in a *Vision for Change*, should be established to oversee the transformation of mental health services in Ireland. *Vision for change* cannot be effectively implemented without the establishment of this office.

Ireland, as a State party to the UN Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities, has an obligation to recognise Article 19 'the right of people with disabilities to live in the community, with choices equal to others.'

Inclusion Ireland recognises the difficulties facing the HSE in the current economic climate, but this does not in any way diminish the HSE's responsibility to implement *A Vision for Change*.

² *A Gloomy View: Rhetoric or reality in relation to the advancement of A Vision for Change*, Dr. Siobhán Barry & Dr. Patrice Murphy, 08 May 2009

³ John Saunders, *Irish Examiner*, 06 February, 2009

⁴ *ibid*

The Government's responsibility to protect vulnerable people in society must always remain to the fore."

Priorities

The movement to appropriate community housing of those living in longstay psychiatric hospitals or de-designated units

Access to mainstream community mental health teams for people with intellectual disability

Establishment of meaningful day services and access to appropriate therapeutic supports