



## **Department of Social and Family Affairs**

### **Mullingar chosen to have first centre delivering co-ordinated employment programme for people with disabilities**

#### ***Minister Hanafin sees positive impact the new service is having***

**“Providing a service for people with disabilities or long term illness to encourage them to consider taking that first step back into employment, education or training is the focus of a new service – Disability Activation Project - being piloted in Mullingar”** said Minister for Social and Family Affairs

Mary Hanafin T.D. today (14<sup>th</sup> November 2008). Minister Hanafin met with participants as well as key personnel from a number of agencies who are involved in this new project, which is jointly funded by the Department of Social & Family Affairs and the European Social Fund.

Since the start of this year almost 300 people in the Mullingar and surrounding area, who are receiving illness or disability related payments have been contacted by the new service – the first of its kind in the country. Staff working on the programme have met 118 men and women on a one to one basis and are developing individualised plans for them which will help them progress into education, training and explore employment opportunities and an improved quality of life.

A key feature of this new service, said Minister Hanafin is **“the interagency co-operation which sees assistance from FAS, the HSE, Department of Education and Science, the VEC as well as the National Disability Authority, who meet regularly to chart progress of the programme.**

**What we are seeing here is a real example of people who may have felt distant from the work environment, being given opportunities to explore what their skills and abilities are, and see what positive contribution they are able to make to their own personal development. Their participation is completely voluntary, but I feel the more government agencies and relevant**



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**interested organisations look to meet the specific needs of the individual person the more responsive we can be to various needs. ”**

Based in the Social Services Centre in Bishopsgate Street since September of this year, the new facilities accommodate three departmental staff overseeing the work and a suite of training and ancillary accommodation to provide a range of supports to those participating in the programme.

Minister Hanafin said that €10m is being provided to the pilot programme between now and 2013, specifically in the BMW region, with **“the experiences of the participants of the programme in Co Westmeath being refined and replicated to hopefully develop the model of activation for people with disabilities nationally in the future.”**

### **Mullingar Disability Activation Project progress to date:**

- o 293 people in receipt of Illness/disability related payments have been contacted and 118 people met on a one-to-one basis with a view to preparing individualised progression path plans.
  
- o Research into the type and level of services in Co Westmeath has been conducted. The capacity of people on illness/disability payments to access these services is being examined and the project will identify where obstacles exist and propose possible ways of addressing these.
  
- o An analysis of the needs of people in receipt of disability welfare payments is part of the ongoing work of the project. People engaging in the project are interviewed on a one-to-one basis and wide ranging data is recorded. Needs, in terms of education, training, work or services are ascertained and follow up work – including referral and support are an integral part of the service.



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- o At present 14 people in receipt of illness/disability are taking part in an 8 week programme entitled 'Enable for Life'. A personal development/life skills course is being examined for another group of participants.
  
- o Of the 17 people who completed a pilot Enable programme in May 2008 - 4 commenced employment, one person is employed on a Community Employment scheme, 2 returned to education, 4 completed accredited computer training and 4 commenced employer based training with the National Learning Network.

**ENDS**