



Department of Social and Family Affairs

MINISTER MARY COUGHLAN LAUNCHES VIDEOPHONE IN CORK SOCIAL WELFARE OFFICE

Revolutionary video technology is being used to help people with hearing difficulties access Government services.

The new videophone service will make a huge difference to people with hearing difficulties and help them gain grants, access social welfare payments and get vital information about services, said Minister for Social and Family Affairs Mary Coughlan when she launched the service in Cork this week.

The videophone is installed in the Cork Social Welfare Local Office, in Cork Association for the Deaf offices and in the National Association of the Deaf premises in Dublin.

People with hearing difficulties who want information, or have queries, about social welfare service or payments, visit the Cork city social welfare office and are directed to a private booth. Seated in front of a videophone link they sign their conversation to the offices of the National Deaf association, where a person fluent in sign language passes on the message through another phone link to the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

The three-way handset and video cameras are connected by ISDN lines for instant communication.

"This initiative is of considerable benefit to people with hearing difficulties," Minister Coughlan said today.

"I see this as a way to improve and promote the capacity of people with hearing difficulties to access public services through the use of Information and Communication Technology," the Minister added.

The videophone is located in a private booth in the Information section of the Cork Social Welfare Local Office in Hanover Street.

ENDS - 16th May 2003