



**Minister Cullen addresses Citizens Information Board – *Information to Advocacy Conference***

**Martin Cullen TD, Minister for Social and Family Affairs** this morning (Friday 12 October 2007) opened the national conference of the Citizens Information Board, held in Tullamore.

The Citizens Information Board, which is funded by the Department of Social and Family Affairs is the national agency responsible for supporting the provision of information, advice and advocacy to the public on the broad range of social and civil services.

The Board is the support agency for the national network of Citizens **Information Services** and the Citizens Information **Phone Service**. The Citizens Information Board also supports the development of advocacy services for individuals, particularly those with a disability.

Addressing the conference theme 'Citizens Information – Information to Advocacy', Minister Cullen praised the work of the Board and its three core areas of work – the website [www.citizensinformation.ie](http://www.citizensinformation.ie); the Citizens Information Phone Service and the network of Citizens Information Services located around the country.



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Minister Cullen said: "The importance of information provision cannot be over emphasised. Like all public representatives, I am very familiar with the fact that people's rights and entitlements can so often stand or fall on the quality of information available to them and on the level of access to information. The objective of the information provider is to bridge the gap between the citizen in need and the wide variety of services that are available to meet those needs".

He added: "Information services which can direct individuals and particularly those who are marginalised, to their rights and entitlements are essential. Your approach to reaching out to particular groups through presentations and outreach into day centres, hospitals and prisons for example, helps to ensure access to information. It is not just about providing basic information, very often it is about interpreting the information for the customer, and assisting them to act on the information they have received".

In relation to the Citizens Information Board advocacy service and its plans for further expansion of the service, the Minister said: "While advocacy support has always been provided by Citizens Information Services, the further development of advocacy services is to be welcomed, as this is an added value you can bring to the information experience for those who need it. I am very glad to see that this advocacy capacity is being strengthened in Citizens Information Services through the support of Advocacy Resource Officers and I understand that by the end of 2007, nine such projects will be in operation across 24 services. Advocates are being recruited and trained, and organisations are working in partnership to maximise resources and build on the expertise available to ensure people, particularly those with disabilities, are supported to give voice to their needs. I know we have some way yet to go, however with the planned establishment of a Personal Advocacy Service, provided for under the Citizens



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Information Act, 2007, there will be a more comprehensive advocacy service available across the country for people with disabilities”.

“Collectively”, said the Minister, “we play a pivotal role in providing supports for people with disabilities who may not be in a position to provide for themselves. In my Department, the number of recipients of illness, disability and caring supports at the end of December 2006 were 246,576 and the expenditure was €2.4bn”.

Minister Cullen concluded: “We have a responsibility, in conjunction with other agencies, to give people the opportunities and encouragement that they need, whether it is to take up employment, education or training opportunities or to support them with their caring responsibilities. I am committed to ensuring that no individual's talent or contribution is overlooked, and to helping our citizens to achieve their full potential, both in terms of participation in the labour market and in wider society”.

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