



Ministers Doherty and McGrath launch WALK REAL Ability Project for young people with disabilities

Thursday, 31st January, 2019: The Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Regina Doherty, T.D., and Minister of State with special responsibility for Disabilities, Finian McGrath, T.D., today officially launched the WALK REAL Ability Project for WALK, the Walkinstown Association for People with an Intellectual Disability.

The WALK REAL Ability Project – **Reaching Employment Ambitions in Life** - is one of 27 projects funded under the 'Ability Programme' that focuses on bringing young people (aged 15 to 29 years) with disabilities closer to the labour market. It supports these young people who can and want to work to develop their vocational and employability skills to get a job.

Through the WALK REAL Ability Project, 75 young people with intellectual disabilities and autism will get valuable work experience and training in the environment of the Supported Employment model. The "Supported Employment model" is delivered by professional Job Coaches where participants develop their own vocational profiles and personal progression plans before taking up a series of appropriate work experience placements of their choosing. Engagement with local employers will help participants find work and avail of other opportunities. It also supports employers in building their capacity to become more proactive in employing people with disabilities.

Speaking at today's launch, Minister Doherty said:

“I am delighted to support the WALK REAL Ability project which promotes the employability of young people with intellectual disabilities, Autism and complex needs. A project like this supports young adults who are not in employment, education or training and helps them to progress towards employment in the open labour market by delivering fantastic real world-of-work vocational training and work experiences. I understand that, over the course of the project, up to 75 young adults will be supported through person-centred engagement to build the skills and confidence they need to become career ready. For these 75 young people WALK will tap into their potential and give them the confidence and experience to realise their work ambitions.”

In 2018, Ministers Doherty and McGrath secured Government funding of €16 million for 27 projects to deliver the 'Ability' pre-activation Programme for young people with disabilities. It is expected that this Programme will support over 2,600 people. The Programme is jointly

funded under the EUs ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) Operational Programme, 2014-2020 (PEIL, 2014–20) and the Irish Exchequer.

The focus of the 'Ability' Programme is on projects aimed at young people with disabilities and is designed to assist in their transition from school to further education, training and employment. The Programme will promote employment prospects and meaningful social roles for young people with disabilities and in particular, young people who are distant from the labour market, using a range of person-centered supports.

Minister McGrath commented:

“Helping people with disabilities to enter the labour market has huge benefits for everyone involved. It is an opportunity to tap into the substantial talent pool available within the cohort of people with disabilities, and there are many positive effects from having a more diverse and cohesive workforce. By doing so we can ensure that our common goal of supporting more people with disabilities into employment is achieved. I would like to thank Joe Mason, CEO of WALK and Gráinne Kelliher, CEO of Airfield who, together with their teams have developed this innovative project to create real and meaningful pathways for the young people who participate in the WALK project.”

The WALK REAL project was launched at Airfield Estate, Dundrum. As a Social Enterprise, it provides employment and placement opportunities for people who are distant from the labour market, including people with disabilities. Through trading activities in hospitality, catering, events, agriculture, horticulture, education, training, tourism and administration, Airfield Estate has engaged with young people with disabilities from primary school through to adults with mental health challenges.

Ends.

Note for Editors

“Ability” is the pre-activation programme for young people with disabilities. The funding for this programme will amount to around €16 million over a three year period and is being provided jointly under the EUs ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) Operational Programme, 2014-2020 (PEIL, 2014–20) and the Irish Exchequer. The programme will support over 2,600 young people with disabilities aged between 15 – 29 years of age.

Programme objectives

- To bring young people with disabilities who are not work-ready closer to the labour market using a range of person-centred supports.
- To assist young people with disabilities to develop life-skills required to participate in education, training and employment.
- To assist young people with disabilities at key transition points between education, training and employment.
- To support young people with disabilities who are not in education, employment or training to access and participate in education, training and employment.

- To build the capacity of mainstream employment services, education and training providers to support the progression of young people with disabilities.
- To build the capacity of employers to recruit and retain young people with disabilities within their workforce.

The aim of the programme is to help bring young people with disabilities who are not work-ready closer to the labour market through engagement in training and personal development activities, which would be followed by an incremental exposure to work. The programme is being delivered by 27 community and voluntary groups from around the country.



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