



Report on Access Awareness Initiatives in the Town of Newcastle West

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

An inaccessible built environment affects all members of society. However, for people with disabilities, the barriers to equal participation in society due to an inaccessible environment are much greater.

On a daily basis, people with disabilities are faced with barriers, which effectively exclude them from participating as equal citizens. Many of these barriers relate to the accessibility of their built environment. The difficulties experienced by people with disabilities, as well as older people, in accessing services and facilities, could also be a factor in them feeling isolated and socially excluded.

National Disability Strategy

The National Disability Strategy (NDS) was launched in September 2004 and proposes a number of measures that will have significant impact on built environment accessibility. The NDS comprises legislative proposals, including a Disability Bill, and six Outline Sectoral Plans which have been produced by individual Government departments.

The Outline Sectoral Plan published by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG), will also have an impact on built environment accessibility. One of the key objectives of the DEHLG plan is to promote universal access to public spaces, buildings and services owned and operated by local authorities.

Limerick County Council made a submission in 2005 to the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government under the National Disability Strategy - Local Government Outline Sectoral Plan. The objectives of this submission is very much in keeping with Limerick County Council adopted the Barcelona Declaration in April 2002. The submission was made under the headings of:

- ❑ Newcastle West as a Pilot Town
- ❑ Training in Disability Awareness
- ❑ Provision of Information in accessible format: WEB Accessibility Proposal
- ❑ Accessibility Audits

Barcelona Declaration

The Barcelona Declaration is a manifesto that aims to create an inclusive society. It contains specific goals, which relate to all aspects of our lives, including social, environmental and economic issues. The aim of the Declaration is to encourage local government to make provision for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the community in which it represents. Limerick County Council adopted the Barcelona Declaration in April 2002.

Adopting the Barcelona Declaration obliges Local Authorities to:

1. Promotion

Promote disability awareness and ensure the rights of people with disabilities to be different and their right to receive personal attention

2. Policies and Measures

Develop policies and an equality/disability proof decision-making process

3. Consultative process

Develop a consultative process

4. Inclusion and accessibility

Provide people with disabilities access to the social and physical environments as well as services

5. Training

Provide training programmes dealing with equality/disability issues

6. Analysis and Assessment

Develop monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment procedures for actions, projects and policies regarding equality/disability issues.

Newcastle West as a Pilot Town (Access 4 All)

Accessibility to the built environment affects a large number of people within society. It is accepted throughout the European Union that at any one time 15-20% of the population will have a significant level of disability of a temporary or permanent nature.

Limerick County Council nominated Newcastle West as a pilot town for the introduction of measures to improve access for people with a disability. Limerick County Council setup a working group (Access 4 All) to develop and monitor progress, the group is made up of the following organisations.

- ❑ Working Towards Access
- ❑ Brother's of Charity, Newcastle West
- ❑ Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI)
- ❑ Irish Wheelchair Association
- ❑ National Association for Deaf People
- ❑ West Limerick Independent Living
- ❑ West Limerick Resources
- ❑ Limerick County Council
- ❑ National Council for the Blind
- ❑ Newcastle West Senior Citizen's Group
- ❑ Newcastle West & District Chamber of Commerce
- ❑ Newcastle West Community Council
- ❑ People with Disabilities, Ireland (PwDI)
- ❑ Rathfredagh Cheshire Home
- ❑ West Limerick Community Development Project

Awareness Projects

In 2005 the Access 4 All group initiated the following awareness projects in the town of Newcastle West.

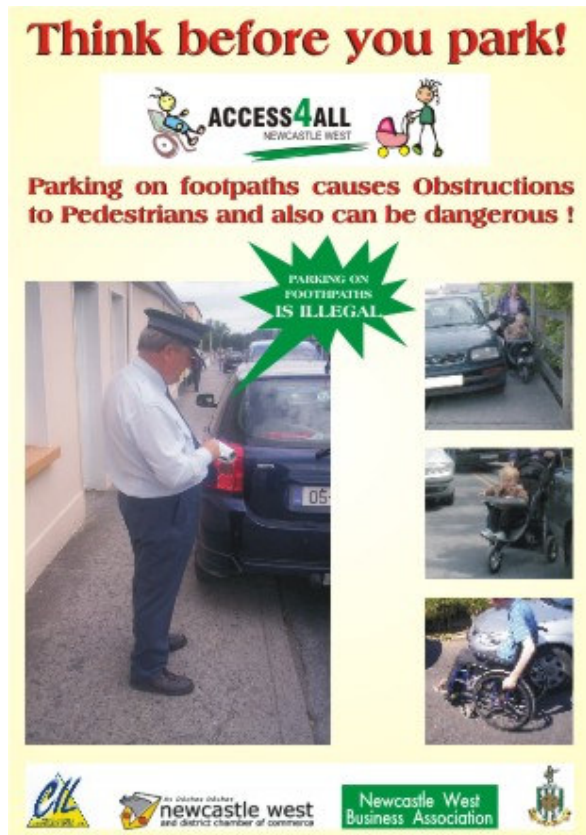
Parking on Footpaths Poster Campaign

The parking on footpaths poster campaign was the first project initiated by the Access 4 All group. The poster campaign was designed to prevent people parking their vehicles on footpaths, which is a safety hazard to others and illegal.

Parents with buggies and people who use wheelchairs experience the most difficulty, when a car is parked on the footpath, pedestrians may be forced onto the road in order to move around the vehicle blocking their access to the pathway.

The poster informs people that they are breaking the law if they park on footpaths and this offence poses a real danger to residents, particularly for children and the elderly, as well as people with a disability or vision impairment.

1. Parking on Footpaths Poster





Access Awareness leaflets

West Limerick Independent Living in consultation with Limerick County Council and a number of disability organisations designed an Access Awareness Information Leaflets. The leaflets featured drawing designed by Newbridge Access group to illustrate some of the barriers experience by people with physical and sensory disabilities when accessing shops, restaurants and pubs etc.

Access For All Information Leaflet. Side 1

 <p>A guide to creating a barrier-free built environment for people with Physical or Sensory disabilities</p> 	  <p>When I want to buy some toothpaste to emphasize my smile, it's hard to get to it, with such clutter in the aisle.</p> <p>  Tel: (01) 6080400 Website: www.nda.ie  Tel: (069) 77320 Website: www.limerickccl.com  Tel: (061) 496000 Website: www.limerickcoops.ie  Tel: (069) 61477 Website: www.pwdi.ie </p>	 <p>AWARENESS</p> <p>Awareness is the first step to affecting change and building a more inclusive community for all citizens. Such change should be viewed as an investment, making a premises accessible, will make life easier for many others e.g. older people, a person pushing a buggy, someone carrying heavy loads.</p>  <p>When parking your car, please take care, I may need to get by in my chair.</p> <p><small>Special acknowledgment to the Downbridge Access Group & Clipse Network PDI for the use of their cartoon & caption. Camera by Television Council. Captions by Irene Kelly.</small></p>
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Access For All Information Leaflet. Side 2

<p>ALL ORGANISATIONS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY</p> <p>To ensure that their premises are accessible to people with a disability. Often small changes can improve access considerably. Making premises accessible is good for business. Changes made to accommodate people with a disability will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Make all customers feel valued + Enhance your public image + Increase your customer base by making your business accessible to a wider market. <p>Access: is not just about physical features such as ramps and toilets but also about other issues such as ensuring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Your information is in large print and other formats. + There are no obstructions in routes or doorways. + Signs are clear and in contrast to their background. + Lighting and surfaces are not reflective and confusing. + Staff understand how to communicate effectively. + Induction loops and other communication systems are installed and working properly. + Accessible transport and parking are available nearby. 	<p>GENERAL REQUIREMENTS</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Blind or Partially Sighted</th> <th>Deaf or Hard of Hearing</th> <th>Wheelchair Users</th> <th>Ambulant Disability (Reduced mobility)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Stable environment avoid movable objects and low overhead obstacles</td> <td>Clear signposting</td> <td>Alternative To steps (ramps & lifts)</td> <td>Slope as well as ramps</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Texture contrasts underfoot to aid location and warn of hazards</td> <td>Induction loops for users of hearing aids.</td> <td>Space to manoeuvre a wheelchair and accessible controls.</td> <td>Ample seating</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Good lighting and colour contrasts to aid partially sighted people</td> <td></td> <td>Smooth, non-slip surfaces</td> <td>Easily gripped handrails</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td>Reserved car parking close to the facility served.</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Blind or Partially Sighted	Deaf or Hard of Hearing	Wheelchair Users	Ambulant Disability (Reduced mobility)	Stable environment avoid movable objects and low overhead obstacles	Clear signposting	Alternative To steps (ramps & lifts)	Slope as well as ramps	Texture contrasts underfoot to aid location and warn of hazards	Induction loops for users of hearing aids.	Space to manoeuvre a wheelchair and accessible controls.	Ample seating	Good lighting and colour contrasts to aid partially sighted people		Smooth, non-slip surfaces	Easily gripped handrails			Reserved car parking close to the facility served.		 <p>The percentage of people with disabilities in Newcastle West town is just over 10% of the population and in the West Limerick area, there are almost 3,000 people with disabilities.</p> <p>In many cases, a single step prohibits entry by a person with a disability and denies, him/her access to services enjoyed by the rest of the community. A decision to visit the doctor, pharmacist, dentist, hairdresser, etc is preceded by the question, will I be able to get in?</p> <p>Too often the answer is No!</p>  <p>It looks so simple, it's only a door. But there's a six inch step up to the door.</p>
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Feedback

Two students on work experience with West Limerick Independent Living, distribute the leaflets and also compiled a questionnaire; the primary objective of the questionnaire was to obtain feedback from the general public on the value of the awareness initiatives.

Findings of Questionnaire:

- Of the premises visited 5 of the 11 fast-food/restaurants were partially accessible.
- 4 of the 25 bars were accessible.
- 1 night club was accessible.
- Most fashion, shoe, jewellery, butchers and grocery shops were partially accessible.

Partially Accessible: The level of access, including usability & safety accommodates some people with disabilities

Feedback:

- All business surveyed thought that distributing these leaflets was a good idea.
- From interviewing the business owners it was apparent that when they think about accessibility it is normally only people that use wheelchairs that they think about.
- None of those interviewed mentioned people with sensory disabilities.
- Business owners referred a lot to entry into the premises but never mentioned accessibility within the premises itself.
- While some of the shops were accessible to get into, when inside the layout was very cluttered and the aisles in the shop very narrow.
- The fact that most of the bars and restaurants are inaccessible to people with disabilities means that there is a poor social life available to those with disabilities in the town of Newcastle West.
- Some business owners contradicted themselves saying on one hand accessibility to businesses should be compulsory but on the other hand they said they weren't sure if they would consider accessibility when carrying out renovations.
- One particular business owner said that she couldn't complete the questionnaire because her premises were totally inaccessible, she explained that she is only renting the premises and that it wouldn't be economically viable to make the premises accessible.
- She said there is no grant available to make the premises accessible.
- Many business owners complained about inaccessible and narrow footpaths in the town.

- Those business owners with inaccessible premises showed embarrassment when filling up the questionnaires.
- This was a positive outcome as they said they would consider people with disabilities more when making future renovations.

Recommendations

The distributing of access information leaflets definitely caused business owners in Newcastle West to reflect on the accessibility of their premises to people with disabilities. Awareness regarding access is an ongoing issue, these initiatives need to be repeated on an ongoing basis to keep the issue in the public domain.

The issue around the enforcement of parking regulations outside of the town center needs to be addressed by the relevant authorities i.e. Gardaí and County Council. Parking on footpaths and double parking is a problem in a number of areas throughout the town.

The current fine for illegal parking is not a sufficient penalty or deterrent and needs to be increased significantly to be a real deterrent for people who park illegally.

A media campaign should be developed focusing on increased levels of public awareness.

Conclusion

The right to access the built environment is essential for the realisation of a society based upon equal rights. However, inadequate or restricted access to the built environment remains a significant barrier, which restricts the equal participation of people with disabilities in Irish society, much work remains.