



**Inclusion Ireland**

The National Association for People  
with an Intellectual Disability.

# Strategic Plan 2023-2026

[InclusionIreland.ie](https://www.inclusionireland.ie)













You belong here,  
and are capable of shaping  
the world around you.

If you are ever in doubt,  
consider the way  
the rain can move  
mountains  
over time  
because it is so  
relentlessly insistent  
of its place

**Rachel H.**



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# CEO Statement

## **I am proud to welcome you to Inclusion Ireland's Strategic Plan 2023-2026.**

To create this strategy we consulted with people with intellectual disabilities, their families and supporters.

We listened to what is important to you in your life and we put all of our ideas together into this plan.

A common story we heard through all our consultations was about people wanting to "belong".

For many years in Ireland, people with intellectual disabilities have struggled to find their place, their community, their sense of belonging. Their families fought for that space alongside their son, daughter, brother or sister, and sometimes that struggle lasted for a lifetime.

Society often chooses to separate and "other" when we could choose to value people with intellectual disabilities as citizens, neighbours, colleagues, friends.

We stand on the shoulders of giants who went before us, people who fought long and hard for the ratification of the UNCRPD, for supporting people to move out of institutions, for acceptance, equality and community for people with intellectual disabilities.

Our new strategy is a hope for a different future. It is about valuing people for who they are, it's about respecting our differences and about understanding that people can belong when the barriers our society has created are removed .

We recognise that inclusion and belonging is a pathway; sometimes it twists and turns, sometimes we change or take routes we never thought possible, sometimes it is difficult and challenging and can feel hard or impossible. It is different for every person.

We know Ireland will be a better place when real inclusion happens, and we won't stop until all our citizens are valued equally and belong , exactly as they are and exactly how they want to live.

**Derval McDonagh**  
**CEO Inclusion Ireland**



# Chairperson's Message

## **I would like to welcome you to the new Inclusion Ireland Strategic Plan 2023-2026.**

On behalf of the board, I would like to thank our members, our partners and our funders for their support over the course of the last strategy.

2019-2022 was a challenging time as we faced Covid-19 together. People with intellectual disabilities and their families needed connection, information and support more than ever.

As we begin to emerge from the worst of those days, it is important to reflect on what is important and how, as an organisation, we can support people to live connected lives as equal citizens.


We know there are many challenges right now. There are never enough resources and sometimes the resources that are available do not support people in ways that uphold people's rights and support people as valued citizens. At Inclusion Ireland we need to call this out whenever and wherever we see this, we need to publicly demand better for people with intellectual disabilities and their loved ones. We will do this by campaigning for change around issues that are important to you, supporting people to participate in society and making sure that information is accessible and available so people can understand their rights.

I am proud to be a chairperson of a committed and passionate board. We have made great strides over the last three years in improving our governance, but we know this is a journey and we learn all the time how to have a better, more strategic and more inclusive board. One third of our board have a lived experience of intellectual disability. This dynamic helps our organisation to stay focused on what really matters; people's lives.

We look forward to working with you over the next three years, together we can make a difference in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

**Ashley Sands**  
**Chairperson Inclusion Ireland**



A photograph of a woman with short, vibrant pink hair, identified as Sadbh Feehan, speaking into a black handheld microphone. She is wearing a light-colored, button-down shirt over a dark floral dress. A name tag is pinned to her shirt. She is gesturing with her left hand towards the right side of the frame. In the background, a man with grey hair is partially visible, looking towards the speaker. The setting appears to be an indoor event space with a dark curtain in the background.

Sadbh Feehan speaking at Inclusion  
Ireland's 'My Life, My Choice' event



# About Inclusion Ireland

**Inclusion Ireland has been working as part of the disability rights movement in Ireland for over 60 years as a “civil society” organisation. Inclusion Ireland was established at a time where advocacy in Ireland was only getting started.**

From the beginning, the organisation connected people with intellectual disabilities and their families to networks of support, supported people through giving information and worked alongside people with intellectual disabilities and their families for their right to live as equal citizens.

## What we do

- We are a campaigning organisation; we work for changes in laws and policy.
- We provide an accessible information and signposting service for people with intellectual disabilities and family members. This means when people call or email us, look at our website or come to our talks, we help them with information about their rights.
- We support other organisations to become more accessible and inclusive of people with intellectual disabilities.
- We hold the state to account for its progress with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).
- We support people with intellectual disabilities to become self-advocates.
- We are at the table wherever people talk about the rights of people with intellectual disabilities and work to influence thinking.



Roundtable discussions at our seminar 'Communication as a human right: Having your voice heard through Alternative and Augmentative Communication'



Brian Hayes speaking at 'The Pathway to Inclusive Education'

## What you should expect from us

- We support the full inclusion of children and adults with intellectual disabilities. We work towards fully inclusive schools, communities and workplaces.
- We want people with higher support needs who may be non-speaking, to have a voice in all of our work. We will find ways to make sure this happens.
- We want to change the language and story around “care” and “independence”. We know that no person exists on their own; we all need support; some people need a little bit of support, others need a lot of support and this can change over time for each person.
- The UNCRPD and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) are at the heart of everything we do and we build all of our campaigns around human rights.
- We understand that as humans we all want connection, belonging, and community in our own way.
- We are “builders not bashers”. Our job is to point out the problems and the inequalities but we also focus on building better systems and supports for people. We want to be a part of the solution and will work with government, state agencies and others to make change happen.



**Family Member**

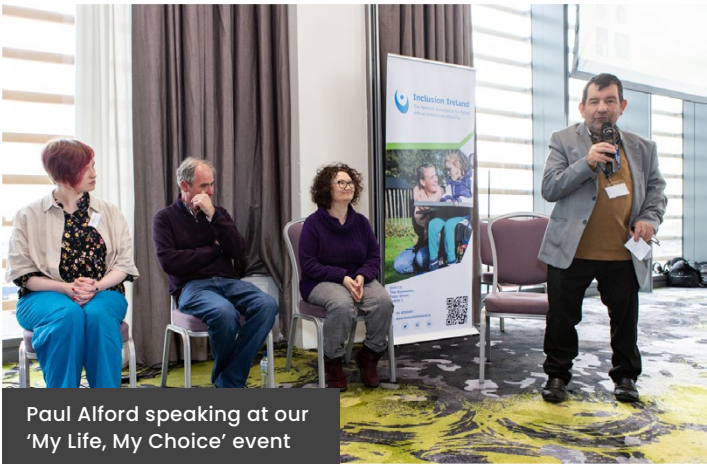
**I want people with disabilities to have the same opportunities choices as their siblings.**



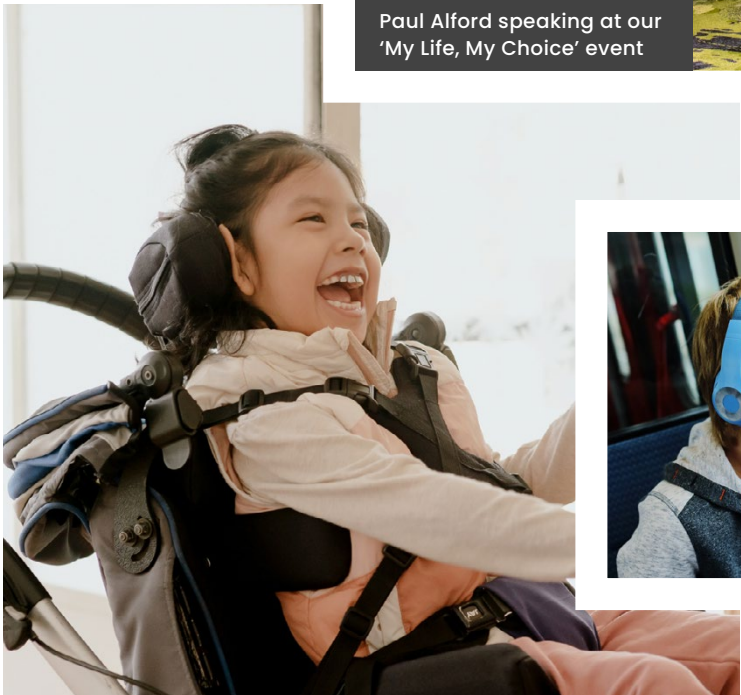
Eileen Dunne speaking at our 'My Life, My Choice' event







Paul Alford speaking at our 'My Life, My Choice' event



- We support people moving out of institutions.

We know that moving out of institutions is not just about the size of the building someone lives in, it is much more about how people have choice and control about where they live, who they live with and how they live.

- We don't accept it is enough to invite someone to sit on a committee or to give a talk. Real inclusion is about changing how we do things so that everyone has an equal seat at the table.
- Working together in solidarity with people who share our values is really important to us.

We understand, value and support the work of Disabled Persons Organisations; we promise to work in partnership with them whenever and wherever we can.

- We try to walk the walk! One third of our board members have a lived experience of intellectual disability.

We are constantly trying to be more inclusive in everything that we do, but we understand it is a journey and we will continue to learn from each other every day.

- We are a learning organisation. We value our team by supporting them to learn, grow and develop new skills.



**Tomás Murphy, member  
of the Board of Directors  
of Inclusion Ireland and  
Self Advocate.**

**Employment is a big problem. We  
need to promote inclusive boards,  
we need to talk about this a bit more.  
UNCRPD should be kept at the top  
of the agenda. If we don't talk about  
that, it will go away.**

# Vision, Purpose & Values

## Our Vision

Our vision is an inclusive Ireland where people with an intellectual disability are supported to live and participate as an equal member within the community.

## Our Purpose

We work towards the full inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities by supporting people to have their voices heard and advocating for rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

## Our Values



### Respect

Respect is about valuing the life of every person with an intellectual disability. It is also about respecting different people's opinions and ways of living.



### Inclusion

Inclusion is about people with intellectual disabilities taking part in all parts of Irish life. We believe that it's a better world when we are all in it together. We don't think that people with intellectual disabilities should be separate.



### Equality

Equality is about a fairer society where disabled people have equal rights. We work towards a time when every person with an intellectual disability is treated fairly and has the same rights as every other citizen.



### Voice

Voice is about people with an intellectual disability having their say and being heard in Irish society. This includes people who communicate in different ways.



### Choice

Choice is about supporting and respecting people with an intellectual disability to live lives that they want to live, with the support they need.



## Our Process

**We wanted to make sure that the people we connect with had a chance to be a part of our new strategy.**

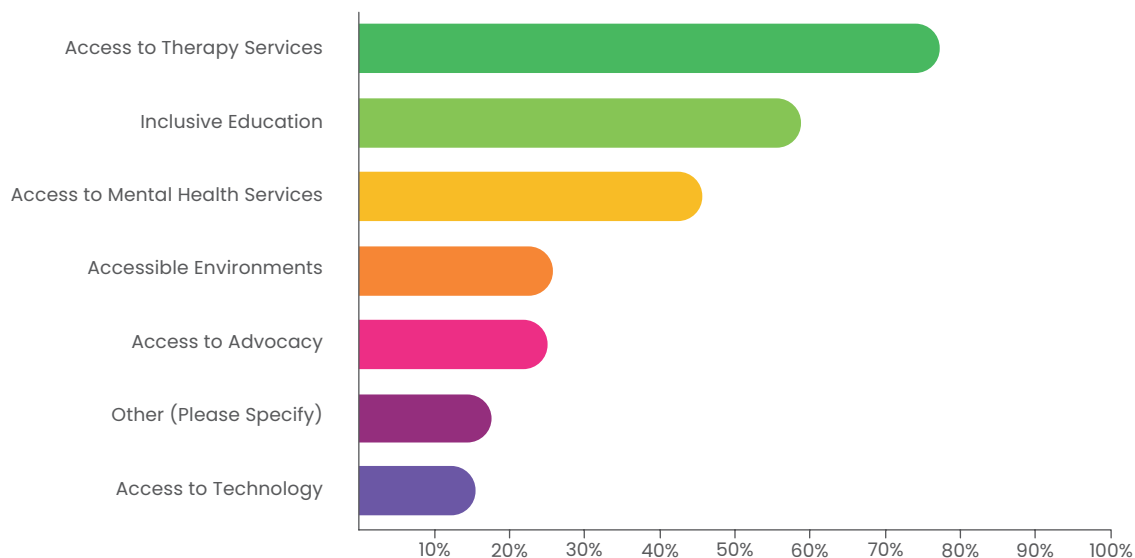
**We did this in a few different ways:**

- We spoke to over 150 people with intellectual disabilities in person
- We sent a survey to our members and everyone on our mailing list
- We held online focus groups
- We got feedback from our funders and other organisations we work closely with

**The top three issues facing children with intellectual disabilities in order:**

- Access to therapy services
- Inclusive education
- Access to mental health services

Other issues included access to advocacy services and supports, access to high quality information and accessible environments.

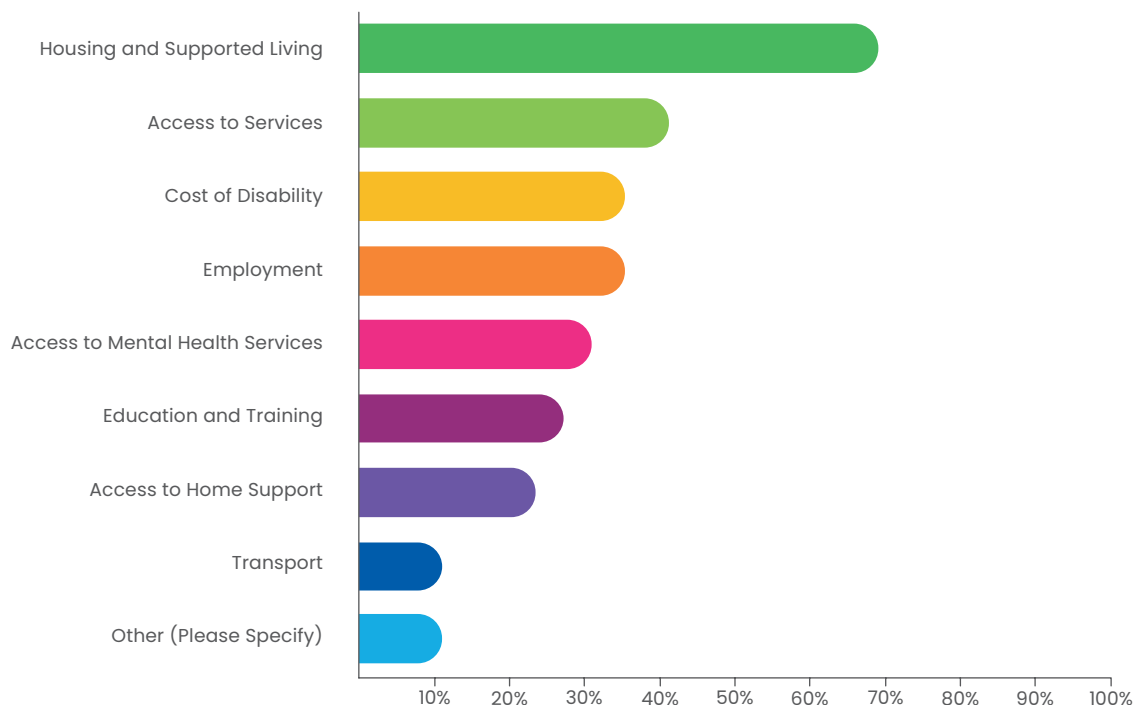


**Parent**

**People with intellectual disabilities should be listened to and respected when it comes to what their real needs are and not just tokenism.**

**The top three issues facing adults with intellectual disabilities:**

- Housing and supported living
- Access to services (including mental health and health and well-being supports)
- Cost of disability
- Employment



**Una Coates, Self Advocate**

**Its important for everyone to have access to services. I see my friends they don't get out much to attend activities in services.**

“

Family Member

Everything has to be pleaded for, argued for, waited for. Whether it's education services, adult services, mental health services, supported living. Every stage is a struggle.



Graphic Harvester Eimear McNally at 'The Pathway to Inclusive Education'



Attendees at our seminar 'Communication as a human right: Having your voice heard through Alternative and Augmentative Communication'



# Our Environment

## Things we need to look out for and be aware of between 2023-2026

### Technology

The development of new technologies, including assistive technologies, will support people with intellectual disabilities to access their rights.

This is really exciting and there are many possibilities to make things better for people.

We also know that some technologies are not accessible and we need to make sure that people with intellectual disabilities can be supported to stay up to date in our digital age as well as have access to the technology people need to lead full and inclusive lives.

### Policy and Laws

In the 3 years of the strategy there may be some important changes in our laws. The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004) will be reviewed in 2023 and this will bring changes in education.

We will call on the Government to also review the Disability Act 2005.

The Assisted Decision Making Capacity Act 2015 has just been signed into law. There will be a lot of work on this in the next 3 years and it will be one of the most important laws for people with intellectual disabilities in Ireland.

The implementation plan for the new Housing Strategy for disabled people will start. Inclusion Ireland will hold the state to account for how it delivers on this and also push for policy around supported community living for people with intellectual disabilities.

### Economics or money

When we wrote this strategy, Ireland was facing significant challenges around the cost of living crisis. This will have an impact on people with intellectual disabilities and their families. It may also have an impact on all organisations, including Inclusion Ireland in recruiting and retaining staff and having enough money to continue our work.

Ireland is also facing a housing crisis. People with intellectual disabilities have faced this crisis for a long time. It will be a challenge for people to get their own home with the supports they need to live there. This will need to be a priority for us at Inclusion Ireland.

### **Cost of Disability**

For the first time in 2021, the Irish Government agreed that there are extra costs to having a disability. This means that there will need to be laws, policies and supports around this cost into the future. It will be important for Inclusion Ireland to work on this

### **Climate**

All organisations including Inclusion Ireland need to be serious about our environmental impact. We need to think about how we can be a green organisation and work with companies that are good for our environment.

### **Sustainability: keeping our organisation going**

We need to make sure that our organisation can keep going for a long time. This means we need to think about ways of making sure we have enough money from different places to do our job and to continue to support our team into the future.

We are proud of our governance and the way we run Inclusion Ireland. We have a committed board of directors and we follow and are fully compliant with the Charity Regulator Code. This means that the public can trust we are doing the right things with our money and our time. We will continue to improve our governance and make sure we are the best organisation we can be.



Roundtable discussions at our seminar 'Communication as a human right: Having your voice heard through Alternative and Augmentative Communication'



## Goal 1

**We are a campaigning organisation working for real change in people's lives**



## Goal 2

**We support people with intellectual disabilities to be valued and effectively participate in society**



## Goal 3

**We are leaders in accessible information and communication**





# Strategic Goals

**This section highlights our three key strategic goals between 2023-2026.**

**We will share why these goals are important, what we will do to make the goals real and how we will know if we have had impact and success.**

## Goal 1

**We are a campaigning organisation working for real change in people's lives.**

### Why this goal?

We will be a successful campaigning organisation that promotes change in society so that people with intellectual disabilities are treated as equal, valued citizens.

We will lead a movement for change that everyone believes in and can take part in.

Our campaigning will help everyone to understand how important these changes are for the lives of people with an intellectual disability.

### Our Goals

**What we will do over the next three years.**

**a**

We will do inclusive research to collect data and insights about the lived experience of people with an intellectual disability

Our campaigns will be based on this research and in priority action areas identified by people with an intellectual disability and their families in Ireland.

**b**

We will build our membership over the next three years so that we can grow our movement for change.

**c**

We will focus on a number of campaigns over the next three years; these include:

- Housing and community living (including transport)
- Inclusive Education
- Children's advocacy
- Cost of disability
- Access to services
- Employment

### Our Impact

**How will we know if we achieved our goals?**

We will publish research reports which highlight the issues facing people with intellectual disabilities. These reports will be used by ourselves, other organisations and politicians to fight for change.

We will have more members and they will be involved in our campaigns locally and nationally. More of our members will have a lived experience of intellectual disability.

We will see our campaign asks coming true, for example, changes in policy, changes in legislation, implementation plans in action and improvements in the lives of people with an intellectual disability.

**d**

We will build partnerships and alliances through our campaign work. We know we can't do this alone.

Inclusion Ireland will be recognised as an organisation that works with others to achieve change. We will work with named partner organisations for many of our campaigns.

**e**

We will source more funding to achieve our campaign goals.

We will access new funding to help us build our membership and grow our research department.



People speaking at our seminar 'Communication as a human right: Having your voice heard through Alternative and Augmentative Communication'

# Our Campaigns

## Housing and Supported Living for all



## Access to Services and Supports



## Employment



## Inclusive Education



## Cost of Disability





## Goal 2

**We support people with intellectual disabilities to be valued and effectively participate in society.**

### Why this goal?

People with an intellectual disability are amongst one of the most excluded and invisible groups in Ireland, often not seen or valued by society.

It is important that people can realise their right to take their place as equals in society.

For too long the participation of people with intellectual disabilities has been tokenistic- we want to make sure it is done effectively in a way that leads to real change.

We take our responsibilities seriously as an organisation and want to “walk the walk”. We commit to constantly learning and improving on how accessible and inclusive we are.

The Public Sector Duty clearly outlines the state’s obligations to better support the participation and inclusion of disabled people.

### Our Goals

**What we will do over the next three years.**

**a**

We will develop accessible training and resources that support people with intellectual disabilities to build skills to become self advocates and play a role in decisions which affect them. We know that some people will need ongoing support to be self advocates.

**b**

We will work with the HSE and service providers to share resources and promote models of good practice that strengthen the voice of people with an intellectual disability.

**c**

Make sure that people with intellectual disabilities play a central role in the review of Ireland by the UNCRPD Committee.

**d**

Self-advocates will be at the front of campaigns for change.

### Our Impact

**How will we know if we achieved our goals?**

The training and resources that we develop will be widely adopted and used. Documentation and publication of practical projects and case studies of effective participation within services and beyond.

There will be an increase in the number of active members of Inclusion Ireland who have an intellectual disability

People’s voices and experience will be reflected in the concluding observations of the UNCRPD committee about Ireland.

People with intellectual disabilities will be more visible in the media and in our campaign work. We will employ spokespeople who have a lived experience of intellectual disability.

**e**

Support people with intellectual disabilities to join and take part in committees where decisions are made with whatever accommodations they need.

People with intellectual disabilities will have an equal place at planning and decision-making tables, with the supports they need to have their voice heard. This includes the recognition of Alternative and Augmentative communication and the participation of people who are non speaking or who have higher support needs.

**f**

Support people to have valued roles in society and participate fully in communities in whatever way they choose.

We will work towards a society that recognises the value of people with intellectual disabilities. More people with an intellectual disability will be employed in meaningful, paid jobs in both the public and private sector. Inclusion Ireland will employ more people with intellectual disabilities to support our work.

**g**

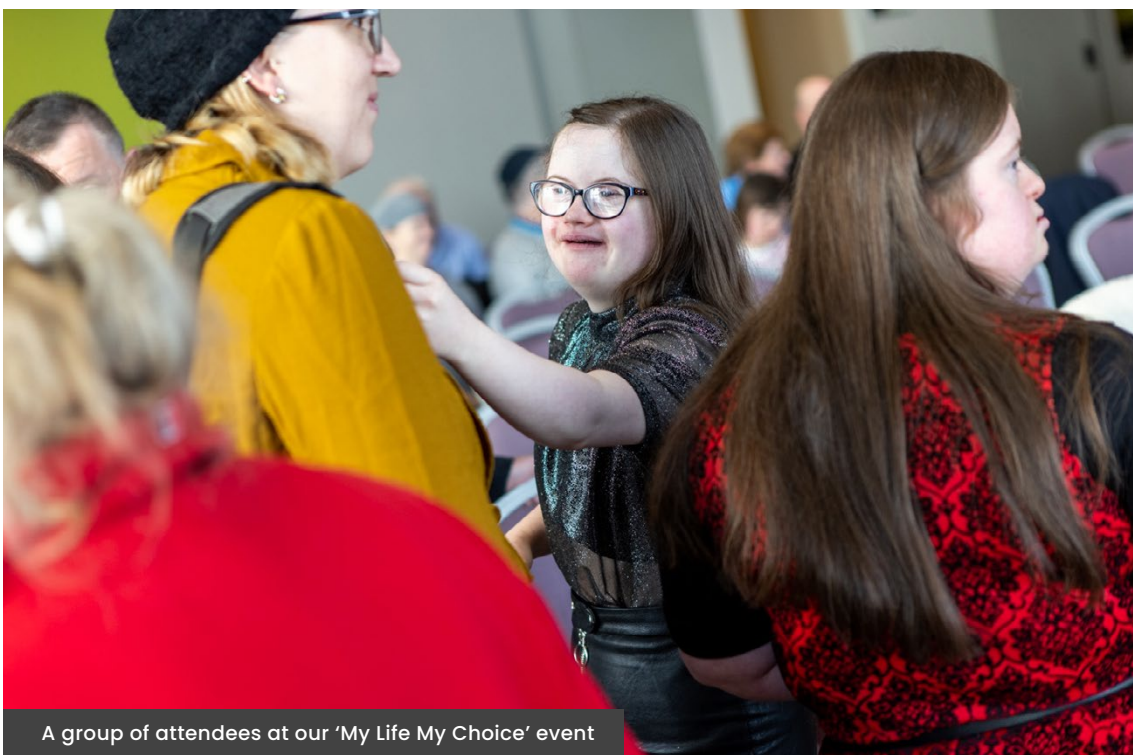
Support organisations to develop inclusive boards and workplaces. We will support culture change in services towards rights based supports where people are valued as equal citizens.

We will name where change needs to happen in services through feedback and reports. More organisations who support people with intellectual disabilities will have inclusive boards. We will be an inclusive organisation where our team can thrive and flourish.

**h**

Participation has to start in the early years. We will advocate for inclusive schools and the participation of children.

We will lead an "inclusive education alliance" working towards the full inclusion of children in their local schools. The voice of the child with an intellectual disability will be heard. We will campaign for a children's advocacy service.



A group of attendees at our 'My Life My Choice' event

## Goal 3

### We are leaders in accessible information and communication.

#### Why?

Information is an important tool for change and having control over your life. You can demand your rights if you understand them.

Having information that you can understand is a way of you being respected, belonging and being a part of the community.

We want a world where information is always available in accessible formats, that it is second nature and typical for people make information in this way.

We want people to understand how important accessible information is for people with intellectual disabilities, especially those with higher support needs.

We want people to know that accessible information is a way of working. It is not as simple as making an easy-to-read document, it is how people are supported to understand information and use it to access a good life, their rights and their community.

#### Our Goals

##### What we will do over the next three years.

**a**

We will set up our team so that we can focus on accessible information as a priority. All information we create will be in accessible formats including Easy to Read and Video. We will make sure our process is inclusive by involving people with intellectual disabilities in the creation of information.

**b**

We will identify ways to reach people who are in more remote areas of Ireland and who might not have access to technology.

**c**

We will support other organisations and members to make accessible information for people with disabilities. We will influence others around accessible consultations and communication.

#### Our Impact

##### How will we know if we achieved our goals?

The information we provide inside and outside the organisation will be accessible and easy for people with intellectual disabilities to understand. More people will engage with the organisation through our information line, email, website and social media. We will employ more people with intellectual disabilities to support our work around inclusive communication.

We will work locally with people in communities across Ireland to make sure that people can be heard. We will set up regional offices to ensure that we are connected to people locally.

All key government departments will understand and use accessible information.

More essential public services will use accessible information.

We will provide training to public services and other organisations around accessible information.

We will strengthen our accessible information team and expand it.



**d**

We will provide high quality information on all aspects of a person's life from childhood to adulthood. We will consult with people with intellectual disabilities and families round information gaps and create useful resources which will meet their needs.

We will look for feedback from people with intellectual disabilities and family members to make sure that we are meeting their information needs.

Our website will have high quality information on relevant topics and we will update information regularly.

More people with intellectual disabilities will call our information line for support.

We will support 100s of people with intellectual disabilities and their families through our talks and information sessions.

**e**

We will make our website accessible to people with intellectual disabilities.

Our website will be more accessible.



**Feedback from  
organisation that took part  
in our Stakeholder Survey**

**I would like to see rights-based supports following the UNCRPD and actioned through a properly funded investment plan that crosses all Government Departments. Without this it is hard to see the change that is needed happening fast enough.**



Minister Anne Rabbitte, Aisling Mason and Derval McDonagh pictured at the opening of our seminar 'Communication as a human right: Having your voice heard through Alternative and Augmentative Communication'

# Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone that helped to inform and shape this strategy. We want this strategy to be meaningful to the lives of people with disabilities and their supporters. We listened to what is important to you in your life and we put all of our ideas together into this plan.

**Thank you to:**

- everyone who took part in our surveys and focus groups
- the Inclusion Ireland Board of Directors
- the Inclusion Ireland Team
- the Inclusion Ireland Self Advocacy Committee



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