

Showcasing disability Best Practice



Disability Award Judging Panel:

Gary McDonald - Irish News

Sheila Fleming-Mitchell - Liberty IT

Roisin Loughran - Tesco NI

Liam Nellis - Intertrade Ireland

Aaron Stewart - Pricewaterhouse Coopers

Patricia Rooney - Tughans Solicitors

Gabrielle Fitzpatrick - Employers for Disability NI

Martin Magennis - Investors in People
(TIME Associates)

Mark Regan - Kingsbridge Private Hospital

Paul Gillen - CIPD (Pinsent Masons LLP)

Winners:

Belfast City Council - Large Employer

Todds Leap - Small Employer

Shortlisted:

Armagh City and District Council

Formula Karting

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Invest NI



Our mission statement

“Employers for Disability NI is a unique, not-for-profit organisation comprising employers and service providers. It supports member organisations in implementing practices to attract and retain disabled employees, customers and service users and promotes good practice generally.”

Employers for Disability NI (EFDNI) was honoured to collaborate with the Irish News Workplace and Employment Awards to mark its 20th anniversary of promoting disability best practice here in Northern Ireland. There was no better way to mark this milestone than by introducing a **Disability Best Practice Employer Award** to celebrate examples of excellent practice by local employers.

EFDNI is indebted to the **Equality Commission for Northern Ireland** and the **Department for Employment and Learning** for joining with us to ensure that the award winners' case studies are shared with other employers in our unique publication, **Showcasing Disability Best Practice**. We hope you enjoy learning about the work undertaken by the award winners and those organisations shortlisted for the award and that this will inspire you to adopt disability best practice in your organisation.

The judging panel assessed the award entries against five criteria:

1. Strategic direction and top level commitment
2. Supporting employees with disabilities
3. Raising awareness of disability
4. Accessibility
5. Links with disability organisations

It was decided that awards would be presented to two organisations to recognise their outstanding commitment to disability best practice and these are the first to be featured.

The judging panel was particularly impressed by Belfast City Council. The council's practices across all the key measurements were exceptional. It has consistently gone well beyond its legislative duties. Its creativity and the attitude of key staff made it an outstanding example of disability best practice.

Award Winner - (Large Employer)

Belfast City Council

The key value, 'Respect each other, be fair, and promote equality and good relations' guides much of Belfast City Council's work. In terms of its disability commitment, the council developed its first Disability Action Plan in advance of legislation and this plan, part of the overarching Equality Scheme, is reviewed, developed and updated annually, overseen by the Disability Access Group. Two diversity champions, one elected member and one chief officer, have been appointed and the chief officer chairs the group.

Various initiatives ensure fairness and equity at all stages of employment, encourage applications from people with disabilities and support them through the recruitment process:

- All jobs are advertised through job-centre offices, online, EFDNI's Jobs Bulletin Board, directly to disability organisations and through numerous careers fairs, including those run by the Belfast Special Schools Business Education Partnership.
- Application forms are provided in alternative formats and there is an accessible 'job kiosk' in the main building where applicants can complete application forms. A helpline is available to anyone with a disability who experiences a difficulty with any aspect of the recruitment process. For some basic grade administrative posts a computer based skills test is undertaken rather than requiring applicants to possess formal qualifications. Also, medical screening only takes place once the successful applicant has been identified.

- Belfast City Council operates a 'guaranteed interview' scheme for people with disabilities which is promoted in the guidance pack documents and through the community outreach programme.

EFDNI : “this is most encouraging, as feedback from many people with disabilities indicates that they are discouraged from applying for jobs as they think they will not be considered for interview”.

In addition it has gone further by creating eight basic grade posts that were specifically 'ring-fenced' for disabled applicants and filled through the Workable (NI) programme.

- All line managers are made aware of the need for reasonable adjustments and a budget is made available. Any adjustments are progressed through consultation with the person and specialists as necessary.
- An area of concern for many disabled employees is how sickness absence is managed and how their disability may impact upon their record. The Belfast City Council absence policy has a clear statement and accompanying process outlining how to deal with disability-related sickness absence; this includes recording disability-related leave separately so that any

decisions taken in respect of a person's attendance are based on sound information. The need for a flexible approach is emphasised.

- Belfast City Council reviews and monitors the experiences and views of all applicants and employees. It recently improved the monitoring form, established internal equality groups following staff surveys, held disability focus groups and will be establishing a disability staff network to continue this work.
- All staff complete Personal Development Plans (PDPs) and the council aims to use these to provide additional support for disabled employees.
- There are numerous examples of how the council has supported employees with disabilities. Ian's experience has been highlighted to illustrate the approach taken by the council and the benefits to both the employer and the disabled employee.

Ian Lawther, Receptionist

“Belfast City Council was recruiting a Receptionist for their training centre through the Government’s former Employment Support Programme.

I attended an interview which was conducted very professionally, was not intimidating, and I was later offered the job.

At the medical I was asked if I needed any reasonable adjustments and the only adjustment I required was removing some of the physical aspects of the job, for example moving furniture when setting up the training rooms.

I developed arthritis in my joints and was finding it hard to sit at a desk for any long periods of time. Following a workplace



Ian Lawther and Loren Osborne

assessment I got a chair that supports my neck and back. I have PDP meetings and regular one-to-one meetings and can discuss my learning and development needs and raise any concerns I may have.

Last year I was nominated for a Making a Difference award for Going the Extra Mile. Knowing that the council recognises my role and contribution gives me a great deal of satisfaction, purpose and hope for the future”.

Belfast City Council also takes steps to ensure employee awareness of diversity and equality. Disability awareness training has been delivered to over 2,500 staff (at the time of writing) and 12 employees have undertaken EFDNI's 'Disability Awareness Train the Trainer' in order to continue disability awareness training to all staff. Employees also attend general equal opportunities and good relations training which include disability and over 50 front-line staff have received sign language training.

In February 2011 the council's Good Relations and Equality and Human Resources training team won an award in the category of 'Workforce Equality and Good Relations Award' awarded by Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA). The judging panel found evidence of best practice and innovation.

Training and disability information large screens have been installed throughout sites where many frontline employees do not have access to a computer. The internal staff magazine and intranet regularly feature council disability initiatives, for example the Therapy Garden at Musgrave Park. Information from EFDNI and other organisations is also disseminated across the organisation.

Belfast City Council carried out in-depth access audits at all locations and physical access improvements are now included in normal facilities management resource planning. Relevant employees have been trained in carrying out assessments in relation to reasonable adjustments. Numerous adjustments have been made, for example, making accessible car parking spaces available for disabled employees at a number of Belfast City Council locations including Belfast city centre where car parking is at a premium.

The council links with many external partners to enhance the employability of people with disabilities in the Belfast area including Action on Hearing Loss, Cedar Foundation, Data Link, Disability Action, Dr B's, New Horizons, NOW Project, Orchardville Society and Stepping Stones.

The work undertaken involves:

- An extensive, well structured and meaningful work experience placement scheme.
- Hosting site visits promoting the council as a potential employer.
- Presentations made to teachers and other organisations.
- Enhancing interview skills via mock interviews - benefitting the individual and boosting staff disability awareness.

The council has a representative on the Special Schools Business Education Partnership Board and on the Orchardville Employer Strategic Group and has promoted its disability policies and practices at events organised by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Orchardville Society.

The council holds disability events for staff and external partners with the focus on disability awareness and best practice. It celebrates the achievements of staff and the council in their aim of having a fair and equitable workplace. In addition the council has launched a comprehensive 'Investment Programme' highlighting the need for proactive employability initiatives for disabled people.

As a leading employer in Northern Ireland the council is setting an excellent example for all organisations, public, private and voluntary. It is a worthy award winner and we hope it will inspire others to develop and implement disability best practice.

Todds Leap stood out to the judging panel for many reasons and is a great example to all employers and service providers, particularly smaller businesses, which are of great importance to the local economy and provide significant job opportunities for people with disabilities.

Award Winner - (Small Employer)

Todds Leap

What started as a weekend enterprise has grown into a full time, seven-day week business, employing more than 60 full time, part time and volunteer staff and serving over 600 customers every week during the busy season. Todds Leap is headed by its founder Ben O'Hanlon who, with his wife and four children, is involved in the running of an outdoor activity centre. The activity centre offers a range of adrenaline pursuits and extreme adventures for customers of all ages and abilities.

Todds Leap has a motto - 'Todds Leap: No limits. No exclusions'. The company believes that with the right mix of training, diversity, technology and awareness, the activity centre runs more efficiently and productively with the inclusion of employees from different backgrounds and abilities.

Training, development and career progression is considered an important element of everyone's job. Weekly meetings take place and annual appraisals set out a development plan for each member of staff for the following year.

Todds Leap has employed 12 members of staff with disabilities over the past seven years. Each disabled employee is treated as an individual.

Through consultation, induction, training and review, employees are able to meet their full potential, build confidence and a sense of achievement. Where needed, expert advice is obtained and adjustments made. For instance, one office worker at times experiences difficulties due to arthritis. When this occurs she works mainly from home.



**'No
Limits.
No
exclusions'**

Another office employee has hearing loss. A headphone was purchased for her and the office layout was altered to improve the flow of sound waves.

Todds Leap invests significantly in staff training and employees have attended disability awareness and 'Tools and Techniques for Disability Inclusion' workshops. The company also specialises in agricultural and land based training and any courses run by the centre are open free of charge to all staff based on their job requirements and personal interests, and adapted to include employees with disabilities.

The following examples show how Todds Leap has worked with people with disabilities to support, train and incorporate them as part of the team.



Cathal McKenna and Ben O'Hanlon

... has autism and some learning difficulties. Through the support of Equality 2000, and then Ulster Supported Employment Ltd (USEL), Cathal was employed three days per week working alongside the caretaker with a variety of roles including grass cutting, gardening and general handyman.

Cathal undertook the Lantra accredited Bush Cutting and Trimmer course and his placement has been converted, with the support of USEL, into a paid job. Ciaran McKenna, Cathal's father, had this to say:

“Cathal likes things to be well ordered, to know exactly what he is doing and finds some social situations challenging. We feared these would be barriers to employment. Todds Leap staff took the time to mentor him and once they appreciated what Cathal was capable of, he was allowed to take on new responsibilities – challenges he has risen to. We are proud of what Cathal has achieved and very appreciative of Todds Leap and their contribution to Cathal's self-development.”

David Wilson

...has restricted use of his right arm. He came to Todds Leap to do a forklift driving course, something his previous employer had not permitted due to his disability. With some extra tuition and practical experience David passed the course. He then successfully applied to become a part time instructor with Todds Leap with the adjustment of some extra help on site to carry equipment.

Ashley Wright

...has a learning disability. He wanted to do a chainsaw course and undertook the CS30 (cross cutting and felling). This is a high level examination with a moderate pass rate but, with only some extra tuition, Ashley passed. He is now preparing to do his CS31 (fell and process small trees) training.

Ashley is very pleased with his result and his mum, Pauline, said, “Ashley loved the course and can’t wait to do the next stage. His trainer was very supportive and gave him some extra time and encouragement. This is the first exam he ever passed and it has given him the confidence to sit his theory test for driving”.

Todds Leap has always endeavored to accommodate the needs of its disabled customers and employees. In a proactive measure it recently, with support from the South West Action for Rural Development (SWARD) and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB), invested £500,000 in improving access. This investment has included provision of accessible toilets, showering facilities, conference and training suites, appropriate door widths, lifts, lighting, ramp access and wheelchair friendly pathways.

Todds Leap is another deserving award winner. Its enthusiasm and commitment to excellent employment practices and customer services is inspirational, especially given that it is a small business. The judges believed that it would demonstrate to employers of all sizes what can be achieved and would motivate organisations in all sectors.

Although there were two award winners that stood out from the other entrants, there were four organisations whose entries were considered worthy of being shortlisted. These organisations endeavor to improve opportunities for people with disabilities in their respective organisations and always 'go the extra mile'. Their entries are highlighted in this section.

Armagh City and District Council has achieved great outcomes in relation to disability due to the attitude and commitment of staff in developing policies and imaginative practices.

The council supports disabled employees at all stages of employment. Monitoring is undertaken to determine the number of people with disabilities employed, the nature of their disabilities and whether any adjustments are required. Jobs are advertised as widely as possible, including on the EFDNI Jobs Bulletin Board, and the council has linked with disability organisations such as USEL, Mencap and Appleby Careers Project Ltd. These important connections have led to many work placements being facilitated, an important starting point for many individuals to gain skills and build confidence leading to employment. This is evident in the following examples.

Duane Fagan

...has cerebral palsy and is a wheelchair user. He is employed as a part time Receptionist working between Building Control and the Navan Centre. Duane first arrived at the council 13 years ago while studying for an NVQ, and during his studies gained valuable work experience within tourism. On completing his NVQ, he successfully secured the position of Casual Tourist Assistant, followed one year later by the position of Part-Time Tourist Assistant working in numerous council facilities.

The Department for Employment and Learning has assisted with additional costs incurred as a result of improving access to his workstation. Duane says, “helping people is a nice aspect of working; it gives you a sense of purpose”.



John Wilson



... has worked for Armagh City and District Council as a General Operative in the Grounds Maintenance Section for over nine years. John has a learning disability and applied for a seasonal post in the council, with his father attending the interview as an advocate. The council contacted USEL who assessed his suitability for the job and have supported him in his placement.

John carries out a range of duties including litter picking, planting, weeding and pruning. He says the best thing about being employed was **“coming in and clocking in every day”**, indicating how he benefits from having the structure and activity that his placement brings.

He has experienced some difficulties at times with how others understand his disability and in order to address these difficulties, the council asked USEL to deliver learning disability training for the staff members that work with John.

Mickey Quinn

...started working as a volunteer almost 16 years ago and is now responsible for carrying out cleaning and recycling duties at the leisure centre and at the Cathedral Road Recreation Centre. Mickey has a learning disability and initially received support from the Appleby Trust.

During his time at the leisure centre, Mickey **has attained a coaching qualification in both athletics and football**. Mickey described his employer as “VG”. He approaches his work with enthusiasm and good humour and gets on well with his work colleagues.



Some of the adjustments that have been made for staff and those on placements include:

- Alterations to workstations
- Redeployment to alternative positions
- Flexible working arrangements
- Assistance with travel to and from work
- Ergonomic assessments followed by appropriate adjustments.

In terms of physical access, audits have been carried out on all facilities. Adjustments have been made for specific employees and for customers in general. As a result, many facilities have been recipients of the William Keown Trust Access Award and the Market Place Theatre has been recognised as having made substantial improvements to the physical environment by Adapt NI. The council is continuing to work towards achieving the Arts and Disability Equality Charter.

Employees have received training both in-house and from organisations such as Epilepsy NI, Mencap, the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) and EFDNI. Disability training is included at induction and there is a training programme in place, into which employees have input, and which is tailored to suit all levels of staff.

The **Belfast Health and Social Care Trust** has an annual budget of £1.2 billion and around 20,000 staff. Its overall purpose is to improve health and wellbeing and to reduce inequalities. Every level of the organisation is committed to the promotion of equality of opportunity. A key focus is the “Positive Action in Employment Equality - Disability” project centering on the need for effective disability measures. A Disability Steering Group and other multidisciplinary teams ensure that the Trust delivers on the disability duties and tasks.

The organisation works collaboratively with other Health and Social Care Trusts in developing a number of policies and procedures in relation to disability, for example employing people with disabilities, providing reasonable adjustments and disability etiquette. This is a good example of how resources, in terms of staff and expertise, can be pooled in order to achieve common goals.

Our next shortlisted organisation is **Belfast Health and Social Care Trust**, the biggest employer in Northern Ireland. The Trust proves that no matter how enormous the task is of including and supporting all employees in an effort to raise awareness, to fulfil duties and to adopt disability best practice, it can be done creatively and effectively, while delivering excellent services to all patients and users.

The Trust surveyed over 400 disabled staff, with help from EFDNI, to identify any specific issues and obtain feedback and suggestions to help it continue to enhance the workplace environment, policies and practices. Of the respondents, 32% were interested in establishing a Disabled Employee Network. The Trust, with EFDNI, put a significant amount of work into its development, and to support disabled employees in shaping it. The Trust formally launched the network in March 2012. Susan Miller, Senior HR Officer, is really pleased with how staff have worked together to get this developed: “This network provides a forum for disabled staff to further influence Trust policy and practice and enables staff with disabilities to engage directly with key staff.”

The Trust works in partnership with community, voluntary and education sector organisations such as USEL, NOW Project, Action Mental Health, Orchardville Society, Cedar Foundation, Mencap, University of Ulster and Disability Action to develop and provide a variety of work placements to enable disabled people to gain real work experience. There is a commitment in place to facilitate 15 placement opportunities in a wide range of areas each year and during 2011/12 this target was exceeded.

Three individuals enjoying and benefiting from placements are Thomas, Richard and Sandra.
(Photographs left to right)

“The experience that I am gaining at the Emergency Department at the Royal Hospital has been very beneficial to date.” Thomas - Client from Disability Action and Bryson Future Skills who is placed in the Royal Hospital’s Emergency Department.

“I am really enjoying my work experience at the Mater Hospital; my supervisors are very helpful and have made me feel very welcome.” Richard - Client from Mencap who is placed in Laundry Services at the Mater Hospital.

“This placement will help me develop skills and qualities to help me gain future employment.” Sandra - Client from Cedar Foundation who is with the ‘Edging Out’ project in the Arts Department.





Wayne Crowe, (centre) Chair of the Disabled Employee Network, with Andrew Hornsby and Sam Edwards, who are on placement

Under the Workable Programme, posts were ring fenced and six people with mental ill health disabilities successfully secured permanent employment as Occupational Therapy Assistants and Support Workers.

The Trust has in place a comprehensive mandatory equality and diversity training programme. Over 3,000 employees have been trained so far and, as well as face-to-face training, staff can access an on-line resource which has a disability module.

The organisation had noted higher absences related to mental ill health conditions and so linked with the Reader Organisation's, "Get into Reading Programme". This programme promotes good mental health and well being and is designed to aid staff with mental ill health conditions to improve their own health and emotional well being.

Finally, to ensure a comprehensive review of disability employment policies and practices, the Trust completed the EFDNI Member Audit which helps organisations self-evaluate and monitor progress in implementing good disability practice. Any areas of need identified then feed into future plans and actions.

Formula Karting is Europe's largest indoor centre offering various race formats for people aged eight and over. All levels of the organisation work together to develop the right policies and practices. The equal opportunity policy is communicated to all staff and, based on the nature of the job, risk assessments are carried out on a regular basis to ensure staff are working in a safe environment and in turn offer the same for customers.

Our next entry features one of the smaller employers shortlisted for the award. We at EFDNI believe that any employer, regardless of size and resources, can easily adopt disability good practice. This will bring positive benefits to your organisation in terms of both employees and customers and to the community as a whole. This company shows that surpassing basic legislative duties will help you meet all your business needs and goals.



Gerard Hughes

The company works with Disability Action, Opportunity Youth, Clanrye Training Centre, The Prince's Trust, Steps and the Gaining Ground Project among others, to identify and provide employment and work experience opportunities for people with disabilities. There are currently two disabled staff members on long-term work experience and these individuals, with the help of colleagues, have fitted in well and are very much part of the team. Management regularly meets with each employee and support staff from the disability organisation to monitor the ongoing employment arrangement and to get feedback from all parties.

The organisation has set in place many measures to ensure accessibility to the premises for wheelchair users as well as people with other disabilities. In addition, employees have undertaken disability awareness training to assist in building knowledge and confidence in working with people with disabilities and this has knock-on benefits when serving disabled customers.

Disability Action believes that the organisation has exceeded expectations in its commitment to offer work placements and permanent employment opportunities to people with disabilities. Franshine Young from Disability Action commented:

‘Management has engaged with our organisation in a very open and positive way to overcome any perceived barriers to recruitment. Formula Karting makes sure that trainees and disabled employees are fully included in the team and they have embraced the Workable programme as a positive action. Formula Karting has secured a valued employee and has tailored a job to match the employee skills and abilities.’

Invest NI is Northern Ireland’s economic development agency, offering the community a single organisation providing high-quality services and expert advice to assist businesses and individuals to create greater wealth for the benefit of all.

The final shortlisted entry is drawn from the public sector, emphasising the level and extent of good practice being undertaken in this sector.

Dedicated Equality, Learning and Development and Human Resources teams offer advice and promote best practice for all staff. The organisation's Disability Action Plan outlines its commitment to encourage the participation of people with disabilities in public life. Also, jobs are advertised as widely as possible, including on the EFDNI Jobs Bulletin Board, and advertisements include a welcome statement and the organisation's text phone number.

Invest NI undertook public consultations and incorporated feedback into its internal processes, with the aim of mainstreaming equality into the organisation.

During 2011, the Invest NI equality team felt that there was a need to improve awareness and understanding of the support available to people with disabilities in becoming entrepreneurs. It worked with Disability Action and in September 2011 introduced an event entitled 'Working for Me', an information and networking event for people with disabilities thinking of starting their own business. The aim of the event was to highlight self employment as a route to economic activity. Delegates also had the opportunity to network with relevant organisations from the disability, business and benefits sectors and due to the positive feedback this event will take place annually.

Internal processes reflect commitment both to members of staff and clients with disabilities who visit the Invest NI headquarters, which was designed above legislative requirements with the help of Disability Action.

All Invest NI employees take part in disability awareness training when they start employment and get refresher training every three years. Specialist training was delivered to facilities management staff including training in sign language. Employees also use the Member Area of the EFDNI website, accessing a selection of training materials, an on-line disability awareness briefing, video links and factsheets. Invest NI's eLearning platform 'SkillStore' also has modules on disability.



Monica Wilson Disability Action
Sharon Polson Invest NI
Stephanie McParland from Comber

In addition to providing adjustments for employees, such as establishing full workstations at an employee's home, Invest NI provides permanent car parking spaces at company headquarters for disabled employees who require accessible parking. The organisation has also introduced a wide range of human resources policies which encourage a flexible approach to work, promote a healthy work-life balance and facilitate flexible working such as:

- The provision to apply to work personalised hours
- The ability to work flexibly in non-core hours
- A partial retirement scheme
- Remote working capability
- Phased return to work pattern following long term sick absence.

On receiving the news of being shortlisted for the Disability Best Practice Employer Award, Pamela Marron, Equality Manager with Invest NI, said, "We set ourselves high standards in the area of equality and disability and continually measure ourselves against them, both internally and externally, and being considered for this award shows that our approach is working."

It is vital the legacy of the Disability Best Practice Award is that the winners and those shortlisted inspire other organisations to learn from their practices and implement similar initiatives. Therefore, we are very grateful to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Department for Employment and Learning for their support, without which this Showcasing Disability Best Practice publication would not have been produced.

Our final thanks go to the Irish News who worked with us in putting disability on the Workplace and Employment Awards agenda for the first time, ensuring it has equal place among other business issues.

Contact Details



Employers for Disability Northern Ireland

Tel: 028 4062 4526

Email: info@efdni.org

www.efdni.org

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Tel: 028 90 500 600

Email: information@equalityni.org

www.equalityni.org

The Department for Employment and Learning

Tel: 028 9025 2237

Email: das@delni.gov.uk

www.delni.gov.uk

The Irish News Workplace Employment Awards

Tel: 028 9032 2226

Email: j.brolly@irishnews.com

www.irishnews.com/WEA

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