



The Information Needs of People with Disabilities in South Tipperary

**Report on the South Tipperary
Disability Information Project**

Antje Hogan:
The Information Needs of People with Disabilities in South Tipperary
(Report on the South Tipperary Disability Project)



Abbreviations

ABI	Acquired Brain Injury
CIC	Citizens Information Centre
CIS	Citizens Information Service
DES	Department of Education and Science
DESSA	Disability Equality Specialist Support Agency
DFI	Disability Federation of Ireland
DSFA	Department of Social and Family Affairs
FÁS	Foras Áiseanna Saothair
FHIST	Funded Housing Initiative South Tipperary
HSE	Health Service Executive
ICF	International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health
IWA	Irish Wheelchair Association
MS Ireland	Multiple Sclerosis Society of Ireland
NAD	National Association for Deaf People
NCBI	National Council for the Blind of Ireland
NDA	National Disability Authority
NLN	National Learning Network
NRB	National Rehabilitation Board
PwDI	People with Disabilities in Ireland
STSEP	South Tipperary Supported Employment Project
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
WHO	World Health Organisation

County Tipperary Information Service

County Tipperary Information Service is a Social Economy Enterprise which was founded in 2002 to provide the community, voluntary and statutory sectors in North and South Tipperary with customised information services such as social research, publications and information dissemination. A not-for-profit organisation with charitable status, it is closely associated with County Tipperary Citizens Information Service (Co. Tipperary CIS) and currently employs seven information officers in five Citizens Information Centres (CICs) throughout the county.

The South Tipperary Disability Information Project

The need for research into the information needs of people living with disabilities emerged for Co. Tipperary CIS in 2000 when the implications of the government's strategy to mainstream services for people with disabilities materialised and subsequent practical issues became more noticeable. Anecdotal evidence gathered up to that point in the Citizens Information Centres in Clonmel and Tipperary suggested that the dramatic shift in service provision since June of that year had caused a sense of confusion among people with disabilities, their carers and families, as well as amongst the organisations and agencies providing specific services to this group. The impression of the CIS that people with disabilities were not fully aware, and thus not availing of the range of information, advice and advocacy services offered to them, was fostered by an ever increasing number of queries in respect of entitlements to social and public services for people with disabilities.

As an independent information provider, Co. Tipperary CIS felt the need to investigate further and carry out research into the information needs of people with disabilities in the county. With an estimated 10 to 15% of the population living with a disability at any given time, people with disabilities form not only a particularly vulnerable, but also a quite large group of the general public. Knowing their specific information needs and how information is obtained and best received by people with disabilities is imperative to information providers such as the Citizens Information Service, especially if their service aims to empower people and minimise their risk to being exposed to disadvantage and social exclusion.

Being aware of the key role it plays in enabling the general public to fully access existing support services, Co. Tipperary CIS initiated what was called the 'South Tipperary Disability Information Project' with a view to examining the actual level of awareness among people with a disability in respect of these services. The project aim was to identify their information needs and establish, how, when and where people with disabilities and their families seek and obtain information. The findings and recommendations from this research are intended to help improve the service that the CIS provides to people with disabilities, but may also be used by other organisations and agencies for the development of more effective customer policies and a more focused approach to service provision.

The project is fully funded by Comhairle and has been carried out on behalf of Co. Tipperary CIS by the County Tipperary Information Service.

Contents

Acknowledgements	8
Foreword	9
Executive Summary.....	10
Aims & Objectives.....	11
Framework & Methods.....	11
Experience & Feedback.....	11
Recommendations.....	14
Background and Context.....	16
Methods and Procedures.....	19
Survey Participants	21
The Information Needs of People with Disabilities	25
The Views of Support Personnel and Carers	35
Citizens Information Centres	38
General Conclusion.....	44
Appendix 1: List of Tables (Survey People with Disabilities).....	45
Appendix 2: List of Tables (Survey Support Personnel)	55
References.....	58

Acknowledgements

On behalf of County Tipperary Information Service I would like to thank the many individuals and organisations who provided invaluable support and assistance during the course of this project, particularly the members, staff and volunteers of the following organisations:

- Camphill Community (Carrick-on-Suir)
- Cluain Training & Enterprise Centre (Clonmel)
- Day & Outreach Centre for Acquired Brain Injuries (Clonmel)
- Irish Wheelchair Association (Tipperary)
- The Journeyman (Carrick-on-Suir)
- Moorehaven Centre (Tipperary)
- MS Ireland (South Tipperary)
- National Association for Deaf People (Regional Office Kilkenny)
- National Council for the Blind of Ireland (Regional Office Kilkenny)
- National Learning Network (Clonmel)
- Rehabcare (Clonmel)
- South Tipperary Autism Support Group (Clonmel)
- South Tipperary Supported Employment Project (Clonmel)
- Transitional Living Unit (Clonmel)

In addition, I would like to thank Bernadette Kennedy and Susan Shanahan (Comhairle), Deirdre Hennessey (Consultant), Sinead McGinley (Tipperary Institute), PJ Cleere (Disability Federation of Ireland), Carol Moore (Health Service Executive) and Mary Plunkett (Co. Tipperary CIS) for their assistance in completing various stages of the project.

Finally, special thanks is given to those who provided us with insights into their information needs, i.e. the many people who volunteered to be interviewed or who were prepared to complete a postal questionnaire.

Antje Hogan
Manager
Co. Tipperary Information Service

Foreword

As Regional Manager of Comhairle's Dublin South & South Eastern Regional Services, it gives me great pleasure to introduce this report, »The Information Needs of People with Disabilities in South Tipperary«, for which Comhairle provided funding through its regional structures to County Tipperary Information Service to undertake this report on behalf of Co. Tipperary Citizens Information Service (CIS).

»The core function of Comhairle is to support the provision of, and where appropriate, provide directly to the public, independent information, advice and advocacy services relating to social and civil services. Comhairle has a statutory commitment to assist and support people, particularly those with disabilities, in identifying and understanding their needs and options and in accessing their entitlements to social and civil services.« (Comhairle Strategic Plan, 2003-2006, p. 17)

With regard to enabling people with disabilities to identify and access their rights and entitlements, this report indicates the value in determining from people with disabilities themselves and from their families and carers, what information they really want, by what means this information should be provided to them and where this information may be most usefully accessed by them. The challenge for all information providers, therefore, is to tailor information provision for people with disabilities according to these preferences.

From Comhairle's regional perspective, this research is unique because it provides the answers to the questions raised above from the clear perspective of people with disabilities and it does so on a local basis, which makes its findings and recommendations both meaningful and relevant.

This report has benefited from the insight and expertise of many individuals. I would like to thank all who contributed to this project in any way and acknowledge especially: all the service providers who gave of their time in preparing the ground work for this research, all the participants who took the time to complete the questionnaire, which is the cornerstone of the survey and Antje Hogan of the County Tipperary Information Service who coordinated the research and brought the entire project to fruition.

With regard to making improvements in information provision for people with disabilities in South Tipperary, this research makes recommendations that are designed to meet the information needs of people with disabilities in South Tipperary. When adopted at local level by the relevant services, these recommendations will ensure that information provision in South Tipperary is user driven rather than producer driven. The findings within will serve to enhance the capabilities of services providers, and also of people with disabilities and their advocates, and thus will promote the social inclusion and empowerment of people with disabilities in living their lives.

Susan Shanahan

*Regional Manager (Dublin South/South East)
Comhairle*

Executive Summary

On 12th June 2000, the Minister for Health and Children, Micheál Martin, ordered the transfer of the property, rights and liabilities of the National Rehabilitation Board (NRB), which had been in operation since 1967, to the then newly established agencies Comhairle and the National Disability Authority, as well as FÁS and indirectly the Health Boards. All services carried out by the NRB prior to its cessation were now to be »exercised, supervised, arranged or operated« by these public bodies. In practice, people with disabilities were now asked to obtain advice and guidance on vocational or employment skills training, rehabilitative/life-skills training, employment opportunities, employment supports and grants from their local FÁS Employment Services. The Health Boards, were to be contacted for general medical services. Comhairle were now responsible for information services in respect of entitlements or social services and – as host of the National Disability Resource Centre – aids and equipment for people with disabilities. Broader disability issues relating to accessibility, accommodation etc. were to be addressed by the National Disability Authority.

The implications for the individual living with a disability, who prior to the cessation of the Board needed to contact only one agency for the majority of their queries, weighed heavily. Whilst the idea of mainstreaming services was generally viewed as a positive development by the disability movement, it meant that service users had to relearn and find their way through what now seemed like a maze of agencies with various different responsibilities.

The subsequent confusion and in some instances frustration among people with disabilities was sensed early in the Citizens Information Centres in Co. Tipperary as much as probably elsewhere in the country. In addition, the Citizens Information Centres became conscious of their new role as part of the structures under Comhairle – the national agency which had taken on the responsibility of providing information, advice and advocacy to people with disabilities.

In order to be able to fulfil their responsibility in providing people with disabilities with the same quality of information and advice as any other customer group, the question was quickly raised within the Co. Tipperary Citizens Information Service as to what the specific information needs of these people with disabilities, their carers and families might be. Regretfully, at the time, the service was not in a position to create mechanisms which would assist them in responding to this question and were subsequently left to respond to each query on a case by case basis.

The opportunity to finally research the common information requirements among people with disabilities in Tipperary arose in late 2002 with the establishment of a Social Economy Enterprise within the Citizens Information Service, the objective of which was – besides supporting the CIS and its services to the general public – to carry out research, information dissemination tasks, the design of publications and similar information services for the public sector. After a developmental phase during the previous year, the enterprise was ready to take on its first assignments in 2004 and a grant was obtained from Comhairle to carry out a comprehensive research project into the information needs of people with disabilities in South Tipperary. This report is the outcome of the work that was undertaken between November 2004 and October 2005.

While focusing on local needs, the study took place in the wider context of not only the change from the medical to the social model of defining »disability«, but also a movement towards a rights-based approach to equality and full participation of people with disabilities in society. In this context, people with disabilities form a very important customer group for the Citizens Information Service which aims to educate and empower the whole public by providing the information necessary for anybody to gain full access to all the rights and entitlements they have as a citizen.

Aims & Objectives

The main objective of this study was to identify the information needs of people with disabilities in South Tipperary with regard to the services – both statutory and voluntary – that exist in the county to support them. To this end, we set out to identify possible information gaps and access barriers that may exist for the target group while establishing the means through which people with disabilities access and as a result receive information. Considering that this study is carried out on behalf of the Citizens Information Service, we also endeavoured to establish the level of satisfaction experienced by those people with disabilities who have contacted a CIC in the past, and obtain feedback from service users and service providers in the disability sector alike as to how the CIC could improve their service to address the specific needs of people with disabilities in Tipperary.

Framework & Methods

The framework of the study was based on the information services that are available in the Citizens Information Centres for the general public. During a consultation process with representatives of organisations which provide specific (i.e. training or care) services to people with disabilities, key areas of interest were identified among the various topics about which the CICs are able to provide information.

The project commenced in two phases: The consultation process with service providers formed the main part of the first phase alongside the review of relevant literature and a consultation with information officers in the CICs in respect of past experiences in the provision of information to people with disabilities. In the second phase, a survey was carried out among 102 people with disabilities and 38 carers/staff from the service providers who had agreed to participate in the project. 58 respondents from the primary group of survey participants (i.e. the people with disabilities) attended face-to-face interviews which had the purpose of assisting in the completion of a questionnaire and gaining qualitative insights into the experiences of the individual, while the remainder completed the questionnaire by way of a postal survey. With the exception of 9 respondents, all primary survey participants were recruited from the client base of the participating service provider organisations.

The questionnaire comprised of three main parts. After an introductory part, in which respondents were asked to state general information about themselves, such as age, gender, disability, place of residence and employment status, a series of questions under the heading 'Information Needs' aimed to identify specific information fields that are important to people with disabilities. Questions in this part of the questionnaire also sought information in relation to where people with disabilities direct their queries, what the quality of information is like and in which formats people prefer to receive information. The last part of the questionnaire consisted of a basic customer satisfaction survey touching on awareness of the Citizens Information Service and previous experiences in availing of the service.

Experience & Feedback

In most of its findings, the results from the survey and the individual feedback received during the consultation process and in the interviews with service users confirmed that people with disabilities share common information needs and access information in similar patterns, despite the fact that as individuals they have very specific and unique requirements.

Information needs are generally as diverse among people with disabilities as among any other group of people, however, the study shows that information about the most basic needs of a person,

namely personal health (medical information) and financial security (Social Welfare entitlements) represent the primary need of this group. Matters of legal questions and rights issues rank considerably lower. This may be understandable considering that these only arise when basic needs impacting on the everyday lives of people are met. Issues that are of average importance to people with disabilities relate predominantly to information that enables them to reach full potential in life, i.e. information about training and education, and transport and travel, which to many provides a means of flexibility in gaining access to and participating in society.

The study identified four groups of people who serve as agents to accessing information for the majority of people with disabilities. These are: family members and friends, staff and volunteers in training/care centres and organisations which represent people with disabilities, GPs and medical staff and finally information centres (in order of importance). While people were generally satisfied with the information they had received in the past from these »information agents«, it was established early in the consultation process and later in the conversations with individual service users that it is of the utmost importance that the correct information is fed to the agents in order to allow them to pass it on in suitable formats.

The staff of service provider organisations, which formed the respondent group for a separate, although secondary survey within this study, expressed a clear need for improved information provision to them in respect of the services available in the CICs. This group very much welcomed the CICs as a valuable resource, but wanted a more pro-active role on the part of information officers to address people with disabilities and their support persons.

Besides identifying the main information needs of people with disabilities and the agents through which they access information, the study also focused on their experiences in obtaining quality information. Possible barriers to accessing information and preferred formats were of particular interest in this regard. The most captivating insights of the study in this respect were not so much gained through the statistical analysis, but in the conversations/interviews with people with disabilities.

By statistical means, the quality of the information received in the past was characterised by the respondents most noticeably in that it was accurate, up-to-date and easy to understand. Information was much less likely to be in the right format or easy to obtain. Access barriers clearly exist in the areas of legal issues, employment issues and council services, but also in respect of benefits and entitlements when compared to how important this issue is to people with disabilities in general. Medical information ranked highest with regard to easy accessibility. Understandably, GPs and social workers are the most frequently used agent to obtain this information. Here, the obvious association of »medical information« with »Doctor or Social Worker« acts as a guarantor for accessibility. In the case of queries relating to other information categories, people with disabilities have greater difficulties in identifying the most efficient information access point.

The feedback received from the respondents during interviews helped identify more practical barriers that were not as clearly visible from the statistical results. Here, frustration due to bureaucracy and inefficient referral systems, impersonal and non-individual services and the lack of written information to support verbal advice were named as the main barriers to obtaining, understanding and applying information to one's own circumstances. It was imperative to a number of respondents to talk face-to-face with the person, preferably over the entire length of their communication with a service. Criticism was also expressed in respect of the complexity and amount of detail in the information received, often in connection with an inappropriate and restrictive use of the English language.

Finally, with regard to the level of customer satisfaction in respect of the Citizens Information Service in South Tipperary, the study showed a positive trend in that more than three quarters of customers were satisfied with the service they had received in the past. Needs to develop the service further were identified in areas such as the promotion of the service and the provision of outreach services addressed specifically at people with disabilities.

The main focus of the study was to formulate proposals for the Citizens Information Service to develop their service further based on the information needs identified through the research. The recommendations arising from the research will be incorporated in the Development Plan of Co. Tipperary Citizens Information Service, but may also be adopted in whole or part by any other interested party actively involved in the provision of information to people with disabilities.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of this research, Co. Tipperary Information Service recommends:

- 1** That direct links are developed between Co. Tipperary Citizens Information Service and the staff and volunteers of those organisations that provide specific services to people with disabilities in Co. Tipperary. In addition to the contacts which were established with participating service providers and the South Tipperary Disability Forum through this project, the networking efforts should be extended to organisations in North Tipperary.
- 2** That the content of the information available in the Citizens Information Centres and Outreach Offices operated by Co. Tipperary CIS should be developed to meet the specific information needs of people with disabilities. To this end, it is our recommendation that the CICs single out specific information that is of common interest to people with disability and compile this in a suitable format to act as a resource for these customers, their carers and the organisations that represent them. The development of an information pack for all interested customers would provide a suitable starting point.
- 3** That Co. Tipperary CIS pursues a pro-active role in the provision of information to people with disabilities based around the key areas of interest identified in this study. To this effect, specific outreach presentations should be organised for groups of people with disabilities, ideally in co-operation with the existing network of service providers, but also with other interest groups at local level.
- 4** That the CIS actively promotes its service to people with disabilities, their carers and the organisations which represent them in order to raise awareness of the information, advice and advocacy avenues that are available. This should take the form of a specific information campaign which addresses the information needs of people with disabilities.
- 5** That Co. Tipperary CIS recognises the role that GPs, Social Workers and other medical personnel play in the provision of information to people with disabilities and create links with them to promote its services and set up a referral system to take on information queries outside the remit of these agents.
- 6** That Co. Tipperary CIS should designate one or more persons in each CIC to assist people with disabilities who may experience difficulty in accessing information on an individual, and if necessary, continuous basis. The study has shown that people with disabilities prefer one-to-one contact with service providers when seeking information and a pre-designated contact person would enhance the personal aspect of the service while prohibiting possible feelings of intimidation or embarrassment experienced by some people in the past.

7 That all personnel employed by Co. Tipperary CIS and all volunteers working in the service undergo disability awareness training to ensure that communication patterns, attitudes and the general approach to customers with a disability is as respectful, efficient and friendly as possible.

8 That the provision of information to people with disabilities is based on the individual needs of a customer. This means first and foremost that the customer is offered information through available alternative channels and formats (i.e. in writing) if required.

9 That all efforts should be made by Co. Tipperary CIS to recruit an advocacy worker for customers, such as people with disabilities, who may experience disadvantages or difficulties in obtaining information or availing of services that exist to support them.

Background and Context

Information Services, like most other services provided in the public or the private sector can only fulfil their objectives effectively if the needs of the customers are known and subsequently met. Services like the Co. Tipperary CIS, which is part of a network of over 220 Citizens Information Centres nation-wide, are very much driven by changing public demands. A cohesive approach to obtaining and managing information is an imperative means to providing the general public with adequate information, advice and advocacy. Citizens Information Centres endeavour to provide this service free of charge and in a confidential, impartial and independent fashion. They cover a range of subjects, including the more well known ones: Social Welfare, Employment Rights and Legal Matters/Advice. But CICs also act as a link between statutory (national) and community services and as such are in a position to adopt general information to local and individual circumstances.

The County Tipperary Citizens Information Service, which currently operates five local centres and three outreach services in Co. Tipperary, has been set up with a deliberate focus on this link function. Its mission statement highlights that it is designed for the *people* of Co. Tipperary, to provide them with »easy access to the highest quality of information, advice and advocacy in relation to their civil and social rights, their entitlements and social services that exist to support them«.

While the service is open to anyone in the county, regardless of »age, sex, colour, creed, disability, political views, race, sexual orientation or social status«,¹ the type and amount of queries received in the CICs provide valuable evidence about common issues among different groups of people. Once identified as particular information needs, the service is committed to taking every step necessary to meet these needs.

The »South Tipperary Disability Information Project« is to be seen in exactly this context. It constitutes the bridge between perceived information needs among people with disabilities in the county, and a means of directing the service to fulfil them. The research that constitutes the core of the project is intended to confirm and specify the requirements people with disabilities have in respect of information, advice and advocacy, so that recommendations can be made to Co. Tipperary CIS (and any other interested party involved in the provision of information) to adapt the service to the actual needs of one particular group of customers.

In recent years, people with disabilities have been the object of many efforts and activities originating from various levels of society, which are all aimed at recognising and meeting special needs that exist. Many will agree that progress is slow and similar difficulties are experienced by other disadvantaged groups in Ireland today. Delays may be as a result of a lack of commitment, possibly bureaucratic/legislative barriers or simply a lack of support from those in power.

In the case of the »South Tipperary Disability Information Project« all involved would probably agree that the project represented a learning process which at times raised more questions than could be answered and which encountered barriers rather than being able to remove them. Nevertheless, it represents an opportunity for those who are providing information and for those who are in receipt of it, to take small steps toward making a difference. The recommendations from this research will be incorporated into the Development Plan of Co. Tipperary CIS with every effort to work toward the realisation of these objectives. The service is committed to meeting the information needs of people with disabilities in Co. Tipperary.

¹ Co. Tipperary CIS: Development Plan 2005-2007, page 11.

A proposal by Co. Tipperary CIS to investigate the information needs of people with disabilities in Tipperary was made as early as 2000 when a general perception surfaced in the Citizens Information Centres that people with disabilities became genuinely confused about the services that were available for them. Interestingly, CIC information officers encountered a similar experience on the part of agencies and service providers when trying to obtain more detailed information from them.

It appeared as though the cessation of the National Rehabilitation Board (NRB) had not resulted in a smooth transition process from the service user's point of view. From June 2000, the roles and responsibilities of the Board had been taken over by other agencies, such as FÁS, Comhairle, the NDA and the Health Boards. While most of these agencies became proactive almost immediately in ensuring that people with disabilities, their carers and service providers were fully informed about the new roles, the types and numbers of queries received in the CICs suggested that confusion outweighed certainty about how the new roles were distributed.

Naturally, the implications of the changes following the closure of the NRB became most prevalent in the actual provision of services to people with disabilities. Services formerly delivered by the Board were now provided in the same way and by the same agencies/organisations as for everybody else. This mainstreaming of service provision as it were, whilst welcome, took its toll on information provision and policies and ruptured the service user/service provider relationship. In many instances, the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) acted as an intermediary between service users and agencies to co-ordinate and support the new roles and responsibilities. But the brief of the DFI was predominantly focused on assisting agencies and organisations rather than the individual service user.

The service user depended instead on the information policies of each individual service provider/agency, and more importantly on independent information providers such as the Citizens Information Service. While the CICs could immediately access information and other resources offered through Comhairle (such as the National Disability Resource Centre), few centres were equipped to meet the special needs customers with a disability may have.

While the mainstreaming of services for people with disabilities and the provision of information about these services has greatly improved since 2000, the need to research the specific information needs of this customer group remained an important issue for Co. Tipperary CIS. The 'South Tipperary Disability Information Project' endeavours to address this need.

The project as devised originally found itself in quite an encouraging position in that a lot of research has been carried out in recent years into the special needs that people with disabilities may have. Various statutory and voluntary organisations such as the National Disability Authority (NDA), the Disability Equality Specialist Support Agency (DESSA), the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) and People with Disabilities in Ireland (PwDI) encourage research into various aspects of living with a disability. Likewise, the delivery of information services has undergone a major review through research, and is increasingly looked at as customer-focused. With the bulk of findings and recommendations available already, the 'South Tipperary Disability Information Project' is therefore a modest contribution to a growing area of research.

However, the project was very much designed to focus on people and local needs. It emerged as a vehicle to connect with service providers in the county and with their service users. For those involved in carrying out the research it gave an opportunity to learn more about what it means to live with a disability and to reflect on one's own approach and communication patterns.

In order to place this project in a broader context a number of existing reports and literature were reviewed and studied. The accessibility of information for people with disabilities constituted the

main focus of this exercise. On closer examination it is an issue that raises a number of questions: How do people living with disabilities obtain information? How important is this information for people with disabilities, perhaps in relation to their social inclusion in society? What are preferred modes of communication and formats for information?

The role of adequate information for the life of any individual has been highlighted on many occasions: »Information helps us all to make decisions and choices about our lives and enables us to live independently, to access social rights and entitlements and take part fully in society«.² The channels that people consider for obtaining information are manifold and can be formal or informal, direct or indirect; they can be in response to a request for information or unsolicited advice. There are many options and many people suggest that it is often the wealth and detail of information that creates problems in today's society, not always the lack thereof.

However, information becomes a precious commodity, especially where access to it is difficult to gain or even denied. People can encounter an array of barriers to accessible information, ranging from a lack of literacy or technical skills to inappropriate formats, restrictive use of language, restricted physical accessibility or faulty referral systems between agencies.

A study carried out on behalf of Comhairle in 2000 entitled »Pathways to Information«, shows that seeking information for many people is a multi-faceted search process that often leads from one location to another. The majority of people surveyed in the study had contacted one or more information centres during their quest, and often went on to get in touch with other services and agencies before receiving appropriate replies. This fragmented nature of information provision at local level was confirmed by a survey carried out by Behaviour & Attitudes Marketing Research in the same year. It highlighted that an average of 1/5th of all adults found it difficult to obtain information from health boards, local authorities and government departments.

People with disabilities are no exception in this regard and may even encounter additional difficulties in obtaining information. They are likely to encounter barriers with alarming consequences. A report published earlier this year by the NDA and the Equality Authority »Disability and Social Inclusion in Ireland« pointed toward the social implications for people with disabilities that may, amongst others, result from a lack of information and the inaccessibility of services. The study clearly states that people with disabilities face disadvantages in many areas such as education, social participation, their means of living and income.

While another study has noted an increasing awareness in public services about information accessibility issues,³ many local services lack the resources and/or awareness to tackle the problem. In addition, people with disabilities represent a very diverse group of people with equally diverse accessibility requirements in respect of information. One will agree that the format in which a person with a sensory disability may want to receive information will be quite different to the communication needs of a person with learning difficulties.

The publication »Access to Information for All« offers guidelines for information providers in this regard on removing barriers and improving access to information also to people with disability. It is a valuable piece of research to coincide with the »South Tipperary Disability Information Project« and complements the findings and recommendations from this report.

² Access to Information for All. Comhairle 2005, page 8.

³ Pillinger, Jane: Disability and the Quality of Services. Dublin: NDA 2002 (Working Paper).

Methods and Procedures

As outlined, the main objective of this study is to identify the information needs of people with a disability in South Tipperary with regard to services that exist for them and to explore the most appropriate means of providing this information. The project also presented an opportunity to examine the level of satisfaction with the Citizens Information Service in the county among this group of customers. The findings will feed into recommendations and specific actions for Co. Tipperary CIS and, if applicable, other information services on how to improve the provision of information to people with disabilities.

As part of the above objectives we set out to find answers to the following questions:

- What information is most important to people with disabilities in South Tipperary?
- How do people with disabilities in South Tipperary obtain information?
- What are their experiences as regards the quality of information the obtained in the past?
- What barriers may restrict this group from accessing information about civic and public services?
- How can Citizens Information Centres in the county be promoted as a source of information for people with disabilities?
- How can Citizens Information Centres and other service providers adapt their services to the needs of this customer group?

In order to approach these rather complex questions from various angles, the project was divided into two phases as follows:

1. The first phase of the study involved a consultation process with various service providers in South Tipperary who offer direct health, education or other services to people with disabilities. The feedback from a series of meetings with representatives from these organisations greatly shaped the design of the questionnaire that was used in phase 2. Simultaneously, a review of literature took place which helped identify the main issues likely to evolve during the course of the project. Information officers in the Citizens Information Centres were consulted in relation to their previous experience in respect of the uptake of the service by people with disabilities and their carers/families.
2. The second phase included a pilot study with 5 respondents. Following on from this over 100 people with a disability completed a questionnaire. Some questionnaires were completed in face-to-face interviews, whilst others took part in a postal survey. In addition, staff and volunteers from the participating service providers were asked to complete a short questionnaire in respect of their experience with information requests by service users and common practice in providing this information in the past. The feedback and questionnaire replies were analysed in co-operation with Tipperary Institute and a report was compiled.

The nature of this study presented a number of conceptual difficulties, predominantly in relation to the definition of terms, the selection of respondents and choice of information categories.

To undertake research into ›the information needs of people with disabilities‹ meant to first of all agree on a shared terminology to ensure that everyone involved would understand the objectives and implications of the project. However, both the term ›information needs‹ as well as ›people with disabilities‹ are difficult to define and act as a catalyst to much broader and more fundamental issues.

During the consultation process with service providers from the disability sector it was agreed that for the purpose of this research, the following definitions and categories would be adopted. Based on the guidelines outlined in the »International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health« (ICF) published by the World Health Organisation the term »disability« would comprise all impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions experienced by a person. It was further agreed that the so-called biopsychosocial model would provide the theoretical context for the research. This model recognises that neither the medical nor social model is adequate to describe »disability«. It is rather the interaction between the (limited) abilities of a person and the context/environment in which he or she lives that defines »disability«.

On a more practical level, it was nevertheless necessary to simplify, categorise and generalise the abilities of the respondents in order to allow for a statistical profile of the group. It was agreed to identify participants in the survey both by type and degree of disability based on these categories:

- | | |
|------------------|-------------|
| 1. Physical | A. Mild |
| 2. Sensory | B. Moderate |
| 3. Intellectual | C. Severe |
| 4. Mental Health | |

An allowance was made to select more than one »type« of disability, while the terminology used in (A.) to (C.) was used to categorise the overall health situation of the respondents. With a few exceptions, respondents identified themselves in both categories based on their perception rather than a medical diagnosis or classification they had received from someone else.

In the next step, respondents had to be identified to participate in the survey. The statistical information that is available on the profile of people with disabilities in South Tipperary however reflected an inconsistency in data and definitions, which made the selection of an empirically correct sample difficult, if not impossible. While, for example, the Health Service Executive has records of 1024 people living with a disability, seven times more people (7,284) referred to themselves as living with a disability in the 2002 Census carried out by the Central Statistics Office. However, both sources were based on varying terminology, particularly in respect of types of disability. While the HSE could offer an exact breakdown into types and degree of disability, the Census offered data only in respect of physical and sensory disabilities. In addition, it emerged in the discussions with the service providers, that neither sources were taking account of mental illnesses.

In order to resolve this dilemma, the sample group was selected from the clientele of the participating service providers primarily on the basis of gender, age and geographical location (residence), while the classification of disabilities became secondary. As the participating organisations reflected a wide spread of services with emphasis on varying (dis)abilities of people, it was taken that the sample group would reflect this diversity. To further diversify the sample, a small number of respondents who do not avail of any services were also included in the group.

With regard to the term »information needs« it was decided to focus on the Citizens Information Service and the key areas of information and advice offered therein. From this point of view, people with disabilities were singled out for the purpose of the project as one particular group of potential customers who may share common interests. Their information needs as citizens were presumed to range right across the spectrum of topics typically dealt with in the centres. The main information fields chosen for the survey are non-specific to people with disabilities, with the exception of perhaps »equipment and technical aids«, and derive from the list of information available in any CIC in the country. The research subsequently focused on the information needs of people with disabilities in respect of:

- Entitlements
- Equipment and technical aids
- Medical information
- Transport and travel
- Training and education
- Council services
- Legal services

All remaining information categories handled by CICs were put aside as their quantitative impact (i.e. the number of queries typically received) is relatively low. However, participants were given an opportunity to express any other information needs that were not specifically covered by any of the above categories. Information needs that could have been included here are for example consumer queries, taxation matters and migrant issues.

Following the consultation process with service providers a questionnaire was drawn up with consideration of the above mentioned premises. This questionnaire consisted of three parts:

1. General information
2. Information needs
3. Citizens Information Centres

Part one contained questions about the respondents, such as gender, age, type of disability, health condition and place of residence as well as employment/living arrangements. Part two constituted the main part and focused on the seven information areas identified during the consultation process. Each area was examined in respect of needs, source and format of information required in the past. Additional questions in this part of the questionnaire aimed at prioritising information areas and identifying preferred sources and formats of information. The third and last part of the questionnaire dealt exclusively with the Citizens Information Service and asked about awareness of the service and the level of customer satisfaction where the service had been used by a respondent in the past. Respondents were also given the opportunity to add comments and remarks in addition to the questions contained in the survey.

Survey Participants

During the course of the project, Co. Tipperary Information Service consulted with a number of representatives from service providers in the disability sector as well as people otherwise engaged in working with people with disabilities. This consultation process provided valuable insights into their work and experiences, but also linked the researchers directly with the survey participants.

In total, there were 218 individuals sampled for this study, 46.8% of whom responded to the survey. The respondent group comprised of 102 persons with diverse backgrounds in respect of age, gender, place of residence, health condition and living arrangements. 48 male and 51 female respondents took part in the survey, 3 people preferred not to identify themselves by gender. The largest group of survey participants were aged between 36 and 59 years. With regard to place of residence, the majority of people surveyed were either living in Clonmel or in a rural area (i.e. in towns with a population under 1,000). When compared to the statistical data available from the Census 2002, this meant that the geographical spread of the sampling group was slightly disproportionate in that people with disabilities who live in rural areas were underrepresented (29% vs. 52% in the Census) while Clonmel residents (37%) represented a larger group than that identified in the Census (23%). This imbalance may be explained by the fact that a large number of participating service providers operate in and from larger towns (particularly Clonmel), with rural dwellers simply representing a smaller number of service users. Figures 1 to 3 illustrate the profile of the survey participants in respect of age, geographical location and employment status/living arrangements.

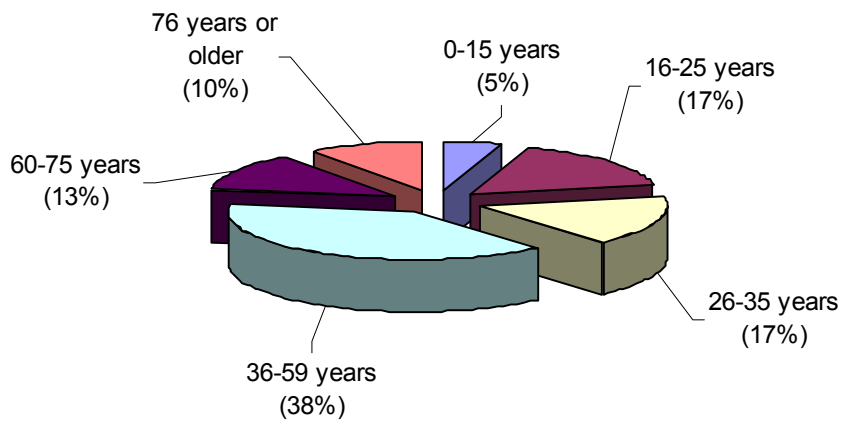


Figure 1: Survey Participants by Age

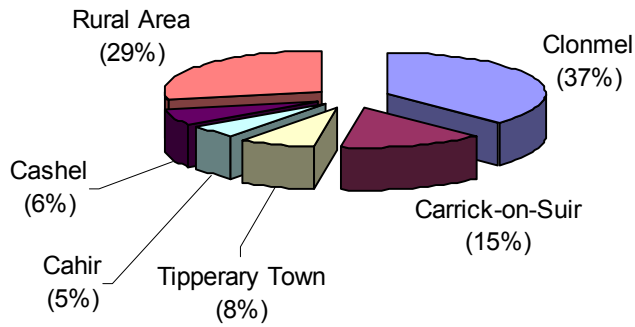


Figure 2: Survey Participants by Place of Residence

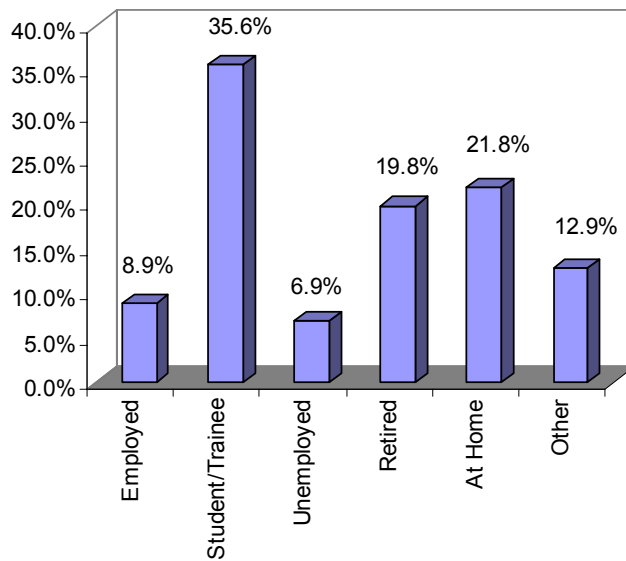
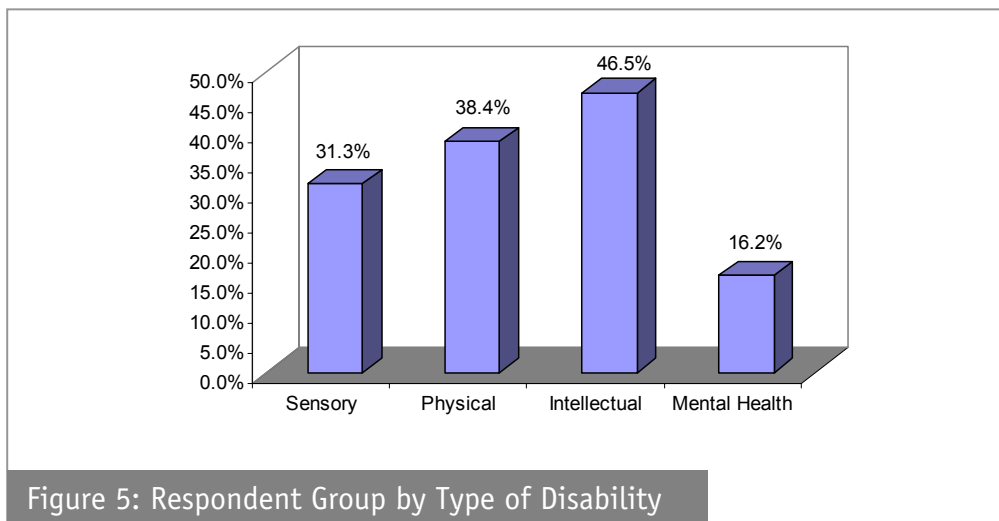
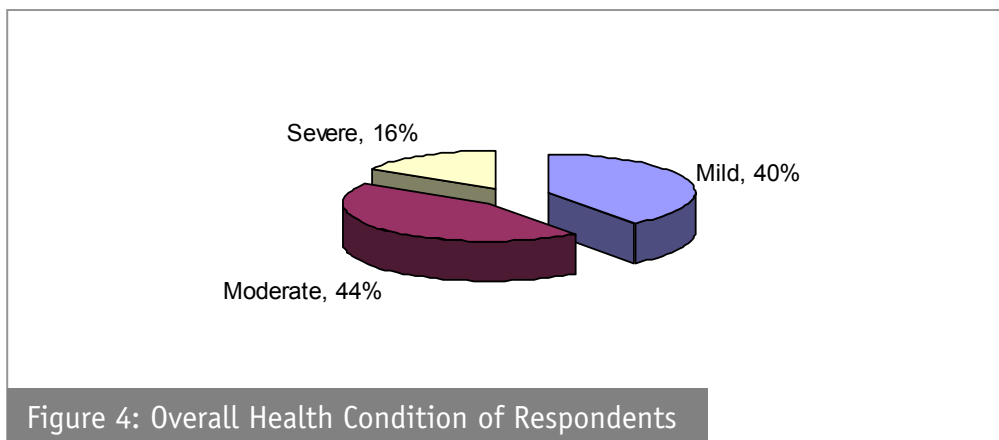


Figure 3: Survey Participants by Employment/Living Status

As can be seen in Figure 3, the majority of respondents – over one third – were enrolled as students or participating in training programmes at the time of the survey, while one in five people were at home for health reasons. In respect of this question, respondents had the option to select more than one answer, considering that work and training arrangements are not necessarily exclusive of one another. The 12.9% of respondents who did not opt for any of the predefined answers stated that they were »at home with a child«, in an »institution«, »living and working in a community« or on work experience.

When it comes to the (dis)abilities of the survey participants, the respondent groups are equally diverse. Again, in respect of disability type, respondents had an option to select more than one category. The majority of respondents selected the category of choice based on their personal perception. Where self-selection was not possible, due for example to the severity of one’s intellectual disability, interviewers consulted with the service providers and based their categorisation on the experience of those most familiar with the respondent.



In order to decide which of the respondents would complete the postal questionnaire and who would attend face-to-face interviews based on the questionnaire, the participating service providers were divided into categories based on the nature of the service they provide. The members and service users of those organisations who provide assistance primarily in the form of information, advocacy and support only, were invited to complete the questionnaire by themselves and return same by post. A dedicated phone line was set up for these respondents in case they required any

assistance in relation to the survey. Respondents from this group were members or service users of the following organisations:

- National Association for Deaf People
- National Council for the Blind of Ireland
- Irish Wheelchair Association
- Multiple Sclerosis Society of Ireland
- South Tipperary Autism Support Group
- Day & Outreach Centre for Acquired Brain Injuries

In addition, the respondents who did not avail of any services at the time of the survey were asked to complete the postal questionnaire.

Service users from the following organisations, which provide day care, training or similar services, agreed to participate in a series of face-to-face interviews:

- RehabCare (Clonmel)
- Moorehaven Centre (Tipperary)
- National Learning Network (Clonmel)
- Cluain Training and Enterprise Centre (Clonmel)
- South Tipperary Supported Employment Project (Clonmel)
- Camphill Community (Carrick-on-Suir)
- The Journeyman (Carrick-on-Suir)

The interviews carried out were closely orientated on the structure of the questionnaire and consisted of verbal assistance to its completion which also allowed for more detailed feedback and responses than what would largely be associated with the term »face-to-face interview«. By and large, they represented an opportunity to gain a more qualitative perspective on the information needs of people with disabilities in addition to the quantitative results of the survey.

The group of respondents who attended interviews largely consisted of people with intellectual disabilities (81.3%) and mental illnesses (87.0%), whereas the majority of respondents who completed the postal questionnaire were living with a sensory (67.8%) or physical (60.5%) disability.

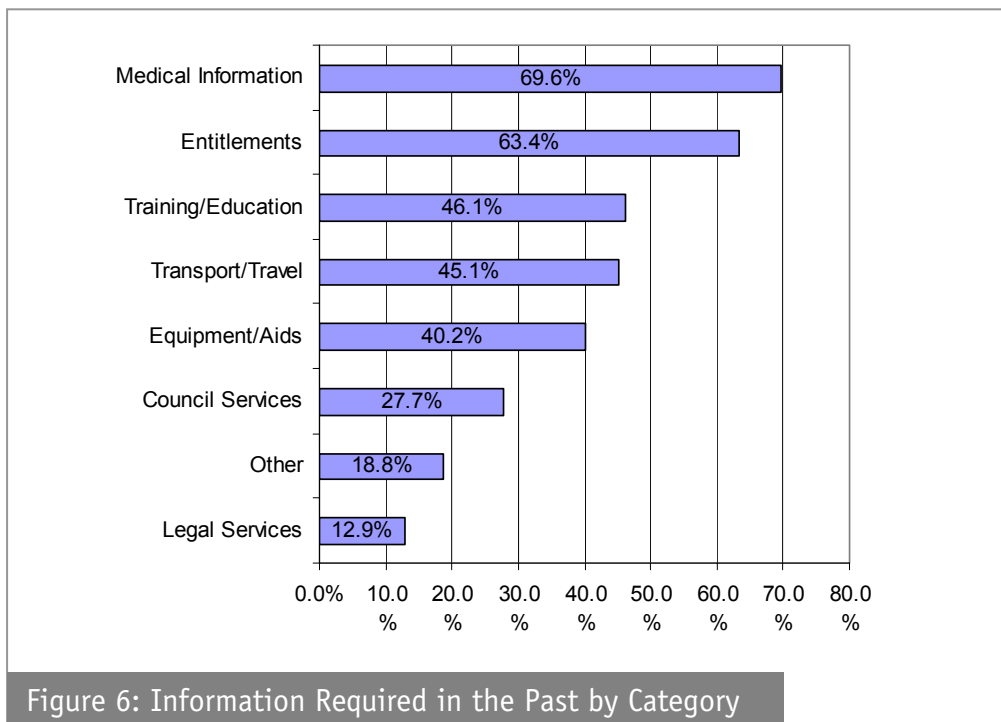
A group of secondary survey participants was formed from the staff, volunteers and carers in all participating service providers. The survey requirements for this group were more loosely structured and comprised of a very short questionnaire and comment form, the objective of which was largely to gain an insight into the information needs carers may have on behalf of their service users. It had emerged early during the consultation process with service providers, that support personnel and family members require equal, and in some cases even more information on disability-related issues than some of the people living with disabilities themselves.

The Information Needs of People with Disabilities

It is often assumed that people with disabilities experience common issues in life. However, experiences and life choices depend on individual circumstances and abilities and are therefore as diverse as among any other group of people. With regard to accessing information, people with sensory disabilities may experience quite different barriers than those with physical disabilities, mental illnesses or learning disabilities. These barriers may also vary depending on the degree or combination of disabilities being experienced. It is therefore problematic to summarise the information needs of people with disabilities with complete accuracy.

The data collected from the survey will for that reason try to take account of different abilities of people, perhaps less so in statistical terms, but most certainly during the interpretation process. A number of comments and suggestions received from participants during the course of the project will provide a much welcome contribution in relation to individual needs.

It is quite important at this point to emphasise that the information needs of people for the purpose of this study were primarily examined from a retrospective point of view. By tackling the information that was required by respondents in the past and looking at the ways in which information was obtained on various occasions, conclusions can be drawn more easily about the current state of affairs than asking people about their future information needs. The reason for this is a conceptual difficulty that naturally underlies any investigation of 'needs'. In many instances people do not know that they need information until they actually need to receive it. To effectively overcome this obstacle, we shifted our focus to how people obtain information that they actively seek. This will give us valuable insights into communication patterns, which in turn will enable those who have the information to distribute it more effectively to those who may need it.



In the questionnaire, people were asked to state first of all, whether or not they required information in one of seven (or any other) categories in the past two years or so. Figure 6 illustrates the quantitative information needs of our respondents in respect of this.

It is no surprise to find that the most frequently sought information is concerned with medical issues and entitlements. Both are primary determinants for any individual, in that they reflect health and income as a means of achieving a basic quality of life. The 12.9% of queries in respect of legal service may indicate that the movement to a rights-based perspective on disability has not yet fully materialised on the individual's level.

The replies that respondents included in »Other« were mostly crosscutting queries in relation to one or more of the other categories and therefore difficult to include under the predefined headings, but also consisted of indigenous fields of information, such as »Shopping and Entertainment«, »Consumer Affairs«, »Living Arrangements« and »Complaints Procedures«.

When asked for each individual category of information that had been required in the past, and where information was sought from, the results were as follows.

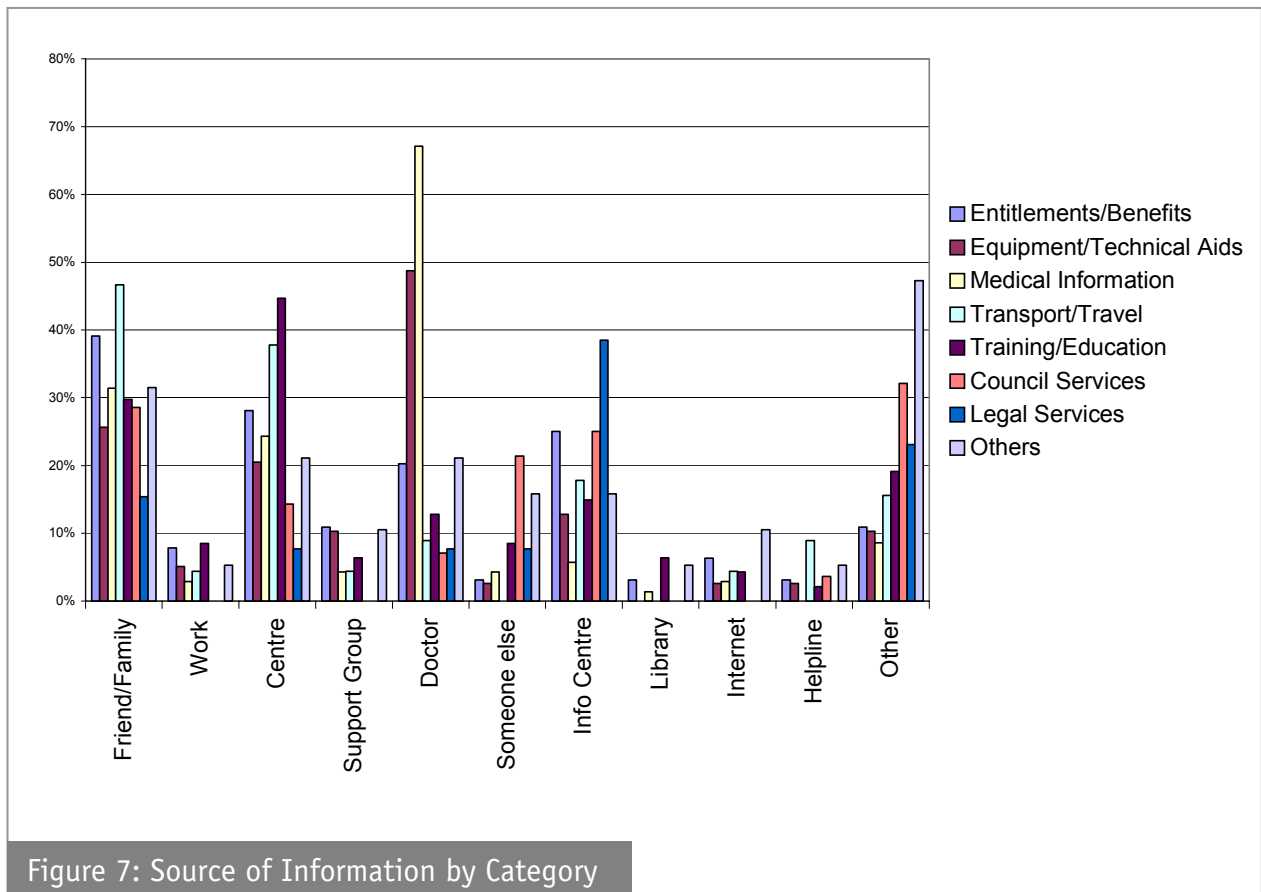


Figure 7: Source of Information by Category

Figure 7 shows explicitly that doctors/social workers, family members and friends, personnel in care and training centres and information centres are the most frequently addressed sources of information. Their competence in providing the required information is, however, perceived differently and depends clearly on the information category into which the query falls. For example,

- Doctors are contacted most frequently for information required in relation to medical issues (i.e. by 67.1% of respondents).

- Family members and friends are considered to be competent in supplying information about entitlements (39.1%), medical issues (31.4%), transport & travel (46.7%) and training/education opportunities (29.8%).
- Personnel in care and training centres are approached equally as often for the same issues, however more frequently than family members and friends in relation to education and training queries (44.7%).
- Information centres are perceived as a useful point of contact for queries in relation to entitlements (25.0%) and legal queries (38.5%).
- Libraries are the least frequently used source of information (highest score 6.3% in relation to entitlements and benefits).
- The internet and helplines are used slightly more often than libraries, but in relation to a broader spectrum of information.

In addition to the listed options, respondents named a number of other sources for information some of which seemed quite significant with regard to the above observations. On many occasions, services and agencies were contacted directly, i.e.:

- The HSE and Social Welfare Offices were most frequently contacted directly in relation to entitlement queries.
- Medical personnel (physiotherapists, hospital staff) were directly addressed in respect of technical aids and equipment-related as well as medical issues.
- Public transport personnel and information points such as bus stops, Bus Eireann information services and newsagents were contacted for information in respect of transport and travel.
- FÁS and the VEC were named as agencies who were contacted for information on education and training. Training institutions, colleges etc. were also called directly.
- Interestingly, local politicians appeared as contact persons in relation to council services along with the town, county and borough councils, community welfare officer and housing associations such as FHIIST.
- People had also no qualms in addressing very specific issues to the government departments and agencies in the form of letters or phone calls.

The answers given in this section of the questionnaire confirm that the mainstreaming of services has come to fruition in the past few years in that agencies such as the HSE, FÁS, the VEC and others are recognising people with disabilities as a customer group with particular needs and are in a position to provide the required information on request.

When adding up the results for each information source/agent, i.e. the number of queries from the different categories directed at them, friends and family score highest with 31%, followed by the personnel of day care or training centres and organisations representing people with disabilities (24.8%) and doctors/medical personnel (24.2%). Information centres rank fourth with 19.4%. Libraries represent the least frequently used source of information, scoring only 2.0%. Helplines (3.2%) and the internet (3.9%) also had a low ranking.

During the interviews it became apparent that one of the main reasons why family and friends, personnel in service provider organisations (particularly those availed of regularly) and GPs were contacted first for information was the existing level of familiarity and trust. The respondents with mental illnesses and learning difficulties were more hesitant to contact public sources of information. Many felt, when contacting outside agencies or information centres that they were speaking to strangers who had no knowledge about their personal background. A general unease, an urge to have to explain themselves and a distrust as to whether the information provider would take a real (and unbiased) interest in the person was an experience felt by many. A number of

respondents from these groups found it most distressing to deal with more than one person in agencies when following up on previous queries.

When asked about different aspects of the quality of information that had been obtained from the various sources, such as its adequacy, comprehensiveness, the appropriateness of the format it was presented in, and the accessibility of information, the survey indicated an acceptable level of satisfaction (Figure 8).

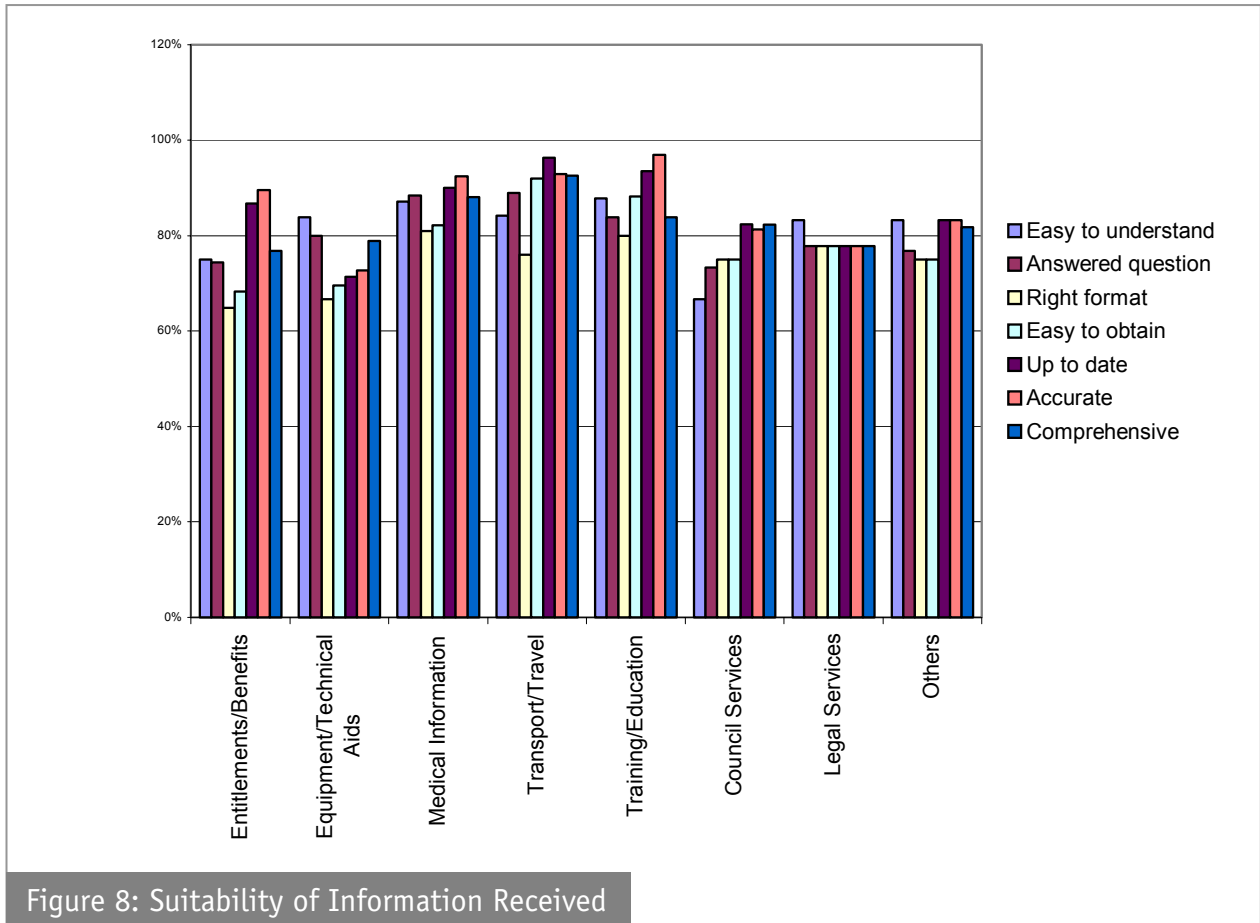


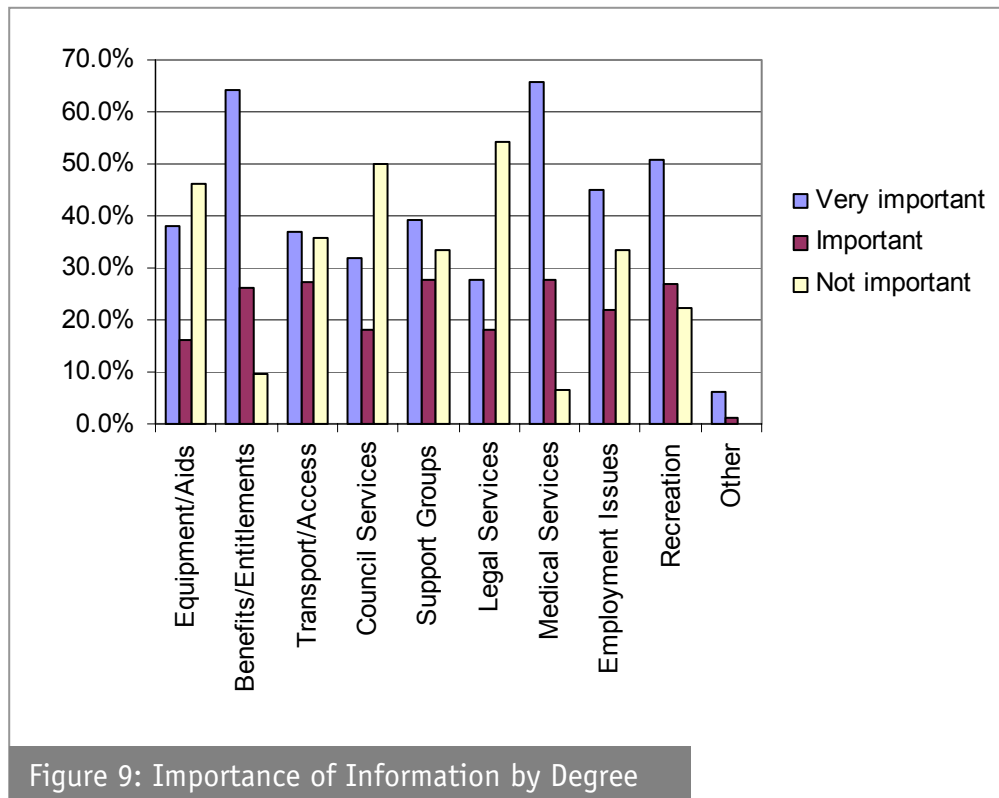
Figure 8: Suitability of Information Received

Information was generally perceived as easy to understand (average 81.4% across all information categories), accurate (85.9%) and up to date (85.2%). 80.5% of all queries were handled to the satisfaction of the respondents. When combining all quality aspects of the information received, the one in relation to transport and travel issues was of the highest quality, with 89.0% of queries in this area fulfilling the expectations of the respondents. 87.7% of queries in respect of training and education satisfied the criteria, closely followed by medical information with 87.0%. Information received in respect of technical aids and equipment queries was generally perceived as least satisfactory (average 74.7%) and lacked particularly in accessibility (30.4% of the information was not easy to obtain by the respondents) and was not presented in the right format in 1/3rd of the queries. Information about council services, on the other hand, was least likely to be easily understandable (1/3rd of queries in this regard did not fulfil the requirement for respondents).

The choice of the right format represents the most sensitive quality issue. One quarter of all information received did not satisfy this criteria. Most likely to be in the wrong format was information in respect of entitlements and benefits, equipment and technical aids, council as well as legal services. It was expressed during the interviews that in many cases the information was too complex and/or detailed to be provided only verbally, whereas commonly used information leaflets and handbooks contained so much information that it was difficult to find the information that

applied to the individual circumstances. This was also confirmed by people with visual impairments who were often unable to retain the information which was given verbally.

While the findings thus far represent the experiences of people with disabilities when actively seeking information in the past, a series of other questions aimed to establish information priorities independently of past experiences. Here, the objective was to identify the information most important to people with disabilities, their general perception of access to information and their preferred sources/formats of information.

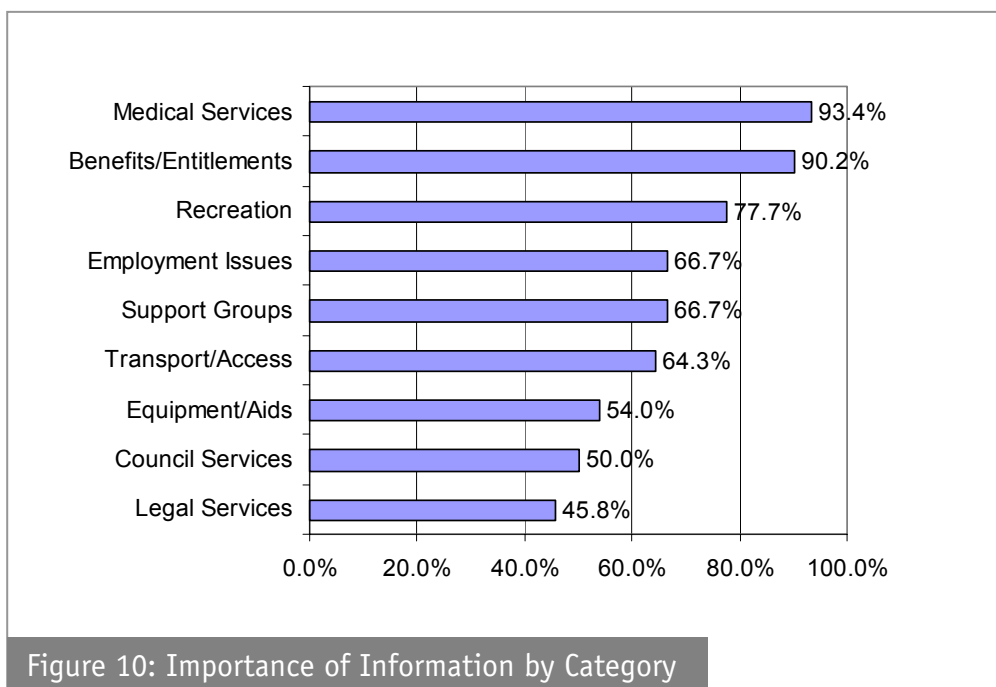


Similar to the results concerning past experiences, information about medical services and benefits and entitlements topped the list of importance. 93.4% of respondents considered medical services important or very important, while 90.2% stated the same in relation to entitlements (Figure 10). Support groups and employment issues were not important to one third of the respondents. Often overseen by information providers but quite important is information on holidays, sports and leisure (appearing as »Recreation« in Figures 9 and 10), which was essential to 77.7% of the respondents. Legal services and council services appear at the bottom of the chart with only half of the respondents considering these issues important.

A number of survey participants stressed other issues that were important to them, most noticeably information about (self-)advocacy, independent living, and equality/ discrimination issues.

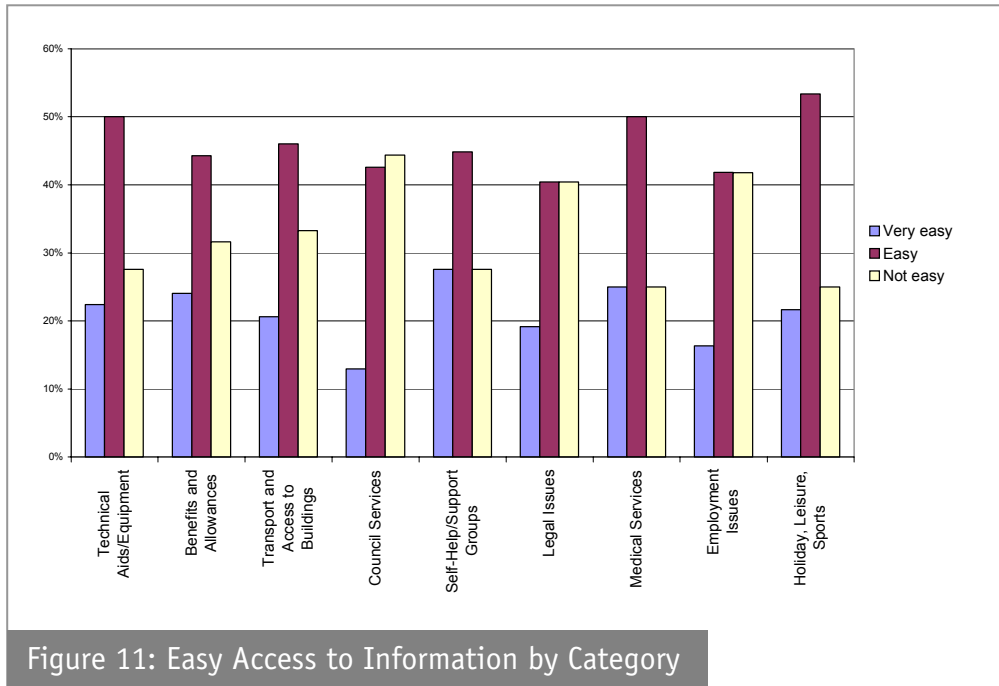
While some of the above figures can be explained by the diversity of the survey participants, others act as a clear indicator of information needs to be considered by information providers. One will surmise that Council Services may only be of interest to those who live independently as tenants or homeowners, while those in care or living with their family may not need to engage directly with local authorities. The number of respondents living with intellectual disabilities, who did not live independently, was considerably higher than from the other groups. Similarly, information about equipment and technical aids will be most necessary for those experiencing physical or sensory

restrictions. Physical access to buildings would also be most relevant for this group. Information about employment issues appealed most to those in training at the time of the survey, while it was of no importance to those retired or at home for health reasons, i.e. unable to work. Recreation, entitlements, legal services, support groups and medical services on the other hand must be seen as information categories that should appeal to a broad spectrum of people with disabilities in all instances of life. Sports, leisure activities and holidays – determinants, in other words, for an active social life – were not only of particular interest to the majority of respondents, but were also perceived as the least promoted area in life. This was not necessarily true in respect of the ease with which information about recreation could be obtained (in fact, three quarters of respondents found it easy to get such information), but in respect of the amount of information about activities that was available.

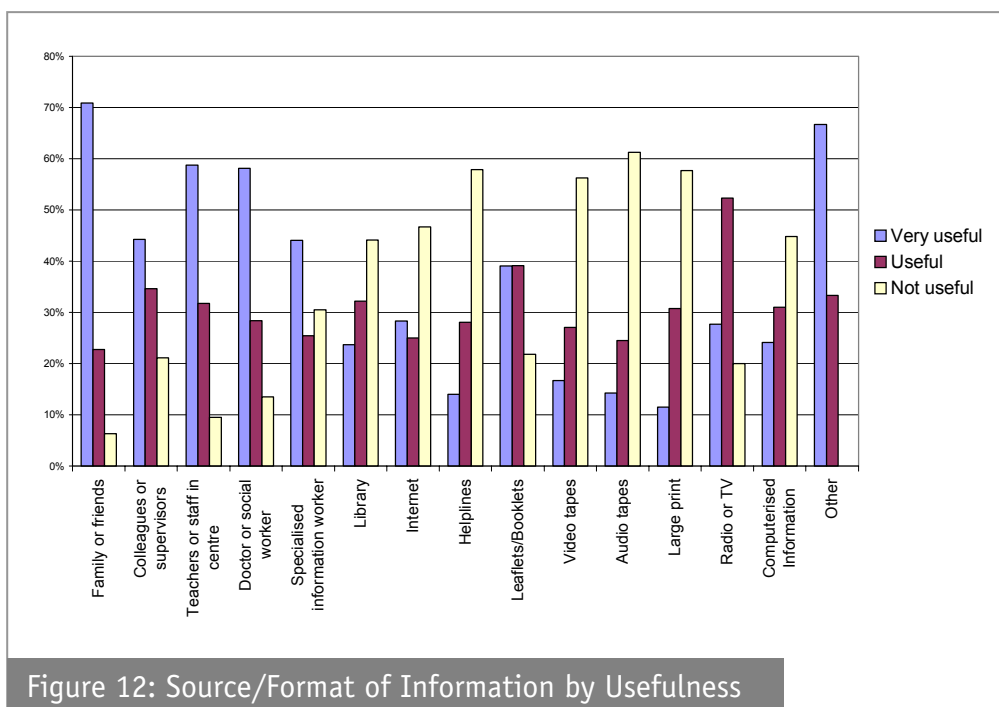


With regards to accessibility, the majority of respondents considered it easy or very easy to get the information they require. However, the degree of accessibility very much depends on the area of information that is required. According to the survey, information on medical services (75%) and benefits/entitlements (68.3%), as well as recreational issues (75%), is easy to access for those who seek it. Clear accessibility difficulties exist for information on council services (44% of respondents to whom it applied claimed they considered it difficult to access such information), employment (41.8%) and legal issues (40.4%).

The feedback received from the interviews suggests that often the accessibility of information on a particular topic is interlinked with actual availability of opportunities. This may be particularly true in respect of information on employment: a lack of available employment openings for people with disabilities will naturally result in a limited quantity of appropriate information. What was also highlighted by a number of respondents was the level of bureaucracy that acts as a barrier, which prevents easy access to information. Particularly the completion of registration and application forms for agencies and councils before being able to determine eligibility for various support services is – whilst necessary – often experienced as a frustrating process. In other cases, such as queries in relation to legal issues, the use of restrictive language was pointed out as the most prevalent obstacle to accessing information.



In the last of this series of questions, respondents were asked to state which sources of information (these could be people or media) and which particular formats they preferred in respect of information they may receive. By and large, the results in this regard support the findings from an earlier section on how the respondents obtained information in the past. An overwhelming 93.7% said they perceived families and friends as very useful sources of information. This was followed by 90.5% who referred to personnel in training and care centres and 86.5% who stated that doctors and social workers were very useful when approached for information they require. In addition to the four agents which had been established previously, information leaflets and booklets (78.2%), as well as radio and TV (80%) were perceived as useful or very useful for the majority of respondents. On the other hand, helplines, the internet and libraries were not considered useful information resources with only 50% of respondents choosing these. In fact, helplines were perceived as not useful by a small majority of people (57.9%).



The low results in respect of large print and audio tapes, which would appear to be a preference for people with visual difficulties, are understandable when one considers that this group of people formed only a small part of the overall and of the group of respondents with sensory disabilities.

For the purpose of outlining the individual information needs of people with different disabilities, the following table is included.

	Physical	Sensory	Intellectual	Mental Health
Family & Friends	92.9%	91.7%	91.4%	76.9%
Colleague/Supervisors	76.5%	50.0%	81.8%	76.9%
Teachers/Centre Staff	85.0%	73.3%	96.9%	100%
GP/Social Worker	96.2%	95.8%	83.3%	73.3%
Info Worker	90.0%	80.0%	63.6%	38.5%
Library	41.2%	64.7%	68.0%	35.7%
Internet	57.9%	50.0%	44.0%	42.9%
Helpline	50.0%	52.9%	31.8%	28.6%
Leaflets/Books	95.0%	84.2%	68.0%	71.4%
Video Tapes	35.7%	30.8%	47.3%	36.4%
Audio Tapes	43.8%	33.3%	30.0%	27.3%
Large Print	56.3%	42.1%	35.0%	33.3%
Radio/TV	63.2%	68.2%	84.6%	84.6%
Computerised	61.1%	44.4%	65.2%	38.5%

Table 1: Breakdown of Figure 12 by Disability

Table 1 illustrates the following trends:

- People with mental illnesses show a greater dependency on staff in day care and training centres for access to information than any other group while they are least likely to address GPs and Social workers with information queries.
- Only over one third of people with mental illnesses consider specialised information workers a good source of information compared to 63 to 90% of people with other disabilities.
- People with sensory disabilities are least likely to ask questions in the workplace, while all other groups consider colleagues and supervisors a useful source of information.
- The internet and helplines are least likely to be used for information research by people with intellectual disabilities and mental illnesses.
- Video tapes are appreciated most by people with intellectual disabilities while audio tapes are regarded as a useful source of information by 43.8% of people with physical disabilities.
- People with sensory disabilities and mental illnesses are least likely to use computerised information.
- Large print is appreciated most by people with physical and sensory disabilities.

- Overall, people with mental illnesses and intellectual disabilities prefer people in their immediate surroundings as sources of information, while people with sensory or physical disabilities are more likely to access information through different media and technology.

While any statistical analysis can give valuable insights into the information needs of people, it was important for the purpose of this project to gather additional information and individual feedback from respondents. The face-to-face interviews provided an ideal opportunity to obtain such feedback. Those who were interviewed were invited to tell of personal experiences and add comments at any time during the interview. However, people who completed the questionnaire by post were also prompted to provide feedback, comments and suggestions. In summary, the additional responses received from both groups confirmed the statistical findings:

- Those who were regularly attending training or day care institutions perceived the staff and personnel of these centres not only as the first port of call when they required particular information, but were also quite content with the help and information they received in this regard.
- Family members and often one particular person in the family were equally important for respondents in their search for information.
- A number of respondents agreed that information was easy to obtain as long as assistance was available. Assistance was particularly crucial for the completion of forms.
- Those who were members of specific disability associations such as the NCBI and NAD or who attended support groups, were most likely to contact these for assistance. In fact, a number of respondents stated that they were more inclined to contact disability support organisations than mainstream services or independent information providers such as the CICs for disability-related issues.
- When actively seeking information – both with or without the assistance of someone else – people sometimes felt that once received, information was too detailed and difficult to understand.

Some of the comments received in respect of barriers to accessing or understanding information were:

- Information and the language or format it is presented in is genuinely difficult to understand (there is a need for bigger print in many publications).
- The fact that different information has to be sought from different sources was perceived as an obstacle («It would be great if you could find out from one person everything you are entitled to».)
- The decentralisation of government offices it was felt »does not help«.
- It is of vital importance to talk to a person face-to-face in a local service and to receive the information additionally in writing.
- Doctors were not always fully informed and there is often a lack of communication in surgeries and/or between agencies.
- It is very important to always deal with the same person in services.
- People sometimes feel embarrassed to contact services such as the CICs, especially when they need assistance in filling out forms.
- The fact that one has to fight for everything leads to frustration, anger and a feeling of exhaustion which can result in the fact that one does not even try to avail of a service the next time.

CONCLUSIONS

It can safely be stated that the information needs of people with disabilities in South Tipperary are as diverse as the group itself. In this respect, some of the statistical information provided here can only be seen in connection with individual feedback received from respondents and, of course, with an approach that recognises the uniqueness of each person with a disability.

Nevertheless, this study was able to identify a number of issues that apply to the majority of people with disabilities and their information needs. These are as follows:

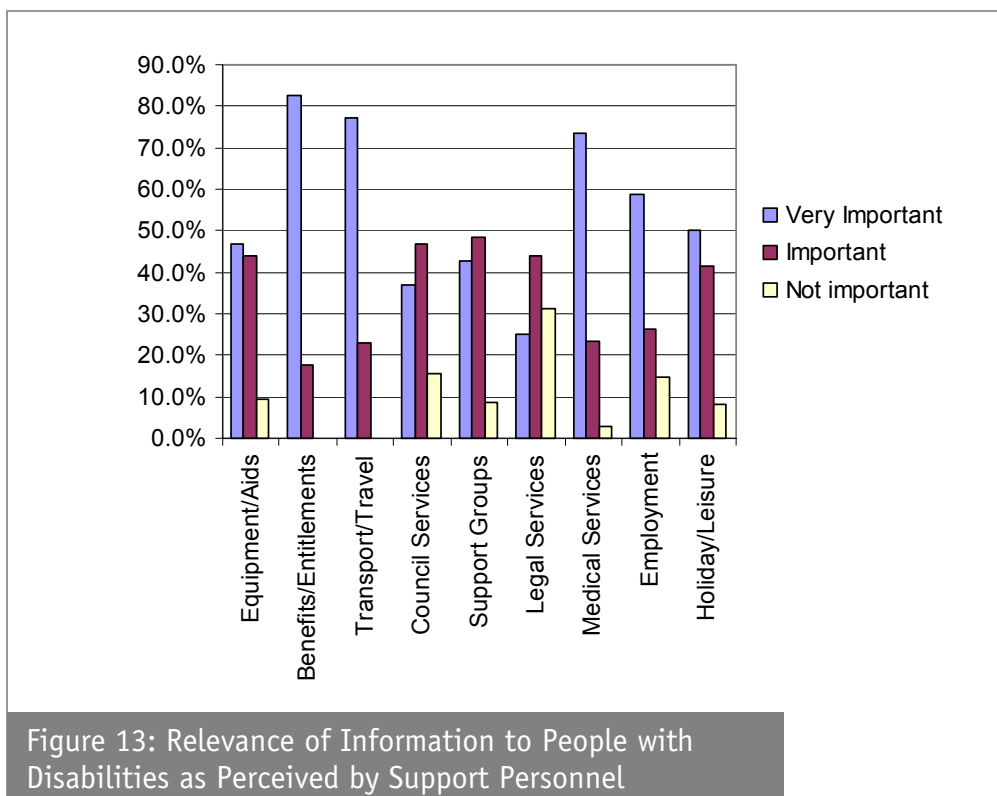
- Information about medical services and entitlements/benefits is of utmost importance to people with disabilities, particularly where these contribute to a basic quality of life.
- Legal issues, while important, do not represent a priority to people with disabilities at present.
- In order to obtain information, people with disabilities are most likely to contact one of these four agents:
 - I. Family and friends
 - II. Staff and volunteers in day care/training centre and/or organisations representing people with disabilities
 - III. GPs, Social Workers and a variety of other medical staff
 - IV. Information Centres
- All of these agents are characterised by personal contact which is important to people with disabilities.
- The quality of information received by people with disabilities in the past is quite satisfactory with an average of 81% of queries having received adequate replies. However, various quality aspects, such as presentation in the right format and whether or not the information is easy to obtain scored lower than other criteria and need to be considered for development.
- Information categories, such as council services, legal services and employment appear to be more difficult to access by people with disabilities.
- Some of the barriers that people experience when trying to obtain information include: restrictive language, bureaucracy, unfamiliarity with the service and/or contact person, lack of written communication as backup.

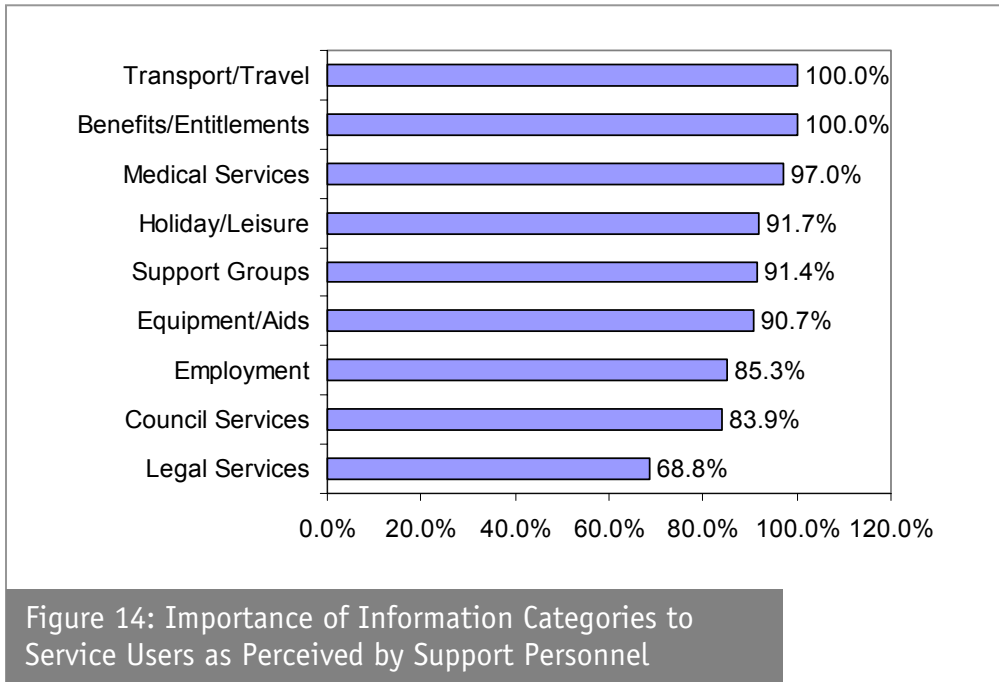
The Views of Support Personnel and Carers

As part of this project, we asked 38 persons who work for and with people with disabilities in the participating service providers to complete a short questionnaire to reflect on their experience with their client’s information requirements. The group of support personnel consisted of therapists, training instructors/facilitators/coordinators, service managers, social care workers, medical advisors, administrators, and a small number of other professions. 58% of those surveyed stated that they were regularly approached by service users with information queries. Training personnel, social care workers and supervisors, but also a number of managers, were most likely to be approached by service users. Administrative staff and support staff such as chefs were less likely to deal with client’s queries.

When asked how relevant they thought the various categories of information were to their service users, the support personnel answered as follows (See Figures 13 and 14):

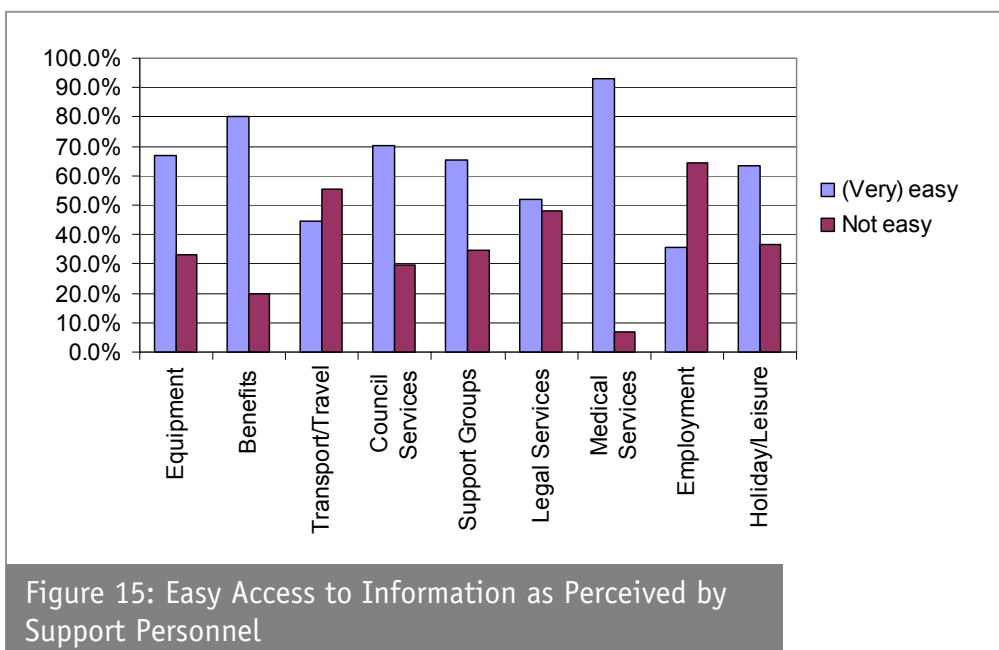
- A clear majority of support personnel believed that benefits & entitlements, transport & travel and medical services were very important to their service users.
- Over one third of staff thought information about legal services was not important to people with disabilities.
- Almost one in every six people working for service providers stated that council services and employment issues were not important to their service users.
- All who were asked (100%) agreed that benefits & entitlements as well as transport & travel issues were either important or very important to the people availing of their service.
- Information in respect of holiday and leisure activities were perceived as important or very important by 91.7% of the support personnel surveyed.
- Education and training was named as an additional area, which the staff of service providers perceived as important to their service users.





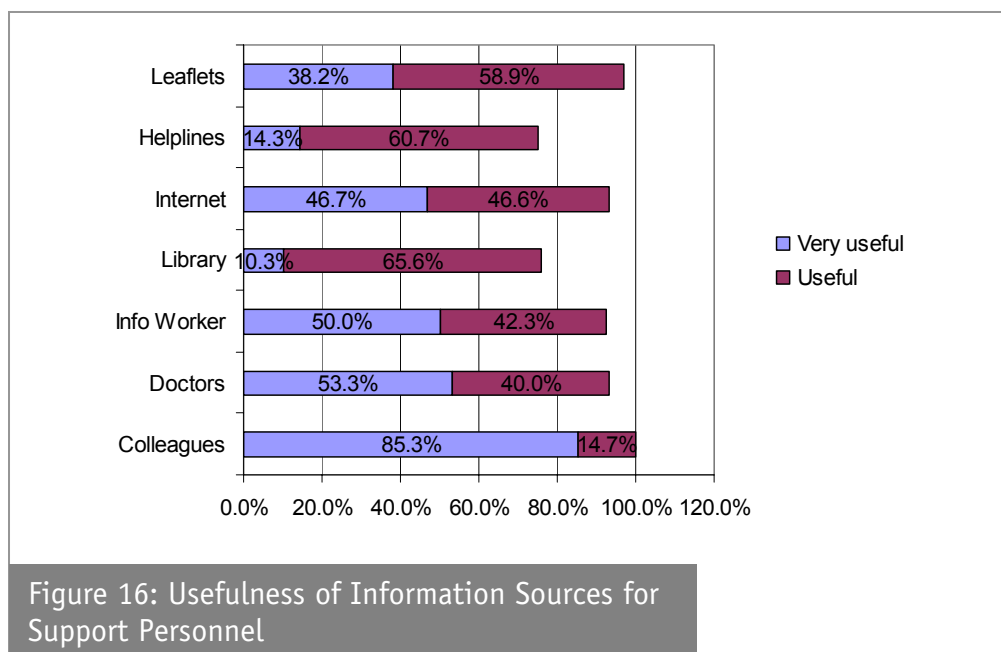
In the next question, the respondents in this group were asked how easily accessible information about the different topics was when they sought information on a client's behalf. Of those who replied,

- Almost two thirds (64.3%) thought they had no easy access to information on employment.
- 93.3% believed they could easily access information on medical issues, followed by 80% who stated that access to information about benefits was also easy or very easy.
- More than half (55.2%) felt it was difficult to obtain information about transport and travel; slightly less (47.8%) stated information about legal services was equally difficult to get.
- Almost two thirds (63.3%) of support personnel found it easy to find information on leisure and holiday activities for their service users.



When support personnel try to obtain information, the following sources were perceived as most helpful (Figure 16):

- Colleagues: All those questioned stated that they thought their colleagues were very good sources of information, with 85.3% perceiving them as »very useful«.
- Leaflets were perceived as another useful source of information, however only 38.2% of those asked considered them »very useful«
- The Internet is a useful source of information to 93.3% of those surveyed, of whom half rated it »useful« and half »very useful«.
- Libraries and helplines are perceived as least helpful. Only three quarters of respondents said it was useful, only one in seven of whom would consider it »very useful«.
- Information workers and doctors appear to be a useful source of information to nine in ten persons asked.



Similar to the primary group of respondents, i.e. the people with disabilities, we asked the staff and volunteers in the service providers to let us have their comments on the information needs of people with disabilities in addition to the questions raised in the questionnaire.

A number of people pointed out that their service users exhibit very individual needs and abilities and should therefore be approached on an individual basis. It also appeared that in respect of information needs, service providers are networking to optimise resources such as information and experience. One respondent said she approaches people who have had the same request or experience when trying to find out about something as it is the most efficient way to gain information as they would »have already trodden that path«. The need for information resources based on the idea of a »one-stop-shop« (i.e. a website containing a database of technical aids and special equipment all in one place or a website where agencies can lodge their information that can then be passed on to service users by CICs or other information providers) was also expressed. As a matter of fact, the CICs were perceived as an ideal base for this.

Citizens Information Centres

There are currently two Citizens Information Centres (CICs) in South Tipperary. These are located in Clonmel and Tipperary. Outreach services operated by the centres can also be found in Carrick-on-Suir, Cashel and Cahir. Both CICs are incorporated into the County Tipperary Citizens Information Service which was formed in 2002 to co-ordinate the delivery of services on a countywide basis. Prior to this, the CICs in North and South Tipperary had operated independently of each other.

The formation of a countywide service and the recruitment of a Development Manager has had a profound impact on the way the Citizens Information Service is delivered to the public. Most CICs in the county were able to extend their opening hours and offer additional outreach services over the past few years. Volunteers and paid staff are continuously receiving extensive training on issues involved in the provision of information and the recent adoption of a Customer Charter reinforces the commitment to the delivery of a customer centred quality service. As a direct result of the qualitative and quantitative expansion of the service, the CICs across the county have seen a dramatic increase in the uptake of the service. Between 2002 and 2004 the number of queries received countywide rose from 12,472 to 24,598 representing an increase of 82%.

It has been the mission of County Tipperary Citizens Information Service to ensure that all people of County Tipperary have access to the highest quality of information, advice and advocacy in relation to their civil and social rights, their entitlements and the social services that exist to support them. The service is independent, impartial, confidential, free of charge and comprehensive in its nature and, where feasible, is based on customers' needs. The current Development Plan (2005-2007) states that it is the »main priority« of Co. Tipperary CIS to »meet the needs of our customers and to amend and adjust such service provision as necessary«.

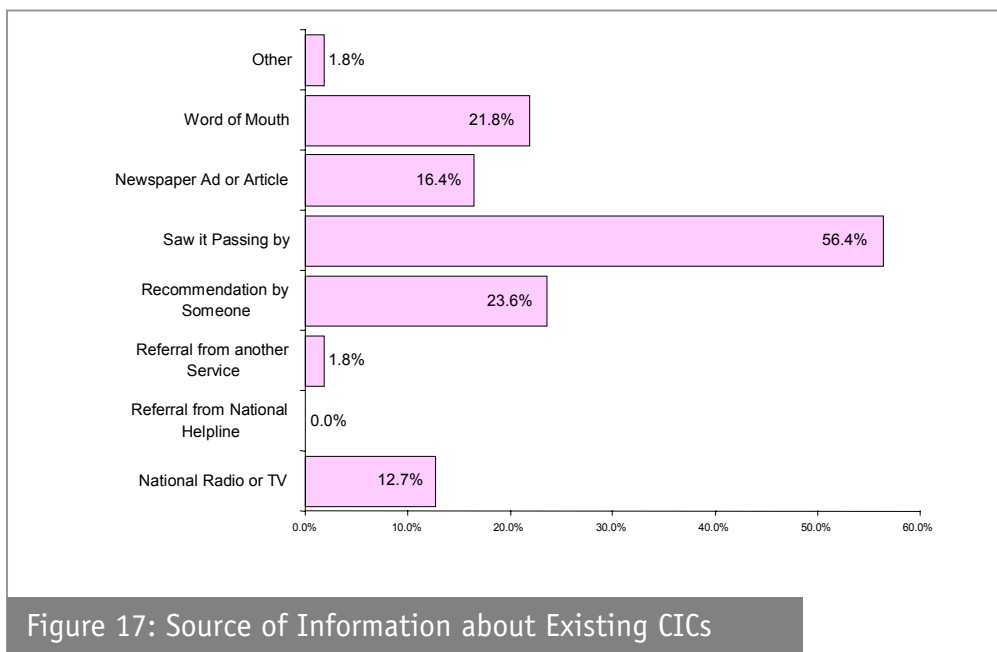
It is in precisely this context that the »South Tipperary Disability Information Project« originated and in which the recommendations resulting from this research will be placed. Co. Tipperary CIS firmly believes that access to information is a basic right of all individuals and that it empowers people to get full entitlement to state and community services.

It was important therefore to the Citizens Information Service to not only investigate the information needs of people with disabilities in a broader context, but to take the opportunity to evaluate the service it has provided to this customer group so far. In this regard, the third and final part of the questionnaire focused on people's awareness of the CIS and their experiences in using the service.

The service spectrum of Citizens Information Centres is quite broad in respect of the type of queries that can be dealt with. It is a common perception that CICs deal mainly – although not only – with questions relating to Social Welfare payments and entitlements. Not surprisingly, when asked what type of information they thought was available in the centres, the majority of respondents (90%) agreed that Social Welfare issues were a central area of expertise of the service. However, a large number of respondents also assumed that rights issues (75%) and queries in respect of disability information (78.8%) could be addressed by the CICs. It is understandable that the replies given in response to this question are interest driven. The low percentage, therefore, in respect of the respondents' awareness that information for migrants and about the European Union (only 42.5% respectively) is also available from the service only reinforces this perception. More interestingly, only 51.3% of the respondents believed that information on counselling and family support services was available in CICs – areas, of course, which should be of importance to quite a number of people with disabilities.

The level of awareness among the respondents of a CIC in their area came in relatively low, with only 59.6% of them stating that they were aware of their nearest centre. The fact that the majority of those who knew about a CIC close-by, namely 56.4%, had noticed it passing by speaks for the central location and brand recognition of the centres and outreach offices in South Tipperary. In fact, with the Clonmel CIC located right across from the County Council offices in the town centre and Tipperary CIC being situated alongside other services in the Community Centre in St. Michael Street, both centres are central, visible and easily accessible. The outreach services in Cashel (Civic Offices), Cahir (Enterprise Centre) and Carrick-on-Suir (Nano Nagle Community Resource Centre) equally avail of customer-friendly locations.

From a marketing point of view, advertisements and appearances in the media, which were named by 29.1% as the source through which they became aware of the CIC, are proving to be efficient means of gaining publicity. It has to be noted, however, that the 12.7% who stated they had learned about the service on TV or radio would have mainly profited from nationwide publicity campaigns which are generally organised by Comhairle. Press releases, articles and advertisements in the local press, on the other hand are by and large organised on a local level through Co. Tipperary CIS. While word-of-mouth and recommendations by another person together form the largest force behind awareness of the service (45.4%), the potential of other resources, such as interagency referrals and of course referrals from the national helpline, should be taken into account for measures aimed to increase awareness of the service in the future. A summary of the responses is shown in Figure 17.



Among those who were aware of the Citizens Information Service, 55.9% stated that they had in fact contacted the service in the past. In comparison, the number of staff from the service providers who had contacted a CIC on behalf of a client is considerably lower at 30.6%. However, half of those who were asked also stated that they had referred a client or recommended the CIC as a source of information to a client before. On the surface, this would strongly contradict the low figure of service referrals identified by the respondents with disabilities (1.8%, see figure 17). It must be assumed that such referrals from training and care personnel were perceived by the service users not as a referral in the official sense, but as a »recommendation by someone« or perhaps even »word of mouth«.

The queries that people with disabilities addressed to the CICs cover a wide spectrum. Social Welfare issues (56.3%) top the list of queries that people with disabilities had when they contacted a CIC. These were followed by questions in relation to disability information (34.4%) and legal issues (21.9%), which included the use of the Free Legal Advice service offered in Clonmel CIC. Interestingly, the queries that service providers directed at the CICs on behalf of their service users mainly concerned disability information (63.6%) and housing issues (54.5%). This would indicate that people with disabilities more often address support personnel in the training and day care centres in respect of the latter issues, while they are more likely to contact CICs directly in respect of Social Welfare queries or legal issues despite their high level of awareness that CICs deal with all of these areas of information.

Respondents were asked to specify their level of satisfaction with the service they had received in the CICs. The physical accessibility of the centres was clearly not an issue: all respondents agreed that the CICs were easily accessible. The vast majority of respondents (93.8%) were also satisfied with the information they received which they perceived as having been »helpful«. Almost one third of those who received the requested information (31.3%) stated they had been given the information in writing with an additional 46.9% of respondents who had got a publication to take away, such as a leaflet or brochure. 81.3% had been given the information verbally. In most cases, the information was received as a combination of these three options.

Where queries can not entirely be answered by the information officers themselves, it is common practice in the CICs that customers are directly referred to another service. Where possible, contact with the relevant agency is made in the presence of the customer to ensure unnecessary delays or internal referrals. 87.5% of respondents in the group of people with disabilities stated that they had, in fact, been referred to the correct agency and/or person. Only 6.3% were unhappy with the circumstances of having been sent to another agency. Given the amount of queries and referrals dealt with in the CICs, this is a satisfactory result and reinforces the importance of making contact with other agencies prior to referring a customer to them.

In light of this, the overall satisfaction of respondents with the service offered in the CICs is very high. Only 9.1% of respondents said that they had either received a »very poor« or »somewhat unsatisfactory« service in the CICs. A total of 78.8% stated they were satisfied or very satisfied with the way their queries were dealt with. 12.1% had even perceived the service as being »superior« to other services (unspecified). The results from the survey among service providers were similar. Here, 9% claimed they were dissatisfied with the service they had received, whereas 91% were either satisfied or very satisfied with their experience in the CICs.

The feedback received from the interviews and from individual comments of people with disabilities reinstates this positive result. With few exceptions, the information officers were described by many as »very kind« and »helpful« with some respondents saying that their experience in the CIC was one of a »non-judgemental«, »efficient« and »impartial« way of dealing with customers. Naturally, people also pointed to areas that they would like to see improved. As one respondent put it:

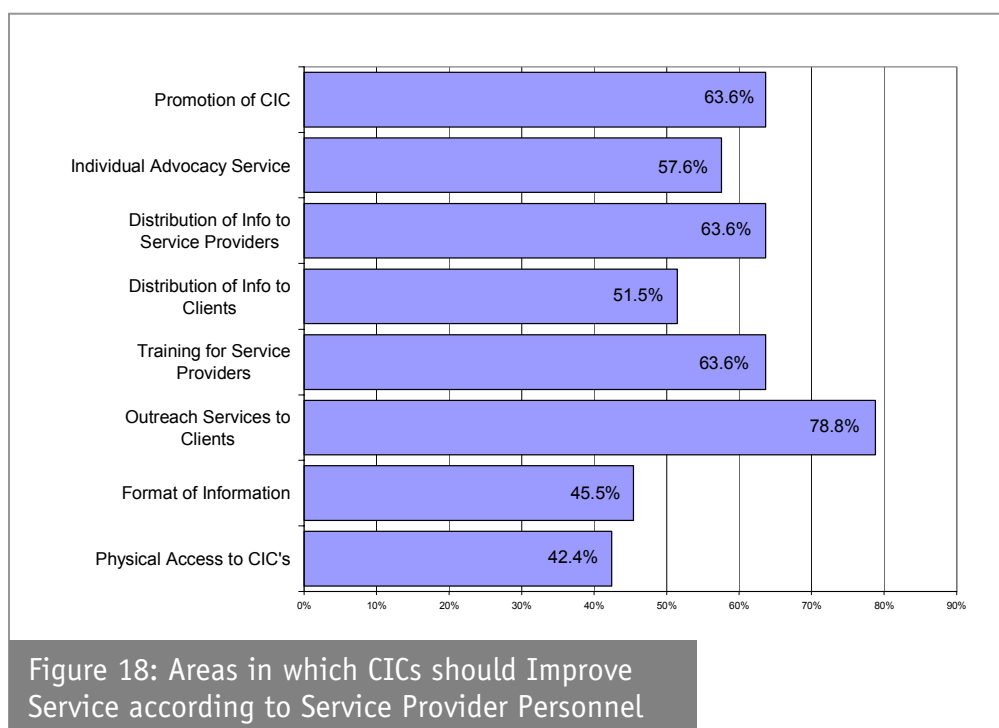
Our Citizens Information Centre in Tipp is very good. Just we as citizens do not know enough about this service.

Others said that the centres should have more information on special needs and social life choices for people with disabilities:

It is of great help to have a Citizens Information Centre. I was pleased to be able to get the information I needed. But I think children and very young people need to be catered

for better. It would be good to get all information or help when trying to get in touch with some departments of government, i.e. Special Education, as it is very difficult to get help needed for children with special needs.

The areas that the Citizens Information Centre could improve in the future were more directly addressed in the questionnaires submitted to the personnel in the various service provider organisations. While this group was also asked to make individual comments about the service (and these resembled largely those made by the people with disabilities), a number of strategies were listed on the questionnaire and the staff were requested to identify which of these (or any other) they consider most important. The most pressing need that emerged in this regard was outreach services to the service providers which would address their service users. 78.8% of support personnel agreed that this would be a beneficial strategy. With 63.6% respectively, training for the service providers (in respect of Citizens Information issues), the distribution of relevant information to the staff and a general promotion of the service directed at both service users and providers were other vital strategies that, according to those working with and for people with disabilities, should be addressed by the CICs (see figure 18).



From the consultation with service providers, it also became clear that advocacy services were a pressing need. Often staff and carers are taking on this role on behalf of service users, however, the lack of the required independence and expertise was seen by many as a clear impediment to carrying out the tasks associated with advocacy successfully. The majority of service providers agreed that independent organisations like the CIS were in a much better position to provide this service, provided, of course, that the resources for this were available.

The main points that were raised by the service providers, i.e. intensified promotion of the service and the development of outreach services, are summarised in the following quotations taken from the responses to the questionnaire:

Promotion of the Services offered in CICs

I hadn't known about this service. It could be very important as a starting point for many queries.

I did not know about this service before. [...] It might be helpful if I (or someone else) could visit/meet your centre or someone from it to inform themselves more fully of what you are offering and what is available.

It would be of great help if there was an information leaflet/handbook about the service you provide.

It would be helpful to know the role of the CIC and especially what type of service they provide.

Outreach

I would like to see regular visits by Citizens Advice members to care and outreach centres to provide information in a clear and simple manner to put a human face behind the phone number.

I would like to see more field work, possible visits to services with updated information – and a compiled handbook for staff to use within services.

It would be helpful for an outreach worker face to become familiar with the service users so they feel less intimidated when accessing the service.

As a matter of fact, it became clear during the consultation meetings and from the individual responses to the questionnaire that a number of people working for the organisations which provide services to people with disabilities had only a vague knowledge of the specific roles of CICs. Some had perhaps heard about the service, but were unsure as to what queries could be directed to the centres or to what extent information was available. Clearly, the close co-operation with the services in the course of this research project has had a positive impact in this regard, but as can be seen from the detailed responses, much work has yet to be done to improve awareness, accessibility and subsequently the use of the CIS both by people with disabilities and their carers.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall the results from the customer satisfaction survey clearly state that the service provided in the CICs to people with disabilities and the staff of service provider organisations in the past has been a satisfactory or even very satisfactory experience for many. This is not to say that various aspects of the service require strategic development in order to address the needs of this group of customers more effectively.

The main issues raised through this survey are as follows:

- There is a clear need to promote the CICs in South Tipperary, their role in providing information and specifically the type of information that is available from the service among people with disabilities and the staff in service provider organisations.
- Further to promotional activities, there is a demand for outreach services. The organisations working for and with people with disabilities represent an ideal starting point for this, as outreach presentations can be addressed to an audience that integrates both service users and service providers.
- As service users often turn to staff in their training and care centres, there is an opportunity for the CICs to educate support personnel in providing basic information and referring more comprehensive queries to the service directly.
- Support media, such as detailed brochures/handbooks or a website containing links to other agencies, would be welcomed by service providers in ensuring easy access to information for their service users.
- A number of people with disabilities as well as the service provider staff stressed the importance of a personal and individual aspect to the service.
- There is an urgent need for advocacy services to be provided by an independent service such as the CIS.

General Conclusion

The aim of the 'South Tipperary Disability Information Project' was to examine the information needs of people with disabilities on a local basis and determine how, when and where different types of information is accessed by them.

The findings of this research are so comprehensive that it is difficult to offer an overall summary which would take into account all of the important aspects highlighted in this report. Each person will have set out to read this report with different priorities in mind. Similarly, the conclusions and recommendations resulting from the project may not be applicable or appropriate for all users or providers of information services.

Nevertheless, this research was able to highlight key areas that can and should inform a strategic approach to the provision of information to people with disabilities. These are:

- People with disabilities continue to have a primary need for information in respect of medical services as well as rights and entitlements. In light of this, information about other aspects of life, which has the potential of encouraging them to fully participate in society, loses some of its importance.
- People with disabilities prefer to access information through other people rather than media or technology. Face-to-face communication is of particular importance to people with intellectual disabilities or mental illnesses.
- Four groups of people are most likely to be contacted for information by people with disabilities. These are: (i) Friends and Family, (ii) GPs and Social Workers, (iii) Staff and Volunteers in Day Care and Training Centres and (iv) Staff and Volunteers in Information Centres. Particularly the first three groups would indicate that people with disabilities require a certain level of trust and familiarity in order to access information.
- While people with disabilities were generally satisfied with the quality of information they had received in the past, it became evident that information was less likely to be in the right format. Easy access to information also continues to be an unmet need in many instances.
- The ways in which people with intellectual disabilities and mental illnesses access information seem to differ slightly from those of people with sensory and physical disabilities. The latter are more likely to contact existing services and use print and other materials to inform themselves.
- Support personnel, such as the staff in day care and training centres, as well as carers are highly aware of the information needs of people with disabilities and are often addressed with specific queries. Surprisingly, this group expressed the greatest need for information and was least aware of independent information services such as the CICs.
- The level of awareness among people with disabilities of a Citizens Information Centre in their area is relatively low. The promotion of the service and the extension of outreach services present key areas for development for the CIS in the future.

Appendix 1: List of Tables (Survey People with Disabilities)

0. Survey Method

Postal	43.1%	44
Interview	56.9%	58

102

00. Participants by Service Provider

Autism Support Group	2.9%	3
Irish Wheelchair Association	2.0%	2
National Council for the Blind	10.8%	11
National Assoc. for Deaf People	14.7%	15
MS Ireland	2.0%	2
Day & Outreach ABI	8.8%	9
Transitional Living Unit	2.0%	2
Camphill Community	7.8%	8
Journeyman	3.9%	4
Cluain Training & Enterprise	7.8%	8
RehabCare	7.8%	8
Moorehaven Centre	8.8%	9
National Learning Network	5.8%	6
STSEP (Supported Employment)	5.9%	6
Independent	8.8%	9

102

Question 1: Are you ...

Female	47.1%	48
Male	50.0%	51
No answer	2.9%	3

102

Question 2: Which age range best represents your age?

0-15 years	4.9%	5
16-25 years	16.7%	17
26-35 years	16.7%	17
36-59 years	38.2%	39
60-75 years	12.7%	13
76 years and older	9.8%	10
No answer	1.0%	1

102

Question 3: Please indicate the type of your disability.

Sensory	31.3%
Physical	38.4%
Intellectual	46.5%
Mental Health	16.2%

Question 4: How would you describe your overall health condition/disability?

Mild	40.0%
Moderate	44.0%
Severe	16.0%

Question 5: Where do you live?

Clonmel	37.6%
Carrick-on-Suir	14.9%
Tipperary Town	7.9%
Cahir	5.0%
Cashel	5.9%
Rural Area	28.7%

Question 6: How would you best describe your current position?

Employed	8.9%
Student//Trainee/Apprentice	35.6%
Unemployed	6.9%
Retired	19.8%
At Home for Health Reasons	21.8%
Other	12.9%

Others: Child at home, Institution, Living & working in community, Pre-School, Work Experience

Question 7: Have you needed information about entitlements (i.e. allowances, benefits, pensions and similar payments from the state) in the last two years or so?

Yes	63.4%
No	36.6%

Question 7 (A): If yes, what did you do to find out this information?

Ask friend or family member	39.1%
Ask someone at work	7.8%
Ask someone in training/care centre	28.1%
Ask someone in support group	10.9%
Ask doctor or social worker	20.3%
Talk to someone else	3.1%
Go to information centre	25.0%
Go to library	3.1%
Search the internet	6.3%
Call a helpline	3.1%
Nothing	1.6%
Other	10.9%

Others: Brothers of Charity, County Clinic, Home Help, HSE, Social Welfare Office

Question 7 (B): Please answer the following questions about the information you received.

	Yes	No
Was it easy to understand?	75.0%	25.0%
Did it answer your question?	74.4%	25.6%
Was it in the right format for you?	64.9%	35.1%
Did you find it easy to obtain?	68.3%	31.7%
Was it up to date?	86.8%	13.2%
Was it accurate?	89.5%	10.5%
Was it comprehensive?	76.9%	23.1%

Question 8: Have you needed information about equipment and technical aids (i.e. hearing aids, aids to mobility, visual aids, prosthetics, special furniture etc.) in the last two years or so?

Yes	40.1%
No	59.8%

Question 8 (A): If yes, what did you do to find out this information?

Ask friend or family member	25.6%
Ask someone at work	5.1%
Ask someone in training/care centre	20.5%
Ask someone in support group	10.3%
Ask doctor or social worker	48.7%
Talk to someone else	2.6%
Go to information centre	12.8%
Go to library	0.0%
Search the internet	2.6%
Call a helpline	2.6%
Nothing	5.1%
Other	10.3%

Others: Hospital, Physiotherapist, HSE, Brothers of Charity

Question 8 (B): Please answer the following questions about the information you received.

	Yes	No
Was it easy to understand?	83.9%	16.1%
Did it answer your question?	80.0%	20.0%
Was it in the right format for you?	66.7%	33.3%
Did you find it easy to obtain?	69.6%	30.4%
Was it up to date?	71.4%	28.6%
Was it accurate?	72.7%	27.3%
Was it comprehensive?	78.9%	21.1%

Question 9: Have you needed medical information (i.e. therapy, health services, specialists etc.) in the last two years or so?

Yes	69.6%
No	30.4%

Question 9 (A): If yes, what did you do to find out this information?

Ask friend or family member	31.4%
Ask someone at work	2.9%
Ask someone in training/care centre	24.3%
Ask someone in support group	4.3%
Ask doctor or social worker	67.1%
Talk to someone else	4.3%
Go to information centre	5.7%
Go to library	1.4%
Search the internet	2.9%
Call a helpline	0.0%
Nothing	1.4%
Other	8.6%

Others: Brothers of Charity, Golden Pages, Hospital, HSE

Question 9 (B): Please answer the following questions about the information you received.

	Yes	No
Was it easy to understand?	87.1%	12.9%
Did it answer your question?	88.4%	11.6%
Was it in the right format for you?	81.0%	19.0%
Did you find it easy to obtain?	82.2%	17.8%
Was it up to date?	90.0%	10.0%
Was it accurate?	92.5%	7.5%
Was it comprehensive?	88.1%	11.9%

Question 10: Have you needed information about transport and travel (i.e. buses, taxis, trains, driving etc.) in the last two years or so?

Yes	45.1%
No	54.9%

Question 10 (A): If yes, what did you do to find out this information?

Ask friend or family member	46.7%
Ask someone at work	4.4%
Ask someone in training/care centre	37.8%
Ask someone in support group	4.4%
Ask doctor or social worker	8.9%
Talk to someone else	0.0%
Go to information centre	17.8%
Go to library	0.0%
Search the internet	4.4%
Call a helpline	8.9%
Nothing	0.0%
Other	15.6%

Others: Bus Eireann, Bus Driver, Home Help, Newsagent, NCBI Worker

Question 10 (B): Please answer the following questions about the information you received.

	Yes	No
Was it easy to understand?	84.2%	15.8%
Did it answer your question?	88.9%	11.1%
Was it in the right format for you?	76.0%	24.0%
Did you find it easy to obtain?	92.6%	7.4%
Was it up to date?	96.3%	3.7%
Was it accurate?	92.9%	7.1%
Was it comprehensive?	92.6%	7.4%

Question 11: Have you needed information about training and education (i.e. training institutions, available classes, certificate courses, education grants etc.) in the last two years or so?

Yes	46.1%
No	53.9%

Question 11 (A): If yes, what did you do to find out this information?

Ask friend or family member	29.8%
Ask someone at work	8.5%
Ask someone in training/care centre	44.7%
Ask someone in support group	6.4%
Ask doctor or social worker	12.8%
Talk to someone else	8.5%
Go to information centre	14.9%
Go to library	6.4%
Search the internet	4.3%
Call a helpline	2.1%
Nothing	0.0%
Other	19.1%

Others: FÁS, VEC, NAD, NCBI, Colleges, Newspaper

Question: 11 (B): Please answer the following questions about the information you received.

	Yes	No
Was it easy to understand?	87.8%	12.2%
Did it answer your question?	83.9%	16.1%
Was it in the right format for you?	80.0%	20.0%
Did you find it easy to obtain?	88.2%	11.8%
Was it up to date?	93.5%	6.5%
Was it accurate?	96.9%	3.1%
Was it comprehensive?	83.9%	16.1%

Question 12: Have you needed information about council services (i.e. housing, planning, water, refuse service etc.) in the last two years or so?

Yes	27.7%
No	72.2%

Question 12 (A): If yes, what did you do to find out this information?

Ask friend or family member	28.6%
Ask someone at work	0.0%
Ask someone in training/care centre	14.3%
Ask someone in support group	0.0%
Ask doctor or social worker	7.1%
Talk to someone else	21.4%
Go to information centre	25.0%
Go to library	0.0%
Search the internet	0.0%
Call a helpline	3.6%
Nothing	0.0%
Other	32.1%

Others: Town/Borough/County Council, Community Welfare Officer, FHIST, Local Politician, Newspaper

Question 12 (B): Please answer the following questions about the information you received.

	Yes	No
Was it easy to understand?	66.7%	33.3%
Did it answer your question?	73.3%	26.7%
Was it in the right format for you?	75.0%	25.0%
Did you find it easy to obtain?	75.0%	25.0%
Was it up to date?	82.4%	17.6%
Was it accurate?	81.3%	18.7%
Was it comprehensive?	82.3%	17.7%

Question 13: Have you needed information about legal services or legal issues (i.e. questions of your legal rights, disputes, legal aid etc.) in the last two years or so?

Yes	12.9%
No	87.1%

Question 13 (A): If yes, what did you do to find out this information?

Ask friend or family member	15.4%
Ask someone at work	0.0%
Ask someone in training/care centre	7.7%
Ask someone in support group	0.0%
Ask doctor or social worker	7.7%
Talk to someone else	7.7%
Go to information centre	38.5%
Go to library	0.0%
Search the internet	0.0%
Call a helpline	0.0%
Nothing	0.0%
Other	23.1%

Others: Solicitors, Local Politician

Question 13 (B): Please answer the following questions about the information you received.

	Yes	No
Was it easy to understand?	83.3%	16.7%
Did it answer your question?	77.8%	22.2%
Was it in the right format for you?	77.8%	22.2%
Did you find it easy to obtain?	77.8%	22.2%
Was it up to date?	77.8%	22.2%
Was it accurate?	77.8%	22.2%
Was it comprehensive?	77.8%	22.2%

Question 14: Have you needed information about anything else in the last two years or so?

Yes	18.8%
No	81.2%

Question 14 (A): If yes, please specify what information you needed.

Related to Benefits	35.0%
Related to Education	5.0%
Related to Living/Housing	10.0%
Related to Travel	5.0%
Rights Issue	5.0%
Related to Consumer Affairs	15.0%
Specials Needs (General)	5.0%

Question 14 (B): What did you do to find out this information?

Ask friend or family member	31.5%
Ask someone at work	5.3%
Ask someone in training/care centre	21.1%
Ask someone in support group	10.5%
Ask doctor or social worker	21.1%
Talk to someone else	15.8%
Go to information centre	15.8%
Go to library	5.3%
Search the internet	10.5%
Call a helpline	5.3%
Nothing	0.0%
Other	47.3%

Others: HSE, DSFA, DES, Bank, Chemist, Community Welfare Officer

Question 14 (C): Please answer the following questions about the information you received.

	Yes	No
Was it easy to understand?	83.3%	16.7%
Did it answer your question?	76.9%	23.1%
Was it in the right format for you?	75.0%	25.0%
Did you find it easy to obtain?	75.0%	25.0%
Was it up to date?	83.3%	16.7%
Was it accurate?	83.3%	16.7%
Was it comprehensive?	81.8%	18.2%

Question 15: How important to you is information about the following issues?

	Very important	Important	Not important
Technical Aids/Equipment	37.9%	16.1%	46.0%
Benefits and Allowances	64.1%	26.1%	9.8%
Transport and Access to Buildings	36.9%	27.4%	35.7%
Council Services	32.1%	17.9%	50.0%
Self-Help/Support Groups	39.1%	27.6%	33.3%
Legal Issues	27.7%	18.1%	54.2%
Medical Services	65.6%	27.8%	6.7%
Employment Issues	44.9%	21.8%	33.3%
Holiday, Leisure, Sports	50.6%	27.1%	22.4%
Other	85.7%	14.3%	0.0%

Others: Advocacy, Education, Independent Living, Rights and Discrimination

Question 16: How easy do you find it to get the information you need?

	Very easy	Easy	Not easy
Technical Aids/Equipment	22.4%	50.0%	27.6%
Benefits and Allowances	24.1%	44.3%	31.7%
Transport and Access to Buildings	20.6%	46.0%	33.3%
Council Services	13.0%	42.6%	44.4%
Self-Help/Support Groups	27.6%	44.8%	27.6%
Legal Issues	19.2%	40.4%	40.4%
Medical Services	25.0%	50.0%	25.0%
Employment Issues	16.4%	41.8%	41.8%
Holiday, Leisure, Sports	21.7%	53.3%	25.0%

Question 17: Generally, which sources of information do you find most useful?

	Very useful	Useful	Not useful
Family or friends	70.9%	22.8%	6.3%
Colleagues or supervisors	44.2%	34.6%	21.2%
Teachers or staff in centre	58.7%	31.7%	9.5%
Doctor or social worker	58.1%	28.4%	13.5%
Specialised information worker	44.1%	25.4%	30.5%
Library	23.7%	32.2%	44.1%
Internet	28.3%	25.0%	46.7%
Helplines	14.0%	28.1%	57.9%
Leaflets/Booklets	39.1%	39.1%	21.8%
Video tapes	16.7%	27.1%	56.3%
Audio tapes	14.3%	24.5%	61.2%
Large print	11.5%	30.8%	57.7%
Radio or TV	27.7%	52.3%	20.0%
Computerised Information	24.1%	31.0%	44.8%
Other	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%

Others: Information Seminars, Personal Assistant, Subtitles, Local Shops, Agencies

Question 18: What type of information do you think is available in Citizens Information Centres?

Social Welfare Issues	90.0%
Rights Issues	75.0%
Information for Migrants	42.5%
Disability Information	78.8%
Housing Issues	67.5%
Health Services	60.0%
Counselling Services	51.3%
Legal Services	61.3%
Information about the EU	42.5%
Taxation Matters	51.3%
Family Support	51.3%

Question 19: Are you aware of a Citizens Information Centre in your area?

Yes	59.6%
No	40.4%

Question 19 (A): If yes, how did you become aware of the centre?

National Radio or TV	12.7%
Referral from National Helpline	0.0%
Referral from another Service	1.8%
Recommendation by Someone	23.6%
Saw it Passing by	56.4%
Newspaper Ad or Article	16.4%
Word of Mouth	21.8%
Other	1.8%

Others: Leaflets

Question 20: Did you ever visit or contact the Citizens Information Centre in your area for information?

Yes	55.9%
No	44.1%

Question 20 (A): If yes, what was the general nature of your enquiry?

Social Welfare Issues	56.3%
Rights Issues	12.5%
Information for Migrants	6.3%
Disability Information	34.4%
Housing Issues	6.3%
Health Services	3.1%
Counselling Services	0.0%
Legal Services	21.9%
Information about the EU	6.3%
Taxation Matters	15.6%
Family Support	9.4%
Other	12.5%

Others: Employment

Question 20 (B): Was the information you received helpful to you?

Yes	93.8%
No	6.2%

Question 20 (C): In which format did you receive the information?

Verbal Advice/Information	81.3%
Written Note	31.3%
Leaflet/Brochure	46.9%
Other	3.1%

Others: Advocacy

Question 20 (D): In your opinion, were you referred to the right place/person?

Yes	87.5%
No	6.3%
Not applicable	6.2%

Question 20 (E): In general, how would you rate the service you received in the Citizens Information Centre?

Very Poor	3.0%
Somewhat Unsatisfactory	6.1%
Satisfactory	39.4%
Very Satisfactory	39.4%
Superior	12.1%

Question 20 (F): Was the centre accessible for you?

Yes	100.0%
No	0.0%

Appendix 2: List of Tables (Survey Support Personnel)**Question 1: What is the name of the organisation you work for?**

Camphill Community	13.2%	5
Cluain Training & Enterprise	18.4%	7
Day & Outreach ABI	7.9%	3
Journeyman	7.9%	3
Moorehaven	18.4%	7
National Learning Network	2.6%	1
RehabCare	7.9%	3
STSEP (Supp. Employment)	2.6%	1
Transitional Living Unit	21.1%	8

38

Question 2: What is your position within the organisation?

Administrator/Accounts	2.6%	1
Care Assistant	10.2%	4
Chef	5.3%	2
Manager/Supervisor	21.1%	8
Nurse/Medical Advisor	5.3%	2
Social Care Worker	26.3%	10
Therapist	2.6%	1
Training Instructor/Coordinator	23.7%	9
Other	2.6%	1

38

Question 3: Which of the following would best describe your responsibilities within the organisation?

Management	16.6%
Administration	30.6%
People Care	80.6%
Training/Teaching/Consultation	61.1%
Other	11.1%

Others: Rehabilitation, Cooking

Question 4: How often are you approached by a client to find out information on his or her behalf?

Never	5.4%
Only once or twice in the past	24.3%
On a regular basis	59.5%
Almost daily	10.8%

Question 5: From your experience, how relevant is information about the following issues for your service users?

	Very important	Important	Not important
Technical Aids/Equipment	46.9%	43.8%	9.4%
Benefits and Allowances	82.4%	17.6%	0.0%
Transport and Access to Buildings	77.1%	22.9%	0.0%
Council Services	37.5%	46.9%	15.6%
Self-Help/Support Groups	42.9%	48.6%	8.6%
Legal Issues	25.0%	43.8%	31.3%
Medical Services	73.5%	23.5%	2.9%
Employment Issues	58.8%	26.5%	14.7%
Holiday, Leisure, Sports	50.0%	41.7%	8.3%

Other: Education, Respite Care

Question 6: When acting on behalf of a client, how easy do you find it to get the information you need?

	Very easy	Easy	Not easy
Technical Aids/Equipment	16.7%	50.0%	33.3%
Benefits and Allowances	20.0%	60.0%	20.0%
Transport and Access to Buildings	3.5%	41.4%	55.2%
Council Services	3.7%	66.7%	29.6%
Self-Help/Support Groups	11.5%	53.9%	34.6%
Legal Issues	13.0%	39.1%	47.8%
Medical Services	36.7%	56.7%	6.7%
Employment Issues	14.3%	21.4%	64.3%
Holiday, Leisure, Sports	13.3%	50.0%	36.7%

Question 7: When acting on behalf of a client, which sources of information do you find most useful?

	Very useful	Useful	Not useful
Colleagues or Supervisors	85.3%	14.7%	0.0%
Doctors or Social Workers	53.3%	40.0%	6.7%
Specialised Information Worker	50.0%	42.3%	7.7%
Library	10.3%	65.5%	24.1%
Internet	46.7%	46.7%	6.7%
Helplines	14.3%	60.7%	25.0%
Leaflets/Booklets	38.2%	58.8%	2.9%

Question 8: Did you ever refer a client to a Citizens Information Centre for information?

Yes	50.0%
No	50.0%

Question 9: Did you ever contact the CIC in your area yourself to get information for a client?

Yes	30.6%
No	69.4%

Question 9 (A): If yes, what was the nature of your enquiry/enquiries?

Social Welfare Issues	45.5%
Rights Issues	27.3%
Information for Migrants	0.0%
Disability Information	63.6%
Housing Issues	54.5%
Health Services	27.3%
Counselling Services	18.2%
Legal Services	18.2%
Information about the EU	0.0%
Taxation Matters	9.1%
Family Support	9.1%

Question 9 (B): How would you rate the service you received in the CIC?

Very Poor	0.0%
Somewhat Unsatisfactory	9.0%
Satisfactory	45.5%
Very Satisfactory	45.5%
Superior	0.0%

Question 10: In which areas could the Citizens Information Centres improve their services for your service users?

Physical Access to CICs	42.4%
Format of Information	45.5%
Outreach Services to Service Users	78.8%
Training for Service Providers	63.6%
Distribution of Info to Service Users	51.5%
Distribution of Info to Service Providers	63.6%
Individual Advocacy Service	57.6%
Promotion of CIC	63.6%
Other	6.1%

Others: Stock of Booklets, Website

References

1. Ralaheen Research & Design Ltd: Pathways to Information. Developing an Integrated Approach at Local Level. Dublin: Comhairle 2000.
2. Gannon, Brenda and Brian Nolan: Disability and Social Inclusion in Ireland. Dublin: Equality Authority 2005.
3. Ask Me: Guidelines for Effective Consultation with People with Disabilities. Dublin: NDA 2002.
4. Pillinger, Jane: Disability and the Quality of Services: Irish and European Perspectives. Dublin: NDA 2002 (Working Paper).
5. Access to Information for All. Comhairle 2005.
6. Walsh, Aisling: The Road to Mainstreaming: A Report on the Changes in Service Provision for People with Disabilities since June 2000. DFI in association with FÁS and Comhairle 2001.
7. Towards a Common Language for Functioning, Disability and Health: The International Classification of Functioning and Health. World Health Organisation: Geneva 2002.
8. National Rehabilitation Board (Dissolution and Revocation) Order 2000. (= S.I. No. 171 of 2000). Department of Health and Children.
9. Co. Tipperary CIS: Development Plan 2005-2007.
10. Public Attitudes to Disability in the Republic of Ireland. NDA 2002.

