

Rehab Group

Over the last two decades the Rehab Group has been transformed into one of Europe's biggest and most influential providers of services for people with disabilities. Each year more than 30,000 clients avail of the world-class programmes that have been developed by the organisation across Ireland and the UK.

It is a far cry from the Group's origins in a basement room in Dublin's south inner city where its first service was established a half a century ago to help survivors of tuberculosis regain their independence and return to work.

Today, Rehab delivers training, education, employment and social care services in a network of some 140 centres. And whilst people with disabilities continue to represent the majority of its client base, other marginalised groups such as people who are long-term unemployed, are increasingly using its services.

In Ireland the Group's main divisions are:

The National Training and Development Institute (NTDI) which provides training, education and job placement services at over 60 locations nationwide.

Gandon Enterprises, a group of nine businesses with a unique fifty-fifty employment policy between people with disabilities and non-disabled workers.

RehabCare, the health and social care division of the Group, which provides a range of services in the community to people with disabilities, older people and carers.

Rehab believes that regardless of a person's disability or social circumstances, it's ability that should determine success in life. As a result, the organisation's role goes beyond providing services that enable our clients to make the most of their skills and talents in the workplace and the wider community.

In addition to championing the abilities of our clients through services that are effective and progressive, the Rehab Group is a leading campaigner for reforms to remove the barriers preventing equal opportunities, particularly for people with disabilities.

We are also committed to the formation of a broad coalition of all stakeholders within the disability sector and we support the full implementation of the recommendations of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities.

And we are deeply involved in the development of a more businesslike, rather than merely philanthropic, approach to the provision of disability services through the Not for Profit Business Association.

Within Rehab, people with disabilities have a powerful say in the decisions that affect the services they use through client bodies that represent their interests. These include the National Representative Council and the National RehabCare Advocacy Council.

The organisation also has a highly expert Research and Innovation department responsible for developing new services for clients across the Rehab Group divisions, as well as ensuring the quality of existing programmes.

Championing People With Ability

For many decades in Ireland people with disabilities have been widely regarded as passive recipients of charity, rather than people with ability who are capable of making a real contribution to the social and economic life of the nation.

This woeful under-estimation of what amounts to around 10 percent of our population, often by well-meaning people, has seriously compounded the obstacles that people with disabilities face as they strive to lead independent lives.

It has contributed to discrimination in the jobs market, as well as in all sorts of social situations and has resulted in people with disabilities being routinely excluded from involvement even in basic decisions that affect their lives.

All of Rehab's activities are based on the principle that regardless of a person's disability or social circumstances, our society can only ever operate on all cylinders if everyone has the right to be judged on their ability.

This philosophy is reflected inside Rehab by progressive services that are delivered in partnership with its clients and externally through Rehab's contribution to the campaign for equal opportunities for people with disabilities and others who are marginalized by society.

“Within our organisation, we believe it is crucial that our clients have a real say, not just in relation to the services they personally use, but on all important matters relating to the development of the Group,” says Group chief executive, Frank Flannery.

“Indeed, we believe that unless services are client-driven they can have no long-term future, because without the input of the people who use them, they will never be entirely relevant.”

On the basis of this view, Rehab has led the way in terms of client involvement and was the first organisation to implement recommendations by the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities on closer consultation in the provision and running of services.

Service users in NTDI and RehabCare have their own representative bodies, whilst employees in Gandon Enterprises are represented by SIPTU.

These bodies, the National Representative Council (NRC) and the National RehabCare Advocacy Council (NRAC) are made up of local, regional and national committees which resolve matters of concern that arise with relevant managers. They are also represented on various Group boards, including Rehab Council – the Group’s central policymaking body.

According to Paddy Doyle, who is NRC chief executive and a disability activist for over 30 years: “It is undoubtedly the case that input from service users and their representatives in recent years has changed the organisation significantly.”

“Of course, this has not only been of benefit to service users, but the Rehab Group itself by helping to ensure services that fit in with people’s needs as identified by themselves.”

Another groundbreaking development in client involvement in Rehab has come with the introduction of Charters of Rights for service users and a Code of Good Employment for workers within the organisation’s employment programmes. More than 1,000 clients were directly involved in developing these documents.

This process was carried out by Rehab’s Department of Research and Innovation which is also responsible for developing new programmes for clients and ensuring the quality of existing services.

In recent years these have included award-winning programmes ranging from Sound Access - a course enabling participants to gain employment in the music industry, to Camus - a programme assisting people who have recently experienced mental health difficulties to get back into employment.

The Department is also involved in a number of ground breaking external projects such as an initiative to reduce the incidence of work-related accidents called Workforce Plus. The programme, a partnership with employer and union bodies, aims to develop strategies that will both reduce the risk to employees and minimise the costs for employers of illness and accidents at work.

Another key activity of the Department is in the area of quality. Rehab has always prided itself on its ability to develop and maintain high-class services and the Department is now facilitating the introduction of the European Foundation Quality Management model of business excellence across the organisation.

“This model will enhance our current practices and act as an all-embracing framework for all our quality activities, including self-assessment and continuous improvement,” says Director of Research and Innovation, Dr Donal McAnaney. Indeed, the Department is well qualified to deliver this initiative, having recently landed the FAS Excellence Through People accreditation with the second highest mark ever awarded.

Meanwhile, Rehab has also mounted the first ever advertising campaign in the history of the State promoting more positive images of people with disabilities, which was based on research carried out among clients across the country. And the organisation publishes Ireland’s only national disability publication, Insight magazine, which is overseen by an editorial board comprising leading activists from throughout the sector.

Externally, Rehab has also been active in campaigning for positive change in many areas such as the introduction of realistic State funding for disability services, greater access to both employment and the physical environment and equality legislation.

In particular, Rehab has been heavily involved in a national campaign, titled “Unseen, Unheard, Unfair” to highlight the chronic State under-funding which has put services for 40,000 people with disabilities at risk. But lack of financial assistance for services isn’t the only challenge that people with disabilities face.

“People with disabilities are routinely denied the right to use public transport, to enter public buildings, or even to use footpaths unhindered. As a result they are effectively denied the right to participate in society,” says Frank Flannery.

“And after the most sustained economic boom in the history of the State, it’s still estimated that over 70 percent of Irish people with disabilities are out of work.

“The only conclusion any reasonable person can draw is that even today there remains a pervasive view among the planners of our economy and

the controllers of our manpower that people with disabilities have no role to play in the creation of wealth in Ireland, that they are solely consumers of social services.”

Rehab believes that the solutions to all of these injustices lies in the formation of a broad alliance of stakeholders in the disability sector to present a single, irresistible movement for change.

Some progress has already been made through the creation of the Not for Profit Business Association comprising nine of the leading service providers in the physical and sensory disability sector.

The Association’s primary objective is to create a more business-like, rather than a merely philanthropic approach to the delivery of services in line with client demands.

Adds Mr Flannery: “The days of well-intentioned, but essentially amateurish charitable bodies must be replaced by a new era of not for profit businesses providing services that are progressive, entrepreneurial and which above all operate to a level of professionalism that meet the needs and wishes of the people who use them. Our clients demand nothing less.

“Voluntary organisations which cannot rise to that challenge, even those which have made a genuine contribution to Ireland’s social development in the past, may no longer have a meaningful role to play in providing services for people with disabilities.

“But if we are to enter this brave new world, we must put an end to the corrosive concept of charity being an acceptable form of financing social services in this country.

“It is not right that people with disabilities should be forced to rely on the voluntary good will of members of the public for services which are absolutely essential for them to participate in everyday life.”

“That is not to say that voluntary organisations should do away with fundraising to help develop new programmes – just that proven services must receive proper levels of funding.”

NATIONAL TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

Tommy Farrell is a successful businessman. He runs his own newspaper with a weekly circulation of over 16,000 which is expanding so rapidly he now has to take on extra staff.

When he first set foot into the National Training and Development Institute (NTDI) centre in Wexford town just four years ago, however, life was very different for the father of three.

Then, Tommy – who left school at the age of 12 – was long-term unemployed. And he freely admits that far from having any experience in the publishing business, he had never previously used a typewriter let alone a computer.

But since completing a groundbreaking ‘start your own business’ course called Self Start for people with disabilities who had been out of work for a minimum of three years, Tommy has not looked back.

“Self Start has helped me to change my life,” he says. “I suppose I felt a bit inadequate before I joined the course. Now I feel I am a threat to my competitors in the same game.”

Yet, Tommy is just one of many thousands of people for whom NTDI’s training and education programmes have proved to be a life changing experience.

Indeed, of the 13 people who participated in his course in Wexford alone, seven are now running thriving businesses providing anything from architectural services to land surveying and garden design.

And each year hundreds of NTDI graduates – many of whom have never previously been in full-time employment – are achieving their goals by breaking into the labour market in jobs as diverse as agriculture and architecture.

Catering annually for some 2,500 students at more than 60 locations nationwide, NTDI’s primary objective is to assist people with disabilities and others at a disadvantage in the labour market to learn the skills they need to build lasting careers in jobs that reflect their abilities and interests.

Students can choose from more than 40 certified courses ranging from foundation programmes enabling them to assess their career options through to accountancy or business studies and a range of computer programmes to journalism and photography.

“Whilst teaching students the skills they need to gain qualifications that are recognised by employers is obviously important - but it only explains part of NTDI's work,” says Head of Programmes and Business Development, Jane Forman.

“What makes us different from other training bodies is that we address all of the factors that will affect a student's prospects of obtaining and retaining a job in their chosen field.

“We have developed a unique system of training delivery which enables students to reach their potential in a manner which takes account of personal, social and environmental requirements.

“All programmes are designed to meet individual needs so that each student can achieve their vocational goals at their own pace, while a comprehensive range of additional supports is also available such as career planning and individual counselling programmes, personal and social skills, literacy and numeracy.”

In addition to programmes at NTDI's countrywide network of centres, students can avail of employer based training with host companies and distance learning which enables people, particularly with mobility difficulties, to study from home.

Whilst the majority of NTDI's clients continue to be people with disabilities, the organisation is increasingly extending its services to other marginalised groups in Irish society.

Among these are members of the Irish prison population who are being helped to prepare for employment after their release through a project called CONNECT, which is run in partnership with the Irish Prison Service.

Following a three year pilot in Mountjoy, which showed that participants were ten times less likely to re-offend on their release than the rest of the prison population, the programme is now being extended to all of the State's jails.

Around 50 ex-prisoners who have kept in contact with the project team are in full-time employment in areas like retailing, recycling, contract cleaning, panel beating, spray-painting and metalwork. At least ten more are in full-time training.

One ex-prisoner is setting up his own metalwork business and another has recently been promoted to a management job with a Dublin-based company. Six of the participants who are still in prison were also among the first 100 people in Ireland to obtain the Advanced “European Computer Driving License” qualification in computer studies.

Other ground breaking services are also being developed, such as a residential training programme for recovered drug users and a programme for people with brain injuries which is about to get under way in partnership with the Western Health Board in Galway.

The Quest Brain Injury Service will help people recovering from head injuries usually sustained in car crashes or other accidents to improve their work-related, personal and social skills in order to enable people with brain injuries to re-enter employment and participate fully in the community.

“People with a brain injury can suffer from any number of effects that may include poor memory and concentration difficulties, personality change, loss of co-ordination, poor planning and organisational skills, and a lack of motivation,” said Quest co-ordinator Francis Byrne.

“Given these effects, it is hardly surprising that recent research has shown that, without proper support and training, only 25 percent of people with a brain injury will manage to return to work.”

It’s estimated that a staggering 13,000 people sustain a brain injury in Ireland every year, including 900 in the Western Health Board area and it’s hoped that Quest will provide a model for the development of similar services in other parts of the country.

GANDON ENTERPRISES

Since being established eight years ago, Gandon Enterprises has provided a success story that stands out even in an era of unprecedented achievement for Irish business.

In that time the company has successfully developed nine separate businesses whose activities range from biscuit making to electronic assembly and which now boast annual sales figures totalling more than €24 million.

But what makes Gandon Enterprises unique is its workforce. It is the world's first group of businesses providing truly integrated social employment - involving people with disabilities and non-disabled employees working in equal numbers and equal pay for equal work.

The company provides a supported environment for people with disabilities within the workplace, including adapted working environments and procedures, facilitative supervision and management, along with services to ease the transition into employment for people who have been out of work for considerable periods.

But whilst Gandon is being increasingly viewed one of the most important examples of best practice in the employment of people with disabilities internationally, the company is being prevented from expanding to create hundreds of new jobs across the country.

Gandon Enterprises operates with a subsidy from the **Pilot Programme for the Employment of People with Disabilities** which contributes to the costs associated with employing large numbers of people with disabilities in its workforce.

According to Gandon Enterprises chief executive, Ashley Balbirnie, an extension of the pilot programme would enable the company to double its workforce to over 1,000 people at a cost per job to the state of less than €2 a day.

This is backed up by an analysis of the company carried out by a team of independent experts which concludes that the programme has generated social benefits in excess of its net operational financial costs which it estimates at just €500 per annum for each job.

The assessment by consultants Tansey, Webster, Stewart & Co adds:

“On cost and efficiency grounds alone, not only should the pilot programme be continued, but the recruitment of people with disabilities into integrated social employment should be increased.”

Says Mr Balbirnie: “Despite these findings, the Government has so far declined to make the pilot programme permanent, let alone fund its expansion. The result is that we have many able people with disabilities waiting to join the programme, but we are unable to offer them employment.

He adds that even more important than providing an efficient form of job creation is the programme's impact on the quality of life of people with disabilities and their families throughout Ireland.

“For a relatively minor investment, many more people who are able and willing to work, but who have so far not been given the opportunity to share in the country's economic success could benefit from this programme.”

THE GANDON BUSINESSES

Galway Corrugated Cases (GCC)

Galway Corrugated Cases specialises in total packaging solutions for the electronics, pharmaceutical, telecommunications and food sectors.

Plant facilities enable the company to offer both high and low volume production of premium packaging materials customised to the needs of hi-tech businesses. Its strength lies in its quick response time offering a just-in-time service to its major customers. In addition to supplying flat pack, it also supplies assembled packaging comprising anti-static foam and inserts ready for use on the assembly line. Thirty-three of the company's 52 employees are people with disabilities.

Kilkenny Corrugated Cases (KCC)

Kilkenny Corrugated Cases was formed in 1999 as a duplicate of the Galway service to strengthen Gandon's position in the packaging market. It is specifically geared to servicing the southern region and is ISO 9002 approved.

The company is awaiting the provision of further funding under the **Pilot Programme** in order to offer employment to its 22 disabled workers.

Hats of Ireland

Established in the 1940s, Hats of Ireland is the country's oldest headwear manufacturer. Its range of quality traditional and contemporary headwear is sold successfully to countries such as the USA, France and Japan, while the customer base ranges from large chain stores and small craft shops, to many of Ireland's top designers. Recently, the company has expanded its operations to high quality presentation packaging. Hats of Ireland employs 30 people, 14 of whom are workers with a disability.

Rehab Recycling Partnership (RRP)

RRP is Ireland's premier post consumer waste recycler with over 1,200 sites collecting glass, aluminium drink cans and textiles. Its customers include all local authorities throughout Ireland, the major Irish drink manufacturers and a large number of hotels and public houses. RRP works closely with, and receives significant support from, Repak Ltd.

Information Security Management (ISM) ensures the secure destruction of confidential information for clients including the major banks, insurance companies, hospitals, political parties and government departments. The company provides unique tamper-proof "confi-bins" which can hold up to 70 kilogrammes of paper documents.

Through its plants in Dublin, Galway and Cork, RRP continues to be a major resource to both the domestic and commercial sectors in the management of waste in an environmentally friendly manner. Forty of the company's 68 employees are people with disabilities.

Harrison's Food Company

Harrison's Food Company manufactures a range of handmade biscuits and premium cake products. Its biscuits are made to traditional farmhouse recipes using the best of ingredients and Harrison's is a certified organic manufacturer. The company employs 14 people, eight of whom are workers with a disability.

Connect Industries

Connect Industries is a joint venture partnership between M&M Qualtech Ltd and Gandon Enterprises. It began operating from a small unit in Galway and now also has facilities in Scotland, The Netherlands and Hungary. The company provides services to the electronic and computer software markets and has 19 workers with disabilities in its workforce.

Precision Workwear

The distinctive white suits worn by Garda forensic experts at crime scenes and combat jackets and trousers for the Navy and Gardai on UN duty are just some of the products made by Precision Workwear.

The Navan based business offers a quality manufacturing and distribution service to its customers primarily in the healthcare, medical, electronic and industrial sectors. It is Ireland's only licensed supplier of converted Tyvek garments, manufactured by Du Pont. The company is ISO 9000 approved and employs 29 people, 15 of whom are people with disabilities.

Response Electronic Manufacturing (REM)

Response Electronic Manufacturing provides cost effective, robust solutions to meet the ever-changing requirements of its customers. Originally formed as a sub-contract assembly house to service the electronics industry, REM has since added other facets to its operations – Logistics and Warehouse Management; and Mechanical Assembly. REM has ISO 9002 accreditation and 53 of its 89 employees are people with disabilities.

The Mill Enterprise

The Mill provides contract assembly, labelling and packaging for the healthcare Industry. A highly motivated team of people assemble large volumes of dental floss and related products daily for the export market.

The company employs 16 people with disabilities, all of whom are awaiting funding under the **Pilot Programme for Employment of People with Disabilities**.

REHABCARE

“I love coming in to the centre. There’s a real family-like atmosphere and it’s always good fun.”

“It’s not just about reading and writing, it’s about building up your confidence and getting out into the community.”

“There are so many activities you can do, it’s really hard to make a choice.”

This is how just one group of Dundalk-based resource centre clients summed up the difference that RehabCare has made to their lives.

RehabCare operates a nationwide network of these resource centres which assist people with significant disabilities to achieve their full potential and a better quality of life.

But they only account for part of the organisation’s work. As Rehab’s health and social care division, RehabCare provides a range of services for people with disabilities, older people and carers in communities the length and breadth of Ireland. These services include respite care, supported accommodation, sheltered workshops and care work delivered in people’s homes

Says RehabCare chief executive, Angela Kerins: “Choice, quality and personalised services are the cornerstones of RehabCare. We pride ourselves on the flexibility of our programmes which are all designed to meet the individual wishes and requirements of each client.

“We are also committed to ensuring that our clients play a full and active role in the decisions that shape the services they use through our client representative body, the National RehabCare Advisory Council”.

Activities in the resource centres vary widely according to the interests of clients. These can include anything from shopping for clothes or planning the weekly budget to learning computers - it's up to the client to decide.

The centres provide a five day per week service designed to enable clients to develop their independent living skills and to become active members of their local communities. If they wish clients can also choose to take part either in supported employment in the community or in centre-based co-ops.

An important part of the programme is to encourage participants to make choices that fit in with their needs and wishes and those of their families or carers. Each person draws up their own action plan in consultation with staff which maps out their interests and requirements, as well as the activities they would like to pursue.”

These are divided under the following headings: independent living skills, personal development, supported employment in the community or in centre-based co-ops, community integration, social & leisure activities.

Centre-based respite care affords many people with disabilities their only opportunity to take a holiday, as well as giving their families a break from full-time caring. **Home-Based respite care** also gives primary carers temporary relief from the rigours of round-the-clock caring, both on a planned or emergency basis. It is also beneficial to the person being cared for who can remain in his or her own environment whilst the carer has the opportunity to ‘take a break’.

Carelink provides a range of support services which enable people to continue living at home as a viable alternative to residential care. The programme caters for require support and assistance with daily living activities such as domestic tasks, personal care, community participation and leisure activities.

One home-based service that has been recently established for older people is **Home First** which is already helping a number of older people in North Dublin to live at home rather than entering nursing homes. Clients receive support, available round-the-clock, from home support workers who assist them with all daily living activities.

Says Margaret Fitzsimons, whose 95 year old mother Ellen participates in the scheme: “Home First really is a life-saver. Caring for an elderly spouse or relative is a 24 hour-a-day job. Carers need to take a break each day, even if it’s only for an hour or two. The scheme gives me the freedom to do just that.”

Newgrove Housing Association Limited provides accommodation to meet a diverse range of individual needs from people requiring high-level support to those who can live independently. Its provision ranges from housing with 24-hour staff support and supported living accommodation to houses or apartments let on an unsupported basis.

RehabCare's **sheltered workshops** operate for people whose primary interest is being involved in work, although participants can also access additional programmes in the areas of social and leisure, independent living skills, personal development and lifelong learning.