

Building Links to Mainstream Education — Audrey Carroll, SJOG Carmona Services

The general profile of the young adults being referred to Intellectual Disability Service Providers has changed in recent years and many are enjoying a much more inclusive education in mainstream primary and secondary schools during their childhood years than their predecessors did. In response to this positive trend, St John of God Carmona Services approached the HSE (Health Service Executive) and DLVEC (Dunlaoghaire VEC) to discuss the possibility of developing an inclusive postsecondary education option for these young adults so that they could build on the capacity that was gained in their mainstream schools.

The HSE and DLVEC came onboard with Carmona and in 2006 an outline for a new postsecondary education programme was collaboratively developed. The vision of the two year programme was to provide;

1. A postsecondary education option for any interested individuals with intellectual disabilities in the catchment area (ie it is not agency specific)
2. An accredited independent learning/academic education programme at FETAC level 3 led by DLVEC in a mainstream setting
3. A complementary programme combining; health and fitness, self-advocacy, personal safety, active citizenship, personal and social effectiveness and community involvement devised by Carmona Services
4. Enhanced access to Further Education and Employment

The programme, which was entitled LIFE (Leading into Further Education), was deemed successful and is now being run at level 2 as well as at level 3 & 4 in DLVEC. The evaluation of the programme has shown it to be effective and with some adaptations could be replicated for use in VECs throughout Ireland. The key strength of the programme is the close working relationship between the partners and the commitment demonstrated through sharing of resources and information.