

# Counting Us In

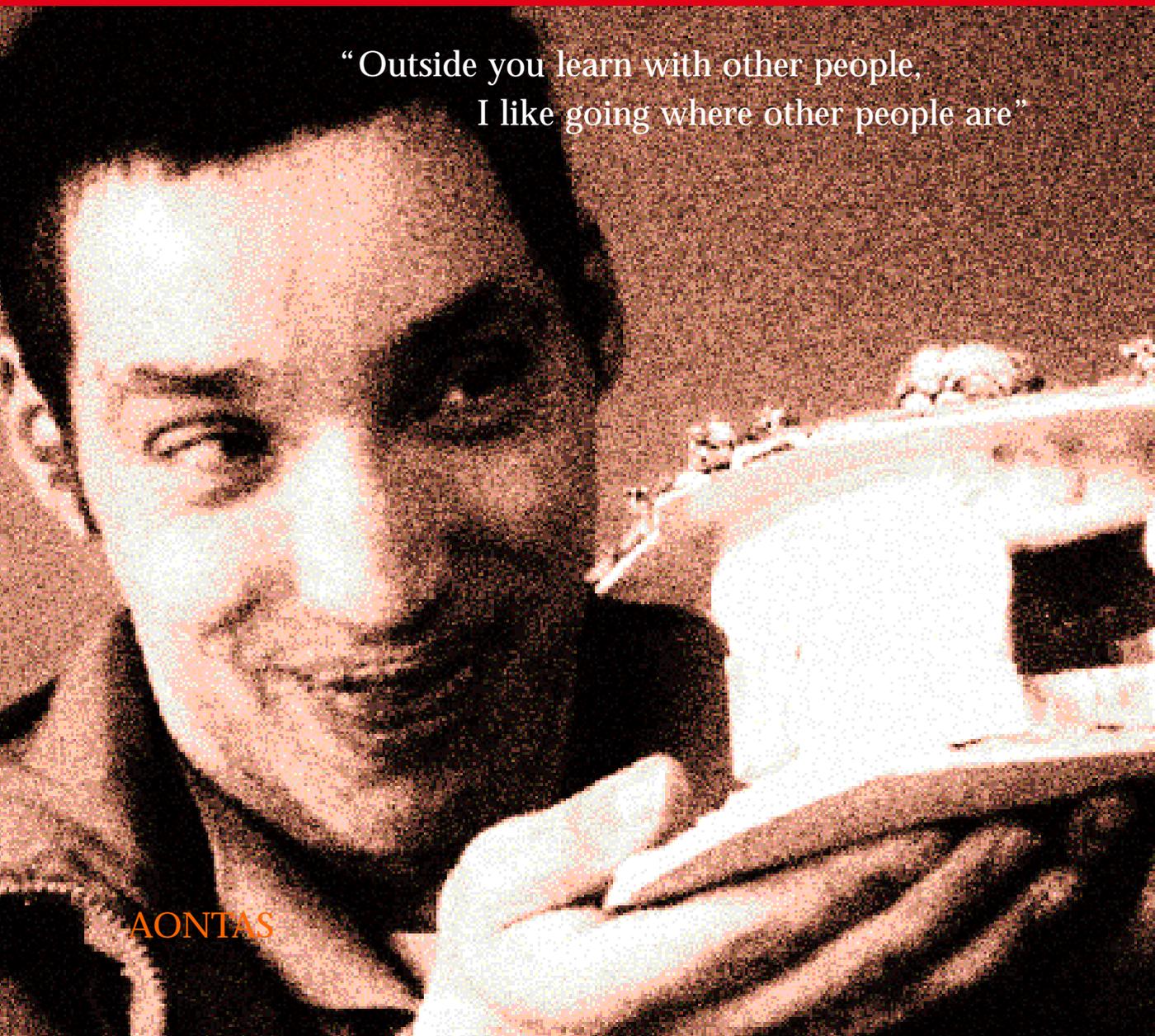
Education for adults with a learning disability

# 1998

Monica McNamara

“Outside you learn with other people,  
I like going where other people are”

AONTAS







Counting Us In

Education for adults with a learning disability

1998

AONTAS

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- Our sincere thanks to all those who contributed to the running of the pilot project and the writing up of the research report.
- **The members of the working group:**  
Cathleen O'Neill - AONTAS Executive  
Frieda Finlay - Commission for the Status of People With Disabilities  
Monica MacNamara - Training Officer, St. Michael's House  
Mary McArdle - Training Officer, St. Michael's House  
Robert Morgan - Training Officer, St. Michael's House
  - Ms. Berni Brady, Director of AONTAS to whom the working group reported.
  - **The A.E.O.s and co-ordinators of the four colleges which were running the pilot project.**  
Mr. Kevin Smullen, Colaiste Íde, Cardiffsbridge Rd., Finglas, Dublin 11.  
Ms. Kathleen Forde, Colaiste Dhulaigh, Coolock, Dublin 17.  
Mr. Fred Goulding and Ms. Anne Dore, T.A.C.T., St. Dominic's school, Tallaght, Dublin 24.  
Mr. Tom Ralleigh, Connolly College, North Strand, Dublin 1.
  - To all those Adult Education Organisers who completed questionnaires.
  - The teachers and ancillary staff at the four colleges where the pilot project took place, who were so enthusiastic and hard working.
  - The trainees involved (twenty-three).
  - Special thanks to the trainees who appear in the photographs: Tony Beresford, Linda Ryan, Eileen Good, Mary Conlon, Mary Kelly (all St. Michael's House), Jean Bridgeman, Anne Walshe, Janet Kavanagh, Criona Kearns (all Moyle Road Industries).
  - **Training Centre Managers:**  
Mr. Terry Glavin, St. Michael's House, Charles St.  
Mr. Frank McDougall, St. Michael's House, Castle Industries, Coolock.  
Mr. Tom Shanahan, St. Michael's House, Moyle Road Industries, Glasnevin.  
Mr. Gerry O'Connell, St. Michael's House, Templeogue House.
  - **Training Centre Officers:**  
Rachel Breen, St. Michael's House, Charles St.  
Robert Morgan, St. Michael's House, Castle Industries.  
Mary McArdle, St. Michael's House, Moyle Road Industries, Glasnevin.  
Monica MacNamara, St. Michael's House, Templeogue House.
  - **Research Assistants:**  
Geraldine O'Meara  
Sheila Verdon
- AONTAS would like to thank the Department of Education and Science for providing us with a grant in 1996, the European year of Lifelong Learning, to pursue this research.**

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

**Monica MacNamara** qualified as an Occupational Therapist in 1981 and in 1984, received a Diploma in Adult Basic Education. Monica has worked in the area of training and development in the field of Disability for 15 years. She has written extensively on her subject, publishing a series of teaching materials (Wordwell Ltd. 1990 and 1992) and a text book 'Lifeskills a Positive Approach' (Souvenir Press, London, 1995). She has presented papers at local, national and international level. Completed consultancy assignments include work for; The Irish Association of Teachers of Special Education, The Daughters of Charity, The Open Training College and The College of Occupational Therapy. Monica now works as an associate in Productive Personnel Ltd. a training and consultancy company.

# Contents

Introduction	6
Chapter 1	
The Pilot Project	10
Chapter 2	
Learning Disability Profile	14
Chapter 3	
The Group Response to the Pilot Project	18
Chapter 4	
Research Methodology and Results	22
Chapter 5	
Overview	28

‘Many people with disabilities feel that they are being either kept at, or pushed to, the margins of society. They are not being allowed to realise their full potential or to participate as fully as they are entitled to in everyday life.’

A Strategy for Equality, Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities, 1997

## INTRODUCTION

### There are approximately 360,000 people, 10% of the population, with disabilities in Ireland <sup>1</sup>

Of this number 26,694 people have a learning disability (Mental Handicap) <sup>2</sup>. There are 63 organisations around the country many of which have several branches <sup>3</sup> which provide a wide range of day services for children and adults with Learning Disabilities.

St. Michael's House is one such Dublin-based organisation. It provides an extensive service and comprises approximately 36 day services, 24 of which are adult services. Two very significant aims of service providers are:

- 1) To provide real opportunities for service users to learn and develop.
- 2) To facilitate the integration of each service user into his/her own community.

At the AONTAS Annual General Meeting on March 12th 1994, a representative from St. Michael's House proposed the following motion:

**“That AONTAS in its commitment to the general provision of Adult Education, shall promote the inclusion of adults with learning disabilities (mental handicap).”**

This motion was carried unanimously and a Working Group was promptly established and facilitated by AONTAS. The working group was made up of parents of adults with learning disabilities and professionals working in this field. The group was chaired by Ms Cathleen O'Neill of the Executive Committee of AONTAS. The Working Group reviewed how the existing provision of adult education catered for adults with learning disabilities. This review was confined to the Dublin area where, it was found, there was a small number of Adult Education classes at three separate Dublin locations, which were attended by adults with learning disabilities. In some cases, these adults were accompanied by a helper and in other cases they attended independently. The classes attended were: Art, Crafts, Watercolours, Flower Arranging, Keyboard Skills and Literacy.

<sup>1</sup> 1997 Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities.

<sup>2</sup> National Intellectual Disability Database Annual Report 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Health Statistics 1993.

Members of the Working Group spoke to the relevant teachers about this experience. The findings were consistent across the three locations.

**They were as follows:**

If the adult with learning disability was happy, could follow the class and keep up with only minimal extra help, there was no problem.

If the adult with learning disability could not follow the class and needed considerable extra help, he/she became self-conscious and uncomfortable. This tended to slow down the progression of the class, causing some frustration for the other students. Where a helper was available, this problem was greatly reduced but this was only the case in one out of the eleven classes looked at.

The Working Group agreed that the integration of adults with learning disabilities into regular classes, although sometimes successful, is not always possible or practical and that additional attractive options should be made available. They explored other types of integrated learning and found the system of 'Inclusive Education' used in the Further Education Colleges of England and Northern Ireland to be a good model.

This system involves one or more members of the College teaching staff agreeing to run a class in his/her subject at a suitable level for adults with learning disabilities. e.g. If a Word Processing teacher was running a class in Keyboard Skills, he/she would go through the same procedure as usual but more slowly, giving fuller explanations and more time to practice. There would be less emphasis on speed and more scope for students to progress at their own pace. The process of adapting classes to a suitable level is done with the help and support of the training personnel of the learning disability Agency. The teacher student ratios are smaller, usually 1:6.

The outcome is that classes are pitched at the right level for students with learning disabilities enabling them to learn and develop, as well as to benefit from and enjoy integrating into a college in the community where other adults are going to learn.

Members of the Working Group visited the Rupert Stanley College of Further Education in Belfast and three of the learning disability Agencies which link in with it for Adult Education classes. This college runs a series of classes for adults with learning disabilities and calls this provision 'Adult Basic Education' (A.B.E.). The Working Group met with teachers of various A.B.E. classes, all of whom chose to get involved in this area of work and found it very fulfilling.

None of these teachers had previous experience of learning disability and they found that any anxieties or apprehensions which they felt at the start dissipated quickly once they met the students. The College Principal felt that the development of the A.B.E. provision, while clearly benefiting its target students, had also benefited the whole college in terms of disability awareness.

The adults with learning disabilities whom the Working Group met were very enthusiastic and full of praise for the A.B.E. classes. One woman said;

**“These classes have opened new doors and changed my life.”**

Staff from the learning disability Agencies found the A.B.E. classes to be an excellent resource requiring only a small investment of their time.

Having seen how well this system worked, the Working Group agreed to design a Pilot Project based on this model of ‘Inclusive Education’. Before setting up the Pilot Project and in order to confirm the level of interest in such integrated Adult Education classes, members of the Working Group ran an evening class in Literacy one night per week for a term. The class took place in the Marino Institute of Education, Drumcondra, Dublin, where many other adult classes take place each term.

An information sheet about the forthcoming class was sent to eight centres for adults with learning disabilities in the Dublin area. The response was very enthusiastic with one hundred and fifty three applications for eighteen places. The class was a great success, with the end-of-term evaluation indicating that every student had improved his/her literacy skills and also developed new social and independence skills. All of the eighteen (18) students wanted to continue for the next term but there were also the one hundred and thirty five (135) people on the waiting list to consider.

**In the sincere hope that positive findings would highlight the need for such provision and lead to its development country-wide the Working Group decided to focus their efforts on designing and implementing the Pilot Project.**

# Chapter 1

10

The Pilot Project



# The Pilot Project

## AIMS OF THE PROJECT

**The aim of the Pilot Project was to request that a teacher in each of four Centres of Adult Education would agree and be funded to provide an Adult Basic Education class.**

This class would be in the teacher's own subject but adapted, with help from a St. Michael's House Training Officer, to a level suitable for an adult with a learning disability. Each class would run for two hours, once a week, for a ten-week term. The student teacher ratio would be 6:1. Integration with other students would be encouraged whenever possible e.g. for tea/coffee breaks, use of college facilities, access to information etc. The progress of the class would be monitored and all those involved interviewed at the end of the term to ascertain the true outcome. If the outcome was positive, the Working Group proposed to research the Project and send a report to the Department of Education and Science, making a strong case for the provision of this type of facility country-wide.

The pilot project took place in the Dublin area between September and December 1994. It involved four branches of St. Michael's House and four Adult Education Centres. These branches of St. Michael's House each provide a long-term training service for between sixty and eighty adults with a mild to moderate level of learning disability. The Working Group agreed that the Vocational Education Committee (V.E.C.) was the closest parallel in the Republic of Ireland to the Colleges of Further Education in England and Northern Ireland. Accordingly, it was decided to invite four V.E.C. Adult Education Centres to partner St. Michael's House for the Project.

## PREPARATION

The Training Officers of four branches of St. Michael's House, contacted the Adult Education Organiser (A.E.O.) at their local Vocational Education Committee headquarters. They outlined the aims of the Pilot Project and requested the support of the A.E.O. In all cases the A.E.O.s facilitated their request by providing and paying for a teacher and classroom space for one class per week for a term of ten weeks. They further agreed to talk with the staff to explain and describe the Pilot Project and seek a volunteer from the teaching staff.

Each Training Officer either visited the V.E.C. college or invited the relevant V.E.C. staff to visit the Training Centre. The purpose of this visit was to familiarise the V.E.C. staff with the Pilot Project, give them some information on learning disability and seek information about their Adult Education system. Each Training Officer then selected a group of six trainees all of whom had expressed an interest in further education. A suitable subject was selected from the options available in each college. These options were determined by the number of teachers willing to be involved in the pilot project. The Training Officer worked with that teacher in advance of the class in order to:

- Provide further information on learning disability
- Introduce him/her to the class participants
- Anticipate and discuss possible difficulties
- Assist in adapting course material to a suitable level.

**Each Training Officer also worked with his/her trainee group before the classes began in order to:**

- Confirm dates and times of classes and when the term would start and finish.
- Detail the content of the classes, what topics would be covered and how.
- Outline any requirements of the course e.g. (to bring overalls, notebooks etc.
- Find the exact location of the college and work out the easiest way to get there.
- Practise the bus route, gauge the length of time the journey would take, point out land marks, and check safety at crossings.
- Discuss with Trainees what is expected of them in terms of commitment, attendance, timekeeping, and behaviour.
- Deal with any apprehensions, anticipate any difficulties which might arise and answer any questions the trainees might have.

**Training Officers then ensured that all relevant members of the Training Centre team and parents, where necessary, were informed of the time, place and location of the classes.**

## 12

### PARTICIPANTS IN THE PROJECT

Twenty three (23) students (referred to as Trainees in their Training Centres) were involved in the Pilot Project. The student group was made up of thirteen women and ten men aged between twenty five and forty five. There were two art classes with six students in each, one Pottery class with six students and one Personal Development class with five students.

**Four V.E.C. class teachers, volunteered to become involved in the Pilot Project and gave it an enthusiastic commitment.**

Four V.E.C. Adult Education Organisers provided support (in two cases they delegated the responsibility to others, a Principal and an Adult Education Co-ordinator). They also offered practical help and funding which allowed the Pilot Project to take place.

Four Centre Managers facilitated the Pilot Project by allocating the Training Officer time for it, promoting the attendance of Trainees, purchasing materials (in two cases) and hosting a display of work (in one case).

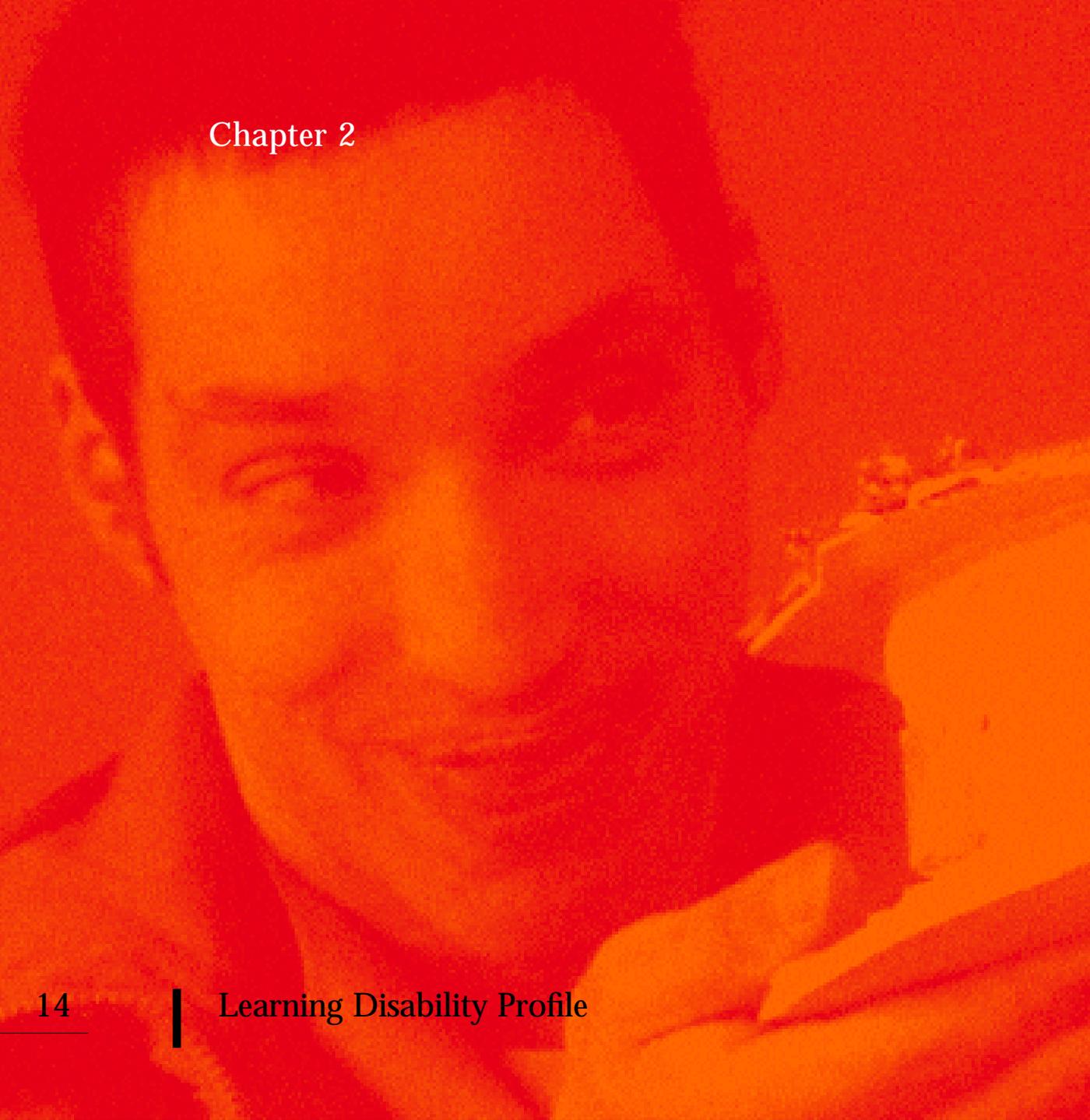
Four Training Officers from the four St. Michael's House Training Centres initiated, co-ordinated and recorded the outcomes of the Pilot Project.

## THE COURSES

The Pilot Project took place in the Dublin area. The V.E.C. schools/colleges involved were in: Finglas West, North Strand, Tallaght and Coolock. For the purpose of the Pilot Project the classes ran for two hours, one day per week for ten weeks. The students travelled independently on foot or by bus, accompanied at first by the Training Officer. The students usually had tea/coffee after the class and sometimes beforehand as well.

The main cost of the Pilot Project was the payment of teachers through the V.E.C. Adult Literacy and Community Education (ALCE) budget. The Project involved two by two hour preparation sessions and ten by two hour classes at each location. In one case materials were paid for by St. Michael's House and in one case they hosted a display of Art work completed.

**It is important to note that in all four locations the provision of such classes continued beyond the designated time allocated to the Pilot Project. In three out of four cases they have continued to date, in a range of different subjects, with only minor interruptions.**



## Chapter 2

There is often a concern among members of the public that people with a learning disability might be rough or violent. This is rarely the case, it is much more common to find a noticeable warmth and friendliness.

## Learning Disability Profile

**It is impossible to give a generic description of an adult with a learning disability. Like any group of people in a community, each member is an individual with his/her own appearance, personality and way of life.**

However, with respect for the individuality of every human being, the circumstances which surround various groups allow for some common traits to be identified. In order to make this report more meaningful to the reader, the following is a general profile of the group.

### **GROUP PROFILE**

There were twenty-three students involved in the pilot programme - thirteen women and ten men. Adults with a learning disability who attend Training Centres are all over the age of twenty five. The range of ages of the pilot programme participants was twenty five to forty five.

### **ABILITY**

The only requirements for entry to the pilot project were mobility i.e., independence in moving around the college, using canteen, toilet facilities, etc., and communication skills, i.e. the ability to make ones needs known and to interact with the teacher and others in the class. The ability of the group ranged from those with a very mild degree of learning disability to those with a moderate degree of learning disability. Some members of the group were street wise, independent, chatty and quick to learn, while others were more dependent, sheltered, slow to understand and in need of reminding and practice. There would often be common features such as short attention span, difficulty in retaining information, poor literacy and numeracy skills and taking a longer time to complete a task.

### **HEALTH**

Two of the twenty three students had an accompanying physical disability, one woman used a walking frame. Otherwise the group members were of average build, strong and healthy with a tendency towards slower movement and poorer co-ordination than average.

## MANNER

For the duration of the Pilot Project, no undesirable behaviour was ever displayed or recorded. The main desire of people with a learning disability is to be like, be with and be accepted by others in their community. Adults with a learning disability are often very organised and like routine therefore the attendance and time keeping during the Pilot Project were very good.

**There is often a concern among members of the public that people with a learning disability might be rough or violent. This is rarely the case, it is much more common to find a noticeable warmth and friendliness.**

## LEVEL OF INDEPENDENCE

Most adults with learning disabilities live at home with parents or other family members. Some live in group homes in the community with a house parent. A small number live independently in flats or small houses. All twenty three participants in the pilot project travelled independently to their class either by bus or walking. All participants were able to manage independently in the canteen but few would understand money or know their correct change.

## LEISURE / HOBBIES

Adults with learning disabilities pursue a wide range of hobbies. However, it is common for people to be quite home based and isolated with television viewing becoming the main leisure pursuit. They do not have enough opportunities to integrate into their community or develop a good social life.

## FOR A LITTLE MORE DETAIL PLEASE MEET TWO OF THE COURSE PARTICIPANTS SALLY AND BARRY.

**SALLY is 29, she has a mild degree Down's Syndrome. She is the youngest of a family of six.**

## MANNER

Sally is a slow steady worker, very neat and methodical and totally dependable. She loves mixing and meeting new people and has a warm and charming personality. Sally admits to being stubborn and can dig her heels in when she has to but for the most part she is bubbly and good humoured with an infectious laugh.

## INDEPENDENCE

Sally lives in a group home with five other trainees from her Training Centre. There is always one house-parent with them to help them out. Sally has a range of responsibilities in the house, she does some cooking, cleaning and gardening. She travels independently by bus and regularly goes into town with a friend at the weekend. She can write her own name and address but cannot understand money.

## HEALTH

Sally enjoys good health, but suffers sometimes with ear aches. She has never been in hospital but has a tendency to be overweight.

## LEISURE / HOBBIES

Sally enjoys meeting people and thinks that she doesn't have enough chance to do so. She goes to a club one night a week and she usually goes to the cinema at the weekend. She has a boyfriend in the Training Centre and she meets him in town on Saturday afternoons but they can't meet at night as he lives too far away. She would like to have more to do in the evenings and weekends. She would love to be able to read and write better and understand money.

**BARRY is 23 and has a moderate degree of learning disability. He lives at home with his parents and two sisters.**

## MANNER

He is a quiet, shy young man who lacks self confidence and assertiveness. He makes very few demands but if he wants something enough he can make his needs known. Barry has good concentration and attention to detail in the work he does. He is a quick and neat worker, picking instructions up easily and following them exactly. On occasions, when given the opportunity and in the right atmosphere, Barry has shown that he can be very creative.

There is a sense with Barry that there is a lot below the surface, which has not yet been explored or developed to his full potential. Barry does not initiate much conversation with others but responds when asked questions or spoken to. He has a few friends but stays on his own a lot.

## INDEPENDENCE

He is independent in all areas of self care but is inclined to be nervous and cautious. He gets help with hair washing and shaving. He also has to be reminded when to do certain activities. His parents look after most of the household routine but he helps out willingly when asked. Barry can cross the road independently but does not travel alone by bus. He goes to the local shop for a message. Barry can write his name with a little help, he cannot read or understand money, has difficulty understanding weeks, months and years and cannot tell the time. Because Barry does not say very much his ability can be underestimated. In fact he can be quick to learn and follows instructions well and has good concentration when motivated.

## HEALTH

Barry has very good health, eats well and is fit and agile.

## LEISURE / HOBBIES

Barry enjoys sport and music. He is involved in a football team and participates in the Special Olympics. His favourite band is U.2. He can be creative when he feels free and confident but this takes time to 'warm up'. He does not see friends out of work but does have a friend locally with whom he sometimes goes cycling. Other than that, all of his activities are family based.

## Chapter 3

18 | The Group Response to the Pilot Project

# The Group Response to the Pilot Project

## SELECTION OF GROUP

The Training Centre team, which is made up of manager, instructors, training officer and a range of consultant specialists, work with each trainee and his/her family to draw up an Individual Programme Plan. This plan is drawn up annually or biannually. It is based on the identified strengths, needs and preferences of the trainee and outlines a series of long and short term goals. It details how those goals might be achieved and who will be responsible for ensuring that all reasonable steps are taken to attain the stated goals.

**All twenty three trainees involved in the Pilot Project and many more besides had identified a need for either further education or increased integration into their community or both.**

These needs may have been arrived at in slightly different ways i.e., some trainees wanted to improve specific skills e.g., literacy, typing, while others felt the need to learn something new. Some trainees were bored, based at home often six or seven nights a week. They felt that they needed an outlet or to develop a new leisure activity. Others felt isolated 'different' and wanted to feel more a part of their community.

## MOTIVATION

When trainees were invited to take part in the Pilot Project, those who accepted saw this as an opportunity to work towards an agreed goal. As a result, the trainees were enthusiastic and well motivated. Four out of the twenty three trainees had attended adult education classes before, two Literacy, one Art, and one Flower Arranging. The two Literacy students enjoyed the classes and had continued for several terms. The Art student said the classes were good but "I was always the worst in the class so I left". The Flower Arranging student said the teacher was really nice but "I didn't understand everything and the flowers were too expensive, so I left after three weeks".

## ATTITUDE

The trainees' attitude prior to the class was positive and enthusiastic. Many commented that it was good to get this chance, great to be doing something new, nice to be mixing with other people. However, several trainees had reservations and felt apprehensive too.

- "What if we get lost?"
- "Will the other people talk to us?"
- "Will the teacher help you if you can't do it?"
- "If the Training Centre is busy (contract work section) will the manager let us go?"

The Training Officers did preparatory work with the trainees before the classes began. All of these issues, and any others which were raised, were addressed in so far as possible.

## Once the classes began, the apprehensions faded and the enthusiasm and confidence developed.

For many training activities in the centres, trainees had to be reminded each week of the starting time and often collected from their work area. All centres reported that the groups going out to the V.E.C. classes were highly motivated, got ready independently, knew what time they had to leave. They clearly felt a sense of importance about going out to a class. Other trainees sensed this and began to ask questions about the classes and if they too could attend. One Centre Manager commented that trainees who attended the classes were noticeably more alert and in better form, that the classes really gave them a buzz.

Parents commented on the enthusiasm and the pride with which they brought home the products of their work. One parent said that her daughter, who finds it hard to get out of bed in the morning, was up bright and early every Friday which was the day she attended her class.

It was clear that going out into the community and mixing with other students and teachers was stimulating for trainees. While it placed more demands on trainees, they rose to those demands. Many made efforts to look well, behave in an adult way, concentrate on what they were doing and communicate with others.



## Chapter 4

# Research Methodology and Results

Questionnaires, in the form of semi-structured interviews were completed with all significant people involved in the pilot project.

## THESE INCLUDED:

- 1 The Students i.e., the adults with learning disability who attended the project, (23).
- 2 The Adult Education Organisers (A.E.O.s) of the V.E.C. colleges involved (4).
- 3 The Teachers of the classes (4).
- 4 The Centre Managers of the relevant St. Michael's House Training Centres (4).
- 5 The Training Officers of the relevant St. Michael's House Training Centre (4).

By necessity the questionnaires for each group differed in content. In order to fully analyse the response to the project it was necessary to look at each of these groups separately. A significant and central question appeared on all questionnaires, although the format differed slightly: i.e. Were the classes successful/enjoyable/beneficial. The response to this question was positive across the board with thirty-nine out of thirty-nine respondents saying yes and many making comments or giving examples to support their answer.

## FOR EXAMPLE;

"Outside you learn with other people, I like going where other people are"  
Student

"It did the trainees a power of good, the community is where they want to be"  
Centre manager

"The benefits have surpassed my expectations, not only did the students improve their skills but clearly developed in other skills too, like confidence, observation and communication"  
Class Teacher

"It was great to see how the group developed"  
Adult Education Organiser

"The classes gave the trainee a sense of importance, an interest and an outlet for creativity"  
Training Officer

Each of the twenty three students who attended classes in the pilot project completed a questionnaire by means of a semi-structured interview.

## SUMMARY OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

### STUDENTS

The classes were enjoyed by all with enthusiastic comments about them being the highlight of the week. Attendance and time-keeping were better than an average group. The students reported no problems accessing the various colleges and minimal difficulty in finding their way around. All students agreed that they learnt a lot. The learning extended beyond the class content in that it increased the awareness, sense of importance and self confidence of the students.

**“I did not think I would be any good but I got on great, my Da was amazed”**

The students most enjoyed getting out into a new environment and mixing with other people. They were glad of the opportunity to learn something new and were delighted with the end products.

The support from home was enthusiastic with a couple of minor reservations. Parents were delighted with the outcome of the classes. The rapport between student and teacher was very good with plenty of fun mixed in with the learning. All of the students felt that they had benefited from the classes and the demand for further classes was very high, with twenty-one out of twenty-three students wanting to do another class. The most popular subjects for further classes were Arts and Crafts, Literacy, Woodwork, Pottery and Computers.

### ADULT EDUCATION ORGANISERS

The A.E.O.s or Adult Education Co-ordinators agreed that the classes were beneficial. Two out of four colleges were not accessible for disabled people. One of the four did not have canteen facilities. Students benefited in many ways beyond the class skills, in that they became more independent and more confident. Teaching and ancillary staff were interested and supportive. The A.E.O.s felt however that the support offered by the Training Centre was inadequate. More support was required in the form of an induction course for college staff and on-going support particularly if difficulties arose.

On the subject of courses they felt that Personal Development was not a suitable subject. The skills involved depended a lot on good communication and there was no visible end product from this class which seemed to be a disadvantage. The Art and Pottery classes worked out extremely well for all concerned. It was agreed that two ten week terms would be better than one. The students integrated where possible and there was no sign of any negative exchanges.

All A.E.O.s involved would like to see this opportunity being made available in their college on an ongoing basis and agreed that it should be financed under the Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme (ALCES) of the Dept. of Education and Science. There should also be some financial or practical input from the training centre involved.

The A.E.O.s would have found it more helpful if they had received more support from the Training Centres with the introduction of the project and in practical terms felt that having access to two contact people in the centres would have been useful in case any difficulties arose. A formal finish to the class with a display of work produced and a class certificate would have given the students a concrete sense of achievement. They also felt that an overview of adult education provision in relation to the inclusion of adults with learning difficulties at present might be useful in developing such provision in the future.

## **The teachers reported that students learned skills and developed personally as a result of taking part in their classes.**

Attendance and time-keeping were excellent. Communication skills developed amongst the students themselves and where possible with others in the college. Three out of four teachers had concerns before the class began, but in two cases these faded quickly. Extra care was needed on the part of the teacher to cater for individual needs. They felt they needed more help in preparing the course outlines and that an induction course for college staff would also have been useful.

Two out of four teachers felt that there was not adequate support given during the course of classes to re-assure teachers and students. Students were enthusiastic, well motivated and very appreciative; "They were lovely to work with". Three out of the four teachers would run a class at this level again. In the case of the fourth teacher the subject matter (personal development) was not felt to be suitable for reasons stated earlier but the teacher enjoyed working with the group.

In general the teachers felt it was a worthwhile and positive experience and advised other teachers to become involved but to be careful to ensure that they have the adequate support and the patience to allow students to progress at their own pace.

In three out of four cases other trainees in the work-shop expressed an interest in attending the classes. Three out of the four managers reported that the classes did not cause any disruption to the workshop but in one case occasional disruption was reported if a key worker was attending a class.

The colleges required minimal support from the workshop and the experience for trainees was very positive. Three out of four managers felt that twenty weeks would have been better than ten because it takes trainees some time to settle in.

All four managers were very interested in such opportunities being available on an on-going basis. They felt that classes in practical subjects with an end product were the most successful as students could see their achievements. The four managers thought it appropriate that the Dept. of Education and Science would fund the teachers fee. All were open to making a contribution to the development of this work and two managers spoke enthusiastically about teacher training and hosting the presentation of certificates on display.

**All managers agreed that the classes were beneficial and all noticed a positive difference in trainees during and after the classes.**

Trainees were selected on the basis of identified needs, interest expressed in further education and their level of independence. No trainees turned out to be unsuitable.

The practical subjects of Art and Pottery which had a tangible end product appeared to be more suitable than personal development which was vague and demanding at times.

Very positive relationships were formed between the Training Officers and the A.E.O.s and staff in three of the four colleges. In the fourth case this relationship was less comfortable. The Training Officer felt that there was not a high enough level of interest and the teacher felt there was not a high enough level of support.

Preparation time spent by the Training Officer varied from one situation to another but it was agreed that the more time invested the better the outcome. The Training Officers agreed that it would benefit the Teacher to run a comprehensive induction course for all those interested. They felt it would also be important to develop a standard system of support from the Training Officer to ensure the teacher's confidence and the best outcome for all involved.

**The training officers saw the classes as being very beneficial to all involved with the benefits encompassing far more than the subject matter of the individual classes and contributing greatly to confidence and self esteem of the students.**

The financial input from the Adult Education Organisers and all the work put in by the teachers was greatly appreciated. New opportunities which were opened up for the trainees might continue and expand in the future.

**All training officers would like very much to see opportunities like this being made available on an ongoing basis.**





## Chapter 5

Once the classes began, the apprehensions faded and the enthusiasm and confidence developed.

# Overview of the Adult Education Provision by the Vocational Education Committee in relation to the Inclusion of Adults with Learning Disabilities

The Vocational Education Committees provide a wide range of educational opportunities in second level and further education. Their Lifelong Education Programmes offer to adults in all age groups career improvement, leisure and self development courses. The extensive second level sector provides full time courses in Junior and Leaving Certificate throughout the country. Their expanding further education sector provides Post Leaving Certificate, career foundation courses and pre-third level courses for those who wish to proceed to higher education.

## Unemployed people are facilitated by the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme in an initiative whereby they may return to full time study and retain their social welfare payments.

Life long education is made available to all adults whether young, middle aged or retired. The V.E.C. also provides an extensive Adult Literacy service throughout the country. Basic education provision and day-time adult education are becoming more widespread. Their classes, in a wide range of subjects cater for the many whose personal circumstances prevent them from attending classes in the evening. They also include provision for the un-waged, the house-bound, single-parent, women's groups, men's groups, the handicapped, the aged, and the educationally disadvantaged. The entire adult education provision is monitored by Adult Education Organisers. Each county has at least one Adult Education Organiser A.E.O., who is employed by the local Vocational Education Committee.

In order to get a sense of the level of provision for adults with learning disabilities within the V.E.C. system a questionnaire was sent to forty six Adult Education Organisers around the country. The remaining four adult education organisers were directly involved in the pilot project.

Of the forty six questionnaires twenty six were completed and returned, (this 50-60% response rate is "about the best to be expected from a postal questionnaire" according to Kenneth Bailey in his book **Methods of Social Research**.)

## A.E.O. RESPONSES

Twenty six out of forty six questionnaires were returned. Questionnaires were completed very comprehensively despite the difficulty for Adult Education Organisers who were responsible for a large number of Adult Education Centres. The following figures are approximate for the purpose of giving an overview.

Fifty per cent of colleges or centres are accessible for disabled people. Seventy five per cent are accessible by public transport and have safe access. Seventy per cent have a canteen facility. Eighty per cent have made specific provision for adults with learning disabilities. (However, the researcher is unsure whether the term learning disability was interpreted accurately to refer to its former term mental handicap). Provision has been made in four main ways;

- 1 Individual teaching in Literacy classes,
- 2 Places being made available in regular adult education classes,
- 3 Teaching hours provided in-situ to centres with adults with learning disabilities,
- 4 A range of classes specifically designed to meet the needs of adults with learning disabilities.

Eighty per cent of the respondents reported that adults with learning disabilities or others on their behalf had come looking for classes. These were mainly sought in Literacy, Arts, Crafts, Computers, Drama and Flower Arranging.

Sixty per cent of respondents were aware of a centre for adults with learning disabilities in their area.

Seventy five per cent of respondents would definitely facilitate this kind of project in their adult education service and a further fifteen per cent might if given adequate support.

**Adult Education Organisers are clearly aware of the benefits of such provision and are anxious to facilitate inclusion and integration and to provide encouragement and support to those with a learning disability thereby increasing their quality of life.**

Sixty per cent of respondents had no reservations about including adults with learning disabilities. The remainder who had reservations were mainly concerned about lack of resources and whether teacher and student alike would get adequate support.

Sixty per cent of the Adult Education Organisers felt that teaching and other staff would support the idea, the remainder did not know.

The additional support that they felt might be required was teacher training, ongoing advice and support, more staff and finance, assistance with adapting the class content and information on suitable equipment and materials.

There is a high level of awareness among Adult Education Organisers of the need of adults with learning disabilities to integrate into their community.

The fact that these adults require access to Lifelong Learning and opportunities to improve their quality of life was acknowledged. In the space at the end of the questionnaire for further comments, this awareness was demonstrated by an eagerness to support the pilot project, find out more about it, provide training for staff and put it into place if resources allow.

## Chapter 6

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The classes were enjoyed by all students on the Pilot Project with twenty-one out of twenty-three students expressing a desire to do another class.

Attendance and time-keeping were better than that of an average student group and the most popular subjects for classes were Arts, Crafts, Literacy, Woodwork, Pottery and Computers. The learning extended far beyond the class subject to such areas as increased self confidence, improved communication and independent living skills.

### **The students particularly liked getting out of a segregated environment and integrating into their local community.**

All parties involved agreed that the classes were beneficial. Centre managers and Training Officers noticed a positive difference in the trainees during and after these classes.

Adult Education Organisers found that teaching and ancillary staff were interested and supportive. Although it varied from centre to centre it was generally felt that the support offered by the training centre was inadequate. More support, particularly in the form of an induction course for college staff before the classes began would have been very helpful. In two out of four cases it was felt that the ongoing support for teachers was inadequate or 'could have been better'.

Practical subjects which had an end product were very successful. However, personal development is a more subtle and less tangible subject and did not work out so well because on a higher level it depended on communication skills which were not necessarily strong among students.

One ten week term was too short. By the time the students had settled in and got used to the college and to the teacher the classes were almost coming to an end. Two ten week terms would have been more suitable.

No negative exchanges between other students and this particular group were reported at any of the four locations. Actual integration varied according to the size of the colleges and the time at which the classes were on. In some cases there were not many other students around at this time. However, where integration did occur it was positive and supportive.

**Good rapport was quickly established between teachers and students in all cases. Students were enthusiastic, well motivated and very appreciative, all teachers agreed that they were lovely to work with.**

Three out of four teachers would run classes at this level again and in the case of the fourth the group was not the problem but the subject matter ie. personal development.

All parties involved thought it appropriate that the Department of Education and Science would fund the teacher's fees for this area of work from the ALCE budget. The training centre involved could make a contribution by paying for the cost of materials.

All of those involved in the Pilot Project would like very much to see opportunities like this being made available on an on-going basis. There is a high level of awareness among the Adult Education Organisers who were not involved in the project, of the need of adults with learning disabilities to integrate into their community.

Seventy-five percent of the Adult Education Organisers who responded to the questionnaire would facilitate this sort of project in their adult education service and a further fifteen percent might. Sixty percent of the respondents had no reservations about running classes such as these. The remainder who had reservations were mainly concerned about their own lack of resources and whether or not they would get adequate support from the training centres. Eighty percent of Adult Education Organisers already make specific provision for adults with learning disabilities. How this provision is made differs greatly from one college to the other. As a result of this research the following recommendations are suggested.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 Provision be made in the ALCE Budget of each Adult Education Organiser to run a special class in a chosen subject for adults with learning disability. This would compliment rather than replace any service they were already providing in this area.
- 2 Training Centres providing services for adults with learning disabilities around the country approach and make themselves known to their Adult Education Organiser in order that a positive partnership may be established.
- 3 Training Centres wishing to avail of such Adult Education Classes would prepare a simple induction or training day for teaching staff in their local college. This training day would give teachers and other college staff some insight into the lives of adults with learning disability and some information regarding their strengths and needs.
- 4 Subjects for the class should be carefully chosen, Those which are practical and have an end product were clearly more successful. The specific subjects which were sought were Arts, Crafts, Literacy, Woodwork, Pottery and Computers.
- 5 Training personnel from the training centre should offer support to the teacher by:
  - a) Adapting the class content to a suitable level before the class begins.
  - b) Maintaining involvement and interest in the class for its duration.
  - c) Setting up a display of work at the end of the classes or a 'ceremony' to present certificates.
- 6 Classes should run for two terms rather than one in order to enable the students to settle in well and get the full benefit from the new learning environment.
- 7 Integration with other students should be facilitated where possible by using a canteen or other shared facilities.
- 8 The end of the classes should be marked with the presentation of a certificate or organising a display of students work so that their achievement is fully acknowledged.
- 9 That after the two terms classes should be evaluated by the teacher, A.E.O. and training personnel from the training centre so that all parties are free to make comments or changes and develop good relationships.

