DIGIPLACE4ALL

Enabling Access to Education and Employment –
Digital strategies for sustainable community building

18 SEPTEMBER 2015
Digiplace4all, Friday 18th September 2015:

>> Hi there. Hi everybody, good afternoon. You're very welcome to our seminar about enabling people with disabilities to access employment and education and some digital strategies around that.

Today we're delighted to have our European partners from Poland, Bulgaria and Belgium with us today. We're also thrilled that Marian Harkin MEP can be here and also John Dolan CEO of DFI and our own former CEO, Des Kenny, so you're all welcome.

In particular I'd also like to extend a big thank you to our community, in particular our champions who are part of our Digiplace4all community.

Our online peer support initiative, which today is about. And thank them for their contribution to the project to date over the last two years. And we're delighted to have some of our champions here today.

So I had intended to give some more background to the development of this project, but just to say that this initiative was built as a recognition that there was a need for online platform to support people with disabilities with their technology needs and information, and in particular that there was a recognition that peer support could be considered one of the most cherished channels to receive such information and supports.

So on that basis, we built this platform, with the help of our European partners and indeed with a lot of national support. In building our community, we recognised the real benefit of engaging with stakeholders across Ireland, both in education sector and the NGO, most particularly in what we consider phase 1 of the initiative.

So yeah, I would like to thank you all for being here and the continued support. So thanks. And I'd like to handover to my colleague, Mark Magennis. He is going to give you an overview of the website and some of the functionality and how it works and a demonstration, so thanks very much everybody.

MR MAGENNIS: Hello and welcome to everyone. The reason I'm talking here is because I'm the project manager, not because I'm a particularly good speaker or presenter or anything like
that! So don't expect fireworks!

So just go straight in, Esther mentioned the peer support. The reason we did this project is because we recognised the peer support is very, very useful and I would say important, for building digital literacy skills among people with disabilities.

As we all know, digital literacy now is absolutely essential for everybody, education, employment as well as social life generally. People with disabilities as we all know, face additional barriers in addition to what people, other people face as well.

And that's why personalised training is very, very important. Training that's provided by organisations like NCBI, who I work for, and like our partners in -- our European partners in this project.

We provide training from the point of view of people who understand how to train people with disabilities, who understand the disability and how to, for instance if its people with vision impairment like NCBI works with, our trainers are experts in using screen readers and screen magnification and things like that. If they are not, then they find it very difficult to train.

So that's very important, that kind of professional training. But there are limits. And there are limits because digital has so taken over everybody's lives, that the amount of help and support and training that people are now asking for with digital products, digital services, is threatening to outstrip the ability of training providers to fulfil that need.

Now we noticed that people with disabilities naturally look to their peers for support. For instance through online forums, they look to their friends and the people around them. And we noticed in our training centre that when we're training people, people with vision impairment in their initial training in digital skills, the people who are coming to the end of the training and have learned something often start supporting the people who are coming in on the next phase of the training.

So peer support naturally occurs. And we've decided we wanted to facilitate that.

So just to give a brief example. The Digiplace4all approach to peer support is obviously a peer
is somebody like me, somebody who understands interest my perspective. But otherwise they're
equal, they're not somebody higher than me, or necessarily a teacher as such.

They are untrained, unaccredited and informal, unlike other areas that you may have heard of
peer support, in terms of emotional support, where people have to be trained and accredited. It's
not like this here at all.

Just anybody that knows something, they can share. It's worth mentioning also that it's not just
people with disabilities who need to share information and support each other, but for instance
educators and employers -- if you're an educator and you want to make your educational
environment accessible or an employer who wants to make your workplace accessible and
inclusive, you can learn from other educators and employers who have done that, maybe gone a
little bit further and they can help you through the steps of doing that. So that's peer support
between them.

So basically our three target groups are the students with disabilities, the educators and the
employers.

Just to mention that this work came from a project called DICE, Digital Inclusion Champions in
Europe, funded by the European Commission under the lifelong learning programme, we had
partners, like Esther said, in three other European countries, and they will be speaking later about
their experiences in their countries, of using Digiplace4all.

Just to say this is a transfer of innovation from a previous project headed by IADT, called
gateway2at.org, again for these three groups -- people with disabilities, educators and employers,
there was a lot of information about assistive technology.

That was static information, Digiplace4all is now dynamic information, user generated and
shared, that's how we're taking this forward.

Very briefly to mention the design of the Digiplace4all community is based on a very large
requirements gathering exercise in all four countries, where we talked to people with disabilities,
we talked to VET centres and trainers within them, to mainstream educators and employers,
NGOs and others. We actually had 241 questionnaires, 91 people took part in focus groups and
85 people were interviewed one-to-one, so that was quite a large requirements gathering exercise.

And it has resulted in this, which is the home page of Digiplace4all. So I just want to very briefly show you the peer support functionality.

The home page has a video there which is an introductory video, it has a couple of them. People talking about Digiplace4all and what it does. And then underneath that there is the four sections. These are the four things that you get in Digiplace4all. There's the get and give one-to-one support, which I'll show you. Then there's a create and share, which is public blogs -- this is where people share experiences and information.

For instance if you found out about a new App that you think is brilliant and you think everybody else should know about it, you share it through these public blogs and you can comment and create a discussion around that.

Then we have two areas, support in education and support in employment. Which are like subsets of these blogs, where people who said this entry is particularly relevant to education, this is particularly relevant to employment, so if you're looking for stuff about education only, then you go in there or employment only you go in there and get much more focused information.

So before I -- before I show you I'll tell you the current status of Digiplace4all. It's only been launched recently, we're coming to the end of the two-year project which has created this thing, like I said we did a lot of requirements gathering and built it and have been rolling it out over the summer. We already have nearly 1,400 registered users, in fact these stats are old, these are from about a week and a half ago, so we probably have 1,500 now, because it's really catching on. So we had 1,400, we had 170 plus peer support requests and maybe 70 plus peer support offers on the site. 880 blog posts and we had 113 Digiplace4all champions.

Now we're going to hear from Shauna, Shauna Humphries, one of our champions in just a minute. The whole idea of a Digiplace4all champion is this is a community, and it's a community of the people who belong to the community and it needs to be managed and run by these people, past the period when NCBI and our partners are able to do the building it, building the community and hand holding. But ultimately these communities have to have a life of their
And it's our Digiplace4all champions who are going to take this forward into the future, introduce more people to it, promote it widely amongst their peers and networks, and manage it and do things like moderate it, because there's a lot of moderation functions and things like that.

So just very briefly to show you the actual website, like I say there's the home page and if we go into this place, the get and give one-to-one support page. Which is where you basically post -- it's like a listings site, you post a request or an offer of peer support.

So if you want to offer or request support, you click the button that says make a request or offer of support, and you fill in the form. And here's a very simple one, this is a peer support request. Somebody simply said I need help with Siri on iPhone. And they said they want help once only, they don't want help over an extended period of time. They said support can take place by e-mail, not face-to-face, not by phone, not by video, not by other means.

Now on the form where you fill in what your support requests, you get to choose how you want to request support. Some people like face-to-face, they prefer that. Some people prefer e-mail or phone. You can state your preference. And you can also state the amount of time that you want support for.

If somebody like me comes along and thinks I think I can help that person, I'll click the offer support to this person button, and then it will pop up a window where I can send a message to that person saying great, I know all about Siri on the iPhone I can help you with that, I'm blind as well, and I see you want support by e-mail, here's my e-mail address.

At that point the whole relationship is private. It doesn't take place online. A lot of people told us in the requirements gathering that they wanted these support relationships to be one-to-one, in private. A lot of people don't like using forums to do these things, extended support in public, they don't like to identify themselves or put themselves forward in that way. That's a key thing.

Similarly to the peer support requests, there are peer support offers, where somebody said ask me anything -- that's very generous. But typically you have things like -- this is a good one. "I am more than happy to offer advice regarding starting college or university." This is somebody
who has gone through that process, this is somebody who is blind and they've had, they say they are visually impaired or blind and they've got to third year in university and they'd like to help other people doing the same, so they can offer support over a longer period of time.

So anything from the very specific to the very long. Just the last thing I want to mention about this is our digital champions.

Like I said we'll hear from Shauna in a short while. The digital champions are the people who will take this forward and they're listed on the site. So we have a listing here of the champions, and champions could be organisations like the National Learning Network, and then there's a piece of information about them, about why they're championing and what their abilities or skills are.

Or they can be individuals, most are individuals like Sarah Harrington here. Now that's all I need to tell you, I don't want to spend a long time going through it. But the main thing is to hear from people themselves who are going to benefit from this and who believe in it so much they want to become Digiplace4all champions.

So I'd like to introduce Shauna, invite her up to the stage, and she can tell you about her motivations for doing this and her -- the kind of activities that she's getting involved in.

MS HUMPHRIES: Okay, hi everyone, as Mark already said I'm Shauna Humphries I'm a Digiplace4all champion here on site.

I'm currently a student in University College Cork doing a bachelor of arts degree in German and Irish. And it's thanks really to the benefits of assistive technology that I've been successful so far in doing this course.

And I'm really enjoying it and really this website is, it holds a huge place in my heart, because going through school I struggled a lot, because the assistive technology that I know about now, I didn't have that knowledge back then, unfortunately, the resources that I could have used to benefit myself, I had no knowledge of.

And really we could have done with a website like this probably, or a community like this about ten years ago, so it's fantastic that I could be a part of it now.
So really the one thing that would benefit me really from this site is the biggest thing is the peer support that I know that I have support, if I have any questions or queries regarding technology, that I know that there's somebody out there that can help me, because really going through school the one thing I didn't have a lot of, was peers that could give me a hand if I needed anything.

So it's really great now that all I have to do, if I have a problem is to correspond, put a request in on this site and correspond with someone who has the information and can help me out.

Like, for example, I know a couple of months ago over the summer I put in a request regarding a screen reader I'm using at the moment, Voice Stream, and I put up a request and probably a couple of days, within about 48 hours I received a message from Niall, one of our other champions, Niall Gogarty, he's here, down there somewhere.

And we were able to collaborate then and be in contact with each other over the phone. He explained the process of using the screen reader and downloading it and also downloading Dropbox for storing the files, which I have many of, being a college student.

Then after talking to him I am currently using Voice Stream successfully now. So it's working out really well.

Basically I have been vision impaired since birth, so I've mainly, my daily lifestyle would include using technology, 90% of the time. Like to access this site for example I used my tablet, my iPad, and also for college work I also use my iPad and normally I access the site using Voice Over, the reader, and also zoom magnification as well.

And also everything to do with my college life is based around technology. For example my textbooks, any documents or reading I have to do, any homework that I have is all electronic, so really technology is very important, very important in my life, as a college student. To be able to complete work successfully.

Also now that I have the knowledge of what technologies are available, I can share that with others that have gone through what I've gone through in school and not having the support
available. So I also offered, I put out an offer for peer support to students needing help with assitive technology at university and I'm open to offering any kind of support I possibly can now if anybody is needing help with finding the right technology that will suit them in college, for example the right magnifiers that might suit them, or the right -- whether they would benefit from a light laptop or iPad or what Apps they could download to benefit them, whether a screen reader, Voice Stream or whether using Voice Over suits them, or anything really that would make their life easier and take the stress -- I know stress is a big thing for students, to take the stress off people.

So I've put out a request there, and anyone that's struggling, I'm happy to help in any which way I can.

So also my role as a champion would involve promotion work for the site. So planning small activities in our locality is very important to keep it going and also to expand the community as well, because we don't want -- we want to keep this going for as long as we possibly can, definitely, and recruit more members, and the more the merrier really. The more ideas people have the more information can be shared.

So next week hopefully please God we'll get it organised, I'm hosting my own small event in University College Cork, I'm actually collaborating with a good friend of mine that I recruited as a champion, Mark showed her profile, Sarah Harrington, a great friend of mine, also suffering with a physical disability and also has a vision impairment.

So myself and herself will be hosting a small coffee morning, hopefully next Friday in the O'Rahellaigh building in UCC, we'll host a small give it a go activity for any students with disabilities in UCC are welcome to come along and learn about the site.

We'll be acting as teachers really to show them, demonstrate how the site works, show them what the benefits are. And basically guide them, take them on a tour of the site, work with them in small groups and guide and show them what they can do and how they can use it.

Hopefully people will reap the benefits of the site, the way myself and Sarah have, and embrace it the same way that we have. And we'll hopefully get more people registered and signed up.

And it's all about getting this community to grow bigger and bigger, as the years go on.
hopefully.

So we're working on that at the moment. And please God we'll be able to host that in UCC next Friday.

Really the main thing, as I said the main thing that benefits me on this site is peer support, but also I can share my ideas using the forums. If I hear of any new piece of technology that's currently out or has come out within the last week or so, I can -- if I know of other people that may not have, or friends that may not have known about it yet, it's a great thing to be able to post up on the forums, and let people know what's out there.

And also I regularly look at the forums as well to educate myself and be regularly clued in with what's out there that maybe would benefit me as I go forward and hopefully into a job as well. That would help me out immensely as well.

So I suppose I guess that's about it. Thanks a million for having me, and I want to thank Mark and Esther as well for helping me with funding and supporting my own event next week, I really appreciate it. And I'm looking forward to sharing my experiences with others and sharing what I've learned. So thanks a million.

ESTHER: Thanks so much Shauna, I really appreciate you being here today and all your work on the site as well. We're so keen to have this type of championing and peer support recognised in the community as well, just going forward in phase 2 we're involved in a project about having volunteer work in Ireland, peer support is something that's really credited and recognised in the community, people like Shauna going forward and can be cited on the CV and it can be said, there's concrete evidence that someone like Shauna has fantastic social skills, organisational skills, you can go on and on and on. And that's really recognised in the community.

When she goes out and is job seeking we know working in the area of supporting people with disabilities that even during college the opportunities for part-time work are limited, even weekend work -- the key elements that are required when you're looking for work later. So we really hope that the kind of contributions Shauna made to our community will be recognised by employers and seen as value and real evidence of her employability.

So the next phase of our event really is what I would refer to as our community conversation, so
we've sent out welcome pack to you all, in it we've given some descriptions of where we see plans for phase 2 going, and also an outline of discussion topics for today. The first being the value and power of peer support, and I suppose it's over to you guys and to hear what you may think in your opening, where you're coming from today, your workplaces and the work in supporting people with disabilities, how you work with peer support.

It can often be considered as an ad hoc group, there are structures around it. So in something, the design of Digipla4all it was something we were conscious of. We know of peer support and we know that somebody might say I know a parent who it may be valuable for them to speak to another parent, but it can be a bit tedious, how can we set it up? And in fact there's a lot of sharing or over sharing of information that may not be wanted to be shared.

But in this we want to facilitate peer support, have technology queries at the centre, so that if somebody wants to ask a query about technology, actually that can be the life saver, they don't actually need to have this social, big hull being of peer support. That it is actually just asking a quick question about technology and builds out into something else.

So unfortunately we did intend to have somebody from Féach, the parent association, one of our champions as well, they're very interested in engaging with the community and sharing, because I suppose when you talk about a website people think you have an information site.

What we hope to achieve is an interaction, a real conversation. For instance from the Féach perspective, they would have a website, but they don't have the facility and functionality built into their site to operate and connect parent to parent, so they asked me to make some comments on their behalf around that and their support.

We also have people here today like Grainne there who is the WALK PEER project coordinator and has a lot of experience in their peer support.

MR MAGENNIS: Before we get into this can I ask Marian to speak. I think -- I thought it might be good to hear what you have to say first actually. We need to use the mic.

Our invited speaker is Marian Harkin MEP. Marian has been very active in disability issues and as a TD and MEP, but also to do with technology. I first came into contact with Marian to do with the forthcoming -- we hope forthcoming directive on accessibility on public websites which
Marian has been championing in the European Parliament.

Marian is the, actually the vice president of the disability intergroup in the parliament and she's worked a lot on the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as well. We think she's particularly relevant to our conversation because she's working so much as well on employment and social affairs and education, for example in her work with children in special needs in schools.

I should also say it's another very relevant thing, Marian's focus on community and volunteering efforts, for which she was actually received an outstanding achievement award in the MEP of the Year 2011. So we're very, very pleased to have you here Marian. I'd like to invite to you come and speak.

MS HARKIN MEP: Thank you very much Mark and good evening everybody. I'm very, very pleased to be here this evening, to hear what you have to say.

When Shauna was speaking there I was thinking Shauna is the end user, as it were. She's the person who is making this real, who sees the reality of what people like me to some extent are trying to do several years beforehand, because this fund -- this project of course is partly funded with European money, and at the end of the day somebody has to influence decisions that we take about how money is spent and about policy decisions, etcetera, I'll talk to you a little about that a few minutes, that's the sort of work I do.

In many ways for a lot of you it will seem as if it's a million miles from here, but I can tell you from my experience in the parliament and I have been privileged enough to be re-elected now, this is my third time in the parliament, the longer I'm there the more I see the connection between the work we do and some of the outcomes that we're talking about here today.

But I just want to say Shauna, it was a pleasure to listen to you. Because you have such a can do attitude. I just was sitting there and I thought it's great, and it is great because as I said you make people’s lives better. And there's not much better than that you can do, so thank you for that.

But anyway, I have a speech, I was told 20 minutes but as Mark said to me I don't have to do 20 minutes and I won't! So I'm going to try pick out a few bits and pieces here, hold on a second this is literally falling off the table on me!
Anyway just a thought struck me, I was doing some notes for this, this morning and I was thinking about "accessibility", because that's such a big word for people who have a disability. For the rest of us it's a tiny little word, it means nothing, because we expect it. We expect things to be accessible and I was writing a sentence: That we have designed the world in such a way that it is accessible for non-disabled people. But actually what I wrote first was: We have designed our world in such a way that is accessible for non-disabled people.

And I looked at what I'd written and crossed it out, the word "our" and put in the word "the" then that made me think. To me this is really the most important thing. It's how you think about things that matter.

Once you start to think in a particular way, then everything else flows from that. And at European level, to take that big jump if you like to Brussels, what does that mean?

What it means is this, that if we're always looking at legislation from the perspective of a person without disability and then we think afterwards oh yeah do we need to add something on there, or do we need to add an extra little bit to that for somebody who has a disability? Then you're always playing catch-up and you never get that time right.

So what you have to do is open up your mind and think in terms of the world that will be accessible to all. And I think that's a change that I see in the European institutions. And that's very important.

Because a lot of our legislation really does matter and does make a difference. So if we can have that kind of mindset, then that can give people a chance to have a different and a better way of living.

And in that context, we're talking here about digital inclusion, in that context we are right now looking at the digital agenda, opening up a digital market, across the EU, that is accessible to all. And if we don't get this right in the beginning, now there's a lot of the principle structure there, we're not starting with a clean sheet, but if we don't get it right now, then once again we'll be always playing catch-up.
And Mark has said it and Shauna said it, and particularly Shauna, it was clear from what you said in your life, how important your access to whether it's websites or Apps or various digital technologies, how important they are in your life.

But equally for many people more and more, and sometimes even in hidden and unseen ways, the importance of digital technology is increasing all the time. So now is the time to get the thinking right and get the policy right. So that in a year's time or two year's time or three year's time when some of this legislation is coming on stream it's already -- and I don't like using this word, but I will use it because everybody understands what it means -- it's already disability proofed, insofar as we can do that.

What do I mean by that? Well a lot of people will look at an MEP and say I wonder what she does in Brussels? What does she do every day? What's her role? I suppose if I could give you just one sentence, what I consider to be the role of the European institutions, it's this.

The European Commission and as you know we have -- every country has one commissioner, ours is Phil Hogan, their job is to draft legislation, new laws, and also to guard the treaties, any laws that are in place they have to make sure the Member States adhere to them.

The role of the Parliament is to amend or change that legislation, which we do through committees, etcetera.

And we can significantly change legislation, and often do. But it's a three-legged stool. And the third leg of that stool is the European Council. And that's generally the couple of Ministers.

So it would be the 28 Ministers who are responsible for disability issues in their own countries. So the Council also can put forward amendments and to make a very long sentence, to come to a full stop. What has to happen in the end is there has to be agreement between all three institutions.

Now it's a very cumbersome process, it's long winded, but at the end of the day we are making legislation for 28 Member States. And if that legislation is put in place it must be ratified in Romania the same as it is in the UK, or in Italy the same as it is in Denmark.
So we have to get it right and we have to get agreement. And that can be pain-stakingly
difficult. Those of you watching the news at the moment, you see the issue about the refugees,
you know there's a lot of goodwill out there, but you also know that getting 28 countries with
different mindsets, different histories, different perspectives to agree is very difficult.

So that's the process of EU legislation. So why is it important to influence that process?

Because as I said, a lot of EU legislation directly affects people's lives. And I just want to look
at some pieces of the legislation. I'm not really going to refer to my speech at all here, just a few
off the top of my head, which are important for people with disabilities.

And the role that I, as an MEP, can play in shaping that and changing that.

One of the major pieces of legislation in the last term was accessibility of public websites, and
that was a proposal from the Commission. So it came to the Parliament. Now what did I do?
Because I don't know anything about websites, and I don't know anything about designing them
or about what would be needed to ensure they were accessible for people with sight impairment
or sight loss, etcetera.

So I contacted the Disability Federation of Ireland, they got the experts for me and they came to
Brussels, we worked with the person in the Parliament who was in charge of that dossier, who
happened, just happened to be a colleague of mine.

They suggested amendments and changes to that legislation, which we actually got through the
Parliament. And then Parliament agreed on it. So that was my role. My role was to influence
that legislation in a way that those within the sector felt it needed to be changed in that way.

Unfortunately that piece of legislation is what we now say, stuck in Council. What that means is
there's 28 Member States and they have to agree. There is one or two Member States, Germany
in particular, who is causing problems trying to get agreement on the legislation.

We have what we call qualified majority voting in the Council, which means that a certain
number of countries with a certain population can block something. That's difficult if you want
to get it through, but it's good news if you don't want to see legislation going through, it's like
everything else, there's pluses and minuses.

However, the Luxembourg Presidency, they are the Presidency at the moment, they have committed and I know are working to try to get agreement on that piece of legislation.

And I'm pleased to say that the Parliament certainly approved what came from the Commission. So that's one piece of legislation that if it were on the statute books now would make a difference in the fact that all public sector websites, and indeed a change put in by the Parliament is that any website, even if run privately, as long as it deals with public issues, that that would have to be accessible as well, that's in it. As I said that would make a difference.

Another piece of legislation, I'm talking here about the two that are stuck, is the anti-discrimination directive which would guarantee access to goods and services in a non-discriminatory way, and people with disabilities are part of that legislation. That's stuck since 2008. Again we're trying to get movement on it and as I said the Parliament has done its job, the Commission has done its job, but some Member States, for different reasons and sometimes for good reasons, just say no, we can't do it, we can't do it now.

And I won't comment on this anymore, but I think it's important that you're sitting there thinking well why can't the Germans do it or why can't the Italians or Latvians or French or sometimes the Irish or what do it? You have to remember that people elect their governments. It could be a conservative, socialist, it could be right, it could be left, it could be disability aware or disability unaware if there's such a term. So you're dealing with all of that across Member States.

So to try to get agreement is never simple. But as you know yourself, we have some good disability legislation on the statute books. Accessibility for public transport for example is one good example of it. Accessibility for public buildings, all of that legislation has come from the EU.

So that as I said is just a hop, skip and a jump if you like through how the system works and where we are now.

So before I finish, I just want to mention, to come back to the digital agenda, because there are a number of proposals coming from the Commission to what they call complete the digital market,
across the EU. That means harmonisation and full accessibility across the EU. That will have an impact in a crosscutting way on people with disabilities.

And just this week the disability intergroup, as Mark said I'm the vice president, or one of the vice presidents, we had a meeting with the people in the Parliament who are in charge, if you like, of the report from the Parliament on the digital single market.

And all of the main players were there. And the European Disability Forum and various MEPs spoke about the need to ensure that accessibility and skills of course, another very important issue, are all included in this. And it was great that the people who are in charge of the dossiers if you like, every one of them were there. They were listening, they were agreeing with a lot of what we said. So now we know that when the time comes to put down amendments to the legislation from the Commission, which will be in the next two months, that we have people who are already informed, who already know what we're talking about, who already know the rationale for the changes we're going to look for, that they will be receptive.

Because you can put down any amendment you like, but if you don't get people to agree with you and you can't get consensus on it then you're wasting your time.

So there's a lot of work like that going on, it was great this week to see that and to see the positivity around that.

There's a lot more I could say, but I think I've said enough, at this stage I recognise I'm over ten minutes I'll take another two to three minutes of your time and finish with that.

I want to briefly say one or two things about the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. And again where we are as far as that is concerned.

As you know the EU has ratified that Convention. But during the last term one of the final things that I did within my committee, because actually the committee, my main committee employment and social affairs is the main committee looking at that and in charge of that, it's crosscutting, but we lead on it.

And one of the things that I was involved in, very strongly, was ensuring that a monitoring group
was set up within the Parliament to ensure that any legislation, not just disability related
legislation, but that any legislation was disability proofed, as it were.

And that body is up and running and starting its work. Those of you who are familiar with
what's happening will know that the UN itself has assessed the progress of the EU and has come
back with six major recommendations on this.

I won't go into them, but they are very positive recommendations and part of our work will be to
ensure that those recommendations are now put in place.

Finally, what's happening here in Ireland about this? Well as you know we have not yet ratified
the UN Convention, and there are a number of issues surrounding it.

According to the Department of Foreign Affairs, they talk about the need to enact capacity
legislation and there are a number of other pieces of legislation, the sexual offences legislation,
mental health, law, etcetera, that need to be amended or changed before they can ratify that
Convention.

And also there will be one stumbling block. And that is the High Court -- sorry the Supreme
Court decision on the issue of reasonable accommodation. Because the Supreme Court decided
that -- the issue of reasonable accommodation if it's more than a nominal amount, according to
our Supreme Court, that is unconstitutional, because it places a responsibility on business that is
literally against our constitution.

Whereas the United Nations Convention, as you know, doesn't use the word nominal, it uses the
word disproportionate, in other words that the cost isn't disproportionate and there is a difference
between the two.

Now I know some of you down there are scratching your heads saying my God what's this
about? I know and I suppose you know that at the end of the day until we sort that we won't get
this in place. And if we don't have it in place then people won't be able to rely on it.

So look that's a hop, skip and a jump, I didn't even look at it, but there's lots more in there, if
there's questions or whatever later on, I'd be delighted to participate and talk to you, etcetera.
I'm very interested in hearing more about this project, because as I said what I do is drive stuff, a lot of it, hugely interesting stuff, but it's dry stuff. I'm also delighted to see the people from WALK PEER programme here. I was at a meeting in Castlebellingham recently and again what you do -- and listening to people and the impact it has on their lives was just heart warming. Hopefully I get a chance to say a few words to you before I leave.

Thank you again. I am privileged to do the work I do. And I try to represent all sectors, but particularly people with disabilities. And my final word on this is, all MEPs, no matter who they are or what their interest, they are all busy people because there will be 100 calls on their time, that's why it's very important that we have groups like the Disability Federation and I see John coming in, and various other groups at national level, Inclusion Ireland, many, many more, NCBI, etcetera. All of whom who can give us advice on issues that we probably don't know a lot about. And also that can keep up to speed with what's happening at European level. Because for them that will be their core issues. For me, I'd be dealing with 100 other things. So I need good advice, good organisations and good people to get it. And I'm very pleased to say that in Ireland that sector is probably, if not the best, it's certainly in the top three in Europe. So thank you again.

MR MAGENNIS: Thank you very much Marian, it's great to hear that the EU, of course are working around -- Marian herself is known already to quite a few of you in terms of she's worked directly for you, or with you on various issues.

A couple of things that you said there Marian really struck a chord here. The EU is working on our behalf, they fund this had project which is great, Digiplase4all. We have to have a role ourselves because the funding is only 75%, so organisations like NCBI and our partner organisations across Europe are also contributing financially to this.

But it's not even as simple as that, the whole ethos of Digiplase4all is that it's the people who are going to benefit, who are doing a lot of the work. They're not waiting for stuff to be handed to them.

There is support being given to them from the EU Commission and Parliament and Council of Ministers, and the organisations like NCBI and our partners. But they are also doing it for themselves and this is what we're talking about here.
Another thing you said there Marian is about we need to co-operate, obviously Europe needs to co-operate, the various institutions need to co-operate. This is one of the things we want to talk about today, we all need to co-operate, all the organisations need to co-operate, all the employers need to co-operate with us as well, the educators need to co-operate with us as well.

We contribute, none of us can do this alone. So we're going to talk a bit about this. First of all I'll invite Esther back to lead a discussion about the peer support and the value of peer support and where we see it working in our own lives and our institutions.

ESTHER: Hi again. I slightly jumped the gun earlier!

So it would be brilliant to hear from Grainne, one of our champions and is doing a lot of work in the area of peer support as well.

As Esther said I work with an organisation called WALK, in particular I run a programme called WALK PEER programme and peer standing for provided people employment routes.

Just speaking about the value of peer support, peer is what we do, in our case we work with young people with disabilities and the peer aspect is young people supporting each other in education, training or employment environments.

In our case it's offline support, so it's peer-to-peer, people supporting each other in the natural environment. But just what I have been thinking about as sitting here today in relation to Digiplace4all, some of the young people we work with would use assistive technology, but in a very specific way.

A lot of the young people we work with may be the only person in their class or even the college who has a particular diagnosis, so they would use assistive technology differently to their peers in their class. So to be able to access online peer supports from somebody who interacts with technology in the same way as they do is really, really beneficial. And it's not actually -- even though we might ourselves be able to provide some level of support in terms of how to use the technology, we don't interact with it in the same way, so being able to access supports from somebody else who has the same -- has gone through the same experiences as the young person,
is really beneficial and I see it as an add on to the work we're doing.

The other area I have been thinking about peer-to-peer support as well, we work a lot with employers and employers -- we go to employers and we engage with them around supporting a young person and we make suggestions around assistive technology and say this might work, this might work, we'll try this or this. Employers like to talk to other people who have the same experience as them as well.

So in our experience in the offline environment, often an employer will say is there anybody I can speak to who has gone through the same thing? Or anybody, maybe somebody in a hotel and catering type business, do you have any other businesses like that who have done the same thing? We can refer them all right, but being able to refer to, hopefully in the future, employers speaking directly to each other through a portal like this would be beneficial as well, because sometimes people think the employer might be coloured by the experience they have had with you, so people might feel they would be more honest in the online environment or direct contact environment.

So certainly peer support we found, the most successful places and most successful young people experiences we've engaged with have always had an element of peer support. There's always been that element of real, natural supports on the ground, as well as the professional supports that we provide.

So I can't say anything more positive about how I believe the value of peer support is core to all of this type of work.

ESTHER: Thanks Grainne. We learned from your work, we thought it was such a compliment to what we're doing, so we're delighted to team up with you and delighted you are one of the champions.

Going forward again speaking to the co-operation idea, throughout this two-year process on a national scale, we've had the opportunity to talk with other NGOs and consider new opportunities in terms of research also and in terms of looking for sustainable opportunities, so I'm delighted to say Grainne and myself worked on it with a couple of other colleagues, have got more funding from the European Commission for, through the Erasmus programme to take some ideas developed in this project forward for a new initiative, but that will help sustain the
Digiplace4all as well.

And also just some thoughts there around engaging with employers. We have been lucky to have meetings with business and community recently. To say that the community itself were endeavouring for it to be as inclusive as possible, so rather than, while we may have been approached by actual individual employers, our ethos has been to think about networks such as ahead who have their successful WAM programme we're delighted they're here today, and also the work in the last 15 years Business in the Community has been doing engaging with employers around social responsibility. And also about linking employers with each other to share information around best practice around supporting their employees with disabilities in the workplace.

So if Shane is there, I don't know if you wanted to say something?

SHANE: My name is Shane and I work with Business in the Community, as Esther mentioned, we're the network for corporate responsibility.

Currently we have over 80 large companies in Ireland that would be within our network. We advise them on all aspects of corporate responsibility, but workplace being one of them, and I know Grainne probably touched on some of the points there as well.

But I suppose what we see in the network, a lot of our companies are striving to have a more inclusive and diverse workplace. But again they are also trying to strike the balance between their needs and their employee's needs.

And really they're trying to improve as much as they can that area, the peer learning whether from other business or maybe where it's employees who have disabilities in the workplace that can share some of their experiences as well, could be very beneficial for them.

And again that's why I think this initiative here could be a great support to employers in that regard. Again as I mentioned, employers are always trying to do their best, but maybe we need to learn more from the likes of even Shauna there and having those kind of real-life experiences and having a platform like this. I think it could be really beneficial.

ESTHER: Thanks Shane and we're hoping you'll join as champions for us as well. So over to you guys, if anybody had any thoughts in your own professional lives of how peer support works
for you? I mentioned AHEAD there, they are here today and they have the successful WAM network and also from the education perspective for instance I've been speaking with disability services in campuses around the country and there's a real push for ambassador programmes, training students on campus to support other students and how to get those initiatives going, if anybody has any thoughts or experiences they'd like to contribute to the discussion?

SEONAID: Hi Esther, my name is Seonaid, and I work with AHEAD on the WAM programme, we found peer support is invaluable, because we can talk about disability till we're blue in the face, we can talk about the advantages of having people with disabilities working in your company, but the interesting thing is it means an awful lot more when it comes from another employer.

I was laughing with your colleague from Bulgaria here saying we are like a dating site nearly, bringing people together because they want to meet each other, but don't know how to do it.

It is quite funny. But what we're trying to do is obviously using Digiplace4all, but also at events, some of the employers don't really want to put their fears and worries online, that's why it's great that the forums can be private and that conversations have been private. And that you can come together at events like that. When it comes to employers, they would be afraid of things like legislation, inappropriate language and let's face it, unless you know something about the disability sector you might end up saying the wrong thing.

And in that way, through the events and through really information dissemination, that's really the best way to provide that peer support to people. And we find it works for the employers and graduates with disabilities seeking work as well.

They learn more from each other than they do from us.

ESTHER: Exactly.

>> Comment redacted for publication

ESTHER: Thanks so much for your contribution. And thanks for everybody's contribution, just to your points there really around face-to-face peer support, I suppose at the outset of the development of this project I actually came from the rehabilitation training centre in NCBI myself and we witnessed the benefit of the social meeting place, the training centre can be.

And people going through experiences of sight loss in particular may not have come across
somebody else in that situation and then they're connecting and sharing, the enormous value of
that. We often say the best stuff happened in the centre over the tea and coffee, and what lead to
the development of this was that actually the time I was there, it was all about how do you use
your phone? How can I do this?

And I just felt we need to try and organise some sort of system where people can chat with each
other and they don't have to go to the emotional side if they don't want to. And that if they just
need to have a simple query related to the phone or laptop, that friendship may come out of that
later.

In terms of sustaining it, absolutely, as Mark said we are calling on our champions, in fact some
of you in the room will have received e-mails from me saying we call on the champions are you
interested in hosting an event? Can we support you doing it, through the lifespan while we have
the funding? Going on ahead we've had support from people who know that we can't be there
after the funding, for financial supports, we can be there in person, we can connect you with
people, with the disability service or our service through the networks that we have, and in
terms of paid employment, I mentioned earlier -- but I said I jumped the gun a little.

Because I really am so passionate about this initiative and the concept, that there are the
opportunities to recognise the contributions that people have made, both to date and going
forward, and offering opportunities for community members to moderate and be able to display
those skills to employers and to contribute into the future with the project and the initiative, and
so -- and even we will talk more about this later about the co-creation aspect of the design of it,
participation and research, that it's a co-creation initiative with people with the needs for this
community, and that there would be financial support from people who contribute into the
future.

So that's that first topic anyway. But I suppose at this point we'd be delighted to invite our
European partners to share with you some of the experiences of how the communities have been
working with them.

First up we have our partner from Belgium, Karel, he is the CEO, their team. Thanks very
much.

>> Good afternoon everyone. First of all I'm pleased that we can shortly introduce what we
have been doing in Belgium, first I would like to give you a very short overview of what we actually do in our company.

We are a company that was established in 2007, and we exist actually or consist of people that have worked in the software industry. Big numbers, we all earned a lot of money, but we were missing one thing, nothing we created was actually accessible. This was also one of the reasons one day I stood up and handed in my resignation.

So since 2007 I have been focusing as much as possible on how we can, how can software and new technologies be brought together to help people with disabilities?

And we have done this in the course of years through a number of European projects, and some of the areas we addressed as a company and also as a team were areas of employment, of ICT and assistive technology competence and knowledge, of social competences and now we bring also technology together to help people to provide efficient caregiving support, by using mobile applications.

All of these aspects together were brought to us by end users because when we started in 2007 we had worked together with some end user organisations and they said we'd like to do that, but we don't have the means.

We'd like to develop a training course on basic ICT competences, but we do not have the resources to put together, nor the competences to put it together. So back in 2007 as I said, we started putting the ideas together and started creating projects.

Now in the course of the years we have provided free ICT training for our local community, so work together with local organisations, that group mainly is people with severe to moderate learning disabilities.

The training that we provide to them means that we have to adjust ourselves a lot to the user group, to the target users, but what we also try to bring together when we do that training is we try to make it in a way that it is also entertaining for them.

So ICT training we're combining with gaming, because for example we had to provide training
to people, to young people with learning difficulties that are working in sheltered workshop, sheltered environment. We also introduced touch screens.

What did we do? That person next week was going to handle a new machine with a touch screen and was very afraid. One of the things we did was introduce mobile games and he start to tap, this is one of the things we introduced when we talk about training.

Another element is obviously the training courses that we have to adjust, but two elements here I want to pick out because it's connected with the work we have been doing, is mentoring and peer support.

When we are doing the training we always have a mentor hooked up with each of the people that participate in our training. But what we notice over the course of the years was that people within the group were helping each other, and this is typical peer support. So there's the linkage to the project.

Now our target group of people with moderate to severe learning disabilities actually face quite some substantial difficulties in Belgium. First of all there is an overall distrust of ICT usage for these people.

When we talk with parents, when we talk with teachers even politicians do not give ICT to these people, because they might go onto the internet and see something dangerous. So that also means that the majority of the people that we train are forbidden to have internet access at home, in the sheltered environment or in their sheltered home.

Most of them were from very poor social backgrounds. And obviously they lacked the necessary information.

Another thing is for one reason or the other these people with these specific types of disabilities, they are disregarded when it comes to free initiatives, for whatever reason, I'm talking now for Flanders, for whatever reason there are companies that think they have to charge these people money. That is also why our company came forward and offer weekly free ICT training courses.

In Flanders we also have limited number of mentoring initiatives, again here with the work that
we already do with Digiplace4all we can address that, we can support them.

One of the users that we had said I'm lucky to have you as teachers, but actually it's me who is lucky, because there are many more that are not lucky. So really this kind of, the training that they can receive, the support they can receive, it is still more like an individual quest and you have to be lucky.

You have to be lucky to live in a region in Flanders where there is such support.

Now who is using -- from our group of people that we work with, who is using Digiplace4all in Belgium? So I said before we have the existing training and we have embedded Digiplace4all in our existing training. So our focus is people with severe to moderate learning disabilities.

Combined with other impairments and in England I heard always a term complex disabilities, but in Dutch I would call it -- I'll translate literally, combined disability.

There is very few people where you can really say he has only this specifically, it's often a combination. You have to work with people -- it's very combined set of disabilities.

We also brought on board their friends, their families and also the teachers that they have from special education departments. Obviously we worked together with NGOs for people with disabilities, that's also where we find our end users.

Then we have a number of employers on board, but not the employer that you see in downtown in the big companies, but actually the more small companies that had a social objective. I'm not talking about the social economy, I'm talking about purely, commercial companies that have a social objective as well.

And then as I said before special education teachers, because they are often acting also as champions.

I'm going to skip this one, why? Because I want to go to the feedback that we received by the different target groups.

Do not worry I think each one of you has received a bag, within there is a USB stick and in that
you will find the complete presentation with all the slides from everyone in fact.

So when we look at the feedback we received from the participants, team approach, in general when we do training and combine Digiplace4all we do it in a team, that means we bring people together. We have learned that if you do face-to-face training it does not work. We bring them together in a team.

We offer them dinner, offer them lunch, breakfast, so it's really becomes like a small family. One of the comments that's also put on the video on the website, one of the guys said we have cool trainers, yes because the trainers that we have are people that have experience of working with young people and are motivated also.

When we look at the employers, I said before we really look at the very specific type of employers, we look at employers that are in the commercial area, but with a social concept attached to it. In that respect I also talk about peer employers, because one employer influences another employer, we have the local chamber of commerce where some of our employers are members and influence each other.

They for example also asked we have a Digiplace initiative, but also a VV database of job seekers and users of the platform. Good for us, one of the participants in our part in Belgium actually got a job through Digiplace4all, he got offered a contract for six months, of course he has to prove that he is good enough.

But so far as I heard he is doing pretty well on his job, where he is working.

Let's look at special educators. They said this kind of service should be embedded in what they said the VDAB service, that's actually the regular employment services in Flanders. Because as opposed to the past, nowadays everyone, disability or not, has to go through the regular employment services. This takes out discrimination, but still is quite challenging for many people.

And from the special educators also we got some students that joined because they were presented also an initiative in school.
Finally the last group the champions. There we face one issue, few want to have a public profile, the reason is simple, we're not talking about people who want to promote themselves actively. They are silent people who do the job and really realise the job.

However we do see when we look at older peer supports and peer requests that there is a lot of interaction going on. Finally this is a comment of one of our champions.

It has become my weekly appointment, a visit to Digiplace4all and see if I can help out. Actually you see many of the champions support many of the people that look for support. That's the end of my presentation. There will be a couple of other presentations from the other countries, but feel free after or during to ask questions. Thank you.

MS MURPHY: I'd now like to handover to my colleague from Poland.

>> Good afternoon to everyone. I'm very happy to be here, my name is Malgorzat, as Mark introduced me I'm here representing the Foundation Institute for Regional Development.

A few words about our organisation, we are a Polish non-profit organisation, mostly we are working with ICT and in accessible areas.

Why we have decided to join DICE project and the project to create Digiplace4all? In our work we are on a daily basis meeting people with different disabilities. Mostly we are focusing on people with visual impairments.

We know through this experience that there is a great need for creating space, common space, accessible and easily entered, that people can exchange their experience, their good practices and their informations.

All those needs and some extras that we later found out were strong and we realised that we have to respond to them.

Through the questionnaire and report that we created in the first phase of the project, it was ran in all the countries, we realised that there is more that is needed and through that, it was the lack of easy accessible information about technology and what was very concerning for us was that basically a lack of information of basic rights of persons with disabilities, and next was mentioned was the financing -- lack of information about financing resources, and the great need
of support of ICT skills.

Who is using Digiplace4all in Poland? After launching the Polish version of the platform, it was very recently, we have noticed that great attention we are receiving from students with disabilities, from people, from adult people with disabilities who are looking for development, both personal and professional development.

Noticeable attention we are receiving also from one of our projects that we connected with Digiplace4all, was the parents of children with disabilities.

In this I would like to introduce you a few slides about how we introduced our platform to others.

We ran daily computer workshops in our foundation. Here you can see one of our champions Martin, he is fully blind and he is a programmer. He is also a teacher in our foundation.

Here are seminars that we organised, introducing the platform with all details.

A fully abled student conference in Poland held in Krakow it was the 8th edition of this event, it gathers universities from all of Poland, so that's a great audience that we reached through this. And that's some pictures.

We have also -- we were also in talks and introduce the platform to NGO environments, focused mostly on accessibility issues. Here is accessibility workshop from 2015, accessible cyberspace forum, it was also held in Poland in Warsaw, so we introduce the platform to NGOs present at this event.

We were attending also Krakow week of persons with disabilities, introducing the platform to Krakowians, and tourists sometimes as well!

We were giving a presentation at the university of science and technology in Krakow at professional career open days. I would like to underline here we have a great co-operation with universities in Poland. That was also connected with the previous event that we introduced the platform, it was the fully abled students.
And after this event we realised that universities are very interested in giving their students with
disabilities, but also normal students, every student, that would want to have more information,
giving Digiplace4all, this platform as a channel of information and exchanging their experiences.

Here I wanted to mention about a project that we are running in our foundation, a very successful
project, it's a return of parent of children with disabilities into the labour market, it's one of the
most successful projects that we run, here one of our champions Lisa, if you show off a little bit
-- we are introducing, we are helping parents of children with disabilities to handle their
everyday life and fight for their rights, and empower them in some ways. And also as a part of
sustainability of the platform, we want to introduce the platform to those parents so they can find
their space more stable and that they can interact and become in the future, peer-to-peer
supports.

We took some international introduction of Digiplace4all, an idea of peer-to-peer support on the
idea of creativity and reuse for empowerment a training course in Palermo last May, we
introduce to project leaders and youth workers from 14 countries, it was a very nice event.

Here are pictures, in co-operation with my foundation projects, here we see the posters from this
event that I was discussing before.

Now how Digiplace4all is helping, that's a very good question. For us here I am mentioning that
get and give support is an open road for us. What we see that peer-to-peer support, the heart of
the project is the most important part.

We are introducing that in Poland, we did not have much experience with such support before.
So for us it is, as I said, an open road, it is just starting. We are seeing that peer-to-peer support
is warmly welcomed. But it is just a beginning. And I hope it will be a great experience for us.

What we are proud of is our champions. I think that profit in itself is to gather trustworthy and
active people to work together. As I say, people are the best investment.

We are very happy to be part of Digiplace4all, of creating Digiplace4all, it was a great
experience for us and we are hoping for much more in the future. As I said it's an open road for
MR MAGENNIS: Thank you very much. Now we'll hear from our third team in Bulgaria, Andrean Lazarov from inter projects.

MR LAZAROV: Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, my name is Andrean and I'm representing the Bulgarian team on the project. First of all I would like to thank you that you are here to get together with us today. And you will be our friends who will be actually the audience with which we'll share our impact of Digiplace4all which happened in Bulgaria.

On that slide we have put our motto of our team, behind disadvantages we see perspectives. Behind disabilities we discover capacity. We bring innovation into education and training and we strengthen interaction between education and business. And, to be honest, our team knows how.

Digiplace4all is not the only initiative that we are supporting people with disabilities, over the last 12 years we are working also in educational robotics for students with learning disabilities, also we are supporting accessibility in accommodation and catering sectors for disabled people. We are offering also a dedicated training to the carers who are providing services for people with disabilities and for the elderly people.

What is more important is Digiplace4all will continue to be used as a media which will ensure the peer support not only in the direction of the digital inclusion, but also in our initiative Coach At Work, where we use it as a tool that the supported employment coaches will interact with their clients with disabilities by sharing important information in terms of their inclusion into the labour market.

This is also possible because of the financial support of the Erasmus Plus programme of the European Commission, which is very important and we really appreciate it. Another initiative also very important as a tool is the European project, Euravon, where we're supporting the work of volunteers who are also supporting people with disabilities and also all the society, for example next month in Bulgaria we have elections where the volunteers themselves will communicate and share important information regarding the organisation of the events, in terms of the elections through Digiplace4all.

Actually our beneficiaries in Bulgaria are quite diversified and wider from the other hand,
that slide you can see that not only people with disabilities, not only their educators and trainers who are interested in that topic, but also we have included social workers, psychologists, personal assistants, social assistants, as well as the NGOs who are supporting people with disabilities, and the community itself.

What is important, I would like to share in my presentation is how Digiplace4all makes change in Bulgaria? So in other words what is the actual impact of that project and that initiative. On one hand for the Vet sector it facilitates the process of mainstreaming of training courses between the trainers and the learners with disabilities.

Through Digiplace4all the practical activities are possible, especially for acquisition of digital competencies, also Digiplace4all is an online media for offering different thematically related events in terms of education and training and mediator from transition from Vet to employment.

Also we have digital champions who conducted e-mentoring schemes for Digiplace4all and this actually contributes to the peer support relationship itself.

In terms of the NGOs and people with disability in Bulgaria it was very important in terms of supporting education, and well-being support. Actually the peer support in Bulgaria in this digital way of presentations for the first time, so that project is very innovative for Bulgaria and very innovative for the NGOs who facilitated the peer support relationship between their members.

On the other hand those NGOs are organising annually an event supporting the talents of people with disabilities, especially in terms of music and in terms of Bulgarian folk dances events, Digiplace4all was a major one there, to share the events, the places of the events, what are the outcomes, photos of the events, all there if they are seeking some support in terms of the organisation of the events they can receive it from their digital champions.

Something that is last but not least is important is the presentation and sharing information in terms of changing of the legislative initiatives in Bulgaria, which took place for Digiplace4all. So if you click on the Bulgarian version you may see a lot of links and information in terms of the current suggestions, proposals for change of legislation, and legislation in terms of integration in terms of people in the labour market, social benefits that they can purchase for
example assistive technologies or receive support in terms of environment or accessibility.

In that case it was important also as a tool for employers who would like to hire people with disabilities because frequently in Bulgaria there is still employers that don't know what kind of accommodations they can organise at their premises and the government is offering so far also financial benefits for those employers who would like to make the workplace accessible, or they would like to introduce some assistive technology who will support the process of working with employees with disabilities.

For Digiplace4all the employers are also offering available job vacancies and they can find very useful tips in terms of accessibility on their premises, as I said before, but also in terms of supporting the process of inclusion of more employees with disabilities.

On my last slide I would like to share some quotes from the pilot phase in Bulgaria. Those quotes are coming from our users, especially users with disabilities, which they said, "oh the peer support option is really innovative, and I would like to be part of that." From the other user he said, "For me this platform is definitely helpful. I can exchange views, information and also to help those who need it."

Digital inclusion champions also shared that the platform is very well structured, there are no unnecessary accessories and there is a convenient access to the data. The publication process was easy according to another user and this user was pleasantly surprised that there was a quick response to the offered support.

So my last sentence is that Digiplace4all will be not the last initiatives that our company, or that partnership will seek for. We'll continue in the future and if you'd like to learn more about our initiatives please feel free to take a leaflet on the table on the left-hand side of the conference hall where you can learn more. And our team is also at your disposal for networking and for arising questions as soon as the event is finishing. Thank you for your attention.

MR MAGENNIS: Thank you for that. You can see we've been -- this thing is applicable in many, many situations, but we're hearing the same things from all our speakers, we're hearing issues of the need for collaboration, we're hearing issues about sustainability, like we're just starting and we need to take it forward and want to take it forward, and we'll be talking a lot about hopefully, about sustainability later.
First of all I’d like to introduce our next guest speaker who is John Dolan, who many of you probably know, he is the long-term CEO of the Disability Federation of Ireland. Before that, he has had a long history in the disability sector, particularly on issues of equality issues and things like that.

But also on issues to do with digital -- around the national digital strategy, development of that. He is also a member of the HEA, Higher Education Authority, so there’s that connection to education as well which is very important here. And John is a great believer obviously as chief executive of the Disability Federation of Ireland, which is an umbrella body, very great believer in collaboration across the sector. So I’d like to welcome John.

MR DOLAN: Good afternoon and it’s great to see some people that I have known, what Mark is really saying is I’m an old man I’ve been around a long, long time! He could have just said it!

First my apologies for not being here for the commencement of the afternoon conference. I think also I’d like very much to give a special welcome to our Belgian or should I say Flemish -- yeah that goes down well -- our partners and similarly from Poland and from Bulgaria. Europe is more and more a place that we have to see as part of Ireland and the different States and more and more working together.

Shauna I think it was down at the back that talked about -- somebody talked about the dating agency, yeah? I think we have to be careful when it comes to digital stuff that we don’t find ourselves in a situation that some people with some dating website found themselves in recently! So there are some dangers, anyway let’s get on with it.

I’m very pleased to have been given the opportunity to be here to say a few words. Technology has come to define the society in which we live, no doubt about that, it moved into every aspect of social, political, economic and cultural life at this stage. It dictates how fast the world spins and turns in many ways.

It can be considered as a source of social support, with life enhancing opportunities for society at large, it’s advancing rapidly and with the rest of society its impact on people with disabilities has been considerable.
For most people technology can make life easier, by expanding life choices and opportunities. However for people with disabilities technology can change the most ordinary of daily activities from the impossible or very impossible to the possible and easy.

This emancipatory possibility means it's a very exciting time indeed.

I just want to focus for a little while how peer support and online community initiatives like this can serve the national agenda, the State's agenda to improve transition opportunities to education and work for people with disabilities. There's no doubt education leading on to work is at the epicentre of making a real game changer for people with disabilities in Ireland, it's long, long overdue.

The social exclusion of people with disabilities involves a complex set of processes that encompass the lack of or denial of resources, the denial of relationships rights and opportunities in all areas of life. Which negatively impacts on the individual concerned.

And now just to look at the place of people with disability in Ireland, what has it been? And what in many ways is it still? The place in public policy is to be cared for and maintained. Rather than enabled. While the rest of the population get educated, get a job, are on their way and only fall back on the system and its supports episodically, there is a condescension towards people with disabilities that results in them being entirely dependant on a system that basically -- not to put a tooth in it -- leaves them poor and helpless.

The roots of this, what I call social apartheid can be traced back to the legacy of Ireland's carceral state, that sense of locking up or locking out of society, people with disabilities. And some people would say that maybe the numbers in terms of population, that that was done to in Ireland would far exceed what Stalin did in Russia, whether it is or it isn't, it was massive and there's a legacy from that.

The statistics on people with a disability related to education and employment read like a misery index. And we're so used to it we have to jar ourselves to come back and understand it.

People with disabilities are much less likely to complete third level and even second level education. In fact among people with disabilities almost half have not progressed beyond
primary education while about one third of people with disabilities have been found to leave education before they intended because of their disabilities. And the facts are just as stark in the area of employment.

Much more likely to be unemployed, while the participation rate of the working age, people with a disability in the labour force is less than half that for others. Even at the height of the boom, when long-term unemployment was at an all time low, the percentage of people with disabilities in employment was even less than half that for those without disability.

Ten years ago we were sucking in people from every corner of the globe to meet our employment needs. We haven't seen too many disabled people lose jobs in the downturn, because they didn't have them to lose them. That is stark. And it's a major issue in Ireland.

Furthermore, mainstream activities -- activation and employer measures such as Job Bridge, Momentum, Gateway, community employment for those on the live register, deliberately exclude people on disability allowance. So you can't even get to the starting gate.

It is to Ireland's shame that we are the only country in the EU that systematically excludes disabled, young disabled people from the youth guarantee, of the 28 Member States, Ireland stands out in relation to that. You might say in one way it's not a big deal, but the fact that that can happen and nobody in government blinks at it and tells us quite a lot.

It's pertinent to mention the striking pact that over one third of people with disabilities and almost two thirds of young people would like to work, wish to work and do wish to work if the circumstances were right for them.

These new technologies offer an opportunity to in that sense to decolonise our imaginations and that of our State and see the promise in empowering people with disabilities to take control of their own lives.

So it's not just technology makes it easier, technology and all the stuff you're talking about and have worked on for the last number of years can actually be what I call a real game changer, forcing a cultural shift.
The likes of DFI and other organisations have to push that, not simply around the technology, but as an issue around the ambition of Ireland, of our State, to actually do the decent thing.

Initiatives such as this can exploit the individual’s capabilities to their fullest to overcome the fragmented and unequal distribution of people with disabilities in both education and employment. It represents a flexible and comprehensive approach to the daily experiences of people with disabilities.

As it can be adaptable to each individual’s need at a particular time in their life, and in the different transitions they go through in their lives.

Different people can work on it or people can work on it in different places at different speeds, etcetera, you know this stuff better than I do.

It is instrumental to an inclusive society that it goes towards ensuring equal opportunities by changing the environment from a disabling one, an exclusionary one to an enabling one.

With a myriad of network people up to now who were exploited and disenfranchised by the current system, but with the whole human intelligence and imagination available to them, and how people already mentioned coming at things with a different perspective can see possibilities and opportunities.

Change is possible. It is not a given. It is possible. We're truly on the cusp of something extraordinary. Educated and connected human beings who are not reliant on hierarchical structures, and who cannot be silent, segregated or dispersed. That's the point that we're at now.

More specifically user centred and user generated content and approach could help with and overcome transitional issues in the area of education and employment by creating dynamic communities of peer support relationships within and across stakeholder groups. You've heard that from the various partners already this afternoon.

This would enable community members to develop and maintain and support relationships, sharing experiences, knowledge and skills.
There is an opportunity to build the digital literacy skills needed to transition from vocational education training, centred training to mainstream education and employment. Regarding education, there's also the possibility of alternative online courses provided by universities which could be cheaper and more accessible.

Related to employment, many people with episodic conditions may have intermittent availability for work, greater flexibility is needed in order to support people to maintain economically -- to remain economically and socially active.

While over 40% of people have had to leave work because of a disability, demonstrating the very real way in which disability is itself socially constructed, both due to lack of accessible work environments, transport infrastructure and the absence of appropriate supports, and also I would add it seems to be acceptable that someone in your workplace that you've worked with for ten, 15, 20 years, somehow it's their bad fortune or their bad luck that they can't continue to be a colleague. That's something we really have to think about, all of us.

We are way beyond having to accept that, well they drew the short straw. It's nobody's fault. It is somebody's fault that we can't put our minds and our will to defining ways for people to stay involved, maybe not in the same way. But it is terrible that people fall out of work -- hard enough to get people up as youngsters and into it, but people who have worked can be just become dross, that is terrible.

I think the article 27 of the UN Convention, I know article 27 of the UN Convention, work and employment, and Article 9, accessibility, are relevant in relation to this.

So look in relation to what I've just said, the innovative technology being considered here today may offer the opportunity to turn around the poor employment statistics. And the poor educational outcomes that are a cruel and unjust reality for people with disabilities, and equally for their families. Equally for their families. Their families are caught up in this just as much.

I just want to move to how peer support communities can complement support by trained staff. I think these types of support communities are major avenues for transforming knowledge and cutting through the professionalism of service provision as people with disabilities can gain, garner advice from their peers, rather than if you like genuflecting at the altar of the
professionals.

You have covered this well this afternoon, the people talk about the importance of simple peer support, sitting around having a cup of coffee or tea or whatever it might be. It is the people with the lived experience who have so much -- not just expertise, but can give so much oomph and confidence to others.

Crucially this focuses on the person's strengths rather than trying to alleviate what might be regarded as their weakness in order for them to become supplicants to the system as it is currently organised.

On a more practical level people with disabilities often need personal assistance, to engage with activation schemes which will be much easier to access online, the majority of Intreo offices here in Ireland which provide a single point of contact for all employment and income supports are not accessible to people on disability and illness payments.

Personal assistance services are not automatically available to those who need them, while capacity amongst staff to interact with disabled people, including people with mental health needs and issues, is a recurring problem due to lack of appropriate training, a point that's already been made by our Flemish colleague I think it was, that people don't just come with one disability or condition or issue there is a lot of stuff going on.

To turn for a moment to the organisations within the disability sector and our need to co-operate and share responsibilities in creating and using initiatives like that and indeed in creating a better climate and understanding for these things.

There is considerable scope for better co-operation by organisations and individuals in this area. Issues that need to be examined, for example, are ways of creating more effective and streamlined access to assistive technology for individuals.

DFI's own goals would include developing a sustainable network of individuals and organisations and helping to bring that together and support it, that collaborate and focus on the development of strategies and policies for AT services.
To achieve this we are creating another online community of practice for individuals and organisations who wish to play a key role in moving this agenda forward. It aims to support further development and take up of AT in organisations that compliments developments such as Digiplace4all, and ensures that Digiplace4all is known throughout the sector and that take-up is maximised.

It’s a cross-sectoral collaboration bringing together expertise from within the sector. It’s also important to inform policymakers of how assistive technology can be improved and extended. And I’m looking down at my colleague Pierce Richardson here who will be happy -- he is an expert on this stuff I'm not, okay? And he can talk more about that, I know there are other people in the room who are involved in this as well.

Just briefly before I finish, the role of public policy support and funding. Just a short word on that. Do we see this as a more accessible way for people with disabilities to feed into the labour market, as it is currently formulated? Only for the people to be exploited in different ways, or is it perhaps an alternative?

Hopefully the shoots of something less alienating and instead promising human liberation and flourishing can be achieved through building inclusive alternatives to what we have known to date.

There are a couple of concerns that I think we need to address. Firstly those who can't afford internet accessories being becoming poorer and even more marginalised as life more and more shifts online.

Secondly we must address questions of dominance, power and control, who controls the power of networked communities and online knowledge and directs technological change to ensure it benefits all in society? These are real issues.

These initiatives must be decentralised, users must have much greater and more meaningful control over that flow in order to prevent the typical monopolisation and protection of debt.

The State must be central to making sure this happens. In conclusion, DFI absolutely believes that assistive technology could be given more attention and needs to be given more attention and
importance in policy affecting people with disabilities right across the life cycle, as well as in
policy and wider issues facing the health and social provision areas.

These assistive solutions need to be specifically identified as an important dimension in all
relevant policies and programmes, in order to fully empower and to maximise and empower
people with disabilities to live the life of their choice.

My colleague Joan O'Donnell told me that today, she didn't tell me, it was only right and better
that it comes from her mouth, that I should thank Mark very much and also Esther Murphy and
the complete Digiplace4all team. I put those words in Joan's mouth rather than mine, because
she knows more closely the work that the team have been doing and I think it's better received if
it comes from her, as someone who was involved in that.

I also want to thank Pierce and other colleagues for their support in this and thank you for
listening to me and well done.

MR MAGENNIS: Thank you very much for those words John. What we heard there was a
huge mixed bag really of barriers, of supports and of opportunities. We're going to be talking
around some of those issues, I want to spend the rest of the time here basically having a
discussion amongst us. No more presentations. And there are -- the whole issue of
collaboration, the whole issue of sustainability and the funding required for sustainability and the
policy around that. These are real issues.

For instance we have discovered some of the funding opportunities that we're actually involved
in have been very difficult for us as an NGO to actually get money from. We've had to go in
various round the corner in order to get paid for things that we're doing in collaboration with
other organisations, because the funding schemes fund particular types of organisations, but they
don't include NGOs. So there are various things around policy that need to be fixed.

I first want to focus a bit more on technology there, in terms of these barriers and supports and
the opportunities and things. We heard I very much welcome John DFI's putting together a
community of practice in assistive technology, that kind of thing is very relevant, very current,
the way things are going.

Also we heard from Marian about the directive on the website, on accessibility of public
websites for example and the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of People With Disabilities and John you mentioned Article 9, which is all about technology and puts technology accessibility on the same basis as for example transport and built environment.

These things are great and these are fantastic supports, but then there's barriers in that they're not being implemented fast enough or well enough. So it's a mixed bag and we can talk about that.

But first of all I want to talk about some of the opportunities, let's be positive, technology doesn't just bring barriers, in terms of web accessibility, it brings fantastic opportunities, really transformed the lives of a lot of people with disabilities, this is really the heart of Digiplace4all, is spreading those opportunities by sharing information and experience rather than just looking at the barriers.

So first of all I wonder if, is Saleem here? He's one of our Digiplace4all champions, in fact after this I'd like to call on another champion Harriet, to talk about your experiences of the empowering -- the empowerment you get from the technology?

>> Hello? Firstly I'd like to thank, Liam is one of our champions and a real example of how the platform is levelled. Just graduated from ITB in Blanchardstown and hosted a give it a go session for all, so I'd like to thank him for that.

>> Hello as Esther said I just graduated from ITB and my experience in college was overall, it was positive, there was barriers but I overcome them by asking lecturers for help and other people as well. So overall it was positive.

So basically I used a screen reader to assist me in daily subjects, modules. And overall that was fine. At the beginning there was a problem with lecturers don't know how to deal with blind people or disabled people in general, so this Digiplace4all is a brilliant idea. And I'm going to host my own event as well, to highlight what can be done, how to take full advantage of it, because as was mentioned earlier there's going to be education, I think some of the organisations are involved in that as well.

And I think the best thing I think to do is highlight the issue, how to deal with blind people and how to help them. And I think this platform will hopefully bring people together in dealing with people like us, how to make content accessible.
One of the lecturers most of them were really helpful, some of them just don't know how to deal with people. So this will definitely really, really help people.

Another thing that's really helpful is social media, trying to highlight different problems and things like that. It's actually really helpful, if you mention some organisation or mentioned the person they will come back to you. I'll give you an example of Twitter for example. If a person has an issue with their phone or something like that, the issue is not getting fixed or something, something is wrong with customer service you just tweet something on Twitter and you can mention it, who it is Vodafone Ireland or Meteor and they'll get back to you in a few days and the issue will be solved so that really helped me.

And yeah as I said, hopefully the lecturers and the students will come together and if there is any issues they can be solved. So that's it. Thanks for listening. Thanks.

MR MAGENNIS: Can I just -- they have put the volume down quite low here and I'm terrible, I have a very soft voice anyway and I'm tall so I'm having to -- I noticed Andrean you had to lean over too. Could I just remind people using the mic to speak, could you hold it quite close to your mouth so that we can hear you a bit easier. Thanks.

I wonder if we can ask Harriet would you like to say something about this? You had a lot of experience in this area. Harriet is from the Dyslexia Association, one of our champions and very supportive. In fact you're running, is it Monday you are running another event? You have run one already?

>> Yeah, briefly to explain who I am first of all the information with the Dyslexia Association, we have done a couple of things tied into what we're already doing, so we have a programme for adults with dyslexia called career paths and I demonstrated the site to them and explained how it might help them in when they go on into further education and/or employment and we had an event last week on dyslexia at third level and again a quick demo of the site at that and explained how it might be helpful.

I suppose in terms of the general benefits of technology, we like to say at the Dyslexia Association if there is any such thing as a good time to be dyslexic that's now other than before the invention of the printing press!

But the technology has been such a game changer for people with dyslexia and the great thing
now is up until very recently even a few years ago you'd have to have spent hundreds of euro to
get some sort of specialist software programme to level the playing field for you. Now if you
have a tablet and/or a smartphone then you already have a wealth of options in your pocket that
can help you. The great thing about something like Digiplace4all it means people don't have to
go to specialists, to psychologists to get recommendations, they can ask someone else in a
similar situation to them or has been through something similar and ask them for advice and if
they know of an App for example that's worked particularly well for them, then they can just
pass on that knowledge.

And again it's about empowerment. So people don't have to rely on organisations like ourselves
to pass on this information to them, it's there, out there already in the digital community and
Digiplace4all brings it altogether into one place, for people to help and support each other. So I
think it's fantastic and we'll certainly continue to support the project and spread the word.
MR MAGENNIS: Yeah technology is doing fantastic things for people with dyslexia.

>> Absolutely, a complete game changer, it's a very different landscape to what it was a few
years ago. People with dyslexia have huge opportunities in education that they wouldn't have
had up until recently, as I say it's there, it's mainstream, not just about specialist software
packages that the companies develop. Those have their place as well, but the point is you don't
have to spend lots of money now to keep up with all those, the tablet an smartphone can do it for
you, so it's great.
MR MAGENNIS: And you can see how we're trying to pull together lots of different
organisations and individuals. People who we wouldn't have worked with naturally on anything
else, but the technology makes it in a sense, for us all to work together.

I wonder if you'd pass the mic right behind you to Des Kenny former CEO of NCBI, Des you
have a lot of views about the value of us collaborating as a sector? Obviously you have a huge
history of having made changes on a political level and that kind of thing and societal level, so
perhaps you'd like to speak about that?
MR KENNY: Yes Mark, probably very briefly, now that I'm retired -- I turn up every so often
to remind people something terrible might happen.

John described the extent to which change starts to happen and is then impeded by forgetfulness
or over attention on legislative process, so we have to find new ways to unlock things. Because
while the digital communities and support within the EU Commission to actually have accessible
websites is progressing and probably stymied a little bit at the German end, we have to work through a movement, the European Guide Union to unleash the dogs of if you like, dissent in Germany on the German resistance and fight it at that level.

I think we're moving back to a point where a bit like happened here over the last couple of days, that the old guard of revolution in the form of Donal Toolan and people came out for 72 hours to actually fight for, if you like a faster progress in terms of moving life forward, because we have sustained and lived with the promises now for so long.

Recently I was asked to write a paper for something coming up shortly, 15 years of inclusion and mainstreaming, your reflections. I said nothing happens in Ireland in 15 years! Things tend to be generational. And while we put up with them if you like, taking in the life cycle of generation, we'll always be at a point of retrofitting mistakes and moving back to undo, if you like the neglect and what not.

So when we're talking about today and moving along in terms of multi stakeholder involvement, sustainability and funding and collaboration, the important things we have been trying to protect over the last probably decades is the enactment of the Disability Act is the affordability of technology from the vision impaired person point of view. We've been able to keep it as a funding profile within the HSE funding stream, with huge difficulty, people don't see computers any longer as a means of communication and liberation into the mainstream of access.

Admittedly when we started to supply computers inside in NCBI people wanted to "do" computers, what's "doing" computers? Oh I want to write a note for the milkman! I want to do notes on a book I'd like to write. So we moved that on to a point where you can only have a computer when you want to connect with somebody else. And now it's taken as a given that computers and the digital age is about connectivity and a new relationship we can have with one another without necessarily moving outside our doors.

It's important that we continue to raise that to a level of importance within the mainstreaming and inclusion and participation rights of people with disabilities, to see that it's funded in the same way as ramps are seen as an automatic right of access to buildings, that the legislation in terms of air passenger rights, coach and bus directives within Europe, all of the other things that if you like move people together, include the accessibility and the technology that make it
possible for us to commune and live together, because we do live in that environment, of
relativity to one another, be it in our play, our work, our recreation, our cultural pursuits and
what not.

And all of that is very close to us, or it can be. But equally it can be very far away if we do not
have the funding and policy that recognises that the digital community is not something in the
future, it's here today and in fact it has been knocking on the door for a long time and we must
see that the Disability Act which is now ten years in existence, and it's only now that part four is
being referenced for accessibility. We've had ten years of inaccessibility within the Irish context
in websites and while other matters were being attended to.

Were it not for Europe and the various directives enacted and put forward there, we would be
much poorer than we are today. So sustainability, multi-stakeholder involvement, really depends
in part on people like John and Marian, but we need to build the new revolutionary, the
champions like yourselves to continue to value what you do and not let anybody take it away
from you, tell them that you want to enrich it and that you want more of it and you won't go
away and you won't be quiet until you obtain it. They are my words Mark.

MR MAGENNIS: Very true. I think us older people have a certain inertia that the younger
people have less of for sure. When you hear people talking about Twitter for example, young
people tend to talk about it in a very positive way, whereas a lot of people of my generation
tends to talk about it in an oh my God we're supposed to get into that now!

There is a radio programme Off The Ball, where they have the introduction and they have this
series of people like -- I can't even remember his name who is the Irish football manager now,
Johnny Giles talking about Twitter, saying God this new Twitter thing! But we need as a
community to embrace these things. There is fantastic mileage in them and we can't afford to be
left behind in the way Des that you said, there is an inertia and things take too long at a
government level for sure.

I think sometimes they take too long at our level as well and we need to get that energy of the
people in the Digiplace4all community to make us adopt a more exciting, a kind of fearless
approach as opposed to adopting technology.

I'd like to open the floor now to anybody that wants to talk about any of these issues around
MR MAGENNIS: I'd absolutely agree, mainstream is so important. And we need to collaborate on this, you in the mainstream in the ETB and us in the disability sector, like you said Shane, Shane from Business in the Community, you said that you can learn a lot from us. We can learn a lot from you, because I don't understand very much about business and how it works, I don't really understand much about the ETBs either, so that's why we have to work together.

MR MAGENNIS: Josh O'Connor.

That's one of the things. Something that strikes me as well I disagree with that man, I think we're in a very positive time, and I see a lot of change coming directly from the markets themselves, from business, from people who see an opportunity here and working a lot with the airline industry now and a company I'm working with are putting hundreds of thousands of dollars into accessibility in projects and taking it really seriously, because they see this is an opportunity for us to build better stuff that works for a broader range of users with diversity and money to spend. That's what it comes down to for certain sectors.

Obviously we need the carrot and stick, legislation and standards, all that's important. But we need to get business onside. But it's a bit like one of the things I love about accessibility, assistive technology, people take the things they can get their hands on and just use them. And I really think for a lot of this stuff to progress, it has to be less about disability and more about who people are, what they can do and what they can bring to the table. The example of employment like Saleem has come out with a degree and is a brilliant development, I see really good work he is doing. -- (inaudible) it really should be about that. We talk about a level playing field and all aspects, I think we get lost in our own jargon, because at the end of the day we're...
just talking about creating opportunities and then letting people run with them.

MR MAGENNIS: It sounds like you're talking very much about inclusive design rather than accessibility. Would that be more?

>> No because I'm not. We didn't talk about accessibility, people have a strong focus on what that means, if you talk to commercial people about inclusive design they get lost in exactly what that means or thousand achieve it, or it sounds largely aspirational. Like it's great, it's great for politicians to go on about inclusive design and what does that mean and how do I achieve that? So it seems more aspirational.

>> Thanks my name is Bláithín Gallagher, former employee of NCBI. One of the things just raised as a society moves towards being digital by default there's a huge list of increased marginalisation and exclusion of all people, not just people with disability.

So there needs to be some sort of continuing education for, to keep people informed of a change in technology. So we have a person here with a PhD in computer science who talks about being nervous of Twitter, but the point is you don't expect that, people assume if you know something about technology you'll know about all the changes in technology and how that affects our society.

So I think something like DICE, the Digiplace website could be very useful for not just focusing on disability but focusing on inclusion. So it's about educating people of all levels, of all parts of society from young people right up to the older person, about what the changes in technology are and how they can keep up to date in a rather easy way.

MR MAGENNIS: It's not so much the technology of Twitter I'm nervous about, it's the social aspect of it and the idea that you have to keep doing it all the time otherwise it doesn't work!

>> But it's also Mark, it is something that people do say, there is an assumption that you are techno savvy in one area that you will carry that right through, people forget that as society changes our knowledge changes and we lose that ability to keep up. And suddenly we become the excluded people.

I know my own son says to me mum you know nothing it's technology, I have done computer programming in college and stuff, so I just think it's an important issue we need to realise that if affects everybody, not just people with disabilities.

MR MAGENNIS: You're absolutely right. I don't think it's just as we get older, we sometimes make jokes about I'm getting too old, even when I did my PhD in computer science people used
to come up and say tell me what PC should I buy? I don't know anything about PCs, I'm just
doing a PhD in computer science! So it's a vast field.

>> Thanks very much, Siobhan Long from Enable Ireland. Just to congratulate Mark and
Esther and all involved in developing Digiplace4all it's great to see the evolution of thinking
around how to put technology into the hands of everybody, because let's face it we all need it.
And to see the emphasis of this conversation moving really towards inclusion, which then
encompasses concepts around accessibility and inclusive design and so on.

I just really want to say a few brief things, there is a great serendipity of timing here, what's
happening for the last 72 hours out of the Dail with the old revolutionary guard, to see that
echoed here in this bottom up approach, there has to be a complementarity about the top down
legislative change that's required and the global funding requirements that are in such short
supply being addressed.

I know last Sunday I had a conversation with Donal about this impending protest and at that
point very few people knew about it, by Thursday they were meeting Enda Kenny, so the power
of social media collating with the old people power on the street is something that I don't think is
lost to all of us who are interested in Digiplace4all.

Also coming out of, or at least government are convincing us that we are emerging from a period
of depression, much more than recession I think. We're not seeing that impacting on many
people's lives yet. But I think coming out of a six or seven years where the only thing we hear
about is doing more with less, value for money, it's really nice to see that what we're talking
about here is peer support, peer mentoring and using the real world experience of individuals to
build something that's much more sustainable.

So I would see Digiplace4all as being the acorn from which hopefully a much greater oak will
grow, not just to overcome the barriers of geography and time and expertise and funding, but
will shift the focus away from this old conventional idea that it's all about putting funding into
professional services, when what we should really be doing is ensuring people in their own lives
are supported to do whatever it is they want to do.

So I think very recently we had a very interesting meeting of, a cross-sectoral meeting to look at
how we can harness online resources to be more effective in supporting people with different

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abilities, and Digiplace4all very much sits within that framework where we're looking at creating an online environment, building on online environments already there to reach out, not just even with in Ireland, but to reach out on an international basis so that somebody in Galway can support somebody in Galway or can support somebody in Sierra Leone, so this conversation doesn't have to have the conventional limits, it doesn't have to impose conventional limits on our thinking that geography would have done in the past.

So I just think there's great potential here. It's not easy, I know that from day-to-day experience, but I think the Digiplace4all idea is one that actually really does make a practical step in removing the barriers that we have all been caught up in for far too long. So I look forward to just supporting it and growing it into something as it will morph over the coming years into something larger.

MR MAGENNIS: I just get this feeling that there is a coming together here. Digiplace4all is, as you called it, an acorn, one of many acorns and a lot of us are coming together, and Harriet what you said about this is the best time to be dyslexic, there's a lot of that stuff happening with people starting to use technology. We need to harness that and we are in conjunction with our partners. I think this is going to be really exciting, that's why the sustainability is so important, we need to not just do something and think that's it, we've done it, we need to do something and that's a building block for the next thing and next thing, that's the way these technologies work, because they change all the time.

>> Absolutely and again to thank Shauna and Enable Ireland for the last two years right back from when we did the requirement category exercise they were open for us to meet with their trainees and some trainees became champions and we are hosting an event there later next week, so it's an ongoing effort, a co-operation and we really appreciate that and it is very timely initiative I suppose, we're delighted to have your support.

>> Afternoon, Gerry Ellis like Josh I'm not sure I need a microphone but I'll use it anyway.

A lot of what we have been talking about here today remind me of a long, long, fado, fado, in the late 80s when we were starting off a group in UCD which eventually got students together and the students didn't even know that other students existed, there was no AHEAD, there were no organisations. Many of the teachers, the lecturers said there are no people with disabilities in college, but when we got, myself and John Kelly and a few others got together and we put up a notice on the board saying anybody with a disability come to a coffee meeting, we expected four or five and about 25 turned up.
That grew and grew and eventually became AHEAD as a national organisation, but the point is the strength of it was that those people got together and supported each other. They could only do it over a coffee once a week, because that's the only time or whatever, the Digiplace4all has that strength of doing two things.

It can bring people together, it gives us the opportunity of doing it internationally, but it can bring the institutions together as well. So one of the strengths of the group that we set up in UCD was that the lecturers could talk to each other, not just the people with disabilities, but the lecturers, so that they can support each other.

What I wanted to say about Digiplace4all was maybe a slight danger, there is a slight danger that it will look only at the new nubile young people coming through, people who are very comfortable with technology, know about Twitter, maybe don't know how to use assistive technology, maybe need a little bit of training or support, don't forget about the auld fellas like myself!

80% of disabilities are acquired during people's lifetime, or so we reckon. And the demographic in Ireland is that we are getting older and that's more so in Europe than it is in Ireland. There will always be a need for very, very, very basic training for those who currently don't even know enough to get onto the likes of Digiplace4all to get started, and there is a lack in that area, we need to make sure that there is training for the old people, not just the younger people. So that when disability strikes later in life, they can get into Digiplace4all, once they get in, off they go.

Just at the very other extreme, I want to talk about international standards. Marian is here, Mark was a bit too shy to tell you about when Marian was asked, the two experts last year were Mark and myself asked to go over and we thank Marian for that opportunity.

But what's happening yesterday in the European Parliament, I was listening to the petitions committee, and they have said that one piece of legislation that we have been looking for, for years through Europe Disability Forum and elsewhere is the Disability Act. And they say that that will be in place by the end of this year. That's fantastic news.

But the other one that they talked about was the Marrakesh Treaty, which was the copyright to
make information available to turn it into Braille and so on, that like the one on websites is stuck in the Council at the moment. There was a beautiful suggestion by one guy, I didn't catch his name, he spoke in French so I didn't get everything he said, but he said let's find the countries that are blocking this and write to them in Braille! And see what they think.

And that's actually going to happen now. The European Commission is going to write to them in Braille or so they said yesterday. That will be wonderful.

But we need to get those international standards right. Because if Ireland works on what we want to get done and Britain does it differently and France does it differently and Australia does it differently and Japan does it differently, it's not going to work. So that's the strengths of what Marian is doing and what the International Telecommunications Union and European Disability Forum are doing, we need to work at both extremes thank you.

MR MAGENNIS: You're right about we need to reach out to all people, not just the young dynamic people, but I think our partners are doing that, the people they are training are people from wide range. I know we had an event down in Cork a couple of weeks ago, a lot of people of your age and older Gerry and my age and older, so we're definitely doing that.

I'm aware that it is half past four we said we'd finish at half past four, there are a few people that stuck their hands up.

>> Very briefly just a piece of information, both Disability Federation of Ireland and AHEAD were appointed over a year and a half ago by the Minister for Education to be able to nominate people to the 16 ETBs. Now that doesn't mean you get people on them, but there are people with the disability interest now directly on a number of those, so that's just something to keep in mind.

Education and Training Boards. The old VECs. So it's the whole further education area that you're talking about.

MS MURPHY: Thanks very much, I suppose we've been referring to it as VET. It's been a change.

>> I'm Michael Shevlin, I work in the school of education and I've had the pleasure of working with Esther and Mark on a number of initiatives.

It's very interesting listening to the whole debate, because it's like a confluence of the old and the new and the themes have emerged, whether to do with the old revolutionary guard, I'm not sure of it's because Jeremy Corbyn is the new leader of Labour but there seems to be that mood out
there.

But what really strikes me and I’ve been working in this area for a long time in inclusive
education, and one of the initiative that is we had was to bring together all the stakeholders and
then to have the young people themselves who have vision impairment to actually lead the
sessions, and we’ve done a couple of those and I think they’re very, very powerful and this is
very much the context where your initiative is.

Part of the difficulty is there are barriers and there will always be barriers and I think we have to
be aware of those and John and other people articulated those very well. But I also think fresh
thinking and a new dynamic and Saleem and people like him who actually participated in our
seminar, I think encapsulates that. And I think there is a lot of deeper understanding and insight
and I think Josh's point was really interesting.

Looking at where the opportunities in business and the community, there are a lot of positive
kind of indications there. And it's about how do we harness those and build those.

I would be very positive listening to what we've heard today and also to my own experience in
this area. And I think it's a matter now of trying to work on those and to try and build on that
kind of positive attitude and atmosphere that has been generated by your programme.

I was also struck very much by what Shauna said at the beginning, this was just a small point,
when she said she felt very much alone. I think Digiplace has to come back down into schools
as well, because many of these young people are on their evened their needs are very, very
specific. And I think it's something that can really hopefully provide another community and
another set of outlets for their knowledge and their experiences. So well done and keep up the
good work.

MR MAGENNIS: Thanks Michael that's a very good point. The technological journey starts in
school and a lot of the barriers along that journey start in school.

>> The only thing I really want to say, I suppose not representing the old guard and not
representing the new guard, maybe the middle aged guard, working with AHEAD where we are
now is really about universal design. So that things are designed whether it's education or
employment in such a way that it's inclusive for everybody. You don't have to gather statistics
about disability, you don't necessarily register with a disability because everything is online and
digitally accessible it just becomes easier, so no longer becomes us against them, people with
disabilities against people without, that it's just universally designed for all of us to be able to
access across the board. That's why it's great to be able to work with DFI and all the various
organisations and work on Digiplace4all, because universal access for everybody makes the
disability disappear.

MR MAGENNIS: Very true. Universal design is crucial, but my feeling is it does require an
understanding of it in order to do it. And that requires at a very high level a belief in inclusion
which, not just collusion of people with disabilities, but inclusion as a general basic pillar of
anything that an organisation does. That I think is often a bit missing.

Is there anybody else who would like to say some final words?

>> You should say the final words.

MR MAGENNIS: It's all been said really. There's nothing I can add except it's fantastic for me
to hear such positivity. Often when we talk about disability and technology we often talk about
barriers and the whole thing about -- I've been involved in accessibility a long time, and we often
find ourselves talking about the barriers and it's so nice to hear this positivity about how we can
use technology and use our relationships and get together and maybe overcoming some of these
barriers, just ignoring them and not letting them be there.

So I'd like to thank everybody who has contributed to today. In particular I'd like to thank
Esther, contributing to this project and making it such a great success from our point of view and
our international partners as well from Poland, Bulgaria and Belgium. It's been a very, very
fruitful collaboration and I hope this thing will carry on into the future. This is just the acorn and
from this acorn a mighty oak will grow.

So thank you very much and goodbye.

>> On behalf of the team we'd like to thank Mark.

Event concluded