

Citizens' Assembly – 14 November 2020

Theme - Work

Personal Experience Panel

Suzy Byrne, Manager

National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities

Suzy has been involved in community work and campaigning on disability and equality issues for 30 years. She works as a manager for the National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities which provides professional representative advocacy for disabled individuals who may need support in decision making. Suzy is also on the board of Iarnrod Eireann as one of the first disabled people to be appointed to a state public transport board. She is also a board member of the Irish Council of Civil Liberties.

Introduction

Disabled women are not a homogenous group, disability is often hidden and many people are afraid to disclose their disability to employers and others due to fear of discrimination. Disability covers mental health, sensory, physical, intellectual and learning impairments. Disabled women can be parents and carers themselves as well as people receiving care and support in order to access education, the workplace and society. What most impacts disabled people is the society around them which is the disabling factor rather than the disability a person might have. Too often disabled people and disability in general is viewed as a charity issue rather than 640,000 people who require reasonable accommodations and support as a rights issue.

Recommendations

- There is a cost to disability and no tax allowance or additional payment for that cost if you are working and earning more than the means tested social welfare payment allows. The costs of disability may include higher medical, transport, heating, housing and food costs.
- If you need personal assistance for the activities of daily living the state may not view work as an essential activity you require assistance with - so you might get help to get out of bed and have a shower but not to get to work and manage in the workplace.
- Sick leave schemes often disadvantage disabled people and many are afraid to go out sick because they may be treated differently by managers and colleagues and viewed as a liability.