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Active Disability Ireland recognise Excellence in Physical Activity across disability Services

Active Disability Ireland were delighted to host their Active Disability Services Awards last Friday 22nd March in the Midlands Hotel in Portlaoise. The awards have been developed to recognise and reward Disability Services and individuals with disabilities throughout Ireland who have shown leadership and commitment to helping people with disabilities stay active and healthy.

The event supported by the HSE and Sport Ireland, was a celebration of how people within disability services across Ireland prioritise, encourage, facilitate and create physical activity programmes and healthy lifestyle initiatives for people with disabilities.

The awards aim to champion the innovative physical activity, health promotion and community inclusion initiatives that have arisen as a result of the service engaging with our 'Active Healthy Me' programme. Active Healthy Me aims to empower people with disabilities to take control of their own health & wellbeing through an online education programme, facilitated by staff within disability day services all across Ireland. Through the programme, Active Disability Ireland are now working directly with over 400 disability services to support their development and growth in physical activity and to support their connection with their local community services.

Active Healthy Me Coordinator Lauren Watters said "That there was an overwhelming response to the awards this year, which highlighted the fantastic work and commitment that is happening across the disability sector. Our Judges, highlighted an increase standard in the applications they had seen in previous years and indicated the hard decisions that had to be made to choose the winners."

By growing the development and support to the disability services, their staff and individuals with disabilities through the awards, Active Disability Ireland want to ensure that as many disability Services and fundamentally people with disabilities are aware of their choices and the opportunities when it comes to been active.

In total 8 category awards were presented on the day, highlighting areas of excellence through programme initiatives including outstanding physical activity programme, health promotion initiatives and community inclusion collaboration projects. The awards also highlighted 4 special recognition awards presented to individuals and services who champion the importance of physical activity and inspire their peers or colleagues who go above and beyond to include active healthy practices in everyday life.

Speaking after the awards – St Michael's House, winners of the Best Community Engagement Initiative and Best Disability Organisation Senior Management said 'they feel very lucky to be a part of such

incredible team of sports & leisure department staff and attendees and want to thank all their community partners who are passionate and committed to expanding inclusive opportunities in the areas of health, physical activity and sport”.

The judging panel which consisted of representatives across a number of sectors had the unenviable job of shortlisting and selecting the finalists. Our judge and Active Disability Ireland Ambassador, Nikki Bradly highlighted on the day that it was a privilege to be part of the judging panel and that she felt humbled by the level and representation of activity that was available to people with disabilities, especially in the outdoors”

The event was hosted by Gráinne McElwain, sports and entertainment presenter, who provided a platform of opportunity to the recipients to share their celebrations and achievements. We welcomed a number of other key note speakers on the day including Helen McHugh (Sport Ireland Inclusion & Diversity Manager), Martina Lanigan (HSE Disability Services Business Manager) and Brian O’Callaghan (Active Disability Ireland Chairperson) who all highlighted the importance of creating opportunities for people with disabilities to be more physically active in their services and local communities and also outlined the true meaning of inclusion in sport and physical activity.

CEO of Active Disability Ireland Brenda O’Donnell closed the ceremony stating that the event was “a very special celebration in so many ways. The day is about acknowledging all the people who make it happen and about highlighting the impact that physical activity and sport has on the lives of people with disabilities. The awards have given us the chance to highlight to our peers the importance of the work that we do as an organisation and the value and impact it has on and within our communities. The ceremony was concluded with a dance performance from local stage school Dance Zone. Led by director and dance teacher Sandra Julian, this group of dancers is made up of members from the Athlone Down Syndrome Branch and friends.



***ENDS ***

Full details of all the award recipients follows:

The first award recipients of the day were **Cumas New Ross** from Co. Wexford, who were awarded the **Best Physical Activity Initiative**. This group were commended for not only the array of physical activity initiatives they offer within the service, such as ‘Strollers’ - an inclusive walking group, yoga and ‘Integrate’ - a performing arts group, but also for the establishment of an inclusive soccer team with the local New Ross Celtic soccer club.



Representatives from Cumas New Ross

Streetwise Brothers of Charity from Ennis in Co. Clare took home the **Best Outdoor Activity Initiative** for the development of their hiking programme. This programme was established in September 2023 in response to a request from the attendees of the Streetwise centre. Every Friday the group tackle a different hiking trail and so far, the group have hiked over 100km and have completed most of the hiking trails around Clare and Limerick.



Representatives from Streetwise Brothers of Charity

The group from **Rehab Care Blennerville** were crowned the winners of the **Best Healthy Lifestyle Initiative** for their weekly cooking class in collaboration with the Kerry Education and Training Board. This programme provides both service users and staff with knowledge around different cooking skills and techniques and allows them to create nutritious and easy to make meals.



Representatives from Rehab Care Blennerville

The **Best Community Engagement Initiative** awards aimed to highlight a programme that was developed in collaboration between a day service location and their local sports partnership. Dublin location **St. Michael's House** came out on top for their partnership with Dublin City, Fingal and Dun Laoghaire- Rathdown Sports Partnerships to provide over 15 different sporting activities to the people they support over European Week of Sport.



Representatives from St. Michael's House

The ceremony then spotlighted the **Active Champion Male and Female** award. This award celebrates both a male and female service user who had shown outstanding commitment to physical activity participation and inspiration to their peers to live a healthy lifestyle. **Martin McLoughlin from HSE Ballytivnan Resource Centre – Co. Sligo** and **Ruth Barron from Stewarts Care – Co. Dublin** were chosen as this year's winners for their involvement in sporting activities and their passion for advocating for inclusive physical activity participation.



Active Champion Male winner Martin McLoughlin (HSE Ballytivnan Resource Centre) with Sport Ireland Diversity and Inclusion Manager Helen McHugh and keyworker Chris Heffron



Active Champion Female winner Ruth Barron with proud Mam (Aine Barron) and Stewarts Care staff (Lauren Gilsenan & Emma McCormack)

Leitrim based support staff **Rebecca Allen from North West Parents and Friends Association** was triumphant in the **Best Active Healthy Me Staff Lead** category. As a qualified yoga instructor, Rebecca

took her personal interest in physical activity and transferred it to her working life by introducing many initiatives to the service attendees, such as the chair yoga activities.



Rebecca Allen with Active Disability Ireland Board Member and award judge Matt Connor

Lastly **St. Michael's House** accepted their second award of the day for **Best Disability Organisation Senior Management**. The Sport & Leisure Services Management team in St. Michael's House is dedicated to enhancing the health and wellbeing of individuals with disabilities through physical activity programmes, sports and health and wellbeing initiatives. Their adoption of an inclusive culture where people with disabilities can engage in activities suited to their needs, abilities and choices highlighted them as deserving winners.



Representatives from St. Michael's House

Notes:

For more details about the project please contact Lauren Watters at lwatters@activedisability.ie

About Active Disability Ireland

Active Disability Ireland are a national pan-disability organisation committed to creating an Ireland where people with disabilities have more opportunity to participate in physical activity of their choice.

Guided by the voice of people with disabilities as an insights-led organisation, Active Disability strive to support their partners and stakeholders to enhance opportunities available to people with disabilities to experience the joy and benefits of participating in physical activity throughout Ireland.

The Active Disability Ireland strategy (2023-2027) outlines a clear commitment to work in collaboration with national and local partners to make active lives possible for people with disabilities while ensuring the voice and needs of people with disabilities is placed at the forefront of all our decisions and actions.

About Active Healthy Me

Active Healthy Me is a health and wellbeing programme delivered directly to people with disabilities in adult day service locations to build awareness and understanding of the health benefits of physical activity.

Developed in partnership with the HSE and supported by Sport Ireland, the aim of the programme is to increase the knowledge and understanding of people with disabilities on the importance and benefits of being physically active, living a healthy lifestyle and the opportunities that are available to participate within their local community. The programme also aims to enhance the engagement between service locations and service users and their local sports partnership connecting them to the local participation opportunities and supports that are available.

About HSE

HSE Healthy & Wellbeing - The services within Health and Wellbeing support people and communities to protect and improve their health and wellbeing; turning research, evidence and knowledge into action; acting as the authority on health, wellbeing and policy development; building an intelligent health system and a healthier population.

HSE Disability Services - New Directions is the HSE's approach to supporting adults with disabilities who use day services in Ireland. New Directions sets out twelve supports that should be available to people with disabilities using 'day services'. It proposes that 'day services' should take the form of individualised outcome-focussed supports to allow adults using those services to live a life of their choosing in accordance with their own wishes, needs and aspirations.

Our partnership with the Health Service Executive has been instrumental in supporting us to develop new and innovative programmes within disability services across Ireland.

About Sport Ireland

Sport Ireland is the authority tasked with the development of sport in Ireland. This includes participation in sport, high performance sport, anti-doping, coaching and the development of the Sport Ireland Campus.

Working in partnership with Sport Ireland, Active Disability Ireland support the network of Local Sports Partnerships and National Governing Bodies of Sport to ensure they are offering opportunities for people with disabilities to be active all across Ireland. We will continue to support the ambition of the National Sports Policy target of reducing the gradients within sports participation.

About Hyundai

Hyundai Ireland support Active Disability Ireland as an organisational sponsor which supports the expansion of our work across multiple project areas and help us move closer to achieving long-term strategic goals.

Through this valued partnership, Hyundai Ireland help Active Disability Ireland to support, facilitate, advocate, develop, educate and create more inclusive opportunities in sport and physical activity for people with disabilities.



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HYUNDAI