



*Pictured:*  
A graphic illustration which featured in the recent 'Partners in Policymaking' programme.

# Making Ireland a Better Place for All

The 'Partners in Policymaking' programme helps families to develop the skills to allow them to contribute to the policy-making process.



*Pictured above:* Ray Harte, a participant in the 'Partners in Policymaking' programme.

**I T CAN BE DIFFICULT FOR ANYONE TO** navigate through the policy process. Complex, detailed and at times frustrating, it can be a challenge to communicate your views to those making decisions that affect you and for them to hear what you have to say about issues. However, with help, things can be made easier.

That's why, in 2004, Rehab set about tackling the challenges people face by securing the licence to run the 'Partners in Policymaking' programme in Ireland. The programme aims to provide parents of children with disabilities, and adults with disabilities, with the skills that they need to improve services and make a real contribution to the building of a more inclusive society.

Rehab's current course, funded by The Wheel – the support and representative body connecting community and voluntary organisations and charities across Ireland – focuses on the parents of young people with disabilities aged 12-23 and people with disabilities themselves. It takes place one weekend each month for five months and 24 people are due to graduate from the course in January 2010. It gives participants a great opportunity to find out about the range of services available, to learn new communication skills, to explore ways of getting involved in the policy process as a stakeholder, as well as giving people an opportunity to form new links with fellow course participants from across the country.

Geraldine Graydon, Rehab's Family Support Co-ordinator, and a former graduate of the programme, is passionate about spreading the word about family leadership and believes that the course is an ideal way for families to come together and to share information which can empower them.

### Who to contact

For further information please contact:



#### Geraldine Graydon

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She says, "It is hugely important that the very people affected by policy have a say in it. It's the people who use the services who have the greatest stake in investing time and energy to ensure that things are

changing for the better. 'Partners in Policymaking' helps families to develop the skills that they need to ensure that their voices are heard and that they can contribute positively to the policy-making process." ■

## Here is what some of the participants had to say to *Rehab News* about the 'Partners in Policymaking' programme:

### Ray Harte

Ray Harte, whose son Aaron has Down's syndrome, is actively involved in securing better services as chairperson of the Laois Down's Syndrome Association.

"I am taking the course as I believe it is important for people with disabilities and their families to share information and learn from each other when it comes to policy and advocacy. It's also about having a common-sense approach. For example, we needed speech and language therapy so we teamed up with the L.O.F.F.A. (Laois and Offaly Families for Autism) to share our speech and language hours. It was the first time that we worked together and it was hugely beneficial."

### Lisa Butterly

Lisa Butterly was diagnosed with psychosis at the age of 15 and says that she has seen the effects of exclusion and isolation.

"The ongoing development of new and better drug treatment provides hope to those with mental health difficulties. However, medication is only part of the recovery process. Inclusive policies can significantly improve the lives of all people with a disability.

"Unfortunately, the secondary school I attended did not have



*Pictured above:* Lisa Butterly, one of the 'Partners in Policymaking' programme participants.

the resources to cope with a pupil who had developed such a serious illness. At this stage, I left school without a Junior Certificate or any recognised qualification. Effectively, I disappeared off the educational and social radar for a long period.

"Nevertheless, I was determined to pursue my education and decided to sit my Leaving Certificate as a mature student, which I successfully passed in 2003. I then went to the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, where I did a Degree in History and am now currently undertaking a Doctorate in the same field. Advocacy is my passion, that's why I am here. I want to change the way people with disabilities are viewed and this course is a great way of meeting like-minded people who also want change."