

# 360

## Reality TV

### Rehab style

media

A ground-breaking television series initiated by Rehab to give the Irish public a greater insight into the lives of people across the whole spectrum of disabilities will hit the nation's TV screens in June.

The eight-part series, titled **Three 60**, will bring a fresh perspective to disability issues – ruthlessly exposing discrimination where it exists, whilst also focusing on human interest stories from around the country.

It will be presented by Bethan Collins, a 26-year-old Trinity College lecturer who will be making her debut on television. Also featured prominently is the well-known disability campaigner, Donal Toolan. **The series will be broadcast on RTE 1 at 7.30pm on Mondays from June 28st.** Many hard-hitting stories are featured such as the account of a young Dublin woman, who lost three limbs after a house fire at home during her Leaving Cert. She is now a university grad-

uate working in the IT sector. At least five times a year, she must apply in order to secure new liners for her prosthetics and indeed for the prosthetics themselves. Her Medical card and benefits were taken away from her 4 months ago as she is earning €300 per week. A battle and appeal followed and the decision was reluctantly overturned, and she was granted the card/benefits for just one more year. She knows that her days are numbered as regards holding onto it - particularly if she wants to get a better job.

There is also a report on the impact of the chronic shortage of rheumatology services in Ireland and a piece dealing with the controversial area of mental health and medication. In addition, the issues surrounding many specific disabilities, such as narcolepsy, dyslexia and stammering are addressed.

Rehab programmes feature strongly in the series including RehabCare's Prader Willi Syndrome service

**Tommy Farrell who participated in NTDI Wexford's Self Start programme and is featured in RTE's Three 60 television programme. Tommy is publisher of the Wexford-based South East Voice newspaper.**



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**Bethan, left and Philip Byrne, NTDI, right, who also features in the series.**

based in County Dublin and NTDI's Homelink programme, which operates from Roslyn Park College for people with agoraphobia – a piece which also features the personal experiences of NTDI regional manager, Phillip Byrne.

Rehab's Educate For Inclusion disability awareness programme for schools is also featured, along with the story is also told of Tommy Farrell, who set up a highly successful newspaper in Wexford after graduating from NTDI Wexford's Self Start programme for people who wanted to be self-employed.

In addition there are many other pieces covering burning issues in areas like access and stereotyping and exploding many damaging myths surrounding disability.

Rehab Group public relations manager, Chris Macey said the organisation initiated the series in an effort to prompt a



change in how the mass media deals with disability.

“After the Special Olympics, Rehab undertook to help ‘keep the flame burning’ by developing the connection the Games created between the public and the world of disability. One of the best contributions we can make in this regard is to try and change negative images of people with disabilities portrayed in the media.

“Consequently the purpose of **Three 60** is to show as wide an audience as possible what life is really like for people with disabilities in Ireland. It is reality TV in the truest sense.

“Instead of the stereotypical media portrayals, we want to present an image of people participating in the world the same as everyone else – not boxed into a category: Paying taxes, working, having families, meeting life's challenges head on and having a set of human experiences that are universally familiar.”

He added that the programme, which is co-sponsored by Rehab Group and FÁS, was also attempting to communicate the diversity of disabilities and to get the message across that what makes people with disabilities marginalised is not the disability itself, society's attitude towards it.



# seminar

**An international conference has given business leaders a better understanding of the legal and ethical issues relating to the employment of people with disabilities.**



**Pictured launching the 'Access Ability - Your Business Solution' conference were from left, Gordon D'Arcy, Irish rugby international and Paul McNeive, managing director, Hamilton Osbourne King and guest speaker at the conference.**

# State 'not doing its job'

**A** high profile conference stressing why employing people with disabilities makes good business sense has been staged in Dublin by the Rehab led Access Ability organisation.

Featuring experts from business, legal and consumer backgrounds, Access Ability – *Your Business Solution* conference examined the legal and ethical issues surrounding the employment of people with disabilities for the mutual benefit of the employer and the person with a disability.

The conference also challenged the Government to set a better example to Irish employers by giving more jobs to people with disabilities. Just 2.8 per cent of workers employed in central and local government jobs here are people with disabilities – fewer than 1,500 people.

These figures are only marginally higher than the overall rate in Ireland for jobs filled by

workers with disabilities which currently stands at 2.7 per cent, according to Paula King, project manager of Access Ability, the European Equal Initiative, which is supported by partners in both the public and private sector – including lead partner, Gandon Enterprises.

“There are only 45,000 out of more than 320,000 people with disabilities in employment here according to the latest figures compiled by the CSO – which means well over 80 per cent of people are out of work. It is the State’s solemn responsibility to ensure that traditionally marginalised groups like people with disabilities receive equal treatment in society, but this obviously hasn’t even translated into extra jobs within its own sphere of activity,” she declared.

“If the Government won’t employ more people with disabilities, how on earth can it expect firms in the private sector to do so.

“We hear a lot of platitudes from political leaders about equality for people with disabilities. Employing significant numbers of people with disabilities in the Civil Service and in Local Government jobs is a tangible means of helping to make this a reality. But it appears this is no more a priority than among employers who don’t have the same statutory obligations.”

Ms King said that in fact many sectors had a better record of providing employment for people with disabilities. For example, the rate for farming, fishing and forestry workers is 3.5 per cent and at just under 3,200 people, accounts for more than double the number of people with disabilities with central and local Government jobs. Also, the rate among textile, clothing and leather workers is 4.1 per cent, according to the figures which come from the last Census.

Ms King was speaking prior to the half-day conference which took place in the Croke Park Conference Centre and featured a panel of experts from business, legal and customer focused backgrounds.

**‘The benefits to companies employing people with disabilities are enormous, ranging from the dynamics of having a diverse workforce, the financial supports that can be received and the positive public perception for the company’**

These included Paul McNeive, managing director of Hamilton Osborne King; Terence McCrann, senior partner McCann Fitzgerald Solicitors; Geraldine O’Neill deputy managing director Edelman PR Worldwide; Carmen Vroonen from McDonalds, and Ashley Balbirnie, chief executive, Gandon Enterprises. Caroline Casey of the Aisling Foundation and broadcaster, David McWilliams acted as MC’s for the event.

Said Mr. McNeive: “Employers and employees should think about ‘ability’ and not ‘disability’ – a person’s disability may have no effect whatsoever on their ability to do the job. People working with a disability usually have a natural tenacity and enthusiasm which are great strengths in any workforce”

Access Ability project director Terry Fahy agrees. “If a person has the abilities, competencies and skills they have as much right to employment as any member of society: This is not about tokenism or charity. This is about employing people who have the ability to carry out a task or a job.

“The benefits to companies employing people with disabilities are enormous, ranging from the dynamics of having a diverse workforce, the financial supports that can be received and the positive public perception for the company.

“The fact is that there are already lots of supports, financial and otherwise in place for employers, but take-up remains disappointing. Some employers are not aware of the supports and others fear bureaucracy. More still are labouring under serious misconceptions such as the belief that there is high absenteeism among people with disabilities when the opposite is in fact the case.

“We hope that this conference has helped many employers and Human Resource managers explode these myths and get a more rounded sense of the business solutions that are available,” said Ms Fahy.

## Big turnout for Advocacy Day

Service users from no fewer than eleven RehabCare centres throughout the Midlands and North East region converged at the Johnstown House Hotel in Enfield, Co Meath last February for a ground-breaking ‘Advocacy Day’.

Welcoming the 280 service users to the event, Peter McKeivitt, RehabCare general manager for the North East and Midlands, spoke of how advocacy is about being more confident and assertive, and not being afraid to speak up and speak out.

A number of guest speakers addressed the service users, including David Whelan, assistant planner (disability services) with the Midland Health Board. He told the delegates, that by discussing the importance of advocacy they were playing their part in making the world a better place for people with disabilities.

Other guest speakers on the day included Anne McElroy from Comhairle, who part sponsored the event. Speaking on the importance of advocacy, Ms McElroy told the delegates that advocacy can enhance the quality of life. “It empowers you to live the life you want to live,” she said.

Most of the morning was spent in workshops which featured brainstorming sessions and role-plays. A number of interesting comments were made on the theme of advocacy during the afternoon session that featured feedback from each of the different workshop groups. The importance of communication, confidence and taking the initiative, were just some of the themes that emerged from the workshop sessions.

Following a hard day’s work, all the service users were delighted to relax and unwind at the disco and quiz which were also held in the hotel, prior to leaving for the journey home at tea time.

Initial feedback on the event from RehabCare service users throughout the region has been very positive and it is hoped that the day will become an annual event.