



Down  
Syndrome  
Ireland

National Leadership Local Support

# ANNUAL REPORT 2022

**Working Together  
for a Brighter Future**

**#ShareTheJourney**



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# OVERVIEW

Down Syndrome Ireland (DSI) offers support and services to people with Down syndrome and their families throughout Ireland. Our membership comprises approximately 3,500 members with 25 branches nationwide.

We provide 'all-through life' supports and services with specialists in the areas of health, speech and language, early development, education and adult training and education, employment and independence that enhance the lives of thousands of children and adults with Down syndrome across the

country. We work to ensure that people with Down syndrome can lead the lives they want, how they want and where they want at whatever stage of life.

Down Syndrome Ireland works collaboratively with a number of key stakeholder partners to ensure that the needs of our members are met.

We also provide information, training and advice, influence policy, raise public awareness and work towards the improvement of services and supports for children and adults with Down syndrome.



## Our Vision

We work towards a society that enables all people with Down syndrome to participate to their fullest potential, as equal members with full entitlement as Irish citizens.

## Our Mission

Down Syndrome Ireland supports people with Down syndrome and their families in their communities. We strive to provide consistent, high-quality advice, support and information to every person with Down syndrome to ensure that whatever their stage of life they have a network to support them.

## Our Purpose

Our purpose is to create the environment for people with Down syndrome to achieve their potential, with a particular focus on health, education, employment, and life in the community. Down Syndrome Ireland is a confederation of local branches, who work together to ensure consistency, quality and a common approach which celebrates, supports, and advocates for people with Down syndrome.



## Our Values

- **Inclusivity:** We strive to create a society where people with Down syndrome are supported, valued and integral members of their communities and we demonstrate that inclusivity in our own work.
- **Passion:** We will fight tirelessly to enrich the lives of people with Down syndrome and their families through our work and support Nationwide.
- **Integrity:** We will act with honesty, accountability, and professionalism at all levels of the organisation.
- **Respect:** Everyone should be supported to live a meaningful, rewarding, healthy, and happy life.
- **Collaboration:** Together we are stronger. Sharing information, knowledge and expertise improves outcomes for everyone both locally and nationally.

# DOWN SYNDROME IRELAND NATIONAL TEAM

**Our national office is run by a small team dedicated to supporting people with Down syndrome and their families across Ireland.**

We provide specialist consultancy services and supports around the country in health, speech and language, early development, education, adult training and education, employment and advocacy and independence.

## Our 25 Branches

We have twenty-five branches across the country with each branch fully dedicated to enriching the lives of those with Down syndrome.

Our branches are run almost exclusively by volunteers working in committees, providing children and adults with Down syndrome with a wide range of services and social opportunities.

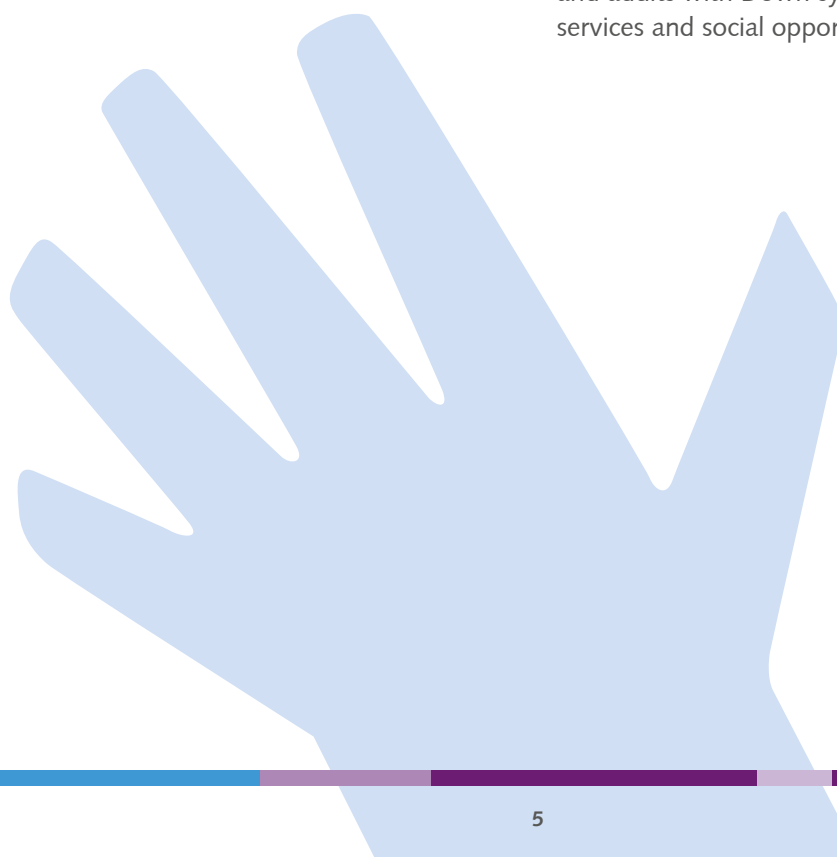
All the services provided at branch level are funded through donations and fundraising by the members of those branches and their families and friends.

## Our Objectives

We aim to facilitate and optimise service delivery and supports in the country by:

- Raising awareness of people with Down syndrome as valued members of the community
- Working towards the development of essential supports and services to best support people with Down syndrome through the various life stages
- Working closely with our branches, service providers and community groups to ensure integrated analysis, planning and provision of services
- Being an efficient provider of high-quality evidence-based supports and services
- Lobbying for better supports and resources for people with Down syndrome throughout their various life stages

Our 25 branches are run almost exclusively by volunteers working in committees, providing children and adults with Down syndrome with a wide range of services and social opportunities.



# SECTION 1: WELCOME

## Message from Gerard O'Carroll, President of Down Syndrome Ireland



Féachaint siar at 2022.

A welcome piece of news in early 2022 was the lifting of most of the restrictions relating to Covid which had affected many of our members disproportionately. It was a year devoted to returning to more normal living and while this was welcome, some of the experiences gained during Covid offered new opportunities to some, such as blended and remote working and learning. DSI continues to use new technologies where appropriate to offer opportunities for learning and communication to members. This can facilitate people by reducing physical distance and allowing for virtual communication between physical meetings.

DSI's strategy 2022-25 Working Together for a Brighter Future, was launched which identified priorities in the areas of Health, Education, Employment, and Life in the Community. This is the focus of current activities at all levels of the organisation and will continue to inform our decisions and resource allocation. It is through branch activities to support these priorities that most of us see change and opportunities for members. This, combined with strong national leadership and support can make meaningful changes in daily life for members.

2022 was a busy year and work continued at pace on reviewing and suggesting reforms for a new Constitution (Memo & Arts) in order to be in a good position to get feedback and input from members. Many new and required policies were developed and approved to enhance work at national and branch level. Financial structures were refined and agreed throughout the organization to ensure continuing good governance and compliance. Information and training sessions on these new financial procedures were rolled

out nationwide. A number of branch chairpersons meetings were held. There were changes at Board level and governance support and training was provided.

The National Advisory Council (NAC) and Regional Advisory Council (RAC) consisting of adults with Down syndrome were reactivated and continue to offer us an important voice.

It is a challenging environment for fundraising for the charity sector but many initiatives at branch and national level are continuing. Many branches are taking a strategic look at how they are using funds and putting in place plans for same.

A small but highly committed team in national office continue to lead and innovate in areas that have greatest impact on the lives of our members: early years, school education, adult education, training and employment, health. Supporting these is research, communications, advocacy and all the support services (HR, payroll, compliance etc.) required by a national charity with branches throughout the country.

DSI is most effective when we all work together, at branch and national level, with the common goal of enhancing the lives of our members and especially of people with Down syndrome in Ireland. There are many good examples of this in 2022 and we acknowledge the commitment and time of parents, family members, volunteers, branch officers, national board, national office executive and staff, the generous public and all those who make DSI such a wonderful national charity. Go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir.

**Gerard O Carroll**  
DSI National President

## Message from Barry Sheridan (CEO)

After the most challenging years in our recent history, 2022 was a burst of light at the end of a long tunnel. The easing of the Covid-19 pandemic allowed branches to return, gradually and safely, to full activity.

Two long years of isolation and disconnection brought out the true spirit of our community, as members went the extra mile to maintain services and supports in extremely challenging conditions. As restrictions eased, we witnessed joyous scenes of reunion, as members re-connected with one another and with the wider community.

Challenges remain, but the speed with which our branches and members got back into full flow was a credit to each and every one of them, and as CEO, I was proud to witness it and to support it.

Those challenges include an acute nationwide crisis in speech & language therapy, which is depriving far too many of our members of the supports they need and deserve. As usual, we are pursuing a twin-track approach of closing the gap wherever we can, while advocating strenuously for a governmental solution to what is, ultimately, a society-wide problem.

During my time as CEO, I have been fully committed to ensuring that Down Syndrome Ireland serves its members first and foremost – the basic mission which informs and guides our actions at all levels. With the disruption of Covid beginning to recede, 2022 was a year to take stock of our operations and our structures, and to focus on making them future-proof and fit for purpose.

To this end, 2022 saw a ramping-up of efforts to overhaul Down Syndrome Ireland's constitution, taking into account the massive changes which have occurred in Irish society since the constitution was first laid down half-a-century ago. This is being undertaken through a partnership approach involving branches and members alongside the board, staff and external legal experts.

Over the decades, circumstances have changed beyond recognition for people with Down syndrome, and for their families and supporters. Through its efforts over the past fifty years, Down Syndrome Ireland has learned an enormous amount about the types of supports and structures that work for our members.



We are also operating in a completely new regulatory environment, one which demands strict accountability and compliance at all levels of our operations.

Our new constitution will reflect these changes, but more importantly, it will reflect the needs and wishes of our members and branches. The process that kicked off in 2022 will come to fruition in 2023 when, after several extensive rounds of consultation and expert input, we will present a finalised version of the new constitution for sign-off at the Annual General Meeting.

Throughout the year, I have been fortunate to be able to call on the efforts of a dedicated and hard-working team at National Office and in the branches, and I thank them all once again for their contributions and expertise. It has also been a particular privilege to work with the National Advisory Council and Regional Advisory Councils – their input has been, and will continue to be, invaluable.

I would also like to place on record my appreciation for the guidance and support of our board of directors, and its Chair, Gerard O'Carroll, whose calm leadership was invaluable throughout the year.

But most of all, I want to thank our members and branches for their tireless efforts in support of one another, and for their commitment to improving the lives of everyone with Down syndrome in Ireland. It has, as ever, been humbling and inspirational to witness. In 2023, we will continue to work tirelessly to give people with Down syndrome the lives and the futures they deserve.

**Barry Sheridan**  
CEO

## National Advisory Council – The voice of our members

Our National Advisory Council (NAC) and Regional Advisory Council (RAC) represent the views of adult members with Down syndrome within Down Syndrome Ireland. The Councils are composed exclusively of adults with Down syndrome. Amplifying the voices of people with Down syndrome is a cornerstone of Down Syndrome Ireland's mission. Our new National Advisory Council (NAC) began its term in 2022. Our first Regional Advisory Council (RAC), hosted by the Louth-Meath Branch for the Northeast region, continued their excellent work throughout 2022. Both councils elected officers for the first time. Members of both councils made valuable contributions to the 2022-2025 DSI Strategic Plan.



## Message from Claire Murphy – National Advisory Council Minute Secretary



Hi, my name is Claire Murphy. I live in Kilkenny.

I am a member of the NAC. I have met a lot of people and I enjoy the experience of being the Minute Secretary with Ross O'Neill.

The NAC is the voice of people with Down syndrome. We discuss topics like employment, advocacy and wellbeing at our meetings.

We give our opinions to Down Syndrome Ireland. Down Syndrome Ireland listens to us.

As well the NAC, I have a very busy life. I have 2 jobs. I like doing digital photography.

I'd like to say thank you to Sinéad and Joanne, our facilitators and everybody.

My message for people with Down syndrome is to stand up for yourself and to believe in yourself.



# SECTION 2: BRANCHES REPORT 2022

## Athlone Branch

In common with all our branches, 2022 saw our Athlone branch emerging from the challenges the pandemic posed for all of society. The branch enjoyed support from its local community throughout the year; the branch was the beneficiary of an "Athlone's Got Talent" contest, as the winner's chosen charity. The Athlone branch of Woodie's raised over €6,000 for Down Syndrome Ireland's early years programmes via its Woodie's Heroes campaign.

## Carlow Branch

The branch enjoyed strong support from the local community as ever in 2022. The fundraiser held by Coláiste Aindriú in Bagenalstown was particularly heartening to witness. Meanwhile, Aldi hosted our Annual Collection Day at its Tullow, Carlow town, Bagenalstown and Graigecullen stores in October.

In April, MACE Hacketstown Road in Carlow hosted a static cycle event, with proceeds going to Down Syndrome Ireland.

## Clare Branch

The committee of Down Syndrome Clare endeavoured to support its 84 members throughout 2022 through services, meetings and regular communication.

A packed 2022 schedule saw swimming, horse-riding, singing classes, physiotherapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, parent and toddler group and home tutoring offered to members. Members' feedback was extremely positive, across the entire range of services and supports offered.

The branch partnered with Leah from Le Chéile Music to provide a music group for babies and toddlers; a very popular and enjoyable addition to the programme.

As ever, fundraising was a key component of branch activities across 2022. World Down Syndrome Day was marked with a party for branch families and friends at the West County Hotel. The Odd Socks Cycle went ahead again in April, thanks to the support of the Shannon Cycling Club, and a range of local businesses,

## Cavan Branch

2022 was a year to celebrate the members and supporters of the Cavan branch, who went above and beyond to promote and fund the branch throughout the year. One parent who went the extra mile – in fact, many extra miles – was Sonia, mother of our very own Jacob, who ran the Dublin marathon on behalf of the branch in October.

World Down Syndrome Day saw another terrific groundswell of support, with the Convent of Mercy National School in Belturbet among the many local groups and bodies generously donating to the branch. In July, the branch received a very welcome cheque from Kilgarry GAA, raised the previous Christmas.

The Christmas 2022 season was a particularly joyous one. In early December, Santa gamely stood between the posts at Kilgarry GAA, in a "Score Past Santa" event on behalf of the Branch, before the annual Christmas party brought the year's events to an end.



donors and volunteers, to whom the branch is eternally grateful.

The annual Tour de Munster also passed through Clare on August 4th and 5th, to huge excitement from branch members, families and the general public – an incredible event that goes from strength to strength, and a vital fundraiser for all Munster branches.

The branch looks forward to supporting its members, staying active on social media, and responding to queries and communications in 2023. A website launch is planned for July, as well as an expansion of the committee



## Down Syndrome Cork

Supporting 410 members and their families, Down Syndrome Cork was kept typically busy throughout 2022. The branch's three facilities (Ballincollig – therapy and admin; Field of Dreams – education and horticulture; and the Merchants Quay charity shop) hosted a wealth of events, classes and get-togethers.

The branch's Speech & Language Therapy department supported over 130 members throughout the year. Social opportunities for

members included dance, tennis, drama workshops, discos, Easter egg hunts, panto visits and bowling evening, to name just a handful.

Significant upgrades were made to the branch's IT infrastructure, to the benefit of productivity and collaboration. The Field of Dreams continued to live up to its name, with 51 students on site on a weekly basis (up from eight in 2017). The Ready2Work programme placed 22 students in paid employment throughout 2022. The branch also hosted 33 Corporate Social Responsibility events, with 894 volunteers racking up 1,788 hours between them.

These services and activities are funded through the generosity of the people of Cork, who supported the Camino Walk, Field of Dreams cycle, Cork Summer Show, Cork's Got Talent 2022, Prom in the Park, Pick-a-pumpkin festival, and many more. The professionalism, team spirit and energy of the branch's staff, members, parents, volunteers and committees ensured that 2022 was a year of triumph for Down Syndrome Cork.

## Donegal Down Syndrome

Despite the restrictions of the previous two years, 2022 was a dynamic and fulfilling year for everyone at Donegal Down syndrome with activities and fundraising.

Membership numbers reached 200, with therapies resuming as soon as health and safety conditions allowed. Free swimming and speech therapies were the first to resume, with subsidised holistic, physio, occupational and neurotherapy available to all members.

Weekly exercises classes – vital to forming social bonds – also resumed, with kickboxing and yoga popular among older members.

One of the most exciting events of the year was the offer from McElhinneys department store asking if our members would like to partake in a photo shoot. This initiative resulted in a beautiful book entitled "SeeMe", featuring over 50 branch members and their stories. The book is available nationwide and featured on the Late Toy Show.

The final quarter of the year saw online and in-person workshops including Lámh, learning through play, while social activities resumed with disco nights, dancing and online bingo. A trip to see Skyzdalimit perform "Circus" was a particular highlight.



Other proud achievements included Meg Carr's and Anna Hennessy's Ulster Special Olympics medals, Anna participation in the Down Syndrome World Swimming Championships in Portugal, and Christopher Grant becoming the first person with Down syndrome elected onto Donegal Youth Council.

The branch was immensely grateful for the continued support of the communities of Donegal in helping our members reach their potential throughout the year.

## Dublin Branch

2022 was a year of both consolidation and expansion for Down Syndrome Dublin. The branch's musical theatre, art & activities and Fun with Numbers groups returned after a long Covid lay-off, while the hugely popular hip-hop and ballroom dancing classes remained accessible via Zoom.

New departures included bowling outings, and members getting their hands dirty at the City Farm Club in St. Anne's Park. A particular highlight was the party thrown for the branch in Fitzwilliam Square in June. Fifty-seven families (200 members in total) were invited by generous hosts Danielle Ryan and Richard Bourke, and the branch hopes to see this memorable event become an annual tradition. Special thanks are due to organiser Rosie Cooney.

Members also enjoyed a World Down Syndrome Day coffee morning at the Mansion House, courtesy of Lord Mayor Cllr. Alison Gilliland. Other notable supporters included Kevin Stynes, who once again ran the Dublin marathon on behalf of the branch, and Ally Alpine of the Celtic Whiskey Shop, who raised an astonishing €45,546 for the branch via his annual Whiskey Live event.

## Down Syndrome Galway

In Galway, Down Syndrome Galway and Voices for Down Syndrome Galway experienced their busiest year yet. The year began with a burst of fun and activity, in the form of Genevieve Ryan Dance Academy dance classes, inclusive GAA sessions and free Zumba classes.

On the social front, there were movie nights for all age groups (once Covid restrictions were lifted), and the popular Club 48 (four- to eight-year-olds) and Club Tween (nine- to twelve-year-olds) social clubs.

A vast range of fundraising drives were undertaken in aid of Galway members throughout the year. Highlights included the Inishbofin half-marathon, Club Vitae's 24-hour swimathon, the Bike 2 Bofin Charity Cycle, donations from Bríd Lydon and Martina Daly's handmade facemask project, and a magnificent Lots of Socks Galway event hosted by McD's and broadcast live on Galway Bay FM.

In addition, the branch was able to offer the Latch-On programme to members for the first time in September, which capped off a memorable year for Down Syndrome Galway and Voice for Down Syndrome Galway.

## Kerry Branch

Down Syndrome Kerry was a hive of activity throughout 2022. Like our other Munster branches, the Kerry branch benefited from the annual fundraising Tour de Munster cycle, known as the Unsung Hero Cycle on its Kerry leg. The branch's supporters certainly got back in the saddle in 2022; the Ring of Kerry charity cycle also benefited Down Syndrome Kerry, with members lending support on the day.

There was also fun (and fundraising) on four wheels, with the Maurice Collins vintage tractor run.

Elsewhere, workshops and education programmes got back into full swing, with a phased return of face-to-face Speech & Language Therapy as Covid restrictions lifted. Swimming lessons, bi-monthly horse-riding and the reopening of Deenagh Lodge tea-rooms and the branch's charity shop rounded out a superb and productive year for the branch and its members.



## Kildare Branch



2022 saw the Kildare branch rack up numerous achievements, including a very successful showcase video, a well-attended New Parents Day and the commencement of our two-year Latch-On programme with KWetb.

The branch's second horticulture site at Donadea saw plenty of use in 2022, with animal husbandry and the Green Mile keeping members busy. Meanwhile, three speech and language therapists catered to the needs of dozens of members.

Education was a key theme of 2022, with Adult Education trips to Bloom and Grow It Yourself in Waterford, and students selling their own-grown daffodils on Daffodil Day. On the fundraising front, the branch raised funds to recover their polytunnel on the Donadea site, and two gazebos on the Sallins site.

The branch was also successful in an application to Pobal for a new portacabin in Sallins. Throughout the year, the branch worked in collaboration with such prestigious and diverse partners as Kerry Group, Tidy towns, Sallins Biodiversity & Local Restaurants, Community Garda, KWetb Community Education and Further Education. With the New Build Team starting operations in 2023, the year ahead promises to be an exciting one.

## Kilkenny

In 2022, our Kilkenny branch benefited from 50% of the proceeds of Plough Through the City, an annual tractor run through Kilkenny city. The branch's excellent reputation in the local area also saw a photography display installed in Dunne Stores to celebrate World Down Syndrome Day.

The branch itself undertook a rich and diverse programme of activities in 2022. Sibshop, a youth club for siblings of children with Down syndrome, proved a great success, and further social activities were facilitated through the Under 12s meet-up and Teen Day out.

One-to-one swimming classes provided members with an important life-skill, before a trip to the Arboretum in Carlow provided younger members with a magical end to the year.

## Laois Branch

2022 saw a welcome return to normality for our Laois Branch, with the lifting of Covid restrictions facilitating a return to social activities and in-person Speech & Language/Occupational Therapy sessions.

The great reopening saw members and their families celebrate World Down Syndrome together for the first time in two years – an emotional reunion for many, centred on the Manor Hotel in Abbeyleix, with terrific support from the public throughout the county. A summer camp, complete with visit to the Japanese Gardens, brightened the summer months. With the gym club, arts and crafts classes, music, Zumba and mindfulness all on the go, there was plenty to look back on once the annual Christmas Party brought 2022 to a close.

## Leitrim West-Cavan Branch

In Leitrim/West Cavan, 2022 was notable for the launch of the Extra Special Baby and Toddler group. Funded through Leitrim County Childcare Committee, the group offers support in a social setting for babies and toddlers with Down Syndrome, as well as their parents, in Leitrim, Roscommon, Sligo, Longford and even further afield.

Generous support from other local organisations, such as Leitrim Library and Mohill Library, allowed the branch to offer a wide range of services and supports, including Lámh sign language classes, play therapy, swimming classes, days out and other opportunities for physical, social and cultural development.

With an emphasis on inclusion and camaraderie, 2022 brought members ever closer together, while laying the groundwork for even more ambitious plans in the years ahead.

## Down Syndrome Limerick

2022 proved another busy year for the Limerick branch. Demand for therapies continued to rise, with a total of 923 hours of one-to-one Speech Therapy, and 52 hours of one-to-one Occupational Therapy sessions delivered. Training was the keynote of the year, with a broad range of sessions and courses ranging from webinars for teachers and SNAs, through programmes such as Lámh and Numicon, to early years projects and a major seminar for school leavers.

The branch's Youth Club were finalists in the National Good Causes Awards, while also lining out for tag rugby with Old Crescent RFC. In addition to the regular services and supports such as ParentLink and our Saturday Social Club, the branch was immensely proud to see our Work Skills students graduate, with six members taking up employment



in the retail and hospitality industries across 2022. The completion of a state-of-the-art sensory room, and a number of high-profile fundraisers such as the Sean Kelly Three Counties Cycle, made 2022 a year to remember in Limerick.

## Longford Westmeath

The Longford Westmeath branch enjoyed tremendous public support in 2022. Among those who raised funds were the North Midlands Credit Union, St. Paul's GFC Clonmellon, St. Michael's National School, Clonmellon National School, Shandonagh GAA, Brownstown GAA and many others.

In March, our 63km challenge was taken up enthusiastically throughout the region. In July, the Dromone MCC Motor Bike Run raised a whopping 3,932.68 for the branch, another reminder of the incredible local generosity and goodwill towards our members.

2022 was also memorable for the founding of book clubs for adults with Down syndrome in Mullingar Library and Edgeworthstown Library. In October, the branch made good use of social media to promote World Down Syndrome Awareness Month. A branch member was introduced to our followers each day, in a series of posts which proved hugely popular.

Learning and fun combined beautifully in the form of dancing lessons with Pasquale from Dancing with the Stars, and our cycling workshops later in the year. Winter highlights included an excursion to Causey Farm, and an enjoyable Christmas party at the Annebrook Hotel.

## Louth Meath Branch

2022 saw the conclusion of Work Skills classes for Louth/Meath Down Syndrome's Ability programme students. After completing a trial of the Personal Development Course, students graduated in 2022.

The Regional Advisory council – a self-advocacy group for branch members with Down syndrome – continued to meet in person and online throughout the year. Courses and workshops including the speech & drama club, Fun with Numbers, Numicon, Sibling Workshops and the See & Learn Kit Library.

But it wasn't all work and no play; social events included discos, a Family Funday & BBQ, a céilí, and Christmas parties for both adults and children. In the sporting arena, the multi-sport Warrior Wolves took part in three disciplines – athletics, futsal and artistic swimming. The latter saw David O'Hare and Fergus Cosgrove fly to the Czech Republic, for the athletics World Championships for athletes with Down syndrome.



As ever, our team proved a vital support for new parents and families in need of assistance at every life stage.

## Down Syndrome Mayo

2022 reached its height for Down Syndrome Mayo in July, when the branch's very own Linda Devaney was among the Kilimanjaro 4 DSI Team which reached the summit of Africa's tallest mountain in July.

While not all fundraising endeavours went to such extremes in 2022, all efforts were equally welcome and appreciated. The branch enjoyed notable support from local schools throughout the year, with Cullens National School, Mount St. Michael Secondary, Ballyhaunis Community School, Irishtown National School among those who ran fundraisers throughout the year, as well as Little Leprechauns Creche & Montessori, and Joanna's Pre-School/After-School.

Fundraising also continued for the Down Syndrome Ireland West regional centre in Swinford – most memorably, a mock wedding at the Gateway Hotel in June.

The GAA For All initiative was hugely popular with members – Moy Davitts GAA, Castlebar Mitchels and Kilmeena GAA among those taking part. Also on the sporting front, member James Carty organised an evening with Liverpool Legends Jason McAteer and John Aldridge in Ballina in April, which proved to be a highlight of the year.

There was no shortage of activities on offer for members, as the country began to leave the dark days of Covid behind. The branch's Art & Movement Group

showcased their work at Ballina Arts Centre, in an exceptional exhibition called "Exploring New Mediums".

Dramatherapy (funded from the Coca-Cola Thank-You fund), Numicon multisensory maths and online webinars were all on offer throughout the year, and the 30km in 30 Days initiative enjoyed big public support throughout September.

## Monaghan

With the threat of Covid receding, members and their families were delighted to see the branch fully back on its feet in 2022. Pottery classes and swimming lessons were among the highlights of the year's varied activities.

A group day out at Dublin Zoo was a delight to members and families alike, as was the trip to a Christmas panto, which brought a year of fun, learning and camaraderie to a close. However, perhaps the most meaningful event of the year was the presentation of nine younger members' portraits to the branch by artist Siobhán Curtis.

Siobhán's younger brother Darragh is a member of the branch, and the colourful mixed-media portraits paid stunning tribute to the joy and happiness members bring to their community.

## Offaly Down Syndrome Branch

2022 saw Offaly Down Syndrome lavished with honours. In May, the branch committee received an Offaly County Council Volunteer Group award for its community contribution during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. Speech and language therapy, dance therapy and the ever-popular Summer Family Fun Day returned after the Covid restrictions, and swimming lessons were introduced at Aura Leisure Centre.

In October, the branch celebrated World Down Syndrome Awareness Month with the "ThreeTwentyOne" photo exhibition. 2022 Press Photographer of the Year James Crombie shot 40 close-up portraits of members for this exhibition, which gained national exposure and was funding

and supported by Offaly's own Inpho Sports Photography and several local businesses around the county.



## Roscommon branch

With Covid restrictions beginning to ease, the branch was able to celebrate World Down Syndrome Day with a visit to Roscommon Garda Station, where local Gardaí offered members a wonderful tour and party in honour of the day.

Welcome support was also received from Castle Street Tyres, the main sponsor of a Shave or Dye fundraiser for the branch in September, which was followed by a table quiz at the Hollytree Bar.

The branch's Latch-On students at Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board completed the first year of their training in July; a joyous occasion, as students made end-of-year presentations on topics of interest, from sport to arts to soap opera.

In October, an information fair on transition to adult services in Co. Roscommon proved hugely beneficial, and the branch looks forward to a full and productive 2023.

## Down Syndrome Sligo Branch

2022 saw the Sligo branch enter the local St. Patrick's Day parade for the first time. Around 20 members and their families joined in the festivities, to a tumultuous reception from the gathered crowds. It was a proud day for the branch, which took its place beside many other groups and pageants promoting inclusion and diversity.

On the home front, the online yoga classes introduced during lockdown continued into 2022, due to overwhelmingly positive feedback from members and families. The classes were delivered by a yoga teacher who is also a practising Occupational Therapist, and members enjoyed both the health and social benefits of taking part.



## Down Syndrome Tipperary branch

The Tipperary branch's *Meitheal 21* facility was fully utilised throughout 2022. From the innovative Sign & Dine programme, which saw members practising their Lámh sign language skills in a restaurant scenario, to the SpringHouse psychotherapy groups, it was a year for expanding horizons.

The Link and Connect group activities assisted members with verbal and non-verbal communications, through the medium of iPads and Nintendo Switches. Monday Night Hip-Hop proved as popular as ever, and Christmas was particularly lively, with Santa's grotto, a Christmas party and the Jingle Your Jumper campaign rounding out the year in style.



## Waterford and South Kilkenny Branch

Membership of the Waterford and South Kilkenny branch reached 175 in 2022, and those members were certainly kept busy. 42 branch members availed of speech & language therapy on a regular basis throughout the year, with occupational therapy added to the roster for the first time in 2022.

Junior Club members could enjoy soft play, therapeutic horse riding, FAI Football for All, and a host of other activities. For primary school kids, there were swimming lessons, dance & drama, courses in Lámh sign language and Numicon numeracy skills, among any more.

For secondary school members, there were lessons in cycling, horse-riding, swimming and IT, while adults could enjoy bowling, discos, swimming, cookery classes and planting & potting.



## Down Syndrome Wicklow

The after-effects of Covid were still being strongly felt by the Wicklow branch in 2022. Social events did return, however, to the joy and relief of members and families. A "Special Day of Flying" in Newcastle was particularly memorable for all concerned. The coming of autumn saw the return of the Halloween Disco, a fun-for-all-the-family favourite which was badly missed during the Covid lay-off. The branch is looking forward with great optimism to getting full back on its feet in 2023.

## Wexford Branch

2022 saw an emphasis on youth, as the branch's very active Tots group took part in music sessions, sensory play sessions, and aerial fitness, all organised by David Gannon.

The 12+ age-group enjoyed dance lessons with Martina Leacy in Enniscorthy, and put all that practice to good use by performing at the branch Christmas party in Ferrycarrig Hotel.

Throughout the year, branch members got out and about in their beautiful county, visiting Johnstown Castle and Ballycross Apple farm, in addition to some delightful bowling and cinema excursions.







# SECTION 3: NATIONAL OFFICE REVIEW 2022

## Compliance, Governance and Organisational Structure

The Board of Directors is responsible for governance and oversight of the organisation's activities. All directors are volunteers. They met monthly throughout 2022. The Board delegates day-to-day operational management to the Chief Executive Officer, Barry Sheridan, who is supported by the executive leadership team.

The Board continued the implementation of the recommendations made in the 2021 Governance Review. This led to a new code of conduct being introduced for directors, a review of the conflict of interest policy, a revised induction for Board Directors, a skills audit of current directors and an assessment of the skills that would benefit the Board. The Board reviewed risks at every meeting and assessed means of mitigating these risks for the benefit of the organisation.

The Board also appointed a sub committee to review the organisations policies and this met 5 times throughout the year.

Following consultations and surveys with Members, Branch Committee representatives, the executive and the Board A new Strategic Plan was adopted by the Board for 2022- 2025.

The Board commenced its review of the Memorandum and Articles of Down Syndrome Ireland to future proof the organisation. It also wanted to implement changes in the composition of the Board in line with best practice recommendations.

### Appointments and resignations

A number of Board members resigned during the year for personal reasons but the Board was grateful for their time in office and for being key members in future proofing the organisation. Marian Flanagan (former President), Alan Martin (former Treasurer)

Amanda Cahill O' Donnell (former secretary) and Fiona Dunny (HR expert).

### The AGM

The President of DSI invited Sinéad Friel, the Chairperson of the National Advisory Council, DSI's representative body for people with Down syndrome, to address the AGM. Sinéad's address focused on the membership, and the organisation's priorities.

A new President, Treasurer and Secretary were appointed at the AGM. Gerard O' Carroll, Nichola Aylward and Sylvaine Ní Cheallacháin were respectively appointed to the roles.

Proxy voting was used at the AGM for greater branch and member engagement with the voting process. The Board also introduced Standing Orders to govern the conduct of the AGM.

Two Board members, Liam McLoughlin and John Upton retired from the Board as their tenure of 6 years was complete. Two Board members extended their 3 years tenure as their first term had ended, Bernadette Connolly and Paul Radford.

The Annual Accounts, produced by Hayden Brown, were approved at the AGM and it was agreed that the Board could appoint auditors for the coming year.

### Members

There were approximately 3,000 members registered with the organisation at the date of the AGM.

### Branches

DSI has 25 branches across the country run by volunteer committees, supporting the charitable objects and membership at ground level.

# Adult Education

## Overview

2022 commenced with the lifting of many Covid-19 restrictions, allowing in-person classes to resume, in line with the wishes of the majority of our focus group members. Blended online and in-person courses continued until September, with 88 members completing specially developed modules on music, movies, and healthy living & wellbeing. Post-course evaluations showed that members now felt more confident using technology and had made new friends.

By September, demand for online classes had diminished, with members expressing an overwhelming preference to return to in-person learning.

## Book Clubs for Adults with Down syndrome pilot

One of many success stories of 2022, was the development of the Book Club programme to support members' literacy and wellbeing through social contact.

Naas Library in Co. Kildare led the way, beginning our first book club for adults with Down syndrome.

Kildare Branch members Kim O'Kelly and Niamh Flannery tailored and delivered training for library staff, alongside DSI Adult Education Officer Sinéad Flynn. Mullingar Library and Edgeworthstown Library followed suit. Members meet monthly to chat about the month's reading.

The book clubs are not only an excellent way to maintain literacy skills, but also to meet friends and be part of the community. Down Syndrome Ireland plans to develop the pilot scheme further in 2023, extending its reach to more locations throughout the country.



**"It's my first year in the book club. I can socialize with my two friends but it's nice to have new friends and new members. I like reading too"**

**Book Club member Niamh**



**"On Mondays, we do reading, writing and computers. On Tuesdays, we do art, cooking and drama. My favourite part is learning to type on the computer. Anyone thinking of going to college, you should because you make new friends and new skills".**

**Gerard O'Dwyer, attending Cahir College of Further Education**

## Partnership with Education and Training Boards

Our partnership with ETBs continued to flourish in 2022. Working with the ETBs has meant that our adult members no longer have to pay and fundraise to access adult education and training.

The partnership broadens the scope for our adult members to find courses at the right level, and to follow other pathways such as progressing to other ETB courses or taking up meaningful employment.

We began the year with classes in 5 Colleges of Further Education – in Parnell Square, Finglas, Roscommon, Dundalk and Castlereagh. By December, classes had begun in 7 new Colleges of Further Education – Dunmore, Cahir, Thurles, Kildare Town, Wexford Town, Waterford City and Mullingar. Dundalk students studied Work Skills while students in the other colleges studied Literacy and Technology.

Cork Branch Field of Dreams students began their second successful year in their 2-year Literacy and Technology Programme supported by the Cork ETB.

## Personal Development Programme Pilot

Kerry Branch students completed the Personal Development Programme Pilot.

It aims to develop social and life skills, to increase self-awareness, self-esteem and independence, to enhance employability and to promote inclusion.

The students fully embraced the programme, and their feedback has been very helpful in its further development. The students also participated in a project with Down Syndrome International and Inclusion International, helping to develop a set of guidelines for organisations on better including people with intellectual disabilities. These guidelines can be viewed on the website [Listenincluderespect.com](https://listenincluderespect.com).



## Work Skills

Students in the Limerick and Louth Meath branches graduated from the Work Skills programme course. The course is designed to prepare adults with Down syndrome to take up meaningful employment, and to equip them with the skills to navigate the world of work. Students explore their own strengths and interests, and discuss how these could be useful in the workplace, as well as learning how to go about finding and keeping a job. Students study four modules over one or two years, including a module based on interpersonal skills.



# National Employment Programme

## 2022 stats

No of paid jobs:

69

No in work experience:

29

No of employers engaged with:

85

No of employers providing employment:

34

No engaged in training programmes:

82

No engaged in pre-employment  
& pre-interview training:

163

## Specsavers

We began our partnership with Specsavers in May, with Specsavers Ennis being the first store to come on board employing Owen McDonagh from our Clare Branch. Sean Power, Store Director in Ennis did huge work with us for the remainder of 2022, to promote our National Employment Programme among his colleagues in Specsavers stores nationwide, and our partnership went from strength to strength, with 11 positions created in Specsavers stores throughout the year and a commitment from Specsavers to continue to expand the partnership and job opportunities into 2023 and beyond.

## Employment Days

We held Employment Days in Dublin, Mid-West (Limerick, Clare & Tipperary), Waterford & Wexford. The aim of our Employment Days is to inform adults with Down syndrome, their families, support workers & employers about our National Employment Programme. As part of the day, our Employment & Adult Education talk about our programmes & work to date. We give feedback from those out at work and some of our members with Down syndrome speak about their jobs too. We like to invite potential employers along to the day too, to spread awareness. We also run taster workshops for adults with Down syndrome, to learn and trial some skills for work. These days are a fantastic opportunity to meet with families, exchange ideas & for our team to learn about job seekers and their interests too.

## Charity Shop Employment Pilot

Building on the success of DS Cork's Charity Shop Training & Employment Programme, we replicated the model in Dublin, in our Templeogue and Finglas shops. We carried out interviews and retail training, and throughout 2022 our first 2 employees with Down syndrome began work in our Finglas charity shop. We will continue to build and expand on this programme over time, learning from our members out in work. To date it has been a huge success.

## Conrad Hotel Barista Academy Programme

Conrad Hotel Dublin recruited 4 adults with Down syndrome in 2022. They have been a fantastic employer to work with, and as part of discussions and a request for additional training, in October 2022 we ran the first round of our Barista Training Programme in partnership with Conrad Dublin. This is a 5 week course, which has been specifically designed for learners with Down syndrome who are interested in working in the hospitality sector. 4 students completed the training as part of the first round.



### Grafton Barber

We completed our second cycle of Barber Training with the Grafton Barber. 6 students completed training in the Grafton Barber Academy on Grafton Street and work experience in their local Grafton Barber salon across Ireland. To date 12 students have completed the training nationwide, with 10 securing paid employment in the local Grafton Barber salon where they have completed their work placement.



### Compass @ Google

We partnered with Compass who provide catering for Google and completed our first round of Catering Training with 4 adults with Down syndrome. The catering programme was a 10 week programme, specifically aimed at adults with Down syndrome. Pictured here is Stephen Sharkey O’Keeffe who was offered permanent, paid employment after completing the programme.



### Funding

Our programme was funded in 2022 through the Dormant Account Fund and this will continue into 2023. This fund is managed through Pobal. We are greatly appreciative of the support of this fund and from Pobal, which enables us to continue the work of our National Employment Programme.



# Primary and Post-Primary Education

Providing the best possible educational experience for our members continued to be the main focus throughout 2022. Training, assistance and advice for schools and families were priorities as children progressed through the various stages at primary and post primary, or special school. Best practice was continually researched to ensure the information provided was the most up-to-date available.

## Training

39 trainings & school supports were facilitated at all levels- primary, post primary & third level (post graduate)

## Webinars

The following webinars were facilitated over the course of the year

- Pre-School Transition
- Primary School Transition
- Post Primary School Transition
- Specific Learning Needs of Children with Down syndrome at Primary School – Teachers, SNAs & Professionals
- Specific Learning Needs of Children with Down syndrome at Primary School – Parents
- Managing Behaviour at Pre-School & Primary School Stages with Mr John Curran
- Managing Behaviour at Primary & Post -Primary School Stages with Mr John Curran

We had a great attendance at all events, with approximately 800 participants over the 7 evenings. While we are very aware of the benefits of online sessions in making information more accessible to families and schools, we do feel that the opportunities for very valuable interaction at onsite, in-person events is missed by participants. The online training webinars and seminars will continue in 2023, and we also hope to be to return to some onsite events nationally.

## Assistance & Advice

There were 2305 email and telephone communications with parents and schools throughout the year. There were in excess of 1000 education –related email and telephone communications with other professionals, organisations and branches.

## Research Forum

Our project on the Importance of Parent-Teacher Communication was presented at the Down Syndrome Education International Research Forum. An information document is available as a free download on the DSI website and members can share this with their child's school. In addition, templates for a communication journal for both primary and post-primary stages are available as a free download. Template pages can be printed as required and added to a folder /booklet to be used daily by both parents and teachers.

## Conference

The NCSE Research conference was attended virtually in November. The theme of the 2022 conference was Post-pandemic Education and Experiences of Transition: Entering the Irish system and leaving school

## Representation at Meetings

A number of meetings were attended over the course of the year with groups and organisations, including meetings with Department of Education officials, NCSE officials, NCSE Consultative Forum, Children's Rights Alliance, Ombudsman, WRC, Tusla, DS (International), DES Special Education Forum, NDA and various other advocacy groups.

## Surveys

The following survey was conducted to ascertain member's opinions:

- School Placement

## Submission

A submission was made to government bodies and organisations highlighting our concerns in relation to:

- UNCRC submission –State Report

## Publications

Education related articles written by Fidelma Brady were published by the Irish Learning Support Association (ILSA) and the National Association of Principals & Deputy Principals (NAPD).

- Managing the Transition from Primary to Post Primary for Students with Down syndrome (ILSA)
- Inclusion at Post-Primary Level for the Student with Down syndrome - An Overview (ILSA & NAPD)





## Fundraising & Retail

With just 19% of Down Syndrome Ireland's annual funding coming from the state, the organisation remains heavily dependent on fundraising activities and the generosity of the general public for its income.

2022 saw the welcome end of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Down Syndrome Ireland continued to adapt its traditional fundraising campaigns and activities online with the ongoing development of digital and social fundraising methods.

The start of the war in the Ukraine in March and the cost of living crisis both had a negative impact on the charity sector in Ireland throughout 2022.

Lower levels of disposable income resulted in reduced donations and community engagement.

Down Syndrome Ireland's fundraising income in 2022 remained at the same level as 2021 and continued to reflect a return to pre-COVID levels. This income was achieved through the implementation of a wide variety of fundraising campaigns and activities which included the following highlights:

### World Down Syndrome Day

'Lots of Socks' continues to be an important annual international awareness building campaign to mark World Down Syndrome Day (March 21st). It has grown in Ireland over the years largely through increased community, corporate and social media engagement. In 2022, this growing support was harnessed by actively encouraging more individuals, families, schools, communities and companies to get involved by wearing their most colourful socks and sharing their photos and videos online. They were also prompted to make a donation, if they were in a position to do so. The campaign was once again a great success from both an awareness and fundraising perspective.



### National Raffle

Following the success of Down Syndrome Ireland's 50th Anniversary National Raffle in 2021, it was decided to run another raffle through our branch network in 2022. The well-known singer Cliona O'Hagan came on board as the campaign ambassador and the top prize of a fabulous family holiday in Disneyland Paris was won by a family in the west of Ireland. The National Raffle was another successful fundraising campaign between our participating local branches and National Office.



## Kilimanjaro 4 DSI

After a lengthy two-year lay-off due to the pandemic, our Kilimanjaro 4 DSI climbers finally took on the challenge of a lifetime in July 2022. This was no walk in the park, as over the course of a 12-day itinerary they climbed the 19,341 feet to the summit of Kilimanjaro, which is not only Africa's highest point, but the highest free-standing mountain in the world - seeing the Down Syndrome Ireland's flag flourished at the summit was a proud moment for everyone.

Our wonderful group of adventurers included a number of member parents, siblings and relatives from our branches around the country who tirelessly fundraised over €60,000.



## Corporate

Throughout 2022 our corporate partnerships continued to play a key role with a number of companies including MACE, iNUA Collection and Fidelis Insurance etc. each proactively supporting Down Syndrome Ireland with a wide variety of staff fundraising activities. In addition, a number of new corporate partnerships were welcomed during the year with companies including Zurich, Go-Ahead and the Press Up group etc. We are most grateful to our partners and their fantastic teams for all their continued support, it is very much appreciated.

Down Syndrome Ireland was also very fortunate to be chosen once again by the wonderful staff at Woodie's as one of four charities to benefit from their annual Woodie's Heroes 2022 fundraising campaign. Despite the cost of living crisis, the campaign was a huge success and raised over €490,000 through its stores and the overwhelming generosity of its customers. Down Syndrome Ireland's share of the funds raised went towards supporting our Early Years Communication Programme.



## Charity Shops

Down Syndrome Ireland's four charity shops in Dublin play an integral part in our annual fundraising activities and provide regular sustainable income. Sales across all our shops rebounded immediately post-COVID and continued strong throughout 2022, with average monthly sales up 30% on the previous years. These strong sales can be attributed to a number of factors including the cost-of-living crisis and the recognition of the growing importance of the circular economy.

The continued success of our shops is due to the support of our fantastic team of shop managers, volunteer staff and our wonderful loyal customers.



Even though the war in the Ukraine and the cost-of-living crisis brought uncertainty and difficulties during 2022, we are so very grateful for the support that Down Syndrome Ireland continued to receive from countless individuals, schools, communities and companies all over the country, through their generous donations and various fundraising activities. This support is vital for the funding of our work with children and adults with Down syndrome, and their families throughout Ireland. Thank you!

## Communications

In October, Down Syndrome Ireland advertised for a new Communications Manager, with Aoife Feeley being appointed to the role.

The stories of our members and branches resonated with the public throughout the year, both in the newspapers and on broadcast and social media.

As ever, World Down Syndrome Day proved a strong showcase for our members' stories, and a touchstone for public support.

In addition to a torrent of support from well-wishers and support on social media, World Down Syndrome Day also brought our message to the national media.

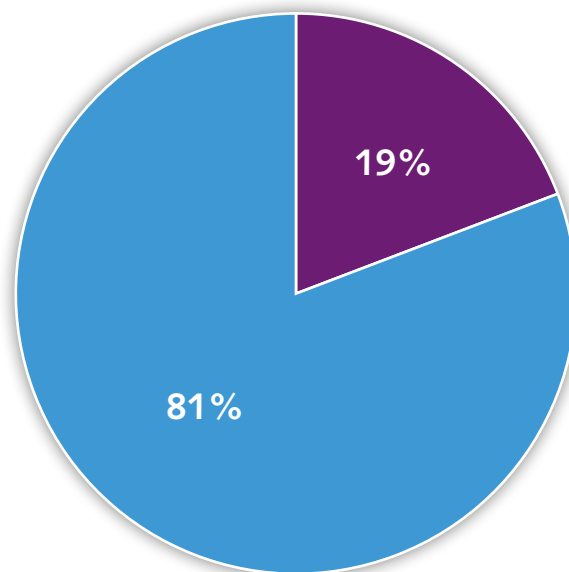
Five "Day in the Life" member videos were broadcast on RTÉ Junior, and proved hugely popular.

Items on World Down Syndrome Day were also featured in the Irish Examiner, the Irish Independent, Irish Daily Star and on Ireland AM.

The latter third of the year saw Christmas Jumper Day engage a large number of social media users, while our Employment programme also proved hugely popular among social audience. Our posts highlighting members in their workplaces racked up enormous numbers, with a single post achieving a reach of over one million users.

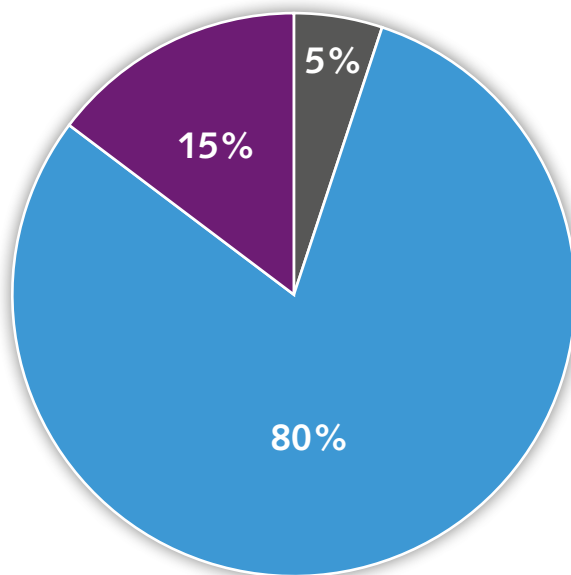
## Finance and Accounts

### DSI Income Analysis 2022



● Government Funding    ● Fundraising Income

## DSI Expenditure Analysis 2022



● Costs of Generating Voluntary Income   ● Charitable Activities   ● Governance Costs

## Research

Facilitating research requests was a focus throughout 2022, by prioritising high quality relevant research that will make a difference for people with Down syndrome and their families, along with initiating and supporting key research across the lifespan. Understanding current research and practice and identifying gaps in knowledge where further research is needed promotes the development of better information and services to enhance the lives of people with Down syndrome.

Given the close link between communication skills and access to education, the need for a multidisciplinary approach to education is clear. Providing a speech, language and communication thread in all DSI trainings continues to be a valuable use of time, helping teachers, families and other stakeholders understand the importance of considering communication challenges when supporting people with Down syndrome.

As well as the webinars outlined below, training was provided to libraries, ETB tutors and Postgraduate teachers on the Special Educational Needs course in NUIG. Ongoing professional development to maintain an awareness of research and practice nationally and internationally is vital in order to ensure that any information and support provided is accurate and based on best available evidence.

### Research

A big thanks to all families who engaged with and supported research in 2022. Research is essential to help develop best practice and ensure that people with Down syndrome receive effective support from the very early years until old age.

Our project on understanding and measuring reading in adults with Down syndrome was presented at the Down Syndrome Education International Research

Forum, and this project is continuing in 2023. Working with adults with DS as co-researchers has been an extremely positive experience for all involved.

An online music and signing research project aimed at supporting early vocabulary development was offered to all members with a child aged 1-3 in 2022. This intervention started with pilot sessions in 2021, and was designed in consultation with families. 80 members participated in the research, which included a new video every week along with weekly support sessions for parents to help them make best use of the materials and share ideas.

We also worked with researchers to facilitate the development of an app called Empathic, which is used to support care and understanding of people who have no means of communicating directly (see: <https://seamlesscare.ie/>)

## Conference

An SLT Special Interest Group conference was organised for SLTs, student SLTs and researchers. While the conference covered developments in research and practice, there was also a forum for discussion on Progressing Disabilities with guest speakers from the HSE to communicate the goals and structures of current HSE therapy provision.

Unfortunately, the proposed model of care does not appear to align with research evidence, family needs, or best practice in the provision of therapy to support the development of children with Down syndrome, and this has been raised with HSE representatives, the Joint Oireachtas Committee and the Minister for Disability.

## Representation at Meetings

Liaison with relevant groups and organisations continues to be important. Regular meetings were held with the HSE team regarding Covid 19 & Vaccination updates, to ensure that members were well informed. We also attended meetings and maintained links with the Disability Federation of Ireland, the NCSE, the Down Syndrome Medical Interest Group, the Ombudsman, the Children's Rights Alliance, Children in Hospital Ireland and other advocacy groups.

## Surveys

As well as feedback surveys following webinars, a survey was developed to research members' experiences and opinions regarding access to therapy services under the Progressing Disabilities model of care. Responses were analysed and used to form the basis of the submission below.

## Submission

A submission was made to government highlighting our concerns in relation to the failure of the HSE to provide adequate therapy services to people with Down syndrome, and in particular, the Progressing Disabilities model, leading to an invitation to speak to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters on the importance of SLT provision and current issues faced by members.

## Webinars

The following webinars were co-facilitated over the course of the year

- Pre-School Transition
- Primary School Transition
- Post Primary School Transition
- Specific Learning Needs of Children with Down syndrome at Primary School – Teachers, SNAs & Professionals
- Specific Learning Needs of Children with Down syndrome at Primary School – Parents
- Managing Behaviour at Pre-School & Primary School Stages with John Curran, behaviour specialist
- Managing Behaviour at Primary & Post -Primary School Stages with John Curran

There was good attendance at all events, with approximately 800 participants over 7 evenings. Online training webinars and seminars will continue in 2023, hopefully alongside some onsite events.







Down  
Syndrome  
Ireland

National Leadership Local Support

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