



Annual Report 2025

Together, We Go Further.

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About Down Syndrome Ireland



Down Syndrome Ireland (DSI) offers support and services to people with Down syndrome and their families throughout Ireland.

Our membership comprises of 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, adult education and training, 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

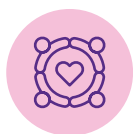
We work towards a society that enables all people with Down syndrome to participate to their fullest potential, as equal members with full entitlement as Irish citizens.

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 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.



Collaboration

Together we are stronger. Sharing information, knowledge and expertise improves outcomes for everyone both locally and nationally.



Respect

Everyone should be supported to live a meaningful, rewarding, healthy, and happy life.



Integrity

We will act with honesty, accountability, and professionalism at all levels of the organisation.

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.



2025 at a Glance

The difference Down Syndrome Ireland made, in numbers

National Reach & Community

25

Branches Nationwide

- ✓ Thousands of members and families supported nationwide
- ✓ National campaigns delivered across schools, workplaces & communities
- ✓ Services delivered across all life stages from early years to adulthood

Fundraising & Public Support

€253,000

Raised through national fundraising campaigns, including our charity shops, website donations and the WDSD sock sale

15.9 million

People reached across social media, helped by our newly relaunched website





Supporting Families Every Step of the Way



2,021

Clients supported individually through Speech & Language Therapy, including specialist reading programmes in 40 schools



506

Families also supported directly, from New Parent Guides at diagnosis to Lámh training for parents and professionals

Building Skills & Independence

73 members

Gained paid employment in 2025, backed by pre-employment and work readiness training

610

People attended our education webinars and seminars, alongside educator training delivered nationwide

Advocacy & Community Voice

300+

Consultation responses gathered from families and adults with Down syndrome

52

Support group meetings held nationwide, covering regression, all-ages support and dual diagnosis support, plus our adult health conference

Welcome from President

Martina Kelly

A chairde, Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to read Down Syndrome Ireland's 2025 Annual Report. It was a significant year for the organisation, one marked by change and challenge, but also by remarkable growth, collaboration and progress. Together, our members, families, volunteers, staff and supporters continued to strengthen our organisation, expand services and advocate for a more inclusive Ireland.



Before I discuss the work carried out in 2025, I want to acknowledge some outstanding figures across Down Syndrome Ireland. Firstly, I would like to thank Gerard O'Carroll, who stepped down as President of the Board at the end of 2025. Gerard dedicated himself to Down Syndrome Ireland throughout his tenure, always putting our members first. It was a privilege to work alongside him and I thank him sincerely for his commitment and leadership. I would also like to thank Will Cronin. Will stepped into the role as temporary CEO after the untimely passing of Nichola Aylward at the end of 2024. It was a very distressing time, and Will handled this difficult period with care and sensitivity, while providing stability and ensuring the organisation continued to serve its members with great passion, dedication and hard work.

Following an extensive recruitment process, I was delighted to welcome Aidan Stacey as our new CEO in autumn 2025. Aidan brings a wealth of experience from the disability and charity sector, and it was clear from the outset that he shared Down Syndrome Ireland's values. In his first few months he travelled extensively to meet branches, members and staff, and has already made a significant contribution to the organisation.

One of the things I am most proud of is that Down Syndrome Ireland continues to listen to the voices of our members. The National Advisory Council demonstrated this brilliantly at the AGM, showcasing the impact of their advocacy on accessible transport, disability rights and national policy. Their meetings with government representatives and collaboration with organisations - both in Ireland and internationally - remind us that meaningful change happens when people with lived experience are at the centre of the conversation.

Improving access to information for our members and their families was another important milestone this year with the launch of our new website. Designed with accessibility and usability at its heart, it provides members, families, professionals and the wider public with easier access to trusted information, resources and supports.

Growing employment is always a top priority. We constantly strive for more paid, meaningful employment in many different sectors. Our employment team continued to build relationships with employers while supporting more members in meaningful work. With each new employer, workplaces become more inclusive spaces. The more people with Down syndrome in employment, the better society becomes.

Support for families grew this year, from education, speech and language, advocacy and family support. One big milestone in 2025 was the launch of the New Parents Guide and the Tell it Right conference. For years, we have heard the horror stories of parents being told their child has Down syndrome in the most insensitive ways. With our colleagues in the UK's Down's Syndrome Association, our Early Years department delivered a conference for medical staff on telling the parents their child has Down syndrome in the correct way. The words used when delivering a diagnosis matter. A simple "Congratulations" can make an enormous difference to a family's first experience.

Fundraising also went from strength to strength. From Lots of Socks and Christmas Jumper Day, Ice Cream Fundays and Purple Run, communities across Ireland demonstrated incredible generosity. These events not only raised vital funds but also helped spread awareness and bring people together in support of our members.

None of this could have happened if it wasn't for the team in Down Syndrome Ireland, the members and their families, the local branches and volunteers. The work that goes on behind the scenes of this charity is massive. The resilience, determination and tenacity of families fighting for better supports and services, the dedication of staff advocating tirelessly for change, and the commitment of volunteers and supporters fundraising for the people they care about are what make Down Syndrome Ireland such a remarkable organisation.

Thank you to everyone who has played a part in our journey this year. Together, we have achieved so much, and together we will continue to achieve even more.

As we look ahead, the Board remains committed to building on the momentum of 2025. Together with our members, the National Advisory Council, staff, volunteers and supporters, we will continue to advocate for meaningful change, strengthen our services and work towards a more inclusive Ireland where every person with Down syndrome can achieve their full potential.

Le meas,

Martina Kelly

Martina Kelly
President

Welcome from CEO

Aidan Stacey

A chairde, Although I joined the organisation in August, it has already become clear to me that Down Syndrome Ireland is defined by its people. Across every branch, every programme and every service, I have seen an unwavering commitment to ensuring that people with Down syndrome and their families are supported, valued and empowered at every stage of life.



As I reflect on the achievements highlighted throughout this report, I do so with enormous admiration for everyone who made them possible. This was a year of significant progress across the organisation. From expanding employment opportunities and strengthening our education and speech and language services, to growing our advocacy work, fundraising campaigns and national profile, the impact of Down Syndrome Ireland has continued to grow because of the dedication of our members, volunteers, employees, branches and supporters.

What has struck me most since joining is the strength of our community. There is a genuine passion for improving lives, a willingness to work together, and a determination to ensure that every person with Down syndrome has the opportunity to reach their full potential. These values are evident in every conversation I have had and every success story I have encountered.

Since joining, I have been lucky enough to attend some fantastic events. The Tell It Right conference was a powerful insight into the importance of hearing the diagnosis and how kindness and compassion can go a long way. The conference for Professionals and Caregivers, Supporting the Health and Wellbeing of Adults with Down Syndrome gave me a deeper understanding of some of the issues older adults face. In my first week, I attended the Tour de Munster, meeting members, volunteers and branch committee members in all the Munster branches and was inspired by the tenacity of those who created such an incredible fundraising event bringing so many branches together in celebration. One of my favourite moments so far has been attending the National Advisory Council AGM. The volume of work the NAC has done in 2025 is vast, and incredibly important. Their voices matter most and I want to amplify that.

While we should be proud of what has been achieved, we also recognise that challenges remain. Families continue to face barriers in accessing services, education, healthcare, employment and opportunities for independent living. Down Syndrome Ireland will continue to be a strong voice for our members, advocating for meaningful change while providing practical supports that make a real difference every day.

We are entering an exciting new chapter for Down Syndrome Ireland. Together, we will build on the strong foundations that already exist, strengthen our partnerships, continue to grow our services and ensure that our organisation remains ambitious, sustainable and most importantly, member-focused, for years to come.

What inspires me is the determination and goals of my team. Reading this report, I can see that each department has such brilliant, impactful plans for the year to come. From my short time working with this team, I have no doubt we can achieve what we set out to do, and then some!

I would like to sincerely thank our members and families, our dedicated employees, volunteers, branch committees, National Advisory Council, Board of Directors, donors, corporate partners and everyone who supports Down Syndrome Ireland. Your commitment, generosity and belief in our mission are what make our work possible. My biggest thanks to the incredible branches across the country who work tirelessly to support our community every day.

I look forward to my tenure in Down Syndrome Ireland. Together, we will continue working towards a society where every person with Down syndrome is supported to live the life they choose and achieve their full potential.

Aidan Stacey
Chief Executive Officer

Welcome from NAC Chair

Fintan Bray

My name is Fintan Bray. I am the Chairperson of the National Advisory Council. The National Advisory Council is also called the NAC.



So far this year, we have been busy. We have been in the Irish Independent, nominated for an award and met President Catherine Connolly, Taoiseach Micheál Martin, Minister Marian Harkin, Tanaiste Simon Harris, and MEP Nina Carberry.

I hope you enjoy reading all about our work in the digest. I am so proud of all of the NAC for the incredible work and the things we have achieved together

I look forward to updating you all at the end of 2026 with more exciting projects!

Fintan Bray
NAC Chair



National Advisory Council

Members: Ross O'Neill, Sinéad Friel, Orla Casey, Conor O'Donnell, Eric Nolan, Una Coates, Fintan Bray.

2025 was a very big year for the National Advisory Council (NAC). Projects included:

- **Transport for Ireland (TFI) Collaboration:** The NAC has been advocating for better transport for people with Down syndrome. A lot of people with Down syndrome now have jobs but it is hard to get to their job, independently, particularly in rural Ireland. They also wanted better public transport resources for people with Down syndrome. They worked with TFI on a project called 'My Journey, My Way'. They have made Easy Read guides on the new bus routes and are working on many more.
- **Research and Resources:** The NAC worked closely with Down Syndrome Ireland staff to help with ongoing research and to assist with Easy Read guide. These guides are for all people with Down syndrome and are resources that are extremely beneficial to them. DSI always gets approval from the NAC on any resource for members before publishing.
- **Electoral Commission Partnership:** In the last few years, we have had a lot of elections. The NAC worked very closely with the Electoral Commission (EC) to encourage people with Down syndrome to exercise their right to vote and use their voice. Conor was the face of their TV advertising campaign, and videos the NAC did for the EC were among their highest viewed videos throughout the elections.
- **Collaborations:** The NAC works in partnership with many different organisations, and they had many meetings. They attend regular meetings in the insurance company The Fidelis Partnership, where they update the staff on their work and advocacy. The NAC has regular meetings with a charity in Russia called Down Side Up, who are working on similar projects. They also work with Down Syndrome Scotland who are trying to start similar advisory councils, and the NAC members are helping to set them up.
- **Inclusion Ireland:** The NAC has a great working relationship with Inclusion Ireland. They met with the staff and shared many resources.
- **International Groups:** The NAC is very involved with Down Syndrome International and the Down Syndrome International Network Group. Fintan is a member of the new International Network Group and the NAC connects the national ambassador for Down Syndrome International, so they are updated on the work that is taking place in Ireland.
- **Meeting Important Figures:** The NAC regularly meets with important figures and decision makers, from politicians to ambassadors and more. The NAC met with Tánaiste Simon Harris to discuss their priority issues and were pleased to see issues they raised were featured in *The National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2025-2030*. They look forward to seeing real change from this in 2026 onwards.

2025 Outcomes

- Issues discussed with Tánaiste Simon Harris were featured in *The National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2025-2030*
- Easy Read documents created for research
- Better transport accessibility because of 'My Journey, My Way'
- More people with Down syndrome registered to vote because of the work with the Electoral Commission
- More awareness brought due to a stronger media presence of the NAC from press and social media



Early Years



Team

Early Intervention Specialists: Amanda Murphy and Silvia Segales-Angel

Highlights

- ✓ **New Parents Guide:** published and distributed to maternity hospitals.

- ✓ **Tell It Right:** Maternity Conference with UK Down's Syndrome Association in October with 100+ medical staff in attendance.

- ✓ **Collaboration with Hospitals:** The beginning of collaboration and liaison with Maternity Hospitals National

- ✓ **Breastfeeding policy:** Participation in the National Maternity Breastfeeding HSE Policy Update

- ✓ **Publicity:** Early Intervention, Specialist Silvia Segales-Angel, was a guest on the Baby Tribe podcast to discuss the Tell it Right conference and the importance of sharing a diagnosis in the right way. She was joined on the podcast by mum, Emer Flanagan, whose daughter Maisie has Down syndrome.

- ✓ **Webinars:** *Supporting Children with Down Syndrome in Early Years Settings, Starting Primary School, and Preparing Your Child To Become a Reader.*

- ✓ **Early Years Groups:** took place all over the country with babies and toddlers.

- ✓ **Lámh:** training for Early Years educators and families and Lámh online session with schools for the World Down Syndrome Day

- ✓ **Training:** on Down Syndrome to Home Visitors (from the National College of Ireland)

- ✓ **Consultations:** with families nationwide on early intervention.

Objectives

- Building relationships and providing education with both families and clinician departments in maternity hospitals.
- Updating and publishing the *New Parents Guide* and start distributing it to maternity hospitals and services for new parents.
- Providing training (through webinars and face to face courses) to parents and early-year educators.

Changes

Strengthened relationships with maternity hospitals to ensure parents receive up to date information. Parent gaining increased access to up to date, evidence-based information and links to resources through the *New Parents Guide*. Facilitated training and disseminating information so parents and educators have up to date and evidence-based information. Empowering families with up-to-date research, information and resources.

Statistics

- **Tell It Right Conference:** An in-person conference for maternity hospitals and services (100+ attendees from across Ireland, held in Kildare). The aim was to strengthen professionals' support for parents at the point of diagnosis and in the early days after birth.
- **New Parents Guide published:** A guide for new parents of babies with Down syndrome (300+ distributed nationwide). The aim was to provide parents with factual, balanced, clear and positive information at a time when they need it most.
- **Baby Tribe podcast participation:** A podcast for the general public and professionals (nationwide). The aim was to raise awareness of the Tell It Right programme and encourage better early communication with families.
- **Supporting children with Down syndrome in Early Years Settings:** Webinar for early years educators (37 attendees, online). The aim was to build educators' confidence and improve day-to-day inclusion and support in early years settings.

- **Early Years Groups:** A group programme for families (20+ families, Dublin). The aim was to reduce isolation, provide early guidance, and create a supportive community for parents.
- **Baby Group:** A group for new parents (Dublin). The aim was to support families during the newborn period with practical information and connection.
- **Toddler Group:** For families of children aged 2+ (Dublin). The aim was to support development and participation through play, routines, communication and early learning.
- **Lámh training programme:** Workshops and courses for parents, family members and educators (70 participants across Dublin, Leitrim, Galway, and online). The aim was to support parents and educators in learning Lámh signs to support children's communication and language development.
- **World Down Syndrome Day online event:** An online event for schoolchildren (300+). The aim was to increase awareness, encourage inclusion, and help peers learn Lámh to support communication.
- **Teaching Reading to Children with Down Syndrome:** Training session for branch attendees (20+, Leitrim and Sligo branches). The aim was to build capacity to support early literacy and language development at home and in education settings.
- **Starting Primary School:** Webinar for families nationwide (32 attendees, online). The aim was to help families prepare for the transition to primary school by providing practical information and guidance.
- **Early Learning Initiative training day (National College of Ireland):** Training for home visitors (40+, Dublin). The aim was to strengthen home visitors' knowledge and confidence in supporting families of children with DS in the early years.
- **Consultations with Families:** Direct support (email, calls, clinic, home and preschool visits) for families, educators and other professionals (40+ across Donegal, Wicklow, Kildare, Waterford, Wexford and Dublin). The aim was to provide timely information and individual guidance to families, educators and the wider community.



Positive Feedback

"I just wanted to thank you for your time and information. You were so understanding and thoughtful and I will never forget the support you provided me with,"

Mum of a 3-month-old baby.

"Thank you so much for seeing us. She loves all her Lámh signs and I'm glad we started early with them. Thanks so much!"

Mum of 2-year-old.

"Educated me on how the parents are informed of diagnosis in hospital and lack of support packs offered at time of diagnosis. Upskilled me on how to approach the topic given the parent might be still working through the diagnosis,"

Tell It Right Conference participant (clinician).

"I have more understanding now so I feel I will have a better ability to provide real information and facts to support the family. I will be more confident with my approach, and the positive body language and communication will ultimately instill confidence in the family in what we are saying and how we are supporting them,"

Tell It Right Conference participant (fetal medicine midwife).

"I think a reminder to all professionals of the emotional impact and memory of that moment of diagnosis is so important. Choosing your words and the context of their delivery is so important,"

Tell It Right Conference participant (social worker).

Key Objectives for 2026

- Develop and run an online support group for new and expectant parents.
- Develop and run a training programme for early childhood educators and partnership with Better Start.
- Provide webinars and training videos.
- Continue maternity hospital outreach programme. Building relationships and identifying gaps in pre-screening, pre-natal, and post-natal sections.
- Building strong networks with the wider Down syndrome community (Down syndrome Centres, Hub 21, Baskets of Love, CDNTs, DSA, and others).



Speech and Language Therapy



Team

National Speech and Language Coordinator: Olive Buckeridge

Speech and Language Therapists: Sallyann Murray, Laura Jeffery, Orla O'Mahony, Laura Murray, Eilis Hogan, Lily Reaney, Muireann Balfe, Anne Watson, Eimear Ryan, Susanna Stokes, Orlaith Maher, Nora Fitzgerald, Grainne Duignan, Katie Delaney, Kim Murphy, Ciara Dunn

Highlights

- ✓ **Conference Support:** Supported with Down Syndrome Ireland Tell It Right Conference; an information session for maternity and neonatal staff in October.
- ✓ **NCSE:** Ongoing meetings with the National Council for Special Education and government officials including minister for Education with regards to getting specialist supports into schools.
- ✓ **AAC:** Received funding to purchase iPads to trial AAC apps and to support the SLT clinical work.
- ✓ **SIG:** Held Online DSI Special Interest Group Conference.
- ✓ **Training:** SLT training to support consistent approaches to therapy. RLI training in January, and Bondar Speech Intervention in February.
- ✓ **RLI:** The Reading and Language Intervention for Children with Down Syndrome (RLI): 40 codes were provided to schools to use this specialist teaching programme to improve the reading and language skills of children with Down syndrome.
- ✓ **SLTAs:** 5 SLTAs were employed in Laois, Tipperary, Waterford, Kilkenny and in the Northwest; they support preschools, schools and families in using speech and language resources; See and Learn, RLI.

- ✓ Initial development of SLT Care Pathways was started and will be finished in 2026.
- ✓ Employed Head and Deputy Head of Speech and Language Therapy Programmes.
- ✓ The Down to Be Me Summer Camp at DSI Cork was run because of the ESB regeneration fund. This camp offered primary and secondary school children a fun, inclusive space that built confidence, friendships, and supported communication through creative and social activities.
- ✓ See and Learn Packs were purchased thanks to Woodie Heroe's grant; these resources have been used by the SLTs and SLTAs to support speech and language skills at home, and in preschools/schools.

Objectives

- **Health:** The SLT department contributed to the DSI Tell It Right conference, which played a key role in educating neonatal staff and wider service providers on how to sensitively support parents following a recent diagnosis of Down syndrome. This increased awareness and understanding, which helps ensure parents receive timely, compassionate, and informed support. This contributed to improved parental mental health and, in turn, more positive outcomes for both parents and their children.
- **Education:** Through the support from the SLTs and the SLTA programme, preschools and schools were supported to effectively use specific Down syndrome educational resources to enhance inclusive learning and communication practices. This targeted support helped build staff confidence and consistency in supporting children with Down syndrome across educational settings. In addition, further Lámh training was provided, strengthening practitioners' skills in using keyword signing to support communication and participation for all learners.

Changes

Collectively, these outcomes have brought meaningful improvements to the lives of children with Down syndrome by expanding access to specialised, informed support in settings where it was not previously available. More preschools and schools were able to access targeted guidance and resources, helping to ensure children received consistent, inclusive support that promoted communication, confidence, and participation. In Cork, children with Down syndrome also had the opportunity to attend a dedicated summer camp; an experience from which they are often excluded; providing valuable opportunities for social connection, enjoyment, and a sense of belonging.

Statistics

- 40 schools gained access to a specialist reading programme: RLI.
- 5 SLTAs were employed to support the delivery of the SLT service in Waterford, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Laois and Northwest.
- 2,021 clients were seen on an individual basis by the SLTs and SLTAs last year.
- 506 families were supported by SLT.

Positive Feedback

Feedback on Cork summer camp

"Thank you and all the staff for an amazing camp last week. The kids really enjoyed it and bounced out the door every morning."

Compliment to SLTA

"You have had a hugely positive impact in supporting the implementation of the programme. Your guidance, modelling and advice for teachers have helped staff to use the See and Learn resources consistently and effectively in the classroom. Your input has greatly supported both the children's progress and teachers' confidence in delivering the programme."

Feedback on See and Learn from St Patrick's School

"The See and Learn packs have been very beneficial in our school, and we have integrated them across a number of classes as part of our literacy and communication programmes. Teachers are currently using Sound Packs 1, 2 and 3 throughout the school, and these have been particularly effective in supporting students to develop early speech sound awareness and sound production. The structured, visual nature of the programme has helped many of our pupils to focus on individual sounds and practice them in a clear and engaging way."

Key Objectives for 2026

Build a Standardised, High Quality Clinical Governance Framework

- Develop and implement a national SLT Policy and SOP.
- Standardise clinical governance, record keeping, and data systems across all 25 branches.
- Ensure reliable national data collection to inform service planning and funding.
- Embed consistent pathways so all members understand and can access SLT service.

Deliver an Equitable, Lifespan SLT Service Across All Branches

- Ensure every branch has access to reliable SLT support, including intervention, information, and resources.
- Expand service delivery using a regional coverage model.
- Establish regional SLT teams supporting multiple branches to reduce inequity.
- Guarantee equitable access for members of all ages across the organisation.

Strengthen Workforce Capacity, Retention, and Future Pipeline

- Implement a workforce retention strategy that supports wellbeing, supervision, and career progression.
- Build a strong graduate pipeline through university partnerships and structured placements.
- Develop a sustainable staffing model aligned with longterm service needs.
- Promote a culture of professional development and clinical excellence.

Secure Long Term Funding and Organisational Sustainability

- Develop a longterm funding strategy that supports stable SLT service delivery.
- Use national data to demonstrate impact and strengthen funding applications.
- Align service growth with financial sustainability and organisational priorities.
- Build partnerships that enhance resource sharing and reduce duplication.

Enhance Collaboration and Community Integration

- Strengthen collaboration with families, schools, employers, community groups, and service providers.
- Increase awareness of the SLT care pathway among members and stakeholders.
- Promote co-design and shared decision-making in service development.
- Build regional networks that support consistent communication and integrated care.

During 2025, considerable groundwork was laid to support meaningful organisational and structural change across the organisation. Towards the end of the year, this work began to come together, creating clarity and momentum. This foundation has paved the way for a number of exciting developments in the provision of DSI's Speech and Language Therapy services in 2026.



Education



Team

Head of Education Dr Fidelma Brady

Highlights

- ✓ **Collaboration:** Collaborative seminars with NCSE (National Council for Special Education) for post primary teachers
- ✓ **Panel:** Participation in panel discussion with Minister Michael Moynihan at the NABSME conference
- ✓ **Conferences:** Presentations at two ILSA conferences
- ✓ **Research Forum:** Representing DSI at the International Research Forum

Objectives

Providing the best possible educational experience for our members continued to be the focus throughout the year. 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.

Changes

Continuing and increasing information for parents of children entering school on options, processes and procedures on finding the appropriate education setting for their child. Increased and continued the provision of appropriate information and training for teachers and schools in both mainstream and special settings. Working with branches and parents to understand and advocate for the allocation of sufficient and appropriate resources and supports to be allocated to meet the needs of members.

Statistics

- There were more than 4,500 emails and 300 telephone communications with parents, schools, other professionals, organisations and branches throughout the year.
- 15 multi-disciplinary meetings were attended in schools and with parents where difficult situations arose.

Training

- 6 training seminars were provided for postgraduate and undergraduate students in third level colleges
- 2 conferences for Post Primary teachers were facilitated in collaboration with the NCSE

Webinars

- 10 webinars and seminars were facilitated over 2025 attended by 610 participants.

Representation at Meetings

- 8 collaborative meetings with the NCSE
- 7 meetings with Department of Education and Youth
- 5 meetings with Ministers
 - Introductory meeting with Minister McEntee and Minister Moynihan
 - Meetings with Minister Moynihan re: special classes
- 3 meetings with SNA Workforce Development Group
- 2 meetings with NEPS
- 2 meetings with TDs
 - Online meeting with Deputy Keira Keogh TD re: Special classes
 - Telephone meeting with Deputy Alan Kelly TD re: Special classes
- Participated in 3 DSEI Reading Research Group meetings
- 4 consultations submitted



- 4 conferences presented at:
 - ILSA Spring Conference (In person with Nicola Hart)
 - LSA Autumn Conference (In person with Nicola Hart)
 - NABMSE Conference (Panel discussion with Minister Moynihan, Brendan Doody (Inspectorate) and Sinead Flynn)
 - DSI (SLT) Special Interest Group (SIG) – Online

Positive Feedback

From NABMSE Conference committee member attended with Head of Further Education and Training Sinead Flynn

"Your basic statistics about the current lack of provision for children and young people with Down syndrome were enormously impactful, and I'm thrilled that the minister was there to hear you both. The audience was delighted to see you there too, as you reflected the worries of many principals of special schools who fear that their admissions are being influenced by bodies other than their own Board of Management. It is time that the minister and department were reminded of their commitment to the right of all children/young people with SEN to an appropriate education in the appropriate setting. You both represented Down Syndrome Ireland superbly."

Key Objectives for 2026

- Continue phone and email support
- Multi-Disciplinary school support meetings (as necessary)
- Continue with ITE and PG teacher training through universities
- Continue with Ministerial and DES engagement and lobbying as required
- Continue engagement with other advocacy organisations and Government bodies
- To develop topical webinars to be delivered per month during the school year and recorded for the website.
- Develop a range of short podcasts for the website on specific topics.
- To develop programmes for:
 - TY
 - Guidance in Post Primary schools and Special schools
 - Transition from Senior Cycle to Further Education
*Dependent on additional personnel being provided in the Education department
- To engage in longitudinal research around academic progression for students with Down syndrome at Post Primary stage (both mainstream and special schools/ classes)
*Dependent on additional personnel being provided in the Education department

Further Education and Training



Team

Head of Further Education and Training: Sinéad Flynn

Further Education and Training Officers: Aisling Brown, Mary Frances O'Dwyer, Nuala Byrne, Elizabeth Fox

Highlights

✓ **Minister Meeting:** The team met the new Minister for Further and Higher Education James Lawless. Members Derek McSweeney and Mark O'Meara joined DSI President Gerard O'Carroll, Interim CEO Will Cronin, Head of Employment Aoife Gaffney and Head of Adult Education Sinéad Flynn. They advocated for meaningful pathways and supported transitions from post-primary school to further education, higher education and employment, as well as reasonable accommodation and transport options in further education.

✓ **My Journey, My Way Transport Campaign:** Transport was highlighted as a top priority from the Advisory Councils. That began a collaboration with the NTA (National Transport Authority) on a joint campaign *My Journey, My Way*. The team developed Easy Reads in collaboration with adults

with Down syndrome for the new Dublin Bus routes, with more planned for the coming year. As part of the collaboration, twelve members worked as Mystery Travel Shopper, giving feedback to improve public transport in Ireland.

✓ **Presidential Election webinar and case study:** 2025 was another pivotal year for our trailblazing advocates. Kildare member, Conor O'Donnell, was the face of The Electoral Commission's campaign encouraging people to exercise their right to vote. He co-presented his third webinar with The Electoral Commission on the Presidential Election. Another highlight was The Electoral Commission's case study on the experience of voters with Down syndrome. Five members of Kerry Regional Advisory were involved in the case study.

- ✓ **Work Skills Videos:** Having listened to employers and collaborating with the employment team, a bespoke *Work Skills* video series was developed, designed based on their feedback on gaps in employment skills. The scripts were developed in collaboration with members who were hired to perform in the videos. Members and staff took part in the shooting of the videos and the team then compiled related resources for use in classrooms and employment training settings.

- ✓ **Success of classroom and library resources:** Classroom resources developed during the year were used across a wide range of adult literacy classes (in ETBs (Education and Training Boards), NLNs (National Learning Networks), Rehab hubs, Reachability programmes, Field of Dreams) and book clubs nationwide. Feedback from educators and learners was very positive, particularly in relation to their relevance, accessibility and pitch. The online games proved especially effective in supporting engagement, iteration and UDL principles.

- ✓ **Book Clubs success:** The Library Book Club programme blossomed in 2025. In addition to adult clubs around the country, two book clubs for teens began. The first club for primary school children was started in Kells. Members take part with parents and some siblings. Some of the book clubs are comprised solely of members with Down syndrome, while others are made up of participants with a range of intellectual disabilities, promoting inclusivity and broadening the reach of this programme.

- ✓ **Down Syndrome Research Forum Presentation:** Aisling and Sinéad presented on DSI Book Clubs in the Down Syndrome Research Forum. Sinéad spoke about the initiative's journey over the past three years. Aisling spoke about her research on the psychological benefits of being a member of a book club.

- ✓ **ETB Partnership:** The partnership with ETBs nationwide continued to flourish. Adults with Down syndrome from age 18 up to adults in their 50s attended free, accessible education courses nationwide. Most adults attending classes attend a broad range of state-funded adult education in education providers such as ETBs and NLNs. DSI-ETB collaborative programmes *Work ready*, *Sásta-nable Living* and *Living It Up!* continue to run successfully in ETBs. DSI-developed resources are incorporated into numerous accredited and non-accredited programmes nationwide.

Objectives

Education

Provide clear, accessible information and support to adults with Down syndrome, their families, support workers, educators and other stakeholder.

Support and grow adult, further and higher, increasing the number of free and accessible options for all adults with Down syndrome in Ireland in collaboration with ETBs (Education and Training Boards).

Advocate for increased pathways to further and higher education. We worked with ETB Guidance Services to ensure that people who advise adults with Down syndrome had Down syndrome awareness training, and awareness of accessible courses for adults with Down syndrome.

Empower professionals, particularly educators, to teach, facilitate and work with adults with Down syndrome. This was achieved through training and the development of a bank of resources to support teaching and learning.

Life in the Community

Be the leading advocacy group for people with Down syndrome. Facilitate our National Advisory Council and support DSI branches to run five Regional Advisory Councils.

Provide a social outlet and community for our members with Down syndrome.

Collaborate with libraries nationwide to set up and support book/library/culture clubs for adults with Down syndrome.

Changes

The work of the Further Education and Training (FET) Department led to increased free, accessible, inclusive lifelong learning opportunities and options. The number of Further Education and Training staff that have benefited from DSI training rose to over 350. The number of education and library staff that accessed resources developed by the FET Department rose to over 450+. This ultimately increased the reach to adults with Down syndrome.

The diversity of adult education pathways after course completion in FET colleges expanded to include tailored programmes to meet the needs of adults with Down syndrome. Programmes such as literacy and horticulture have been popular but graduates have been able to



access follow-on programmes such as drama, art and life skills. This has been possible through our collaboration with SOLAS.

The first ETBI (Education and Training Boards Ireland) Guidance Service webinar for school leavers, adults and their families was hosted. Held five local Information Evenings. These successful sessions were excellent means to share information and empowered attendees. DSI has a proud history of listening to members. The National and Regional Advisory Councils told Down Syndrome Ireland that transport was a top priority.

The team had their first collaboration with the NTA - National Transport and launched a collaborative 'My Journey, My Way' Campaign. This highlighted the dedication to listening to the members.

Statistics

Training and Reach

Over 450 education staff, library staff and partners received training from the Further Education and Training (FET) Department in 2025, with 400+ educators and library facilitators using resources developed by the team. This included:

- 426 individuals accessing Media Literacy resources
- 226 individuals accessing Work Skills resources
- 10 tutor workshops and support clinics
- 5 webinars and training sessions for ETB staff including tutors, coordinators and guidance staff, and a collaborative webinar with ETBI's Guidance Service on adult education options
- 35 ETB further education classroom support visits
- Training delivered to Munster Technological University and to transport staff at the Wayfinding Centre

Resources Developed

130 resources created for learners and adult education practitioners, including:

- 30 resources to support learners in travelling independently
- 15 introduction-to-college resources
- 10 themes shared on the ETBI library

Community and Participation

- 5 Adult Education Options Information Evenings for learners, potential learners and stakeholders
- 20 book clubs running, including 2 teenage, 1 children's, 1 university and 6 newly established clubs
- 6 Advisory Councils supported - the National Advisory Council and 5 Regional Advisory Councils
- 7 Easy Read Reviews completed
- Presidential Election webinar delivered in collaboration with the Electoral Commission

Positive Feedback

On Going to College

"It's an exciting time. I learned a lot in college. I made new friends. It gave me a lot of independence in life. I loved the routine and meeting my friends every day. I enjoyed the canteen and lunchtime too."

Eric, City of Dublin ETB Graduate

"My daughter is so much more independent now. We never thought we'd see her going in herself. Her teachers were brilliant. Her reading came on. She's not ready for work yet so I think the Work Skills course will be great."

Parent of a recent graduate

"They are part of the college here. They bonded with everyone. The whole place knows them. There was a great turnout at anything they organised — the coffee morning and the Ice-cream Funday. We've learned as much from them as they've learned. It's real inclusion."

Sinéad, Longford Westmeath ETB Coordinator

"It's nice to meet up with my friends to chat about different books and share different opinions, even if you don't agree."

David, Longford Westmeath ETB student and All Stars Book Club member

"My son has really grown in confidence since starting his courses with KWETB in Kildare Town and horticulture in Donadea. When we first discussed the horticulture course with him, he didn't want to get dirty and told us he had no interest. With our encouragement he joined, and he has never once said he didn't want to go — getting his hands dirty many times, including planting and even feeding baby lambs. The availability of tailored courses has opened so many new doors for him and, more importantly, given him choice and variety, which is so important in maintaining his interest."

Mary, parent

Key Objectives

- Increase the number of free, accessible lifelong learning opportunities and options for all adults with Down syndrome
- Empower professionals, particularly educators to teach, facilitate and work with adults with Down syndrome
- Provide empowering, clear, accessible lifelong learning information with a focus on Easy Reads, and support to adults with Down syndrome, families and stakeholders
- Build on existing and new partnerships and networks
- Listen to, capture and reflect the voice of adults with Down syndrome

Overall objective: strive to build a society where people with Down syndrome can achieve their full potential, with a focus on education, self-advocacy and life in the community.

Conor

Further Education and Training Case Study

“I love my life! I’m a busy, busy bee.”

Conor is a member of the Louth Meath Branch and leads a wonderful, full life with exciting plans for the future. His journey with DSI began early, with home education and Speech and Language Therapy. Since finishing post-primary school, Conor has completed many adult education courses, including: Literacy and Technology, Personal Development, Ability Online, Photography level 5 module (LMETB), Culinary Arts (LMETB) & Work Skills (LMETB).



“Going to college was very good for me. I had great teachers and I made loads of friends. The work was hard, but I got there in the end.”

Conor is the Treasurer of the Louth Meath Regional Advisory Council (RAC), DSI’s longest-running RAC, established in 2018. “Me and my friend Jason, we get the bus to the meeting. We all have a meal before the meeting starts in the hotel. At the meeting we have discussions, we talk about stuff like events, fundraisers and politics. We have an Agenda to read and we take turns reading the Minutes. We all get to speak and to give ideas.”

Transport is one of the issues the RAC has highlighted as a priority. Conor has taken action on this by working as a Mystery Travel Shopper as part of DSI’s My Journey, My Way Transport Campaign.

“I travel by bus and by train. I have to write a survey about whether it’s on time and if it’s accessible, for trains, buses and the Luas in Dublin, looking for ways to improve transport for people with disabilities. I email my report to TSI.”

Conor has a busy social life. One of his favourite things to do is to go to the cinema on his own.

“I walk to the cinema. It’s a party for myself. My time for myself.”

Photography is another passion. Conor has won the Down Syndrome International Photo of the Year Award.

“It was a picture of my friend Jason. I want to be a photographer, and my friend wants to be a model. Taking pictures gets me out and about, meeting people. Yesterday, one of my friends had a new shop opening and I went down and took pictures to give to them.”

Conor also has entrepreneurial ambitions. He has begun designing and selling coasters featuring photos of local landmarks, an idea that grew from his participation in the Abundance Programme in Galway, where he made and sold Christmas cards at a local market.

“The Abundance Programme was about being your own boss.”

“I take pictures of famous landmarks everywhere in town and send them to the printer to make them into coasters.”

Conor has been part of a Saturday Speech and Drama group since childhood. The same group of ten friends, now all in their twenties, continues to perform together.

“We’re doing Mamma Mia and I am playing Tina, who is one of Sophie’s best friends. We do plays every summer and Christmas. I will sing and dance. It will be on sometime in June. I have another play coming up in May with a group that meets on a Wednesday. There is singing, dancing, and comedy. I am playing the late, great, Tommy Cooper. I love comedy.”

Employment



Team

Head of Inclusive Employment and Impact Partnerships: Aoife Gaffney

Employment Officers: Joanne Dawson and Emma Foran

Nationwide: Cormac Breen, Cara Morgan, Norah Mahony, Margaret Greaney, Sheila Dineen, Sandra O'Donoghue, Clive Stocker

Highlights

✓ **National partnerships:** established with Neville Park Hotel Group, Windward Management Hotel Group, and Circle K for employment.

✓ **Regional partnership:** with Penneys established, beginning with a 6-week retail based work experience in Killarney, Tralee and Clonmel.

✓ **Lidl:** Rachel Coen from Dublin, the first person to gain employment in Lidl through our National Employment Programme, featured on RTÉ News with Aoife Gaffney for World Down Syndrome Day. Aoife Gaffney was invited to speak on a panel at Lidl's 25 year in Ireland celebration. Aoife spoke

about DSI's partnership with Lidl to date, the impact employment has on our members, but also the value our members bring to a workplace. She put an ask to Lidl on the night that over time we will have a person with Down syndrome working in every Lidl store in Ireland.

✓ **Irish Hotels Federation:** Aoife Gaffney and the Irish Hotels Federation collaborated on a webinar to hotels. Dalata, Conrad Hotel, and iNua contributed on their experiences as employer, and Niamh Gorey, Kildare Branch member, who works in the Springfield Hotel (iNua) spoke about her job.

✓ **Dalata Hospitality Training:** 11 members completed over 2 cohorts of 6 weeks hospitality training and work experience.

✓ **Conrad Barista Training:** 8 members completed over 2 cohorts of 5 weeks each

✓ **Beauty in all its Forms Hairdressing:** 6 members completed 8 weeks training and 10 weeks work experience.

✓ **Dublin Zoo Retail:** 4 members completed 6 weeks retail training.

✓ **Information evenings:** in Kildare and Limerick branches in collaboration with TCPID, Adult Ed Dept colleagues and employment on post school options.

✓ **Scottish Collaboration:** with Down Syndrome Scotland to support them in setting up their employment programme, sharing learning and resources, as well as employment contacts oversees e.g. Specsavers, Dalata, who can replicate best practice from their partnerships with DSI.

✓ **ValueAble:** Working with the Italian Down Syndrome Association (IAPD) since 2024, along with Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Croatia, France, Hungary through the Italian programme ValueAble. DSI and iNua officially launched ValueAble in Ireland at a celebration in the Radisson Hotel in Limerick. iNua are the first hotel group to join the network. The purpose of ValueAble is to create a network of inclusive employers in the hospitality sector, providing more training and certification to workplaces to ensure they are providing appropriate employment opportunities to adults with Down syndrome nationwide.

— As part of the ValueAble partnership, DSI welcomed 4 Italian students with Down syndrome to Ireland in October. Giulio, Jesus, Aurora and Letizia along with their Mentors Angela and Alessia came to the Radisson Hotel Limerick for 3 weeks to train across food and beverage, and accommodation. They also took part in Heineken bar training and received their certificates at the ValueAble launch on behalf of the iNua Hotel Group. Limerick branch members were also in attendance on the day, taking part in the celebrations and training exchange.

Key Objectives

In line with Pobal requirements:

- 60 gained paid employment
- 10 gained work experience
- 100 partook in Pre-Employment and Pre-Interview Training (Preparing for Work)
- 50 engagements with new employers
- 50 Down Syndrome Awareness Training provided to workplaces

Department Objectives:

- Grow employment team nationwide to ensure greater support at a local level- Kerry x 2 team members, Louth/Meath x 1 team member joined the team in 2025
- Increase national partnerships
- Create more awareness of our programme (IHF, webinars, Sky panel discussion, Lidl panel event, RTE coverage of World Down Syndrome Day).

Changes

Increased access to new industries of training and work. Through national partnerships, the employment programme had a further reach. The aim of the national partnership with Lidl, Circle K, Mr. Price, Specsavers, Penneys, iNua, Dalata, Windward and many more is to ensure that there is no postcode lottery when it comes to employment. Members will have the opportunity to access work in their own community as a result.

Statistics

Nationwide Statistics

- **73 members gained paid employment in 2025**, across the following sectors (20 retail, 24 hospitality, 11 office admin, 2 hospital/healthcare, 14 transport, 1 manufacturing, 1 hairdressing)
- **15 members in work experience**, across the following settings (2 theatre, 5 retail, 6 hairdressing, 2 hospitality)
- **60+ new employers engaged with, of whom 54 went on to provide employment**
- **51 members engaged in Work Readiness Training**, including Beauty in All its Forms Hairdressing, Conrad Barista Academy, Dalata Hospitality, Dublin Zoo Retail, Heineken Academy
- **124 members engaged in Pre-Employment and Pre-Interview Training**
- **381 total jobs created from 2018 to end of 2025**

Positive Feedback

Leon Gilmore, Limerick Branch member gained employment in the Bon Secours Hospital in 2025 following on from his workplace training programme in the hospital. His Mum Edel shared: "Leon love's his job in the Bon Secours Limerick and the success Leon has achieved would not have been possible without the unbelievable support he has received from Down Syndrome Ireland. They have been part of his journey into the workplace from the very beginning and have been instrumental in his success. Finding successful employment where he is appreciated and respected has been the making of Leon."

"Aoife has been working in Blenders since December 2025 and loves it. Aoife has a mentor, Ann-Marie, who has helped Aoife settle and supports Aoife in work. Cormac was a great support for Aoife from the start of the whole process, with interview training and on the day of the interview with Blenders. Working in blenders has helped Aoife in confidence, socially, independent, and feels important because she gets a wage. Down Syndrome Ireland are out there getting jobs for adults who want meaningful jobs and who want to be part of the community."

Lorraine Geoghegan, Mum to Aoife

Key Objectives for 2026

- Build employment team to support more members in the North-West (Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Leitrim, Donegal) and Midlands counties.
- Provide increased job opportunities nationwide, particularly outside large cities
- Build on national partnerships across different industries
- Work in collaboration with other departments and stakeholders to provide more information around pathways, post school options, information from DSP on grants and subsidies - through information evenings and webinars
- Work with more HSE Day Services to ensure more adults with Down syndrome join DSI and have access to our information, programmes and supports
- Work with companies to support them to adapt their onboarding and HR materials to improve accessibility

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Stephen

Employment Case Study

"I am very proud of the job I have in Lidl. My team works brilliantly. We are always on the shop floor together working."



Stephen is a member of the Dublin Branch with a strong work history in retail. Over the past year, he has worked with Down Syndrome Ireland's employment programme to return to paid employment.

Stephen had worked in jobs in his local area for many years but had to step back from employment when his parents passed away and he needed to move home. By May 2024, he was ready for a new challenge.

"I was spending 5 days a week in day service and I wanted a new challenge. I worked in supermarkets for years and I used to enjoy this work. I started working with my support worker to find employment in 2024. I started by doing a placement in the Crowne Plaza Hotel for one week. I really enjoyed this."

In 2025 Stephen linked in with Down Syndrome Ireland by signing up to one of their employment days. From there Stephen met with one of Down Syndrome Ireland's Employment Officers to complete a vocational profile to identify roles he would and would not like.

In 2025, Stephen connected with Down Syndrome Ireland through one of their employment days. He then met with an Employment Officer to complete a vocational profile, mapping out the kinds of roles he would and wouldn't enjoy.

"I met with Cormac [Breen, Employment Support Specialist] to talk about what jobs I would like. We put down jobs I would not like and some I would like. I really enjoy working in shops from my past jobs in Nolan's supermarket and Supervalu"

In 2025 Stephen engaged in a number of work place training programmes with Down Syndrome Ireland to support his transition back into employment. Stephen completed the Conrad Barista programme and a training day with Heineken with Down Syndrome Ireland.

"I learned a lot on the Barista Course. I learned how to make all the different coffee. My favourite one is a cappuccino. I also learned how to meet and greet customers in a hotel"

In October Stephen applied for a role in Lidl through Down Syndrome Ireland. Stephen went through pre-interview training and pre-employment training with Down Syndrome Ireland and was successful in gaining employment. Stephen has settled in well to his new job in Lidl and has become a valuable member of the team.

"I am very proud of the job I have in Lidl. My team works brilliantly. We are always on the shop floor together working. I work Thursdays and Saturdays. I help keep all the aisles in the shop tidy. I help taking away the empty boxes from the shelves and putting them into a trolley. I keep the stock neat and tidy and make sure I move stock forward to the front of the shelves. I then bring the empty boxes to the recycling machine in the back. I then do all the rounds again. It is great exercise for me. I also show customers where stock is when they ask me. I am usually tired after work and I like to sit down at home in the evening with a cup of tea and read the newspaper"

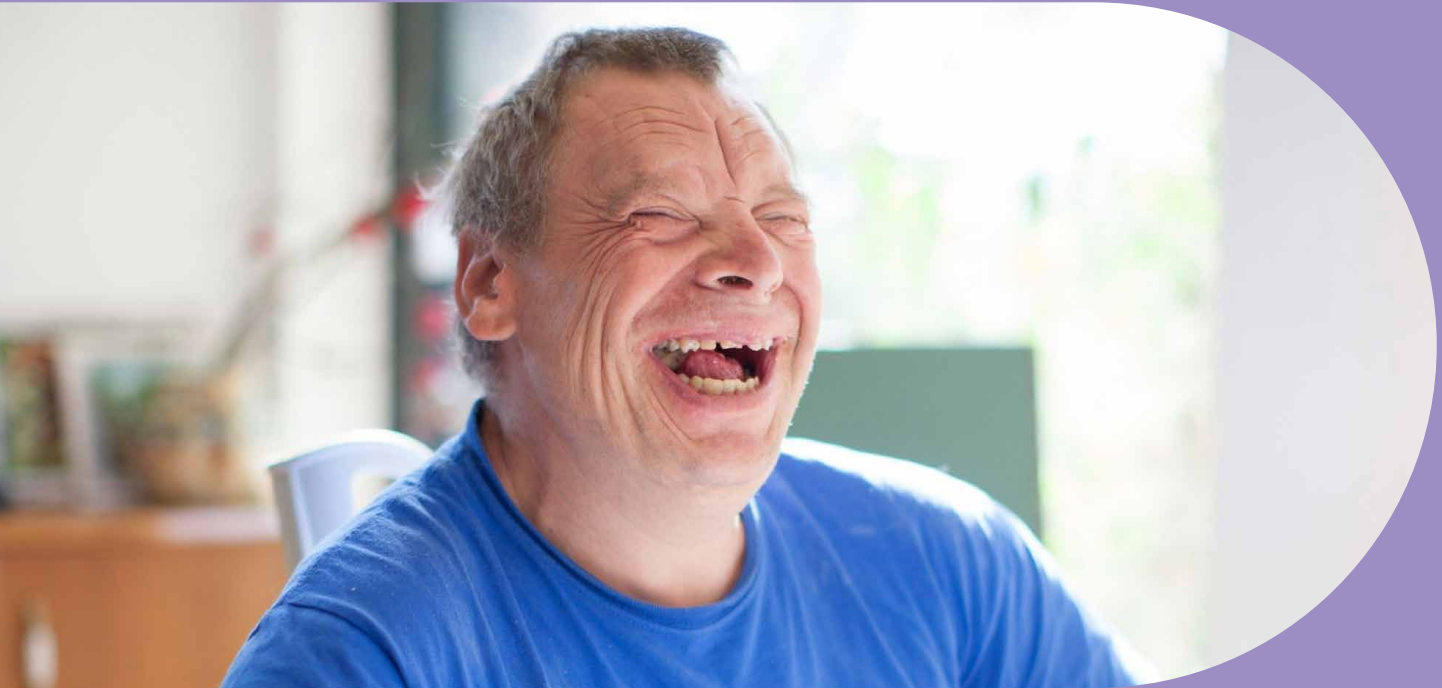
Stephen has a busy social life and earning his own money has helped him engage in more activities he enjoys on his days off.

"I like getting paid. With the money I make I like to go on holidays and go to shows in the local theatre. I also liked going out for coffee and shopping with the money"

Alongside his role with Lidl, Stephen has remained an active member of his community.

"I am part of the local walking club. I help out with Dementia Ireland and do Webinars with them. My attendance in day service is now better and I like the course I am doing there. On Tuesdays I do cooking courses"

Advocacy



Team

Head of Fundraising, Communications & Advocacy: Ruth Hickey

Branch Advocacy Coordinator: Gina Grant

National Research and Support Specialist: Nicola Hart

Highlights

✓ **Collaboration:** Began a partnership with AsIAM to improve supports for individuals with dual diagnosis (Down syndrome and autism). Created Same Chance Playbook, a joint informational booklet with resources for members, families and branches.

✓ **Regression:** Created a regression booklet with crucial information.

✓ **Down Syndrome Associated Arthritis:** Established a collaboration with Dr. Orla Killeen, Senior Rheumatology Paediatric Consultant, to raise awareness of DA (Down syndrome-associated

arthritis). Aiming to improve early identification, awareness, and understanding of this under-recognised condition among families and professionals.

✓ **Workshops:** Development of “Next Steps” Workshops, a new workshop series created to support families transitioning into adulthood. These sessions provide clear guidance on available services, rights, housing options, community participation, Decision Supports Services and future planning, once a person with Down syndrome leaves school-age supports.

Objectives

Health

- Delivered health awareness and entitlement workshops in partnership with Tusla Social Work services.
- Supported the Research department with the *Conference for Professionals and Caregivers, Supporting the Health and Wellbeing of Adults with Down Syndrome*.
- Organised a national webinar with Dr. Jonathon Santoro involving Irish medical teams, parents, and the public, significantly increasing awareness of Down syndrome regression.
- Engaged with healthcare professionals nationally and internationally to explore collaboration on regression and Down syndrome-associated arthritis awareness.
- Supported families through advocacy relating to healthcare access, safeguarding, and service navigation.

Education

- Delivered post-primary training with the Education department and contributed to national education advocacy through participation in the Special Education Consultative Forum, meetings with the Department of Education and NCSE regarding SET hours, and engagement with public representatives.
- Assisted with NCCA submissions and presented at the Tusla Education Support Services Code of Behaviour Steering Committee, ensuring lived experiences informed policy discussions.

Life in the Community

- Facilitated peer-support groups including Dual Diagnosis, Regression, Supporting Adults, Siblings, carers, and all-ages support networks.
- Held online information sessions on housing and Decision Support Services.
- Delivered Next Steps workshops with branches to support transition into adulthood.
- Participated in national advocacy stakeholder groups, including the DFI New Directions Advisory Group.
- Supported families through complex advocacy and safeguarding processes while promoting inclusion and community participation, which has expanded support networks for families across Ireland.

Changes

Families gained clearer understanding of their rights, entitlements, and available services through workshops, support groups, and one-to-one advocacy, which helped families to make informed decisions and access appropriate support earlier. The peer-support groups provided safe spaces for families experiencing complex challenges, reducing isolation and building peer networks across Ireland. Partnerships with organisations such as AslAm and engagement with national stakeholders strengthened coordinated responses to dual diagnosis and complex support needs.

Statistics

- **National Reach:** Advocacy activity reached hundreds of families nationwide through direct support, workshops, policy engagement, healthcare collaboration, and new national support initiatives addressing previously unmet needs.
- **Regression Support:** 12 Regression Support Group meetings delivered nationally, plus two expert Q&A sessions for parents with Dr Dennis McGuire and Dr Jonathan Santoro; one national webinar with Dr Santoro; and one webinar for Irish medical professionals on clinical research findings into regression treatments.
- **Webinars delivered:** Down Syndrome Associated Arthritis (6), Dual Diagnoses (16), Supporting Adults (24), National Group Meetings for All Ages (24), and Navigating the Sensory Challenges of Christmas (1).
- **Education and Policy Engagement:** Assisted with multiple NCCA submissions; represented at the Special Education Consultative Forum at national level; delivered post-primary training with the Education Department; presented to the Code of Behaviour Steering Committee (TESS); and held multiple meetings with public representatives on SET hours, special education, regression, and adult services.
- **Wider Advocacy:** Delivered 1 Health Awareness and Entitlement Workshop with Tusla Social Workers; supported an Electoral Commission submission; and joined DFI's New Directors Advisory Group.
- **New Resources Created:** Regression Information Booklet; updated Benefits and Entitlements Booklet; and Same Chance Booklet (developed in collaboration with AslAm).

Positive Feedback

Workshop Feedback

"Thanks so much for this information. I wasn't aware of it. I came into this workshop very worried and I'm leaving a lot lighter and more confident."

Regression Workshops and Booklet Feedback

"This is a great source of information, it really helped our GP."

family member

"The regression support group has been a lifeline for our family. Before this we felt completely alone."

family member

Other Info

This past year, the role focused on emerging needs within the Down syndrome community. This included responding where formal supports or service pathways were hard to find information on, or do not yet exist. Much of the work in 2025 involved supporting families experiencing complex situations, including regression, dual diagnosis, safeguarding concerns, transition to adulthood, and independence planning. The Capacity Act created a different environment for those with Down syndrome their families and support networks.

Key Objectives for 2026

- Continue supporting lived experience on regression with the hope of having a national pathway for medical treatment.
- Strengthen the connection between branches.
- More information on areas - especially adult services and health needs for members and the website.
- Topical webinars such as toileting, behaviour, grief and understanding how those with Down syndrome process trauma.



Elisha

Advocacy Case Study

“I Didn’t Know I Could Apply”

Elisha is 18 years old and lives at home with her family. She is studying Leaving Cert Applied at Coolmine Community School and is working towards greater independence. She enjoys meeting people and being part of her community.



Elisha assumed she was already receiving all the support she was entitled to.

“I thought I was already getting all the supports I was allowed to have. My family helped me with my Disability Allowance, and I didn’t really understand that there were other benefits or supports I might be entitled to. Nobody had ever explained them to me in a way that made sense.”

That changed when her father came across Down Syndrome Ireland’s Benefits and Entitlements Guide.

“At first, I didn’t think it was for me because it looked like a lot of information. My dad helped me understand what was important to me and what else I could be entitled to.”

The family contacted Down Syndrome Ireland for advice and were guided through the application process in a clear and accessible way. A few weeks later, Elisha received confirmation that she had been approved for supports she hadn’t known she could apply for.

“A few weeks later, I received confirmation that I was approved for supports I hadn’t known I could receive. The extra financial support has made a big difference.”

“I would encourage other people with Down syndrome and their families to explore the Benefits and Entitlements Guide. You might discover supports you didn’t know existed.”

Fergal

Advocacy Case Study

“These meetings help to give us the strength to face the daily challenges that we encounter from day to day.”

Fergal's family has faced significant challenges supporting him through Down syndrome regression disorder, a condition that is poorly understood even among many medical and education professionals.



His parents have found consistent support through Down Syndrome Ireland's Branch Advocacy Coordinator, Gina Grant.

“Gina Grant has been a constant support to us. She has given us advice and guidance. Gina has been available at short notice for a phone call when days are bad, and we have been struggling. She is very generous with her time and encourages us to stay positive, which is very difficult.”

One of the most valuable things Gina has provided is information. She has shared references and resources on Down syndrome regression disorder that Fergal's family have been able to bring directly to the professionals involved in his care, including CAMHS, CDNT teams, psychologists, therapists and his school, many of whom had little or no awareness of the condition.

“If these qualified, knowledgeable professionals don't understand or aren't even aware of this condition, then how are we expected to know how to help our son? We are trying to get help from whoever will listen to us, and it has been a struggle to get to where we are. Gina has been a great advocate for us.”

Gina also keeps the family informed about relevant webinars and organises DSI's monthly parent support network through Zoom. These sessions have become an important source of strength.

“We find the parents' discussions at the Zoom meetings to be extremely helpful, as we all share our experiences and information. These meetings help to give us the strength to face the daily challenges that we encounter from day to day. Through these meetings we know we are not alone.”

Research



Team

National Research and Support Specialist: Nicola Hart

Highlights

✓ **Research Awareness:** Maintained an awareness of research and practice nationally and internationally, to ensure any information and advice provided is accurate and based on best available evidence. This included linking with the DSMIG, the medical research group in Ireland (DISCO), Dr Mary McCarron's team in TCD, Dr Jonathon Santoro and Dr Dennis McGuire in the US.

✓ **Health:** Consulted adults with Down syndrome and their families on health-related issues, leading to the conference for caregivers in November, and the planned series of webinars for adults on individual health and research topics in 2026.

✓ **Support Groups:** Regular online support groups have continued and expanded. As well as parent groups, Branch Advocacy Coordinator Gina Grant now hosts groups focused on issues, such as Down syndrome Regression disorder, Down syndrome and

autism, Down syndrome arthritis, and grief and loss. There have also been once-off sessions on issues including the decision support service and preparing for adult life.

✓ **Preparing for Adulthood:** Branch Advocacy Coordinator Gina Grant also began delivering in-person sessions about preparing for adult life for local branches which were well received, which will continue into 2026.

✓ **Trinity College:** Ross O'Neill, Administrator, and Nicola Hart, National Research Specialist, worked with the DISCO team in Trinity College Dublin, leading Ross to getting invited to open two conferences on Down syndrome and paediatric medicine, speaking about the importance of research for people with Down syndrome. The conference by the DISCO group is now available on the DSI website.

- ✔ **Speech and Language:** The team provided a speech, language and communication thread in all DSI educational trainings and webinars, helping teachers, families and other stakeholders understand the importance of considering communication challenges when supporting people with Down syndrome in education. This included delivering joint conferences with the NCSE and delivering Down syndrome specific training to families and teachers. Two booklets were also produced for teachers about supporting speech, language and communication development in the classroom, one focused on primary and the other on post-primary education.

- ✔ **AslAm:** Worked with AslAm to produce a booklet about inclusion for children who have Down syndrome and autism.

- ✔ **TUSLA:** New collaboration with TUSLA to provide online training for social workers supporting families fostering a child with Down syndrome.

Objectives

Providing evidence-based information to families and professionals. Supporting families by responding promptly to concerns, and by hosting peer support sessions. Facilitating and driving research that will positively impact health and wellbeing for people with Down syndrome and their families. Supporting the production of accessible information for adults with Down syndrome (with adult education and employment departments).

Changes

- More shared information regarding paediatric health.
- Increased awareness and information about adult health, particularly around Down syndrome regression disorder.
- Better parent support, with Branch Advocacy Coordinator Gina Grant's regular online family support groups.
- Sharing key information about supporting people with Down syndrome with lots of stakeholders including our members, state bodies (DES, NCSE, etc.), third level institutions, etc.
- Linking closely with IDS-TILDA researchers in Trinity College Dublin to explore issues around ageing and dementia.

Statistics

- Over 300 responses from parents, caregivers and adults with Down syndrome about health issues in adult life, giving us good information for the conference.
- 92 people attended the *Conference for Professionals and Caregivers Supporting the Health and Wellbeing of Adults with Down Syndrome* last year – primarily parents and carers.
- Linking with researchers and practitioners in Scotland, England, USA, Italy, Portugal.

Positive Feedback

Health and Ageing Conference, Attendee Feedback

"A great variety of speakers – all very relevant."

"Absolutely wonderful to have access to these research findings and clinical experience."

Key Objectives for 2026

- Continue online support group sessions
- Provide accessible information and webinars for adults with Down syndrome on health-related issues.
- Deliver a second conference for caregivers on adult health and wellbeing
- Set out very clear objectives that are achievable that align with the 2026 strategy we are building.
- Conduct a longitudinal research pilot looking at language and reading skills in people with Down syndrome aged 35+
- Maintain an awareness of research and practice nationally and internationally, to ensure any information and advice provided is accurate and based on best available evidence.
- Work on a research section for the DSI website including information for parents, professionals and people with Down syndrome.
- Hoping to strengthen cross-border connections in 2026.

Fundraising



Team

Head of Fundraising, Communications & Advocacy: Ruth Hickey

Fundraising Manager: Lauren McCarthy

Corporate Partnerships and Development Manager: Mark Doyle

Retail Managers: Celine King, Gerry Moore, Amanda Molloy, and Barbara McCarthy

Highlights

✓ **Lots of Socks:** Our Lots of Socks fundraising campaign was a standout success this year, delivering strong growth in income, participation, and engagement across DSI. Income generated through Enthuse increased by 29%, while registrations nearly doubled, rising by an impressive 95%. Engagement from schools was particularly encouraging. The introduction of school packs was very well received, contributing to a 113% increase in participation. To support wider involvement, downloadable packs were made available to all branches, alongside county-level press releases to maximise local visibility. Branded socks proved extremely popular with our women's socks selling

out in just 2 weeks, generating over €8,000 in additional net income and adding further momentum to the campaign.

✓ **Ice Cream Fundays:** Ice Cream Fundays was another highly successful fundraising event, with particularly strong engagement from the school communities and notable growth across key income metrics. Schools remained at the heart of the campaign, delivering a significant increase in funds raised. With support from the incredible Adult Education Team, DSI was able to provide registered schools with a schools guide full of

lesson plans and activities for teachers to use on the day of their event, which was very well received. This additional engagement contributed to a substantial rise in the average gift, which doubled from the previous year. While active school registrations remained stable, overall registrations reflected sustained interest and reach within the education sector. Overall, Ice Cream Fundays demonstrated effective engagement across multiple audiences, and particular success in deepening support within schools, reinforcing its value as a key annual fundraising initiative.

- ✔ **Purple Run:** The Purple Run campaign was successfully refreshed, evolving from a virtual 5km event into a 30-day marathon challenge. The new format encouraged sustained engagement over a longer period and appealed to a broader range of participants. To strengthen supporter connection and motivation, a dedicated Facebook community group was introduced, creating a shared space for participants to encourage one another and build a sense of community throughout the challenge. In addition, a new Purple Run branded running t-shirt was launched, adding to participant enthusiasm and visibility. These strategic enhancements delivered a significant impact, with online income doubling compared to 2024, demonstrating the value of innovation, community-building, and supporter-focused campaign design.

- ✔ **Christmas Campaign – Pocket Hug Appeal:** As part of the Christmas campaign, and to maximise the use of the Fundraise Up donation platform, the team introduced a special donation incentive to thank supporters. Donors who gave €25 or more received a Pocket Hug in the post which was a small but meaningful token of appreciation. The Pocket Hug symbolised inclusion, belonging, and connection – values that sit at the heart of Down Syndrome Ireland. Designed as a reminder that every supporter is part of something bigger, it offered a tangible expression of gratitude while reinforcing the impact of each donation. The campaign resonated strongly with supporters, raising €8,000 during December alone. It demonstrated how thoughtful stewardship and value-led messaging can deepen donor connection while delivering strong fundraising results during a key giving period.

- ✔ **Charity Shops – Community Impact and Sustainable Income:** The four charity shops in Dublin continue to be a constant and reliable source of income for the organisation, while also maintaining a strong and meaningful connection with the communities they serve. Together, the shops generate over €500,000 annually, providing vital, sustainable funding to support the work of DSI. Beyond their financial contribution, the shops act as visible community hubs that engage supporters, volunteers, and donors, while also raising awareness of DSI's work at a local level.

Corporate Fundraising Highlights

- **Woodie's:** Successfully renewed the Woodie's Heroes partnership for a further year, continuing a strong collaboration that drives national awareness, in-store engagement, and vital fundraising support.
- **Fidelis Partnership:** The Fidelis Foundation kindly continued its valued support, providing consistent funding and reinforcing a strong, long-term partnership aligned to DSI's strategic priorities.
- **KAEFER:** Established a new five-year partnership with KAEFER, representing a significant long-term commitment and expanding corporate engagement.
- **Zurich:** Further strengthened partnership with Zurich, with increased support across campaigns, events, and initiatives. The partnership was recognised through a nomination for Corporate Charity Partnership of the Year at the Charities Institute Ireland Awards.
- **iNua Hotels:** iNua Hotels continued their commitment to supporting Down Syndrome Ireland, contributing to national fundraising efforts and helping to raise awareness across their network.

Objectives

- Build on the campaigns from 2024 and increase donations
- Work closer with charity shops to keep growth strong
- Increase awareness through national campaigns
- Expanding our corporate partner base through targeted new business development
- Building and maintaining a strong pipeline of qualified (warm) leads
- Increasing the value and depth of existing partnerships
- Enhancing corporate engagement to drive both income and awareness
- Aligning partnerships with national campaigns and strategic priorities

Changes

Improved engagement with supporters, increased unrestricted income, as well as proven growth across all four national campaigns. Purple Run and Lots of Socks saw the biggest campaign change with the addition of a month-long event and the selling of socks, respectively. Both these changes were very positive and brought in much larger donations.

As a result of the work in 2025, the team saw a measurable strengthening of corporate partnerships and overall fundraising impact. This included:

- Growth in new corporate partnerships, increasing both income and long-term sustainability

- A stronger and more active pipeline of prospective partners, improving future income opportunities
- Increased engagement from existing partners, with greater participation in campaigns, events, and initiatives
- Expanded reach and awareness of Down Syndrome Ireland through corporate networks and employee engagement
- Improved alignment between corporate partnerships and national priorities, ensuring more strategic and impactful collaboration

Statistics

- Lots of Socks raised €89k.
- Ice Cream Fundays raised €71k.
- Purple Run €68k.
- Christmas Jumper Day raised €17k while the Pocket Hug campaign raised €8k.
- €77k raised via the website with 977 donations.

Positive Feedback from Corporate partners

Rob Kelly, CEO, Fidelis Partnership

"I have two nephews with Down syndrome, Tom who is 16 and Alfie, who is 3, so I have seen the importance of early years intervention whether it is speech therapy, physiotherapy or general health support. As Tom is nearing the end of school, the services DSI provide to support transition into further education or work experience are invaluable. We are also delighted to have Deborah Bolton work with TFP through a placement organised by DSI, which further demonstrates the great work they do."

"There have been huge changes in how society supports people with Down syndrome through the extra support they receive in school, through to third level education and the workplace. The biggest change I have seen over my lifetime though is the recognition that people with Down syndrome are people first, with abilities, strengths and weaknesses like everyone else."

Anthony Brennan, CEO, Zurich

"We're delighted to have Down Syndrome Ireland as our charity partner. Zurich prides itself on its commitment to making a difference in the local communities in which we operate, and this partnership allows us to extend our support to an organisation that has a deep well of support across our employee base in Ireland. We're excited to support DSI in ways that will directly help the families, children and adults who are part of the DSI family."

Key Objectives for 2026

- **Grow Campaigns:** The growth on the campaigns in 2025 compared to 2024 was massive and we want to keep that growth going. The aim is to get more donors, more engagement on campaigns and through that, more awareness brought to Down Syndrome Ireland.
- **Improve Stewardship of Donors:** With a new CRM, the team want to expand stewardship so that donors feel valued and appreciated.
- **Communicate Better with Community Fundraisers:** To grow conversations and support to those who are fundraising locally.
- **Grow Corporate Partnerships:** Aim to secure five new multi-year corporate partnerships while strengthening existing relationships, with a target 75% renewal rate of current partners. The focus will be on building deeper, longer-term partnerships aligned with corporate ESG priorities, particularly around employment inclusion and diversity.
- **Increase Corporate Income:** Corporate fundraising is targeted to generate €500,000 in income in 2026, representing a 20% growth in corporate income. This will be achieved through a combination of new partnerships, Charity of the Year collaborations, and expanded employee engagement opportunities.
- **Develop ESG-Aligned Corporate Partnerships:** Corporate partnerships will increasingly align with strategic workstreams under the upcoming strategy, particularly Employment Pathways, where companies can directly support inclusive employment opportunities for people with Down syndrome.
- **Strengthen Corporate Stewardship and Retention:** A key priority is improving partner stewardship through stronger impact reporting, structured engagement plans, and clearer demonstration of how corporate support contributes to measurable outcomes.
- **Implement CRM to Support Corporate Growth:** The implementation of a new CRM system (target go-live September 2026) will be critical in strengthening corporate pipeline management, improving reporting, tracking engagement, and supporting long-term relationship management.
- **Coordinate Corporate Approaches Nationally:** Use the upcoming strategy governance model, corporate approaches will be coordinated centrally to avoid duplication, protect the Down Syndrome Ireland brand, and ensure partnerships align with national priorities and campaigns.



Communications



Team

Head of Fundraising, Communications & Advocacy: Ruth Hickey

Communications Manager: Megan Roantree

Communications Officers: Aoife Flood and Edel Bane

Highlights

- ✓ **Email Systems Roll-out:** Implemented one cohesive email format and system for all branches and staff members. This roll-out included over 125 email accounts.
- ✓ **New Website:** The communications team designed and implemented a brand-new website, following issues with our previous website.
- ✓ **Improved Accessibility:** Added accessibility tool Eye-Able to the website to ensure improved user experience for members and people with additional needs.
- ✓ **Social Strategy:** Built templates and strategy for social media accounts which resulted in a growing TikTok presence with 100,000 views across videos and reaching 10k followers on Instagram.
- ✓ **Increased Content Creation:** Created video content promoting members in Early Years, Employment, Speech and Language therapy and more, to showcase the services and celebrate members' lives and stories.
- ✓ **Departmental Support:** Ran successful events and campaigns to support departments including Fundraising, Early Years and Governance. This included the Tell it Right Conference, Lots of Socks, Ice Cream Fundays, Purple Run, and Christmas Jumper Day. The Communications team's contributions included digital advertising, creative assets across design and photography, digital communications, ambassador collaboration and media outreach.

- ✓ **World Down Syndrome Day:** Ran WDSD campaign together with the Fundraising team which included sock design and sales, event promotion, members meeting with national leaders including the Taoiseach and Tánaiste, digital pods across train stations, shopping centres and public areas, and video series showcasing members.
- ✓ **Press:** Celebration of World Down Syndrome Day on a national media scale across RTE News, The Irish Independent, The Irish Times, regional papers and special interest media including parenting sites and women's magazines.
- ✓ **Digital Resources:** Worked closely with the member support team to promote and deliver webinars, create and share resources with members, and ensure information was easy-to-read and accessible across our platforms and on the website.
- ✓ **Woodie's Partnership:** DSI was selected as a Woodie's Heroes charity following the communications team's application and ambassador selection. Worked across the campaign to promote and celebrate the initiative and ambassador which resulted in €149,551.28 raised for DSI.
- ✓ **Collaboration:** Worked in collaboration with other organisations with similar missions including AslAm and Down's Syndrome Association (UK).
- ✓ **Digital Advertisement:** Brought digital advertising in-house and introduced Google and LinkedIn Advertising, along with increased use of Meta Ads to promote events, campaigns, drive traffic and bring general awareness for the organisation and members.

Key Objectives

- To promote the services and support that Down Syndrome Ireland provides.
- To support the Fundraising team in bringing in funds to help continue DSI's mission.
- To bring awareness to the public about the achievements of people with Down syndrome.
- To improve communication systems across the organisation.

Changes

The new website was launched in the summer of 2025 after a large-scale project, improving the usability and accessibility for members to access resources and information. Increased social media presence, increased media presence for the organisation and members, increased awareness on services and supports through video promotion. Improved and more compliant communications system across the organisation due to new email roll-out. Successful fundraising campaigns including Woodie's Heroes, World Down Syndrome Day and Purple Run.

Statistics

- **Infrastructure & Communications:** 125+ new email accounts set up across branches; 1 new website launched; 25+ issues of the Down Syndrome Ireland digest sent to members
- **Fundraising:** 5 successful fundraising campaigns
- **Organic Social Media:** 15,906,775 people reached and 252,434 engagements across all platforms; 100,000+ TikTok views; 10k+ Instagram followers reached
- **Paid Advertising:** Across Meta, LinkedIn and Google 7,314,949 impressions, 830,134 post engagements, 41,514 post reactions and 533 post shares; driving 21,715 people to the website
- **Website:** 100,000 users with 772,000 actions recorded; 10,584 resource downloads

Positive Feedback

The team has received warm feedback from parents and members on DSI's communications, particularly the digest newsletter, social media presence, and media coverage including RTÉ News.

"Thank you for another great edition of the digest. It's great to keep informed about the services and activities across the country."

Parent and member.

"I love seeing the digest every week and seeing all the employment posts on social media. It's great to see that the future is so bright for my daughter and she has so many options when she grows up."

Parent of girl aged 4.

Key Objectives for 2026

- Create Down Syndrome Ireland's 2026-2030 Strategy
- Create new suite of assets for National office and branches
- Improved bank of resources (photos and videos)
- Increased celebrity ambassador support
- Increased national coverage
- Create awareness on correct use of language across public and media

The key to success in the communications team has come from a hard-working team with an excellent skillset across digital marketing, content creation, strategy, and creativity. It has also been down to cooperation and cross-collaboration from other departments and teams and working closely with members and the national advisory council.

HR



Team

HR Manager: Therese O'Donovan

HR Manager: John Gilchrist

HR administrators: Shona McAuley, Rosemary Vincent

Head of People and Culture: Lauren Keating (Maternity Leave)

Highlights

- ✓ **People and Culture:** this was a key area of organisational development in 2025, reflecting a deliberate shift towards a more structured, consistent and professionally supported workforce model across Down Syndrome Ireland.
- ✓ **HR Manager:** In July 2025, Therese Donovan joined as HR Manager, with the brief of evolving the organisation from a traditional HR function to a more strategic, organisation-wide approach to people, capability and culture. This role has a clear mandate to strengthen organisational infrastructure, support workforce sustainability and enhance the overall employee experience across both national office and branches.

- ✓ **Benchmarking:** A significant body of work was undertaken during the year to review and strengthen employee terms and conditions. This included benchmarking against comparable organisations and broader sector norms to ensure that Down Syndrome Ireland remains competitive in attracting and retaining skilled staff, particularly in specialist and high-demand roles. Following this process, formal pay scales were introduced, providing a transparent and equitable structure for remuneration and progression. This represents a key step in reducing historical variability and supporting a more consistent approach to workforce management.
- ✓ **Contracts:** All employment contracts were reviewed and standardised, improving clarity, consistency and compliance across the organisation.
- ✓ **Pension Scheme:** A pension scheme was introduced, enhancing the overall benefits offering and reflecting a long-term commitment to employee wellbeing, retention and financial security.
- ✓ **HR System:** Recognising the need for stronger systems to support a geographically dispersed workforce, a review of the organisation's Human Resource Information System (HRIS) was undertaken. This review assessed current functionality and identified requirements for a more integrated system capable of supporting recruitment, performance management, reporting and compliance.
- ✓ **People and Culture:** A core focus in 2025 was the development and introduction of a People and Culture Plan, designed to strengthen organisational cohesion and support a more unified way of working across national office and branches. As a federated organisation, Down Syndrome Ireland has evolved with a strong local presence supported by national coordination.

Changes

With Lauren Keating, Head of People and Culture, on maternity leave, John Gilchrist joined to cover. Shona McAuley finished up in her position in the summer, and Rosemary Vincent joined the team as HR Assistant. Therese O'Donovan was hired as HR Manager, and Lauren moved to a new company while on Maternity Leave. Therese was then appointed to Head of People and Culture. During this time of change, there was an external HR consultant hired to assist Therese.

2026 Objectives

- The developments progressed in 2025 represent important foundational work in building a more structured and sustainable organisation. By strengthening employment frameworks, enhancing benefits, reviewing systems and investing in culture, Down Syndrome Ireland is positioning itself to support its workforce more effectively into the future.
- Continued focus will be placed on embedding these changes, further developing organisational capability and ensuring that people and culture remain central to the organisation's ongoing development.
- The People and Culture Plan seeks to build greater alignment across this structure by establishing shared expectations around values, behaviours and standards of practice, while continuing to recognise the importance of local engagement and community leadership. Key areas of focus include:
 - Strengthening communication and collaboration across teams and locations
 - Supporting leadership and management capability
 - Embedding consistent standards in recruitment, performance and employee support
 - Promoting a culture of inclusion, respect and professionalism across all parts of the organisation



Governance



Team

Compliance and Governance Officer: Claire Wright

There was a significant period of change in Down Syndrome Ireland in 2025. The loss of our recently appointed CEO, Nichola Alyward, in late 2024 was unexpected and impacted all stakeholders within the organisation. Will Cronin began the role of Interim CEO after he resigned from the Board in January 2025. Will served as a board director from 2023 – 2025 including his term as the National Treasurer. He compassionately led the organisation through this period of recovery as the organisation came to term with this loss. His experience and knowledge of the organisation supported DSI during this transitional period until Aidan Stacey was appointed as the new CEO in August 2025.

Aidan Stacey has a recognised pedigree in the charity sector. Prior to joining DSI he worked for the Irish Heart Foundation, Goal, Oxfam and spent 8 years at The Irish Wheelchair Association as their Commercial Director. Following his appointment, he immediately reached out to the branch network to meet members with Down syndrome and their families. He also engaged with key external stakeholders within the disability sector. His focus and support to all people with Down syndrome and their families was apparent. He came in with a goal to remove the burden of fundraising from parents and families in order to gain services for the family member with Down syndrome.

Other significant appointments within the Senior Leadership team were the appointment of HR Manager, Therese Donovan. Therese had an extensive background in HR, lecturing and the charity sector. She was joined by Ruth Hickey as the Head of Fundraising, Communication and Advocacy. Ruth brings considerable experience and expertise having previously spent 12 years at Child Vision as the Head of Communications and Development together with overseeing significant change at The Friends of St Luke as an executive director.

The Board also had three changes of Officers in 2025. Wayne O'Connor was appointed by the Board as the National Treasurer following Will Cronin's departure. The President of DSI, Gerard O'Carroll, and Secretary, Sylvaine Ní Cheallacháin, completed their term of office in November 2025. Both board members brought incredible commitment and drive to the organisation with the investment of their time and support to the board during their terms of office.

Their stability at board level through several governance and personnel changes cannot be underestimated. They oversaw the 18-month consultation process before the adoption of the new Memorandum and Articles, the Byelaws for the branches and the introduction of the first independent board members. Both were involved in the appointments of the two CEO's and supported the successful candidates in their roles. The staff is incredibly grateful for their commitment to Down Syndrome Ireland.

Fionn Crombie Angus, the first member of the board with Down syndrome, also resigned from the board in 2025.

Fionn represented DSI at the United Nations in New York on World Down Syndrome Day and was a great advocate for the organisation from 2023 - 2025.

The independent directors of Garry Doyle, Martyn Rosney and Karin Lanigan completed their first year of their three-year term. Kellie Daniels, the forth independent director, resigned from the Board in May 2025. Her legal knowledge and experience were incredibly valuable during her term of office.

At the National AGM in November 2025, Martina Kelly, was appointed as the new President of DSI. She had been an active member of the Board of DSI since her appointment in 2023. She also had experience at branch committee level as the former Chair of the Longford Westmeath branch. Her commitment to good governance was illustrated by her considered engagement in the consultation for the Memorandum and Articles.

Margaret Quane was also appointed as the Company Secretary at the National AGM. She has been an active member of the board supporting branch AGMs, Employment events and the Tour de Munster.

Máire Neary, VP of People and Legal at Flipdish was also appointed to the board as a member director. Her legal knowledge and experience are a significant benefit to the board. She also has experience at board level as a non-executive member of the board of Vision Sports Ireland.

Board Attendance

Name	Role	Attendance record 2025
Gerard O Carroll	President until 08/11	12/12
Sylvaine Ní Cheallacháin	Secretary until 08/11	11/12
Will Cronin	Treasurer until 08/01	1/1
Martina Kelly	Director and then President 08/11	13/14
Margaret Quane	Director and then Secretary 08/11	14/14
Wayne O' Connor	Director and then Board Treasurer 02/2025	12/14
Fionn Angus Crombie	Director until 08/11	10/12
Paul Radford	Director	14/14
Kellie Daniels	Director until 26/05	7/7
Karin Langlin	Director	13/14
Garry Doyle	Director	12/14
Martyn Rosney	Director	12/14
Máire Neary	Director 08/11	1/2

Branches

Athlone

23

Members

Highlights

- The members took part in the Dance Zone classes and put on a show at Easter.
- Members took part in rhythmic gymnastics and competed at the beginning of the year.
- Fundraisers took place in 2025, including a coffee morning at Bank of Ireland and a Ladies Lunch at the local golf club.

Carlow

58

Members

Highlights

- SLTA at the beginning of 2025
- Members of the Wexford FC Futsal team were involved, with branch member Mark O'Keeffe becoming the first development player from the branch to train with the national futsal team.
- The branch held its 2nd Annual Walk your Socks off for the branch, with a massive turnout and fun had by all.
- Carlow County Council turned Carlow blue and yellow for World Down Syndrome Day, lighting up the town in support.
- Marie Sheppard, former secretary of the branch, was honoured as volunteer of the year.
- To celebrate WDSO, branch member Rebeka Cole was a special guest on news2day on RTÉ.
- Carlow GAA All Stars started up, and loads of members took part and played in Croke Park.
- The branch enjoyed Bike Week in May, with thanks to a grant from TFI.

- Active Carlow held some amazing camps, which have been a great support to branch members.
- The first branch Calendar was published!
- Eimear Hennessy from the branch appeared on Dizzy Deliveries.
- The branch had an amazing Christmas Party.
- Branch Bowling is always a fun event, and members young and old love it.

Significant Changes

We have a whole new committee and we are still learning.

Positive Feedback

The members really love it when we have events that include the whole branch, i.e., the Christmas Party and bowling nights, so this year we have stepped up the bowling and days out.

Cavan

32

Members

Highlights

- Teenage meet-ups took place.
- Swimming had good attendance throughout the year from both younger and teenage members.
- Events included kayaking and clay modelling, and there was also a trip to the Christmas pantomime.
- Teenagers also took part in cookery sessions, pony sessions and a farm visit.

- Three Branch members qualified for the Special Olympics Games this summer: Katie Mills – Bocce, Hilary Smith – Athletics, Michael Lafferty – Swimming

Significant Changes

New Committee formed at AGM to drive the branch forward

Statistics

15 members attend Teenage Meet-Ups

Clare

87

Members

Highlights

- The Clare branch has secured SLT provision for members for 1 day a week, with 14 members currently attending and more on the waiting list. They received funding from the HSE National Lottery Grant towards the SLT provision (€2,007.60), with the remainder funded by the Branch and the parents.
- The branch purchased a house in Ennis in 2024 for a future hub. The property requires thorough renovations, and planning permission for this was secured in December 2025. To date, they are renting rooms in the council hub to try to provide services as best they can. The whole project will need substantial fundraising. They are awaiting a review of the works required, which will be substantial. Their endeavours to secure and renovate the future hub for the branch have been featured on social media and in local media, including Clare FM.
- They have received a €12,500 SEE Grant from the Generation Green Community Fund towards the renovation costs, as well as a €2,000 grant from the Clare County Council towards the engineer's costs associated with the house.
- Funding for this was granted by the Clare County Council under their Embrace Art Initiative, which is paying the fees for drama teacher Lisa Joyce.

Significant Changes

- The branch had two administrators leave in 2025, one in May and another in November, which meant the

administrative duties fell to the committee for months at a time. A new administrator was hired at the end of 2025, with the role beginning in early 2026.

Statistics

- 10 members attend Drama.
- 18 children and young people attend gymnastics, together with Clare Local Sports Partnership.
- 15 members attend a very popular branch Zumba class once a week.
- 4-5 members attend a Book Club held at Ennis Library once a month, led by library staff who have undergone training with Sinéad Flynn, Head of Adult Education, Self Advocacy and Community Engagement.
- Bowling takes place monthly with 10 members.
- 12 members attend cycling lessons for all ages, with Clare Local Sports Partnership.
- 14 members attend SLT.

Positive Feedback

The branch members and their families share their appreciation of the work towards making their lives better. It is clearly visible in the turnout of volunteers at local fundraisers, mostly at the Odd Socks Cycle, held jointly with Shannon Cycling Club every spring, and when supporting the Clare leg of the Tour de Munster once a year in summer.

Cork

380

Members

Highlights

- The Field of Dreams was featured on RTE's Homegrown programme.
- It received significant funding from a foundation to build three new therapy rooms in the Field of Dreams, allowing all members to access services from one site.
- A new therapy and education-based playgroup, Playful Pathways, was launched. It was designed by the SLTs and the SEN teacher.
- Summer camps took place.
- 35 people completed the Camino, raising over €137k for the branch.
- Assume I Can employment open day took place on 6th May and welcomed 85 attendees from 27 companies, stakeholders, members and their families.
- SUDS Field of Dreams Cycle took place on 8th June and was a super fundraiser for the branch.



Cork (continued)

380 Members

- The branch and the produce made in Field of Dreams were represented at the Cork Summer Show, which welcomes over 30k visitors over a weekend in June.
- SLT team hosted Lámh cafés for members.
- 25th Anniversary of the Tour de Munster, one of the largest fundraisers for the branch.
- Launched new bespoke education programmes, short courses and job skills courses. Partnered with Penneys on a new Skills In Action programme that incorporates 6 weeks of work experience in a Penneys store.
- Baby massage classes took place.
- 60 students graduated from the education programmes in the Field of Dreams.
- Aqua Therapy swim classes took place.
- The Pick-A-Pumpkin Harvest Festival was another success this year and is another big fundraiser for the branch.
- The SLT team hosted Halloween communication cafés.
- Members enjoyed an Easter egg hunt and a Christmas party. I am running a few minutes late; my previous meeting is running over.

Significant Changes in 2025

Streamline of operations

Statistics

- 60 students graduating
- 28 members in 44 paid part-time roles
- 30 members attended summer camps
- Over 3300 visitors to the Pick-A-Pumpkin Harvest Festival
- 85 members attending individual SLT sessions
- 31 members attending SLT group sessions

Positive Feedback

"The flexible approach to my son was the biggest success. Seeing that he is very slow to join and giving him the time and space he needed was vital. He enjoyed this camp so much and probably socialised more in a week than he has in a very long time. There was no pressure on him to join or complete projects, and the big smile at the end of the day was worth far more than any piece of art." - From a parent of a member who attended summer camp



Donegal

201 Members

Highlights

- The Finn Harps Down Syndrome Futsal team has made a huge name for themselves in the sporting world, winning the prestigious Cairdeas Cup for a record third time in just two years, with an incredible 6-2 win over Dundalk.
- The team won again in the second tournament later that year, in November 2025, to reclaim the Cairdeas Premiership Cup.
- Donegal swimmers Anna Hennessy and Eoin Rooney were selected for Team Ireland at the 8th European Down Syndrome Swimming Championships. Anna and Eoin competed at the event in Portugal, where they achieved great success.

Significant Changes

New Branch Administrator started in August 2025

Statistics

- 22 members attending SLT appointments
- Approximately 15 in employment, mostly part-time
- 5 members attending OT appointments (these are currently in review)
- 4 members attending NDT
- 60 members under 12 attended their Christmas party, 14 teenagers and 25 adult members for their parties
- 10 members attend drama classes
- 50 members in swimming lessons

Positive Feedback

Parents/Carers happy with the services provided

Dublin

400 Members

Highlights

- In 2025, the Dublin branch received significant exposure through groups and activities, especially the exclusive performance of the Christmas panto at the Civic Theatre, Tallaght.
- The branch's hugely popular Tuesday bowling group had 40 members attending every week.

Significant Changes

Short tenures within the committee resulted in significant gaps in 2025.

Statistics:

12 members gained employment in 2025, bringing the total number of employees in Dublin to 75.

Positive Feedback:

People say the committee is very proactive.

Galway

174 Members

Highlights

- Hired a new Speech and Language Assistant, Lily Reaney.
- A successful year, with Hewlett-Packard Enterprise (HPE) choosing the Galway branch as their charity of the year, thanks to committee member David, who also works at HPE and organised all the charity initiatives at HPE with his team.

- Also elected as one of the chosen charities for the Mayors Ball 2025.

Galway (continued)

174 Members

Significant Changes

From the end of 2024 through 2025, the Galway Branch successfully moved the team of colleagues into the Ballybane office – SCCUL Enterprise Centre, where they have run a Speech and Language clinic over the past year, offering both SLT and SLTA groups and individual sessions. The Ballybane office is also a hub for the employment specialist to meet with members who would like to seek employment in Galway.

Statistics

- 10 members are supported in employment through the Galway Employment Support Service. Five of those individuals have maintained long-term employment for several years.
- The branch has also seen ongoing positive engagement from local employers, including one employer expanding their involvement from one employee to three through the programme, and another progressing to recruit a second employee following initial engagement last year.

- Continued workplace mentoring and employer liaison remain key to supporting sustainable employment placements. Norah Mahoney, Employment Support Specialist, has continued to promote inclusive employment locally through the Employer Spotlight series on LinkedIn, helping to build awareness and strengthen employer relationships within the Galway community.
- Over 100 members are receiving SLT services from both a speech and language therapist and a speech and language assistant.



Kerry

200 Members

Highlights

- In 2025, the branch continued to expand its reach, supporting over 200 families in Kerry with lifelong services spanning therapies, education and employment pathways.
- The Kerry branch made a film, 'Believe', which was nominated for two awards at The Fresh Film Awards. A story of belief and inclusion, and that things are never black and white.
- 321 Kerry Branch charity shop, a social enterprise, celebrated 10 years in business, serving the community with connection and care.
- Deenagh Lodge Cafe Social Enterprise employed 30 young adults with Down syndrome in the National Park Cafe in Killarney.
- The coffee ground initiative was also launched by team Deenagh to champion sustainability and waste.
- A new project proposal grant has been ratified with Kerry County Council for the Blennerville Windmill Cafe, with a grant to open a new cafe at Blennerville Windmill.
- This is part of the Responsible Entrepreneurship initiative and Social Impact. It links to the UN Sustainable Goals SDG 4, 10, 11 & 17.
- Connections with families with new babies in the branch are being strengthened through support for their active Parent and Toddler Group, with guidance from Early Intervention Services in DSI.

- Fundraising remains vital to expand services, and they are grateful for the support of Tour De Munster and the great opportunity to be a charity partner for ROKCC in 2026.

Significant Changes

Kookability for Independence and Employability gained more visibility in the media and welcomed two new students. Recruitment of two new Employment and Learning Support Specialists.



Kerry (continued)

200 Members

Statistics:

- 13 members in paid employment in Kerry
- Over 100 families receive SLT in Kerry each month.
- Outreach in several schools and across the County of Kerry

Positive Feedback:

'My daughter, Máire, looks forward to Easter every year. She loves chocolate eggs, but the main reason for her anticipation is the seasonal reopening of the Deenagh Lodge Café. She has worked in the café every Sunday since it first opened and really loves her job there. The

rest of the year, she enjoys her Sunday morning lie-ins, but there is no keeping her in bed when the Deenagh is open for business. Each Sunday she proudly dons her work clothes and apron and heads off to serve the café's patrons, locals and tourists alike. I have borne witness to how her work there has developed Máire's social confidence and enhanced her self-esteem, facilitated by the wonderful staff and volunteers. As a parent I am profoundly grateful for the partnership between the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and Down Syndrome Ireland that enables our adults with Down syndrome in Kerry to be active members of the workforce and fulfil their great potential.' Kathleen Murphy

Kildare

262 Members

Highlights

- In September 2025, the Kildare branch celebrated its 40th anniversary.
- The Purple Door Creative Arts group performed at the Riverbank Theatre in Newbridge.
- Horticulture students from An Garrai Beag took part in the 100 million tree planting project at Naas Racecourse.
- Kildare members of the Midlands Regional Advisory Council visited Leinster House and met Minister James Lawless.
- They held an adult education and employment night in May, which drew a large crowd and was very successful.

- Minister Michael Moynihan visited the site in Donadea in May.
- Eoghan Ashe, a swimmer at the European Down Syndrome Swimming Championships, won a bronze medal in the 4 x 100 Medley Relay.
- Kim O'Kelly was a keynote speaker on active inclusion at Leinster House in December.

Significant Changes

The Branch Secretary stepped down, with the new Secretary holding the position for just two months before also stepping down. The Branch gained a new Chairperson, while no Vice Secretary, Vice Chairperson or Vice Treasurer were elected.

Kilkenny

115 Members

Highlights

- The "Saddle Up for Down Syndrome Kilkenny" cycle was an outstanding success, raising over €120,000 through a combination of community support and match funding. The event brought together families, cyclists, volunteers, and local businesses in a powerful show of unity and purpose.
- Continued expansion of therapeutic supports, particularly in Speech & Language Therapy (SLTA), with strong advocacy contributing to national momentum around improved services.

- Increased community awareness and inclusion, with strong participation in local events and excellent engagement across social media and local press.
- Strengthened partnerships with local organisations, including sporting groups, businesses, and volunteers, enhancing visibility and support for the branch.
- Positive progress towards the vision of a Centre of Excellence in the South-East, with Kilkenny positioned as a key hub for future service delivery.
- High levels of member participation across activities, including camps, social events, and fundraising initiatives.

Kilkenny (continued)

115 Members

Significant Changes:

A major shift towards structured fundraising and strategic planning, resulting in significantly increased funds raised and better long-term sustainability. Strengthened leadership and committee engagement, with clearer roles and increased volunteer involvement. Greater alignment with national developments. Increased focus on advocacy and service development, particularly around SLT access and equitable supports for families.

Statistics:

- Over €120,000 raised through the annual cycle and associated fundraising
- Over 300 participants in the Saddle Up cycle, with massive community engagement.

- Significant increase in iDonate fundraising pages and community participation
- Continued engagement of members in SLTA supports, camps, and social activities
- Strong volunteer involvement across events, with dozens of volunteers supporting fundraising and activities

Positive Feedback:

- “We felt truly supported this year – not just financially but emotionally. The branch brings families together in a way that makes you feel understood and not alone.”
- “The cycle was an incredible event, so well organised and full of positivity. It’s amazing to see what the Kilkenny branch has built.”
- “The difference in supports and the sense of community has been life-changing for our family.”

Laois

45 Members

Highlights

- The branch continued to employ a full-time SLTA under the tutelage of Olive Buckeridge.
- Several successful fundraisers, including the flagship Shamrock Pots for St Patrick’s Day.
- The branch received a cheque for €20,000 from the Mountmellick Macra Truck and Tractor Run, which took place in December 2024.
- Borris Vintage Tractor Run raised €15,500 for the branch in September 2025, and Abbeyleix House and Farm gifted the branch €12,000 in December 2025 for the branch’s work at their Christmas Fair.
- The Laois Branch also celebrated its 30th anniversary with a party in November.

Significant Changes

The branch saw a huge uplift in funding in 2025, driven by a much-improved public perception of the branch after it took the step to hire its first employee, a full-time SLTA in September 2024.

Statistics

- 35 members attending weekly SLTA.
- 20 members attending monthly OT.

- 12 members attending weekly art classes.
- Horticulture group meeting weekly, with a horticulture tutor joining the branch in September 2025.

Positive Feedback

Public perception of the branch has skyrocketed due to the amount of work done.



Leitrim

30

Members

Highlights

- The Leitrim branch hired Sarah Tuthill to provide SLT for members in September 2025.
- They held the Leitrim Ladies Lunch fundraiser for the first time since 2019, and it was a huge success.
- It was great to see loyal supporters and to welcome a whole new group, including the families of branch members who had joined the branch in the past 6 years.
- They received media coverage, and it turned out to be the branch's largest fundraiser to date.

Significant Changes

Administrator Tiffany Moore was hired in late 2024, but we've noticed the impact in 2025. She has assisted with additional grant applications, and her support for the committee members has been very helpful.

Statistics

- 7 members availing of SLT with Sarah Tuthill
- 10 members attending Maths for Life tutoring
- 6 members attending yoga classes
- 3 members taking music lessons

Positive Feedback

They received so many compliments and positive feedback from the Ladies Lunch fundraiser! Many people had a great time, and they're looking forward to the next one!



Limerick

150

Members

Highlights

- Tour De Munster
- Sean Kelly Three Counties Cycle
- New Ambassador
- AIB Community Fund

Significant Changes

New Operations Manager, new Speech and Language Therapist and new Administrator. New adult education course began in September.

Statistics

- OT - 40 1:1 sessions, 24 members
- PT - 196 1:1 sessions, 13 members
- SLT - 629 1:1 sessions, 51 group sessions, 90 members

- 13 members graduated from our Adult Education Programme in 2025.
- 15 members are in employment (some through the disability sector)
- Family Swim attendance: 5 families (20 people) for 32 weeks.
- Baby Massage attendance: 5 babies and their parents attended.
- Messy Play attendance: 7 toddlers and their parents attended 3 sessions.
- Art workshops attendance: 9 members attended 3 workshops.
- Zumba & Club attendance: 20 people each week for 32 weeks.
- Youth Club attendance: 20 members and 8 volunteers each week for 28 weeks.

Limerick (continued)

150 Members

- Junior Youth Club attendance: 8 members and 8 volunteers each week for 8 weeks.
- Book club: 6 attendees per session.
- Summer camps: 13 attending each day for 3 days.

- Summer outings: 4 outings for various ages, attended by 27 members plus parents.

Positive Feedback

"Had not realised you do so much." "It is a lovely, welcoming environment."



Longford/Westmeath

80 Members

Highlights

- Weekly swimming sessions in Mullingar
- SLTA weekly sessions for U12's
- Monthly adult book club
- Teen book club started
- Bursary payments to members to help with private therapies, etc.
- Fintan Bray was elected Chairperson of the National Advisory Council (NAC). We are very proud of him.
- Some members modelled in the Louth/Meath fashion show. Fintan, Monica, Anna and Liam visited government buildings for World Down Syndrome Day and met Simon Harriss to discuss important issues.
- World Down Syndrome Day was celebrated across many local schools and businesses in Westmeath and Longford.
- We celebrated WDSD with a full branch party – soft play for children and bowling. It was a fantastic day.
- The Dromone Motor Cycle Club held their annual bike run, and many members were there to see them off and return.
- We took part in the Tesco Community Fund, and our members Ethan and Anna went to Tesco to collect the cheque.
- Rachel Connell, a branch member, had her artwork exhibited at a National Showcase. We are very proud of Rachel and all her achievements.
- Many members joined our local Woodies store in Mullingar for their Woodies Heroes days.
- Healthy Ireland Cookery and Gardening classes took place in July and August for our teens and adults.
- The Kind Kids Club mindfulness group was held at Belvedere House and Gardens over the summer for our 5-12-year-olds and their siblings.
- Branch Day out to Molly Moos farm was a fantastic day for all who attended.

Longford/Westmeath (continued)

80

Members

Highlights

- We marked DS Awareness month by sharing daily facts and showcasing our amazing members.
- Tracy Smith skydiving to raise money for our branch, which supports her beautiful sister Hannah. A huge thank you to Tracy.
- David Hogg and Kevin Kennedy represented Ireland at the European Down Syndrome Swimming Championships. Both David and Kevin won medals, and David set a new European record. We are so proud of you both and all your achievements.
- For Halloween, we held cookery lessons for teens and adults, and a Spooky Mindfulness group for younger members, in Belvedere House and Gardens. 2 of our members, Anna and Amanda, sold their handmade goods at local Christmas markets.
- Author Jessica Thompson from Longford wrote her latest book, "Operation Blue Light Snowdown", and chose our branch to share in the sales proceeds, along with Little Blue Hero's. The book was amazing, and all our members loved it.
- We held a Lamh Module 1 course in November for parents, teachers and SNAs of our members. This was facilitated by Lisa Ann Roche, Lamh tutor.
- Holy Family School in Mullingar sang Christmas carols and raised funds for our branch. We were very grateful to receive the funds.
- Lastly, we held our much-loved Annual Christmas Party at the Annebrook Hotel, Mullingar, in early December. This was attended by 70 families from the branch. This has become the highlight of the year for many members and their families.

Significant Changes

Our former Chairperson, and mother of our member Nathan, was elected President of DSI at the AGM. We are very proud of you, Martina.

Statistics

- Support approximately 50 families with therapy costs.
- 35 members under 12 attending SLTA in 2025.
- 30 members under 18 taking swimming lessons.



Louth/Meath

300 Members

Highlights

- The branch's Early Intervention Home Teacher Programme supports preschool children (ages 1-6) through fortnightly home visits.
- The branch welcomed Cara Morgan, a new Employment Support Specialist, who supports employed members and helps others secure paid local roles.
- In June 2025, members graduated from the Latch-On programme in Navan. Building on this, Louth and Meath ETB, with DSI and Cara Morgan, is delivering a one-year Work Ready programme in Navan.
- The Regional Advisory Council, a self-advocacy group for adults with Down syndrome, continued its work this year, with Chairperson Michelle Whelehan and Secretary Eleanor Murray representing the council at branch committee meetings.
- The branch funding scheme provided financial support to members for therapies, sports, and recreational activities.
- Many social events took place, including the Family Fun Day and BBQ, Christmas parties, and discos.
- Sensory Fun with Orla McFeely started in September. This monthly group offers games, music, and activities such as scarf juggling and ribbon dancing.
- Coffee Morning Get-Togethers are held quarterly in the Huckleberry Den, Navan.
- Rainbow Buddies are monthly outings, including pantomimes, circus, films, and more. It is a fun social gathering for younger members and their families.
- Elisha Gallagher and Liam Foley represented Ireland at the 8th European Down Syndrome Athletics Championships (IAADS) in Prague. Liam won 2 gold and a bronze, defending his European titles. Elisha set PBs, finishing 6th in Europe.
- In Futsal, Jamie, Micheál, and Fergus represented Ireland in Italy, winning bronze.
- The branch's Regional Resource Officer, Mike Egan, continues to provide invaluable support to families at every life stage.
- The branch hosted various workshops, including Sibling Workshops, Fun with Numbers, Numicon Workshops, and a See & Learn Kit Library, as well as many other activities.

Significant Changes

The branch appointed a new Employment Support Specialist, Cara Morgan. Sensory Fun also started in September.

Statistics

- 25 children are participating in the Early Intervention Home Teacher Programme.
- Members are employed at Specsavers, the Pillo Hotel, the D Hotel, SuperValu, and The Fairways Hotel.



Mayo

136

Members

Highlights

- The Mayo branch continued to support inclusive learning and developmental opportunities across the county.
- Art classes funded through the Local Creative Youth Partnership (LCYP) provided structured creative learning opportunities.
- Arts and crafts sessions supported engagement, development, and social interaction.
- Collaboration with Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann enabled members to participate.
- Drama Therapy was funded through the Creative Ireland Programme for our members.
- In addition, the branch continues to invest in See and Learn educational resources whenever funding allows. These resources are used both at home and in schools and are now widely adopted across many educational settings in Co Mayo, supporting early communication, literacy, and cognitive development.
- Ongoing access to Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) was provided through continued engagement with our dedicated therapist, Karen Arnold.
- First Aid training was delivered to members and parents, supporting confidence, safety, and practical life skills.
- A significant development in 2025 was the establishment of a working relationship with Dr Hilary Stokes, Consultant Paediatrician at Mayo University Hospital and Head of the Down Syndrome Clinic. The branch met with Dr Stokes to discuss improvements to the clinic experience for members and families, including attendance procedures and blood testing experiences.
- It was noted that there is currently one HSE-employed play therapist supporting the clinic, who provides an excellent and highly valued service. The possibility of securing a second play therapist was discussed, and Dr Stokes agreed to explore this further. The branch will also engage with local TDs and Minister Dara Calleary to advocate for additional supports where required.
- These developments strengthen communication between families and healthcare professionals and support more responsive, person-centred healthcare. The focus on additional therapeutic capacity and ongoing advocacy reflects a proactive approach to improving services for children and families in Mayo.
- Annual Summer and Christmas outings brought members and families together.
- The Baby & Toddler Group, supported by HSE funding, provided early support for younger members and families.
- Dance classes offered inclusive opportunities for movement, enjoyment, and social engagement.
- Dance classes for our adult members.
- Arts & crafts evenings.
- Fergal Birrane was called up to the Irish Down Syndrome Futsal Team and competed at the SUDS European Championship in Italy, representing Ireland.
- Caitlin Malone achieved international success at the World Karate Championships, winning gold and bronze medals, and will compete again in 2026.
- A significant milestone for the branch was the celebration of its 50th Anniversary, marking five decades of commitment to supporting people with Down syndrome in the region. This was celebrated through a special event attended by members, families, local representatives, and past leadership, including TDs and past DSI President Ger O'Carroll.

Significant Changes

- A remarkable €23,000 was raised through a HYROX challenge undertaken by our very own branch Chairperson, James Carty.
- A further €20,000 was raised through a golf fundraiser in Kildare, with funds shared between Mayo Branch and Down Syndrome Ireland.
- Our annual church gate collection raised an incredible €20,000 – a testament to the great generosity of the people of Co Mayo.



Mayo (continued)

136 Members

- A €5,000 grant from the Local Creative Youth Partnership (LCYP) supported the delivery of art classes throughout 2025.
- Continued funding and support from the ETB supported programmes for members aged 18+.
- HSE funding supported the continuation of the Baby & Toddler Group. The branch also received widespread community support through numerous local fundraising initiatives, including Christmas light events, tractor runs, GAA tournaments, school fundraising days (including "Lots of Socks"), cake sales, and community dance nights. These combined efforts ensured strong financial stability and enabled the continuation and expansion of inclusive programmes for members across all age groups.

Statistics

The branch continues to support and celebrate the growing number of members in meaningful employment across Mayo. Members are currently employed across a range of organisations and businesses, including Specsavers, Mayo Movie World, Lidl, Hotel Ballina and Westport House. A notable success is Anna Tobin, who secured employment with support from Down Syndrome Ireland's national employment programme.

Positive Feedback

"It was our pleasure in fundraising for you [Mayo branch] this year, and we were delighted with all that was raised and the generosity of people. Everything went off well. We are truly grateful for the opportunity to work together with you on this fundraiser, and we want to thank you sincerely for everything you do for individuals and families in Mayo."

Offaly

50 Members

Highlights

- Several workshops and training days for members throughout 2025, including Family Lámh, flower arranging, a music workshop, and swimming lessons.
- The annual Family Fun Day took place in August, with a BBQ, music, and entertainment for the whole family.

Statistics:

- 4 members are in employment
- 1 member runs her own card-making company that the branch supports

Positive Feedback

Everyone loves our family fun day, as it allows families and friends to sit back and relax while the kids are safe and entertained. The community guards attend each event, and they are always blown away by the community spirit.



Roscommon

48

Members

Highlights

- Continued successful partnership with OT, Erin Gleeson, providing monthly sessions to members.
- The Branch members took part in a dance performance at The National Dance Championships in Ennis in June, performing 'This Is Me' from The Greatest Showman.
- The Branch held a fun Christmas party at Gleesons, where Santa arrived via Garda Escort!
- Chadwicks held a fundraising car wash, with all proceeds donated to the Branch. The Elphin Fun Run, organised by a member and her family, again raised significant funds for the Branch.

Positive Feedback

- Branch members are well respected in the local community.

More Info

- The branch hopes to obtain more SLT for over 12s as well as better employment opportunities for members once they finish their education.



Sligo

68

Members

Highlights

- In 2025, the Sligo branch continued to strengthen its impact through targeted support, local partnerships, funding initiatives, and increased community visibility. A key highlight was the delivery of speech and language therapy group support for children under 12, with 21 members attending the groups. This was particularly important for families whose children had not received therapy elsewhere. The branch also continued to identify and pursue funding opportunities, with the Coordinator and Committee actively applying for and managing funding to address gaps in activities and supports for members. This has played an important role in enabling the branch to provide meaningful opportunities across different age groups.
- Another major highlight was the continued development of the branch's Futsal team in partnership with the Sligo Rovers Inclusion Officer. The team is now well established, with members regularly taking part in regional and national competitions, creating valuable opportunities for participation, confidence-building and inclusion through sport.
- The branch also maintained a strong local profile throughout the year, with public visibility through World Down Syndrome Day celebrations, including the town turning purple and a reception hosted by the Lord

Mayor at City Hall. The branch also received local media coverage on radio and in print when promoting events, awareness and branch activities.

Significant Changes

A significant development in 2025 was the continued growth and structure of branch activities across age groups, with regular programmes in drama, dance, music, book clubs, CO Motion cycling sessions and speech and language support. The branch also strengthened inclusive opportunities for young adults through the Shine Drama Programme, delivered in partnership with Hawk's Well Theatre, creating a valuable platform for self-expression and performance. Another important development was the branch's increased visibility within the wider community, particularly through World Down Syndrome Day celebrations at City Hall and the town-wide purple lighting initiative. The delivery of speech and language therapy groups for children under 12 was also particularly significant, as it provided access to support for families who had not previously received therapy locally. The continued development of the book clubs and monthly CO Motion sessions also reflected the branch's commitment to inclusion, confidence-building and meaningful participation for members with varying needs.

Sligo (continued)

68

Members

Statistics

- 8 in the Young People Drama group (aged 7–17 years)
- 10 in the Young Adults Shine Drama Programme (aged 18 years and over)
- 12 in the Dance class
- 12 in the Music class
- 21 in Speech and Language Therapy groups for under-12s
- 2 book club groups with 6 members each
- 10–12 members in CO Motion monthly cycling sessions
- 10 in the Monthly Sunday Pool Club

Positive Feedback

Families were very appreciative of the opportunities provided by the branch throughout 2025, particularly the speech and language therapy groups for children under 12, which offered support that some members had not previously received. The book clubs were also seen as a very positive and inclusive activity, with families valuing how different reading abilities were accommodated so that all members could take part and benefit socially. There was also very positive feedback on inclusive events such as Equal Vibes, which created a welcoming space for people with additional needs and their families to come together, enjoy music, socialise, and make new connections.



Tipperary

130

Members

Highlights

- 2025 has been a positive and progressive year for the Tipperary branch, with a strong focus on inclusion, skill-building, and meaningful opportunities for our members to connect, learn, and contribute to their communities.
- The branch's weekly café at the Source Arts Centre remains a cornerstone of its work. Now fully self-sufficient, it provides members with valuable, real-life hospitality experience. Members are involved in all aspects of the café, from customer service and food preparation to transactions, and now receive weekly tip payments in recognition of their contributions. Smaller working groups have supported increased confidence and skill development.
- The branch continued to build strong education and training pathways through a partnership with

Tipperary ETB. Members engaged in structured learning through the Elevate 21 programme, supported by an SNA role funded by the branch. These opportunities are critical to supporting transitions from school to adult pathways and promoting independence.

- Weekly after-school therapy groups continued to provide essential support for all members across different age groups. A 20-week dramatherapy programme delivered with Springhouse was a standout success, supporting confidence, communication, and emotional expression. It ran every Saturday, with additional activity after the group sessions. Easter, Summer, and Christmas SLT camps have remained a very successful and positive contribution, with a Speech and Language Therapy focus that supports communication and social development in a structured and enjoyable environment.

Tipperary (continued)

130

Members

- Social and recreational activities have remained vibrant and member-led, including discos, karaoke, cinema nights, yoga, and the successful Adult Summer Programme. In the summer of 2025, 21 adults participated in a 13-week programme that included theatre trips, mocktail making, and weekly art sessions, that led to a 3-week Art Exhibition.
- SLT supported Independence trips for teens and adults, which ran throughout the summer. These trips supported confidence, life skills, and social development. Members have played an active role in the community through Annual Bucket Collections and awareness activities, confidently representing the branch and promoting understanding of Down syndrome.
- Fundraising events were a strong feature of 2025, particularly the successful Sarah's Cycle, which brought members together in a meaningful way while raising vital funds. The Tour De Munster in August brought members and their families across Munster. The Jingle Your Jumper Campaign was strong this year, with members, their families, local businesses and schools across Tipperary getting involved.
- The Branch staged a Crinniu na Nóg Show in June at the Source Arts Centre, giving members of all ages the opportunity to shine on stage, with participants from the youngest to the eldest involved. Two adult members also MC'd the performance.
- One of the priorities was supporting members' transition to adult services, which remains a priority, with the application to REACH and the ALL office for funding to develop programmes to support the transition.
- In July, we also ran a four-day multiactivity camp for members and siblings, with over 35 participants in Cahir. We plan to run one again in 2026.

Significant Changes

2025 saw several significant developments within the Tipperary branch, particularly the strengthening of core supports and the continued growth of adult services. A key highlight of the year was the return of the Speech and Language Therapist following a period of illness. This was hugely significant for the branch, as it allowed them to re-establish consistent Speech and Language Therapy provision across the week and resume school visits. The impact has been very positive for members and families, restoring an essential support that underpins communication, confidence, and overall development. Another highlight was the collaboration with Equal Vibes to run inclusive social events for our adult and teen members, inviting their friends and families. They also hosted a 'Friendship and Community Lunch' for their peers in Day Services, organised by the adult members. The branch was delighted to receive funding for this from our Local Development Company.

Statistics

- Approximately 120 group intervention sessions, excluding one-to-one supports, reflect the scale and consistency of service provision.
- 9 members participated in a Work Ready programme at TUS, engaging in structured learning and developing skills for future employment.
- 9 members completed Barista training, gaining practical, work-based experience and building confidence in a real-world setting.
- Employment remains a key focus, with 6 members currently employed, highlighting the positive outcomes of the training and progression pathways.

Positive Feedback

Parents regularly expressed their appreciation for the consistency and quality of the supports, particularly highlighting the impact of the Speech and Language Therapy services and holiday camps on their child's communication and confidence. Members of the public who visit the café at the Source Arts Centre frequently commented on the welcoming atmosphere, the high standard of service and the professionalism of our members. Many remarked on how impressed they were by the confidence and ability shown by those working in the café.



Waterford/South Kilkenny

152 Members

Highlights

- Member Sean Upton performed in the play 'Up Down Boy'.
- The Waterford FC Futsal Team were the Cairdeas Cup Champions.
- Traces Dance Ensemble performed at The National Concert Hall, Dublin.
- Members of the Special Olympics Badminton team from the Branch reached the Munster Championship.
- Branch members performed 'Mama Mia' with the Brothers of Charity service at The Theatre Royale.
- Big Fundraisers: Run For Dreams, Beat The Train, Sunny South East Cycle, and Captains Charity Golf Event.

Statistics:

Members attending SLT, OT, Therapeutic Horse Riding, Swimming Lessons, and have members adult members in employment.



Wexford

101 Members

Highlights

- The branch organised very successful social events throughout the year. These included the Easter Egg Hunt at the Heritage Park in Wexford, a family day out in Ferns during the summer, which was enjoyed by all, and the annual Christmas party, which saw lots of fun and dancing, gifts, and a visit from the Big Man himself!
- The main fundraising event was the Great Beach Walk. This involved members, their families, and friends completing a walk that ended at the beautiful beach at Cahore. When the walkers reached the endpoint, they enjoyed burgers, fresh Wexford strawberries with yoghurt, and a selection of freshly baked cakes. All the produce was donated by local people and companies. A staggering €32,000 was raised. The Wexford Chamber of Commerce were most helpful in publicising the event to local businesses, who in turn donated to us.
- The branch organised aerial fitness classes for younger members and dance classes for older members. Some members travelled to Blackpool, where they were successful in competitions. One member even received a prize at the Fleadh in Wexford, held during the year.
- Gina Grant, Branch Advocacy Co-ordinator, spoke to carers about Independence. The talk, which was very well received, was both informative and challenging.
- In the absence of a functioning public service, they continued to coordinate appointments with therapists throughout the year. They also subsidised the cost of Speech and Language and Occupational therapies, as well as a variety of other expenses incurred by our families.
- The Wexford branch plans to expand activities in 2026.

Statistics

- 12 in drama
- 12 in dancing

Positive Feedback

Numerous expressions of thanks from members.

Wicklow

53

Members

Highlights

- Wen Wan Wang-Whelan, a mother of a child with Down syndrome and a member of the Wicklow branch, gave a TEDx talk titled [‘My Journey into play, Wen Wan Wang-Whelan, TEDxTrinityCollegeDublin’](#).
- Member Tracy Holmes has given numerous interviews to publicise her book Raising Resilience.
- Ballymanus GAA Club's annual Club Field Day and Ice Cream Party raised over €5,000 in September.
- Templecarrig School, Greystones, organised a bake sale for WDSD, raising over €500.

- The Christmas Panto at Draíocht, Blanchardstown, was a massive hit with the kids.

Significant Changes

Treasurer changed from Niamh Ni Orgain to Shane Leinster.

Positive Feedback

The family days that the branch has organised at Kitchen 28, Belmont Demesne, have been fantastic for meeting other members and for providing a great day out.







**Down
Syndrome
Ireland**

Down Syndrome Ireland

Unit 3, Park Way House,
Western Parkway Business Park,
Ballymount Drive,
Dublin 12,
D12HP70.

T (01) 426 6500

E info@downsyndrome.ie

