

RCSLT MANIFESTO BRIEFING COMMUNICATION DISABILITY



COMMUNICATION DISABILITY - Ensure that people in Northern Ireland with a communication disability have equality of opportunity in every aspect of their lives.

WE ARE CALLING ON OUR POLITICAL PARTIES TO:

- Support the development of a regional alternative and augmentative communication strategy which enshrines the importance of communication for health and well-being.
- Ensure that Northern Ireland has legislative safeguards including a mental capacity act that supports and protects individuals with a communication disability.

THE BACKGROUND

Alternative and augmented communication (AAC) describes a huge range of techniques which support or replace spoken communication. These include gesture, signing, symbols, word boards, communication boards and books, as well as voice output communication aids (VOCAs). AAC offers individuals with even the most severe communication difficulty, a way to have their voice heard and a way to exercise choice about their lives.



IN NORTHERN IRELAND

- 29,871 people in Northern Ireland are listed in the 2011 census as living with a long-term communication difficulty.
- The cost of not providing adequate AAC services is high, particularly if education and employment opportunities are denied.
- We must ensure that the rights of an individual with a communication disability to make choices about their lives, care and treatment are protected. As the case study demonstrates, adequate legislative safeguards need to be enacted in Northern Ireland to avoid placing individuals with a communication disability at a greater risk of being deemed to lack capacity and not being able to make their own decisions.

Protecting the fundamental rights of those without a voice – Neill's story

Neill 47 has anarthria (a total loss of speech) due to progressive multiple sclerosis. Prior to his illness, Neill was a teacher. Neill is also a published author.

Neill is now extremely limited in his range of movements. He can no longer speak and is unable to walk. He uses the back of his head to control a switch operated communication system on his laptop and facial expressions to convey simple yes, no responses. Neill's general health has also been considerably impacted by his condition.

Neill has been admitted to hospital on many occasions due to ill health and has found that his communication disability has had significant consequences.

Neill believes that his inability to communicate is the reason that many decisions about his care were not discussed with him.

THE ECONOMIC BENEFIT

- Every £1 invested in high tech AAC generates £1.23 – the monetary equivalent to the benefit generated in terms of quality-adjusted life years.
- Although no Northern Ireland cost-benefit analysis for AAC has yet been undertaken, the example below from the Scottish Government's Right to Speak guidance on AAC demonstrates the potential cost savings for AAC. It shows how a quadriplegic individual living alone at home but with the support of AAC, can control their environment, make text or voice calls, engage in face-to-face conversations and get support from a carer, as well as shop or bank and communicate via the internet using available technology.

Potential Economic Benefits of AAC Provision

AAC provision/living at home:
Total cost of AAC equipment £18,000
Weekly Care costs 49 hours @ £14.20/hr £695.80
Total annual care costs: £39,181.60

No AAC provision/living at home:
AAC Equipment costs £0
Weekly care costs 7x24 hours @ £14.20/hr £2385.60
Total annual care costs £124,046

Total Annual Saving with AAC provision £84,864.40

For further information and a full list of references please contact:

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