



**PEOPLE BEFORE PROFIT**

**FIGHTING FOR WORKERS & ECO-SOCIALISM**



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# A Manifesto for Disability Justice

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# INTRODUCTION

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Ireland has a long history of systemic marginalisation of disabled people by the State. Chronic under-investment, institutionalisation, and outsourcing of services to religious organisations, charities and the family have marginalised disabled people and placed parents of children with additional needs under huge pressure.

100 years of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael has meant 100 years of under-funding and neglect of disabled people and their rights. Disabled people who are women, LGBTQI+, immigrants, members of the Traveller community, or other ethnic groups face even more challenges accessing services and supports and experience even more marginalisation as a result.

But injustice always leads to a fightback! Forced by the state to fight for services and supports that should be theirs as a right, disabled people and their families have set up organisations and campaigns, they have protested outside the Dail, they have taken the State to court. They have won real victories against an uncaring Government. The scrapping of the Green Paper on Disability Reform was one such victory. Forcing the State to ratify the Optional Protocol is another. Disability Justice has been placed firmly on the agenda for the General Election in a way it never was before.

This Manifesto for Disability Justice seeks to incorporate the demands of disabled people, disabled people's organisations and parents of children with additional needs - which People Before Profit believes must be central to any programme for a Left Government.

# SUPPORTS FOR CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

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Supports for children with additional needs are in a desperate state. There are huge shortages of qualified health, education and social care staff and the system is a disorganised nightmare. Parents are fobbed off from one agency another and waiting lists are so long that they are forced to go private so children don't "age out" of the care they need:

- Children's Disability Network Teams have an average vacancy rate of over 30%.
- Its around 40% for occupational therapists, 70% for dietitians and 70 % for play therapists. Chamber House in Dublin 24 has a 50% and St Columba's in Crumlin has a 60% vacancy rate.
- Over 10,000 children are waiting for an Assessment of Need (AON).
- Over 100,000 are awaiting essential therapies.
- 25 families a month are taking the State to court to force it to provide an AON.
- At the start of the school year, over 120 children were without a school place. Many more were forced to do a third year of preschool.
- Less than a third of primary schools and only 410 out of 710 post primary schools have autism classes.
- Thousands of children are left without any Summer Programme each year as many schools do not offer this service, including 45 % of special schools.
- Over 1,000 children with disabilities were without school transport at the beginning of September this year.
- Last year, 20,000 pupils with disabilities were bussed out of their locality to special classes or schools.

It must be a fundamental principle of any education system that all children deserve an appropriate education in their own community. No child should be left behind.

### ***People Before Profit would:***

- Ensure that AONs are carried out and recommended supports and therapies are given within the legal timeframe;
- Ensure proper coordination between health, education and disability services so agencies can't pass the buck and children don't fall between the cracks;
- Implement a comprehensive plan to rapidly reduce and clear waiting lists for services - to include a comprehensive plan for staff retention across the relevant services addressing, in particular, pay and conditions;
- Introduce emergency measures to ensure full staffing of Children's Disability Network Teams and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, including speeding up the recruitment and recognition of the qualifications of international candidates;
- Double the number of Third Level places available for therapeutic courses, such as Occupational Therapy and Speech and Language Therapy;
- Remove all barriers to further education for those in allied health and education professions, including by scrapping third level fees;
- Ensure delivery of adequate training and support for teachers, Special Education Teachers (SETs) and SNAs, and improve pay and conditions;
- Trust schools and parents to know the supports needed by their children, and allocate SETs, SNAs and other resources according to this principle;
- Ensure that every school in the State has an autism class and every school offers a summer programme;
- Legislate to end seclusion and restraint in schools;
- Establish a centralised database from the moment a child is diagnosed to provide better data tracking and forward planning for a child's needs and a seamless transition to adult services and supports;
- Provide accessible school transport to all who need it free of charge



# INCOME SUPPORTS

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Due to privatisation and the lack of publicly funded disability services, the cost of having a disability is huge and has been estimated at between €9,822 and €13,886 per year. Even for families on good incomes, these costs are very substantial. For those on low incomes, they are impossible to manage. As a result, the lived experience of many people with disabilities and their carers is of poverty and exclusion.

SILC data for 2023 shows the highest levels of poverty amongst those ***unable to work due to long-standing health problems:***

- 27.3% are at risk of poverty (over twice the national figure);
- 16.5% live in consistent poverty (over four times national figure);
- 44% are suffering deprivation (over twice national figure).

Disabled people are twice as likely to be homeless and far more likely to be unemployed. Due to lack of supports, they are twice as likely to leave school early. This type of systemic poverty and exclusion must no longer be accepted.

At a time of massive exchequer surpluses the time is now to end the scandal of Government neglect and impoverishment of disabled people. People with a disability diagnosis should have an automatic, non-means tested entitlement to state supports, including financial supports for them and their carers and families. We also need to pay those who give up a profession, career and their independence to care for a loved one properly. As it stands, the work carers do is treated as free labour and many are left to live in poverty.

## ***People Before Profit would:***

- Abolish means testing for all disability-related payments, including Carer's Allowance, Disability Allowance, Blind Pensions and Invalidity Pension.
- Provide universal payments that cover the real costs of having a disability and provide income security to disabled people and carers - begin by immediately increasing all weekly disability payments to €350 a week, to include a €50 cost of disability payment.
- Pay carers a living wage of at least €15 per hour, plus pension entitlements and a full medical card.
- Introduce an annual entitlement to 30 days' respite (equivalent to the standard annual leave of 20 days plus the number of public holidays).

# HEALTHCARE AND SUPPORT SERVICES

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The health system in this country is nowhere near the standard of quality, universal, free healthcare that should exist in a country as rich as Ireland. Instead we have a deeply unjust two-tier system that allocates services on the basis of ability to pay - and ability of private healthcare interests to profit - rather than medical need. This is a national disgrace and has a particularly severe impact on people with disabilities. Recruitment embargoes and staffing shortages in the public system, endless public waiting lists, and a postcode lottery for publicly funded services outsourced to a complicated mishmash of public, private and NGO providers all contribute to poor, inconsistent or non-existent disability services and support. Homecare and nursing homes have been intensely privatised and disabled people still face unnecessary institutionalisation due to a lack of affordable care in the community.

Privatisation has also had a deeply detrimental effect on those who need personal assistant support. It has now become a for-profit model in which the carer is paid low wages on precarious contracts with no proper holidays or pensions entitlements. This leads to a high turnover of staff and a poor level of support for those who need continuity in their care. The service needs to be returned to the public sector and massively expanded.

The constant requirement for people who live with a disability to prove that they are still disabled is causing huge anxiety and stress to families who are already suffering. Interdepartmental communication can take months to update straightforward matters such as increased medications and relevant mobility aids. We need a centralised system that is updated by healthcare professionals and social welfare officers with all relevant information so a person with a disability can speedily access all the services and supports they need.

## ***People Before Profit would:***

- Introduce a single tier universal health service, free at the point of use, along the lines of the NHS when it was first set up;
- Take private healthcare into public ownership to ensure allocation of care on the basis of need, not ability to pay;
- End outsourcing of disability services: Incorporate community and voluntary sector disability services and personal assistants into the public sector to ensure consistency of services across the country, secure multi-annual funding for services and jobs, and better pay and conditions;
- Work with service users and frontline staff to develop a comprehensive plan to rapidly reduce and clear waiting lists - ditch the HSE's Pay and Numbers strategy and develop comprehensive workforce planning across disability, healthcare and social care based on the level of need, with a focus on expanding training and education and improving pay and conditions to address the recruitment and

retention crisis;

- Massively expand personal assistance hours - personal assistance must be available to all who need it as a right - to enable them to study, work, socialise and live a full life;
- Increase funding for assistive devices and technology to ensure prompt availability to all who require them;
- Introduce a legal right to homecare - no one should be institutionalised unnecessarily;
- Introduce a centralised registration database for people with disabilities, holding records of their medical needs and social supports to enable easy access to all the supports and services they need;

# HOUSING AND PUBLIC BUILDINGS

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Currently the housing development design system only accommodates the disability needs of an individual in a specific home - i.e. when a person is earmarked for a home it is retrofitted to accommodate their disability. This needs to change so that all public housing is accessible and inclusive by design. The same design requirement must apply to public buildings, both retrospectively and by design for new developments.

## ***People Before Profit would:***

- Ensure that all public housing developments are of an accessible design and are fully disability proofed so disabled people can live independently.
- Ensure that all schools and third level institutions are completely accessible with proper toileting facilities and all government buildings and buildings open to the public are accessible and have changing places installed so that people with disabilities can have dignity when it comes to living independently in our society.
- Expand the Housing Adaptation grant schemes and increase funding to clear waiting lists and ensure access for all



# TRANSPORT

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## **Public transport accessibility**

Public transport must be fully accessible to disabled people. We have to remove the need for our wheelchair-using community to give 24/48 hours notice to travel inter-county. Also currently our urban buses cannot be used by more than one wheelchair user at a time.

The Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant schemes were closed by Fine Gael in 2013 and have never been reinstated. This has left people isolated and creates huge financial burdens for the families of those people who live with a disability. People Before Profit would invest massively in expanding public transport, including through the introduction of public on-demand personal transport services for people with disabilities. We would also abolish fares for all to further encourage modal shift away from the private car and cut carbon emissions.

### ***People Before Profit would:***

- Invest in our public transport system so buses can accommodate more than one wheelchair user at a time
- Remove the need for wheelchair users to give notice of inter-county travel by bus.
- Ensure all stops, platforms and entry points are fully accessible. Invest in regular maintenance to ensure lifts are in good working order.
- Abolish public transport fares and expand service frequency and coverage.
- Provide public on-demand accessible personal transport services free of charge for disabled people and others, such as some elderly people, who are unable to access scheduled public transport services. Until such services are fully up and running, provide a Mobility Allowance to disabled people to cover taxi costs.
- Expand funding for vehicle adaptation and running costs so disabled people and their families who rely on personal transport can be supported in acquiring and running the transport they need.
- Abolish fees for Disabled Person's Parking Cards

# LEGAL EQUALITY AND RIGHTS

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The intervention of many disabled people into the debate around the government's care referendum highlighted injustices they face due to ableism and the failures of the state to guarantee their rights. A new constitutional amendment is required to assert equality and guarantee the rights of people with disabilities. Ireland ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2018 but it has not been properly implemented. The Convention requires a state to apply the human rights principles from the UN Declaration on Human Rights to the persons with disabilities.

## ***People Before Profit would:***

- Introduce a constitutional amendment to assert equality for disabled people and to guarantee the right to the supports needed to fully engage in society as a basic democratic right.
- Fully implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, including the Optional Protocol.