



The
A T L A N T I C
Philanthropies

CENTRE FOR DISABILITY LAW & POLICY

CASE STUDY SUMMARY

MAY 2015

Carefully researched studies are essential for advocates to make persuasive arguments to legislators and for policymakers to make informed decisions. But too often academic research is disconnected from the real world concerns of those who make or wish to influence policy.

The Centre for Disability Law & Policy based at the National University of Ireland, Galway is a rare example of a university research centre that is having a positive impact on policy and practice. The centre has influenced domestic, regional and international policy in disability rights. It has done so through its accessible research and its training of advocates and academics in the field. Few such research centres have made this kind of deep and far-reaching impact.

Background

In 2006, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adopted at the United Nations (UN). The treaty was ground breaking in that it marked a paradigm shift. Rather than view people with disabilities as objects in need of welfare or charity, the convention positions disabled people as subjects with rights, including making decisions for what's best for their lives and contributing as full participants in society.

The centre's main focus is on conducting research and training new policy entrepreneurs to ensure that the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities are fully implemented in the 158 signatory countries and the European Union, which also ratified the treaty.

What Makes the Centre Unique

The centre begins its work with an understanding of the opportunities for change and tailors its research and educational programmes to influence policy. Key features of the centre include:

- **Staying attuned to the real issues affecting the disability community.** The centre undertakes research that addresses problems that ordinary citizens face and provides practical policy solutions.
- **Equipping disability advocates with the knowledge to advocate for themselves.** A central tenet of the centre is that people with disabilities are the experts on their lives.
- **Developing and delivering relevant quality education programmes.** Staff at the centre established a number of educational avenues including an international summer school and a master's and doctoral programme to equip advocates and professionals with the knowledge that they need.
- **Producing research that is useful for policymakers.** Unlike many researchers the centre staff sees one of their jobs as working closely with policymakers when disability policy is being developed. The centre's research has been used to prepare legislative proposals, develop national and international policy and make submissions to UN treaty bodies.

Accomplishments

An independent case study noted that since the Centre for Disability Law & Policy's inception in 2007, its key accomplishments include:

- **Serving as the go-to place for policymakers working on disability rights.** The centre can point to a number of accomplishments in Ireland, the European Union and internationally. The most significant may be informing policymakers on the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Before the centre's work few people truly understood the convention's import and how it could be used in policy and practice.
- **Changing the thinking about people with disabilities and their rights.** The centre played a key role in moving policy so that it reflected the new approach of the UN Convention that people with disabilities make decisions for themselves and that policy reflects their right to autonomy.
- **Producing the next generation of disability policy entrepreneurs.** Students that participated in the centre's educational programmes are working in Ireland and around the world influencing policy and practice.

The case study shows how the centre became such an integral resource to policymakers and practitioners. It highlights the practical steps the centre took to become so useful to so many people and institutions. In addition to capturing the centre's key accomplishments, the case study includes its challenges and lessons learned—both for funders considering an investment in such centres and other university centres seeking to make a bigger impact.

To read the full case study, go to: <http://www.nuigalway.ie/cdlp/>