# LEITRIM ASSOCIATON OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The Leitrim Association of People with Disabilities (LAPWD) hosted a Millennium Disability Conference on Monday 8 May 2000, the Association's 4th anniversary. This ground-breaking event called "Comhar 2000" was attended by up to 170 people from all walks of life. There was a broad representation of voluntary and statutory agencies as well as a large number of people with disabilities. It was held in the Landmark Hotel, Carrick on Shannon.

**President Mary McAleese and her husband Martin on a visit to the committee and members of The Leitrim Association of People with Disabilities.**

The Leitrim Association of People with Disabilities (LAPWD) was established in 1996 as a self-advocacy group, which is managed and controlled by people with disabilities. LAPWD is a voluntary representative group for all people with disabilities living in County Leitrim. Its primary aim is to enable people with disabilities to achieve independence, choice and control over their own lives. With the support of FÁS, the Association has provided a Personal Assistant Service for people with significant physical and sensory disabilities. Services in general include provision of education and training courses for all members, which include people with disabilities themselves, carers/PA's, advocates and associates.

LAPWD decided to mark the new Millennium and the 4th anniversary of the Association by holding a millennium conference called 'Comhar 2000'. The aim of 'Comhar' was to heighten the general public's awareness of issues facing disabled people and identify strategies to be implemented at local level in order to build a more inclusive community. It also provided LAPWD with a framework to influence the provision of better services for disabled people and their families.

Sr Emmanuel Farrelly impressed upon the gathering that in relation to the provision of disability services, the time has come for everyone to work hand in hand and face to face in co-operation and fairness to safeguard the inclusion of all in this age of prosperity. Minister Mary Wallace, Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform was represented by her Personal Assistant, Mr. Nick Killian who conveyed the Minister's good wishes.

The conference was launched by renowned Disability Activist, Martin Naughton. Martin is the co-founder of the Independent Living Movement in Ireland. Well known singer/songwriter, Charlie McGettigan added a celebratory note to the whole event.

The keynote speaker on the day was Ms Angela Kerins from the National Disability Authority (NDA). The NDA sees people with disabilities as strategic partners in moving the disability agenda forward. Ms Maura McNally, NWHB (recently deceased) informed the packed gathering of the current Health Board's strategies in relation to the broad range of disabilities that come under its remit.

Personal testimonies by a team of people impacted upon by disability was a wonderful eye-opening challenge to all present.

Overall this conference provided a great opportunity for everyone to have a voice.

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