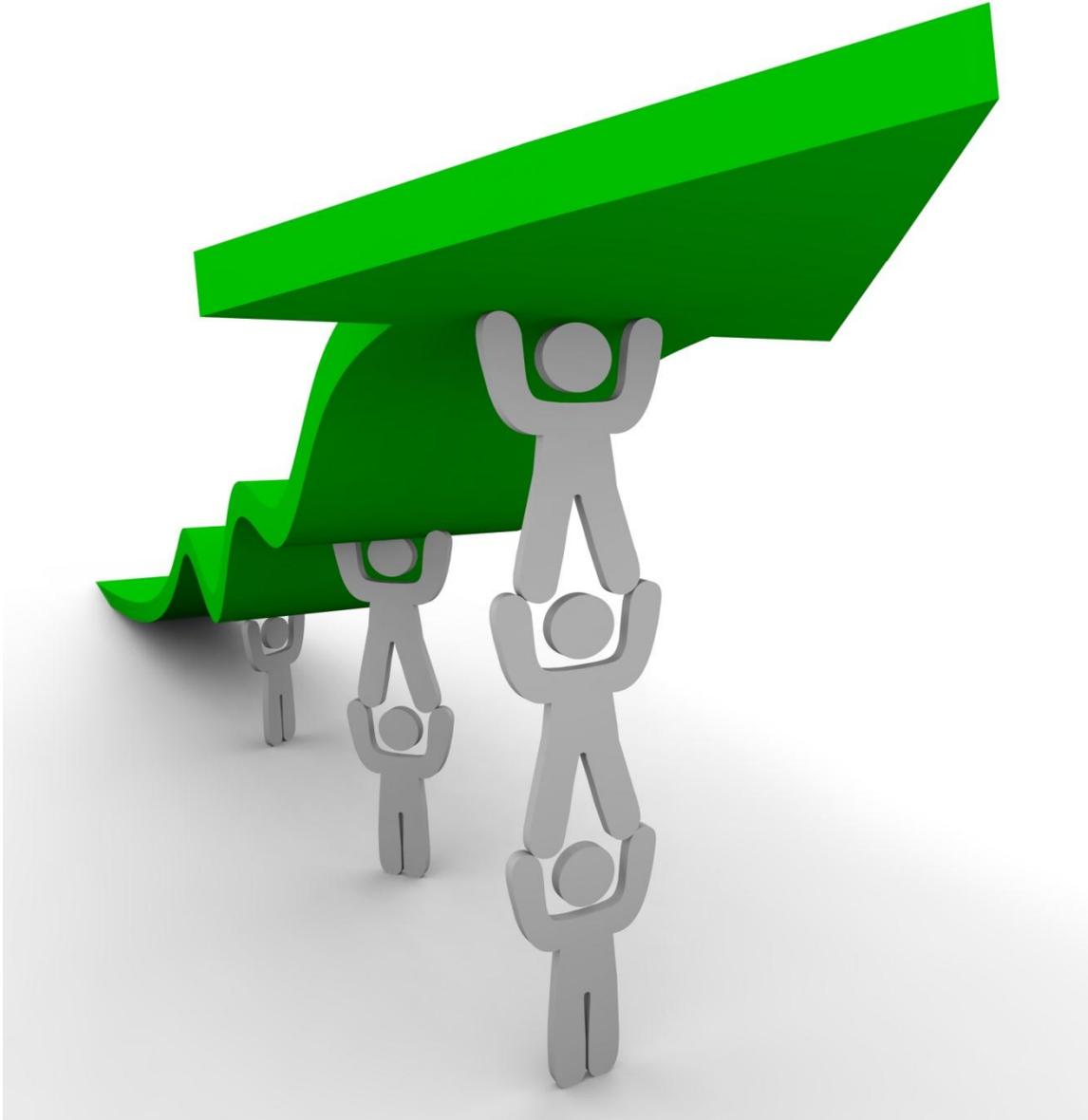


Midland Employment Support Agency Ltd.
Trading as
Employ*Ability* Midlands

Annual Report 2011



“Employ*Ability* – *Linking people’s abilities with employment opportunities”*

EmployAbility



Foreword

The Board of *EmployAbility* Midlands, formerly the Midland Employment Support Agency Ltd. (MESA), is delighted to publish its 2011 report, on our 10th anniversary year. Our economy has changed beyond recognition in the intervening years. From boom to bust we are now in the midst of a period of economic stagnation with high levels of unemployment and reduced resources to meet ever increasing needs. For all of us, the challenges are demanding and in some cases extremely difficult. For people with disabilities who want to obtain employment, the challenges now are immense.

One of the challenges we faced over the last few years was finding a way of getting our message out and our service more widely known by both potential service users and employers. In 2011 we rebranded our service to “*EmployAbility* Midlands”. The name *EmployAbility* aptly sums up what the service is about and gives all our stakeholders a clearer picture of both the ethos and aims of the service.

Moreover the rebranding has given us a national profile and identity closely aligning us to other *Employability* Supported Employment companies throughout Ireland. We expect this potential to market and promote the service nationally to be unleashed in the years ahead and we will certainly play our part in maximizing this opportunity throughout the midlands.

The Board wishes to acknowledge the support of FAS and their staff in providing the core funding for *EmployAbility* Midlands services since its inception. Close working relationships have been forged locally throughout the four midland counties with both FAS Employment and FAS Community Services.

From 2012 onwards *EmployAbility* Midlands will work in partnership with the Department of Social Protection in providing a Supported Employment Service in the midlands. We welcome the fact that we will be forming closer working relationships with others that provide other services to people with disabilities. This will enable us to offer a more timely, seamless and cost effective service.

It's worth remembering that Supported Employment produces a win/win situation for everybody. People with disabilities feel that they are making their contribution to society and are moving themselves out of the poverty trap cycle. Employers and colleagues gain by having a more diverse workforce with committed employees and society gains both economically and socially by focusing on inclusiveness and integration.

No service can exist without the skills and experience of qualified staff. *EmployAbility Midlands* is fortunate in having a highly committed and dedicated team of Employment Officers and administrative staff to carry out its work within communities. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Tony Reilly, Coordinator MESA and his staff for their tireless work and commitment over the last ten years.

Supported Employment is only possible when employers are open and willing to give people the opportunity to fully participate in a working environment and employers in the Midlands, both large and small have not been found wanting in this regard. The Board of *EmployAbility Midlands* would like to formally acknowledge the support, assistance and cooperation we receive daily from the many employers and co workers in a range of different business sectors, both public and private.

EmployAbility Midlands also recognises the role of a host of other statutory bodies and non-governmental organisations in providing support, advice and practical facilities that are vital ingredients to our success.

Finally I would also like to thank my fellow Directors who are generous with their time, knowledge and experience to ensure that *EmployAbility Midlands* will continue to play a proactive role in the lives of people with disabilities in 2012 and beyond.



Board Chairman

COMPANY MISSION

“Supporting people with disabilities into paid employment while providing effective solutions to employers’ staffing needs”



Introduction

2011 was an exceptionally busy year for the entire MESA team on a number of fronts. Firstly we organised a well-attended event in Athlone Community Training Centre to celebrate our 10 year anniversary in conjunction with the launch of our new identity – *EmployAbility Midlands*. When choosing a new National identity we all felt that the name *EmployAbility* conjures up a positive image of disability and links the idea of employment and peoples abilities. The audience was informed and inspired by a number of speakers including employer Keith Nolan, job seeker Noel Curtis and current World Champion hand cyclist Mark Rohan (keynote speaker).

We also continued to build on the achievements to date by delivering our service to a total of 258 participants with 111 new job seekers presenting to our service via the FAS/DSP Gateway system. With employment opportunities reduced across all sectors and growing numbers of unemployed job seekers, people with disabilities faced an even greater challenge when seeking employment. However, with support from *EmployAbility Midlands*, a total of 89 job seekers with disabilities secured work placements in 2011 so well done to all our Employment Officers who continue to place job seekers with disabilities in employment despite the reduced availability of opportunities. *EmployAbility Midlands* will strive to ensure that the progress made in integrating people with disabilities into mainstream employment is not eroded in the current challenging environment.

Throughout 2011, *EmployAbility Midlands* continued to operate our work experience initiative, Job Trial. This scheme, which is generously supported by Aontacht Phobail Teoranta (APT) until May 2012, enables a job seeker to spend time in the workplace to understand what the job entails and demonstrate their ability to do the job. Likewise, the employer has the opportunity to see how a person performs in the workplace while also experiencing the supports provided by *EmployAbility Midlands*. Having secured employment for 14 individuals in 2011 using Job Trial it is our firm belief that this scheme has the potential to secure more employment opportunities for our service users.

In 2011, *EmployAbility* Midlands continued to operate a number of outreach services in order to promote our service amongst individuals and communities. This approach involves our Employment Officer being on site at local community project premises on a regular basis to meet with existing or new job seekers.

The entire *EmployAbility* Midlands team is looking forward to 2012 and we are confident we can address the challenges, overcome barriers and negativity and continue to assist job seekers with disabilities to access mainstream employment.

Finally, I would like to thank our Board of Directors who generously give their time, knowledge and expertise in governing the company and ensuring that as the service develops, we are always mindful of the service user and their needs.

Tony Reilly
Coordinator.

EmployAbility Service

“Supporting people with disabilities to secure and maintain employment.”

As a strategy for enabling people with disabilities to access open employment, *EmployAbility* Service is based on the following key principles:

- Integration
- Paid employment
- Placements in the open labour market
- Support available throughout the entire process

EmployAbility supports Job Seekers:

- To identify skills and abilities
- To identify the right job type
- To find a suitable job
- To keep and develop that job
- By providing ongoing support during and after work

EmployAbility supports Employers by:

- Reducing recruitment costs
- Helping fill ‘reduced hours’ or ‘short hours’ positions
- Providing access to a pool of potential candidates
- Providing on-site support with induction and training
- Providing ongoing support to the employer and co-workers
- Helping promote workplace inclusion through diversity
- Providing advice and information on additional supports

While initially based on the *Supported Employment* model which was developed for people with learning difficulties, the National EmployAbility Service demonstrates that the service can successfully be applied to all disability groups.

EmployAbility Midlands - Locations

In 2011, EmployAbility Midlands provided a service in the counties of Laois, Offaly, Longford and Westmeath. Details of office locations are as follows:

<u>TOWN</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>
TULLAMORE <i>(Central Office)</i>	Unit 53, 1 st Floor, Bridge Centre, Tullamore, Co. Offaly
MULLINGAR	C/o Friary House, Friars Mill Road, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath
MOUNTMELICK	C/o Mountmellick Development Association, Irishtown, Mountmellick, Co. Laois
LONGFORD	C/o Dawn learning Centre, Grafton Court, Longford, Co. Longford
ATHLONE	C/o Community Training Centre, Lyster Street, Athlone, Co. Westmeath

Outreach Service

In 2011 EmployAbility Midlands continued to provide a number of Outreach Services in order to further promote our service among individuals and community groups. This approach was piloted in Granard, Ballynacargy and Edgeworthstown and involved the Employment Officer being present on a specified day each month in order to provide information to interested parties. A key aspect of this approach includes the service being based in an existing community project with details of the Employment Officer's attendance dates being promoted in advance. To date, we feel we have forged stronger links with existing services within local communities.

National EmployAbility Targets

Current targets require that each Employment Officer endeavours to:

- Work with 25 job seekers at any time
- Maintain 50 % of that number in employment
- Ensure that 50% of job seekers who exit the service do so while in employment.

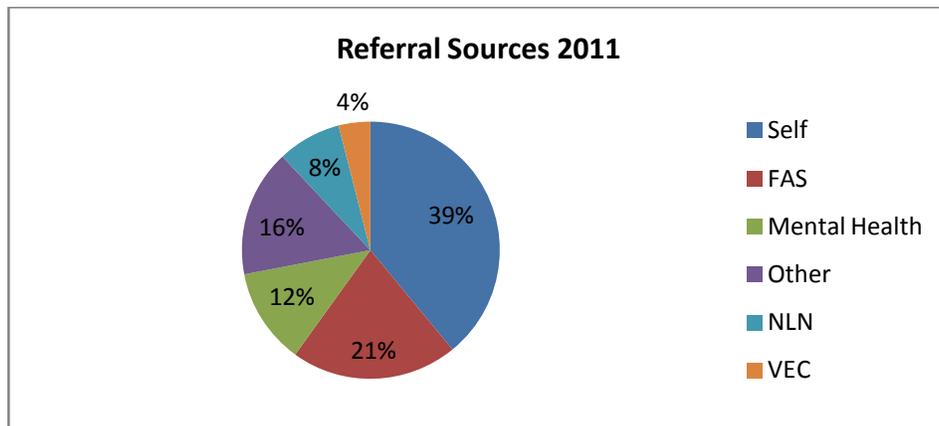
On a strategic level the following key objectives have been achieved and implemented nationally:

1. Developed operational clarity in respect of the target group for the service and developed appropriated assessment procedures.
2. Identified and documented operational procedures in respect of key areas of programme implementation.
3. Developed a national identity for the Supported Employment programme and devise and implement a marketing strategy for the programme.

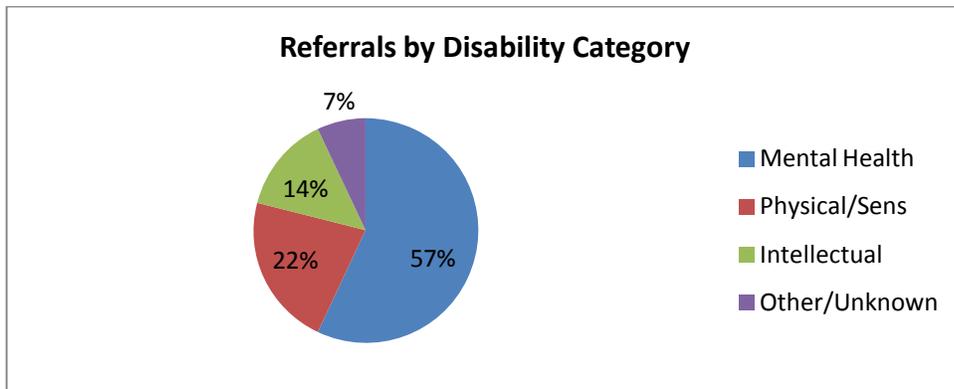
Referrals

As part of our funding criteria for this 18 month service, all our Employment Officers must aim to work with 25 people at any one time. To meet this target, a considerable amount of time is spent introducing and promoting the concept of *EmployAbility's* service to the relevant agencies, community groups and organisations in the Midlands. While participants of the National Service must come through the FAS/DSP Gateway system, we can only start new clients when we exit existing service users.

The working relationship that exists between our Employment Officers, FÁS/DSP Employment Service's staff and disability service providers is crucial to the success of the service. Sharing of information, expertise and consultation between the organisations has ensured that the end user receives a professional service in an effective and efficient manner. This approach had a significant impact on the numbers of people presenting to *EmployAbility* Midlands's service in 2011, as the following statistics verify. We received 111 new referrals in 2011 and the following is a breakdown of that number.



The 16% "Other" category include referrals from A.P.T., CICs, NCBI, Deaf Hear and Jobs Clubs.



Job Trial Scheme

The scheme is for job seekers with disabilities who have a strong desire to find work but require a slightly extended period of on-site work experience. Funding for this scheme is secured through Aontacht Phobail Teoranta (APT) and is due to expire in May 2012. By year end a total of 39 job seekers had availed of the scheme, of which 14 individuals secured mainstream employment. Traditionally, we have found that some of our service users cannot demonstrate their abilities at interviews, and we now find that where an employer is open to accommodating our job seekers with a short on site work trial, early results are indicating that this approach is a more realistic route to employment.

Other benefits of participating in this scheme include the job seeker gaining practical hands on experience. This enables the job seeker to understand exactly what the job entails and to demonstrate their ability to do the job. It also gives the employer an opportunity see how a person performs in the workplace while also allowing that employer to experience the support provided by *EmployAbility*. It is our firm belief that the Job Trial Scheme has the potential to secure more employment opportunities for *EmployAbility* service users. We hope that Job Trial will continue to fit in seamlessly with our current service and, with the support of FAS/DSP, will be replaced by the Workplace scheme for which funding has been requested.



John in Homebase with Caroline O Connor HR, Frank O Connor, Manager



Daniel at work in Midland Veterinary, Tullamore

Marketing and Promotion

EmployAbility

In 2011 we hosted an event to celebrate 10 years of providing the national supported employment programme in the Midlands and the re-branding of the service with a new name – *EmployAbility*. The rationale for the name change follows on from the recommendations of the WRC report into the national supported employment programme. It found that the programme lacked a national identity as each of the twenty three service providers around the country had a different name and this created difficulties in the “branding” and “marketing” of the programme to employers and people with disabilities. By establishing a coherent and visible identity for the service, marketing and promotion of the service to employers and people with disabilities could be delivered in a more consistent and effective manner.

The event took place over lunchtime at the Athlone Community Training Centre with about 50 people in attendance including service users, employers, funders and service providers.

The format included a rolling presentation which explained our service through a series of slides containing, key principles, photographs and testimonials. Speakers included employer Keith Nolan, job seeker Noel Curtis, *EmployAbility* Midland’s Chairman Adrian Stewart, Kevin Gardiner HSE, Kevin Macken FAS and keynote speaker Mark Rohan who is the current World Handcycling Champion.

EmployAbility Coordinator Tony Reilly acted as MC and introduced the various speakers at strategic points during his presentation entitled “MESA – A Decade of Milestones” where they spoke about their personal experience or perspectives on employment for people with disabilities. The event culminated in a truly remarkable address by Mark Rohan who rebuilt his life following a motor cycle accident to become current World Handcycling Champion. Mark then cut the ribbon to signal the launch of the new identity – *EmployAbility*.

Mr Reilly finally thanked everybody in attendance, guest speakers, those who engaged with the service, FAS for funding the service, *EmployAbility*’s Board of Directors, Mike Connors and his team and the entire team at *EmployAbility* for their support, enthusiasm and hard work in organising this event. Guests were then invited to network over a light buffet lunch and visit the on-site marketplace stands where information on services for people with disabilities and employers was available.



Regina Delaney, Administrator EmployAbility Midlands and Kevin Macken FAS at the launch of EmployAbility Midlands in October.

Marketing Plan

As part of our marketing strategy, EmployAbility Midlands has put significant effort and time into developing effective networks in order to promote a quality service. We developed a database of employers and in 2011; our Employment Officers met with and promoted our service to over 500 employers in the Midlands area. While the Company has established local networks with organisations like FAS Employment and Community Services, Department of Social Protection, Disability Service Providers (including Mental Health Services), Community Partnerships and various employer groups, EmployAbility Midlands is also represented on:

- The National Co-ordinators' Forum.
- Westmeath Disability Working Group
- Longford Services to the Unemployed working group
- Midlands Chambers of Commerce
- Athlone Mental Health Association

Participation in the above has enabled EmployAbility Midlands to contribute to the development of best practice in the service and to address issues in order to remove the barriers to employment for people with disabilities. Establishing and developing effective networks encourages, promotes and supports EmployAbility Midlands in delivering a quality service to our customers. A good interagency working relationship has assisted us in:

- Identifying potential referrals
- Identifying employment opportunities
- Sharing of information

- Identifying areas of best practice (Nationally & Internationally)
- Providing the best possible service for the end user

In addition, EmployAbility Midlands undertook the following promotional activities to raise awareness of its service:

- Delivered presentations to a number of relevant agencies and groups throughout the Midlands including the Disability Activation Projects, disability service providers, addiction services and CE Supervisors.
- Our service featured in several provincial newspapers with case studies from employers and employees.
- Circulated EmployAbility's promotional literature including copies of our bi-annual newsletter to employers and disability service providers throughout the Midlands.
- Further developed and updated our user friendly website www.employabilitymidlands.com
- Created an online presence by setting up a Facebook page which can be accessed from the link on our website.
- Participated in Chamber of Commerce events in the Midlands including "speed networking" events in Tullamore, Athlone and Mullingar.
- Delivered our Job Shadow Day across the Midlands, which on the day provided job seekers with the opportunity to observe competent employees going about their daily duties in a variety of work settings.
- Provided Information Stands at Disability Awareness Days and Information Days across the Midlands sponsored by various groups including CIC, EDI Centre, Longford, Mental Health Services, Community Development Groups and local partnerships.

EmployAbility News

Our newsletter continues to inform employers by highlighting and addressing any concerns or issues they may encounter as an employer of a job seeker with a disability. It also ensures that job seekers and other stakeholders are kept up to date on any events, initiatives and supports that may be of interest to them or someone close to them.

EmployAbility News is circulated to over 500 Midlands employers on our database as well as to a wide selection of disability service providers, training and educational agencies and statutory bodies.

Numerous topics of interest have been featured in our Newsletter since we first started producing it including Employer Quiz Nights, Employer Incentive Schemes, Training undertaken by EmployAbility Staff such as Risk Assessment, Boundary Management, A.S.I.S.T. (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training), Employer Testimonials Job Seeker/Employer Experiences and of course, our own Job Shadow.



L-R Adrian Stewart, Chairperson EmployAbility Midlands, Tony Reilly, Co-Ordinator, Mark Rohan, World Handcycling Champion at the launch of EmployAbility Midlands

Future Promotion

It is planned to promote our service by:

- Continuing to circulate our popular newsletter and circulating it to employers and relevant groups
- Upgrading and enhancement of our website which will be updated on a regular basis.
- Liaising with FAS/DSP Directors' Forum to implement any national marketing strategies for the service.
- Continuing to promote and further develop links with local employer groups – Chambers of Commerce, Lions Clubs etc.
- Continuing with awareness raising employer events;
- Identifying and partaking in relevant Disability/Employment events;
- Continue to develop links with other organisations through expansion of our outreach services.



L-R Wanda Shaw, Tony Reilly, Mark Rohan and Tony McCormack (EmployAbility Board of Directors) celebrating our 10th Anniversary of Supported Employment in the Midlands

Staff Training and Development

EmployAbility Midland's training and development policy is designed to ensure the entire team have the knowledge and skills necessary for the effective and efficient functioning of the organisation. EmployAbility provided a range of training and development courses for staff in 2010 including:

- Risk Assessment
- Employment Law Workshop
- Team Building
- Corporate Governance (the Wheel)
- Data Protection

This year the Board of EmployAbility Midland's implemented a contingency plan which makes provision for the management of the company in the event of the Manager or Administrator being absent for a prolonged period. Following the company's recruitment process where all staff was invited to apply, applicants were interviewed and Employment Officer Brenda Tallon was selected. Brenda was then trained up to competently fulfil the day to day company management tasks and is now in a position to take over the role periodically as required. The Board feels it is prudent to make this provision in the interests of the smooth running of the service.

Team Meetings

Regular team meetings form an integral part of our training and development strategy at EmployAbility Midlands. We adopted a policy whereby knowledge or information gained from attendance, by a team member, at any training or educational event is brought back and presented by that person to the entire team. We also recognise that a significant amount of expertise exists within the team across a wide range of topics and

we have used this to address certain internal training requirements such as marketing the service, health & safety, risk assessment, website development etc. EmployAbility Midlands also hold an annual planning day at which we review our performance over the previous year and then identify our targets & strategies for the year ahead and based on this, produce individual and team action plans. We then hold an annual mid-year review day to monitor progress in delivering our plans.

Achievements

In 2011 we achieved the following:

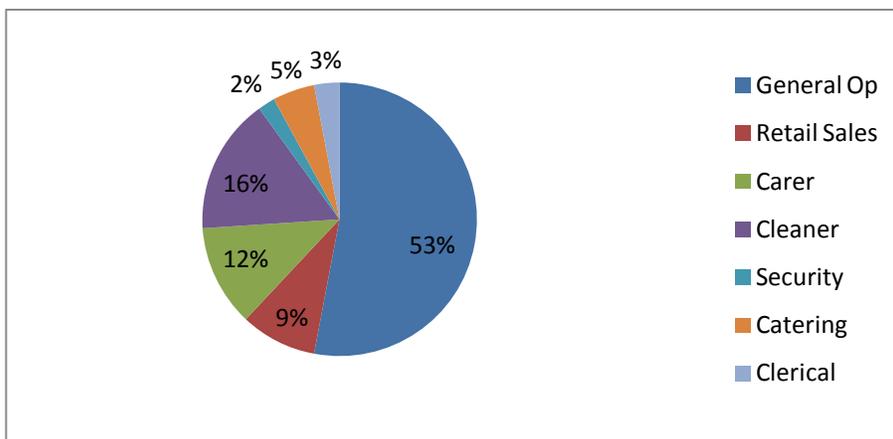
- Delivered the service to 258 participants
- Demonstrated that the programme could successfully be applied to all disability categories
- Sourced 89 new mainstream work placement opportunities which were full or part time, based on participants' wishes and/or abilities
- Supported 141 participants in maintaining and developing their placements
- Sourced a total of 111 new referrals who subsequently presented to EmployAbility Midlands, via the FAS/DSP Gateway system
- Continued to deliver our Outreach Service in Longford and Westmeath.
- Continued to implement our Job Trial Scheme.

EmployAbility Midlands Team

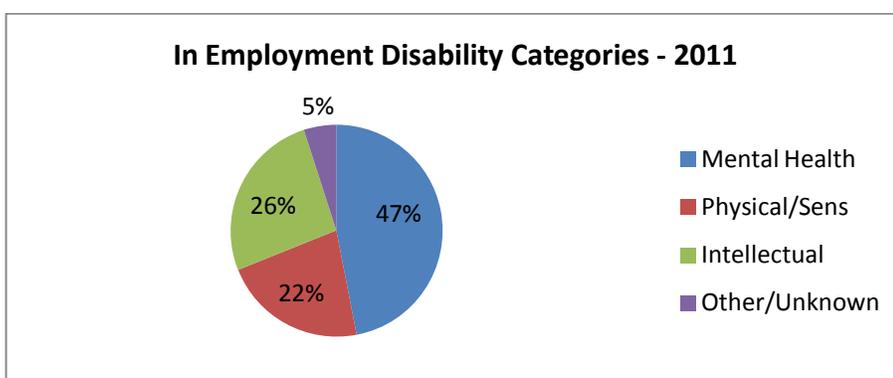


L-R Wanda Shaw, Daniel O Reilly, Rosemarie O'Brien, Tony Reilly (Co-Ordinator), Brenda Tallon, Joan Halpin-Hall, Regina Delaney (Missing from the photograph is Jacqueline Berney)

Employment Categories 2011



In Employment Disability Categories - 2011



The above charts are a breakdown based on 89 work placements for 2011.

Job Shadow 2011

Having initiated and developed Job Shadow, we still find it a useful tool for employers to experience the different types of disability along with the on-site support available from *EmployAbility Midlands*, and for jobseekers to showcase their abilities where it matters. The event has become very popular throughout the country and is being widely used by our colleagues in their Supported Employment Programmes.

Challenges for the Future

- Maintain and further develop good working relationships with all employers
- Continue to attract and maintain sufficient referrals to meet target requirements
- To ensure *EmployAbility Midlands* maintains a level of flexibility required to implement new targets, criteria and operational guidelines
- Secure employment opportunities.
- Secure ongoing funding to maintain the service
- Ensure a quality service through ongoing review and feedback

- Continue to build on the success of all our other marketing initiatives
- Endeavour to provide EmployAbility Midlands staff with the best development opportunities required to deliver a quality service.

Board of Directors

Mr. Adrian Stewart – Chairperson

*Regional Manager
(National Learning Network)*

Mr. Tony Corry - Secretary

Manager APT Unit, HSE

Ms Susan Ryan

*Manager,
(Citizens' Information Centre)*

Mr. Joseph Reilly

(Retired HSE Manager)

Mr. Fergal Boland

*Finance Manager
(HSE)*

Mr. Sean Ryan

*C.E.O.
(Offaly County Enterprise Board)*

Mr Tony McCormack

*Vice President
(Tullamore Chamber of Commerce)*

Staff Members

Unit 53, 1st Floor, Bridge Centre, Tullamore, Co. Offaly

Tony Reilly *Project Co-ordinator*
Wanda Shaw *Employment Officer*
Regina Delaney *Administration/Support*

C/o Athlone Community Training Workshop, Lyster Street, Athlone, Co. Westmeath

Rosemarie O'Brien *Employment Officer*
Joan Halpin-Hall *Employment Officer*

C/o Friary House, Friars Mill Road, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath

Daniel O Reilly *Employment Officer*

C/o Mountmellick Development Association, Irishtown, Mountmellick, Co. Laois

Jacqueline Berney *Employment Officer*

C/o Dawn Learning Centre, Grafton Court, Longford

Brenda Tallon *Employment Officer*