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PRESS RELEASE

Showcasing Disability Best Practice



A new publication which highlights the practical steps local employers are taking to boost employment opportunities for disabled people was launched at Stormont today. “Showcasing Disability Best Practice” gives practical examples of how employers are breaking down barriers, both in recruitment and in retention, of employees with disabilities.

Speaking at the publication’s launch, the Equality Commission’s Chief Commissioner Michael Wardlow said, “We work with thousands of employers each year providing expert advice on complying with legislation. This publication highlights examples of innovation and excellence from employers who have gone beyond simple compliance.

“People with disabilities are entitled to be full and equal participants in every aspect of society and we need to ensure that barriers which prevent that, whether physical or in attitudes and practices, are removed. We hope employers across Northern Ireland will be inspired to follow these examples to enable disabled people realise their full potential and build more inclusive workplaces.”

The publication, produced by the Equality Commission, Employers for Disability and the Department for Employment and Learning, follows on from the Irish News Workplace and Employment Awards which this year introduced a new category for Disability Best Practice Employer. The level of interest in this award resulted in a large number of entrants, each providing impressive details on the steps they have taken to help disabled people enter and succeed in the work place.

Minister for Employment and Learning Dr. Stephen Farry, who hosted the launch, said: "People with disabilities are fully entitled to participate equally in all aspects of society and to also enjoy the stimulation, challenge and financial benefits of employment. My Department is fully committed to supporting people with disabilities to help them maximise their employment potential. Together, and in partnership with a range of organisations from the local disability sector, our objective is simple - to help as many people with disabilities as possible to progress towards, move into, and sustain employment, either on a full or part-time basis.

"The production of such a positive and informative publication serves as an excellent example of successful partnership working. It demonstrates the benefits associated with employing people with a disability, both for the employer and the employee. The stories

of the Award winners and those shortlisted are testimony to this and I hope that other local employers can follow their lead.

"My Department's Disability Employment Service has worked successfully in partnership with Employers for Disability NI (EDNI), organising and delivering disability awareness events for employers across Northern Ireland. The aim of these events is to increase awareness of the services and programmes available to help people with disabilities find and keep work and also, of critical importance, the assistance available to employers to enable them to recruit and retain employees with disabilities."

Tony Earley, Chair of Employers for Disability said, "The best way for us to mark 20 years of Employers for Disability NI is to showcase disability best practice among local employers in order to inspire other organisations to implement similar initiatives.

"The employers featured in this booklet have given thought to the needs of disabled people and have gone the extra mile to make their workplaces inclusive. It reflects the professionalism of these companies and organisations and I commend all of the employers involved."

Included in the publication are Belfast City Council, winner of the large employer award, and Todds Leap Activity Centre, winner of the small business sector award and short listed entries by Armagh City and District Council, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, Invest NI and Formula Karting.

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For further information contact Mark Soult at 028 900561, Communications Unit 028 90 500 666 or out of hours 07715 476186

Photo caption:

Launching the new publication “Showcasing Disability Best Practice” at Stormont were Jill Minne, Head of Human Resources at Belfast City Council, Tony Earley, Chair of Employers for Disability NI, Dr Stephen Farry MLA, Minister for Employment and Learning, Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission and Ben O’Hanlon, Managing Director of Todds Leap Activity Centre.

Note:

- Disability is something which reaches into every community and sector of Northern Ireland. 18% of Northern Ireland’s population face limitations in their daily living as a consequence of a disability or a long term health condition. Research has also found that almost 2 in every 5 households include at least one person with a limiting disability.
- The Equality Commission has put a significant focus on improving disability practices in both the Public and Private sector. The Commission offers a number of free disability training seminars throughout the year specifically for employers including “managing disability in the workplace” and also works with employers to help put employment policies in place.
- The Commission has been pressing for disability law reform. Weaknesses in disability equality law have been addressed in Great Britain through the Equality Act 2010. This means that disabled people in Northern Ireland have less protection against discrimination than those in Great Britain, This also causes difficulties for UK-wide

businesses which operate in both NI and GB and have to keep pace with different equality frameworks between the two jurisdictions; and for Northern Ireland employers and service providers who have previously been able to rely on case law in Great Britain.

- The event follows the **Disability Best Practice Employer Awards**, part of the Irish News Workplace and Employment Awards, which were held in June to mark the 20th anniversary of Employers for Disability NI. The awards were presented at a ceremony in Titanic, Belfast, to Belfast City Council (large employer winner) and Todds Leap (winner of small business sector). Short listed entries included Armagh City and District Council, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, Invest NI and Formula Karting. All nominees were assessed in terms of strategic direction and top level commitment, supporting employees with disabilities, raising awareness of disability, accessibility, and links with disability organizations.
- Employers for Disability NI is a not-for-profit organisation managed and funded by employers. It has almost 70 members from the public, private and voluntary sectors covering approximately 20% of the workforce. Its board develops action plans, reviews progress, responds to member employers' needs and takes advice from disability organisations, business groups and legal profession. Lead partners are Translink, BBC NI, BT and First Trust Bank.