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## PRESS RELEASE

### **People with learning disabilities “a problem that needs to be solved?”**

“They look at us as though we are a problem that needs to be solved,” says Danny Gilmore, who chairs the Users’ Forum at the Belfast-based Orchardville Project.

He neatly encapsulates in one sentence a widely-held attitude to people with learning disabilities, an attitude which can lead to unequal treatment and denial of opportunities that are open to everyone else.

A group of around 20 people from the Orchardville Project marked Disability Access Day, Friday 10 March, by visiting the Equality Commission’s office in Belfast for an equality awareness session with Commission staff – outlining their rights and what to do if they feel they have been discriminated against.

The Orchardville Project supports people with learning disabilities in employment, a key way of improving their independence and economic position, but also a great way of improving people’s awareness of what people with learning disabilities can do and challenging prejudiced attitudes.

Margaret Haddock, Chief Executive of Orchardville, says: “Disabled Access Day is an opportunity for us all to consider all aspects of access. Surveys show that the public deem physical access as ‘access’ but we must remember it is so much more. Access means access to information, sensory access and most important of all cultural change so that access for all is embedded in our society.

Dr Evelyn Collins, Chief Executive, Equality Commission, says: “This week I was privileged to chair a Europe-wide seminar on the rights of people with intellectual disabilities, organised by Equinet, the European network of equality bodies. It was great to hear how equality bodies are working to improve life for people with learning disabilities, with discussion on key issues such as inclusive education, the right to live in the community and the importance of accessible communication, including on disabled people’s rights”.

“Last year, we had a great experience working with the Orchardville Users’ Forum to produce the easy-read guide to basic awareness of equality and discrimination. Good information like that guide is fundamental, helping people to understand what their rights are and what to do if they are having problems asserting them. And good information helps you make better choices too.”

There is more information on Disability Access Day, including events in Northern Ireland, at [www.disabledaccessday.com](http://www.disabledaccessday.com)