

# Holding a Vision: An Investigation of a Rights-Based Social Supports Infrastructure for Children and Young People with an Intellectual Disability in Ireland

## Research Context:

There is a sound principle that all children and young people with an intellectual disability should be able to enjoy citizenship on an equal basis with others. This includes enjoying personal dignity and exercising choice, control and freedom in social, community and cultural life, in keeping with their individual lifestyle preferences and aspirations.

The aim of this research is to assess the realities of the current social supports infrastructure for this group against the components of a rights paradigm. The study aims to provide insight to the social realities of one of society's most marginalised groups, to add to the knowledge base, research literature and targeted policies in the rights-based and social support approaches, and to develop the links between those for this group of people.

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## Research Question and Methodology:

The core question is whether the social supports experienced matches the rhetoric of rights.

Two theoretical areas have been examined in detail: a rights approach and social supports. A seven-element rights paradigm – social inclusion, recognition, agency, voice, capabilities, equality, and self-realisation – is applied to the social supports infrastructure, as reported by young people with an intellectual disability, their parents or guardians, and professional staff delivering services.

The research methodology is a case study of children and young people with an intellectual disability, who are in receipt of additional services and supports from the State.

## Findings:

- There is a clear mismatch between the rhetoric of rights and the reality as experienced.
- While societal attitudes are generally positive and inclusive, separatist service provision and absent social supports infrastructure maintain or even reinforce exclusion. (The social supports infrastructure is the facilities, services and networks that help people, families and groups to meet their social needs, maximise their potential to develop, and improve community well-being.)
- Restrained goal-setting, restricted progression routes after second-level education, and limited avenues for expression and creative social engagement are big weaknesses.
- There is a need for a new narrative to address the institutional, cultural, legal and administrative processes that run counter to embedding a rights-based paradigm and developing a social supports infrastructure that reflects this.

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