



Working In Unison (Connectivity)

**The Only Way We Can Move
Forward**

October 4th, 2012

Caroline Carswell – About Me

- Social entrepreneur, CEO and founder of Irish Deaf Kids (IDK – <http://www.irishdeafkids.ie>)
- Profoundly deaf
- Mainstream educated
 - Primary school, secondary school and university
- Worked in mainstream challenging and rewarding careers (digital marketing, online publishing) in Ireland, UK, Canada and US before setting up IDK

- **What is a Social Entrepreneur?**

An individual who:

- is compelled to act for public or social benefit (rather than to make money)
- has an innovative approach to addressing a well defined problem AND
- has knowledge and ability to effectively develop and grow their idea to maximise impact

What is Irish Deaf Kids (IDK)?

- A **social enterprise**, with charitable status which works to support **inclusive education** for **children/young people with hearing issues** in Ireland while
 - **empowering parents** to support and develop their deaf child's full potential
 - **Advocating for greater awareness** among key stakeholders (parents, educators, policy makers, employers) about **deafness, ability and technological advances/devices/supports** which empower and enable inclusion, participation and equality

Technology – Why its importance?

- Deafness had a role in the phone, internet, SMS text
 - Alexander Graham Bell (telephone)
 - Vinton Cerf, Google (internet)
 - Matti Makonen (Finland) – SMS Inventor

Technology is revolutionising communication options

- Hearing aids, now sophisticated and discreet
- Soundfield systems – reducing ambient noise
- Digital Media
- Captioning

Why Does IDK Exist?

- Dialogue
- Understanding
- Inclusion

What Parents Need

- Informed choices
- Peer networking
- Early intervention
- Education Plans

IDK offers

- Information
 - Website and e-zine, workshops, seminars, information/training days, conferences, mother/child groups
- Lived experience
- Forum, blog, social media
- Services map
- Teaching ideas

The Needs of Others and IDK's Role

- Educators
- Employers
- Other mainstream service providers

IDK Role

- **Relevance of social entrepreneurship and IDK to today's conference – transiting from higher education to the world of employment**
 - First hand experience of disability, real insight to challenges
 - Mainstream-educated when there were no support services, technology was crude, disability awareness limited
 - Graduated from university with honours degree and secured mainstream employment despite lack of supports
 - Now acts as an employer, advisor, mentor, trainer, advocate, communicator – changing erroneous perceptions of deafness

Successful Outcomes – The Factors

- Early **teamwork** by parents, speech therapist + school
- **Creating opportunities**; volunteering, actively engaging in student life
- Being brave enough to **challenge erroneous perceptions** and discrimination if encountered
- **Not being defined by my deafness**

What Still Needs To Change?

- Newborn screening for deafness in Ireland must be rolled out nationwide
- Trainee teachers and most mainstream teachers have limited understanding of disability and disabled children's learning needs – this needs to change.
- Understanding of deafness among the general population (not all deaf people sign, verbal deaf people speak and can be fluent lip readers, various levels of deafness influence what a deaf person can or cannot hear)

What Still Needs To Change?

- Parents need to learn to see their deaf child **first as a person** with ability, interests and passions – **second as a child with a disability** as this has implications for the support or direction they give their young person in life and this has implications for education and career choice later on.
- There is no one career that is ideal for a deaf person but there are many careers that deaf people are successful in!

What Still Needs To Change?

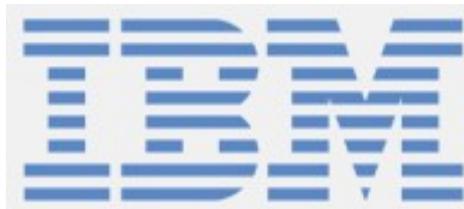
- **Students – own your disability, learn all you can about it so you can confidently challenge negative perceptions.**
- **Schools/Parents/Family – support a young disabled person; enable them to acquire the skills to handle challenging situations, to speak up for their needs and to confidently deal with discrimination where encountered**

What Still Needs To Change?

- Disruptive innovators valued by employers & policymakers
- Voices like IDK's must be heeded (for the lived experience)
- Creative, informed policy & open minds make opportunities
- People who can work, should be able to access employment

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IDK's Backers



STATE STREET.



THE IRELAND FUNDS



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive



The Educational Company of Ireland



TECHNOLOGY WITH PURPOSE



Why IDK?

“ The fundamental change that I want to see in Ireland is for deaf people to have a full role in mainstream society without hearing people feeling awkward because they don't understand deafness. ”

Thank you: Engage with Us!



www.irishdeafkids.ie