

Submission into the Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare: Disability Allowance and Domiciliary Care Allowance

February 2012

Barnardos welcomes the opportunity to feed into the work of the Advisory Group as it examines reform of the Disability Allowance and Domiciliary Care Allowance.

Overall Barnardos does not object to adjusting the age eligibility for the Domiciliary Care Allowance from 16 years up to 18 years and likewise raising the eligibility for Disability Allowance to 18 years in line with most adult payments within the Social Welfare system.

However, Barnardos is strongly against the proposal to significantly cut the rates of Disability Allowance for those under 25 years old. This seems largely based on the premise that the majority of this age group are living with their parents and subsequently can survive on less financial support. In reality, however, this move fails to recognise the additional day to day living and medical expenses borne by those with a disability such as specific dietary requirements, transport and clothing. Already people with disabilities will be adversely affected by other measures introduced in Budget 2012 such as the increase in the drugs payment scheme threshold from €120 per month to €132, and increases in fuel charges and motor taxation due to their reliance on private transport because public transport is often unable to meet their needs. The cumulative impact of such measures is compounded by the impact the increase in taxation e.g. the increase of VAT by 2% will have on their disposable income.

The proposed cuts to rates of Disability Allowance also come on top of cuts to a number of frontline health and educational services that are impacting negatively on people with disabilities including children. The reduction in the availability of Special Needs Assistants has left many children with special needs struggling to keep up in the classroom and the HSE recruitment embargo is leaving many children waiting lengthy durations to receive assessments and treatments.

All young adults with disabilities should be encouraged to take up training and employment opportunities if possible. However, some Government policy prevents this as current recipients of Disability Allowance are excluded from new activation measures such as the Tús Scheme, the Springboard Programme and the JobsBridge Initiative. Their ability to participate and up skill in the Community Employment programme which has been a lifeline for many young people with disabilities will be hindered by their inability to claim a concurrent payment and the reduction in training allowances. Their exclusion from activation measures will lead these young people to experience further isolation from the labour market and greater welfare dependency. Welfare rates for those living with a disability already fall short of providing a basic standard of living. The further cut to Disability Allowance rates will push young people living with a disability into further isolation, poverty and disadvantage.

Wednesday 22nd February 2012 (5:30 pm) and submissions should be emailed to AdvisoryGroup@welfare.ie