Gaps and Innovation in Service Delivery Workshop Summary
Team Leader: Mike Leahy, MSU

There were many topics covered in the Gaps in Service Delivery workshop. It was widely acknowledged that, despite recent pushes to expand opportunities and encourage independence among individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the service sector remains woefully under-funded and communities unprepared to enact the adaptations necessary to fully integrate these individuals.

Prohibitive costs were mentioned in nearly every discussion group. To address the issue of funding, discussants suggested integrating resources across organizations, so that families and individuals can have a clearer understanding of services available. Such transparency and communication will also help ensure justice in service provision.

In terms of research, many participants agreed that a comprehensive analysis of current funding and service provision is needed. There have been many new laws in Ireland, and much rhetoric on what is needed, yet there is no current database on what exactly is being offered, accepted, and funded. A thorough analysis of service provision will not only identify areas of need, but potential areas where funding is not being used responsibly, or is being used in outdated, inefficient ways.

Additionally, one of the biggest ideas to come out of the service delivery discussion is that of community readiness. Laws in Ireland now mandate community living for individuals with disabilities. However, there have been no studies of how communities accept and include such individuals. Studies of individual attitudes, logistical adaptations (e.g. easy-read signs, accessible transportation), and social beliefs will help determine what factors lead to true social inclusion and positive outcomes for individuals with disabilities living in community settings. These results can then be used to develop a community readiness curriculum to help ensure that individuals with ID are truly part of a community, not just living in smaller, differently-located isolated settings.

Ultimately, this workshop emphasized the need for communication and cooperation. Meaningful change will not be achieved by politicians acting alone, researchers collecting data without sharing results, or families trying to make a difference without any knowledge of the various aspects of the service system. Collaborative panels should include participants from every sector to enhance conversations and make sure than any policies, studies, and services are not only maximally beneficial, but efficient and sustainable.

Summary of main points discussed

Primary Needs

- Need for individualized policies and services
- Need for both individual and community preparation to ensure the success of inclusion policies

- Need for better services in adulthood and linkage of these services with childhood supports

Identified Obstacles

- Funding
- How to support high-need individuals
- Sharing of resources/information

Research Ideas

- Study of community factors that increase positive outcomes for inclusion
- Study of current funding levels as compared to current prevalence rates
- Study of the availability of adult services, and how families and individuals use such services
- Development of transition support interventions

Training

- Educating employers and community members to address the fears and misconceptions of individuals with ID
- Include students at all levels (i.e. secondary school through postdoc) to help solve problems and engage in service-delivery research

Potential Products

- Community-readiness training programs
- Collaborative organizations, connecting researchers with individuals, families, service providers, legislators, employers, and community members