

Minister of State lauds CoAction West Cork as model for best practice



Pictured at the official opening of the redeveloped Co-Action Bantry Adult services centre, was John Moloney Minister of State, Department of Health and Children who unveiled the plaque at the official opening of the redeveloped 1 million euro centre at Slip, on Friday and pictured from left was Senator Denis O'Donovan, Maurice Walsh, CEO CoAction, Minister John Moloney, Siobhan Higgins, area Mgr CoAction, Pat Holland, chairman, Bríd Coughlan, Chairperson CoAction Bantry and Reggie Chambers, CoAction. (Pictures Denis Boyle)

BY CAROL GILBERT

AS summer 2010 continued last Friday October 15th, the sun shone unabated on all those attending the official opening of the re-furbished Bantry Adult Services centre and administration headquarters of CoAction West Cork. Unequivocal praise was showered on all involved in the services for people with intellectual disabilities, and the ultimate praise delivered by Mr John Moloney, TD, Minister of State with responsibility for Disability and Mental Health, when he declared CoAction West Cork as being the model for best practice which he would be asking the board of the Value For Money Report to follow and drive forward for the future. Events began last Friday with musical entertainment followed by Mr Maurice Walsh, CEO of CoAction West Cork, outlining proceedings. He recalled the original development was built in 1987 on a site acquired from Sheila Roycroft and said that against all the odds the building was opened in 1988 with the support of funding from the West Cork community. CoAction clients, Anita, John Paul and Ann, spoke warmly of their experiences of CoAction, Anita saying she had enjoyed the change of scenery when the building had to be vacated during the renovations, but it was great to come back to the new centre, where there was more room and it was much brighter.



Pictured at the official opening of the redeveloped Co-Action Bantry Adult services centre on Friday were front from left Maurice Walsh, CEO CoAction and John Moloney Minister of State, Dept. of Health and Children with Karen Vaughan and her mother Mary who cut the tape to officially open the redeveloped 1 million euro centre at Slip, Bantry.

Anita concluded: 'CoAction is a great place to be. It means a lot to me because I have lots of happy memories here.' Ann said it was a very special occasion for CoAction seeing it getting bigger and better. She continued: 'CoAction is great for everyone and I hope CoAction will always exist. All the service users here get 100% support to live their lives to the full and they deserve this as well as anybody else in the community.' 'Being in West Cork is very important to us all. Service users, volunteers, staff and family work together as a team and each year we improve. It is great to see things changing for people with disabilities and we should be very proud of CoAction.'

Humble beginnings

Mr Pat Holland, chairperson of the CoAction board of directors stated how very proud he was to see the opening of the newly renovated centre, and recalled the humble beginnings when CoAction, or Bantry Community Industries as it was then called, was opened in a prefab. He continued: 'We owe a huge debt of gratitude to that forward-thinking group of people who started the organisation way back then and are delighted that some of those founding members are here today.'

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'After 36 years of commitment to developing the best quality services possible, with the unwavering support of the West Cork community, I am delighted with this re-development, costing €1.1 million which was funded, by and large, from fundraising by the local communities of West Cork. There was a huge variety of fundraising efforts and, without a doubt, this development would simply not have been possible without the generosity and support of the people of West Cork and to you we are eternally grateful.' Mr Holland explained the day-to-day running costs of the

centre are provided by the HSE whose support is very much appreciated. He thanked everyone who had supported CoAction in any way and said he hoped they would share in their pride and sense of achievement. He thanked the Minister for attending, Siobhan Higgins and all the staff of the BantryCentre, the design team, Margaret Walsh, Mike Shanahan and Associates, Declan Cremen, Malachy Walsh & Partners, Micheal Deasy, Nolan, Ryan, Tweed, Murnane & O'Shea, Kendrick O'Sullivan, and John Maguire, C & A O'Shea, Deane and Young, all subcontractors and thanked Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland for the generous grant given for energy installations. He continued by thanking the clients, the local community for their support and patience during the building works, Bantry GAA for the loan of their car park and the board of directors of CoAction, the local branch management team and staff, without whose support and hard work this project would not have been possible. Mr Maurice Walsh said it was an appropriate moment to mention that the job went very smoothly and he particularly mentioned Mr Henry Deane who worked on the project until his untimely passing, saying he was a pleasure to work with. He praised the courage of the people who were initially involved in CoAction as they did not receive any funding from the Department of Health until 1990.

Significant impact

Teresa O'Donovan, HSE, general manager for West Cork local health office, speaking as a former CoAction staff member, congratulated everyone involved and said she could really appreciate the work that had been carried out. She said that the increase in the number of smaller work places, the sound quality and lower ceilings would have a significant impact on the ability of people to deliver services particularly to people with autism. Mr John Moloney TD spoke of the importance of seeing things at first hand and meeting the people who really matter, the service users. He said: 'I did meet with the CoAction Advisory Group and they very properly reminded me of the effects of government policy on themselves.

'Lisa, Gina, Colman, Bernard, Mary and Sean reminded me at first hand of their fears and their worries, and also their acknowledgement of the services that they have. I think it is important for me to home in on those issues rather than do a glossy speech and disappear 'It is also important for me to recognise and address the fact that so many people here in this region, not just by way of words or goodwill, have supported voluntarily what is happening here by fundraising. Mary O'Donovan, the financial controller here, explains to me that CoAction is not just altogether dependant upon the HSE. 'The most important aspect has to be, in the context of the climate we now live in economically the whole notion of better

value for money and the very fact that we have a Value for Money Report presently examining all of the aspects of services, particularly disability.

'It is very important for me to acknowledge here that this is best practice. What is happening here is what we should be doing nationwide.

'I have said to Maurice and Mary, I will be asking the Value for Money Review Group to come down here and see firsthand what CoAction Bantry is about. This is what value for money is about.

'I am going to say that I am offering my support of what is happening here. It is quite easy for me to say that, but the reality is that as I leave here it is important that something is said that each of you believe that the service here will be guaranteed for the future. And, that is what I intend to do.

'As we come to the finalized report as to how we continue to provide services for people in the disability sector, it must be based on some model and the model I say publicly, is the model brought together here in Bantry. This is the model I want to see supported. When I go back to Dublin to meet with the committee of the Value for Money Group, I will be asking them to take on board what is happening here and to ensure that this is the model we drive in the Value for Money report.

'I am looking forward to the report that will follow on from the Value for Money committee's visit here and see how we can, not just sustain the services here, but importantly make sure they are continued into the future.' Mr. Moloney thanked Anita, John Paul, Ann and the chairman Pat, who very clearly explained to him the value of the service for the family and the people who use it, and concluded by saying: 'I want to go away asking you to believe that the words I am saying are not just for the sake of saying it.'



John Connolly and Nora O'Donoghue presenting a cheque for €45, 000. to Maurice Walsh, CEO CoAction West Cork, pictured with trainees Anita Lynch, Joey O'Sullivan, Michelle Benhen, Breda Moloney and John Paul O'Donoghue. The money was raised from regular Bingo nights held in Bantry Boys Club.