

Clashganna - Learning, Living and Working with Disability

The Clashganna Mills Trust aims to develop an integrated, accessible village based in Co. Carlow where people with varying levels of physical and intellectual abilities can learn and work together. It will challenge traditional concepts of "special" provision and rehabilitation goals.

JAMES RICKARD is a psychologist and a Director of Clashganna Mills Trust.

Traditionally, many of the groups concerned with the rights of people with disabilities have focused their attention on changing the system from within. Emphasis was usually put on lobbying government agencies and benevolent sponsors from the private sector for further assistance and resources. The concept of Clashganna arose from the need to prove what can be achieved by utilising resources in a new and imaginative way. This is done by challenging the passive roles which people with disabilities are given in the community.

Aims and Philosophy of Clashganna

The aim of Clashganna Mills Trust is to have an integrated accessible village, incorporating a residential college, where people with varying levels of physical and mental abilities can learn and work together. It is intended to be a learning, training and resource centre in which the theory and practice of craft and business skills will be used as a medium for the development of viable workshops and studios, by people with and without disabilities, on a co-operative basis or as self employment projects.

A central tenet which underlies the creation of the village is the concept of community. Clashganna philosophy is based on the recognition that all individuals have five basic needs:-

- (1) Food
- (2) Shelter
- (3) Companionship
- (4) Education
- (5) Meaningful Occupation

It can be argued that many other needs exist but the fulfilment of the above needs is necessary for the satisfaction of other needs. It is fundamental in the thinking behind Clashganna that each individual must be empowered to provide for his/her own needs. It is suggested that this can only be done by recognising the need for an integrated approach.

By integration it is meant that people will work together in an inter-dependent environment which concentrates on one's abilities; that each individual can compensate for another's individual strengths or weaknesses, and thereby the creation of a community can be achieved.

Education

The objective of Clashganna Mills College is to facilitate people with varying levels of physical and mental ability in achieving a full life through 'learning by doing'. Integral to the programme for students/apprentices is that all will take responsibility for the production of food, the appropriate use of energy and the maintenance of the site.

The proposed three year course will include the following:

Clashganna College Syllabus

Craft Education / Skills of Craft / Aesthetic Skills

Business Management / Marketing / Computer Skills

Horticulture.

Adventure Sports and Outdoor Activities.

Adventure Holidays and Summer

Projects will be organised during holiday periods.

Disability Studies / Disability Awareness / Development of Self
Image / Assertiveness Training.

People with disabilities who have not acquired a conventional education will be able to avail of Distance Education Courses based on the Open University Model. Awareness programmes will be developed and run for voluntary workers in the field of disability. In addition special courses will be developed, aimed at assisting and supporting those families who are caring for people with disabilities in the community. Residential accommodation and personal assistance will be available in the village as a practical back up support to families providing care in the community.

Craft

Clay, metal and wood are the materials central to the course. Students will be introduced to the unique qualities of each material through basic exercises in manipulation.

While the course is craft orientated a major emphasis is placed on the realities of life for the self supporting craftsperson with particular emphasis on studio practice, workshop procedures and business studies. Design and production for sale is deemed to be important.

Communications

Graphic, expressive and recording skills are central to the activities of this course. Skills and techniques are introduced and developed through a series of structured exercises/experiences in each of the course components. Specific tasks are set; briefs reflecting the needs and requirements of real clients are answered. This programme leads to more personalised briefs/projects developing individual interests and forms of expression.

Liaison with existing graphic studios, commercial, industrial and art photographers, film makers and theatres will be an integral part of this course.

Back up support studies and experiences in the craft areas and in the project for making National Museum of Ireland replicas will benefit the student in the design and making of models, sets, puppets etc.

Real commissions will be sought while graphic/design work for Clashganna Mills will be home produced.

Horticulture

Clashganna Mills will be self sufficient, using organic methods of growing and producing food for consumption and sale. Each member of the community will be involved in this aspect of daily life. The integration of student involvement as part of the 20% time tabled hours given to complementary studies is seen as a further contribution towards independent living for people with and without disabilities.

Disability Studies

This course will provide participants with a broad appreciation of the impact of disability on individuals, groups and societies, on cultures, economies and health and social services. It will examine the often complex relationships between individuals with disabilities and society as a whole relating the individual experience of disability to the public perceptions of disability. The way in which people with disabilities see themselves and other persons with different disabilities will also be examined.

The role, purpose and organisational dynamics of existing disability-related organisations will be explored. Training in organisational and advocacy work by and for people with disabilities will ensure that participants are better equipped to individually and collectively progress the status of people with disabilities within society as a whole.

Outdoor Activities

Outdoor activity and sport, based on the natural resources of the area, will be developed as part of the complementary studies programme and students/apprentices will involve themselves in the making of some of the equipment necessary for adventure sports, e.g. canoeing. Sporting activities would also form part of the extra curricular activities of Clashganna Mills College. The part time services of a physical education teacher will be required.

Summer School on Disability

An annual Summer School on disability is planned in order to encourage debate and discussion on all aspects and approaches to disability. This Summer School will have a specifically European dimension.

It is envisaged that the village will offer respite facilities on a short-term basis for people with disabilities as well as their families or friends. It will also be promoted as a tourist amenity outside term.

Selection Procedure

It was agreed that the process of selection - i.e. criteria for selection and methods of assessment are of prime importance and must be established clearly. The involvement of the Health Boards and the legal requirements and implications of this involvement must be clearly understood. An important part of the initial application would be the submission of a self descriptive statement. Apart from application forms / Curriculum

Vitae etc. the applicant would be required to submit, for example, a piece of writing, a tape or a self portrait. It was envisaged that the selection process would be at least a two layered process.

The second stage of the process would be the running of a two-week selection/orientation programme for all applicants who are being considered for places in Clashganna - that is, those students who have come through a preliminary selection and have been 'short-listed'. The programme must be seen as a unit/entity and as an experience in itself.

The two-week experience would serve as an excellent forum for an in-depth assessment of the applicants and would also serve as something of a simulation of what is intended to happen in Clashganna itself. The applicant will be able to assess his/her feelings towards the life-style, way of thinking, possible directions etc. The philosophy underlying the project will be very evident and through a joint process of selection by the staff, and preference/choice on the part of the applicants the intake will be decided. The main purpose of the two-week experience will be to raise issues.

The applicant would be encouraged through a structured yet flexible programme to face up to the reality of his/her own needs in an endeavour to bring about real self-evaluation and to increase understanding. This of course, may be painful.

It is the purpose of this two-week course to enable each individual to come to his/her own decision about the possibilities that are practically available to him/her in the foreseeable future. Counselling for both the individual and their families may be required. Stigma or stereo-typical expectations must be challenged. Individuals who may not be selected for the course will be supported and guided towards other options, e.g. Distance Training.

In conclusion this is just a brief outline of the philosophy and aims of the Clashganna Project. At the moment while on the one hand trying to keep open all possibilities for the use and development of the site, we recognise on the other hand the need for practical and concrete plans. Presently we are surveying possible target populations as well as trying to tie down the individual modules of the courses. It would be helpful to have any comments or suggestions from others who have experiences in the area.