



Oifig an Stiúrthóir Cúnta Náisiúnta,
Foireann Míchumais Náisiúnta,
An Chéad Urlár - Oifigí 13, 14, 15,
Áras Phlásóg na Rós, Coimpléasc Gnó na hOllscoile,
Páirc Náisiúnta Teicneolaíochta,
Caladh an Treoigh,
Luimneach.

Office of the Assistant National Director,
National Disability Team,
First Floor- Offices 13, 14, 15,
Roselawn House, University Business Complex,
National Technology Park,
Castletroy,
Limerick.

23rd July 2024

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: ruairi.omurchu@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Ó Murchú,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the following parliamentary question, which was submitted to this department for response.

PQ: 32358/24

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth for an update on the progress of a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Details Supplied: The AAC pilot with AsIAM.

HSE Response

AsIAM (Autism Spectrum Information, Advice and Meeting Point CLG) is an organisation set up in 2014 to support people on the Autism Spectrum by providing information, advice and an online meeting point. AsIAM also provides a platform for people affected by Autism to share their stories and views. The organisation employs approximately 22 members of staff, a significant proportion of whom are on the autism spectrum.

The organisation's vision is for Ireland to be a country where all autistic and neurodiverse people are accepted as they are, equal, valued, respected and included.

AsIAM undertakes a range of programmes and campaigns which work towards the goal of bringing about a more inclusive Ireland for those living with Autism. These include:

- School staff training workshops for individual staff members on *Building Autism Understanding and Inclusion in Education*.
- Autism-Friendly Schools Portal
- Autism-Friendly Communities Portal



- Autism-Friendly Accreditation, which includes a “Charter of Inclusion” that sets out standards for supporting the autism community, and offers practical measures that organisations can put into place.
- The Teach Me AsIAM Early Years Programme, developed by AsIAM to provide an introduction to autism for professionals who work with young children (0-4 years.) The delivery of the programme has been divided into phases, with phase one delivered to early years educators and phase two delivered to early years support workers. This is to ensure consistency in the level of knowledge of autism across all professionals involved in the supported development of young children. The programme is funded through Early Childhood Ireland’s ‘Pyjama Day’ initiative.
- The AsIAM Autism University Award, which was awarded to Dublin City University (DCU) in 2018. DCU became the world’s first autism friendly university through a collaboration between DCU, AsIAM and Specialisterne Ireland (a specialist consultancy that recruits and supports people with Autism).

AsIAM Phone Line for the Autistic Community

Since 2022, the HSE has agreed to fund AsIAM to provide a phone line for the autistic community for a three-year period.

With HSE support, AsIAM operates the Information Line by phone and instant messaging for not less than 20 hours per week (presently 5 hours per day, 4 days per week) with email support provided Monday to Friday. The calls are responded to by either a clinician or an appropriately qualified autistic advisor to ensure appropriate responses and supports to meet the needs and concerns of the range of callers and to inform follow-on activity.

The Augmentative and Alternative Communication Support Programme

AsIAM will also receive funding to administer on behalf of the HSE, the Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Programme whereby Communication Devices will be provided to people with disabilities.

This programme is open to applications from Autistic children or adults who may benefit from a high-tech AAC device and associated support. The programme also aims to support the family and professionals supporting users to advance their knowledge and confidence in AAC.

The AAC support programme will run two separate referral processes

1. For Autistic children and families attending a speech and language therapist who will support the individual with device trial and set up.
2. For families/children not yet linked in with speech and language therapist.

The programme will:

- Support children’s total communication by providing information and training to key stakeholders in the child’s life, e.g., parents/carers and school staff on how to choose an appropriate AAC app through an AAC trial, introduce and model use of AAC.
- By providing individuals a communication device best suited to their individual needs that they can use with guidance from a Speech and Language Therapist to support their communication skills.

The AAC support programme aims to provide AAC/communication devices to the autistic community through two separate referral streams.

1. For individuals attending a speech and language therapist. Their speech and language therapist (SLT) will support the individual and their family through an AAC device trial to choose the communication device that best suits the individuals, and their families’ need. Their SLT will then apply to the AAC support Programme for an AAC device on their behalf, detailing how the AAC device trialed meets the individuals’ needs and supports their communication.
2. For families/children not yet linked in with speech and language therapist, they will be provided with a device and supported through a trial of a communication app of their choosing. Parents will be supported through a series of online webinars and access to an SLT to troubleshoot any challenges that might arise.



In Stream 1, SLT's, individuals and families will be informed as to how to complete an AAC device trial and submit a device application to AslAm's AAC support programme. The person's assigned SLT will be responsible for supporting the person and their family in setting up and using their AAC device.

In Stream 2, children will be provided with a communication device and their parents/families will be supported through a trial of a communication app of their choosing. Service will be delivered via individual and peer group support sessions (guided by individual intake sessions). Level of intervention offered is education, consultation with SLT and peer support.

Aslam has received the first tranche of funding to progress the AAC programme.

The most recent update regarding the AAC programme is as follows:

- Recruitment for the appropriate personnel to manage the programme is currently concluding
- The procurement of devices, in line with OGP rules, is currently being finalised
- The programme manager is now in place and it is anticipated that we will begin to support families from September 2024.

Yours Sincerely,



Bernard O'Regan
Assistant National Director
National Disability Team

