

NHSN welcomes Minister Kathleen Lynch, TD.

The National Home-sharing & Short-breaks Network, NHSN¹, has welcomed the appointment of Ms. Kathleen Lynch TD, Minister of State for Disability, Equality and Mental Health. The Minister responded by saying that she looks forward to working with the Network during her term of office.

The appointment of Minister Lynch, on the 10 March 2011, is an indication that the new government views as “essential that we get the best possible value for money for the investment we make in services for people with disabilities, and that those services meet the needs of users”^{2 3} and that “the resources allocated reach the people who need them”⁴. These views are in keeping with the NHSN’s campaign to redirect scarce resources from expensive centre based ‘respite’ to more personal, and individually tailored, community based short breaks, such as host-family and other support services, and personal budgets⁵.

Prior to her election, the TD for Cork North Central, was *Labour Party Spokesperson for Disability Issues and Equality* and *Opposition Convenor* on the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health & Children and vowed that after the election her party would fight “tooth and nail” on behalf of people with disabilities. As spokesperson, she called for the reversal of the budgetary cuts to ‘respite’ services in the HSE West on the grounds that the level of short breaks for people who “are among the most vulnerable people in our communities” was an “already modest one-day a week or one weekend a month”⁶. A strong proponent of multi annual funding and value for money, Minister Lynch has been to the fore in deploring “crude cuts” in services⁷. It is, therefore, encouraging that the Minister’s Government colleagues in Fine Gael are committed to and appreciate “the important contribution carers make to society and the fundamental role they play in supporting people at home”⁸.

The NHSN has also welcomed the inclusion of Equality with Disability. This should ensure that the Minister “will continue to work to vindicate the rights of people with disabilities in the social and cultural life of the community”⁹. These rights include the right to choose from a menu of suitable and complementary community based supports including family based short breaks and other alternatives to traditional non-inclusive and segregated centre based services.

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¹ www.nhsn.ie

² Labour manifesto 2011.

³ *Government for National Recovery* 2011-2016.

⁴ Fine Gael manifesto 2011.

⁵ *Government for National Recovery* 2011-2016.

⁶ *Lynch hits out at recent care cutbacks*. Statement by Kathleen Lynch TD, issued: Monday 5 July 2010

⁷ *Lynch calls for ring fencing of disability funding*. Speech by Kathleen Lynch TD, Issued 24 June, 2010.

⁸ Fine Gael manifesto 2011.

⁹ Labour manifesto 2011.