

New €1.5 million fund to support people with disabilities

The new €1.5 million Ability to Work Fund aims to reach 500 people with disabilities across Ireland.

Employers across Ireland were urged to “see ability, not disability” and to create more opportunities in the workplace for people with visible and invisible disabilities at the launch of a new partnership between Social Innovation Fund Ireland (SIFI) and State Street.

The partnership will see the creation of the Ability to Work Fund which will provide €1.5 million funding over three years to organisations working to empower more people with a disability to gain employment.

SIFI and State Street hope that during the three years of the initiative, the fund will aim to reach 500 educationally-disadvantaged students across the country and empower 250 people to progress along pathways to employment.

Launching the Ability to Work Fund, Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection Regina Doherty T.D. said, “The National Disability Inclusion Strategy contains a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities, many of whom want to work but are faced with barriers and challenges - some of which are personal, but more of which are societal and demand a concerted effort by government, employers and civic society to break them down. The Ability to Work Fund is an important initiative which will help provide bridges and supports into work for people living with a disability and I congratulate Social Innovation Fund Ireland and State Street for their vision in its establishment”.

Minister Doherty added that “within the public sector we are looking to double the number of people with a disability employed by 2024 and we are looking at alternative recruitment channels for people with disabilities”.

Deirdre Mortell, CEO, Social Innovation Fund Ireland said, “We know from the last census that nearly 10pc of people living in Ireland identified as living with a disability. We also know that people with disabilities are half as likely to be in employment as others of working age. That is creating significant inequality in our society.

“At SIFI we believe in the power of social innovation to deliver solutions to this challenge. The Ability to Work Fund will help create pathways to employment where people with disabilities can achieve economic independence, contribute to their communities and experience personal fulfilment.

“It is encouraging that more and more employers are recognising the contribution people living with a disability can make to their organisation and are actively seeking to create employment for this group. Through the Ability to Work Fund we hope to give more people with a disability the confidence to pursue employment and to ensure that people with disabilities are not left behind in the current era of near full employment.”

The Ability to Work Fund is now open for applications until February 2020. Successful applicants will receive cash grants as well as a place on an Accelerator Programme which includes bespoke training from best-in-class experts across the private, non-profit and public sector.

The Fund is designed specifically to equip charities and social enterprises to expand their business acumen, drive growth and deepen their impact across Ireland. SIFI and State Street believe that this Fund can also contribute to global change and Awardees’ impact will be measured against the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

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