

Proposal to purchase premises for the Down Syndrome Kerry Branch

Questions posed and answered during the Open branch Meeting held in the Manor West Hotel Tralee, 3rd March

Q. Why are we looking at buying a building?

We are looking to buy a building as our current building is no longer capable of sustaining us. It is too small for the size of the organisation. The therapy rooms are too small and not sound proof. The office is large enough for two desks spaces but we are trying to accommodate four people. The OT room acts as a canteen, kitchen and meeting room, which is far from ideal and is not very hygienic. There is no privacy and someone in the waiting room can clearly hear conversations and therapies taking place. There is little or no storage and members frequently have to store buckets, placards at home. This leads to stock disappearing over time and incurs another cost to the organization needed to re order stock.

Q. Cannot we not just rent bigger premises?

Yes we could just rent bigger premises but this would incur a larger monthly rental cost. We believe it would be better to buy a building and repay the same amount in a mortgage that we would be paying in rent or else that we pay for the building outright and not have a monthly rental bill, freeing up our cash flow. We have enough money currently to purchase the building outright without having to dip into our reserves.

Q. Are we going to borrow the money in order to purchase the building?

We have a number of options open to us:

- 1) Purchase the building outright with the money we have sitting in the bank.
- 2) Arrange a mortgage based on our own desired terms

Some arguments for not borrowing would be:

Why pay 6% interest on money sitting in a savings a/c that is only earning 2%? If it is decided to purchase building this can be discussed further at committee level.

Q. Why are we looking to buy this particular building?

Having set up a sub committee to look at what our needs were as a branch we set out a wish list for what we would need from premises. This building ticks all the boxes. It was also the only suitable premises of all the other premises we looked at. It is much larger than our current premises, which gives cause for concern to some. However we believe it is the ideal location for us to expand if desired and future proof the organisation.

Q. Will the running costs of this bigger building be more?

As you can see from the projected figures we do not envisage significant increase in running costs. We will have a metered electricity bill and heating will be proportionate. There may be maintenance costs; these have been worked into the figures. If more services than what we currently offer are added there will be additional costs but that would be the case as additional services are added wherever we are located.

Q. Who can vote and how many votes per family?

Fully paid up members can vote on the night, maximum 3 votes per family, two parents plus young adult with DS over 18. If you have not yet paid your membership you will be able to do so at the door on the night. We would also

encourage members where possible to set up a direct debit or standing order.
Bank Details are:

Bank of Ireland
IBAN: IE42BOFI90578220491265
BIC: BOFIE2D

Q. If only a 1/3 of the members show up at the AGM will a vote still be called?

A vote will be taken on the night with whoever shows up. In advance of the meeting it is agreed that as much information is to be shared with all members. We will explore all options of ensuring that all members have the opportunity to fully inform themselves in advance of the AGM. We would hope that every member would be encouraged to take part in this very important decision. It is also important that the committee feel that they have the members support in making this happen.

Q. Will we be looking for an overall majority or will we be looking for a 2/3rd Majority for the motion to be passed?

Some members felt it was important that there were a 2/3rd majority however we were reminded that we are a democratic voluntary organization with a preference for a broad consensus.

Q. Will we do a Postal vote?

At this point we do not feel a postal vote would be the right approach. We would like that every member would have an opportunity to ask any questions which have not already been asked at the AGM in advance of making a decision. Those interested in voting will turn up to vote.

Q. Are we going to be able to guarantee the continuation of services to all of our members?

All services, which run throughout the county, will continue. It was agreed that if we were to go ahead and purchase the building that it would be on the understanding that if we go below the annual running costs of the branch (90k) in the main a/c that we would look to begin the process of selling the building in order to release the money in order to safeguard services to members.

Q. What happens if we run out of money?

All of our services run on fundraising. We can only provide services based on this. If we run out of money we cannot provide all services. This will be the case if we stay in our current premises or move to a new one.

Q. What happens if we do not get the Ring of Kerry again?

Obviously this is a possibility however we do not believe that this is likely, we will continue to foster relationships with the ROK organizers and continue to lobby on behalf of our members in order to ensure we secure a place while not every year then at least every 3/4 years. In the meantime we also continue to encourage members to fundraise where possible so that we are not as reliant on the ROK for all of our funding.

Q. What are the benefits to members in more rural settings? Will this impact their opportunity to access remote services?

All rural services, including therapies which DSK currently provide throughout the county will continue. Having a visible building in Tralee may help with rural initiatives as we are more accessible to the community at large which will make it easier for volunteers to get engaged with our organization and become aware of the projects that run throughout the County. Also, members from rural settings e.g Cahersiveen have previously benefited from group therapies and have in the past travelled to the main office to avail of these. These therapy groups will continue to be offered on a larger scale from our new premises as we will have sufficient space to facilitate larger groups.

Q. Have we spoken to other branches that have purchased buildings and asked them about their experiences?

Cork and Limerick branches have been spoken to. They both feel the benefits of having a centralized location far outweigh the negatives. Both Counties also offer outreach services. Kildare also have a building but geographically are a much smaller County so not as comparable as Cork and Limerick.

Q. Will this move require us to hire a full time office/administrator?

Over the past number of months it has become apparent that we need to employ an office administrator for a minimum of 25 hours a week regardless of where we are located. We currently employ someone for 10 hours a week in this role. We are in the process of trying to find someone to fill the extra 15 hours. We have tried the Tus scheme and jobs bridge scheme to no avail as of yet. We have two volunteers starting with us in mid March.

Q. If we invest in this will it mean other projects, which are, not profit making become at risk of being shut down?

The main purpose of running our services is not to generate a profit but to provide a service or training to our children/young adults such that they can reach and achieve their full potential.

However that said we are constantly reviewing the services that we do provide. If they are running at a significant loss then it is the responsibility of the committee to look at the benefits of continuing to run a project at such a loss. If the benefits to our members are such that it is considered a worthwhile exercise then we would continue to run that project. If the general consensus is that the project is not fit for purpose and is costing the branch a disproportionate amount then we would be remiss in our duties to allow it to continue.

We do not foresee having to stop supporting any existing projects if we were to go ahead and purchase a building. In fact if you look at the proposed running costs we continue to allow for all existing services for the next four years.

Q. Why do our therapists in Tralee work out of other bases around the County?

One advantage of having a centralized base is it gives therapists a chance to have a multidisciplinary approach to the service our children and adults get. It also allows for more time to be given to direct therapy rather than spending time moving and sorting equipment. If there is a cancellation it also means that our therapists can do some background work in-between clients.

See back for Input from Therapists