**Paul Alford, Inclusion Ireland- Barriers to Employment**

My name is Paul Alford

I have a job with inclusion Ireland.

In 1983 I was in sheltered workshops in disability services.

I did a lot of work at the time but I didn’t get any money. This was not right. Those workshops are now closed, but we need to make sure we never go back.

Later on I started working in a shop but I still wasn’t getting a lot of money, just 2 or 3 euro and just before I left it was 5 euro in 2005.

Now, I get a good wage for my work and I have plenty of money live my own life and own my own home.

It is very important to get proper money for working, to be the same as everyone else and people also need to get their disability allowance and the supports they need to work.

Sometimes people don’t expect me to have a job. People need to change their attitudes and expect that people with intellectual disabilities can do good work. This includes, disability services, employers and the public.

People are afraid of losing their benefits if they work. They are afraid of getting money. All the reports say that people need to have pay and supports for work but this doesn’t always happen.

I got no education. When I started working with Inclusion Ireland, I couldn’t read and write and I started doing the work wrong because I didn’t know what to do. I did courses to learn to read and write and work on computers. Everyone deserves the chance to be included in education. It will help people to know what to do in work. People also need good guidance counselling. At the moment there is no guidance counselling in special schools. We need it so people can make good choices. There is still discrimination in work.

Finding a job can be hard. We have some schemes in Ireland but a lot of the time you need to be job ready and know how to do everything, this doesn’t work for a lot of people as they need more support.

Many people just stay in day services and no one expects them to get a job. it took me 3 years to get out of services and I had to fight hard to get independent living. Working gives people opportunities to have choices in their lives. The government needs to invest money in employment for people with intellectual disabilities in supported employment, they need to keep giving funding to programmes that are working well, people are worried their support will run out, this is unfair.

Transport is really important for people to get to work, they need access to transport and also to have training to understand how to use the transport.

People with intellectual disabilities should not be bullied on transport or in work.

There needs to needs to be more awareness for employers to take on people with disabilities and treat them the same as everyone else

Employment is really important and we need to take away the barriers that are in the way for people. Everyone has the right to work and the support to make it happen and live a good life.

Working has changed my life a lot and now I have a good life, everyone deserves the same chance.