

EACD Annual Meeting 2026 Conference Report

📍 Galway, Ireland

📅 June 2026

🌐 European Association of Childhood Disability

Some of the Gaitway team were **supported to attend this year's EACD Annual Meeting in Galway**, providing a significant opportunity to connect with leading clinicians, researchers, and innovators in childhood disability from across Europe and beyond. This report captures the key connections made and outcomes arising from our participation.

The WHO & EACD 6Fs Framework

The F-words in Childhood Disability are a cornerstone framework championed by EACD and grounded in the **World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)**. Developed by CanChild researchers, the 6Fs shift the focus from deficits and impairments towards strengths, participation, and the things that truly matter for a fulfilling life. Gaitway's model was not designed around this framework — but reflecting on our work at EACD, it was striking to recognise that **all six naturally emerge from the way we work**.

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Function

What children and young adults can do — their activity, participation, and engagement in everyday life. Gaitway's conductive education and neurological physiotherapy programmes are designed to maximise each child's functional capacity and independence.

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Family

Families are central to everything Gaitway does. We work in close partnership with parents and carers, ensuring that therapeutic goals are embedded in home life and that families are supported, informed, and empowered throughout their journey with us.

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Fitness

Physical and mental wellbeing underpin all of Gaitway's therapeutic work. Our intensive programmes build strength, stamina, and physical resilience, supporting children and young adults to be as active and healthy as possible.

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Fun

Gaitway's group-based intensive model means that learning and therapy happen in an environment that is motivating, social, and enjoyable. Children and young adults thrive when they are engaged — fun is not incidental to our work, it is integral to it.

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Friends

Social connection is a key outcome of Gaitway's programmes. Our group sessions create genuine peer relationships among children and young adults with similar experiences, fostering a sense of belonging and community that extends beyond the clinic.

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Future

Gaitway takes a life-course approach — supporting children and young adults from early intervention through to adulthood. Our work at Stormont and our commitment to transition-age programmes reflects our belief that every young person deserves to look forward with confidence and aspiration.

The 6Fs are formally recognised by EACD and endorsed by the WHO's ICF framework as best practice in childhood disability. Attending this year's conference gave us pause to reflect — and it was clear that while Gaitway's approach has always been driven by what works for children and families rather than any single framework, all six naturally flow from the way we work. That is a meaningful validation of our model. [EACD: F-Words in Childhood Disability](#)

Sessions Attended

With a rich four-day programme spanning instructional courses, mini-symposia, oral communications, and poster sessions, members of the Gaitway team divided and conquered, attending the sessions most relevant to our work. Highlights included:

● Optimising the Neuroplasticity Window

Exploring the critical periods in early neurological development and how intervention timing can maximise outcomes for children with neurological conditions, directly relevant to Gaitway's early intervention approach.

● Fostering Self-Generated Movement

A session examining how therapy can be designed to encourage children to initiate and drive their own movement, rather than relying on passive intervention, strongly aligned with the principles underpinning conductive education.

● Neurology and Neurodisability in Acute and Chronic Care of the Complex Child

Addressing the clinical management of children with complex neurological needs across both acute and long-term care settings — relevant to understanding the broader healthcare landscape in which Gaitway's children and young adults live.

● Technology & Innovation Pitches

The conference featured a dedicated technology and innovation pitch programme, giving delegates the opportunity to see emerging assistive and rehabilitation technologies in action. This strand directly informed our conversations with Trexo, Marsi-Bionics, Galileo, and Smartbox, and opened our eyes to the pace of development in this field.

● Strengths-Based Approaches Across the Lifespan

A thread running throughout the conference was the shift from deficit-focused to strengths-based models of practice — placing the child and family at the centre, focusing on what they can do, and building on existing capacities. This resonates deeply with Gaitway's ethos and affirmed the direction of our work.

● Transition and the Life-Course Approach

Several sessions addressed the challenge of transition from paediatric to adult services — a critical issue for many of the young adults Gaitway supports. Hearing international perspectives on how services can better support this journey reinforced our commitment to a life-course model and gave us valuable ideas to bring back to our work in Northern Ireland.

Full Conference Programme

The complete EACD 2026 agenda — including all sessions, speakers, and symposia — is available on the conference website.

[View Full Programme ↗](#)

Organisations & Networks

ALL-ISLAND NETWORK

Irish Cerebral Palsy Programme

We had extensive conversations with the team from the Irish CP Programme. They have agreed to add Gaitway to their mailing list and will signpost our services. Importantly, they have specifically asked for parents from Northern Ireland who would like to get involved in their work.

cerebralpalsyireland.ie ↗

GLOBAL RESEARCH NETWORK

CP Alliance

We networked with CP Alliance, based in Australia, who recently launched two significant new platforms — **CPadvance** and **CPassist**. Though developed in Australia, both tools are recognised internationally within the CP community as valuable resources for families and professionals.

cerebralpalsy.org.au ↗

FOUNDATION

Cerebral Palsy Foundation Ireland

We made strong connections with the team from CP Foundation Ireland, furthering Gaitway's relationships with key all-Ireland stakeholders working to improve outcomes for children and young adults with cerebral palsy.

cerebralpalsyfoundation.org/ireland ↗

Technology & Innovation

EACD provided a valuable window into cutting-edge assistive and rehabilitation technology. We had early conversations with a number of companies — this is the beginning of a journey, and we are taking our time to understand what might be right for Gaitway and the children and young adults we support.

Trexo Robotics

Trexo is a robotic gait training device designed specifically for children with disabilities. It attaches to a standard walker frame and gently moves a child's legs in a customised gait pattern, getting them upright and experiencing real over-the-ground walking. It can be adjusted for weight bearing, step speed, and level of support — and has two modes: endurance and strength training. It has been used with children with cerebral palsy, spinal muscular atrophy, muscular dystrophy, brain injury and more. We had initial conversations with the Trexo team at EACD — an early and exciting step in understanding what this technology might one day offer the children and young adults Gaitway supports.

trexorobotics.com ↗

Marci — Marsi-Bionics

Marsi-Bionics have developed the world's first paediatric exoskeleton — designed specifically for young children with cerebral palsy and spinal muscular atrophy. Built from titanium and aluminium with ten joints, the exoskeleton mimics natural muscle function and adapts as children grow. It has the ability to interpret the child's own movement intent, meaning therapy actively engages the child's neurological pathways rather than simply moving limbs passively. We began conversations with the Marsi-Bionics team at EACD — the start of what we hope will be an ongoing dialogue about how this technology might one day benefit the youngest children Gaitway supports.

marsibionics.com ↗

Smartbox — AAC & Staff Training

Smartbox are leaders in augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) technology. Many of the children and young adults Gaitway supports already have their own AAC devices, so our interest here is not in the devices themselves. Rather, we were excited to learn about Smartbox's training academy — a real opportunity to upskill our staff in AAC, ensuring our team can better support children and young adults to get the most from their own communication tools, whatever device they use.

thinksmartbox.com ↗

Galileo — Whole Body Vibration Therapy

Galileo's whole body vibration (WBV) therapy platforms are already used in leading cerebral palsy centres alongside conductive education and neurological physiotherapy — making them a natural complement to Gaitway's work. The side-alternating vibration stimulates muscle responses, reduces spasticity, and builds strength, balance, and bone density. Research shows that even a single session can reduce spasticity and coordination deficits, with long-term use improving gross motor function, gait, and mobility. Galileo equipment is suitable from as young as 3 months and can be used in standing, sitting, or supported positions. We had early conversations at EACD about what this could look like for Gaitway — this is very much the beginning of a journey.

galileo-training.com ↗

Outcomes & Next Steps

As a result of attending EACD 2026, Gaitway has:

- Set up a number of follow-up meetings to discuss initiatives that will directly benefit the children and young adults we support
- Joined the Irish Cerebral Palsy Programme mailing list and established a pathway for NI parents to get involved
- Built new relationships with CP Alliance (Australia) and gained access to their CPadvance and CPassist platforms
- Strengthened connections with CP Foundation Ireland as a key all-Ireland partner
- Begun early conversations with Trexo, Marci, and Galileo, the start of a journey to understand what these technologies might one day offer
- Connected with Smartbox and identified their training academy as a potential opportunity to upskill Gaitway staff in AAC support

From the Gaitway Team

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Amazing networking opportunity.

GAITWAY TEAM MEMBER

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Great to hear from across the globe.

GAITWAY TEAM MEMBER

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Lovely that we are already addressing the WHO and EACD 6 F's.

GAITWAY TEAM MEMBER

Find Out More

If you would like any further information about Gaitway's attendance at EACD 2026, the organisations and technologies we encountered, or anything else in this report, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

✉ info@gaitway.org.uk

A link to this report, along with other communications including our quarterly newsletter, will be added to the Gaitway website over the coming weeks as our site is updated.