CONCERNS OF DISABLED PEOPLE - ESSENTIALS

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These essential observations are based on recent research conducted by the Kunsill Nazzjonali Persuni b'Dizabilita' (KNPD) and National Statistics Office (NSO). The main focus of this research study was to establish the major concerns of disabled people. The number of respondents was 599, who are registered with the KNPD. A social model perspective was adopted, meaning that disability is viewed as being caused by social oppression. The focus therefore was on the barriers created by society.

1.   A major problem disabled persons have is when it comes to *financial independence.* Indeed, most disabled people still rely on social security benefits for support whilst a majority do not earn more than the minimum wage. Besides limiting their choices, this also means that they are dependent on their families. Moreover, the general tendency is for disabled people to require specialised equipment which also limits their family's expenditure. The pension for disability cannot realistically support disabled persons in their everyday lives. The family remains an important element in the life of disabled people. This is because they consider it a source of adequate support and assistance. Though this bond with the family is a positive thing, disabled people are prepared to pay for support and assistance to be able to be more independent and less of a burden on their families. The Church, and social workers, for example, also provide support but this is limited. Moreover, much has still be to be done to balance the financial problems with the cost of services.

2.   *Education* is also a key concern for disabled persons. Only a small percentage of disabled people have reached post-secondary and tertiary education, whilst some never attended school. Indeed, much of the problem for participation is the lack of support services, though children currently attending schools are provided with facilitators. A strong need was expressed by disabled people for children to attend regular classrooms and not special schools.

3.   Disabled people have also shown concerns about employment. Most disabled people do not work, and most of those who do are engaged in either elementary or clerical work. Moreover, they have few opportunities for on-the-job training and promotions.

Disabled people have the expressed the need for training to be able to perform their job and flexible hours when it comes to working times.

4.   Information and communication technology is another sector that is important for disabled people. Though many disabled people recognise the advantages of using a computer, only a small percentage actually use it. A general need is felt from disabled people to be given the opportunity for training in accessible premises.

5.   Disabled people still do not feel fully included in their communities. The fact that many disabled people find it difficult to go out without support means that a significant number stay at home most of the time. Moreover, less than half of disabled people in this study felt that local councils or the Church supported them. More assistance is needed for disabled people to be fully included, including more accessible structures.

6.   Health and government services are considered to be fairly adequate. However, disabled people feel that they should be given the right to apply for health assurance as this is often denied them. Moreover, certain government buildings providing a service such as the housing department should be made more accessible so as to ensure disabled people are given equal opportunities in applying for services. As in the case of provision of services via telephone, there has been a general expression of disappointment over such services because in some departments it is difficult to be served.

Summary

Though it is undeniable that the lives of disabled people have improved over the years, there are still things to be done. Disabled people are still facing challenges in maintaining their financial upkeep, education, employability, and their knowledge of information technology. Moreover, the fact that disabled people find it difficult to go out on their own both because of physical and attitudinal barriers means that they are unable to be active players in the community. The inclusion of disabled people by providing them with equal opportunities and access should be a key priority.