

**INDAQS: MAY 2003 NATIONAL COMMISSION PERSONS WITH DISABILITY**  
**SPECIAL EDITION: EUROPEAN YEAR OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES -**  
**2003**

**The European Year Of Persons With Disabilities - 2003**

2003 is the European Year of People with Disabilities. The theme chosen for this year is "Flimkienaslu" (Together We Can Make It). The Commission is working to realise the ideals for which it was originally founded. Its objectives are:

- to ensure that every citizen is aware of the meaning of disability
- that persons with disabilities actively contribute to society
- that a concrete plan of action is set up, and that such a plan is carried out through participation of persons with disabilities themselves

The activities to inaugurate the Year for persons with disabilities started in the week dedicated to persons with disabilities. A report can be found in this newsletter. The commission also involved various bodies during these activities, which included:

**“Xejn Dwarna Minghajrna” (Nothing about Us without Us) Weekend**

The Commission organised a seminar with the theme *Nothing About Us Without Us*. The activity was organised by persons with disabilities, and it was the first time in Malta in which only persons with disabilities were involved. The idea behind this seminar was that persons with disabilities should control their own destiny and no one else. No initiative in the area of disability should be carried out without the backup and approval of persons with disabilities themselves. Various forms of disabilities were represented.

There were six who were blind, two deaf persons and eight who were physically impaired and made use of a wheelchair.

- In Marianne Debono's words, one of the organisers: "In this seminar we saw how important it is for persons with disabilities to stand united in order to ensure there is agreement on the fundamental rights of persons with disabilities, and that these rights are recognised and respected." She added: "This weekend proves that persons with different disabilities can work together in important decision making and enjoy themselves in the process."
- Joseph Stafrace, another participant, commented on the enthusiasm and feeling of solidarity expressed in the course of this weekend.
- Rita Borg commented on the importance of breaking the barriers between various disabilities.
- Dorianne Bezzina noted that the blind and the deaf, in certain cases, encountered problems in communicating with each other. That is why they should be supportive of each other.

The main point put forward was that persons with disabilities are capable of speaking out for themselves and take charge of their own life. The cause for the rights of persons with disabilities should be lead only by the persons with disabilities concerned. Using the suitable means to ensure that the objective of gaining fundamental rights and equal opportunities is achieved, persons with disabilities should work in solidarity and prove they can make it together..

This group grew with more persons with disabilities joining it. Eventually, the group was the basis for the formation of the first Maltese Council of Disabled Persons.

### **Inter-Faith Meeting: All Different All Equal – Together We Can Make It**

The commission organised an Inter-faith meeting entitled “Ilkoll Differenti, Ilkoll Ugwali- Flimkien Naslu” (All Different, All Equal. Together We Can Make It). The main message was that only a society which celebrates diversity can be said to be truly inclusive. Every human being must be valued and dignified, despite differences in faith or abilities. The activity was held at the *Coastline Hotel* on Friday 28th March 2003 and was led by Miss Rita Borg and Mr Charles Borg.

The activity started by an introductory speech in which the chairman of the commission, Mr Joe Cammilleri, emphasised that diversity should unite us as human beings and not divide us.

A special prayer written for the occasion was then read out by Mrs Marianne Debono and interpreted to sign language by Ms Dorianne Bezzina. Moreover, a song was also written entitled “Flimkien Naslu.” (Together We Can Make It) and sung by Mr Charles Borg.

The Commission also invited representatives of different faiths who talked about the themes of diversity and disability. The faiths and their representatives were:

- Rev. Peter Wolfenden, for the Anglican Church
- Rabbi Herbert Richer, for the Jewish community
- Tikamdas Bharwani, for the Indian community
- Imam Mohammed Elsadi, for the Muslim community
- Mr Gordon Cardona, for the Roman Catholic Church

The meeting was positively received by persons with disabilities, with high turnover. Other persons interested in this area also attended, as well as people of different religions. The speeches made by the participants can be found on our Website [www.knpd.org](http://www.knpd.org).

### **Lajf (Life): the Play**

Every year, the Drama Unit prepares a play with a particular theme to be presented to secondary school students around the Maltese islands. In occasion of the European Year of People with a Disability, the Drama Unit with the Commission's backup presented a play with disability as its theme

The play entitled 'LIVES WORTH LIVING', written by Lawrence Evans and Jane Nash and translated to Maltese by Marcelle Theuma and Paul Portelli - who also took part in the play now renamed "Lajf".

The Unit visited the schools taking part weeks before the actual performance, in which the actors discussed issues related to disability. The performances were held at the Drama Unit in the Maria Regina Complex, Blata l-Bajda. Some students were asked to wear cardboard tags with negative labels, and were addressed by those labels. This was done to show students that labels and nicknames can be hurtful and offensive.

In the play, the characters Julia and her brother Mark go for a day at the beach. Though Mark appears 'normal' bathers start calling him names and shouting abuse. In fact, Mark happens to be intellectually disabled, and grew up in an institution where he was always ordered around. There he was considered incapable of making his own decisions. In fact,

he knew what was happening as can be deduced from his discussions with his sister on his parents and how they valued him.

### **Meeting with Mons. Annetto Depasquale, Vicar General**

The Commission invited Mons. Annetto Depasquale, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Malta, to visit the Commission Secretariat in Santa Venera. Mons Depasquale accepted this invitation and visited the Commission on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2003. He met the staff of the Commission Secretariat and afterwards had a meeting with the members of the Commission. During this meeting, the Commission presented a memorandum based on the one that it had presented to Mons Mercieca, Archbishop of Malta, during a similar visit in 1994.

In this memorandum, the Commission raised these three points:

- Attitudes and Mentality and the need not only for awareness of the obstacles faced by persons with disability and their families, but also for concrete action for these obstacles to be overcome.
- Inclusive Education: the Commission reiterates its recommendation that the Church should have a point of reference for the support services it offers in its school, to ensure that no one is left out.
- Community Services, including Residential Services: these are essential for the dignity of persons with disability to be respected. They can also be an important means of support for families with the help of the parish.

At the end of the meeting, it was decided that the two sides should continue with the dialogue so that persons with disability and their families can increase their participation in Maltese society, including in the life of the Church in Malta.

Earlier on, the Commission held a meeting with Maltese parish priests. During this meeting, which was attended by 30 parish priests, there was a discussion about the services provided by the Commission for persons with disability and their families, and about how the Commission and the parish priests can collaborate for the benefit of the people they serve.

### **Meeting with Doctors**

Together with the Health Division, the Commission organised a meeting for all Maltese doctors. During this meeting, persons with disability could express their opinion directly about the services given by these professionals, and about how they can become more sensitive to the various needs of persons with disability. The doctors were addressed by persons with different disabilities, namely physical, hearing, and visual impairments, as well as relatives of persons with mental health difficulties and with intellectual impairment. These persons talked about their experiences in this sector. The discussion was led by Mr Joe Camilleri, Chairman of the Commission, and was attended by the Director General of the Health Division, Dr Ray Busuttil and around 25 doctors or specialists.

## **Meetings between Persons with Disability and Secondary School Students**

A number of persons with disability or relatives of persons with mental health difficulties and with intellectual impairment have visited various government, church and independent secondary schools which accepted an invitation that the Commission had made for persons with disability and their relatives to present the message of the European Year of Persons with Disability directly to the students. In total, over 50 schools have been visited. Some of the schools felt this was a very positive experience and requested the persons with disability to revisit the school and meet the students in smaller groups. The Commission believes that direct contact with the younger generation is very important as this helps increase positive awareness about disability issues.

## **Partecipation in the Media and the Press**

The Commission is keeping the media and the press informed about all the events related to the European Year by means of press releases, newspaper articles and participation in TV and radio programmes.

During this year, the Commission released statements about these subjects for the media:

- Women's Day Message
- Youth Day Message
- Workers' Day Message
- Information about the Special I D Card Service
- Information about the Special Apparatus Fund Service
- Information about the Resource Centre
- Information about Physical Accessibility in Malta

There were more than forty articles about different disability issues in local newspapers. Moreover, the Commission has taken part in 37 different radio programmes and 25 programmes on television. As always, the Commission gave the space for disabled persons and their relatives to speak about the issues that concern them most.

### **Financial Support for Other Activities**

Through the Central Committee appointed by Government for this year, the Commission gave limited financial assistance to a small number of organizations which have organised during this year and which had asked for help. These included:

- The Malta Wheelchair Dancers Association which organised a dance competition in Malta in December 2002.
- The National Deaf Association, which organised the first National Conference about Maltese Sign Language in January 2003.
- The Caritas Epilepsy Support Group that organised a conference entitled 'Together We Can Make It' in March 2003.

### **Other Planned Activities**

For this year, the Commission is working on various other activities. These include:

- Conference about 'Sexuality and Disability' organised together with the National Council of Women;
- Publication of guidelines about 'How to Break the News about Disability';

- Seminar about ‘Broadcasting and Persons with Disability’ with the Broadcasting Authority;
- Photography Course together with the Malta Photographic Society;
- Blood donation together with the Sovereign Military Order of Malta Blood Bank
- Donation of books to libraries in secondary schools together with HSBC Ltd.;
- Euromed Training Course for disabled youths from different countries from Europe and the Meditterreanean;
- National Seminar about Disability and Tourism;
- National Seminar about the Individual Education Programme;
- New edition of these publications:
  - Maps of Reserved Parking Bays for Persons with Disability (first edition);
  - Services and Benefits for Persons with Disability (Fourth Edition);
  - National Survey (Third Edition);
  - Access for All - Design Guidelines (Second Edition).

### **Week of Persons with Disability**

Every year, the Commission, together with other entities, organizes the Week of Persons with Disability. This year this week was held between 30<sup>th</sup> November and 8<sup>th</sup> December 2002 with the theme ‘Together We Can Make It’.

This year, the Week was different from previous ones since it marked the Official Opening of the European Year of Persons with Disability. During this Week, the Commission, on its own or with other entities, organised various activities which included a Solidarity Walk and a Declaration.

Together with the organizers of last year's Walk, the Commission started the Week, and the Year, off with the Solidarity Walk from City Gate to the President's Palace. Before the Walk got underway, there was a short variety show with the participation of disabled and non-disabled people. Persons with disability, family members, friends and representatives of local and national entities participated.

At the end of the Walk, the Chairman of the Commission, Mr Joe Camilleri, presented the Declaration in Favour of Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disability to H.E. Profs Guido de Marco, President of Malta. The Declaration has been signed by more than 150 Maltese organizations. At the end, the President read the Declaration and signed it on behalf of the people of Malta.

The entities that have signed the Declaration are as follows:

The President of Malta	1
The Archbishop of Malta	1
The Bishop of Gozo	1
Agencies	2
Authorities	7
Educational establishments	23
Government entities	13
Government entities for persons with disability	3
Non-governmental organizations of persons with disability	14
Other entities	9
Political organisations	4
Commissions	6
Parastatal companies	6
Private companies	12
Local Councils	12
Members of Parliament	12
Ministers	8
Parishes and religious organisations	12
Unions	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>154</b>

## **Theme**

The theme that was chosen this year, the same as that of the European Year of Persons with Disability, was Together We Can Make It. This theme was reflected in an attractive poster that was circulated throughout Malta and Gozo and on six billboards around Malta.

A publicity video with this theme was distributed to all local television stations who showed it throughout the Week for free.

## **National Conference 'Together We Can Make It'**

The National Commission organised a National Conference with the theme 'Together We Can Make It' on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2002. This conference was chaired by Ms Marianne Debono and six papers were given based on the Standard Rules of the United Nations. For the first time in our country, the papers were all given by persons with disability and a parent of a person with intellectual disability with the support of professionals. The papers and speakers were as follows:

- Awareness, Research and International Sector by Mr Michael Micallef visually impaired person (supported by Ms Anne-Marie Callus);
- Health and Accessibility by Ms Kate Richards a person who had mental health difficulties (supported by Ms Grace Micallef);
- Education and Training by Mr Karl Borg hearing impaired person (supported by Mr Fred Bezzina);
- Employment and Social Security by Ms Connie Baker a person with a hidden impairment (supported by Mr Brian Gauci);

- Family Life, Religion and Leisure by Ms Jeanesse Abela physically impaired person (supported by Ms Natasha Cefai);
- Legislation, Policies, Coordination and NGOs by Ms Marchita Mangiafico parent of person with intellectual impairment (supported by Mr Andrew Azzopardi).

The papers were followed by six workshops on the same themes. The conference came to an end with speeches from the Hon Ms M.L. Coleiro, shadow minister for this sector and the Hon. Dr. L. Gonzi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Social Policy.

The conference was very well attended. The papers can be viewed on the Commission website [www.knpd.org](http://www.knpd.org).

### **Together We Can Make It . . . with Politicians**

On Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> December, the Commission organised an activity for politicians in the House of Parliament. Members of parliament were addressed by Mr Bert Massie, Chairman of the UK Disability Rights Commission and Ms Marianne Debono, Manager of the Equal Opportunities Unit within the National Commission Persons with Disability. This activity was attended by 15 members of parliament as well as a number of other guests.

During his visit to Malta, Mr Massie had another three important meetings:

- Meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon Dr. L. Gonzi, together with the Hon Dr. A.Mifsud Bonnici, Parliamentary Secretary and Mr J.Ebejer, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry for Social Policy;

- Meeting with Opposition spokesperson in this sector, the Hon Dr. K. Chircop and the Hon Ms M.L.Coleiro;
- Meeting with Commission officials including the Chairman, the Director and the lawyer of the Commission.

During these meetings, several topics were discussed including ways in which the two Commission can collaborate together for the benefit of persons with disability of the two countries.

### **Together We Can Make It . . . with the Leaders**

On Saturday, 7<sup>th</sup> December, the Commission organised a meeting with the country's leaders for disabled persons and their families to share their preoccupations with the Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon Dr. L. Gonzi u Leader of the Opposition, the Hon Dr. A. Sant. The Prime Minister could not attend the meeting since he was ill. Attendance for this meeting was much lower than expected.

### **Together We Can Make It . . . with Local Councils**

The Commission organised a meeting for mayors and local councilors responsible for this sector to increase their awareness about issues concerning persons with disability. This seminar was addressed by the Hon Dr. C. Mangion, shadow minister for local councils. The Hon Dr. A. Gatt, minister responsible for local councils because of parliamentary commitments. Attendance from local councils was quite poor.

### **Signing of Agreement with Bank of Valletta**

The Commission and Bank of Valletta signed a formal agreement with which BOV accepted to work to provide equal opportunities for persons with disability, both employees and clients, according to the Equal Opportunitites Act. This activity was held on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2002.

### **Thanksgiving Activity**

The Commission held a reception to thank all those who work in this sector, many of whom work on a voluntary basis. The reception was held after the Annual General Meeting of the Federation of Organisations for Persons with Disability on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2002, on the International Day of Persons with Disability.

### **Messagees**

The Commission issued two messages on the Week's theme, one for children and the other for the general public. The children's message was sent out to all schools in Malta and Gozo, public as well as private. The message for the general public was presented to the media during a press conference that was held on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2002, the International Day of Persons with Disability.

Moreover, the Hon Dr. L. Gonzi, Minister for Social Policy, delivered his ministerial message for this day by introducing a disabled person who sent a message to the Maltese public. This year, this message was given by Mr Kevin Cutajar, a university student who has a visual impairment.

## **Together We Can Make It . . . with PEKTUR**

The Commission organised a public meeting about the Programme for Continuous Education, Training and Research (known as PEKTUR) in order to give an account of the work that has been done so far by this programme and to give information to persons and entities which can benefit from this research and training programme. This activity was addressed by the Hon. J. Mugliett, Parliamentary Secretary within the Ministry for Education. At the end of the meeting, the certificates for the participants of the Speak Out! Course were distributed.

## **Other Activities**

During this week, there were several other activities organised by entities that were supported by the Commission. These included:

- The publication of the Code of Ethics for the media by the Broadcasting Authority after full discussions with the Commission.
- A mass organised by the Pastoral Commission of Persons with Disability at St John Co-Cathedral. At the end of the mass, H.E. Mons A Depasquale signed the Declaration in favour of Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disability.
- Annual General Meeting by the Federation of Organisations for Persons with Disability that was addressed by H.E. Profs Guido de Marco, President of Malta;
- Meeting entitled “Together We Can Make It . . . in the World of Work’ with the National Statistics Office. During this meeting a study about persons with disability in the world of work was presented.

- Opening of a new community home in Zejtun for disabled persons by the Nazaret Foundation.
- Open Day in the Pembroke community Resource Centre for persons with disability.
- Closing of training course for HSBC employees for which different persons with disability and family members took part.

### **Equal Opportunities Act**

The Commission has the duty of ensuring that the Equal Opportunities Act is observed and to take effective and corrective measures if it is not. This work is done through different means including formal and informal discussions, mediation and, as a last resort, taking the case to arbitration or to court. The Commission has cases in all these stages and below is an update of the principal cases according to the stage they are in.

### **Solved Cases**

- The parish church of Saint Helen in Birkirkara now has an entrance which is accessible to all.
- The Law Courts now have an entrance which is accessible to all. This means that now practically all the building is accessible.
- Reserved Parking bay in St George's Square which had been removed has been restored by Valletta Local Council

### **Temporarily Solved**

- An agreement has been reached for an adequate ramp to be installed in the first floor from the lift to the rest of the building of the President's Palace, which includes various offices and halls.
- An agreement has been reached with Mosta Parish about the entrance to the church. This agreement was made possible thanks to the direct intervention of H.E. Mons Annetto Depasquale after a judicial protest was made at the Court.

### **Cases that have been taken to Court**

- Case against M. Peresso Ltd of Birkirkara: this is still at the stage of compiling evidence.
- Case against Invicta Ltd of Msida: although this company is operating from a building which is relatively accessible, attempts to reach a final settlement have failed.
- Case against SBT Ltd: there were several attempts to settle out of court but they all failed.

### **Cases taken to Arbitration**

- Case against St James Cavalier. The Arbitration Service had given St James six months during which to carry out the necessary works. These six months have now passed and the Commission is investigating whether or not the work has been done.
- Case against the Home Affairs Ministry in Santa Venera. The Arbitration Service has now given its sentence and this satisfies the principle aspirations of the Commission. The Ministry has been given six months to carry out the necessary work.

### **Other Cases that are being discussed**

- A person with disability has allegedly been refused employment as police inspector.
- A soldier has allegedly been dismissed because of his disability.
- The Commission is still working on making Student House at the University accessible for all. This building is very important for university students.
- The Commission is insisting that the Health Centre in Gzira be made accessible to all.
- The Commission is insisting that parents of disabled students who attend independent schools are given a bigger tax rebate because of the increased expenses they incur.
- The Commission is insisting that Skola Sajf (summer school) hours at Helen Keller Special School are the same as those of regular schools.

### **Day Services for Persons with Disability After the Age of Sixteen**

Our country adopted a general policy of inclusion in all parts of society. This philosophy is most clearly shown in the education sector, especially with the National Minimum Curriculum. The inclusive educational policy gives the opportunity to disabled students to receive their education with their peers. In this way, all children have the opportunity to grow together and to be included in society.

The inclusive education policy should not stop after the end of compulsory education. For inclusion to be full, there need to be structures so that in post-secondary education and in adult life, persons with disability have the same opportunities as their non-disabled peers. Post-secondary education is an important means for a person to increase his or her qualifications and therefore to increase their opportunities of finding a job.

At present, very few disabled students continue to study after the age of sixteen and students who have benefited from inclusive education still encounter many obstacles when it comes to achieving inclusion as adults in society. The following table shows this very clearly:

	<b>Disabled Students</b>	<b>Student Population</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Unviersity	5	9127	0.05
Junior College	3	2800	0.11
Giovanni Curmi	2	1230	0.16
MCAST	17	2018	0.84

The Commission recognises this problem which is the responsibility of different entities including University, Junior College, the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology, the Employment and Training Corporation, the Department for the Elderly and Community Services (specifically Day Services for Adults with Disability) and the Education Division. Therefore, the Commission prepared a comprehensive report about this sector and distributed it among all the parties concerned. In mid-March, the Commission organized a seminar for this document to be discussed and for a national policy for this sector to be drawn up eventually.

This meeting was attended by all the sectors involved and was also addressed by the Hon Dr L. Galea, Minister for Education. The Commission will continue working with all the parties involved for this report to be developed and implemented. The document can be

obtained from the offices of the Commission in Maltese and English, on audio tape, in Braille and in large print as well as on the website of the Commission [www.knpd.org](http://www.knpd.org).

### **Information Leaflets**

KNPD offers several services for disabled persons and their families. As one of its activities for the European Year of Persons with Disability, it has decided to publish information leaflets on each of the services it offers. So far, the following leaflets have been published:

- The Special Identity Card (SID) Service
- The Resource Centre
- The Special Appartus Fund (SGhS)
- The Programme for Continuous Education, Training and Research (PEKTUR)

In the near future, further leaflets will be published, namely:

- Disability Issues
- The Equal Opportunities Act Unit
- The Register of Persons with Disability
- The National Commission Persons with Disability, itself.

This leaflets may be obtained from the offices of the Commission in regular print, large print, in Braille and on audio cassette. They are also available on the Commission website

[www.knpd.org](http://www.knpd.org)..

### **Maltese Representative elected on the Board of the European Disability Forum**

Ms Rita Borg has been appointed to the Board of the European Disability Forum (EDF). She was nominated by the European Alliance of Neuro-Muscular Disorders Associations of which the Muscular Dystrophy Group (Malta) is an active member.

Ms Borg has been active for the past few years in the disability sector. She is the executive secretary of Muscular Dystrophy Group (Malta) and was instrumental in the founding of the Muscular Dystrophy Youth Group within the same organization. She is also secretary of the Youth Group. Moreover, Ms Borg is a founding member of the Maltese Council of Persons with Disability. She is also a member of the Board of the National Commission Persons with Disability, as a representative of the Federation of Organisations of Persons with Disability. Furthermore, Ms Borg is an artist and a member of the Mouth and Foot Painters Association.

Ms Borg, who also has a physical disability, gives a regular contribution to the Commission's awareness-raising Disability Issues programme. She is also a member in various board in the disability sector and participates regularly in national and international conferences and seminars.

The Commission and the Muscular Dystrophy Group congratulate Ms Borg and wish her every success in this role so that, while working for the benefit of disabled persons, she also honours Malta's name abroad.

## **Proposals of the National Commission Person with Disability for the 2003 General Elections**

Despite the short time span available, KNPD put forward its proposals for the 2003 General Elections to the three political parties in order to work towards achieving equal opportunities and a high quality of living for disabled persons and their families.

The three political parties kindly accepted to meet with a delegation of the Commission to discuss these proposals as well as other proposals that the parties had for this sector. The Commission delegation presented a memo to each party with detailed proposals related to each issue that is important for persons with disability and their families.

The first meeting was with Alternattiva Demokratika and during this meeting, the Commission requested that issues concerning persons with disability be included in all areas of life and so, practically, in all the activities organised by the parties. This proposal was accepted.

A delegation of the Commission then met the leadership fo the Labour Party. Apart from other things, the Commission expressed its appreciation about the proposals that the party had made in its electoral programme related to persons with disability, but also expressed the concern felt by disabled persons and their families about the proposal to turn part of St Luke's Hospital into a residential complex for persons with disability. The Labour Party explained that this proposal was still being discussed and that no decision had been taken. The Commission delegation was comosed of Mr Joe Camilleri (Chairman), Mr

Fred Bezzina (Executive Director), Ms Rita Borg, Mr Alfred Camilleri, Ms Marthese Mugliette and Mr John Peel . The Labour Party delegation was composed by Dr Alfred Sant (Leader), Dr George Vella and Dr Joe Brincat.

The Commission also met with the leadership of the Nationalist Party. It stated that during these past years substantial progress has been achieved in this sector. However, the Commission expressed its concern of persons with disability and their families that VAT may be introduced on specialized equipment for disabled persons, such as wheelchairs, white sticks and so on. The Hon John Dalli gave assurance in writing of the Finance Ministry that if this happens, “Government will find a way of compensating for the expense that any negative effect is neutralized.” The Commission delegation was led by Mr Joe Camilleri, Chairman, together with Mr Fred Bezzina, Executive Director, Mr Alfred Camilleri, Ms Marthese Mugliette and Mr John Peel while the delegation of the Nationalist Party was led by Dr. Lawrence Gonzi, Deputy Leader, together with Mr John Dalli and Mr Joe Saliba.

The Commission would like to thank all three parties and feels that this was a very useful exercise which will help for this sector to be given the attention it deserves. After the election, the Commission requested a meeting with all the Ministers in order to discuss the proposals that it had put forward to the parties and to draw up a five-year action plan.

### **Agenzija Sapport (Support Agency)**

In March 2003, the Ministry for Social Policy implemented one of the measures recommended by the National Commission Persons with Disability in the area of personal assistance and residential services for disabled persons with the setting up of the new Agenzija Sapport. Sapport. This agency has the primary aim of providing community and residential services so that persons with disability can exercise their right to participate fully in community life. The Commission helped in the setting up of this agency by participating actively in the consultative committee that was set up to establish it.

So far, Sapport is already providing community services to a number of persons with disability and has opened a number of house in Vajrita, Marsascala, Fgura and Kirkop. There are also plans for other houses to be opened in Mosta, Cospicua and Mtarfa.

Further information can be obtained from Agenzija Sapport in Blk A Town Centre, Triq ir-Regimenti Maltin, Mtarfa, Tel 21451862, 21451868, 21251879, Fax 21453164, email [sapport@gov.mt](mailto:sapport@gov.mt).

### **The Foundation for Information Technology Accessibility (FITA): from 2002 to the present**

FITA has been in operation since 2002 with the primary aim of launching and managing information and consultancy services about Assistive Technology (AT). The Foundation can help persons with disability improve their quality of life. FITA carries out a lot of

consultation and support work connected with technology and computers, taking into consideration the needs of persons with disability.

It has reached an agreement with the Education Division and the Church for its schools to be kept informed about how they can make use of the services offered by FITA for the benefit of disabled students. Both facilitators and heads of school have approached FITA to find out how technology can be used for students with different disabilities to have full access to the curriculum. In the coming months, FITA, together with KNPD, will be preparing courses about information technology accessibility for peripatetic teachers, subject coordinators and support teachers. These will then be responsible for disseminating the knowledge in the schools where they work. Discussions are still underway about in order to find out how current procedures can be amended to ensure equal opportunities for all. Discussions have also been held with MCAST, ETC and other institutions to raise awareness about how technology can be of service for disabled persons. In fact, IT is an important means that helps them develop their abilities and improve their future prospects. Technology can help remove or reduce barriers in education so that disabled persons can have access to resources that may not have had access to previously.

FITA has also participated in the drawing up of the Code of Conduct of the Computer Society of Malta. This Code has established that there cannot be discrimination on various grounds, including disability. A lot of importance was given to the Design-for-All principle. FITA has checked a number of websites to see if they are applying this

principle, especially with regard to accessibility for persons with severe visual impairment. In general, the response was positive and many organizations have taken the necessary steps to implement the rules of accessibility proposed by FITA. Furthermore, FITA is in contact with ETC in order to find a way for technology to be used to help disabled persons find or retain a job.

During the past months, FITA has also participated in the European Year of Persons with Disability by setting up a website for the Year. Moreover, together with the Foundation for the Development of Maltese Sign Language of the University of Malta, a Dictionary of Maltese Sign Language was launched.

On the initiative of Mr Stanley Debono, the Executive Coordinator, and in collaboration with disabled persons, a collection of Life Skills Learning Tools is being compiled for use by Mount Carmel Hospital in Attard. FITA has also reached an agreement with the Malta Community Chest Fund for disabled persons to be given financial help to buy computers and technological aids. FITA will be responsible for drawing up reports about how disabled persons to be able to derive more benefits from technology and how the particular applicant will benefit from the product that will be purchased.

Apart from this, FITA is seeking to provide the necessary information about the needs of persons with disability in connection with technology. Coordination work is underway between different entities for disabled persons to have access to computers, software,

educational aids and the training that is necessary for one to make full use of computers and other technology.

The Foundation has carried out research about accessibility to organizations that give computer and clerical courses. The research dealt with different forms of accessibility, not just physical access. It showed that persons with mobility difficulties can be served by the existing commercial services. On the other hand, those who have intellectual or communication difficulties encounter financial problems. This is because although some of the institutions have the necessary resources to provide this training, they still make it difficult for one to attend an adapted course since they are very expensive. Consequently, FITA is holding discussions with MCAST for courses to be held for persons with intellectual or communication difficulties. Those who are interested should contact the Executive Coordinator, Mr Stanley Debono.

Finally, FITA held lengthy discussions with the eMalta Commission. Apart from projects that need to be finalized, FITA is taking care of the administration of applications for software from Microsoft. Disabled persons can benefit from this very beneficial initiative. This will also help FITA compile much-needed statistics about how technology is being used and how disabled Maltese and Gozitans view its potential. The statistics will be used to help in the implementation of the National Policy Document about disabled persons and information technology.

The FITA website ([www.knpd.org/mittsfita](http://www.knpd.org/mittsfita)) includes information about its main services, articles about the latest technological advances and basic information about how technology can best be made use of, according to the different needs of disabled persons. Those who wish to make use of FITA services or would like to know more about this subject, can contact Mr Stanley Debono or Mr Michael Micallef on telephone numbers 2599 2659 or 2599 2343

### **International**

During the past six months, the Commission continued its work in the international sector. It participated in the following activities:

#### **EQUAL Programme Conference**

The Ministry for Social Policy invited the Commission to send a representative as part of the Maltese delegation that attended a conference on the European Union EQUAL Programme, which was organised by the Danish Presidency for applicant countries. The Commission accepted this invitation and the seminar was attended by the Executive Director, Mr Fred Bezzina. The Maltese delegation comprised representatives from other entities including unions, employers' associations, women's associations and the ETC. The Commission believes that this programme can help it in its mission to eliminate discrimination against persons with disability.

### **“No Discrimination + Positive Action = Integration” Conference**

Malta participated in this conference through Mr Charles Borg (a person with disability) and Mr Elvin Sciberras, officials from the Commission Secretariat. The conference was organised by the EU Spanish Presidency and was held in Madrid last March. It was attended by delegates from EU member states and applicant countries. The conference approved the Madrid Declaration in favour of equal opportunities for disabled persons and their families.

### **Education and Life Long Learning - Equal Treatment Conference**

This conference was organized by the European Disability Forum, of which the Commission is a member, and the European Trade Union Council (E.T.U.C). More than 24 different European countries participated. Malta was represented by Mr Michael Micallef, FITA official and a person with disability, and Mr Sandro Micallef, KNPD official. The conference, which was held in Thessaloniki, Greece during the Greek Presidency, discussed how persons with disability can have full access to the world of work.. The Commission believes that it is very important for it to keep in contact with what is happening abroad. Therefore it is important that, within its limited resources, Commission officials and other persons participate in international meetings.

### **International Congress about Women and Disability**

Malta participated in this congress which was held in Valencia, Spain. Ms Jeanesse Abela (a person with disability) and Ms Michelle Farrugia were nominated by the Commission. They took part in this congress which dealt with important issues that are not always given the attention they deserve.

### **Official Opening of the European Year of Persons with Disability**

The Greek Presidency of the European Commission invited Malta to participate in the official opening ceremony of the year. The Maltese Government accepted this invitation and Malta was represented by the KNPD Chairman Mr Joe Camilleri and the Executive Director Mr Fred Bezzina. The ceremony was held in Athens and was led by the Greek President.

### **Together for Europe Network**

Malta is a member of the committee of this network which organizes European wide activities for persons with intellectual disability. Last April, this committee met in Malta and this year it was Portugal's turn to organise the next meeting. This was held in April 2003 and Malta was represented by Mr Fred Bezzina, Executive Director of KNPD, and Mr Marcel Pisani, Chief Executive of Agenzija Sapport. Through this network, a number of initiatives have been taken including:

- eight support workers from Day Services received training in Portugal;
- four persons with disability and two support workers attended the Arts Festival in Cologne, Germany;

- a group of persons with intellectual disability from Sheffield came to Malta and now a group from Malta will be visiting Sheffield.

### **Transforming Disability into Ability Conference**

This conference was organised by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and was related directly to research that the Commission is carrying out at present about social benefits for persons with disability and their participation in the world of work. Malta was represented by Ms Anne-Marie Callus, the official responsible for research within KNPD.

### **Study Visit in Brussels**

Ms Anne-Marie Callus, the KNPD official in charge of EU affairs, was chosen by the European Commission Delegation in Malta to do a week-long study visit in February 2003 in Brussels through the European Union Visitors Programme. The aim of this visit was for her to study how the European Union works in this sector and to establish contact with EU officials that work within programmes related to persons with disability.

### **EU Directive and UN Convention**

At present, there are discussions underway at a European and international level for legal measures to safeguard the rights of disabled persons.

As part of the European Year of Persons with Disability, the European Disability Forum (EDF) is proposing that the EU issues a directive, that would become law across all EU

member states, for discrimination against persons with disability to be illegal. So far there has been no agreement about this and it is not yet clear how much support the directive has from different member states. KNPD, which is a member of EDF, is fully in agreement with this initiative and encourages the Maltese government to give it its full support, even if we are not yet full members.

On an international level, the UN has set up an ad hoc committee to draw up a plan for an international convention to ensure the safeguarding of all the rights of disabled persons. The Commission has opened discussions with the Foreign Affairs Ministry for Malta to give its full support for this initiative that is set to help disabled persons truly achieve equal opportunities.

### **Self Advocacy**

While the rights of persons with disability are becoming increasingly recognized, and their voice is being heard more and more, persons who have an intellectual disability do not have much opportunity to speak out. Very often, it is their parents or those who work with them who speak on their behalf, because of the belief that these persons are not able to represent themselves. Self Advocacy refers to the ability of a person to speak for him/herself in different contexts, for example with family members or with service providers.

The Commission believes firmly in the principles of Self Advocacy. Consequently, it started an initiative, in collaboration with the Day Services Disability Unit, within the Department of the Elderly and Community Services, as well as the Speech Therapy Unit

of the Health Division. Through this initiative, Self Advocacy groups have been set up in the Day Centres for Persons with Intellectual Disability. The Commission and the Day Services Disability Unit drew up a strategic plan for the development of this sector in Malta. It was decided that a group would be set up at Hal-Far Centre as a pilot project. This group is made up of twelve clients who attend the Centre. With the support of the staff, they meet once a week. The members have chosen the name 'Grupp Flimkien' (the Together Group). During these meetings, members discuss various subjects that are of importance to them. Through these meetings, the clients are increasing their awareness of how Day Services work and are also learning about different aspects of life, such as time and money management. The group at Hal-Far has now been meeting for over a year and has taken part in a radio programme and given an interview to a local newspaper. Moreover, they have also met Mr Michael Bezzina, the Director of the Department for the Elderly and Community Services during which they discussed the services they received and how they would like them to be.

In the meantime, the initiative to set up Self Advocacy groups has spread to other Day Centres. This ensures that clients of these Centres can influence the way that these services are developed in the future.

### **New Numbers for Towing Services**

As has already been announced, the Commission has reached an agreement with towing and breakdown companies to ensure that their services are accessible to persons with hearing impairment through SMS. There were some changes in mobile numbers:

CAA 7931 2644

MET 7922 7979/ 7944 4441

RMF 7947 5558/ 7947 5557

XTC 9946 5502

### **Information about KNPD Services**

#### **Developments in the allocation of Reserved Parking bays**

The Commission and the Transport Authority have reached an agreement through which the allocation of Reserved Parking bays in front of residences of persons with a severe disability will start to be administered by the Authority, and not by the Commission as it used to be. This measure is in line with the declared policy of the Commission that services for persons with disability should be administered by the competent authorities rather than by the Commission.

On the other hand, the Commission will continue to give its full support to the Authority both during the transition period as well as afterwards to ensure that the service continues to meet the real needs of persons with disability in the best way possible.

Consequently, from 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2003, applications for this service will be received and processed by the Transport Authority Tel 21247653.

### **Assisstive Apparatus Fund**

We would like to remind persons with disability who have applied to the Assisstive Apparatus Fund that they should not buy the object for which they have applied for a subsidy before there is a home visit by a professional appointed by the Commission. The Commission also accepts professional reports filled in by other professionals, such as occupational therapists or physiotherapist) who are employed by government and who are qualified to give advice. Blank reports can be obtained from the Commission Secretariat. In these cases, applicants can buy the object as soon as they receive a written confirmation that the report has been received. Applicants can buy the object before they are informed whether they will receive a subsidy from the Commission at their own risk, that is without any guarantee that the requested subsidy will be given.

### **Information for Persons with Disability Registered with KNPD**

The Commission offers a service to organizations and individuals who would like to pass on information to persons with disability without breaking the rules of confidentiality that are kept strictly by the Commission. The information is sent by the Commission itself. This can be done under certain conditions, namely:

- i. the content of the information remains the absolute responsibility of the person or entity sending it;

- ii. the material to be sent has to be at the offices of the Commission at least three weeks in advance;
- iii. postage is paid by the person or entity sending the information;
- iv. if the material being sent is of a commercial nature, a tariff must be paid to cover all other costs involved.

### **Exemption from VAT on Computers and Wheelchair Batteries**

The Commission reimburses VAT that is paid on computers and wheelchair batteries. The maximum sum of VAT refunded on computers has been established at Lm78. Apart from this, the Commission gives a month's time for persons with disability to claim the VAT refund from the date of the purchase of the computers. This means that the date on the fiscal receipt which is presented for refund should not be more than two months old.

### **Information About Inheritance**

In this article, the Commission is providing some general information and attempting to answer the questions most frequently asked by parents of persons with disabled persons.

First of all, it is important to make some general comments:

- a) This article cannot answer all questions since every family has its own different circumstances. Therefore, it is important that parents who wish to make a will discuss these personal circumstances with their notary.

- b) It is important to keep in mind that in order to help our sons and daughters who have a disability, it is not always necessary to give them preferential treatment by leaving them more money or property than their siblings in our will.
- c) Ideally, parents should share out their legacy among their children according to the needs of each and every one of them.

1. *Can we leave more money or property for our son or daughter who has a disability than we leave for our other sons and daughters?*

Yes. The law allows parents to leave more money or property to one child so long as all the children are given what is known as their legitime. This is that part of the inheritance that children have a legal right to. It depends on how many children there are and the way it is computed is explained in the table below. The parents can choose to dispose of any remaining money or property as they prefer.

The National Commission Persons with Disability receives several requests for information about how parents of children and adults with intellectual disability can make a will that conforms to the requirements of the law and at the same time respects the wishes of those parents and safeguards the interests of their offspring.

The legitim for the children is as follows:

One child is entitled to one-third ( $1/3$ )

Two children are entitled to one-third ( $1/3$ ) between them, that is one-sixth ( $1/6$ ) each

Three children are entitled to one-third ( $1/3$ ) between them, that is one-ninth ( $1/9$ ) each

Four children are entitled to one-third ( $1/3$ ) between them, that is one-twelfth ( $1/12$ ) each

Five or more children are entitled to half ( $1/2$ ) between them

For example: A family has three children, one of whom has an intellectual disability. The legitim for each child is one-ninth ( $1/9$ ). For the three children together it is one-third ( $1/3$ ). This means that there are two-thirds ( $2/3$ ) left over that the parents can leave to whoever they prefer.

*2. Can we leave money or property to our son or daughter with disability without compromising their right to the disability pension?*

Yes. The law says that a person with disability is entitled to the disability pension and to own capital so long as the combined amount does not exceed the national minimum wage. The total income can be from the pension, from capital that the person owns from a legacy, and from other sources, including employment. If the total combined income exceeds the national minimum wage, the excess amount is deducted from the pension.

For example, a person with disability may be receiving income from the pension, money in the bank, property and/or employment. If the total income does not exceed the minimum wage, the pension remains intact. If it exceeds it, the pension is reduced accordingly. This means that parents can leave money and property to their children with disability in their will, as long as the income from that money or property does not exceed the minimum wage. If the latter is exceeded, the relevant amount is deducted from the pension.

Let's take some examples, keeping in mind that the national minimum wage is Lm2600 annually and that the disability pension is Lm1560.

#### Example A

A couple have a daughter who has a disability. They leave her the following in their will:

- a) the house in which the person with disability is living;
- b) another house which is rented for a Lm100 a year;
- c) Lm10,000 invested at 5 % interest rate, which yields Lm500 interest a year.

This means that this person with disability has a total of Lm600 yearly from this legacy since the house she lives in does not affect the pension. Therefore, her total income is:

- Disability pension (Lm1560)
- Income from property (Lm600)
- Total: Lm2160.

Since this amount does not exceed the minimum wage (which is Lm2600), this person's pension is not affected.

#### Example B

Income from the legacy or from other property amounts to Lm1200 a year. Therefore,

the total income for the person is Lm1200 plus the pension, Lm1560, amounting to Lm2760. This sum exceeds the national minimum wage by Lm160 and so the pension of that person has to be reduced by Lm160 a year.

### Other Examples

Minimum Wage	Pension	Other Income	Total Income	Pension Entitled To (per annum)
Lm2600	Lm1560	Lm500	Lm 2060	Lm1560
Lm2600	Lm1560	Lm 1000	Lm 2560	Lm1560
Lm2600	Lm1560	Lm 1200	Lm 2760	Lm1400
Lm2600	Lm1560	Lm 1500	Lm 3060	Lm1100
Lm2600	Lm1560	Lm 2500	Lm 4060	Lm100
Lm2600	Lm1560	Lm 3000	Lm 4560	Nothing

*3. Our daughter cannot take care of her own finances. Can we leave someone we trust to take care of her when we die?*

The answer to this question is not always the same. There are two different situations.

- a) when the person with disability who will receive the inheritance is already interdicted and has a guardian appointed by the Court;
- b) when the person with disability who will receive the inheritance has not yet been interdicted and does not have a guardian appointed by the Court.

In the first situation, if there is a legacy, there is no need for any action since there is already a Court-appointed guardian who will take care of the administration of that legacy.

In the second situation, the parents can state in their will that their daughter has an intellectual disability and that, therefore, she will need a guardian. They can also nominate this curator. When the parents die, the daughter with disability has to be interdicted by the Court and a guardian appointed to administer her property. The Court takes into consideration the wishes expressed by the parents in their will when it comes to appointing the guardian.

Unfortunately, when a person is interdicted and has a Court-appointed guardian, he/she lose all civil rights, including the right to vote, to sign and to take any decision on anything that concerns him/her.

*4. So, for my daughter to have a guardian, does she also have to be interdicted?*

Yes. That is how the law stands today. The Ministry for Social Policy and the National Commission Persons with Disability are working on changing this law so that, among other things:

- a) the way guardians for persons with intellectual disability are appointed is changed
- b) persons with disability who have a guardian are not necessary stripped of all their civil rights

Fred Bezzina, Dr Doreen Clarke

Notes

(1) This article refers to 'parents' in the plural, although it could be that there's only the mother or the father.

(2) The examples given are about women with disability, but the situations apply equally for men.

### **Annual Report**

In February 2003, the National Commission Persons with Disability present its annual report to the public and to the Ministry for Social Policy, as required by Article 30 of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act 2000. The Annual Report is based on the basic beliefs of the Commission that is committed to ensure that Maltese society is inclusive. The Report was presented to the media and to the public during a press conference which was attended by the Hon Dr L Gonzi, Minister for Social Policy and all the staff of the Secretariat of the Commission. The report is available in Maltese and English, in large type, on audio cassette and in Braille. It is also available on the Commission homepage [www.knpd.org](http://www.knpd.org).

## **The World of Work**

It is the stated policy of the Commission, that persons with disability should have equal opportunities to participate in the world of work and that they should have the support they need. The Commission worked closely with the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) on this issue.

## **Access to the World of Work for Persons with Disability and the Long-Term Unemployed**

ETC, in full collaboration with the Commission and a team of Swedish experts from the Rehabilitation and Employment Office are working on a project that aims to introduce new methods of assessment, training and identifying work placements for persons with disability and those who are long term unemployed. Another aim of the project is to find ways for non-governmental organisations to collaborate so that more persons with disability can find and retain meaningful employment.

Through this project, a number of ETC officials as well as some from NGOs which work in the disability sector had the opportunity of receiving training in Malta as well as in Sweden. In order to ensure that the project is effective, a managing committee was appointed comprising high-ranking officials from the ETC, the Chairman of the Commission from Malta, and high-ranking representatives from the Workers Lifelong Education Programme and the Coordinator of the Rehabilitation and Employment Office from Vesteres, Sweden.

This project is split into five phases:

\* The first phase (June 2002)

An introductory seminar between representatives from Sweden, the ETC and the Commission.

- The second phase (October 2002)

A visit to Sweden by representatives of ETC and NGOs working in this sector.

- The third phase (September to October 2002)

Continuation of training in Malta of the officials who went to Sweden.

\* The fourth phase (March to April 2003)

Continuation of training in Malta.

The fifth phase (September-October, 2003)

Conclusion of project in Malta.

### **New Scheme for Permanent Support**

After several discussions between the Commission, the Ministry for Social Policy and the ETC, a new scheme was launched that gives support on a long-term (or, possibly, a permanent) basis to persons with severe disability so that they can secure and retain employment. This scheme is different from the ones that already exist, such as Bridging

the Gap, since it recognises the fact that a small number of persons with disability have needs that require permanent support. For the first time ever, Maltese society is providing measures that recognise this need. This scheme will first start working as a pilot project and, if successful, will become one of the permanent schemes operated by the ETC.

Published by the National Commission Persons with Disability

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INDAQS (Equal)

MAY 2003

design: [www.outlook.coop](http://www.outlook.coop)

This magazine is also available on audio tape and in large print. If you require a copy in either of these formats, please phone the Commission.

Cover Photos:

- National Conference Together We Can Make It 2002: the panel of speakers were all persons with disability.

kollha persuni b'dizabilità.

- The signing of the Declaration by His Excellency Profs. Guido De Marco, President of Malta, during the Week of Persons with Disability 2002.
- 'Nothing About Us Without Us' Seminar: the participants and their personal assistants during a break.
- Together We Can Make It ... with the Leaders: participants during this meeting held during the Week of Persons with Disability 2002.