

The Chairman's Word

One of the many tasks of KNPD is to identify the principal needs of this sector and set up priorities. The needs of each sector are many, but the resources of the country are always limited, and at present they are probably more limited than one would like. It is therefore important that KNPD emphasizes the most urgent needs that people with disabilities and their families face.

It is important that everyone understands that when KNPD talks about issues it regards as urgent, it does not mean that there are no other issues to mention; nor does this mean that any left out are not important. It simply means that, since the demand is much greater than the available resources, one has to choose. KNPD has so far always done so.

KNPD has for the last few years emphasized that the issues needing most resources are two:

- a) Community-based and residential services;
- b) Day services for people with severe disabilities.

Community-based and residential services

One of the greatest worries of persons with disability and their families is embodied in the question "What will happen when the support I get from my family, for one reason or another, is no longer available?" Or rather, as the parents would say, "What will happen to my child when we die?" Mons. Mikiel Azzopardi started addressing this worry when he opened the Dar tal-Providenza in the sixties. The opening of Dar il-Wens and Dar Nazareth continued to address this problem on a smaller scale. However, these were relatively small initiatives compared to the need, and came from the non-governmental sector, although supported, to a greater or lesser extent, by the state.

In the last few years, the Government, through the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity has tried to solve this problem in a more systematic way. For this purpose, it set up SAPPOR Agency within the Foundation for Social Services. This Agency has worked hard, and in a short while has developed several services within the community with the aim of providing the support needed by the disabled person to keep living in the family and its environment. It has also set up small group homes in different communities of our country.

Last year the Government increased the Agency's budget by a substantial 80%. What has happened? The demand is so great that this increase has been absorbed by existing services, and for this year the Agency has practically no funds left to enlarge its services and serve new clients that really need its services. This means that there is great need for the Agency's budget to be increased substantially. If we really want this sector to serve the real needs of disabled persons and their families in this sector, this is the only possible way.

Day services for adults with severe disability

The final aim and wish of everyone is that persons with disability enter the working world and have a job. This enables the individual to achieve not only the economic independence which everybody needs, but also the esteem and personal satisfaction which every individual needs. This is why the scheme which the ETC launched a few months ago; the Supported Employment Scheme through European Union funds; is a great step forward in the right direction and we sincerely wish this scheme every success.

The fact remains that, for various reasons, a limited number of severely disabled adults find it very difficult to enter into the working world. For these persons, whilst this opportunity must remain open, the state recognizes the great need for Day Services, which, apart from serving as a just and well deserved respite for the families who take care of these adults, act as services that aid in the personal development of these individuals and offer sensible activities. These services are being primarily given by Centres spread about Malta and Gozo. Until a few years ago, these Centres were rather large, but now a decision has been taken to open small centres in the community. KNPD agrees with this philosophy since this enables the services to be more personalised and closer to the community within which the Centres are operating.

The problem is that these Centres are catering for already large numbers and, as more enter than leave, there is a waiting list. Those who enter these Centres, often at about 20 years of age, keep using these services till they pass away. And, thankfully, these persons are living longer. It is therefore not possible for these services to accept other disabled individuals without there being any increase in financial provision. Another problem is their administration. When the new administration under the new Prime Minister commenced last year, the administration of these services remained under the Department for the Care of the Elderly and Community Services that moved from the Ministry of the Family to the Ministry of Health. From January 2005, the administration of these Centres was again moved to the Ministry of the Family. In principle, KNPD agrees with this move, but at present, this Ministry does not have adequate structures to administer these services. Moreover, the funds allocated for this year have not been enough to cover recurrent expenses, let alone permitting improvement or offering services to new clients that need this service, including those disabled students that, next September, will leave special schools.

KNPD feels that it is very important that adequate administrative structures for these services become available immediately, and that they are provided with the funds necessary, not only to cover recurrent expenditure, but also to assure professional services that cover all those needing this service, including those disabled students leaving special schools next September and needing this service.

In spite of the real commitment of every administration towards this sector, the needs are great and for many years they have not been addressed adequately. This means that this sector needs more resources, and these two fields, residential services in the community and day services for disabled persons need greater financial commitment. KNPD is convinced that this country has a fine enough social conscience to recognise these needs and find a way of providing this financial aid quickly and in such a way as to ensure that improvement in quality that we disabled persons and our families await eagerly.

Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act 2000

The Equal Opportunities Act was the first law of this century and came into effect in October 2000. This year this law celebrates its fifth year of working in favour of disabled persons and against discrimination due to disability, in such fields as education, work, access, provision of objects and services, houses and indirectly, insurance.

Now that this law has been implemented for five years, KNPD and the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity are about to embark on a revision exercise of this law to increase its effectiveness and efficiency. For this purpose, KNPD is organizing a meeting of consultation later this year to get feedback from the public, especially those directly involved, about improvements that can be made to this law.

This consultation will also involve the way KNPD itself is regulated by this Act. Because of this, the Ministry of the Family and Social Solidarity has advised the Prime Minister to, if possible, keep the same composition of KNPD as it was when this was recomposed in October 2004, at this stage. Therefore KNPD's composition remained approximately the same as it was two years ago, as follows:

NAME	STATUS
Mr Joseph Camilleri (a)	Chairman
Dr Anthony Charles (a)	Vice-Chairman, Voluntary Sector
Mr Jesmond Schembri	Ministry of the Family and Social Solidarity
Mrs Myrian Aquilina	Ministry of Education
Dr Marvic Sammut	Ministry of Health
Mr Alfred Camilleri	Ministry of Finances and Economic Affairs
Mr Noel Formosa	Ministry for Gozo
Ms Sarah Cuschieri	Association of Local Councils
Dr Marie Alexander	University of Malta
Fr Martin Micallef	Archdiocese of Malta
Mr Karl Borg (a)	Voluntary Sector
Ms Rita Borg (a)	Voluntary Sector
Mr Wenzu Dalli (a)	Voluntary Sector
Ms Marthese Mugliette (b)	Voluntary Sector
Ms Pam Muscat (b)	Voluntary Sector
Mr Fred Bezzina	Secretary

- *As the Law requires, half the members are persons with disability (the five marked (a)) or parents of persons with disability that cannot represent themselves (the three marked (b)).*
- *Mr John Peel did not accept his nomination on KNPD and has therefore not been included.*

The Equal Opportunities Sector kept working on several complaints of discrimination. The most important are the following:

Complaints regarding Access
Medical Centre – Peresso Ltd.

KNPD notes with satisfaction the Court's decision in its case against Michele Peresso Company Limited. This case was brought forward by KNPD because the the Medical Centre this Company owns in Birkirkara, from where it sells apparatus for disabled persons, lacked access.

The court found this company guilty of discrimination according to the Law of Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) and was ordered to apply for the necessary permits from MEPA within two weeks and to do the necessary work within two months of the permit's issue.

This sentence is much more significant than that. This long and detailed sentence recognizes the basic principles that regulate similar cases. These include:

- a) that KNPD, through the Equal Opportunities Act, has the right to take legal action itself in place of disabled persons;
- b) that the Equal Opportunities Act, in cases involving access to buildings, is applicable to buildings that were existent before this law was passed in the year 2000;
- c) that not all types of access are acceptable, but these have to be adequate for disabled persons to enter unaided, and from an entrance close to the main entrance;
- d) that whoever provides a service can present proof that, in order to eliminate discrimination, an "unjustified" expense will have to be borne; but the Court declared that these proofs must be "based on criteria of a financial rather than an aesthetic nature";
- e) that the proof that, in order to eliminate discrimination an "unjustified" expense exists, must come from the service provider.

This Company appealed against the sentence and therefore, in spite of the fact that KNPD has been working on this complaint since the 20th of April 2000, disabled persons will have to wait even longer before benefiting directly from this important ruling.

Dar L-Istudent, University of Malta

As announced in the last issue of *Indaqs*, the Court has decided in favour of KNPD in the case regarding *Dar l-Istudent* at University. The Court declared that the University was discriminating against disabled persons and ordered the installation of a platform lift in this building. The University appealed against this sentence, but at the same time, discussions from both sides commenced in an attempt to reach an agreement, as in fact has happened. The University has agreed to install a lift within six months which will permit unrestricted access to every floor of the building.

Health Division

KNPD has been asking the Ministry of Health, since April 2000, to install accessible toilets in the Out Patients and Emergency Departments. This has not been done in the required manner.

The reason given being that the hospital is to be moved. KNPD feels that this is not a valid reason for various reasons, amongst them including:

- a) The transfer date is relatively far off and may be changed;
- b) Had the work commenced immediately, the benefit would have been felt long ago;
- c) The requested work will continue to be used even if the building is no longer used as a hospital.

KNPD has also been asking, since July 2001, for steps to be taken to ensure that the Gzira Health Centre, which is found on the second floor, becomes accessible to everyone. A lift was bought, but this could not be utilized because of the objection of the owners. KNPD feels that in spite of the several real problems existent, more concrete steps can be taken to solve this problem. KNPD presented a judicial protest to this Ministry. It has no other alternative but to take legal action regarding these two complaints.

Case against Invicta Ltd.

KNPD had taken legal action against Invicta Ltd. because it was selling objects for disabled persons from a non accessible site. Eventually, this place was made relatively accessible and later on this company was no longer involved in this business. KNPD asked for the expenses related to this case to be paid by this company. The court agreed with KNPD, and now Invicta Ltd has to pay for all the costs involved.

The Parish Churches of Bormla and Gharb

Towards the end of last year, KNPD successfully concluded the its complaint regarding Bormla Parish Church after the necessary ramps were constructed; ensuring that the main entrance of this church becomes accessible to everyone. This ramp was constructed by the Committee for the Rehabilitation of Cottonera, with the full collaboration of the Ministry of Resources and Infrastructure and the parish priest.

KNPD asked for the entrance of the Parish Church of Gharb to be made accessible to everyone. The ramp was constructed, but the parish priest did not want to include a railing. As it is, the ramp is quite dangerous and not appropriate for many disabled persons, including the elderly. The parish priest is refusing to install a railing because of aesthetic reasons, and, according to him, the case is closed. KNPD has therefore no other option but to take legal action.

The Hotels Bay Street, Phoenicia and Calypso

This section is also working to ensure, little by little, that hotels become more accessible to disabled persons. During the last three months KNPD has worked on the following three cases:

Regarding Bay Street Hotel, KNPD received a complaint that, in spite of the fact that this hotel started operating after the year 2000, none of its rooms were accessible to the disabled, this despite the fact that the shopping complex had a substantially good level of physical accessibility. KNPD had long discussions with the aim of solving this problem and recently KNPD has even had to file a judicial protest since no progress was being registered. After this

protest, the management of this Hotel has informed KNPD that they now have a small number of accessible rooms. KNPD has checked this and considers the case solved.

Regarding Hotel Phoenicia, KNPD had received a complaint that the main entrance and the Ballroom could not be accessed by everyone. Several discussions and promises were made but no work was started. KNPD was ready to take legal action but the Hotel management then declared that the Ballroom was to be made accessible in a few weeks' time and a platform lift was ordered for the main entrance. Therefore KNPD has once again given the management more time to ensure that the problem is solved.

KNPD received a complaint that the main entrance of the Calypso hotel, in spite of intense refurbishment, and despite the fact that the plans vetted by KNPD were correct, is still not accessible. KNPD is discussing this problem in an attempt to solve it.

Complaints regarding Education

Rebate of Taxes for Parents

KNPD, on the basis of the Equal Opportunities Act, has recommended that a rebate on income tax be given to parents of disabled students attending independent schools who are paying for the facilitator their children need themselves. The Government, in the last Budget, has accepted this recommendation, and a rebate of up to a maximum of Lm4,000 is now available.

School Transport

KNPD received a complaint that school transport, particularly Church School transport, is not accessible to students using wheelchairs, and these children have to be transported to school by their parents. KNPD feels this is discriminatory and has started discussing this problem with one of the main transport operators to try and solve the problem as soon as possible.

Recording of Lessons

KNPD has received a complaint from a disabled MCAST student who asked permission to record her lessons and take notes later because she could not do so during lessons due to the nature of her disability. This request was denied. KNPD feels that this is a "reasonable modification" as the Equal Opportunities Law requires and asked MCAST to grant this student permission. Discussions are still taking place, but KNPD is treating this complaint as very urgent.

Accessibility in schools

KNPD receives various complaints about accessibility in Government schools both in Malta and Gozo. KNPD holds meetings on a regular basis with the Foundation for Tomorrow's Schools, and despite the good will, progress is very slow. This is due to many reasons, amongst them excessive bureaucracy, wrong attitudes, as well as technical problems such as electrical provision for lift installation, etc. KNPD is determined to keep working in the best possible way to solve these problems in the shortest possible time, since it believes that no boy or girl must be deprived of full access to education because of lack of physical access.

Complaints regarding Work
Government workers with light duties

KNPD received a complaint that a disabled Government employee was not given any increment because he was on light duties. KNPD started discussing with the office of the Prime Minister since it believes that the circular regulating this provision is discriminatory in the light of the Equal Opportunities Act. Both sides have agreed to revise the situation of disabled workers who were not receiving any increment because they are on light duties, so that, if there is no justification, this measure is removed. This exercise has commenced.

Complaints Regarding Provision of Objects and Services
Voting by Disabled Persons

KNPD received a complaint that disabled persons, especially the blind and the severely disabled, cannot vote on their own and need the aid of electoral commissioners. Thus, their ballot is not secret. These persons feel that this practice is discriminatory and have asked for different solutions. KNPD agrees on the need for different solutions such as the use of templates. KNPD is working to try and solve this problem as soon as possible.

HSBC Statements

KNPD has received complaints regarding certain HSBC bank statements, whose type is so small that it is not accessible to the visually impaired. KNPD is working to solve this problem in the shortest possible time.

Traffic Signs in Zejtun

KNPD has received a complaint that traffic signs in Zejtun indicate limited parking time in parking spaces reserved for disabled persons, and no limits in other parking areas. KNPD feels this is discriminatory according to the Equal Opportunities Act, and has asked the Transport Authority to change these signs. KNPD has given a definite time period for this to be effected.

New Service for Disabled Persons with Challenging Behaviour

From the beginning of December 2004, KNPD has introduced a new service that had been on its agenda for a very long time. One of the greatest priorities of KNPD in the last few years has been that of providing a holistic service for disabled persons with challenging behaviour. To address this great need, it has employed Ms. Farough Hessabi M.A. (Psych), Ed.S., who is specialised in this area and has a vast and direct experience in this sector in various countries. This service is being provided to disabled persons with challenging behaviour, school staff members, day centres, residential homes, organisations (governmental and non governmental), and individuals that ask for this service. This service will provide direct formal and informal training, advice and individual therapeutic sessions. At present this service is working with the Agency SAPPOR, the Child Guidance Unit of St. Luke's Hospital, Mount Carmel Hospital, *Dar tal-Providenza*, Day centres, the Education Division and individual persons.

KNPD, together with SAPPOR Agency, will continue to work to build this service on strong foundations.

KNPD's Annual Report

Every year in February, KNPD presents the Maltese public with its annual report for the preceding year.

This year, the presentation took place during a conference for all the media, led by the Chairman Mr. Joseph M. Camilleri in the presence of the Hon. Dolores Cristina, Minister of the Family and Social Solidarity and Hon. Marie Louise Coleiro, Opposition spokesperson for Social Solidarity. All the members of KNPD secretariat were also present. Later, Minister Cristina placed a copy of the report on the table of the House of Representatives in compliance with the Equal Opportunities Act.

This Work Report is in Maltese and is divided into fourteen chapters. It also includes the principal activities held in 2004 in Maltese and English. A copy of this Report in Maltese, English, large type, or on audio can be obtained from the secretariat of KNPD during office hours. A Maltese and English version is also available on KNPD's website: www.knpd.org.

New Blue Sticker

As announced in the last issue of *Indaqs*, KNPD, on the recommendation of the European Union, and in agreement with the Maltese authorities concerned, began the process of replacing the blue stickers so to ensure that their format conforms to that used by all members of the Union.

The Blue Sticker is issued by the Police Commissioner on the recommendation of KNPD, to persons with mobility disabilities. The most important benefit available to holders of this sticker is the right to park in spaces reserved for the disabled.

With the new format, the Blue Sticker, apart from having the same function as before, that is, enabling disabled persons to park in reserved places spread throughout Malta and Gozo, shall also have these benefits:

- Maltese disabled persons will also be able to use this permit in other European Union countries with more ease;
- it will be easier for European disabled persons to make use of their permit when visiting Malta;
- the permit will be covered in plastic, hence making it more long-lasting;
- the new format will decrease the chances of any abuse of the sticker since this will now include the photo and signature of the disabled person to whom the permit has been issued.

Now, this exercise has been completed, and, as from 21st March 2005, only the Blue Sticker will be valid. The police and wardens have all been informed of this change.

KNPD thanks the Police Commissioner and his staff for the total cooperation it has found, enabling this exercise to take place in a relatively short time.

A list of reserved parking spaces for disabled persons can be obtained from KNPD's offices, KNPD's website: www.knpd.org or from the book mAZe.

Awareness Campaign

The National Commission Persons with Disability is wholly committed to a campaign to increase awareness of the rights of persons not to be discriminated against because of disability.

With this aim in mind, KNPD obtained funds from the *Community Action Programme to Combat Discrimination* to organize:

- a) **A one-year campaign, together with the Jesuit Refugee Service, called *Sahha fid-Diversita'* (*Strength in Diversity*);**
- b) **Awareness Days**

In the last six months these activities have been or are being organised, together with these two projects:

Seminar on the Equal Opportunities Act and the European Union Directive on Racial Discrimination.

This seminar, principally aimed at the legal profession, was addressed from the disabled point of view by Ms. Marianne Debono, manager of the Equal Opportunities Sector of KNPD, and by Dr. Doreen Clarke, legal consultant of KNPD. The seminar was chaired by Mr. Joseph M. Camilleri, chairman of KNPD.

Seminar on Self Advocacy for Intellectually Disabled Persons

Towards the end of May, KNPD organised a seminar on self Advocacy for the intellectually disabled. The main speaker in this seminar was Mr. Andrew Lee, chairman of People First, a British group of intellectually disabled persons led by themselves with the necessary support. Also speaking were Ms. Rita Formosa and Ms. Marthese Deguara from the group *Flimkienaslu*, a Maltese group of intellectually disabled persons led by themselves with the necessary support. A draft report on the Maltese situation in this sector was also presented by Ms. Anne Marie Callus and Ms. Helen Attard. The aim of this seminar is to prepare a report on the Maltese situation in this field. For this seminar, KNPD prepared a pamphlet about self advocacy in easy-to-read format. This pamphlet can be obtained from KNPD's offices or from KNPD's website www.knpd.org.

Access for All - design Guidelines

In the beginning of December, during Disabled Persons Week, KNPD started a process of national consultation to revise and publish again the Access for All - Design Guidelines. The consultation exercise, which was quite an extensive one, is now complete, and the publication, which will be funded by this European Programme, will soon be ready.

Seminar on the European Union Action Plan Regarding Disability

In the middle of May, KNPD organised a seminar on the European Union Action Plan Regarding Disability for the years 2004-2010. This Plan was a direct result of the European Year for Disabled Persons, held in 2003. The main speaker of this seminar was the Hon. Richard Howitt, European Parliamentary member and chairman of the inter-parliamentary group of the European Union. Other speakers in this seminar, which was chaired by Ms. Vicki Sciberras, were the Hon. Dr Jason Azzopardi, chairman of the Committee of Foreign and European Affairs of the Maltese Parliament who introduced the seminar, Mr. Gordon Cardona who discussed this plan from the perspective of a disabled person, and Mr. Joseph M. Camilleri, chairman of KNPD, who explained how this plan can be implemented on a local level.

KNPD took care of providing a Maltese translation of this plan. Copies of this Plan in Maltese or English can be obtained from KNPD's offices, or from the website of KNPD www.knpd.org.

Disabled Persons Parliament

Like other years, in the middle of May, KNPD organised the Disabled Persons Parliament, to which all Maltese Parliamentary members and representatives of disabled persons and their organisations were invited. This parliament was chaired by the Hon. Anton Tabone, speaker of the House of Representatives. The principal speaker was the Hon. Richard Howitt, European Parliamentary member and chairman of the inter-parliamentary group of the European Parliament. During the session, Mr. George Vella spoke about education; Mr. Omar Jelassi spoke about self advocacy; Ms. Marthese Mugliette spoke about work and disabled person's pensions; Leon Sciberras spoke about free time and Rita Borg spoke about independent living. These are all disabled persons or parents of disabled persons who cannot represent themselves. The Hon. Dolores Cristina and the Hon. Marie Louise Coleiro represented the parliamentary side. This seminar was filmed live by the Public Broadcasting services on TVM.

Publications of KNPD in Different Media

KNPD is committed to make its publications accessible to everyone through the use of different forms of media. KNPD has always ensured that its publications are available in large type, audio and in Braille format for blind people, the visually impaired or those who are unable to read. Apart from this, these publications are always placed on KNPD's website, which is completely accessible to all.

KNPD, funded by this European Program, has produced its latest publication, the report about the research "*X'jolqot l-Aktar il-Persuni b'Disabilita*" ("What Concerns Disabled Persons Most") in the media mentioned above together with a shortened version of the results in Easy-to-Read format and in sign language on video.

KNPD has started a program to provide the fact sheets about its services, and the booklet "*Servizzi u Beneficji għall-Persuni b'Disabilita' u l-Familji Tagħhom*" ("Services and Benefits to Persons with Disability and their Families") in these two media as well. Up till now, the fact sheets have been published in Easy-to-Read format. A copy of this publication can be obtained from KNPD's offices or from KNPD's website www.knpd.org. Work on other publications is in a very advanced stage and will soon be ready.

European and International Work

United Nations Convention on Disabled Persons

KNPD is doing its bit in the formulation of the United Nations Convention on the Human Rights of Disabled Persons. This is being done mostly on a European level, and for this reason, Ms. Anne Marie Callus participated in a meeting of COHOM, the committee discussing this convention, which took place in Brussels. In this meeting, which was held in mid January 2005, discussions on the draft of this convention were continued, in preparation for the meeting of the Ad Hoc United Nations Committee which was held in New York in late January. KNPD did not participate in this second meeting due to limited resources.

Disability is an Integral Part of National Policy

Together with the Agency SAPPOR, the KNPD is taking part in a project financed by the European Union that is coordinated by Leonard Cheshire International of the United Kingdom. The Project focuses on methods to ensure that disability issues become an integral part of national policy in its different sectors. Organisations from the United Kingdom, Ireland, Portugal and Spain are also involved. The first meeting of this project took place in London towards the end of February, and Ms. Anne-Marie Callus of the KNPD and Ms. Agnes Bezzina of the Agency SAPPOR attended. In the first phase of the project, meetings with disabled persons and policy makers in different sectors will be held, in order to decide on the themes to be focused on.

Inclusive Sports Project

KNPD continued to participate in the project "*Iddisinjar ta' Attivitajiet u Facilitajiet Sportivi Inkluzivi*" ("Designing of Inclusive Sports Activities and Facilities") that is being financed by the Grundtvig Programme of the European Union. After the visit to Romania by five Maltese, the second phase of the project commenced. KNPD prepared a questionnaire about the involvement of disabled persons in sports activities and sent it to two groups: a number of disabled persons registered with the KNPD and a number of agencies, organisations and other entities that organise sports activities. These questionnaires were also sent by Romanian and Italian organisations that are taking part in this program. Now the information collected is to be analysed so that the ensuing results can be presented in the next meeting which will take place in Malta.

The Please Do Disturb Conference

Mr. Mario Borg, a young disabled person, nominated by the KNPD, has been chosen by the National Agency of the EU Youth Programme to take part in a European Conference on the participation of young people in these projects. The conference theme was "Please Do Disturb", and was held in Hanover in Germany at the beginning of April 2005.

Study Visit at Disability Rights Commission

As part of the Leonardo project of the EU entitled "The Rights of Disabled People: campaigning for equality", Ms. Marianne Debono, manager of the Equal Opportunities sector of KNPD, together with her assistant, conducted a study visit at the offices of the Disability Rights Commission (DRC), in Manchester in the United Kingdom. The DRC is the equivalent of the KNPD in the United Kingdom and this visit focused upon the process the DRC uses when treating cases of discrimination. Apart from this the visit strengthened the already excellent relationship between the KNPD and the DRC that includes sharing of literature between the two organisations and the sharing of advice.

The Disabled Persons Parliament in Brussels

KNPD received an invitation from the European Union to attend a session of the Disabled Persons Parliament which was organised on the occasion of the International Day of Disabled Persons on the 2-3rd of December. This activity is organised in the European Parliament in Brussels. This year, the theme was “The Creation of Employment Opportunities for Disabled Persons”. KNPD was represented in this Parliament by Ms. Vicki Sciberras, Manager of Special Help Services in the secretariat of KNPD, who attended together with her assistant.

Maltese Member of the Inter-parliamentary group of the European Parliament

KNPD organised a meeting with the European Parliamentary Deputy the Hon. Joseph Muscat, member of the Inter-parliamentary Group on disability of the European Parliament. The discussions centred on the High Level group of the European Union about disability, the EU directive on Air Travel for the Disabled, VAT on apparatus directly related to disability and the Parliament of disabled persons which is held every year in Brussels in December. The two sides will keep in contact so that Maltese Work on disability at a European level is coordinated and gives results.

High Level Group on Disability

The KNPD, represented by Mr. Fred Bezzina, again took part in the one day meeting of the EU High Level Group on Disability which was held in Brussels. This Group discussed, amongst other things, the following issues:

- a) its work in the next two years;
- b) the United Nations Convention on Human Rights of Disabled Persons;
- c) the European Disability Forum priorities. This is the principal non governmental organisation of disabled persons on a European level;
- d) cooperation in the social Protection sector;
- e) the biannual report that KNPD of the EU is preparing.

The KNPD was asked to comment upon the situation of disabled persons in Malta for this report that is planned for publication in December 2005.

Reasonable Access to Built- up Environments

Mr. Joseph M. Camilleri and Mr. Fred Bezzina from the KNPD, together with Architect Dr Joe Spiteri from the University of Malta participated in a preparatory meeting that took place at Leeds University about the project “*Prattici tajba biex Tipprovdi Access Ragonevoli fl-Ambjent Mibni għall-Persuni b’Disabilita*” (“Good Practice on the Provision of Reasonable Access to Built- up Environments for Disabled Persons”) that has the aim of formulating criteria regarding what is reasonable where physical access is involved. This is a joint project of the Universities of Malta and Leeds with the active participation of the KNPD and the Centre for Disability Studies of Leeds University. The second activity of this project is a workshop in Malta as preparation for the international conference on the same subject which will be organised in Leeds next year.

Pilot Project with Maria Assunta Secondary School

KNPD has started a pilot project, spread over three years, with Maria Assunta Secondary School, aimed at ensuring that students attending this school having a facilitator actually do have an I.E.P (Individual Educational Programme), and are given the necessary support to ensure the implementation of these programmes. The school has managed to obtain funds for this program from the HSBC Care for Children Fund.

Up to now, this project:

- has organised awareness meetings about disability for all students of Form IV and Form V;
- has prepared an Individual Educational Program for every student having a facilitator with the active participation of parents, teachers, and, where possible, the students themselves;
- has started training for facilitators, especially those not having formal training.

Pension Reform

KNPD has examined the White Paper on Pension Reform and has made the following recommendations and comments to the Working Group responsible for this reform:

Pensionable Age and Disabled Persons

The White Paper proposes that the pensionable age be gradually increased. Some disabled persons have less stamina and internal resources to do this without a resultant decrease in their quality of life, or worse, endangering their health. The solution to this real problem is easy but fair right to apply for an invalidity pension. The safeguards to try and tackle abuses in this regard are just and needed, but should be done in such a way so as not to penalise those really needing this pension, amongst them the disabled.

KNPD RECOMMENDS that disabled persons have easy but fair access to the invalidity pension.

Invalidity Pension

The White Paper proposes that the invalidity pension becomes fixed, irrespective of the contributions one may have paid. KNPD feels this is not just and is of a great disadvantage to those disabled persons who might have need of this pension earlier than others.

KNPD RECOMMENDS that the invalidity pension, whilst being covered by the guarantee found in the same White Paper of the National Minimal Pension be not a fixed one, but one that can increase, depending on the contributions paid.

Partial Retirement from Work

The White Paper does not contemplate situations where, because of their disability, persons might have to partially retire from work before the retirement age set.

In these circumstances, KNPD RECOMMENDS there be a pro rata pension under certain just and reasonable conditions, to ensure enough income for an acceptable quality of life.

The National Minimal Pension

The White Paper makes it clear that it is discussing contributory pensions only. However, KNPD strongly believes that the measures that will be taken regarding contributory pensions will have a direct or indirect effect on the system of non contributory pensions, including pension for disabled persons.

KNPD strongly RECOMMENDS that the guarantee of the National Minimal Pension be extended to the pension for disabled persons, to ensure the principle of “adequacy” and the requisites regarding disabled persons to be found in the Lisbon Agenda.

Disabled Persons Pension

At present, this pension is given to people with

- a) “severe mental abnormality” or
- b) “to persons with severe disabilities”

The second category is amplified with a list of medical conditions. In reality what is happening is that a pension is given if the condition of a person is included in this list, even if the disability is not severe, while no pension is given if the condition is not listed.

KNPD RECOMMENDS that this system be changed and that the pension be granted according to the severity of the disability rather than whether the condition is listed or not. This is the system used by Courts for the purpose of insurance compensation.

Extra Expenses Pension or Allowance

At present, adult persons with disability and their families have no compensation for any extra expenses they may need to incur because of the disability. This includes care and attention of professionals or carers, special equipment, specialised transport, etc.

KNPD RECOMMENDS that a pension or allowance be introduced, which will meet these expenses that disabled persons may incur because of their disability.

Employments and a Higher Pensionable Age

The White Paper proposes that the pensionable age be gradually increased to 65 years. Naturally this means the country will have to create more work spaces. This will increase competition in the labour market, which, as a rule, is disadvantageous to disabled persons.

KNPD is WORRIED that this reform can increase the difficulty disabled persons face of finding a job and keeping it.

Compensation on Objects Bought for the Needs of Disabled Persons

On the first of May 2004, various objects specifically intended for use by disabled persons started to incur an 18%. After consultation with the Finance Ministry, the Department of VAT and Customs, the rate of VAT on a substantial number of these objects has been lowered 5%.

Today these objects are still VAT - free:

- hearing aids
- crutches
- Three-wheel walkers
- tripods and quadrupods
- walking frames

These objects incur a VAT of 5%:

- Car Adaptations, including hand controls and revolving seats
- Amplifiers for communication apparatus for people the hearing impaired
- Bath tub lifters
- Braille typewriters
- White walking sticks
- Walking sticks and ferrules
- Special Buggies
- Chairlifts
- Gutter frames
- Hoists
- Lifts to place wheelchairs in the car
- Mouth sticks
- Platform lifts
- Pressure relief mattresses
- Pressure relief cushions
- Prone standers
- Special seats
- High toilet seats
- Inflatable toilet seats
- Wheel chairs (manual or electric)
- Special feeder chairs
- Swimming pool lifters
- Toilet frames/surrounds
- Special walkers for children

Other objects that may be intended for the specific use of disabled persons and which are not included in this list still incur a VAT of 18%.

The Government had promised to set up a scheme to compensate for this extra cost. In the last budget the Government voted a sum of Lm25,000 for this scheme. After discussions between the parties concerned, the administration of this scheme has been entrusted to KNPD. The regulations have been published in the Government Gazette, and KNPD has issued forms regarding this scheme.

Therefore, anyone intending to buy objects for the specific use of disabled persons, and on which VAT is charged, should fill in and return this form with a copy of the special identity card, and fiscal receipts. It is important that the fiscal receipt

- a) is in the name of the disabled person (or his/her parents if the person cannot represent him/herself because of disability or because s/he is underage);
- b) has the specific name of the object bought;
- c) includes the amount and rate of VAT paid.

KNPD can ask for information and literature about the object bought. After processing this application, KNPD will compensate the person.

Those who bought objects after the 1st of May, 2004, have paid the VAT and have the fiscal receipt as explained above can ask for compensation for the VAT that has already been paid.

For more information and applications, one can visit KNPD's offices or KNPD's website: www.knpd.org.

Wenzu Dalli

An appreciation by Mr. Joseph M. Camilleri, Chairman of the KNPD

Wenzu Dalli, who was a member of the National Commission Persons with Disability passed away on Saturday 16th April 2005. This is an appreciation of Mr. Dalli, as presented by Mr. Joseph M. Camilleri, Chairman of KNPD, at Mr. Dalli's funeral, which took place at the Hal Ghaxaq parish church.

The disabled persons community in Malta and Gozo was shocked at the news of the unexpected death of our friend Wenzu Dalli who passed away on Saturday the 16th of April 2005 at the age of 51.

Many people knew Wenzu for only one thing: his disability, 'Wenzu l-Aghma' (*the blind*). But Wenzu was much more than that. He was a man with many different aspects. He had an extraordinary general knowledge, especially about animals, which he particularly loved. He was a sort of encyclopaedia on birds, and many would seek him for advice.

Wenzu was a cultured person with a good education. He had attended a special school where, amongst other things, he learned to read Braille. Later in life he became an instructor of Braille. Wenzu was also one of the first disabled persons to be educated in an inclusive environment, obtaining his secondary education at the Lyceum. He could understand and speak well in Maltese, English and Italian, and was capable of talking in an informed and interesting manner on a great variety of different subjects.

In life, Wenzu could have been much more than a Braille instructor. He had great abilities. But, like most disabled persons of his generation, Wenzu was also hindered by the lack of faith that society often shows in our abilities. When Wenzu was still a young person, few could believe that a blind person could achieve more than becoming a telephone operator, lift attendant, or, as in Wenzu's case, a Braille instructor. In my opinion, the fact that Wenzu could not advance more in his professional life is an example of the great failure in the way our society has always regarded disabled persons.

Thanks to people like Wenzu, this mentality is slowly changing. It is because of this that in these last few years Wenzu started working as an activist in the disabled sector. He did this, so that, in his own words: "The visually impaired, and young people having different disabilities, can have a better quality of life than I have had."

However, in spite of all this, Wenzu still managed to be more than a simple instructor. Wenzu was in every sense of the word, a teacher. Like every good teacher, he would give the two best gifts to his students: hope and direction. Very often, Wenzu was one of the first persons to meet people who had newly lost their eyesight; he would console, and then start helping them build new abilities and hope in themselves. Wenzu taught many of us who can see how to act in the presence of a person who cannot see.

I have myself learnt a lot of this etiquette from Wenzu during my first years of work on the National Commission Persons with Disability, a Commission in which Wenzu played an active part.

Apart from being a symbol and an example to all of us on an individual level, Wenzu was also an activist in the disability sector. We have lost a strong advocate of the rights of the visually impaired and the disabled in general. In spite of his being a very humble person, maybe too much so, we managed to convince him two years ago to become the President of the Maltese Council of Disabled Persons, an organisation welcoming persons with different disabilities.

Wenzu, like a diamond, had many beautiful faces. Probably the best ‘face’ we will always remember is the fact that Wenzu was a great friend - in all senses. He was humane, loving, and person always ready to stick up for and give his share in helping others. His greatest tool was his sense of humour. He was able to tell stories for hours on end and split everybody’s sides with continuous laughter. He could see the absurd, or ironic, in every situation, and one thing I admired was his ability of laughing at himself, a sign of a fine intellect and a humble personality.

All this does not mean that Wenzu, like most disabled persons, never experienced moments of despair, psychological darkness and even anger at life’s injustices. Whilst agreeing with us that, as disabled persons, the greatest hindrance we can meet is caused by the lack of equal opportunities our society creates, he was always conscious of the challenges involved when trying to live one’s life with a physical or mental disability – or both. But it was this capacity of laughing and making others laugh, and keeping his optimism alive, which made Wenzu so human.

To me, Wenzu was like an iceberg, not only because of his size, and definitely not because he was cold – not at all. Wenzu was like an iceberg because those who did not know him could only see the tip – the disability; the fact that he was blind. But we, his friends, saw the hidden wealth, like the iceberg which is mostly hidden beneath the sea. The more one got to know Wenzu, the more beautiful things about him one discovered.

The whole Maltese and Gozitan disabled community extends its deepest condolences to Wenzu’s family, especially his sister Carmen, whom he loved and cared for immensely, and other persons who were very special to Wenzu’s heart.

Wenzu, you have left a great emptiness in our lives. You have left a great emptiness in the disability sector. All of us cannot but say, in one voice,: “Thank you from our hearts, friend. Thank you for the support you have given us. Thank you for your example. And ironically, and above all, thank you for lighting up our lives with your jokes and humour. May the Lord give you eternal peace and rest.

SAHHA WENZ!”

Task Force on Inclusive and Special Education

The Ministry of Education, with the agreement of the National Commission Persons with Disability, has set up a Working Group to carry out a comprehensive Revision Exercise of Inclusive education of both regular and special schools. This task force is led by Mr. Lino Spiteri, and has as its members Ms. Anne Marie Callus, Ms. Micheline Sciberras, Mr. George Borg and Mr. Joseph Cauchi. KNPD is giving its full support to this task force in a concrete manner since Ms. Callus is a high official of KNPD's secretariat.

The Group is expected to finish its work by the end of June. KNPD has organised a special meeting with this group so that the members can express their opinions directly. Amongst the points raised in this meeting were:

- a) the need of providing every disabled student with an Individual Educational Program and to create a mechanism to ensure that this is being done;
- b) professional training of personnel to ensure support to disabled students;
- c) that this support is appropriate to the needs of the student;
- d) that the support is spread throughout the student's education, and does not stop at 16 years of age or when the student finishes Form V;
- e) that the Education Division has a sound structure to administer the support needed.

KNPD will keep following this important work, especially to ensure that measures suggested by this Group are implemented and an agreement about them is reached.

Textelephone Relay Service

In the past, KNPD has worked closely with Maltacom so that hearing impaired persons can have access to the telephone system through an apparatus known as a textelephone. This apparatus gives the hearing impaired the possibility of receiving or sending calls to those having a similar apparatus by writing or reading messages. This apparatus has its own small keyboard to enable the typing of messages and a small screen to read the messages from. For a hearing impaired person to call or receive calls with this apparatus from a normal telephone, an operator and a computerised system are needed. This system is called a Textelephone Relay Service. With this aim in mind, KNPD had reached an agreement with the Skytel Company to start providing this operator service after having provided the necessary apparatus. Through the years, this apparatus and computerised system have become outdated, and the use of this service has decreased because of the introduction of Maltese Sign Language Interpretation Services and the use of SMS with cellular telephones. This service was often out of order and is rarely used. After carrying out the necessary research and consulting the organisation of the Hearing Impaired, it was decided that this service is no longer viable and has therefore been stopped.

Information Technology, Communication and Disabled Persons

We hear a lot about how technology has changed everyone's life, and how this can be of great help to disabled persons. But in practice, for you and for me, how is this working? I think that with thought and commitment, this technology can really pay off.

Nowadays technology, even advanced technology, has become an everyday object, and is therefore becoming cheaper. For example, people with different disabilities can make good use of Personal Data Assistants (PDA). This is an easy to carry computer, little larger than a mobile phone. One can record voice messages, keep appointments and communicate more easily using this apparatus.

A few years ago, it was difficult to use voice recognition software, which enables one to talk to a computer which then does or writes what it is told. Today, with just one hundred pounds and a modern computer, this is possible.

A large variety of teaching programs exist, and the difficulty lies in choosing the desired product. However, this is applicable to the English language only, since products in Maltese are still scarce.

The most expensive technology is still that for the visually impaired or those requiring communication technology or those who need to control the computer through head or eye movement. However, their price has still decreased to a few hundreds compared with the thousand it used to cost.

Less expensive or not, this technology still costs money, and it is important to consider the way one will make use of it. Every tool we use, and the time dedicated to it, can lead us closer to greater aims, such as education and the world of work. These are keys to a new world for the individual. Learning helps us take better decisions, whilst work implies the financial independence of the individual. This results in a more independent life.

The FITA strives to make services information technology and communication services more accessible, with the aim of providing disabled persons with access to information, learning, and work. With the help of many entities, it has created many initiatives in order to make it easier for disabled persons to make use of this technology. Amongst these one finds:

- The National Commission Persons with Disability
- The Ministry of Investments, industry and Information technology
- Malta College of Arts Science and Technology
- The Education Division
- Other Funding Partners details of whom are included in the FITA website (www.knpd.org/mittsfita).

Anyone requiring more information should contact Stanley M. Debono on email Stanley.debono@gov.mt or telephone number 25992659

Notice:

Applications for the Microsoft software close on Thursday, 30th June 2005. Those who have not yet applied can obtain an application from the KNPD or FITA.

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This magazine is also available on audio tape, as well as in large type. Those requiring such a copy can call or write to KNPD. A Maltese version is also available.