

MEDIA RELEASE – INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

PRESS RELEASE

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Intellectual Disability Awareness Month

Cape Mental Health is calling for Human rights for all persons with Intellectual Disability in support of Intellectual Disability Awareness Month in March. As the oldest Mental Health Society in South Africa with a proud history of promoting mental health and providing health care to people with mental disabilities, Cape Mental Health adds its voice to that of the SA Federation for Mental Health (of which the organisation is a member) in raising awareness of the rights of persons with Intellectual Disability and the need for appropriate and accessible mental health care.

A person has an Intellectual Disability when there is brain damage or poor brain development, which results in learning difficulties and development which is slower than expected. Intellectual Disability may occur at conception, before or after birth, or later in life through illness or injury.

Approximately two percent of the population are persons with an Intellectual Disability. It is estimated that up to forty percent (40%) of cases of intellectual disability are preventable and 100% of cases of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome are totally preventable. Unfortunately Intellectual Disability cannot be cured, as brain damage is permanent.

South Africa has made great strides in policy and legislation with respect to the principle of inclusion of people with disabilities. The following are some of the laws and policies that impact on the lives of people with disabilities:

- The South African Constitution & Bill of Rights (May 1996)
- Integrated National Disability Strategy (1997)
- The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Discrimination (Act 4 of 2000)
- White Paper on Special Needs Education (July 2001)
- The Employment Equity Act (Act No 55 of 1998)

Sadly, despite the promulgation of these laws and the adoption of policies, people with an Intellectual Disability are still being discriminated against.

One of the recent examples of the continuing discrimination can be seen in the slow response by government departments to a High Court (Western Cape) ruling in November 2012 that "... every child in the Western Cape who is severely and profoundly intellectually disabled has affordable access to basic education."

The non-governmental organisations (NGOs) providing education programmes at day-care centres for children with severe and profound intellectual disability are turning away children who should be admitted to the centres as no additional funding has thus far been made available by the Department of Education. The subsidy received from the Department of Health has thus far not kept abreast of inflation and have remained largely inconsistent.

Furthermore, inadequate resources and a lack of protocols by the Department of Education make the early detection of learners with learning disabilities impossible. The result is that learners in the 14 to 18 year age group are left without the support and opportunities to which the Bill of Rights entitles them.

The Employment Equity Act of 1998 promotes affirmative action of people with disabilities in the workplace. In support of this, the Commission on Employment Equity is demanding that 4% of the workforce should be people with disabilities. To date, less than 1% of the South African workforce is people with disabilities.

Women and children with Intellectual Disability who are victims of sexual assault experience face extreme difficulty in accessing the justice system as they are often not regarded as credible witnesses.

“Kyle, a 21 year old young man, attends Cape Mental Health’s Eagles Day Training and Care Programme for adults with severe and profound Intellectual Disability. Currently no provision is made for services to young adults like Kyle. Prior to Cape Mental Health opening this centre, Kyle would have spent his days at home living a cloistered life. Over the years Cape Mental Health has pioneered services in response to the gaps in service delivery by government departments. Kyle fortunately has access to a programme where he receives intensive assistance with personal care, skills training, stimulation and social interaction.”

Plea by Cape Mental Health

For most of us, living a 'normal' life is something we take for granted. We grow up, go to school, graduate and start a career and hardly ever give a second thought to those who are unable to do just that. Cape Mental Health calls on you to make a difference this month by respecting the rights of those living with Intellectual Disability to enjoy a life of dignity, inclusion in all the privileges and opportunities afforded by our society to the others, and opportunities to develop their abilities to their full potential.

Cape Mental Health is the oldest Mental Health Society in South Africa and provides a host of services for people with Intellectual Disability. Contact: (021) 447 9040.

-Issued by Cape Mental Health