

Partners for **Change**

The Integration of Young Disabled People in Society is **Everyone's Responsibility**

Without prejudice to the other provisions of this Treaty, and within the powers conferred by it upon the Community, the Council, acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the European Parliament, may take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic, origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

by Josyane Pierre

Article 13 of the Treaty of Amsterdam

Since it was set up in 1982, Mobility International, a European non-governmental organisation of disabled people, has upheld the right of people with disability to be independent. This campaign concerns all aspects of daily life: studying, working, travelling, broadening one's horizons, obtaining information, having a family life, finding accommodation and participating as a full member of society.

An initiative to provide training

Since it was founded, Mobility International has, thanks to the support provided by the European Youth Foundation and the European Commission, enabled many young disabled people to take part in exchanges, training courses and seminars held in various parts of Europe. These activities have made a major contribution to the participants' lives. They have become aware of their abilities and of their responsibility as citizens to combat discrimination against people with disabilities.

It is still difficult for disabled persons to achieve independence because of the many financial, physical and psychological barriers that often result from ignorance of their real needs and potential.

A pool of disabled trainers was therefore set up to organise training on disability issues. A computerised database, which is accessible on the Internet, enables organisations to call on young experts in the various fields relating to disability. It is designed for all public or private organisations which wish to hold training courses or seminars on various disability issues (legislation, accessibility, violence against disabled persons, disability and femininity, etc).

● Francesca, a young active member of Mobility International, was invited to address the Economic and Social Committee in Brussels on the initiatives taken by young people in the field of civil society. The lack of access to the conference room facilities meant that she could not reach the speakers' podium but had to address the audience from the back of the room.

It has also led to the establishment of a service which provides training in and advice on disability issues and offers the assistance of disabled persons in training able-bodied professionals in the public or private sector. It offers training courses on the following subjects: obstacles to participation - attitudes, information, architecture; interaction with disabled persons: language and behaviour; working as partners: ensuring that disabled persons can find jobs; disability as a civil rights issue; etc.

● François suffers from cerebral palsy, a disability that leads to unco-ordinated movements and difficulties in speaking clearly. People who do not take the time to get to know him because his disability embarrasses them will never find out that he is a highly esteemed journalist.

In setting up its Youth Committee in 1997, Mobility International decided to take a number of steps to promote the inclusion of disabled people, in particular young people, in youth activities in general.

Mobility International's training and advisory service also meets specific requirements by designing

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individual training courses to match applicants' needs.

Providing information to increase public awareness

Information plays a prime role in heightening public awareness of the abilities of young disabled people and their activities. Our organisation has therefore decided to pay special attention to finding ways of informing the public at large.

For example, last year a special issue of our magazine "CONNECT" was devoted to young disabled people and published personal accounts of their achievements and how they had overcome the wide range of obstacles they had encountered:

- Mirien decided to serve three months in the European Voluntary Service. She left Germany for Ireland, where she worked with young disabled Irish people. Her own blindness did not prevent her from drawing up a training programme to help Irish remedial trainers cater for blind students.
- Tatiana left Belarus for Northern Ireland on a 2-week training and project-development course. Since she returned home she has been preparing an exchange project involving young disabled Belarusians and young people from other countries.
- Lars, who comes from Finland, decided to travel to Strasbourg to take part in a seminar organised by the European Youth Foundation. He was naturally somewhat worried about the accessibility of the accommodation that he would be offered and about being integrated in a group of young people but he decided to run the risk and, according to his account of his stay, it was well worth it.

An information booklet presenting the Youth Committee and its activities has been published. It calls on other young disabled persons to join the Mobility International youth network and take an active part in its work.

A publication entitled "Getting involved in Europe" has been compiled on the basis of a European survey of the reasons why young disabled persons do not take part in youth activities. It contains statistics and information on the different disabilities as well as advice on how to involve disabled people.

Finally, in partnership with the European Youth Forum, a handbook entitled "Youth Access" has been published. This handbook is really a practical guide for youth organisations which wish to include young disabled persons in their activities. It provides information and advises organisations on small practical details which will help them to make it possible for everyone to take part in events, exchanges and seminars:

- ▷ How to make sure that a meeting place is accessible to participants with limited mobility;
- ▷ A checklist to ensure that accommodation is accessible;
- ▷ Information on the different types of disability and related difficulties;
- ▷ Information on how to improve communication with deaf or blind participants.

We hope that our training activities will interest many organisations and that we will be able to set up partnerships for change with a view to achieving disabled persons' full participation in society and to ensuring that more and more able-bodied people feel at ease communicating with people with disabilities.

All of the publications mentioned in this article can be obtained (in English and French) from the Secretariat of Mobility International:

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Europe, if it is to exist at all, must be for everyone



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