

International Labour Office

INTEGRATING WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES INTO MAINSTREAM VOCATIONAL TRAINING

A Practical Guide

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Bangkok

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Foreword

The Proclamation on the Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asian and Pacific Region, which has been signed by 39 nations in the region, draws attention to the fact that “social barriers and physical obstacles are especially formidable to girls and women with disabilities”. Disabled women*, as a group, have few opportunities for education, vocational training, and employment – the prerequisites for integration into society. A key approach by the ILO to give equal opportunities to people with disabilities, including women, is called mainstreaming – that is, wherever possible women with disabilities should receive training with and under the same conditions as non-disabled persons.

This guide has been developed as an ILO contribution to implementing the Agenda for Action of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, and to the Platform for Action adopted by the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing which has called specifically for action by Governments, in cooperation with employers, workers and trade unions, international and non-governmental organizations, including women’s and youth organizations, and educational institutions to ensure access to quality education and training for, among others, women with disabilities, to improve their employment opportunities. It is also part of the ILO strategy to promote the observance of the ILO Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention, 1983 (No. 159), and Recommendation, 1983 (No. 168). These are the main reference documents for the ILO activities on the employment and training of disabled persons, along with the ILO Recommendation on Vocational Rehabilitation of the Disabled, 1995 (No. 99).

This guide is intended primarily for instructors and administrators in vocational training institutes in both the public and private sectors, and

* Note: As used in this guide, *women* and *woman* include girls.

It will also be useful to policy-makers in vocational training as well as in employers' and workers' organizations. The guide discusses the main issues relating to the seriously disadvantaged position of women with disabilities and provides basic information about disability. It suggests practical actions for vocational training institutes to increase the enrolment, participation, and integration of women with disabilities into their training programmes. By doing so, it is hoped that instructors and administrators of vocational institutes will be better informed to promote equality of opportunity for disabled women in training, and in subsequent employment. While most disabled persons can participate in mainstream training, this guide is geared primarily to those who require minimum support in the learning environment.

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1

Women with disabilities

“Despite their significant numbers, women and girls with disabilities, especially in the developing countries (in the Asian and Pacific Region), remain hidden and silent, their concerns unknown and their rights overlooked. Throughout the region, in urban and rural communities alike, they have to face the major problems of triple discrimination by society: not only because of their disabilities, but also because they are female and poor.”

– *Hidden Sisters: Women and Girls with Disabilities in the Asian and Pacific Region*

A. Three times disadvantaged

“. . . I want to be like others . . .”
– *a woman disabled by cerebral palsy*

This is the aspiration of every disabled woman – to be able to have friends, to go to school, to have the qualifications and skills for a good job and then do the job well, to be independent, to be respected, to give and receive love. In other words, they want to have a life like other women.

But most women with disabilities cannot live like others. They are more likely to:

- be extremely poor
- have little or no schooling
- be without vocational skills
- be unemployed
- have less access to public services
- be unmarried or childless
- be physically, sexually, or psychologically abused.

They make up, without doubt, one of the most excluded and isolated groups of people in every society, being triply disadvantaged by their disabilities, by their sex, and by poverty.

Women with disabilities are disadvantaged by negative attitudes towards disability.

Like all other disabled people, women with disabilities are often treated as if their particular disability has affected all their other abilities. In society's eyes they are not capable of earning an income, let alone of living independently.

Women with disabilities are disadvantaged because women's work is seen as secondary to men's.

A woman's main role, in most communities, is still to be a wife, mother, and homemaker while the man is the main decision-maker and income-earner. Since education and vocational training are seen as investments for higher-value employment, a woman is less likely to have the opportunity to receive them. While public attitudes *are* changing, illiteracy rates among women worldwide are falling, and more and more women are entering the labour market, the situation has changed little for women with disabilities. The general attitude is still that a disabled woman has little hope of becoming a wife or a mother, or of getting a real job. She therefore is a burden to her family or the state – a dependant for the rest of her life.

Women with disabilities are disadvantaged by poverty.

Excluded from opportunities, disabled women are on the whole desperately poor. While poverty is a result of discrimination, it is also a cause of further discrimination. Poverty is the lack of resources: not just money, but also skills, knowledge, and social connections. Without those resources, disabled women have very limited access to institutions, services, markets, and employment.

The extensive discrimination against women with disabilities violates the principle of equality of rights and their human dignity. They are denied equal opportunities in social, economic, and political life. The specially difficult situation of women with disabilities has been recognized nationally and internationally. However, there is as yet not enough action or results, at least to the extent that women with disabilities everywhere are able to experience a tangible improvement in their lives.

Where disabled women have been given opportunities for training and work, they have shown that they can be loyal and reliable workers. They are highly motivated because, while for most people work is a means of gaining financial independence, for women with disabilities having a job also means becoming part of society – something others take for granted.

B. Three essential tools

For women with disabilities to break out of the vicious circle of neglect, isolation, and poverty, they need three essential tools:

- education
- vocational training
- employment.

An important prerequisite for anyone to have opportunities in life is a good education. Education should as far as possible take place in the country's regular school system. Being able to obtain the basic education available in the country increases the opportunity for women with disabilities to enter vocational training.

Vocational training provides them with specific skills for jobs in the labour market. It therefore increases their chances of finding work - and not just any work, but decent work. Vocational training furthers the education disabled women have received from school. It sometimes compensates for the earlier lack of opportunities for an adequate education. Vocational training is not an end in itself; its goal is appropriate employment. Having a job gives the disabled woman the opportunity to break out of poverty, dependency, and social isolation.

However, women with disabilities everywhere have far less opportunity for education, training, and employment. For example, it has been estimated that only two per cent of visually impaired children in developing countries receive any formal education. It is reasonable to expect that visually impaired *girls* in that group who receive formal education form a significantly smaller proportion compared to visually impaired boys. A report on a district in Karnataka State, India found that the literacy rate of disabled women was 7 per cent compared to a general literacy rate for the state of 46 per cent. Few statistics exist on the employment situation of women with disabilities in developing countries. However, one report suggests that 85 per cent of disabled people between the ages of 15 and 64 in Tunisia are unemployed and that disabled women find it four times more difficult than men to find work.

Work for the disabled woman, as for everyone else, is central to her sense of social integration and psychological well-being because it:

- gives her an income and the means to be financially independent
- improves her self-esteem because she has a role in society
- brings her respect from society as she is perceived to be more independent, contributing to the lives of others, as a taxpayer, colleague, and friend
- provides opportunities for social contacts, to interact with others, and to find her identity as part of a broader community
- provides her with opportunities to learn new skills and to develop new competencies.

C. Barriers to vocational training for women with disabilities

The enrolment and participation of disabled women in vocational training programmes is extremely low everywhere. They face many obstacles in getting vocational skills training. These include:

- negative attitudes towards their disabilities
- bias in favour of boys and men
- failure to meet entry requirements for vocational training programmes
- lack of information about available vocational training programmes
- lack of vocational guidance in selecting the appropriate training programme
- tuition fees and other training costs
- lack of transport or inaccessible transport
- inaccessible buildings at the training centre
- lack of suitable and accessible accommodation
- lack of aids and adaptations
- lack of confidence and experience of mainstream vocational training institutes in teaching disabled students
- low self-esteem
- overprotective families

- lack of policy support to increase the participation of women with disabilities in vocational training
- barriers in finding subsequent employment.

Given the seriously disadvantaged situation of women with disabilities, special measures need to be taken to equalize their opportunities to enrol in the vocational training programmes available in each country.

Equalization of opportunities is a basic concept in the principle of equal rights. It is the process through which the various systems of society and the environment (such as services, information, and documentation) are made available to all – particularly to those who are excluded by social, economic, cultural, and political barriers.

Access in its fullest sense refers to physical access, communication access, and social access to facilities, services, training, and jobs. Physical access means that people with disabilities can, without assistance, approach, enter, pass to and from, and make use of an area and its facilities without undue difficulties.

D. Mainstream or special vocational training?

Traditionally programmes for people with disabilities were segregated. If they had any opportunities, these were available in separate special schools, residential institutions, vocational training programmes, and even in workplaces. While such special programmes can play a vital role for severely disabled people, there are serious limitations. In vocational training, this approach:

- segregates people with disabilities and the rest of society from each other, perpetuating the problem of isolation for disabled people and lack of awareness for the rest of society
- tends to slow changes to training programmes in response to changes in the labour market
- tends to maintain disability- and sex-stereotyped training activities, which are often for low-paying jobs, such as dressmaking, hairdressing, basketry, handicrafts, typing, and shorthand (for women); and carpentry, radio-repair, car-repair, and electrical work (for men)
- is less sustainable because funding for the special vocational training system is more likely to be at risk during times of economic difficulties
- can only address a tiny fraction of the training needs
- exacerbates lack of access for disabled people to information services and jobs.

The special vocational training system does provide a service for people with disabilities and many disabled students find the environment more

supportive. Teachers are usually trained to meet the special needs of disabled students. However, the special vocational training system often does not provide certification that is widely accepted in the labour market. Furthermore, it does not help integrate disabled people into society. Integration is vital because it encourages and reinforces changes in society's attitudes towards people with disabilities. Today, mainstreaming is the primary approach to integrating people with disabilities into their communities.

“.. When I train with others [non-disabled persons], I can improve myself because I know what standards are required.”
– *A paraplegic woman*

Mainstreaming is the process of integrating equal access concerns for people with disabilities in all mainstream systems of society, including vocational training.

Understanding disability

A. Who are persons with disabilities?

Persons with disabilities are men and women, boys and girls. Roughly ten per cent of the total population is estimated to have a disability, meaning that some 300 million people are disabled in the Asia Pacific region alone. We are mostly unaware of the significant number of disabled people because they are rarely seen in public. They keep away because of embarrassment and others' unease in their presence. **They may be kept out of sight by their families due to their fear of disgrace or because of overprotectiveness.** People with disabilities are also sidelined due to lack of access to public transport and buildings.

Like those without disabilities, people with disabilities are not a homogeneous group. They differ in their individual personalities, abilities, aspirations, cultural affiliations, employment opportunities, and types of disabilities. These disabilities may be physical, sensory, intellectual, or psychological. The degree of the disability may also differ.

B. Terms commonly used

**Disabled people,
people with disabilities**

People with all types of disabilities.

Physical disability

Any lack of ability to perform an activity within the range considered normal for a human being, resulting from the inability to move or use certain parts of the body.

Intellectual disability

This disability is defined by a person's capacity to learn and by what they can or cannot do for themselves. People with intellectual disabilities are identified by low scores in intelligence tests and by their poor social competence. They usually need people to look after their basic needs and protect them from common dangers. Intellectual disability is sometimes referred to as mental handicap, mental retardation, or learning disability.

Sensory disability

Any lack of ability to perform an activity within the range considered normal for a human being resulting from hearing impairment or visual impairment.

Mental Illness

Mental illness refers to disturbed thought, feelings, perceptions and/or behaviour. Unlike intellectual disability, people can recover from mental illness, sometimes by themselves, sometimes through medication and psychotherapy. Mental illness is sometimes referred to as psychiatric disability or mental health difficulty.

Hidden disabilities

Disabilities which are not obvious at all times, e.g. epilepsy, diabetes.

C. Causes of disability

Ignorant of the causes of disability, some communities believe that disability is punishment for past wrongdoing either by the disabled person or by the family or ancestors. Both the disabled person and the family face rejection by their communities. It is no wonder then that in such cultures families hide their disabled members from the public.

There are many causes of disability. People can be born disabled; disability can also be acquired at any later stage of life. The leading causes of disability in the developing countries of the Asia Pacific region are:

- malnutrition
- disease
- poor perinatal care
- accidents
- violence.

These are responsible for about 70 per cent of all disabilities in those countries. However, many common disabilities can be prevented – and are being prevented – through effective development efforts. Improved general economic conditions, increased access to basic education, better health care, and greater awareness have all helped to prevent disability.

D. Impairment, disability, and handicap

Three words are important in understanding and working with disabled people.

- The word *impairment* means a limitation in a function, such as seeing, hearing, thinking, or moving. For example, a person with a visual impairment has limited ability to see and we say that person is visually impaired. The limitation may range from not being able to see at all to not being able to read normal print. Another cannot hear and we say that person is hearing-impaired. Again the loss of hearing may be partial or total.
- The word *disability* is a general term which refers to any restriction, or lack of ability to perform an activity in the range considered normal for a human being. It summarizes a great number of functional limitations occurring in any population, in any country. People may be disabled by physical, intellectual, or sensory impairment, medical conditions or mental illness. Such impairments may be temporary or permanent, reversible or irreversible, and progressive or regressive.
- The word *handicap* means the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the life of the community as others do. It can arise for example from the way in which the built environment is designed, information is provided, or services are organized. For example, a woman who has lost the use of her legs cannot use the squat toilets that are so common in Asia: she has a handicap when it comes to using that type of toilet.

Understanding the use of these words is important because it helps you to see whether a problem is related to the impairment of the disabled person or to problems created by the environment or by society.

E. Some misconceptions about people with disabilities

Myth People with disabilities are ill.

Fact The general health of people with disabilities is as good as anyone else's. Illness can cause people to become disabled, for example, chronic asthma or heart disease. However, people with disabilities are limited only by their particular impairment. And even so, with the right assistive devices disabled people are able to overcome or reduce their limitations. For example, a physically disabled person may be unable to walk. But with crutches, braces, or a wheelchair she can regain some or most of her ability to move about.

Myth People with disabilities are also intellectually disabled.

Fact This is true only for those who have intellectual disabilities – for example, a person who has Down's syndrome. Other disabled people, those with physical and sensory (sight, hearing, speech) disabilities, are as intellectually able as people who are not disabled.

Myth People with disabilities are lazy.

Fact People with disabilities are no lazier than anyone else. In fact, they generally have to work harder than others. For example, when materials are not in Braille, a visually impaired student needs to have them read and reprinted in Braille. A hearing-impaired student needs to check the notes of lectures from others when no written materials are provided. A physically disabled student spends more energy getting to school or the training centre. **So, not only must disabled people work harder, they in fact do work harder.**

Myth Nature compensates people who are disabled with special abilities.

Fact People with disabilities are not automatically compensated with better abilities in other functions. For example, people with visual impairment do not develop sharper hearing, a more sensitive sense of touch, or a better memory merely as a result of a loss of sight. Nevertheless, they are often skilful listeners, have a keen sense of touch, and are good at memorizing. This is because they have trained themselves in these skills.

3

Including women with disabilities in vocational training programmes

A. Affirmative action

As we have seen earlier, women with disabilities are disadvantaged by discrimination that has resulted in denied opportunities and social exclusion. The answer to the problem cannot be provided through charity or welfare which perpetuates ignorance and discrimination, but first and foremost through changes in peoples' attitudes and behaviour. Such changes are difficult and slow. In many countries it has been recognized that affirmative action on behalf of women with disabilities is needed to counteract the effects of discrimination. Affirmative action is usually taken for a limited time, until inequalities are significantly reduced.

Affirmative action refers to positive measures which are intended to eliminate and compensate for any inequalities faced by a disadvantaged group, and to increase its opportunities to participate in society.

What kind of affirmative action can training centres take to level the playing field for women with disabilities and give them a better chance to find work? Here are some suggestions:

- Set targets for increasing the number of women with disabilities enrolled at the vocational training centre (VTC).
- Publicize the availability of places for women with disabilities in the training programmes.

- Raise the awareness of parents, community groups, and others as to the importance of vocational training for women, and encourage enrolment.
- Set more flexible entry requirements.
- Be more flexible with the time required for completing the training.
- Facilitate and support disabled students in their application for scholarships from government and other sources.
- Sensitize and train VTC personnel to integrate disabled students into VTC training and extra-curricular activities.
- Gradually upgrade the accessibility of buildings and facilities for students with disabilities.
- Gradually acquire special aids and equipment to assist students with disabilities.

B. Increasing enrolment

Policy decision

You will first need a policy decision to increase the enrolment and participation of women with disabilities. The policy decision may be for the whole VTC, or initially for specific VTC training courses. It should also set targets for the number of disabled women to be enrolled. The targets could be:

- a quota (a percentage of the total number of VTC students or of those in specific training courses who are women with disabilities), set for each school year or to be achieved within a specified number of years.

- a specific number of new enrolments of women with disabilities for each school year or a maximum number to be achieved over a specified period.

To get the policy decision made, you need to:

- know who has the authority to make such a decision
- decide how to influence the authorities to make the decision
- learn whose support will help with implementation.

Promotion and information

Once the policy for increased participation of disabled women at your VTC has been made, it is then necessary to make the information known and to invite those who qualify to apply. This information could be added to the VTC's regular advertisements and notices. However, additional action should be taken to ensure that the information reaches women with disabilities. Send information about the training courses and application requirements to:

- Special schools (secondary level), such as schools for people with visual impairment, and schools for people with hearing impairment. In addition you may request the Department of Special Education to disseminate the information.
- Service organizations for disabled persons. These are normally non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which provide various services for people with disabilities.
- Organizations of disabled persons. These are organizations whose members have disabilities. In general, their purpose is to represent the interests of their members and other disabled persons in government policy-making, to raise public awareness about disability issues, and to provide services to their members.

- Women's organizations. These are usually NGOs working for the interests of women on a wide range of issues such as education, health care, and legal rights.
- Youth organizations. Like women's organizations, these are usually NGOs providing various services to young people.

Application forms and other informational materials should be carefully checked to remove or rewrite statements which may suggest the disqualification or exclusion of disabled women.

C. Entry qualifications and course length

Flexibility is the key. A combination of lower entry qualifications and longer course duration may work well for disabled students. It would address the problem of disabled women in general having fewer educational opportunities resulting in fewer of them having the required qualifications. In addition, many have to spend more time coping with their studies as a direct result of their disability.

D. Providing guidance on appropriate training

Remember that vocational training is not an end in itself. It is designed to prepare your students for employment. As with other students, you need to know the aptitudes and abilities of disabled students. In addition, you need to know the limitations caused by their impairments so that you can advise them on the range of job choices and the appropriate training courses.

When advising a disabled woman, bear these points in mind:

- Look beyond the disability. You need to know the types of work she cannot do at all or cannot do well because of her disability. BUT you need to go on and ask yourself what other types of work she can do which are not affected – or are little affected –

by her disability. You will find that there are more kinds of work that she **can** do and **can** be trained for than those for which she cannot.

- Technological innovations to help overcome disabilities are now more easily available and affordable. For example, software to give computers spoken instructions is now available in a number of languages. This innovation allows a person who has limited or no use of her hands to use the computer.
- Be careful of gender-based work stereotypes. Limiting training of disabled women to traditional “women’s” jobs restricts them generally to labour-intensive, low-paying work with few promotion or career prospects.

A case of the wrong training

C is from Thailand and has weak vision which cannot be corrected by eyeglasses. However, she can read large print with the aid of hand-held lenses. When she entered vocational training she was directed to join a course which would have prepared her for a job in catering, such as work in restaurants. However, C’s weak vision not only limited her ability to carry out tasks such as cutting, cooking and decorating food, and handling kitchen equipment, but made the tasks dangerous. She was not allowed to change to another training course and so stayed on for the entire two-year course. C never did try to find a job in catering.

E. Increasing accessibility

Barriers in the VTC built environment can prevent some disabled students from entering an area or using the facilities. Increasing accessibility, perhaps gradually, helps disabled students gain their rightful access to all common facilities as well as hastening their integration into the VTC community (see chapter 5). Removing obstacles for people with disabilities benefits everyone. For example, it makes the place safer for all and makes it easier to move trolleys and heavy furniture or equipment.

Not all changes required to improve accessibility are difficult or costly. To identify what changes are needed you have to know the access-related needs of the main disability groups. By carrying out an accessibility audit you can identify the barriers. Then you may need to set priorities by identifying the barriers to the essential facilities they will need.

In the VTC situation there are usually people around – students, instructors, other auxiliary staff members – who can be sensitized on how to assist disabled students. The disabled students themselves will ask for help and directions. The principle, however, should be to make the environment safer and allow them to move about as independently as possible.

The main needs of the different disability groups

We will consider the three main disability groups who are likely to participate in VTC training programmes. They are those whose disabilities are considered less severe and can integrate with minimum support.

Mobility-impaired people

These can be divided into two groups: people who use wheelchairs; and those who are able to walk, with or without assistance, with the aid of devices such as crutches, sticks, braces, walking frames, or artificial limbs.

- Wheelchair-users (estimated to be only about 5 per cent of all persons with mobility impairment) require:
 - . ramps in place of steps
 - . lifts to go from one floor to another
 - . dropped kerbs on pavements
 - . toilet facilities with handrails and appropriate specifications for door width and toilet size
 - . more space (in enclosed areas such as lifts, corridors, rooms with crowded furniture) to manoeuvre
 - . corridors, walkways, and pavements that are clear and free from clutter
 - . adjusted table heights.

Where lifts have not been put in place, changing classrooms to the ground floor is a practical temporary measure.

- Those who can walk with assistance or with the aid of devices do not usually need special adaptations to the environment. However, they:
 - . may not be able to walk long distances or negotiate too many steps
 - . may have difficulty on uneven surfaces
 - . cannot use squat toilets.

Visually impaired people

Few visually impaired people are totally blind. Many have varying degrees of residual vision and some can distinguish bright colours. Once visually impaired people are familiar with the surroundings they can be quite good at finding their way around. The following adaptations and precautions do help make the environment safer for them (and for others):

- Handrails for stairs should be installed on both sides, and preferably in a bright colour.
- Walkways, pavements, and corridors should be cleared of clutter and of any obstructions.
- Protruding objects above the ground but below head level such as signboards, windows which do not open out flat against the wall, and low tree branches are dangerous and should be adjusted or removed.

Hearing-impaired people

Physical access in built environments is not more difficult for hearing-impaired people than for hearing people, but it is important for alarm systems to also activate flashing lights.

Design specifications for various components of the built environment are available (see *Further Reading*).

Accessibility audits

This is quite simply done by tracing the movements and activities that students will need to go through every day, from the moment they arrive at the VTC premises. Your audit should include access to:

- classrooms, workshops, and laboratories

- the library and other common facilities such as the computer rooms, the students' recreation room
- the canteen
- the toilets.

Initial orientation

When disabled students first arrive at your VTC, conduct a tour of the premises to familiarize them with the layout. Guide them through the main routes to their classrooms and other common facilities.

F. Providing financial support

A disproportionate number of disabled people are poor. Also, it costs students with disabilities more to participate in training. For those with limited mobility, it could mean having to use more costly transport such as taxis; for those with visual impairment it may mean extra expenses for materials such as tapes and Braille paper. If your VTC has a scholarship scheme, ensure that disabled students have equal opportunities for consideration. In addition, your centre may consider grants to help subsidize their additional expenses. **If your VTC does not have a scholarship scheme, it can still play an important role by providing information on scholarships offered by the government and private sectors and by facilitating and supporting applications for these scholarships from disabled students.**

G. Accommodation

For those who have to leave home to join your VTC, finding suitable accommodation may be a worry. For women with disabilities the problem is more difficult. In the first place, they often come from families who are overprotective and are nervous about their leaving home. If the VTC provides residential accommodation, give priority to those with disabilities. Keep in mind their accessibility needs.

If the VTC does not provide boarding facilities, provide assistance in finding accommodation as a service to the students with disabilities. Discrimination and lack of awareness make most relatives and landlords reluctant to take on a disabled person, particularly a disabled woman. In addition, the choice is further narrowed by accessibility and other disability-related requirements. Involvement and help from the VTC not only reassures families that the VTC *does* care but will also bring the centre's connections to bear in looking for suitable accommodation for students.

4

Teaching people with disabilities

A. What disabled students want and need: general

As a vocational training instructor, you share the common goal of everyone in education to identify and remove barriers that restrict learning and that prevent the student from reaching maximum potential. When teaching students with disabilities, you should keep these in points mind:

- Disabled students want to be treated as much as possible like other students. They do not wish to be singled out for special attention.

“ I am intolerant of pampering by my teachers.”

*– a visually impaired woman
training to be a certified
professional secretary*

- Like other students, they wish to be seen as individuals, each with individual special learning needs. Just as with students who aren't disabled, not all physically disabled people, nor all those with visual or hearing impairments, have the same learning needs.
- Observe your students. Are they experiencing difficulty during or following the class or the activity?

- Ask if there are specific actions you can take to help them follow the lessons in class. Disabled students, and especially disabled female students, often lack the confidence to ask for help for fear of appearing slow or stupid. **You should therefore take the first step, but try to do it discreetly without embarrassing the students. Their requests should be kept confidential.**
- Monitor the students' progress through their written work.

B. Including disabled students in your teaching

There are various measures you can take to ensure that you are communicating and using your teaching materials effectively with the disabled students in your class.

Physically disabled students

The needs of physically disabled students are related to the limitations they have in the use of their legs, arms, or hands.

Lectures

Note-taking during lectures is a problem for those who have lost or have limited dexterity in their hands.

Suggestions:

- Record the lectures on audio cassette. (The student may need to sit near an electric outlet.)
- Photocopy the lecture notes or notes of a fellow student.

Practicals (demonstrations, fieldwork, laboratory or workshop activities)

In general, if the training (and the subsequent range of job choices) requires a lot of fieldwork and therefore the ability to move without difficulty, the VTC and the student should consider changing to a more suitable training programme. Laboratory work would be difficult for those with disabilities related to the use of their hands but should not pose difficulties for students with walking disabilities.

Other considerations

For easy movement into and out of the room, allow them to sit in front and nearest to the exits.

Visually impaired students

These students' needs are related to their limited ability to see and read ordinary print as well as mobility.

Lectures

Visually impaired students cannot see what is written on the board, on flipcharts, or on overhead transparencies. They cannot see – or can see only with difficulty – pictures, movies, or videos.

Suggestions:

- Read aloud as you write or read what has been written on the board, flipchart, or transparencies.
- Provide students with a photocopy of the transparencies.
- Describe briefly the pictures used during the lecture.

- Let students with weaker vision sit up close while watching a film or video, or let them see it separately, preferably ahead of the others.
- If using colours, the red colour range is easiest to differentiate; greens and blues are more difficult.
 - . Let these students take notes with a portable computer or Braille. (People who are visually impaired find it easier to use DOS as the graphics in Windows are difficult to differentiate.)
 - . Let these students record lectures on audio cassettes.
 - . Encourage other students to take turns reading their notes to those with disabilities.

Practicals

Again, general training programmes requiring fieldwork, laboratory and workshop activities requiring good eyesight would not be suitable. When demonstrating or showing an object in class, keep these suggestions in mind:

- Say what you are doing.
- Let the visually impaired student feel the objects you are using in the demonstration.

Other considerations

Reduce glare from windows. Glare further blurs contrasts for visually impaired people.

Hearing-impaired students

Hearing-impaired students rely on their sense of sight and touch. As with other disabilities, there are varying degrees of deafness. It is normally recommended that third-degree deaf people should have special education and training. The first language of many of these students is sign language; the spoken and written language that you use in the class is a very different language to them.

While many students with hearing impairment can lip-read, always ask them if they can. Also remember that lip-reading is never wholly reliable and that it requires intense concentration and is therefore very tiring.

Lectures

If there is no sign-language interpreter, and if the hearing-impaired student can lip-read, here are some tips for including her in your teaching:

- Allow the hearing-impaired student to sit in front.
- Face her as much as possible when you speak, and speak clearly and never too quickly.
- Provide photocopies of lecture notes or of fellow students' notes.
- Write the most essential information on the board.
- You can also carry on a discussion by writing down what you both wish to say.

Practicals

Hearing-impaired students should have no difficulty with laboratory and workshop activities which do not require listening. But some special considerations are required.

- Instructions for carrying out the activities must be clearly written down.
- Allow these students to sit up close to observe any demonstrations.

Other considerations

- When speaking with the assistance of a sign-language interpreter, speak directly to the hearing-impaired person and not through the interpreter.
- Reduce glare or allow the student to sit where the glare least affects her.
- Reduce background noise, such as from fans or fluorescent lighting, which can seriously affect the hearing of a hearing-impaired person.

The adaptations you make to your teaching to include your disabled students also make your teaching more effective for the rest of the class. Remember that many disabled students have to spend more time keeping up with their lessons because not all materials are available in a suitable medium.

C. Examinations

Special considerations are required for students with disabilities when they take examinations, whether written, oral, or practical.

For written examinations

No special arrangements are necessary for hearing-impaired students and physically disabled students who have no difficulty writing or typing. Those who write or type slowly because of arm- or hand-related disabilities will require more time during written examinations. The amount of extra time should be judged case by case.

Visually impaired students need to have the question papers in Braille. If these are not available, then time should be allocated before each paper for the questions to be read and for the students to take them down in Braille. The students should be allowed the use of a computer during the examination.

For oral examinations

Hearing-impaired students and students with speech difficulties should be allowed to write down the answers in oral examinations. If the purpose of the examination is to evaluate speaking skills, hearing-impaired students should be exempted.

For practical examinations

The allowances made for students with different disabilities in the written and oral examinations should be made in practical examinations too.

The key principle is *flexibility*, so that examinations can accommodate the particular needs of each disabled student.

Integrating students with disabilities into the VTC community

A. Changing attitudes

The VTC creates for its students and staff a community which can offer companionship and peer support. Full integration for students with disabilities means not only being included and being able to participate in training activities but also being accepted and included in the VTC community. Disabled female students, like everyone else, differ in their personalities and ability to make friends and to integrate. Some women with disabilities are very outgoing, having learned to overcome any embarrassment they might have had about their disabilities. They often take the initiative in making friends and experience little difficulty integrating into new environments. However, there are others who find integration difficult.

A recent consultation in Thailand with disabled women who had gone through mainstream vocational training revealed that acceptance and support rarely went beyond their classmates and those teachers who were directly involved with them.

You can play a vital role in supporting those women with disabilities who face difficulty integrating. Three groups of people need to be influenced:

- disabled students themselves
- their classmates
- the larger VTC community: the other students and teachers.

Your challenge is to change attitudes which have put up barriers to integration in the first place.

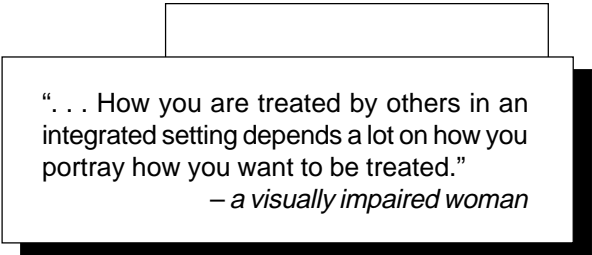
The disabled student

What are some of the problems the student has in integrating with her peers?

- Poor self-esteem, shown through lack of confidence
- Fear of rejection
- Fear of not being able to communicate clearly or correctly
- Fear of behaving awkwardly or of not having social skills
- Fear of not being able to participate anyway because of the disability.

What can you do to help the student overcome these problems?

- Take an interest in her and in her work in class.
- Create opportunities for her to talk to others about her disability in a non-threatening atmosphere.
- Encourage her to participate in class discussions. If she has a hearing impairment or speech difficulties, she can participate by writing her comments on the board.
- Encourage her to participate in the social and recreational activities of the class as well as of the centre.
- Impress upon her that she has an equal responsibility for interacting with others at the centre.



“ . . . How you are treated by others in an integrated setting depends a lot on how you portray how you want to be treated.”
– *a visually impaired woman*

The disabled student's classmates

What are some of the problems classmates may experience?

- Fear of the disability itself
- Ignorance of the causes and effects of the disabilities they see
- Fear of hurting or harming her
- Not knowing how to greet or talk to her
- Pity, preventing them from treating her as an equal.

What are some things you can do to help the students overcome these problems?

- Discuss in general the causes and effects of disabilities, as well as misconceptions about disabilities and disabled people.
- Encourage the disabled student to talk to her class about her particular disability, what she cannot do because of it, and what she can do despite it – and the kind of practical assistance she would like from her classmates.

- Draw up a roster for students who want to volunteer to take turns helping disabled students. For example, reading textbooks or handouts to visually impaired students, sharing notes with hearing-impaired students, and helping physically disabled and visually impaired students to move from one place to another.
- Encourage students to include students with disabilities when organizing activities outside the class work.

The VTC community at large

The problems other students in the centre face in interacting with the disabled student are similar to those faced by the student's classmates. However, because these students have significantly fewer opportunities for interaction, it is more difficult to influence their attitudes and help them overcome their fears.

What can you do to help overcome the problems?

- Use opportunities during staff meetings to give information (a little each time) about the disabled student that will be helpful to the other staff members in interacting with her.
- Organize a talk for staff and students by representatives of organizations of or for people with disabilities to raise the general awareness about disability.

Remember that you yourself are the best example of how to interact with a disabled student.

B. Accessibility

As we have seen earlier, being able to enter buildings and use the facilities is important. Inaccessibility isolates disabled students, preventing them from sharing facilities and participating in the VTC activities.

C. Language: Some suggestions

Words shape attitudes and some expressions may offend people with disabilities. Knowing which expressions to use or avoid may therefore be helpful. When talking to or about disabled people:

- Don't use words that invite pity or suggest dependence.

Don't say: *victim of . . .* or *suffering from . . .* or *afflicted with*
Say: *was injured by . . .* or *has . . .*

Don't say: *confined to a wheelchair* or *wheelchair bound*
Say: *wheelchair-user*

- Don't use medical or other labels to describe a disabled person.

Don't say: *She is a diabetic* or *She is an amputee*
Say: *She has diabetes* or *She had her leg amputated*

Don't say: *the disabled* or *the handicapped*
Say: *people with disabilities* or *disabled people*

- Don't use words which suggest that disabled a person is not normal.

Don't say: *normal* when you mean the opposite of disabled.
Say: *non-disabled* or *able-bodied*

Whenever you are uncertain about which expression to use you should ask the disabled person you are talking to, and respect her wishes.

D. Meeting people with disabilities

In general, greet a disabled person and behave just as you would with anyone else in your culture and country.

When meeting someone in a wheelchair:

- Put yourself at their level.
- If you are behind a high desk or counter, move to the front.
- Offer help with heavy doors.

When meeting someone with a hearing impairment:

- Always face the person. If the person lip-reads, speak clearly and slowly.
- Speak directly to the person, even if there is a sign-language interpreter.
- With those who have speech difficulties, if possible ask questions that require short answers, like a *yes* or *no*.

When meeting someone with a visual impairment:

- Always identify yourself first.
- If you are moving away, tell the person. Do not leave her talking to an empty space.
- If she needs to be guided to a place, offer your arm so that you will be walking slightly ahead of her but beside her.

Your vocational training centre can provide increased opportunities to people with disabilities by equipping them with skills that will give them an advantage in the labour market. As for everyone, work is central in the lives of disabled people. It provides an income, deepens self-esteem, gains respect from others, expands social contacts, and brings new opportunities.

A. Disabled women are the most disadvantaged.

Among people with disabilities, disabled women are the most disadvantaged and marginalized. In receiving vocational training, they face many barriers:

- negative attitudes towards their disabilities
- bias in favour of boys and men
- lack of entry requirements for vocational training programmes
- lack of information about available vocational training programmes
- lack of vocational guidance in selecting the appropriate training programme
- tuition fees and other training-related costs
- lack of transport or inaccessible transport
- inaccessible training centre buildings
- lack of suitable and accessible accommodation

- lack of confidence and experience of mainstream vocational training instructors in teaching disabled students
- low self-esteem
- overprotective families
- lack of policy support to increase the participation of women with disabilities in vocational training
- barriers to finding subsequent employment.

To help them overcome these barriers and equalize opportunities for them, special attention and action are needed to increase their participation in vocational training.

B. Changing negative attitudes is crucial

Many of the barriers are due to ignorance and negative attitudes. To change their attitudes, people need:

- factual information about disability
- opportunities to interact with disabled persons.

C. Accessibility promotes integration.

Buildings and facilities should be accessible to students with disabilities, particularly those who are physically disabled or visually impaired. Inaccessibility prevents them from using services and facilities they are rightfully entitled to. Inaccessibility isolates them.

D. Increasing the enrolment of women with disabilities

- Remember it is important to set specific targets.
- Advertisements and information about application must reach as many of those who may qualify as possible. You should target organizations that work with or for disabled persons and women, and make sure they receive information about your training programmes.
- Flexibility with the entry qualifications and the duration of training is important for students with disabilities.
- Fitting the disabled student to the right training programme (and therefore to a range of jobs in the future) is crucial.
- Financial support frequently makes a difference to whether a disabled student can participate in a training programme or not. Remember: a student with disabilities often has additional costs – for example more expensive transport, additional equipment and materials.
- Accessible and convenient accommodation is important to disabled students. For disabled women, security is a concern.

E. Teaching students with disabilities in your class

Remember that each student is an individual and has her own special learning needs. Teaching disabled students effectively is not difficult once you know what their particular needs are.

F. Integrating students with disabilities into the VTC community

Disabled students should be part of the community at the vocational training centre. While some have no problems fitting in and forming friendships, others may need additional support. You can help build their confidence in interacting with others and you can create opportunities for others to interact with them. Remember that one of the most effective ways to change negative attitudes about disabled people is through direct interaction.

G. Forging links

Identify and link up with organizations that provide various relevant services, such as:

- *organizations of and for disabled people* which provide counselling, volunteer services for personal assistance, reading, sign-language interpretation, information on assistive devices, equipment and appropriate technology for people with disabilities, information on government policies, a range of informal training activities, social activities, job placement services
- *special education departments of the Ministry of Education* which provide teaching materials and aids, student grants and other grants to institutions involved in the education of disabled persons

- *employment placement agencies* which provide job placement services for disabled students when training is completed.

Remember that vocational training provides people with specific job-related skills. It therefore increases their chances of finding work – not just any work, but decent work. Vocational training furthers the education disabled people have received in school. In some cases, it compensates for the earlier lack of opportunities for an adequate education. Integrating disabled people, including women with disabilities, into your vocational training programmes will make an important difference to their lives.

Further reading

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