Directorate of Services to People with Disabilities, of Department of Social Development (DSD) implemented the training on Disability Mainstreaming from 11th to 14th March, 2013 in Pretoria in collaboration with Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The 4-days training was targeted at the National DSD officials and people with disabilities to strengthen their knowledge, skills and competencies on disability mainstreaming to integrate and mainstream disability in all DSD policies and programmes effectively. This training was one of the activities of Disability Mainstreaming Advisor who is dispatched to the above mentioned Directorate in DSD by JICA from Dec 2012 to Dec 2014. The total number of participants was 92 (DSD Officials: 74, Persons with Disabilities: 18). In the first 3 days, the middle managers of National DSD participated in the training programme, and the senior managers of National DSD were also involved at last day.

Given an opportunity to comment after the training, Ms Mmanoa Tshenye, from Directorate Services to People with Disabilities, DSD noted the right hand page.

FUTURE TRAINING PLAN

DSD in cooperation with the JICA’s Disability Mainstreaming Advisor is planning to implement the series of the disability mainstreaming training for all 9 Provinces in South Africa in 2013 and 2014. In 2013, the training will be implemented at Western Cape, Kwazulu-Natal, Northern Cape and Free State. And also, some officials or/and people with disabilities will be invited from the neighboring SADC countries in order to assist and promote disability network with other Southern African Countries, such as SADC to share knowledge, experiences and good practice models. The advisor will also share information and promote the mutual cooperation with the Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities (DWCPD) in disability mainstreaming.
Disability mainstreaming is understood as working towards ensuring equality, which involves eliminating barriers that hinder people with disabilities from participating within the society or workplace. It’s advocating for inclusivity and also giving support to people with disabilities. Participants realized that some of the programmes offered within the department are not for everyone. Participants learned that mainstreaming means incorporating disability issues within our policies, legislation and budget through the process of changing our mind-sets, discovering needs and enhancing monitoring and evaluation systems in collaboration with people with disabilities.

(1) REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION forms an important part of disability mainstreaming but to some participants were introduced to this concept for the first time. Reasonable accommodation provide for necessary environment to enable one with a disability or a medical condition able to perform duties as required, there could be a need to adapt the work space, get a personal assistant, and adjust working conditions in order to accommodate such personnel. Conditions vary depending on an individual’s needs. I believe that this provision is possible if Managers who can affect change in organization can work towards transforming working environments to include people with disabilities. This would include and is not limited to aligning policies, strategic plans, and budget.

(2) SOCIAL MODEL & DISABILITY EQUALITY; A video clip on disability equality gave us a typical reflection to experience the manner in which the “able-bodied” treat people with disabilities in providing service. We ignore them, we are so judgmental towards them, and treat them as if they cannot make their own choices. We deny them their rights to dignity and respect. The environment within which we live and work has so many barriers that deny people with disabilities access to services and structures. Basically our attitude and environment denies people with disabilities an opportunity to fully and effectively participate within the society. Consultation with people with disabilities at all levels is essential.

(3) UNIVERSAL DESIGN allow for designing products and physical structures that are usable to the greatest extent possible to everyone. The main aim is to ensure that these are usable and safe to people of different abilities e.g. pregnant women, wheelchair users, the blind, the deaf, elderly and so on. Universal design promotes accessibility. A product or physical structure is designed for use by everyone, and allows choice by end-users. It emphasizes a human rights-based approach to processes and designs, where end-users fully participate in the design of a product or physical structure. It promotes the right of access by everyone to products and structures.

South Africa thrives to practice accessibility. As we serve a broader social sector as the Department of Social Development, there is a need to work together as government, business and civil society, to plan together and align our budget accordingly in order to promote accessibility.

(4) ADVOCACY ensures that end-users realize their rights e.g. access to services, information etc., while lobbying is influencing people in decision-making positions. We learned about processes to follow in doing these. We live in a society which despite having developed legislation towards promoting and protecting human rights, still excludes people with disabilities. There is need to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities, and to mobilize towards ensuring disability mainstreaming across all levels of society.

ROLE PLAYING as people disabled people participants had an opportunity to feel and barriers what people with disabilities experience. Some volunteered to be blindfolded and others to make use of wheelchairs.

Feelings and barriers of role players articulated thereafter were of “helplessness”, “essential to have a personal assistant whom you can trust”, “loss of privacy due to dependency on others for assistance with basic things like using the toilet and lack of accessible features in the toilet”, “as a blind person, couldn’t make use of one’s cell phone”, “It’s exhausting to wheel yourself around due to steep and narrow ramp”, “One learned to make use of other senses like listening and touching” and “felt excluded in discussions when colleagues whispered or used non-verbal signs”. This exercise made one appreciate the little things that one can do, to identify physical and social barriers and to embrace those with disabilities. Life is about making choices, and choosing to be positive helps one to be at peace with who he or she is. Asked to choose a disability, Participants had a very interesting debate on which disability they would choose and the reason thereof. Despite reasons given, it was realized that each has its own challenges, and that none is better.

Ms. Mmanoa Tshenye, from Directorate Services to People with Disabilities, DSD