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Report of a Workshop on the National Commission for the Handicapped

WORKSHOP QUESTIONS

- 1. Who should be the National Commission members?**
- 2a Do you think that the present terms of reference are adequate?**
- 2b If no, what changes do you suggest?**
- 3a Do you agree with the Commission's plan of action as outlined by Dr.Lawrence Gonzi?**
- 3b What changes do you suggest?**
- 4a What should happen so that global long term planning may be designed?**
- 4b Who is going to be responsible for the implementation of plans?**

Members of this workshop are conscious of a lack of communication between the Commission and Parents. The parents do not always know how to contact the Commission. They often do not even know who the representative group on the Commission is. Perhaps the Commission does not have an efficient Public Relations Service so that people are aware of its work. People are unsure of the role and function of the Commission and do not know what is being developed for the disabled. Perhaps there is a need for more action to be seen. This may be done through efficient public relations that will create contact between various interested parties and will receive the necessary feedback.

Participants felt that there are too many Commission members and even some bureaucracy. There should be an executive team of not more than 4 or 5 members lead by Dr. Lawrence Gonzi and the rest of the members should be parents. Parents should be in the majority and not the minority, because they are the ones who know the children. They are the ones affected by the conditions.

Lack of contact is also experienced between the Commission and individual groups. The representatives from the Federation should be increased so that personal contacts will be more widespread.

Another suggestion could be that each organisation should have a representative directly appointed on the Commission. This will strengthen the contact between the Commission and the families of the disabled.

Some members mentioned, that because of the Commission, some individual groups could not have direct contact with the Minister. This, they feel is due to the fact that they do not have representatives on the Commission Board. Thus, they were constrained to go through the federation to get a message through to the Commission. This system reduces the direct contact between the individual groups and the Commission.

The point was made that one of the Commission's role is that of a facilitator. Parents were most welcome to participate as members of the sub-committees that were recently set-up. It was clarified that government officials were appointed as members so that complaints and suggestions put forward, would receive immediate direct attention and work on these points would be initiated quicker and more effectively.

The Commission must continue to maintain and protect the existent 'Welfare Mix' because this will help and encourage voluntary work. This is important because the state must not stifle the voluntary work that has developed over the years. This support of voluntary work is important because the state will otherwise be carrying the whole load of responsibility and the people will become directly too dependent on state services.

It was also felt that as the co-ordinator of the various departments, the Commission should tackle educational issues quicker. To date education has not been handled as quickly as those issues related to Health and Social Services. Education is still an aim for the future. This might have happened because Health and Social Services are the responsibility of the same ministry under which the Commission also falls.

It is commendable that the idea for the Child Development and Advisory Unit emerged through the Commission's work but the framework and structure must be developed soon so that a quality education can be developed and delivered as soon as possible.

Other Points Brought Up

1. Respite Care Homes are urgently needed to provide support for sick parents, or parents who have passed away. These are not to be Institutions but small and homelike within the community.
2. Fostering of Handicapped Children for young and older children. Other members of the family should first be asked to foster a handicapped child when there are family problems, others outside the family could take on this role.
3. The Commission should continue putting pressure so that ground floor apartments built by the government be allocated for disabled people and their families.
4. Perhaps there should be town/village Adult Education Centres that disabled people can attend.
5. It will be helpful if disabled persons are exempted from having to register for work 3 times a week to gain precedence for work. Not all disabled persons are independent enough to go out and register themselves without inconveniencing others.

Looking Ahead

The Commission needs more executive powers. In the near future, ad hoc legislation should be drawn up so that the Commission will become an independent entity and will have the power to attain the aims for which the Commission was set up. Despite this legislation there should still be close collaboration with and between the various departments.

The Commission should have a substantial vote for funds. As matters stand the Commission is operating through the help from other departments.

Global planning involves a wide spectrum of thought and services. Professionals, parents and government department personnel should together be involved in this process. Once the global plans have been prepared by the Commission, the plans will be implemented by personnel. Whoever has been contributing to these plans should continue to receive the relative reports. The system for monitoring whether the results of these reports are being implemented needs to be improved.

The Commission has the potential and the structure to ensure that decisions are carried out. This potential should be used well.

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