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**Telling People's Stories Through Video CVs**

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**Anne-Marie**

We do not know much about how Maltese disabled persons lived before 1965. Their history starts with the Dar tal-Providenza. It was set up by a Catholic priest, Monsignor Mikiel Azzopardi. He knew that many disabled persons were hidden by their families, who were ashamed of them. If the family could not keep them, disabled persons were sent to an old people's home, even if they were children.

Azzopardi wanted to show that having a disability was not a bad thing and that disabled persons deserved to have a good life, like everyone else. He tried to open homes in the community but no one wanted to give him a house for this. So he settled for a large building, cut off from the community. Dar tal-Providenza still exists, but they also have community homes today. Most residents have always been persons with intellectual disabilities.

In the 1960s, Joseph Burló was working on providing disabled children with an education. Like Azzopardi, Burló also found a lot of disabled children hidden at home. He convinced their parents to send them to the special schools he was creating. Burló was a teacher and he followed the model that was used in other countries at the time and opened three special schools, two for children with intellectual disabilities.

The next step was in employment. Burló worked to help blind adults earn money by weaving cane baskets. There was also a law in 1969 to help disabled persons to find employment. Then, in the 1970s, adult training centres opened to give adults with intellectual disabilities the chance to learn skills that help them find jobs. But there was very little training provided.

In the 1970s, the government also started giving benefits to disabled people. For a very long time, disabled persons who received them could not work.

The first developments were therefore segregated services. However, they were still a big change.

It was in the late 1980s that the next big change happened, when the social model of disability was introduced in Malta by the Commission, which is now the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability. From the 1990s, community-based services began: inclusive education, community-based homes and employment opportunities. In the year 2000, the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act made disability discrimination illegal.

In 2003, Aġenzija Sapport was set up to provide disability services in the community. In 2015, the Lino Spiteri Foundation was established to make employment more inclusive. Other developments were Special Olympics, Opening Doors for inclusive performing arts and Villabianca for music therapy.

Much of this happened through the work of non-disabled persons and of parents of disabled persons. Sandra will now talk about the parents' work.

## **Sandra**

Since Malta is so small, people remain very close to their families. Even when children grow up, they continue to live with their parents, often until their late 20s, unless they get married or move in with a partner. The families of disabled persons support them for as long as possible.

Parents have a huge role in the lives of disabled persons, especially persons with intellectual disabilities. Historically, they have also played an important role in developing services for disabled persons and upholding their rights.

The first grassroots disability organisation was set up in 1976 by a group of parents who were told that their children, who had intellectual disabilities, could not attend special school because they were not yet toilet trained. These parents fought for their children to have their nappies changed and get toilet training at school. When they won that battle, they realised how much more needed to be done. They formed the National Parents' Society of Persons with Disability, which is still active today. There were other groups of parents who joined forces to lobby for better services for their disabled children.

Parents have also been instrumental in setting up some services themselves, especially in the 1990s: The National Commission Persons with Disability; Dar il-Kaptan, which provides respite care services; Inspire Foundation, which provides therapy and educational; the Equal Partners Foundation and Aġenzija Support.

Today, parents – especially of persons with intellectual disabilities – continue to be strong disability advocates in Malta.

The opportunities that parents have created and the ones they have lobbied for have made it possible for persons with intellectual disabilities to develop their skills and abilities. These developments have also created changes in culture and persons with intellectual disabilities are not seen as negatively as they used to be in the 1960s, when Azzopardi and Burló started their work. They have also made it possible for these persons to start speaking up for themselves and become self-advocates.

Self-advocacy activities were started by parents of persons with intellectual disabilities and other non-disabled persons. They paved the way for persons with intellectual disabilities to start speaking up for themselves and to have support they needed to do that.

But we still have a long way to go before persons with intellectual disability are seen positively in Malta. This is why we created the video CVs that Cristina will now talk about. Before that, we will see some snippets from these videos.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztBJWxrdTiU&list=PLeHhFcoEgrPQEz0SrqqIhe3X1wxsZx3P6&index=1>

## **Cristina**

From the 17 participants in the project, 2 attended special schools and the other 15 went to mainstream schools and had a learning support educator working with them in class. This includes myself and Isabel. We all benefited from Malta's inclusive education policy.

Inclusive education started with primary and secondary school students. Later, it was introduced in post-secondary and higher education. This meant that many of us could go to a vocational college after leaving school. In fact, 8 participants went to this college to do the Pathways to Independence course. Part of the course was a work placement and some of the participants, including Isabel, found employment at the same place where they did the work placement.

13 participants have a job. Many of us, including Isabel and me, work part-time. 10 work part-time and 3 work full-time. The policies and services that were developed helped us find a job. Some of us were helped by our parents. The 8 persons who went to a mainstream school and to the vocational college all found a job.

6 of these persons had a job coach from the Lino Spiteri Foundation to support them in their work. 2 of them still have some job coach support. The other 7 received support from the organisations where they work.

I work in a Church school and Isabel works at the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability. Some work in large private companies: Alison in a sheltered employment unit in a factory and Gareth in a factory together with the other workers; Rosie works in a hotel laundry; Ben in the office of a large Maltese company. Maria works in the kitchen of a care home for older persons; Clint, Lourdes and Mary Lou work in government departments, as cleaners or doing office duties. John Paul does manual work at the University of Malta. Denise and Omar do office work with small companies.

Our success in employment shows how much persons with intellectual disabilities can achieve when there are the right support services in place and when employers provide opportunities. In the right environment, we can use our abilities and determination to have a job and do our work well. Some participants have been doing the same job for a long time. Others have been given new tasks and 2 also increased their working hours.

However, not all of the participants could benefit from employment support services. Maris had a job which she lost during the pandemic. She now attends a day centre. Daniel and Christabelle attend a day centre. These day centres developed from the adult training centres that opened in the 1970s. Gaby lives at the Dar tal-Providenza and takes part in activities there and also helps out with the housework, which she enjoys doing. These 4 participants would also like to have a job.

Many of us also enjoy opportunities that started in the past and have continued to develop and become more inclusive. I took drawing lessons and

paint pictures. Isabel goes to drama lessons. There are another 5 who take part in drama, music or dance. Another one makes cards which she sells to raise money for an animal shelter and another two do needlework. Another two are in Special Olympics. One of them also plays table tennis with a mainstream club. Many of us also have a lot of support from their families.

These video CVs show how persons with intellectual disability also create more inclusion. Isabel will now speak about this and about making a video CV.

### **Isabel**

The video CVs show that the participants have many positive personal qualities and get on well with others. Maris' support worker said:

She doesn't give up, she's very determined. If she doesn't know something, she asks. She keeps herself active and busy.

The participants are important team members. Ben's manager said that his coworkers give him attention and he also gives them attention. John Paul helps train younger athletes in the Special Olympics swimming team, pushing them to achieve their best. Alison contributes to the development of dance routines in her group.

The video CVs show the progress made since the first developments in the 1960s. They also challenge stereotypes about persons with intellectual disabilities. They show how we are different from each other and that we have

active lives. Those participants who do not work also take part in different activities. Many of those who work are also part of different groups.

The video CVs show the positive aspects of our lives, because this is what people do in CVs. When there is family support and support services, we can overcome problems. We also have a lot of self-determination.

The video CVs also show that we have plans for the future. We want to develop skills and abilities and to try out new things, building on the support received in the past and services that have continued to develop.

Not all persons with intellectual disability have opportunities and support to develop their potential. For others, including those with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities, living a fulfilling life may mean doing other types of activities.

Doing a video CV helps a person think about their life story. They reflect on what provided them with support in the past and what provides support now. Your CV is not only about the present and the future, but also about the past. Some of the people who spoke in the video CVs are Ben's childhood tutor, Maria's former teacher and Alison's previous job coach.

We have guidelines about how to make a video CV, starting with what happened in the past. You can visit our project webpage:

<https://www.um.edu.mt/socialwellbeing/disabilitystudies/ourprojects/avetta/all-futur/>

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