

KZN Public Works “walk the talk” on initiatives to support people with disabilities



As the country celebrates the annual National Disability Rights Awareness Month (3rd November to 3rd December 2014) we continue to raise awareness and also to showcasing progress made over the past 20 years in promoting and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. The Provincial Department of Public Works has on record programmes that seek to improve the quality of life of citizens with disabilities in the province and these programmes are implemented on continuous basis.

Given the South Africa’s historic and political background prior to the 1994 democratic dispensation, the rights of persons with disabilities were not recognized. However, with the release of the Disability Rights Charter of South Africa in 1992, a new political mindset emerged after the crafting of the charter which set the tone on how disability was to be approached in the country’s new dispensation. The charter paved the way for the inclusion of basic human rights for the disabled on government policies and implementation thereof hence the government emphasis on policies supporting persons with disabilities.

In line with this year’s democracy celebration theme: *“Celebrating 20 years of the Right of Persons with Disabilities in our Democracy, Together we move South Africa through Radical Social Economic Transformation”*, the department is proud to indicate that it has over the past years initiated the following programmes for people with disabilities.

To ensure compliance with legislation such as the Employment Equity Act, 1998, which imposes a duty on employers to take steps in promoting equal opportunity in the workplace by eliminating unfair discrimination in any employment policy or practice, the department has to date developed the Job Access Framework Strategic Implementation Plan on the Recruitment, Employment and Retention of Persons with Disabilities to ensure that people with disabilities enjoy equal employment opportunities.

In addition, the Department has procedures in place on the appointment of people with disabilities which includes the Departmental Employment Equity Plan; the Transformation Strategy; as well as the Departmental Employment Equity Committee consisting of stakeholder representatives from all offices including persons with disabilities.

To ensure the increased recruitment of people with disabilities, the department has developed the Procedure Manual Regarding the Appointment of People with Disabilities to relax some appointment requirements. For example, among other relaxed requirements the issue of the driver’s license is not considered when posts for people with disabilities are advertised. At the same time, candidates with disabilities are considered for appointment when their scoring is above 50% irrespective of the number scoring candidates determined in the interviewing process.

All these efforts have resulted in the employment of 17 officials with disabilities, which translates to 0.8% of the 2% minimum target of employment for people with disabilities. In terms demographics, out of the 17 employees with disability, there are 3 White males, 8 African males, 1 White female, 4 African females and 1 female Indian. Most recently, Quest Staffing Solution, an employment agency has been appointed to assist the Department in recruiting people with disabilities. The Bursary and Internship Programme provides required skills for the benefit of people with disabilities.

The Department also provides employment opportunities for people with disabilities under the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP). From 2009 to date, 230 people with disabilities have benefitted from EPWP categorised programmes such as KZN Intergrated Greening Programme, Infrastructure, Msunduzi Clean-up Programme, and Richmond Greening Programme. These programmes not only provide employment opportunities but also assists them with skills development initiatives.

The EPWP Section continues to recruit & select as per the EPWP Phase 3 requirement where 55% Women and 2% of people living with disabilities are always targeted. The Operation Sukuma Sakhe (OSS) War Rooms have also been involved to assist in sourcing the targeted groups from the OSS database and there has been huge improvement in programmes like Maintenance Programme, Greening Programme and NYS.

It must also be noted that employment of people with disabilities highly depends on their availability closer to project sites and their willingness to participate on projects. Despite all this, there is a continuous effort made in ensuring that such groups are selected on infrastructure projects. The Department has also started to engage with Disability Associations as a way of ensuring that a pool is available when selection has to happen.

In line with the National Policy (SANS 10400-S:2011) and the new Regulation SANS 10400-T: 2011 respectively, which requires building facilities to be accessible and user-friendly for people with disabilities, the department is in compliance and has implemented the policy requirements by making alterations and additions to Head Office, at 191 Prince Alfred Street Pietermaritzburg. The new features includes wheel chair accessible toilets on every floor (ground 1-8 inclusive) and new lift cars and control mechanisms installed on Prince Alfred Street side.

Part of the lift upgrade is the old heat sensitive door seals are replaced by new door seals that ensure 30 minutes escape through a fire zone in terms of new Regulation SANS 10400-T: 2011 Fire protection. In terms of Regulation 4.45 of SANS 10400-T the lifts shall in the event of a fire travel to ground floor level foyer and park on that level. This allows wheel chair users to use the lifts to escape to the ground floor. Prior to 2011 Regulations escape was only by means of steps in fire escape which precluded employing wheel chair users from working only on the ground floor.

Under Property Management, the Property Incubator Programme (PIP) also contributed in assisting one (1) disabled person during its intensive training which capacitated participants with the variety of business and managerial skills on Property Management. The PIP programme

ended in September this year. Izandla Ziyagezana Programme, also make a meaningful contribution in uplifting the standard of people with disabilities.

Public Works continues to serve the people of the Province of KwaZulu-Natal through construction notwithstanding to acknowledge the efforts in supporting the Provincial Administration on achieving its mandate towards People with Disabilities.