



FROM SCHOOL TO WORK

Guidelines on how to support people with disabilities in education and into working life

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INTRODUCTION

These guidelines highlight the need for all Rehabilitation International member countries and organisations to promote equal rights and equality of opportunity in education for children and youth with disabilities. Furthermore it stresses the importance of applying methodology and practices that support children and youth with disabilities in the transition stages from primary to secondary education as well as from education to working life. In order to increase independence and self-sufficiency of people with disabilities education should provide knowledge and skills that are recognized also in the working life.

The original idea of sharing experiences on this topic came in a cross commission meeting of Rehabilitation International held in Hong Kong 2015. The participants of the meeting felt it would be important to share ideas and practices on how one can support and promote children and youth with disabilities as they are in schools, colleges and universities and what should take into account when supporting them as they move on to working life.

Perspectives on current situation

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states on article 24 – Education, that signed parties should recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education and ensure an inclusive education system at all levels including general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. To this end, States Parties shall ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities.

To be more specific, article 24 states that

- Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability;
- Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live;
- Reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements is provided;
- Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education;
- Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.

The parties should also enable persons with disabilities to learn life and social development skills to facilitate their full and equal participation in education and as members of the community. To do so, those who have signed the UN Convention should facilitate the learning of Braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication and orientation and mobility skills, and facilitating peer support and mentoring. Furthermore they should facilitate the learning of sign language.

The current situation of children and youth with disabilities is quite contrary to the aims of the Convention. A study from 2011 found out that youth with disabilities are amongst the most marginalized and poorest of all the world's youth. It estimated that 98% of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend school and 99% of girls with disabilities are illiterate. It also stated that youth with disabilities face dual disadvantages as individuals with disabilities and are more likely to live in poverty even in developed countries. (Youth with Disabilities, 2011).

The same study suggests that the number of children and youth with disabilities is likely to increase in the future. The youthful age-structure in most developing countries and medical advancements promote higher survival rates and life expectancy after impairment-causing diseases, health conditions, and injuries. More over young people are at an increased risk of acquiring a disability through road traffic accidents, injuries from sport activities, violence and warfare.

Even in the developed countries the educational situation of children and youth with disabilities is alarming. An EU statistical study from 2011 found out that the rate of early leavers from school and education was much higher for disabled people than for those not: 31.5 % compared with 12.3 %. Also twice as many young people with disabilities than those without are neither in employment nor in education and training: 30,7 % compared with 15%. These problems with the lower level result that nearly two out of 5 people with disabilities only attained pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education levels, while less than 30 % of those without a disability were in this situation. (Disability statistics - access to education and training)

A study from 2007 'Inclusive education for young disabled people in Europe' states that the commitment to education for all and also a growing commitment to inclusive education, has increased opportunities in mainstream education in all countries. However the study found out, that inclusion is not equal for all. For example in Germany and Sweden access to mainstream education tends to be easier for children with specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia etc.) or speech impairments than for those with other impairments like cognitive impairments. In addition most reports of the countries included in the study indicate that countries still want to invest in special schools rather than inclusive surroundings. It also suggests that right for inclusive education is better realized in primary education than in secondary or higher education. There is a great need also in Europe to map best practices and policies that promote equal and inclusive education to all.

Resources:

Youth with Disabilities Fact Sheet , UN High Level Meeting on Youth, 2011

Report on equality of educational and training opportunities for young disabled people in European countries, ANED, 2010

Disability statistics. http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Disability_statistics_-_access_to_education_and_training#Young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_and_training:_twice_as_many_among_persons_with_disabilities_in_the_EU-28

Guidelines

The need to improve equal opportunities and inclusion in education for children and youth with disabilities is great. Education is a gateway to inclusion in also other areas of life and a necessity for gaining opportunities to attend working life.

In order to promote and fulfill the aims of the UN Convention all RI and its members should actively inform various stakeholders of their responsibilities and opportunities to improve equality and inclusion in education. They should also promote activities, projects, policies that increase the numbers of children and youth with disabilities in all levels of education.

RI members should be active in informing and disseminating best practices and methodologies to support learning and transition from education to working life.

1. Children with disabilities and their parents are provided with sufficient support and help

It is very important that professionals learn and gain knowledge on how they can help families with disabled children to promote the child's own self-assurance and trust on their own capabilities. When a family or community of the child believes in his/her possibilities in learning and coping it helps the child to gain self-assurance and trust.

The studies show that when a child and the family is provided with such supports he/she is more likely to cope in society and find suitable education and work.

Families can be provided with peer support, different courses to help them adjust and cope with the child's disability and various therapies and rehabilitation for the child.

Support services can be provided by public organizations, but also by NGO's.

2. Day-care and primary school staff, teachers and support workers have knowledge and skills to work with children with disability

Children with disabilities should have a right for personal assistance and support when attending day care or school.

All staff and care takers should have at least a basic knowledge on special education methodologies and practices. All children with disabilities have a right for basic education even when it is known that the educational aims might not meet the national standards. Nevertheless a special curriculum can be applied and more time can be provided for learning.

Methodologies and best practices of teaching children with disabilities should be widely disseminated and accessible to all.

3. Right for secondary education and support for transition from primary education onwards

Many children with disabilities have difficulties entering the secondary education. This however is very important since the working life often demands vocational training before employment. Too often children and youngsters with disabilities are seen as automatically outside the labour market and therefore no effort in supporting them to find suitable secondary education and pathway to employment is taken.

Schools should have knowledge and staff to support transition to secondary education and ways to encourage and motivate the child to learn and set targets also for the working life.

The young are entitled to choose the school they want to apply to and all schools have the responsibility to provide the support they need.

Secondary and vocational education should support young people with disabilities according to their needs, the staff should be skillful and methodologies innovative. The teachers, counsellors and support persons should also have knowledge on further educational opportunities and they should be free of biased thinking when guiding young people with their career plans.

4. Personal support should be provided for finding and keeping employment

Young people with disabilities face many barriers when trying to find employment. Even though the labour markets and employment services differ greatly from country to country there is common understanding that personal support and guidance is essential to find and keep a job.

All people with disabilities who are in need or want employment, should be provided with a support person or a job coach.

The job coach service has taken many forms in around the world and there has been some discussions on how to implement the service most effectively. However there is a great unanimity that having a support person that can individually help the person with a disability to find a job and also help the workplace to include the person in the job is essential. The job coach or support person can work in many transition stages along the way.

There have been several projects proving that a support person, counsellor or equivalent can make a great difference when a person is looking for either best suitable education or best internships during secondary training and then ultimately a best work place.

5. Careful skills mapping and Individualized support

In order to help people with disabilities or other barriers in the working life it is important that we know how to support their own will and help them to reach the goals they have set.

There is evidence that it is important to help people with disabilities with career planning and with identifying skills. This helps them to set their own individual goals. Being able to take part in one's own goal setting seems to strengthen motivation. Furthermore it is important to provide social support and peer support when finding out possibilities and interests in one's career.

6. Co-operation between different stakeholders

When promoting equal education and inclusion, it is important that the person with disability, his/her family and different support workers and professionals aim for common goals and work in good co-operation.

Many studies show that collaboration between stakeholders, combination of different measures and seamless chain of tailored services is one way of enabling people to find employment or continue working.

7. Attention to teacher training and skills of support workers

Having skillful and well trained teachers is a key issue when it comes to promoting equality of opportunities in education. Many countries value their teachers' skills and training high and provide university degree training to teachers' education in all levels. From the point of view of people with disabilities it is important that they are provided with training that takes into account their special needs and knows how to use innovative communication and learning methodologies and how to build self-esteem and trust for one's own skills.