

The Living Link: Creating Abilities from Disabilities

South Africa – The Living Link

SUMMARY OF PROJECT

The Living Link was founded in 2000 and aims to improve the lives of intellectually disabled adults by developing and enhancing their true potential. This development happens through a one-year Adult Integration Programme, which consists of (1) Teaching the essential work readiness and life-skills needed for intellectually disabled adults to become independent and integrated members of society (five months); (2) Providing work training and experience that enables these adults to be employable in the open labour market (five and a half months); and (3) Attending a five-day 'Independent Living tour', during which newly learned skills are applied and assessed.

"Every child is gifted, they just unwrap their packages at different times."

—Anonymous

FACTS AND FIGURES

- Over 400 students improved their skills since the start of the programme.
- Over 250 intellectually disabled adults have been placed within the South African labour market in the fields of mining, retail, hospitality, garden services, medical, IT, administration, logistics, manufacturing, and many other industries.
- A number of program graduates now live independently and pursue their careers, thereby slowly working their way out of the cycle of poverty.

PROBLEMS TARGETED

Due to the lack of life and work skills, there are negative stereotypes of people living with disabilities, leading to their disempowerment and exclusion from society. As such, the program strives to provide them with independence, work readiness skills, social acceptance and integration, a better quality of life, and employment.

SOLUTION & METHODOLOGY

The program uses the independent living principles found in the United Kingdom, Ireland, and the United States as adapted to the South African context. Further, The Living Link has developed its own methodologies to assist people living with intellectual disabilities to become employed and, if the possibility exists, to live independently. Basic capabilities are developed through work readiness and

life-skills training, which then lead to job sampling in order to get experience and participation in the open labour market. With the independent living tour comes a final assessment to understand the individual's growth and capabilities of newfound skills and competencies. This approach is slowly breaking down long-standing stereotypes and barriers that exist for people with intellectual disabilities, and the South African work environment is now slowly embracing the concept of employment of people with disabilities.

OUTLOOK & TRANSFERABILITY

Currently the organization is based only in the Gauteng province and is the only organization of its kind. The Living Link focuses on adults who have an intellectual disability, and refers candidates to other organizations if they are found to be too low functioning. While there are other organizations that perform similar work, The Living Link is alone in focusing specifically on intellectual disability only. Thus, there is an urgent need to extend the program to other provinces. However, because The Living Link is a non-profit organisation, it is unable to get credit from South African banks, and must therefore explore other sources of financing.

Photo: Yes

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