



LNFOD is a federation of four disabled people's organisations:

- ◆ Lesotho Society of Mentally Handicapped Persons (LSMHP)
- ◆ Lesotho National League of Visually Impaired Persons (LNLVIP)
- ◆ Lesotho National Association of Physically Disabled (LNAPD)
- ◆ National Association of the Deaf in Lesotho (NADL).

22 Mabile Road,
Old Europa,
PO Box 9988,
Maseru 100
Tel: 22320345
Fax: 22326196
Email:
Infod@lesoff.co.za

Ntsoe Leng

June 2008

Welcome from our President

Welcome to the first edition of *Ntsoe Leng*, the newsletter of the Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled (LNFOD).

LNFOD's mission is to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities and challenge negative attitudes towards the disabled. *Ntsoe Leng* means 'one voice'; we believe that working in partnership and speaking with a united voice is the key to achieving our mission. We hope *Ntsoe Leng*

will help to us to connect with our partners and reach new audiences, ultimately building support for our cause.

Each edition of *Ntsoe Leng* will give all the latest news from the disability rights movement in Lesotho, plus feature an article from one of our partners. In this edition, we are focussing on the Lesotho Society of Mentally Handicapped Persons (LSMHP). You can also read about a major break-through for the

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and LNFOD's latest project on women and human rights. I hope you enjoy *Ntsoe Leng* and we look forward to working with you in the future.



Lehlohonolo Mafofo
President

International Disability Convention gains legal teeth at last



Women demonstrate at International Disability Day last year, where LNFOD called for the government to join the Convention

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is the first human rights treaty of the 21st century. Its adoption by the United Nations in December 2006 marked a major milestone for the disability rights movement. But more work is needed to ensure the Convention really brings benefit to people with disabilities in Lesotho.

The Convention is an international legal document which spells out how governments can protect the rights of people with disabilities in every respect, addressing issues such as accessibility, education and discrimination. It is legally binding for countries which join it,

and requires governments to adopt national policies and laws to protect and promote the rights of the disabled. Twenty countries were required to ratify the Convention before it became international law. Last month, to the jubilation of people with disabilities across the world, Ecuador became the twentieth country to ratify and the Convention at last gained its legal teeth!

LNFOD has been at the forefront of the campaign to persuade the Government of Lesotho to join the Convention. Mojalefa Mabula, Director of LNFOD says "*people with disabilities face numerous*

barriers which violate their basic rights and prevent them from participating as equal members of their communities. The Convention is an essential step to removing these barriers and improving our country's policies and laws regarding the disabled."

At the end of March, LNFOD delivered a joint open letter to the Prime Minister which was signed by 37 leading organisations in the country including international development agencies, service providers, trade unions and religious groups. It called for the government to make it a priority to join the Convention in the coming months. The Prime Minister responded by directing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to convene a committee of government officials and representatives from disabled people's organisations to take forward the country's accession to the Convention. The committee is meeting every month and is working hard to ensure that Lesotho joins the Convention by the end of this year. "*We won't give up until the government makes this Convention a reality in Lesotho*"

STOP PRESS...New advocacy campaign launching soon

In the coming months, LNFOD will be launching a major new advocacy campaign. The campaign will seek to influence the government of Lesotho on its policies and legislation on disability. LNFOD will be building a coalition of organisations in support of the campaign, and will hold quarterly meetings to update partners and plan future activities and events. The first meeting will take place on 30th July 2008.

Educating women with disabilities about their human rights



A member of LNFOD women's committee interviews a Deaf woman as part of the project.

"He thought I wouldn't know him. I succeeded in identifying him during the parade but the Court seems to doubt my evidence because I have to use signs to communicate."

These are the words of a young woman in Quthing who is deaf; a victim of rape who is struggling to gain justice. The case is all too common for women with disabilities, who face double discrimination based on their disability and their gender. These women are particularly vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse; the perpetrators are rarely brought to justice.

The Women's Empowerment Programme of LNFOD has

embarked on a new project to tackle the problem. Funded by the United States' Embassy, the project aims to empower women with disabilities to understand their human rights and options for legal protection. Earlier this year, LNFOD initiated the first phase of the project, a study to establish the current level of knowledge on the rights of disabled women. Different methodologies were adopted, including interviews with women and girls with disabilities, community leaders and gender officers; focus group discussions and literature reviews.

Mapitso Mosito, LNFOD Programme's Officer said *"the study confirmed our worst fears. There is a woeful lack of knowledge of the human rights*

of the disabled, and a high prevalence of discriminatory practices by communities against women and girls with disabilities." The study showed that the justice system has failed to protect women with disabilities from ill-treatment, who themselves do not understand laws against sexual abuse.

The study's findings will inform the activities for rest of the project. LNFOD will soon be developing a training package which will be used to educate women with disabilities. These women will become 'key multipliers', informing policy makers, communities and girls and women with disabilities themselves on their human rights and national legal protection systems.

"...the Court seems to doubt my evidence because I have to use signs to communicate"

FOCUS ON...LSMHP *Self advocacy is the key to youth development*

The Lesotho Society of Mentally Handicapped Persons (LSMHP) was founded in 1992 by parents of children with intellectual disabilities. It has a clear rights-based approach, and aims to represent and protect the rights of people with intellectual disabilities and children with *all* disabilities through the empowerment of parents and youth. With branches across the country, it has a membership of around 1500 people. Activities involve community mobilization, advocacy for services and training for parents, youth and siblings. At the village level, parents conduct advocacy visits to schools, employers, the police, and social welfare and health workers to lobby for better services for their children. At

national level the Secretariat advocates for changes in policies and laws that cater for people with disabilities. It sensitizes decision makers to change their negative attitudes that lead to discrimination against people with disabilities.

Since 2006 LSMHP has strengthened its strategies for youth development, providing their youth members with skills in self-advocacy so they can speak up on issues that affect them. LSMHP provides them with life-skills to be able to cope with peer pressure, to accept their disability, to be able to reason effectively, and to communicate with other people. About 175 youth from seven branches have been trained, including Maseru, Tanka, Mofoka, Bokong, Khohlo-

Ntso, Bobete le Mantšonyane.

These youth are now able to articulate how they would like people to interact with them, to identify different types of abuse and understand the steps to report such cases. They are also able to recognize their own strengths and weaknesses, and identify the kind of jobs they are capable of carrying out. Self-advocacy training also helps the youth to engage meaningfully in other training workshops and interact better with other people including their peers and family members. Kgomoco Motsamai, the Director of LSMHP says *"we hope that in time, some of these youth will be confident enough to advocate for services that can benefit all people with disabilities"*.



© Justice Kalebe/SkillShare

LSMHP:
Government House
No. 72, Stadium
Area, PO Box 9204,
Maseru 100.
Tel: 22320407
Fax: 22322462
Email:
lsmhp@lesoff.co.za

News in brief

Workshops with the Lesotho Mounted Police Service

As part of a Skillshare International project, LNFOD organized a pioneering workshop with the Lesotho Mounted Police Service. People with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable sections of society, and rely on the police to protect them from abuse. The workshop aimed to sensitize police officers about disability, raising awareness of the risks which people with disabilities face and how they can better serve the disabled in their community.



Better access to information and communication for PWDs

On the 17th May, countries around the globe celebrated World Telecommunication and Information Society Day. This year the theme was 'Connecting People with Disabilities' and to mark the celebration LNFOD joined forces with the Lesotho Communications Authority (LCA). Together they raised awareness of the issue through numerous radio shows and a special program on LTV, in addition to meeting the Minister of Communications to discuss LNFOD's concerns.