

**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
DISABILITY SERVICE**



PROMOTING ACCESS AND DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS

**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
DISABILITY SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT**

April 2015 to March 2016

All documentation produced by the Disability Service is available in enlarged text, audio, Braille and e-text on request.

Vision

To establish a human rights culture at UCT with a special emphasis on disability.

To act within the University structures, providing advice and support both in terms of harnessing mainstream capabilities for the accommodation of people with disabilities, as well as providing specialist services where mainstreaming is not possible. To provide academically deserving disabled people with the opportunity for a fair and equal educational and work experience.

To be the sounding board, knowledge base and benchmark which deliver to the University the capacity to interact appropriately with students, staff, prospective students and visitors with disabilities.

Introduction

Over the years our approach when compiling the annual report has been to highlight the achievements of students with disabilities and to focus on the progress we had made in creating an ever more accessible and inclusive university environment. We have tended to downplay the challenges we face, and the areas in which we had less success than we would have liked; in other words to report on what we did rather than on what we failed to do. Looking back on this reporting period however, it strikes me that it was a year particularly beset with challenges and stumbling blocks, and that - despite our team working harder than ever - many of our hopes and ambitions for 2015 remains unfulfilled. We had key members of staff on sick and maternity leave for extended times during crucial periods, and much more. Given the climate of protest that has characterized the entire Higher Education sector during 2015 and the early part of 2016, it was probably inevitable that the Disability Service came in for its share of angry criticism. For me personally this was immensely distressing as I had believed that by and large students with disabilities knew that we were on their side; and that we were constantly striving to increase services to them. No institution, unit or individual can of course claim never to make mistakes, never to misread the climate. But in the 7 odd months in which I will be leading the unit, before I retire at the end of 2016, I want to make a public commitment that we will continue to do our very best to ensure that each student with a disability gets the support to which he/she is entitled. Thus, I introduced the report for the period April 2015-March 2016, but as we move into 2017, I am finalizing this very late report. So the one for April 2016-March 2017 will follow fast on this one's heels!

The complete University Experience

We are constantly breaking new ground, both in our own institution and nationally. Thus, it was that Allen Petersen - a student with quadriplegia - and his carer Herman Bantam, moved into their newly accessible "suite" in Leo Marquard residence at the beginning of February 2015. For Allen's first year at University, we provided daily transport from his home in Strandfontein to Campus and back, and so we were very pleased with financial assistance

from a donor to arrange for Allen to have the complete University experience. As well as creating an accessible bathroom, we also equipped his room with a state-of-the-art electric bed and hoist so as to allow him to transfer from bed to chair and vice versa with the aid of one person.

A warm welcome back

At the beginning of 2016 we were however happy to welcome back Lesego Modutle, our first fulltime South African Sign Language Interpreter appointed at UCT in 2013, and tempted away for a while by SABC, no less!

In-house assessments

As before, we were able to recruit an excellently well qualified Intern Psychometrist to assist with the assessment of those students whose families are not able to afford the cost of a private psychologist. As we have mentioned in these reports before, UCT has stringent requirements for granting the concession of extra time in tests and exams, entailing an exhaustive set of psychometric tests. So every year we employ - at a modest remuneration - an Industrial Psychology Masters Student to do the time consuming (and therefore expensive) testing in-house. In 2016 we had the very real pleasure of welcoming Kendra Joubert to our team.

Accessible Bus Service



Mphumzi Letile demonstrates the use of the UCT Disability Service accessible bus lift

On 1 April 2015 we proudly took possession of our new accessible bus. As we had explained in our previous report, a decision had been taken - strongly advocated by the Disability Service and supported by Properties and Services - to take the transport of staff and students with mobility disabilities in-house. It would appear that we pre-empted the demand for in-sourcing by appointing two drivers who are managed by the Disability Service, they have done a sterling job, but the service is not without its challenges. As the academic year progresses we are often inundated for requests for the use of the accessible service with students with temporary disabilities as the result of sports and other injuries. Rush hour traffic, as everyone knows, becomes worse year-on-year which necessarily impacts on the efficiency of the service, so we do have to field every now and then some disgruntled calls by users of the service (although I can confidently say not as many as do Metrorail!!)

Motorized Wheelchairs for students with mobility impairments



Dureyah Abrahams

It is a fact not generally understood that in many instances the vertical access of especially the Upper Campus pose fewer problems than do the level distances students with mobility impairments often need to cover within the short time between lectures. Students who have coped well with a manual wheelchair before find that they are defeated by these distances. We have in several instances opted to purchase motorized wheelchairs for these students. Dureyah Abrahams is one such student. She joined UCT as a first year student in February this year. She has a rare condition which predisposes her to joint

damage and which severely impacts her mobility. Dureyah was using a manual wheelchair, but in the context of the UCT environment, we realised that there is no way she would have coped with the distances that needed to be covered within short time periods. The exertion she would have to exercise would no doubt seriously compromise her already compromised body, as well as exhaust her to the extent that she would not be able to do justice to her studies. We undertook to purchase from our discretionary donor funding a motorised wheelchair for Dureyah. The family has undertaken to make as much of a contribution as their circumstances allow. Dureyah took some time off between leaving school and starting her studies this year to memorize the Quran and has succeeded in this challenging venture, becoming a *Hafizah*. I can't help feeling that coping with her studies at UCT will be a walk in the park in comparison!

The number of wheelchair users admitted to study at UCT is growing. As well as Dureyah, we also welcomed Aiden Bizony and his service dog into the Disability Service family. Several wheelchair users registered for the Post Graduate Diploma in Disability Studies, in the 2015 as well as 2016 intake. Students with very significant disabilities continue to make their way successfully through their first degree and staying on as post graduates. Chaeli Mycroft, internationally acclaimed child and youth Disability Advocate wheelchair user graduated at the end of 2015 and registered in 2016 for an Honours degree in Social Policy & Management.



Chaeli Mycroft showcasing her wheelchair dancing

Source: Google article – 21 Icons celebrates Michaela Mycroft

We are so used to the publicity around the amazing advocacy work Chaeli is doing in and outside the University that perhaps we haven't given sufficient recognition to the way in which Chaeli has quietly gone on with her studies, requiring astonishingly little support from us – no note taker for Chaeli, no scribe - despite severe impairment of her arms and hands as a result of her cerebral palsy. I don't know how she does it! This is of course when she isn't winning international wheelchair dancing competitions, climbing Kilimanjaro, and changing the lives and prospects of many disabled children through her work as a co-founder of The Chaeli Campaign. And not to mention keeping the Disability Service on its toes since founding a vibrant new disability advocacy and inclusion student movement known as IkeyAbility.

Deaf students keep shining



Robyn Swannack and her parents Alison and Robert
Source: www.iol.co.za

We were robbed at the end of 2015 of a symbolic moment of celebration – to witness Robyn Swannack graduating with majors in Anthropology and Gender Studies. Robyn was admitted to the University in 2012 as the first student who is entirely dependent on South African Sign Language as her language of living and studying. The protest action caused the December graduation ceremonies to be cancelled, and so Robyn had to wait until June for her moment in the limelight. She has also become the first user of SASL to enrol at the University for a Post Graduate Degree; Robyn enrolled at the beginning of 2016 for an honours degree in Social Anthropology.

But, Robyn isn't the only Deaf student who has cause to be proud, and to make the University proud. Jessica Bothma, another Deaf student made her way onto the Deans' merit list of the Humanities Faculty, having attained the highest score in her class for a Sociology exam in June.



Jessica Bothma advocating for Deaf rights

Qobo Ningiza after obtaining his BA Law Degree from the University of North West



UCT also welcomed this year its first profoundly Deaf student to the LLB program. Qobo Ningiza graduated from the University of the North West at the end of 2015 with a BA Law degree. Welcome to Qobo.

Accessible Toilets

In our previous report, we mentioned challenges visitors to Jameson Hall faced on account of there being no accessible toilets. We are happy to report that this problem has been solved. By the time of the June graduation, guests and graduands alike will be able to access bathroom facilities with no problems, as a result of an accessible ablution facility having been created in the Jameson Hall complex.

Because of the postponement of the November exams in 2014, the June graduation will be a much bigger ceremony than usual on account of many students who qualified to graduate wanting to have their achievement publicly and ceremoniously recognised.

Students' Challenges and Triumphs

It is really important in my view to allow students to share in their own words their triumphs and challenges. Below I have pleasure in placing Yaseen Samuel's account of how it felt to be selected for the May Mellon Undergraduate Fellowship Program.

"Recently I applied for the Mellon May Undergraduate Fellowship program under the guidance of UCT Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED). On the very day I submitted my application, I was invited to an interview for the top 20 applicants. Being a stutterer and being interviewed is quite daunting but, confidently I proceeded.

The next week - whilst sitting in a Jammie on my way to the Mowbray terminus - I received another email from the fellowship committee at UCT to inform me that I was shortlisted and should attend the final interview. I reiterate, being a stutterer, it is extremely difficult to take part in interviews. Despite my nerves I knew that this is a 'make it or break situation' and I confidently went through with it. Prior to the interview I had informed them of my impairment for which they had great understanding.

One stutter after the other, I answered the questions to the best of my ability

even using a flip chart at times to physically write down my thoughts. I was asked whether I ever experienced social exclusion on campus particularly for which I made mention of my recent partnership with the disability unit in providing accessible facilities in the prayer rooms to disabled students in order to remove the barriers and promote inclusiveness despite disability. This was near to my heart as I see myself as a disabled student facing various challenges too.

Finally, I heard the magic words: "Congratulations, we would like to offer you a place on our fellowship program." I was told that all 5 members of the panel were impressed with me and my application. Initially, 70 applicants applied which was scaled down to 20 then to 10 and from the 10 only 5 applicants get selected onto the Fellowship program.

On returning home, I shared the good news with my family who were all overjoyed which had my mom and grandparents in tears and showing their proudness of me despite the challenges and barriers I had to endure throughout my life due to my speech impairment. As I sit here and reflect upon this roller-coaster of a journey, I am humbled and thankful. My immense gratitude goes out first and foremost to the Almighty for guiding me along the way, then my parents for their support and not forgetting the disability centre for their helpfulness as well as support. For which I am extremely grateful.

I thank thee.

Regards

Mogammad Yaseen Samuels (a stutterer whose actions speaks louder than words)

A recent newcomer, of which the University is rightly proud, is Joan Byamugisha from Uganda who enrolled at UCT in July 2015 for a PhD in Computer Science. Throughout the blindness sector we mourn the fact that by far the majority of blind students obtain degrees in the Humanities, often because inadequate schooling has failed to equip them with knowledge of maths and science, and also importantly because interacting with scientific and mathematical material if you use computer access software requires highly developed levels of computer literacy, as well as persistence and ingenuity. It is for this reason that I unapologetically reprint an article which appeared in the UCT News at the end of March 2015

A lesson in persistence

29 March 2016

In 2003 Joan Byamugisha had just finished high school and was waiting to start her studies in medicine at the Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, when life threw her the ultimate curveball.

Computer science PhD student Joan Byamugisha is focusing on natural language generation in her mother tongue of Runyankore.

At first she thought she was coming down with a bout of malaria, but a lab technician picked up that she had an extremely high white blood cell count. The diagnosis was leukaemia and within weeks the disease had irreparably damaged her optic nerves, which robbed her not only of her sight but also her dream of becoming a doctor.

What followed was a period of rapid adjustment. Joan was still determined to pursue a university education, but although Makerere allowed her to enrol for some science courses, she was at sea.

“Obviously I couldn’t do it. I had never used a computer with screen-reading software. I didn’t know braille. There was no way of reading back what I needed to.”

So Joan spent four months learning braille and the necessary computer skills. When her brother - who had a background in IT - suggested she consider studying computer science, her academic career was born.

“You just come”

From the outset, Joan loved programming – “it’s completely text-based and I didn’t have to worry about images.”

With Makerere University unable to assist, she enrolled at the Uganda Martyrs University (UMU) in 2005, which welcomed her as their first visually impaired student.

“UMU were very, very good,” she says. “I remember the registrar saying, ‘You just come and we’ll see what we can do.’ ”

Three years later she emerged with a first-class bachelor’s degree in computer science and economics, but she soon found that nobody wanted to employ a blind person. Undeterred, she studied further, enrolling for a distance-learning master’s in software engineering at De Montfort University in Leicester.

After completing her master’s in 2011, Joan landed a job at UMU lecturing in the IT department and heading their new special needs department. The academic bug had bitten, however, and by 2013 Joan realised that she needed to start working towards a PhD before she got “too comfortable”.

Programming for indigenous languages

At first, she considered focusing on speech recognition software in her local language of Runyankore, but soon realised that she would need to take a step back.

“If you want to teach a computer how to talk, it has to learn how to process the words. But if the language itself does not have computational resources, that has to be the starting point.”

Instead, she is now focusing on natural language generation (NLG) and is working on a grammar engine that will be able to recognise the grammar rules in Runyankore to output sentences for computer-generated prescriptions in the health-care sector.

While her research is specific to Runyankore and a particular application, the underlying principles can be generalised to languages such as isiZulu and isiXhosa. What they have in common is that the grammar is based on the noun-class system, which determines the rules for verb conjugation and noun categorisation.

Initially, she applied for and was accepted to do her PhD at the Queensland University of Technology in Australia, but funding was not forthcoming.

“In a way that helped”, says the ever-positive Joan, “because there is so much I did not know regarding natural language processing and computational linguistics.”

Instead, she took a year out to brush up her skills in both these areas, and to write papers which would help her applications for PhD studies elsewhere.

Settling in at UCT

Then the UCT opportunity came up in 2014 via the Hasso Plattner Institute. She found herself having to complete a flurry of forms and to pack up over a weekend to make it in time for registration.

To help Joan settle in, her mother travelled with her. She now lives at Obz Square, which she says is an easier environment to get around – “you can count doors”. Also, Pick n Pay is close by and UCT’s Disability Service provides transport to upper campus.

She is full of praise for the Disability Service, which has helped to settle her in and to jump a few additional hurdles.

One such hurdle was the fact that she arrived with only a paperback copy of the Runyankore dictionary that she needed for her studies. Denise Oldham arranged for student volunteers to transcribe the entire dictionary – a process that took around three months.

And then there was her recent trip to Pretoria to the Turkish embassy for a visa interview so that she could go to the conference she'd been invited to. It was her first solo trip since losing her sight and the Disability Service made all the transport arrangements.

She is hoping to travel to Turkey with Dr Langa Khumalo, who is one of the co-authors of the paper she is to present. But if that's not possible, she says she'll have to "bite the bullet again" and tackle the trip on her own.

With her funding set to carry through to 2018, she hopes to graduate in June of that year.

Is she proud of what she's achieved thus far? She laughs: "Not yet, but I will be when I wear the cap and get the doctor title."

And what happens after that?

"I want to work where I'll be most productive. I don't care where."

Story *Andrea Weiss.*

Exams

I have come to believe that our exam statistics perhaps attest best to the extent to which we succeed in creating an optimal environment for students with disabilities to succeed. Below is a summary of the number of students we support directly during the exam writing process and their achievements:

June 2015 Exam Results: 90 students wrote exams at Disability Service. 300 exams were written; 224 exams were passed; 16 exams were failed; 66 firsts were achieved.

November 2015 Exam Results: 84 students wrote 230 exams. 50 students wrote 114 deferred exams in January 2016 (the exams were deferred due to student protests).

Making a contribution AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Nafisa Mayat, our Advocacy and information co-ordinator was appointed to the Board of NSFAS during 2015, having been nominated to that post by HEDSA, the national body of Disability support units in South Africa. Having a person on that board with more than 10 years' experience of providing support to students with disabilities is bound to result in positive outcomes for the funding of students with disabilities. In its short existence HEDSA has had a major influence on the discourse around disability support provision in the Higher Education sector, and not the least of which was to advocate successfully with NSFAS for funding of a wider range of reasonable accommodations as well as the drafting and adopting of a NSFAS Disability Bursary policy.

And by way of conclusion, a short reflection on how the Disability Service strives to expand notions of transformation at UCT.

Amid the uproar around the Rhodes statue, the **EBE Student Transformation Council** arranged a lunchtime meeting during which they invited members of the UCT community of students with disabilities for a conversation about what it is that could make an institution, a world, welcoming and accessible to its diverse population. Vic McKinney, a student with quadriplegia who is eagerly awaiting the verdict of the examiners on his recently completed doctoral thesis, spoke about accessibility of the built environment. Jessica Bothma, the Deaf student I mentioned earlier in this report, shared with a rapt audience some aspects of Deaf culture and a handful of useful South African Sign Language signs. And neither was this a one-way communication. Questions and comments came thick and fast. Those engineering students want to be sure that the world they will help design is going to be a better place for all to live in, including people with disabilities.



Vic McKinney, Jessica Bothma and EBE students



Jessica Bothma shares aspects of Sign Language and Deaf culture to EBE students

The SRC held a Disability Awareness event with the residence leadership structures on 16 March 2015. The event was well attended by Sub-wardens and house committee members and it was good to see that many SRC members also attended. The group was addressed by Nikki Abdinor, who has a disability and practices as a clinical psychologist. Nikki has no upper limbs and shared with the audience her childhood recollections and challenges she had to overcome growing up and as an adult. She showed a video of her adapted car which has given her such a sense of freedom and independence. Two of our students, Sinikiwe Kademaunga and Mthunzi Kwatsha, also spoke about their experiences as disabled students at UCT. Sinikiwe is a student with small stature, also with very small arms and no fingers. She spoke about her experiences as a person with a disability in Zimbabwe and what a difference it made to her life coming to study at UCT and having access to resources she would not have had in Zimbabwe. Mthunzi, who is blind, is a senior student and also part of the Smuts house committee spoke of his experience living at res. and being a student at UCT. Nafisa Mayat, the DS Advocacy Co-ordinator also addressed the group on the services offered by the DS and other general aspects of disability. Many questions were asked by the students - some that they would not normally feel comfortable asking around how to interact with people with disabilities.

We arranged two further by now well-known buza events, opportunities we create for the University community to have informal conversations with

groups of staff and students with disabilities to learn, from the horse's mouth as it were, about a wide range of issues touching on the lives of disabled people.

These include:

- Employment
- Disability etiquette
- How people with various disabilities negotiate the world around them
- What are their greatest challenges?
- What are their greatest triumphs or achievements
- What are their own personal pet hates
- What is it they miss most and increasingly
- What they expect from the University in terms of meeting their needs

As in the past we hosted colleagues from several other universities, both in and outside the country, who wish to light a candle from us as to how to provide services to people with disabilities; or to benchmark service provision done at their institutions.

We hosted, among others, a delegation of colleagues from Sefaka Health Sciences University tasked with advocacy and diversity. The delegation included Ms Eunice Modiba, responsible for the University's Advocacy and Diversity Office, and the Director Student Affairs, Mr Themba. Also accompanying them was Mr Emmanuel Keyonga, President of the International Student Society, Professor Kuzvinetsa Dzvimbo, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic and Research), from Vaal University of Technology and Ms Elisa Veeronesi from the University of Hassel.

Thank you to donors

Our donor numbers are sadly dwindling but we need to pay tribute to those who have remained interested in and loyal to the Disability Service and the work we are doing!

We wish to acknowledge with sincere gratitude the following donors:

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Analyze

We also need to acknowledge the Department of Higher Education and Training for their financial support which helped provide services to our Deaf students.

Respectfully submitted

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