

CHAPTER 2

Office on Disability

VISION

A national office on disability that will be given the mandate to pull and optimise resources from various ministries and agencies, and galvanise the people and private sectors to ensure effective outcomes for persons with disabilities

INTRODUCTION

1. Disability issues are complex and cut across various disciplines involving different players. Highly effective leadership with the right supporting leadership infrastructure is especially critical. The Committee supports the 'Many Helping Hands' approach. However, for this to work well, there is a need to ensure each party is doing what it is best at with effective collaboration, coordination and ownership amongst the various government agencies, VWOs and other stakeholders.

CURRENT CHALLENGES AND THE NEED FOR LEADERSHIP REVAMP

2. The Committee is of the view that for an inclusive society to be realised, disability issues should be mainstreamed. Mainstreaming is best exemplified by the recent approach adopted by the Ministry of National Development (MND), Ministry of Transport (MOT), Building and Construction Authority (BCA) and Land Transport Authority (LTA). The various agencies took on the barrier-free environment and disabled-friendly public transport system as an integral part of their agenda. To achieve this, they worked closely with MCYS, NCSS, Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs) and the private sector. When mainstreamed in this fashion, resources are optimised and effective outcomes can be achieved.

3. **There are core developmental areas in disability - early intervention, education and employment.** Investment in these areas makes a material difference to PWDs' prospects. The expertise for these core areas lie with ministries and agencies in the educational and health arenas.

4. Good quality early intervention and subsequent education is especially critical to the prognosis of the child with special needs. While the education of children with special needs in non-mainstream settings have been traditionally led by the social service sector, there is strong feedback from parents and professionals alike to reform the leadership structure. This can be done by having relevant government ministries such as MOE and MOH lead this critical function whilst actively involving the social service agencies and disability-focused VWOs.

5. Employment of PWDs should be jointly under the purview of the Ministry of Manpower (MOM)/ Workforce Development Agency (WDA) and MCYS. Employment of PWDs is best achieved based on the manpower needs of industries. The Enable Fund initiative represents a significant step in the right direction. The configuration of WDA, Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF), MCYS and NCSS has led to a successful launch in 2006. Each agency is handling the area it is most competent in but in a coordinated fashion. It sets the example of how other employment issues of PWDs can be similarly mainstreamed and coordinated under the co-leadership of MOM/WDA and MCYS.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Setting up a New Office

6. In view of the above challenges, the Committee recommends the **establishment of a national office on disability to be led by a Coordinating Minister. The office will have senior leaders from MCYS, MOE, MOH and MOM, reflecting the inter-ministry approach needed to address disability issues.** The national office will pull together all the relevant stakeholders including VWOs and NCSS to address the entire spectrum of disability issues.

7. The office will facilitate realisation of the shared vision articulated in the Enabling Masterplan 2007-2011. It will develop and implement the national strategy for disability. The office will have the mandate and resources to manage disability issues holistically, focusing initially on early intervention, education and employment. It will be responsible for tracking the implementation of the accepted recommendations in this masterplan.

8. **MCYS, as secretariat**, will help to coordinate cross-cutting issues and identify gaps in strategies, services and programmes. There is a need for the Ministries concerned to take on leadership roles in their respective portfolios.

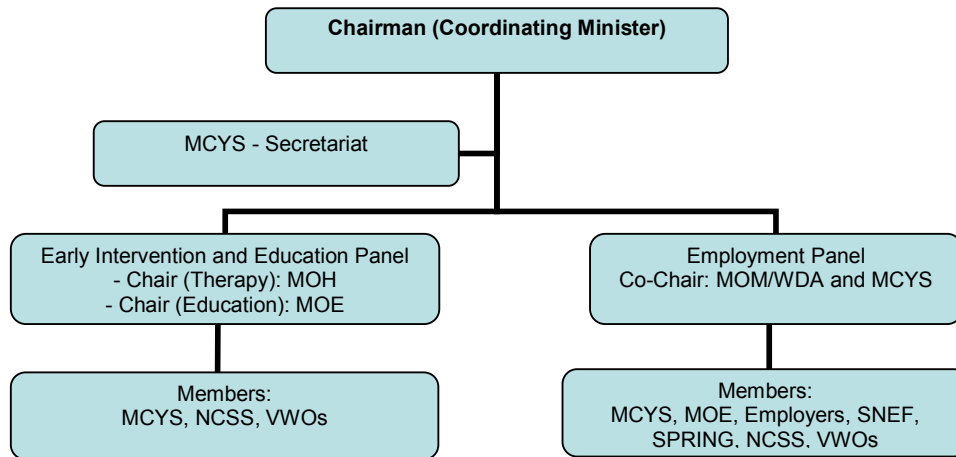
9. Although the national office should be government-led, it should include NCSS and VWOs. VWOs have traditionally played an active role in providing much of the needed disability services. Their inputs will ensure that strategies can work on the ground. They will also provide vital feedback from the ground. The national office should also regularly consult PWDs and their families.

10. It is critical that the each member of this national office be senior, respected individuals who can contribute substantively. The Committee proposes that the profile of members and selection criteria be clearly spelt out and stringently applied. The ability to think strategically, a track record of achievements and a passion to contribute to the sector are some desired attributes.

Roles of the Office

11. The Committee proposes that there will initially be two panels set up under this national office. A proposed organisational chart is shown in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Organisation Structure of the National Office on Disability



Early Intervention and Education Panel

12. **The Panel on Early Intervention and Education should be co-led by MOE and MOH who will take ownership and lead in integrating services in education and therapy support for children with special needs.** Its other members should include the MCYS, NCSS, key VWOs and users of the services. There should be local and overseas disability experts to help the panel develop effective and scalable early intervention and special education models for the best achievable outcomes. MCYS and NCSS will continue to provide the social service support to the children and their families, an area which is equally vital for successful child outcomes. Input from parents and PWDs themselves is indispensable.

13. The Panel should be tasked to work towards creating and promoting a shared vision of aspiring for excellence in the education of children with special needs. It should work towards establishing Singapore as a Centre of Excellence in the Education of Special Needs Students. This will not only benefit our children locally but also presents a potential economic opportunity for Singapore to offer services to such children in the region.

Employment Panel

14. **The other arm would be an Employment Panel co-led by MOM / WDA and MCYS.** It will comprise employer representatives, key industry players, MCYS, other relevant ministries and statutory boards and NCSS.

15. MOM/WDA's leadership will provide the vital link to employers and industry. It will ensure that the training and supply of PWD manpower will match the demands of industry. Employment will be made on the business case, and PWDs should be remunerated competitively according to their productivity. MCYS will take ownership of social service support to PWDs in employment, and lead in breaking down attitudinal barriers in employment. MCYS and NCSS will work with VWOs to advise the panel on the suitability of jobs and job training for the PWDs.

16. To match the demand and supply factors, the Employment Panel will have to work very closely with the Early Intervention and Education Panel. This will ensure that children with special needs are enskilled with the requisite knowledge and skill sets to meet the demands of the industries.

Resources

17. Resources are always limited. The national office needs to show effective leadership to steer and organise limited resources optimally to achieve successful outcomes for PWDs. To do so, the appointed Minister and MCYS should play an effective integrator role to ensure synergy across the spectrum of disability issues over the entire PWD life cycles. Ministries, VWOs and other service providers undertaking the various focus areas need to be accountable for the resources they use to ensure effective outcomes. The national office should continue to engage **the people, private and public sectors under the Many Helping Hands approach.** It should work with MCYS, NVPC, NCSS and VWOs to bring in more resources into the sector **through individual and corporate philanthropy.**

Prevalence Rate and Definition of Disability

18. The Committee recommends that the national office on disability undertake a study to determine the prevalence rate of disability in Singapore. It should also regularly review the definition of disability in tandem with emerging disabilities and the needs of the disability sector.

Issues on Elderly Disabled

19. The Committee is cognisant that a Minister has recently been appointed to oversee elderly issues. The Committee is of the view that there should not be a duplication of functions, programmes and services for disabled elderly persons and adult/elderly PWDs. Therefore, it is proposed that where ageing issues and disability issues overlap, such as in areas of accessibility in the physical environment, it should be addressed as part of the

ageing framework. Hence, the national office on disability to be set up will focus more in the areas of early intervention, education and employment.

CONCLUSION

20. The approach taken by the Committee is one that is pragmatic rather than ideological. The formation of the national office on disability is feasible. It calls for the various ministries and agencies to take charge of areas according to their functional portfolios. This will bring about better outcomes and optimisation of resources. The Committee also recognises that expertise and experience exist in the people sector. VWOs can be better supported to enhance their expertise further. More can be done to tap credible expertise in the private sector. More can also be done to enhance resources for the sector through.