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AT THE  
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO POLICE SERVICE  
STRATEGIC STAKEHOLDERS FORUM  
POLICE TRAINING ACADEMY  
ST. JAMES  
WEDNESDAY 21<sup>ST</sup> SEPTEMBER 2016



Good afternoon,

I would like to apologise on behalf of our CEO Dr. Beckles, who unfortunately could not attend due to commitments with the EOC.

For those of you who may not be aware, the National Center for Persons with Disabilities, or NCPD was established in 1964 and has over 50 years experience in vocational training for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) as well as advocating for the inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in our society. This is why we would like to sincerely thank the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service for including us in today's stakeholder forum.

The 2011 Population Census of Trinidad and Tobago identified that 4% of the population, or 52,244 persons, have a disability or multiple disabilities (CSO). This represents a 14.8% increase from the 2000 census which identified 45,496 persons. However, there is a concern by organisations who work with PWDs that the census data grossly understates this section of the population as a number of PWDs are simply not captured in the census, specifically persons with hidden disabilities.

When we think of persons with disabilities we usually think about persons with physical disabilities since we can see if a person is a wheelchair user, or an amputee. But disabilities are not simply physical. Disabilities can be categorised as:

1. Physical (such as loss of limbs, spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy, etc.)
2. Sensory (includes visual, hearing impairments, etc.)
3. Mental (includes mental illness such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, impulse control disorder, etc.)
4. Intellectual/developmental (includes Down Syndrome, developmental delay, autism, etc)
5. Learning (includes ADHD, Dyslexia, etc.)

It is noted that the World Health Organisation in its World Report on Disability in 2011 indicated that 15% of the world's population lives with some form of disability. If we apply this to Trinidad and Tobago's population, of 1.3 million persons, we may average that approximately 198,000 persons have disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago, over three times the amount identified by the census.

Additionally, in July 2015, Trinidad and Tobago ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Some articles in the Convention which would be relevant for consideration by the TTPS during this strategic planning exercise include:

- Article 5 – Equality and Non Discrimination
- Article 9 – Accessibility
- Article 12 – Equal recognition before the law
- Article 13 – Access to Justice
- Article 14 – Liberty and Security of Person
- Article 16 – Freedom from Exploitation, Violence and Abuse
- Article 21 – Freedom of Expression and Opinion and **Access to Information**

It is against this background that NCPD makes the following recommendations:

### 1. Disability Sensitization Training for TTPS

Do you recall the following incidents?

TT Newsday Jan 5 <sup>th</sup> 2015	2 SRPS in court today  The Two Special Reserve Police (SRP) officers who were captured in a video recording assaulting Robby Ramcharitar, a disabled man on a wheelchair,
Trinidad Express Dec 17 <sup>th</sup> 2011	A harsh lesson on police power Differently abled man gets ticket for driving on pavement...  ... Ramessar said the police officer believed that the wheelchair sign was for a wheelchair and not his vehicle, although the sign is a universal symbol for the differently abled. (a note here that the parking space is after the pavement, so to get to it you have to cross the pavement)
Miami Herald, US 21 <sup>st</sup> July 2016	Caregiver shot. Police union president says the cop was aiming at autistic man sitting on the ground <sup>1</sup>

These reports may have been avoided if officers were sensitised to the different types of disabilities that exist; interacting with PWDs including language to be used and not used e.g. retarded, and the accommodations for persons with disabilities e.g. disability parking spots. In addition, disability sensitisation training may assist in debunking myths that

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/crime/article91160077.html>

PWDS, e.g. persons with autism or Down syndrome or persons who are non-verbal can't explain what they witnessed or experienced.

Recommendation:

1. Persons within the TTPS should be exposed to Disability Sensitization Training. NCPD has been doing this for schools, Ministries and Private companies in order to raise awareness.

**2. Communication.** This is a wide ranging area and deals with a few areas

a. PWDs communicating with Police

Reporting a crime or requesting assistance

According to the 2011 Population Census, there are 6,217 persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. They are distributed throughout all municipalities and parishes of Trinidad and Tobago. The deaf community has indicated that they have trouble reporting crimes to the police since they cannot call the 999 service.

Recommendation:

1. Implement an emergency text system. These systems exist in some cities and states in the US as well as the UK. The UK *emergencySMS* service lets deaf, hard of hearing and speech-impaired people in the UK send an SMS text message to the UK 999 service where it will be passed to the police, ambulance, fire rescue, or coastguard<sup>2</sup>. The system is not restricted to use by the deaf community but also for use in situations where it may be dangerous to speak, or as a way to help the younger demographic that feels more comfortable texting than calling<sup>3</sup>

Making a report at the Station

Let's look at the situation of a car accident. You have to make a report to the police station within 24 hours of the accident happening. When deaf persons go to the police station there is no interpreter. NCPD has been called by the San Fernando Station to assist with interpreting on several occasions.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.emergencysms.org.uk/](http://www.emergencysms.org.uk/)

<sup>3</sup> [www.cnet.com/news/text-to-911-what-you-need-to-know-faq/](http://www.cnet.com/news/text-to-911-what-you-need-to-know-faq/)

Recommendations:

1. Police Stations should have a sign language interpreter. Acknowledging that it may take some time to implement this, NCPD previously recommended and submitted a list of interpreters to the TTPS. We're unsure as to whether it was circulated to the stations.
2. In addition to circulating a listing of interpreters, we recommend that officers be trained in basic sign language skills in order to deal with minor issues. It should be noted that elementary sign language skills does not replace the need for a skilled instructor.
3. If a person has low vision or is blind, North Carolina Disability Rights suggests that the officer should read any papers that he wants the person to sign. The officer should also describe any procedures in advance to help the person understand what is happening and what they are being asked to do.<sup>4</sup>

b. Police communicating with PWDs

The TTPS should be commended for its efforts to communicate with the public though its weekly press conference, Facebook page, Beyond the Tape programme, etc.

Recommendations:

1. We would like to suggest that at all televised news conferences, public awareness sessions including Beyond the Tape and community outreach programmes should be interpreted in order to include the deaf community. Captioning should not be considered a replacement for interpreters since many deaf individuals have difficulty reading and understanding English.
2. TTPS should consider utilising text messaging systems in the same manner as ODPM when major activities or announcements are made, such as a State of Emergency. A member of the deaf community at a recent conference recounted being stopped by police during the first night of the state of emergency because he did not know it had been instated and that he was supposed to be indoors.
3. TTPS should use visual aids and video presentations when engaging in Public Education and Awareness programmes. For example, Beyond the Tape formerly

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<sup>4</sup> [www.disabilityrightsn.org/sites/default/files/Interacting%20with%20Law%20Enforcement.pdf](http://www.disabilityrightsn.org/sites/default/files/Interacting%20with%20Law%20Enforcement.pdf)

featured dramatizations used to educate the public about personal safety. Visual aids with sign language interpretation will ensure the message is clearly understood. Visual aids are an excellent tool for both persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities.

4. Make any video presentations, etc available, for example, on platforms such as your YouTube page, so that they can be used as teaching tools in schools, homes, etc in the future.
5. TTPS should ensure that in the same manner we were invited to today's stakeholder session, PWDs and organisations or groups working for and with PWDs are invited to future consultations, community outreach, etc to ensure the sector is included.
6. TTPS should consider having some of its information brochures printed in Braille for the blind community.
7. NCPD suggest that TTPS includes Special Schools for its school visits to familiarise and sensitise children with disabilities and PWDs to the Police so that they are not afraid to interact with Police Officers. PWDs are a group vulnerable to abuse.

### **3. Disability can be acquired**

The TTPS should also keep in mind that most persons acquire a disability throughout their lifetime versus being born with one. In Britain, only 17% of PWDs are born with disabilities and 70% are working during the onset of an illness or impairment.<sup>5</sup> Due to the high-risk nature of police work, some Officers may acquire permanent or temporary disabilities while in the line of duty. Depending on the extent of the disability, acquiring a disability does not necessarily mean that the Officer can no longer work and provide an efficient service to the TTPS and their country in the same or a different capacity.

#### **Recommendation**

1. If the TTPS does not already have provisions and policies in place, NCPD encourages the TTPS to implement provisions for its Officers who may acquire a disability in the line of duty. Human resource policies regarding accommodation should also be developed.

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<sup>5</sup> Regan, Sue and Kate Stanley. "Work for Disabled People- The Achilles' heel of Labour's welfare-to-work agenda." 2003. *Institute for Public Policy Research*. Research Paper. 22 April 2016

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate the points that to build on the TTPS' thrust for effective policing, sensitivity training is essential as we move toward an inclusive society. Secondly, the TTPS needs to have resources allocated and dedicated to helping PWDs and thirdly that disabilities can be acquired.

On behalf of National Centre for Person with Disabilities we would like to thank the TTPS for including us in today's proceedings and we look forward to partnering with you in the future.