

Some employers still choose to ignore challenges

MANY people living with a disability feel uncertain about the government or public office as a viable employer. Some ask whether this institution is really committed to creating a working environment which is accessible to all people.

Are these accusations fair?

The findings of the Public Service Commission on Equality contribute to the scepticism of disabled people.

According to this report, only 0,09% of people working for the government in 1999 were disabled. This number rose to 0,3% in 2003 and dipped again to 0,2% in 2005. This is very disappointing, if one keeps in mind that the government wants to meet a target of 2%.

The questions are: Is there enough support within the different departments to give the required guidance? Are those involved aware of the current challenges faced by disabled people? It shocks me to read that there are many disabled people who are transferred between jobs in different departments because they get better offers elsewhere. According to the report, departments go through the process of recruitment, selection, orientation and training just to see their subjects leave for greener pastures.

This creates negative feelings about the process of empowerment and contradicts the aims and principles prescribed by the UN convention.

Allegedly, 25 (40%) of the 64 departments that took part in the poll had not handed in a plan of equal employment by December 2006. This hard reality gives disabled people the right to ask whether public office obeys the Employment Equity Act.

Many departments do not have a central database of information about disabled people's qualifications and skills, but according to reports, the Free State does.

The commission also found that many public service officials would rather retire after they had become disabled through injury. There are no sufficient rehabilitation programmes to keep these people employed. How on earth can we fight poverty when people with special skills are "sent home" in this manner? People who contribute to our economy, must be retained.

The commission made recommendations. Departments are requested to develop better recruitment strategies. Advertisements must contain a wheelchair symbol that assures people with disabilities that they will get preference when applying for work.

If government still wants a 2% representation in departments, they will have to develop more bursaries, internships and learnership programmes for disabled people. It also has to be accessible to any kind of disability. Experts say in the past the focus was largely on physical disability. Now the working environment has to be "user friendly" to anybody.

The unique challenges that every disabled person face, are normally used as an excuse to discriminate against disabled people in the workplace. It is disappointing that in this age of information, some employers still choose to ignore the challenges. .

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