



Commonwealth Disabled Youth Forum (CDYF)



The Commonwealth Disabled Youth Forum (CDYF) is an inspiring initiative born out of the 2023-2024 Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF) Youth Leadership Course. It was conceived within a WhatsApp group created for course's participants, aiming to unite and empower disabled youth across the Commonwealth. With a mission rooted in fostering inclusivity and driving societal change, CDYF has grown into a vibrant community dedicated to advocating for the rights of disabled youth and nurturing future leaders.



Under the administration of the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF), CDYF is steadfast in its goal to create an environment where disabled youth feel empowered, supported, and heard. The forum's approach is multifaceted, combining strategic initiatives, capacity-building programs, and collaborative projects to advocate for inclusivity across the Commonwealth.

Currently, CDYF boasts a membership of over 157 disabled youth from different Commonwealth nations. These members are engaged in active networking and resource-sharing through a dedicated WhatsApp group, which serves as a platform for interaction, collaboration, and community building.

The group enables members to exchange ideas, share opportunities, and foster connections that transcend borders, promoting a united front in addressing the challenges disabled youth face. In April 2024 CDYF democratically elected a steering Committee (left).

CDYF held its first groundbreaking webinar on the 11th and 12th of September 2024, titled Paradigm Shift on Disability. This online event was a huge success, drawing 83 participants from different time zones across the Commonwealth.

[<https://commonwealthdpf.org/https://commonwealthdpf.org/commonwealth-disabled-youth-forum/>]

Looking ahead, CDYF is committed to hosting more events, webinars, and forums that will continue to engage and empower its members. However, the future of these initiatives hinges on securing the necessary funding to support the forum's ambitious agenda. With the right financial backing, CDYF envisions expanding its impact, reaching more youth, and amplifying its advocacy efforts across the Commonwealth.

Survey CDYF 2024 to ascertain main issues

We received 52 responses. 65% aged 26 to 30, 33% aged 18 to 25 and 2% under 18. Gender balance 54% male 46% female.

Barriers identified to Inclusive Education

Survey respondents highlighted several obstacles to receiving an inclusive education:

Inaccessible Infrastructure: Many schools lack the physical infrastructure, such as ramps or elevators, necessary for students with mobility challenges.

Lack of Inclusive Teaching: Educators often lack training in disability-inclusive teaching practices, leaving students with disabilities without adequate support.

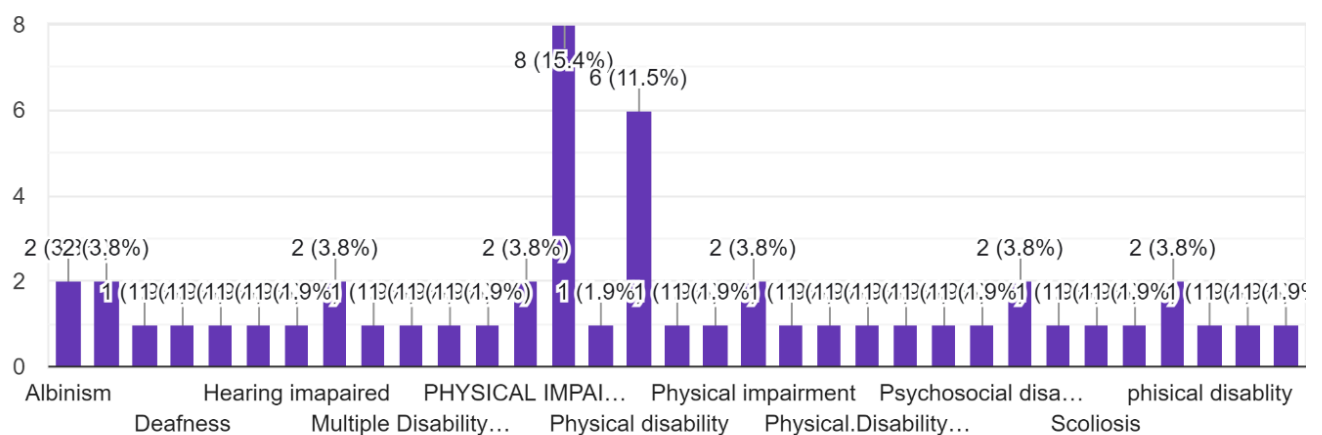
Inaccessible Learning Materials: Limited access to essential learning materials, such as Braille, sign language interpreters, or adaptive technologies, remains a significant barrier.

Discrimination and Bullying: Disabled youth often face bullying and exclusion from peers and, in some cases, lack empathy or understanding from school authorities.

Rigid Curriculum: An inflexible curriculum and assessment processes fail to accommodate the unique needs of disabled students, making it harder for them to succeed academically.

Nature of Impairment

52 responses



Barriers to Employment identified

Limited Job Opportunities: There is a widespread lack of job opportunities tailored to disabled youth, particularly due to misconceptions about their capabilities.

Negative Stereotypes: Employers often hold biased views, assuming that disabled employees may be less capable or less productive.

Inaccessible Workplaces: Physical barriers, such as inaccessible buildings or workspaces, prevent disabled individuals from participating in the workforce.

Lack of Vocational Training: Many respondents noted the absence of vocational training programs designed to equip disabled youth with skills for the job market.

The Role of Digital Technologies in Inclusion

The survey underscored the transformative role that digital technologies can play in improving the inclusion of disabled youth:

E-Learning Platforms: Digital learning platforms provide an accessible alternative for students facing physical or mobility-related barriers, enabling them to study from home.

Job-Seeking Platforms: Digital platforms can be used to match disabled youth with job opportunities that meet their specific accessibility needs. **Assistive Technologies:** Devices such as screen readers, voice-controlled systems, and other assistive technologies can help disabled individuals gain independence and interact more freely with the digital world.

Challenges in Accessing Digital Tools

Despite the potential benefits, respondents also faced significant challenges in accessing digital technologies:

High Costs: Many respondents cited the high cost of essential devices, such as smartphones or laptops, as a barrier to accessing digital resources.

Inaccessible Platforms: Some websites and apps do not cater to users with disabilities, making it difficult to access services such as online education, job applications, and digital resources.

Internet Connectivity Issues: Poor internet connectivity, particularly in rural areas, further exacerbates

The Potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

AI was recognized as a powerful tool that could further promote the inclusion of disabled youth:

Personalized Learning: AI can offer personalized learning experiences, tailoring educational content to the unique needs and learning styles of disabled students.

Employment Matching: AI-driven platforms could match disabled youth with jobs suited to their capabilities, while ensuring that any necessary accommodations are provided.

Daily Assistance: AI-powered assistants can provide support in daily tasks, enhancing independence and quality of life for disabled individuals through features like voice assistance and automated reminders.

Access to Health and Mental Health Services

Access to healthcare, particularly mental health services, remains a significant issue for disabled youth:

Inaccessibility: Many respondents noted that healthcare facilities and services in their countries were physically inaccessible or lacked trained professionals who understood their specific needs.

Stigma and Isolation: Respondents often reported feeling isolated or stigmatized when seeking mental health support, exacerbated by a lack of disability-friendly services.

Recommendations to Governments and Organizations

Invest in Accessible Digital Infrastructure: Governments should prioritize making digital tools and platforms accessible for disabled youth, including by subsidizing costs for assistive technologies.

Create Vocational Training Programs: Tailored vocational training for disabled youth should be developed to prepare them for employment and bridge existing skill gaps.

Promote Representation: Governments and organizations should ensure that disabled youth are given platforms to participate in decision-making processes and policy creation, ensuring their voices are heard and valued.

Increase Support for Assistive Technologies: Financial support and policy incentives should be introduced to make assistive devices more accessible, including through subsidies and tax exemptions.

We believe that the Commonwealth Youth Council Declaration falls short in addressing the needs of disabled youth, especially considering that more than half of the estimated 430 million disabled residents of the Commonwealth are young people.

We suggest:- Resilient Democracies The Inclusion of disability and people with disabilities into the Commonwealth Charter. Developing a strong commitment and realistic proposals for achieving human rights, democratic involvement in elections and parliaments and application of the rule of law for persons with disabilities, who have largely been excluded or overlooked in these areas particularly for youth with disabilities.

Resilient Environments Accelerating moves to Climate justice and reduction in the causes of climate change is important for all of us, but vital for the future of all of us, but persons with disabilities have been shown to be between 2 and 3 times more at risk in emergency situations and will find it harder to adapt to changing climate and environmental conditions.

Resilient Economies Persons with disabilities, especially women and young disabled people continue to be excluded at much higher rates from employment and livelihood opportunities, creating a huge loss of GDP from every country estimated at between 7 and 10%.

Resilient Societies and People Continuing stigma, discrimination and violence against persons with disabilities must be tackled systematically to achieve this pillar. To ensure this the Commonwealth Youth Council should make a start by creating 2 reserved places for a male and female person with disabilities and make the reasonable accommodations so that they can fully participate.

Other Issues- Digital Inclusion & AI: Enhancing digital access empowers disabled individuals to lead more autonomous and enriched lives, while also reducing feelings of isolation and fostering greater social integration. It's crucial to create initiatives that ensure Commonwealth websites and online services cater to various disabilities, particularly for those who are blind, DeafBlind, neurodiverse, or face learning challenges.

Financial Inclusion Commonwealth organizations and governments should focus on promoting financial inclusion for disabled youth. This includes making both offline and digital banking services accessible and providing financial literacy programs.

Social Protection and Legal System: In the Year of Youth measures should be introduced to make it easier for Disabled Youth to resolve their issues in the courts and tribunal system. These to include reasonable accommodations, free legal representation and positive action for recruitment to work in the judicial system.

Access to Youth Programs: The Commonwealth Secretariat and governments should prioritize disabled youth's access to scholarships, capacity-building programs, and other youth initiatives. We need to ensure sign language interpreters, Braille materials, and assistive devices are readily available at youth-led events

Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP)

We at the Commonwealth Disabled Youth Forum (CDYF) strongly urge all Commonwealth State Parties to support the adoption of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) at this year's Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Samoa. The Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) aims to advance the inclusion, protection, and full and equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by persons with disabilities across the Commonwealth. The Plan outlines essential actions to ensure that the needs of disabled individuals are

fully recognized and addressed.

<https://commonwealthdpf.org/disability-inclusion-action-plan/>

Encourage disabled youth/youth with disabilities to join the Commonwealth Disabled Youth Forum (CDYF) Contact Kihembowilb@gmail.com for a link to sign up form. Contact on Facebook or X www.commonwealthdpf.org