

Has the revolution in technical assistive aids really approved the possibilities for visually impaired when meeting the work market? - The Norway Case.

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1 About Norway

- 4,5 mill.
- Homogenous population, despite 350 000 immigrants and a native population of Laps in the North.
- UNESCO; The best country to live in, high level of education which is free, equal rights between genders, political and economic stability based on a social-democratic welfarestate, social rights and pensions for everyone.
- Low unemployment rate- 3%

2. Beeing VIP (Visual Impaired Person) in Norway; Social security Equal rights to education and health services, free assistive technical aids as an important legal right.

* Concept of user participation; The user has a right to participate in all processes involving him or her, e.g. to make an individual career plan where the VIPs interests is the main focus, not the professional helpers instructions.

- Transportation
- Mobility training
- Braille training
- Computer training

- ADL training
- User-pass, easier access to assistive aids

3. Work force

- 30% VIP in the work force – 70% in population
- High education rate, e.g. physiotherapist, social workers, academia
- Few sheltered jobs for VIP

Research findings:

- Econ: Mistrust to the work agencies
- MMI: Rather employ an unskilled with a criminal record than an educated blind person!
- Rehab-Nor: Lack of professional help in the helping structure, bad attitudes

4. WHY?

- The Social security system compensates for lack of a wage
- The structure of the helping system is locally based, but the competence is centralized. In addition with an information gap between the two levels of the helping system. The VIP is not motivated for participation in the work force when they lose their sight, due to the helpers lack of information of possibilities.
- Structural discrimination, the structures in the helping system are made of rational reasons, not necessarily in the interest of the user.
- Institutional abuse, the institutions that are made to serve the interests of the user, live their own bureaucratic life, and do not follow up the user to obtain the policies. The state-run agencies which provide the VIP with technical aid and support, spend so much time in the delivery process that the VIP loses his job because he doesn't get his devices necessary for work in time. (A recent research report from Ostlandsforsk.)
- Power perspective, the transmission of power from the professional helper to the user, that is the acceptance of the user's competence in his knowledge of own needs and desires. User participation is when the VIP plan, go through with the plan and evaluate the process afterward in cooperation with the professional helper.

- Final remarks:
- Paradox: on one hand the Norwegian VIP is better off than in most other countries. Despite the fact that assistive aids, including computers and special technology is free and easy to get, transportation to a job is almost free and fairly easy to get, there are very few VIP in the work force. On the other hand, lack of professional helpers in the system, lack of motivation and an economic insurance or pension from the state make the VIP stay at home instead of getting a job!