

Caritas (Malta) Epilepsy Association – Ten Years Of Work.

The Social Impact of Epilepsy.: Difficulties facing people with epilepsy:

**Report on Workshop C .**

**Facilitator: Maire Tansey.**

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To improve the quality of life of people with epilepsy, it is first necessary to deal with the social stigma attached with this disorder. Epileptic fits are unpleasant to watch and people are afraid to experience them. They tend to panic and do not know how to deal with it. This, together with historic beliefs on the condition makes epilepsy one of the world's most stigmatized condition. In Ireland, it is only as late as 1976 that people with epilepsy have been accepted in society and in Germany, even today there are special camps for people with epilepsy. In black humour they are called Epilepsy Concentration Camps.

So it is no wonder that PWE might be ostracised, find difficulty in employment, in getting married and in other social aspects that are taken for granted by others without the condition. Jobs like those in the construction industry, machinery, transport, and others involving heights might not be suitable because of safety factors. In other job opportunities, employers use excuses like higher insurance costs. In the tourism industry, restaurants, hotels etc. the excuse is that it scares clients away.

An issue that automatically cropped up in the workshop was whether or not one should inform a prospective employer of one's condition. An ETC representative said. "Don't sell your disabilities – sell your qualifications". After being debated, the outcome agreed on was that if a person's epilepsy is fully controlled, and s/he leads a normal life, drives etc., there would be no point in disclosing one's condition thus minimising one's chances of employment. If one feels duty bound to disclose, one can do so after a period of time after he or she have been accepted and when one's abilities in the job have been confirmed.

On the other hand, if one's epilepsy is not fully controlled, one should disclose at the end of the interview after one's qualifications have been appreciated.

Epilepsy in children has other more serious problems. At home overprotection is likely. In school, particularly with absence seizures, it is likely that the child starts missing out on lessons or finding it difficult to follow because of the frequency of the fits. This results in low marks, bullying and ostracising, with negative effects on development into adulthood. Self esteem, independence and self confidence tend to suffer.

"Training for Success" Project for people with epilepsy.

Maire Tansey explained the project in Ireland that is being financed by the Irish Trade and Employment Government Department. This "Training For Success Programme"

accepts up to 14 clients every year from Ireland and other countries aged between 18 and 35. The programme is for one year and concentrates mostly on empowerment, self esteem, personal development and independent living. Art, drama, music, life skills and career planning are also included and students are given a golden opportunity by being guided for further studies in a local University housing 6000 students in different faculties.

Not only is the programme free of charge, but students also get a 250 Euro (Lm100.00) weekly pocket money. Last year, a member (Matthew Attard) of the Association was accepted for this programme.

On being asked Maire said it would be possible for a Maltese representative to visit the Institute to study the system used with a view of opening up a similar one in Malta.