



## INTERNET ARTICLE

### DWS Mpumalanga observes Disability Rights Awareness Month

20 November 2024

South Africa commemorates National Disability Rights Awareness Month annually from 3 November to 3 December. This period culminates on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, 3 December, which is also observed as National Disability Rights Awareness Day. The purpose of these observances is to foster awareness of disability issues and promote the dignity, rights, and well-being of persons with disabilities.

The Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) in Mpumalanga marked the occasion with three awareness sessions aimed at educating officials on disability-related matters. These sessions took place in Mbombela on 7 November, Bronkhorstspuit on 12 November, and Groblersdal on 13 November 2024.

Ms. Wendy Mohlahlodi and Ms. Gugu Gabela, from Transformation Management at the DWS Head Office, led the sessions. They addressed various topics, including disability disclosure, the significance of Disability Rights Awareness Month, legislative mandates, definitions and types of disabilities, reasonable accommodations and assistive devices, as well as the transportation needs for employees living with disabilities in the public service sector.

Additionally, Ms. Letlhogonolo Setshedi provided insights on disability-related occupational health and safety considerations.

In her opening remarks, Ms. Dudu Sifunda, Head of Mpumalanga Provincial Operations, encouraged officials to embrace diversity and treat people with disabilities as equals. "This workshop is about learning to interact with people living with disabilities as equals," she emphasised.

"Disability is not only physical; there are different types of disabilities. We must recognize and celebrate our differences while ensuring inclusivity for all."

Ms. Sifunda also reflected on a powerful message she had encountered at a shopping complex: "Disability is not stupidity."

Meanwhile, Ms. Mohlahlodi elaborated on the definition of disability as outlined in the Employment Equity Act: "A long-term or recurring physical or mental impairment that substantially limits an individual's prospects of entry into or advancement in employment." She highlighted the various types of impairments, including mobility, hearing, intellectual, psychological, visual, and multiple impairments.

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Ms. Mohlahlodi and Ms. Gabela underscored the purpose of disability disclosure, primarily to request reasonable accommodations such as assistive devices or workplace adjustments. They explained the mutual benefits of disclosure for both employees and employers, as well as the challenges associated with it.

“Disability disclosure is the act of informing an employer about a physical, mental, or cognitive impairment that may impact work performance,” explained Ms. Mohlahlodi. “This disclosure can happen during recruitment or at any point during employment.”

Ms. Gabela emphasised that disclosure is a personal decision: “Employees are not obligated to disclose their disability unless they require accommodations or protections related to their condition. However, disclosure helps foster a more inclusive workplace and ensures compliance with the Employment Equity Act.”

Concluding the presentations, Ms. Gabela noted that providing reasonable accommodations begins during the recruitment process and continues throughout an employee's tenure. “Employers must proactively address the accommodation needs of employees with disabilities, including adjustments during disciplinary proceedings,” she stated.

The sessions reinforced the DWS's commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive work environment for employees with disabilities, aligning with South Africa's broader efforts to promote disability rights and awareness.

**Themba Khoza**

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