



EU FUNDED STUDY VISIT ON PERSONAL ASSISTANCE

Personal Assistance (PA) for persons with disabilities has been on MFOPD's agenda for quite some time. Finally, things started moving on this issue and for the first time ever, the national 2022 budget allocated a substantial amount of money for PA, which was also topped further in the national 2023 budget; discussions involving MFOPD and ENIL on a PA reform took place and a public consultation on PA reform was launched. The Malta Federation of Organisations Persons with Disability (MFOPD) wanted to make a step further and wanted to inform itself about good practices on the subject.

This year MFOPD benefitted from an EU funded project in the field of Adult Education whereby MFOPD had the opportunity to learn how Personal Assistance is being implemented in Slovenia. With the help of

ENIL, the Association for Theory & Culture of Handicap (YHD) was chosen as the organization to host the Maltese delegation. YHD developed services that enable users to lead a high-quality and active lives despite their disability. It established methods and guidelines for the implementation of these services, both for users and personal assistants. It also gives great importance to educating, raising awareness, and providing information about independent living for people with disabilities.

The main aim of this study visit was to inform ourselves about the good practices, the role of a personal assistant and understanding how the coordination of personal assistance is carried out. Furthermore, this study visit helped us get a clear definition of the rights of the user, the sharing of responsibilities and the possibility of other support measures that could be provided to support the user.

During this unique experience, we learned mostly on how a PA can change a person's life for the better. We heard about

the great change in the lives of persons with disabilities from living in an institution to living independently in the community with the support of a PA. We also met and visited persons with disabilities living independently, benefitting from personal assistance provided by YHD. These meetings were special and moving for us as the persons described in depth how it was like, living in an institution with limited options and unrealized expectations. It was common with all the persons we met, that they were ready to conquer their own fear which was conditioned by the years of living within an institution, to find the courage to take the necessary step. Their determination to live on an equal footing with everyone else, take decisions about their life and to have the chance to manage all their everyday

tasks, escorting, tasks at the workplace of the person with disability and in his/her education process.

Sharing their experiences about the running of the service of personal assistance was beneficial to all. YHD had its' trial-and-error moments until they found the best system to run the service. Presently they are providing the service of personal assistance to around seventy persons with disability. As requested by the PA law, they also give a yearly 6 hour training to the personal assistants and to the persons with disabilities making use of the PA.

We were very surprised to see that they have accessible maps and a 'Ljubljana by wheelchair app'. One could easily notice the fully accessible environment, partic-



activities was powerful enough for them to overcome all hurdles along the way.

We were also given an overview of the Personal Assistance Law of Slovenia, whereby it states that PA service providers can be charitable organisations, self-help organisations, disabled people's organisations, institutes and self-employed providers. In Slovenia an agreement is signed between the State and the NGOs whereby the latter are funded for the provision of this service by the government. Included in the law are the main tasks of a Personal Assistant which includes the basic needs of the person with disability, household and daily

ularly if one chooses to explore the surroundings on foot.

On our return to Malta, we immediately started making the necessary appointments with the Minister and all authorities and people concerned to share our experience and all that we learnt with them, with the sole intention to have a better Personal Assistance Reform here in Malta.

Venera Micallef - Secretary





MFOPD'S STUDY VISIT TO YHD -

ASSOCIATION FOR THEORY AND CULTURE OF HANDICAP, SLOVENIA



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My name is

**Jeanette
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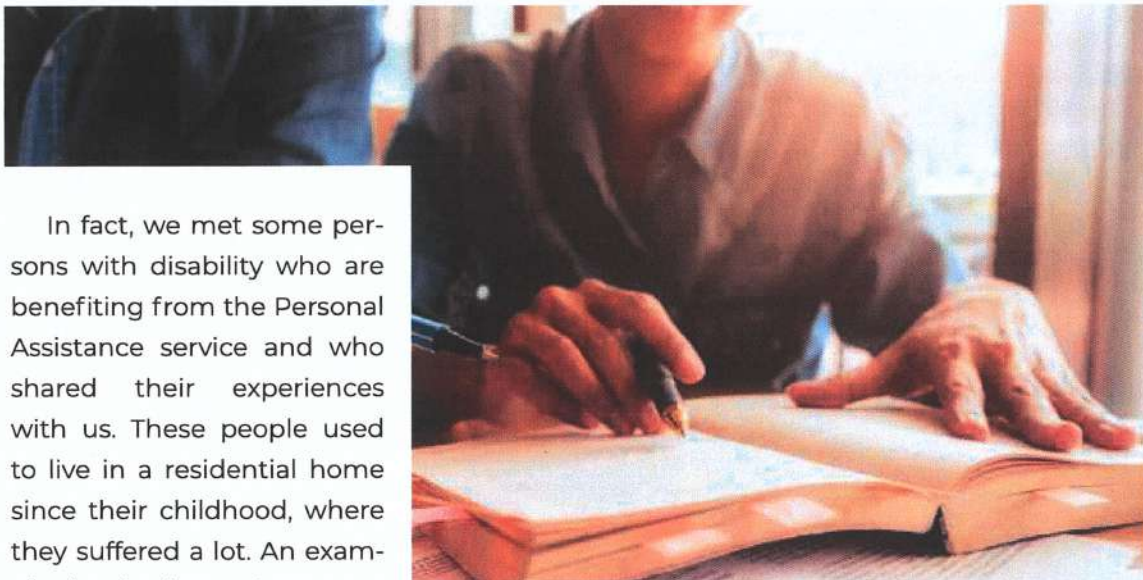
I am 32 years old, and my full-time job is that of a Learning Support Educator (LSE). I work with children who have severe multiple learning disabilities. As a part-time job, I give Personal Assistance to Gayle, a 36-year-old who has Down syndrome.

During the last week of September 2023, I was one of a group of 8 persons who spent a week in Ljubljana Slovenia at the YHD - Society for the Theory and Culture of Disability. This was a study visit about Personal Assistance (PA) organised by the national umbrella organisation for the disability sector, the Malta Federation of Organisations of Persons with Disability (MFOPD).



As a PA myself, my experience in Slovenia was very interesting and hopeful. I am using the word 'Hope' because the people we met in Slovenia made us aware of the significant positive impact that this service is leaving in their lives, allowing them to live an independent life.

They showed us the beauty of independence for a person with a disability, whoever the person may be and whatever disability they may have; that everyone deserves to have a better life and to be given the opportunity to work and fulfil their dreams in the best way they can.



In fact, we met some persons with disability who are benefiting from the Personal Assistance service and who shared their experiences with us. These people used to live in a residential home since their childhood, where they suffered a lot. An example that broke my heart was when they told us how the carers used to leave them wet with their urine for a long period of time. In fact, some of these persons got emotional when they were telling us about their experience. Now that they have the Personal Assistance, they are living their lives completely and with dignity.

Those who are benefiting from the PA service, are succeeding, like you and me. They are living and not just existing. I'm saying this because, for them, the PA is that person who is helping them, in some cases to be their hands and feet, so that they can do the things we normally do every day like for example cooking, gardening, going to work, shopping, etc... Some of the PA service users are working in different fields such as in a factory, in an office, self-employed; one of them also got married, has a beautiful daughter, and addi-

tionally became a grandparent to two beautiful grandchildren. Benefitting from the support of Personal Assistance made the lives of the whole family much better, very beautiful and happy.

My heart rejoiced when I saw so many theories being put into practice and not left written on paper. Thanks to these people with disabilities themselves who run the YHD organisation, who come from different backgrounds but came together for a good cause, work is ongoing to offer others a better life. They are giving others an opportunity to be independent despite having a disability.

I am hoping that as a country, we learn and work together so that these practices will one day start being offered to all people with disabilities, so that they can be more independent and be able to fulfil their individual dreams.

From this experience, I learned how important it is that when you see a person with a disability, you don't just see them from the outside but also recognize that, that person is just like you and me – has feelings, thoughts, has different desires and dreams, just like us. So why shouldn't we continue to support and help them reach their full potential and live an independent life? What is stopping us from doing this? Why is it that difficult to do?

I feel proud that I am a PA because I know that there is a person who is 'living her life' because of my support. This is what she, and those around her tell me. I am making a difference in someone's life. And this must be our motto as human beings!

Jeanette Micallef