Enabling Those Disabled by Society

A Student-Led Initiative to Develop Vocational Rehab in Southern Belize

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Project Background

- In its most rudimentary form, the classification of disability refers to a health condition that prevents an individual from performing socially expected activities.\(^1\)
- From a functional perspective, this means the individual is unable to work for pay, a factor of the World Health Organization’s (WHO) Guidelines to Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR).\(^2\) (See Matrix right with special attention to Livelihood component.)
- According to WHO, disability in fact is a human rights issue: “People are disabled by society, not just by their bodies. These barriers can be overcome, if governments, nongovernmental organizations, professionals and people with disabilities and their families work together.”\(^3\)
- By request of the Rehabilitation Director of Hillside Health Care International, a nonprofit health clinic in the Toledo District, I traveled to Southern Belize for ten weeks to develop a sustainable action plan for vocational rehabilitation.

Objective

To identify resources for vocational rehabilitation in the Toledo District, foster the collaboration of existing partners, and develop a sustainable action plan with ultimate aims to decrease the functional rates of disability in Southern Belize.

Summary of Experience

- Without an agency devoted to the rights of disabled persons in Belize but with advocates for children with special needs, project focus shifted to an action plan within the school system.
- The National Resource Center for Inclusive Education (NaRCIE), the Special Education division of Belizean Ministry of Education, has already established Student Improvement Plans (SIP) similar to the Individual Education Plans in the United States Special Education system.
- Developed an action plan that built upon these SIPs to involve a transition component similar to the Transition Individual Education Plans in the United States.
- As part of the annual meeting with teacher, parents, and child to discuss progress and goals, the addition would include a specific protocol to evaluate the student’s capacity to work for the transition from the school system to the labor force.

World Health Organization’s Community-Based Rehabilitation Matrix

Progress to Date

- Presented action plan at annual NaRCIE conference for Special Educators in Belize City (August 2014)
- At close of conference, action plan accepted by the Ministry of Education and implemented effective immediately for the 2014-2015 academic year
- Detailed methodology and results to project partners unable to attend Belize City conference
- Presented example of student-led initiative at Physical Therapy Association of Georgia Fall conference (October 2014)

Next Steps

- Follow up with NaRCIE at midterm meeting for district progress on TSIP (December 2014). Based on need will determine if feasible to accept invitation to return to Belize City for 2015 NaRCIE conference for further guidance
- Develop Student Physical Therapy internship component on disability education featuring patient families

Project Partners

Special thanks:
- To Emory Global Health Institute’s Field Scholarship for providing funding for this independent project.
- To Lori Northcraft-Baxter, DPT-MPH, Director of Rehabilitation at Hillside Clinic in Punta Gorda, Belize for serving as in-country mentor.
- To Amy Almond, Diagnostician in the Cayo District, for partnering with me in presenting our proposal in Belize City.
- To Francisco Cal, NaRCIE Resource Field Officer for the Toledo District, for helping us make this a logistically feasible action plan.
- To Ms. Ack and Ms. Guy who welcomed me to their Special Education classrooms.
- To the numerous mothers in the Toledo District for sharing their hearts, homes, and families with a foreigner.
- To Sara Pullen, DPT, MPH, CHES for serving as my Emory faculty mentor.

REFERENCES


The photo above represents a typical bimonthly mobile clinic in the Toledo district, predominantly consisting of rural Mayan villages within dense rainforest.