

Guyana Council of Organizations for Persons with Disabilities

Annual Report

20 23



G C O P D



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ABOUT GCOPD

The Guyana Council of Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (GCOPD) was established in January 2009 and was officially registered with the Ministry of Labour Co-operatives Division under the Friendly Societies Act on September 15, of the same year. The organisation serves as the umbrella body for the majority of Organizations for Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), across Guyana, with a present membership of 24 OPDs from Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 10.

The Guyana Council of Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (GCOPD) is the main civil society advocacy body for Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) at the national level, working to promote the rights of PWDs. GCOPD works in partnership with the National Commission on Disability (NCD) and other agencies to change the negative culture towards PWDs that exists in Guyana. The organization also partners with the government, the private sector, and funding agencies to implement various projects and initiatives to benefit the disability community.

LAUNCHES

Orientation and Mobility Phase 2

On November 17th, 2023, the Guyana Council of Organisations for Persons with Disability (GCOPD), in partnership with ExxonMobil, initiated Phase 2 of the Orientation and Mobility Programme. This program is dedicated to bolstering the self-reliance and independence of individuals with visual impairment through comprehensive mobility training.

The launch event attracted representatives from various disability organizations, ExxonMobil, and local and international non-governmental organizations, emphasizing a collaborative effort towards inclusivity. The primary goal of the programme is to equip individuals with visual impairment in Guyana with the skills to navigate their surroundings confidently, promoting autonomy and reducing dependency.

This subsequent phase of the programme facilitates real-life practice opportunities for participants, complemented by ongoing support from the organizations involved. This follow-up training aims to reinforce newly acquired skills and promote sustained independence.

The launch event not only marked the inception of the programme but also served as a platform to raise awareness about the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Guyana. Through advocacy for inclusivity and accessibility, GCOPD hopes to foster a more inclusive environment, empowering individuals with visual impairment to thrive independently.



CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS

Round Table Discussion on Food Security for Persons with Disabilities

The United Nations system in Guyana, in partnership with the Guyana Council of Organizations for Persons with Disabilities (GCOPD), held a round table discussion on food security and malnutrition among persons with disabilities. The event, facilitated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Human Services and Social Security, was attended by key stakeholders including UNICEF, the World Food Programme, and the Guyanese government. The discussion aimed to address the challenges faced by persons with disabilities, particularly in accessing food and healthcare services. Key points of discussion included advocating for inclusive food distribution systems, enhancing access to affordable and nutritious food options, and providing increased support to vulnerable individuals. The round table also aimed to raise awareness about the multifaceted challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Guyana and promote a more equitable and accessible food system.



CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (16TH SESSION)

The 16th Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was held in New York from June 13-15, 2023. Ganesh Singh, GCOPD's Programme Manager attended as a part of the government's delegation to represent the organisation. The conference aimed to discuss the implementation of the CRPD and address the needs and rights of persons with disabilities. Topics covered included the impact of COVID-19, inclusive policies, empowering persons with disabilities, and the role of technology in promoting access and inclusion. Participants shared



experiences, developed strategies, and discussed the need for continued efforts to protect the rights of persons with disabilities. The conference underscored the importance of collaboration between government, civil society, and the private sector to ensure inclusion and representation in decision-making

processes. The conference's outcomes will guide future efforts to protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities globally.

National Youth with Disabilities Conference 2023

The National Youth with Disabilities Conference, the second of its kind, was held in Guyana to advocate for the inclusion and rights of persons with disabilities. The conference was attended by Rosemarie Ramitt, Ganesh Singh, Danielle Anthony, Hon. Charles Ramson Jr., and Her Excellency Nicole Theriat. Day one focused on accessibility for persons with disabilities in daily life, with Ganesh Singh presenting findings from the GCOPD LGE Elections Access Observation. Danielle Anthony presented on the current measures IFES is implementing to facilitate voting for persons with disabilities in Guyana. A



panel discussion with Kerryann Ifill and Erin Brown was held on people with disabilities in leadership and civic life.

Day two began with the observance of Sixteen Days of Activism to Eliminate Gender-Based Violence, with five participants wearing orange

shirts displaying messages about ending violence against women. Presentations and discussions focused on mental health and climate in the context of persons with disabilities. Participants were divided into groups to discuss and give presentations on topics such as promoting inclusion of more youths with disabilities in civic life, advocating for the implementation of the "Elections Access Observation" recommendations, climate change and youths with disabilities, and thematic areas of the draft of the National Youth with Disabilities 2023 Conference Declaration.

(please review this section on the conference. Add number of participants, the fact that participants were all youth with different types of disabilities, they came from different regions and the thematic areas of the

conference were climate change, civic and political participation, mental health and accessibility. The opening ceremony was attended by the names you listed earlier. You don't have to put my name because I was the chair.

Also highlight the panel and who were the presenters and panellists.)

Women with Disabilities Conference on Gender Based Violence

The Women with Disabilities Conference on Gender-Based Violence was held in observance of 16-days of activism to eliminate violence against women and girls. The event was facilitated by Marlon Agrippa of Shades of the Skies, featured presentations, panel discussions, and a working group session. The focus was on providing a background on gender-based violence, building supportive communities, using technology for advocacy, and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse. Dena James shared the UN's zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse. Panel discussions on trauma-informed care and mental health considerations were also held. The conference concluded with an informative breakout session, where participants discussed recommendations for making services for gender-based violence more accessible for persons with disabilities. The conference's impact was evident through the sustained engagement and dedication of attendees, showcasing their commitment to advancing inclusivity and understanding gender-based challenges.



SKILLS TRAINING

Computer Literacy Skills for persons who are Blind / Visually Impaired

GCOPD, in collaboration with the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), and organized by the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, launched a computer literacy training programme to allow persons who are blind or visually impaired to be able to independently navigate digital society. The aim of the workshop was to equip persons with visual impairments with Computer Literacy skills. During the session, the participants were taught basic concepts of computer technology and how to use various computer software. They also had the opportunity to practice these skills in a practical session. Training begun in early July within regions 3 and 4 and was done using a software called Job Access with Speech (JAWS) Screen Reader, which identifies and interprets content displayed on the computer with a text-to-speech output.



Skills Training for Persons with Disabilities

In September 2023, approximately 45 persons with disabilities from across the country were given training in areas such as plumbing, social media marketing, sign language etc. The training course was supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through the Guyana Contingent and was run by the Guyana Ministry of Labour (GML) and the Guyana Council on Persons with Disabilities (GCOPD). The project's objective was to give people with disabilities the knowledge and training they would need to become economically independent and contributing members of society. Because of the program's inclusive design, people with a variety of disabilities were encouraged to take part.

CAMPAIGN

YOUTH ALLIES LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS VOTERS EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

Between March and June 2023, the GCOPD's Youth Allies conducted a Voters Education Mobile Fair across 16 locations in regions 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. The fair aimed to educate young individuals about their rights and responsibilities as voters and to engage them in the political process. Various activities were featured, including games and quizzes on civic education, voter registration, and the significance of voting. Participants learned about the political landscape in Guyana and the importance of democratic participation. The Youth Allies' goal was to encourage more young people to be politically active and to promote civic education and engagement. They hoped to increase voter registration among youth and inspire them to vote in the upcoming general elections. The GCOPD expressed commitment to continuing to engage young people and individuals with disabilities in the democratic process, aiming to increase voter literacy and promote their participation in Guyana's political life.



FUNDRAISER

GCOPD FUNDRAISING RAFFLE

GCOPD conducted a fundraising raffle in early 2023, featuring prizes such as a laptop, electric scooter, flat-screen TV, day trip for two, and consolation prizes. Proceeds from the raffle went towards purchasing a plot of land for the organization. The GCOPD expressed appreciation to the community and businesses for their generous support, emphasizing the importance of promoting accessibility and inclusiveness for persons with disabilities. The organization hopes that the funds raised will positively impact the lives of individuals with disabilities and advance the cause of disability rights in Guyana.

OBSERVATIONS/ REPORTS

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS ACCESS OBSERVATION

The Guyana Council of Organizations for Persons with Disabilities (GCOPD) collaborated with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) to conduct a comprehensive observation of Guyana's Local Government Elections, which took place on June 12th, 2023. The primary objective of this observation mission was to assess the level of access and inclusion for persons with disabilities within the electoral process. While the observation mission acknowledged the presence of certain measures aimed at facilitating access and inclusion, it also identified several areas requiring improvement.

Among the key findings of the observation mission found in the [report](#), one significant aspect was the lack of adequate physical accessibility at numerous polling stations. Many locations lacked essential facilities such as ramps, while others had steep steps that posed challenges for wheelchair users. Additionally, there was a notable deficit of trained voting assistants capable of providing necessary support to persons with disabilities. Insufficient training in assisting individuals with disabilities resulted in instances where voters with disabilities encountered difficulties in casting their votes.

Furthermore, the observation mission highlighted a general lack of awareness among election officials and the broader public regarding the rights and needs of persons with disabilities. This deficiency in awareness extended to data collection practices, with a notable absence of reliable data on the number of eligible voters with disabilities. This absence of data made it challenging to adequately plan and implement necessary accommodations for persons with disabilities.

In response to these findings, the observation mission presented several recommendations aimed at enhancing the accessibility and inclusivity of the electoral process. These recommendations included the provision of appropriate facilities with features designed to cater to the needs of persons with

disabilities, such as ramps and signage. Moreover, it emphasized the importance of comprehensive training programs for election officials and voting assistants to ensure they are equipped to assist individuals with disabilities effectively.

Additionally, the observation mission underscored the necessity of raising awareness and understanding among election officials and the general public about the rights and requirements of persons with disabilities. Lastly, it stressed the importance of improving data collection methods to obtain reliable information on the number and specific needs of eligible voters with disabilities.

Ultimately, GCOPD and IFES expressed their hope that these recommendations would be given due consideration by the Government of Guyana and relevant stakeholders. They emphasized the importance of promoting and protecting the rights and access of all individuals, including those with disabilities, within the electoral process. Furthermore, the findings of the observation mission were shared at the National Youth with Disabilities Conference in November, underscoring the commitment to fostering greater inclusivity and accessibility across all sectors of society.

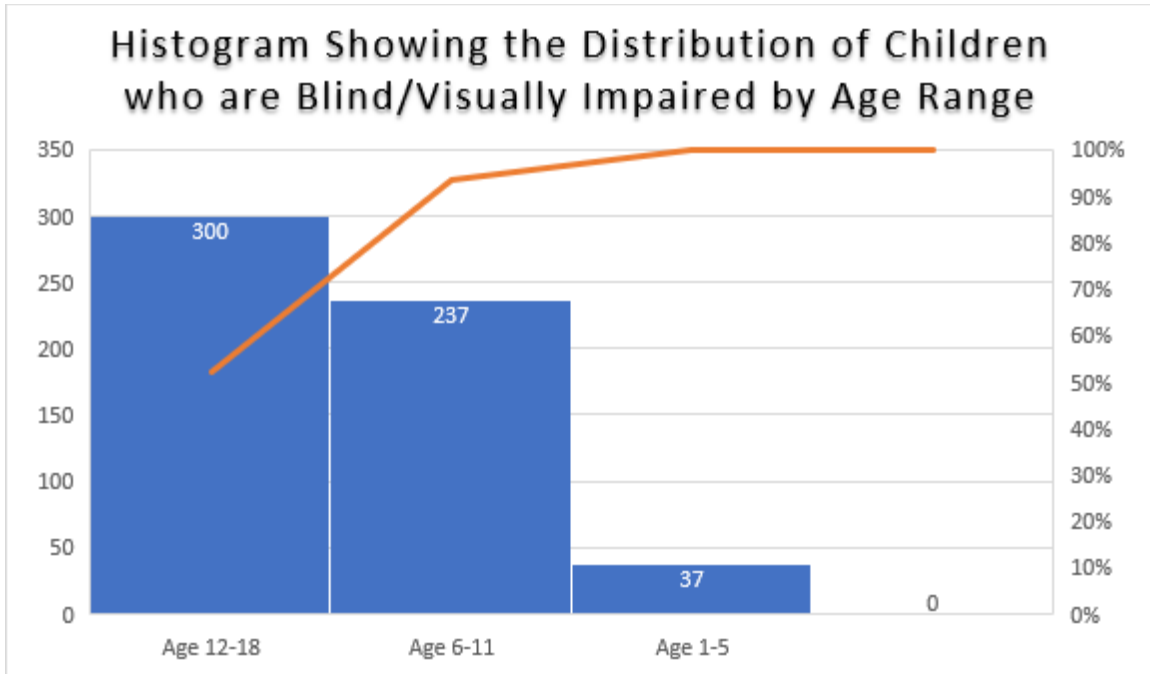
MAPPING OF CHILDREN WHO ARE BLIND/ VISUALLY IMPAIRED ACROSS GUYANA

GCOPD in partnership with the Ministry of Education conducted a research to analyze existing databases and registers to map the number of children who are blind and visually impaired across the ten Administrative Regions of Guyana. This research was conducted over a six months period that encompassed a number of research activities. This mapping explored the prevalence of visual disability in each of the ten administrative regions and serve as a guide to assess the needs of these children and provide services, as well as a valuable tool for policymakers and service providers in planning, monitoring, and evaluating interventions for these children to improve their access to quality and inclusive services ultimately improving their quality of life.

Findings:

The findings of this mapping showed that there is a total of 610 persons that are blind or visually impaired in Guyana, of which 574 are 18 and younger. Below is a table which dissects this number into specific age categories and educational level.

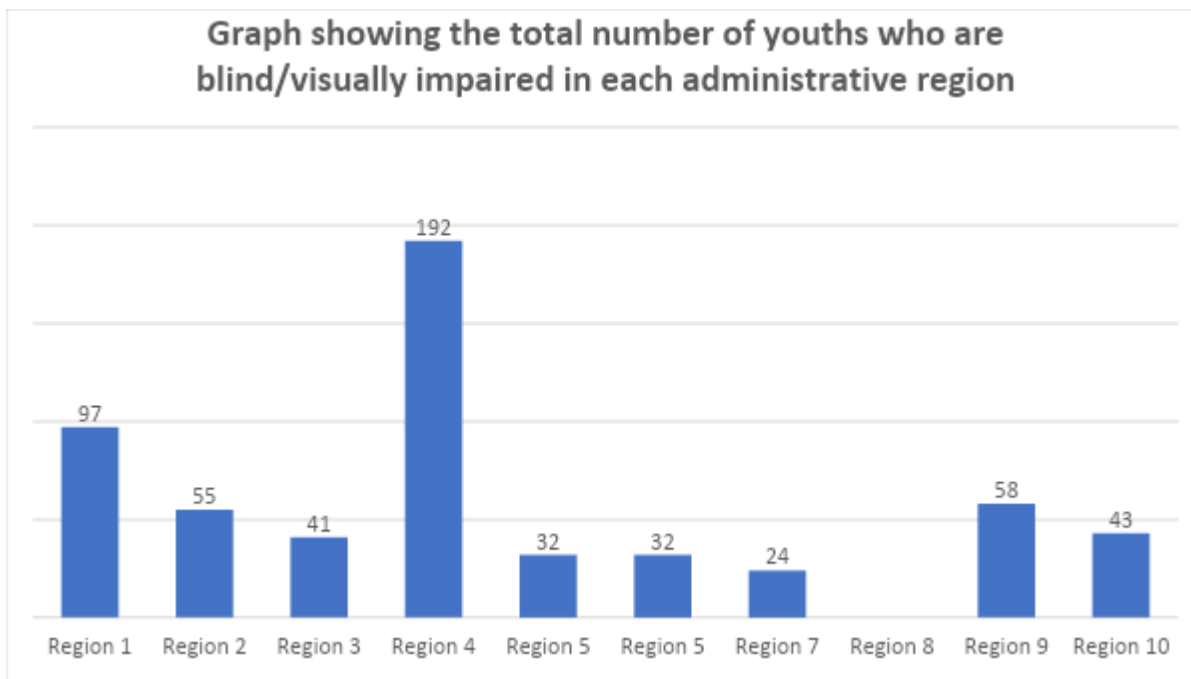
Age Range	Level of Schooling	Number of persons in Guyana who are visually impaired
1-5	Nursery	37
6-11	Primary	237
12-18	Secondary	300



Graph representing the distribution of children who are blind/ visually impaired by age range

The distribution of these youths across the ten administrative regions in Guyana is as follows:

Administrative Region	Number of children who are Blind/ Visually Impaired
1	97
2	55
3	41
4	192
5	32
6	32
7	24
8	0
9	58
10	43



Graphical representation of the distribution of youths in Guyana who are blind/ visually impaired across the administrative regions



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