

# Disability awareness drive

DR CINDY WIGGETT-BARNARD

As we celebrate National Disability Rights Awareness month, culminating in the International Day of People with Disability today, Wednesday December 3, it is time to reflect on what we know (and don't know) about people with disabilities in the greater Stellenbosch area.

It is estimated by the United Nations that about 15% of the world population has some or other disability. National Census data from 2011, however, only report a 7.5% prevalence of disability in our country, and 5.4% in the Western Cape. This is generally accepted as an underestimate, but even if we take this conservative estimate, we expect that at least 8 000 people in the Stellenbosch area have a disability.

Unfortunately, there is no reliable local data to confirm how many and where people disabilities in the Stellenbosch area (including Franschhoek, Klapmuts, Pniel, and surrounds) live. We only know that there are around 2 500 people with disabilities who receive financial support through either a disability grant or a care dependency grant.

Also, fewer than 700 people with disabilities receive support from local disability organisations.

In an attempt to build a better profile and understanding on disability in Stellenbosch in order to plan services and support, the Stellenbosch Disability Network (SDN) was recently cre-

ated under the leadership of the Helderberg Association for Persons with Disabilities (APD).

Although there are some very dedicated local services and resources available to people with disabilities, these are by no means comprehensive.

Our towns, buildings, transport, housing and recreational facilities remain largely inaccessible and/or unaffordable for those with disabilities.

Many children with disabilities do not even receive basic care and education. Persistent unemployment, poverty, discrimination, marginalisation and isolation is still the reality for most people with disabilities, even in our own communities.

Even as we celebrate people with disabilities this month, the need is more than ever to recognise that we still have a long way to go towards true integration and well-being for people with disabilities.

It is imperative we continue the process of raising awareness on the rights and needs of people with disabilities beyond today.

It is only through greater understanding, education and support of and for people with disabilities in our own communities that we can truly become disability aware.

To learn more or share information, contact the SDN at [stellenboschdisability@gmail.com](mailto:stellenboschdisability@gmail.com), or Cindy Wigggett-Barnard from Helderberg Association for Persons with Disabilities, at 021 882 8852 or email [helderberg@wcapd.org.za](mailto:helderberg@wcapd.org.za)

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