

A ROAD LESS TAKEN



NCPEDP - JAVED ABIDI FELLOWSHIP

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BACKGROUND

A fellow from Shillong, Meghalaya comes from a humble family background with 10 Family members. It was 2007 when he was finding ways to continue his higher education, in a situation when his father was not capable of investing on the same landed up in the Ferrando speech and hearing center. The center had agreed to pay for his fees, and support his food and lodging expenses during the period, in return for him working in their spectacle workshop. They had promised to take care of his expenses of travel i.e. INR 80 (to and fro) as well which was denied later and a sum had to be demanded from the family, which already had other members to also be cared for. It was a new journey starting from a place which would require him to travel 18 kilometers to Union Christian College, in Ri Bhoi district to pursue graduation in Geography honors. It was not only the distance that he had to travel but it was a strategic decision to make each day to either walk for 20 minutes through muddy roads to reach a highway from where he had scarce chances to get a private taxi or walk through a shortcut amidst a forest to reach highway early and then walk further till college if he could not get a government bus or a taxi. Amidst all this, he not only had to make strategic arrangements but also face violent discrimination in buses where conductors used to not let persons with disabilities sit for they used to pay their rightful concessional rate for the ticket. So, each day was to make best use of available resources and yet be punctual for both college and workshop, after returning from studies. All towards pursuing higher education in a subject of preference and a college of choice.

“One day, I had to take an assessment test in college at 8 am and to not be late I chose to take the shortcut through dense forest at 7 am, taking along with me my fear of getting mugged or encountering animals on the way to find a taxi on time. It took me 20 minutes and the next 15 minutes of waiting for a taxi on the highway made me literally breakdown because none emerged.

I was terrified and I somehow managed myself to move from there and walk up to college reaching late at 8:40 am drenched in sweat. I was welcomed with a remark by Professor “the least you can do is to be on time for the test, which is followed with judgment on professionalism”. As it was the day of the test, even my friends who used to help me with the notes distanced themselves away from me to help me understand what had to be done for the assessment. It became impossible to continue with the classes that day and worse was to face the missionary sister (Director of Ferrando) back in the center for being late there as well. I took the road less taken that day, yet the incident took such a toll on me that I had to leave my higher studies and return back to my village”.

Although the strategy was well laid he was destined to explore the road not taken since then. He returned back to his village and enrolled himself for Khasi Honors at SNGAP SYIEM College in 2007. Even Though the content was not accessible, the authorities of this college welcomed him for the sake of abiding by the law. It was November 2009 that he went to Bethany society for Sign Language training. He was called to make tactile materials for their Deaf Blind unit and also work as bus conductor for the unit to earn his livelihood. He continued working for the society and became warden of boys’ hostel in 2011.

It was in the year when Ms. Rosa Wahlang started working as principal for Jyoti Sroat School, being managed by the society, that Ferdinand got the chance to handle Deaf Blind unit by himself. He also became the president of Meghalaya Deaf Association in 2014 when he realized the diverse needs of students and then enrolled himself in B.Ed in Special Education in 2015; completed in 2017. He then went on to pursue Masters; although this time without compromising his education in Linguistic Department, NEHU. He had mobilized all DPOs 2018 under one federation known as the Federation of PwDs and was elected as Chairman. He completed masters in 2019 and began with his M.Phil study which is now completed in 2022. Same year he joined his PhD.

He did not give up the charm of also being on job along with his education, this time. And, he was not alone to make that decision for Veronica was god sent to support him; his wife who has been together since setting the right couple goals. She was also working at Bethany Society back then till 2019 when both ventured into setting up a guest house through NHFDC loan; and then Covid 19 pandemic disrupted it. It was in 2021 that he found out about the fellowship through NCPEDP social media page and decided to take another journey questioning why people with disabilities don't have access to public transportation.

PROGRESS OVERVIEW

Introduction:

About the status of accessible transportation in global / Indian context and that in Meghalaya. (Most potent facts and figures to highlight the need very strongly”

NOVEMBER 2021 TO APRIL 2022

- He attended a half yearly capacity building workshop held in New Delhi in October 2021 which helped him with arriving at a specific theme of intervention i.e to introduce elements of accessible transportation in Meghalaya.
- He started to reach out to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the region like Barefoot Trust, Bethany Society, Mary Rice Centre for special education and Disabled People’s Organisation (DPOs) like Khasi Disability Association, Meghalaya Deaf Association, Meghalaya Liberation for Visual Impairment, Blind Lead Trust, All Meghalaya Association for Persons with Disabilities to apprise them about his intervention, gain support for community mobilization, and conducting the study to identify preferences and needs of Persons with Disabilities. Unfortunately, the past friction amongst the organizations lead to a loop sided response for a cause that’s beyond human behavior. He then utilized support of barefoot trust and mere endorsement of Bethany society to begin his evidence based advocacy.

- Simultaneously, he started preparing his study design with consistent aid received from his mentor Ms. Amvalika Senapathi, Deputy Director, Shishu Sarothi, Assam. He then started to reach out to the concerned legislators and executives appointed in the target localities like Laitumkhrach, IGP and Police Bazaar (Khyndailad). He reached out to the headmen of Laitumkhrach in November 2021. To gain no objection (certificate) support for his study. He also reached out to Minister of Legislative Assembly (MLA) from Laitumkhrach Constituency, Dr. Ampareen Mazareen Lyngdoh to get NOC and support. He reached out to the commissioner for persons with disabilities to get support and NOC for the research. He also reached out to the minister of social welfare Mr. Kyrmen Shylla on 22nd November 2021, 19th January 2022 and again on April 2022 who welcomed his presentation about accessible transportation along with representatives of Barefoot Trust, Deputy Commissioner Ms. Isawanda Laloo in February 2022 to ask permission to hold an awareness cum signature campaign for the public at Police Bazar (Khyndailad) and media agencies in the month of March 2022.
- He received no response from the press/ media partners but only gained support from 'The Meghalayan' who not only acknowledged his work but extended it to cover the events that he would organize in the future. He also wrote an RTI to the Public Information officer In March 2022 to inquire about accessible transportation.
- He also started to reach out to the department related to his intervention starting with District Transportation Officer Mr. Dwik Lamin in March 2022 which also initiated the experience of bureaucratic aversion for he did not oblige to take a call without a go ahead from the Commissioner and Secretary, of Transportation Department.
- Please click on the links below for more details on Meeting with DTO
- He placed a request with the Commissioner and Secretary of Transport department Mr. M.R. Synrem IAS in March 2022 in such a scenario denied 4 consecutive requests and directed him to meet Managing Director of Meghalaya Transport Operations Mr. who chose to maintain unresponsive state for the meeting to not happen.

- He also wrote a letter to the office of Chief Minister in April 2022 including an Open letter and received a response of unavailability from the assistant and they will let him know of future availability.
- He reached the then Urban Development Minister Mr. Sniawbhalang Dhar, in March 2022 and had followed up with the PA of the minister but he never received a response back.
- Received a letter from the Deputy Secretary of Social Welfare Department to the Commissioner for persons with disabilities to approve for his appointment.
- He made extensive efforts at the very beginning to gain support for his work towards conducting primary study, reach out to the community members in the region and take support of legislators and executives. It only worked with a minority of legislators and executives and required patience to withstand red tapism in the majority of cases. It has to be faced by going from community to its representatives up to judiciary; taking support of media and influencers to follow non violent means of evidence based advocacy. It is for ensuring due course of action and trusting people in power to transform the policy. However, statutory advocacy can be only pursued on mutual agreement else the advocates are eventually left with the option to only go ahead with self advocacy or citizen advocacy or similar forms of advocacy where the affected and awakened only participate. Such a scenario in an excited state may also end up in activism while governance structure prefers to remain inert. It rather takes punitive measures / guarantees to act in case the nature of it changes into activism.

MAY 2022 TO OCTOBER 2022

- He continued evidence collection during the period through mixed methodology, using quantitative tools like surveys and qualitative tools like unstructured interviews to develop case studies helpful to understand needs and challenges of persons with disabilities by developing a baseline report. In the report there were many issues that PwDs, DPOs leaders and parents of children with disabilities had narrated during interviews, case studies and group discussion. Most of the PwDs stated about no reservation of seats available in buses, lack of accessibility and the buses do not travel to remote places. While traveling by bus they faced traffic jams and the bus route was inconvenient for them. The cost of traveling was also very high, especially when traveling by taxi. Most PwDs have to hire a taxi when they travel around Shillong and buses available do not go to those inner routes. 16.5% of the PwDs stated that there was a lack of support from the public, bus conductors and drivers. They faced a lot of discrimination and were looked down upon by the public in general. They felt that the drivers took advantage of their disability and they had to pay extra fares at times. Those who use wheelchairs cannot travel by bus as it is not accessible and they have to pay higher fare than other passengers in shared taxis.
- He furthered his outreach to stakeholders of transportation services by reaching out to the President of Khasi Hills Taxi Association Mr. Wanbok Jyrwa in May 2022.
- A meeting was later finalized in which he apprised the association on sensitivities to follow with customers with disabilities, aid them in embarkment and disembarkment especially persons with locomotor disability. The president shared that it is difficult to facilitate the transfer of persons with disabilities on a busy road because they take time to do so and it creates a jam which ends up into a brawl between traffic police and the taxi driver or the former penalizing the latter. Thus, the drivers were forced to deny services to such passengers. Although, he agreed to look at a mechanism which can resolve the same and agreed to offer concessional rates for consumers with disabilities.

- It was also later followed up by the President, with him reaching out to all the taxi stand operators to support transfer of Persons with locomotor disabilities at least in the stands.
- He also intervened to use mass media to sensitize the stakeholders on the issue of accessible transportation. He reached out to Radio Mirchi (R.J Nicky) and Red FM (Mr. Desmon) who only considered doing so on a commercial basis rather than as part of social responsibility. He likewise proposed a televised panel discussion on Doordarshan with the Deputy Commissioner Ms. Isawanda Laloo in 2022 who had agreed to support the same but due to her promotion and transfer to a new department, the newly appointed DC did not agree to sponsor the same. Later, he proposed the same with Minister of Social Welfare Mr. Kyrmen Shylla in October 2022 and who sponsored an amount of INR 20,000 for the same. The money was transferred to Barefoot Trust who was not aware of it until reminded and the panel discussion happened much later than expected. The panel discussion could not take place in 2022 as the people for the panelist did not finalize and come to an agreement to a given date to hold the Panel discussion. Further the venue to hold the panel discussion was already booked for other programs hence it was delayed. It was only after the State Resource Centre agreed to hold the event that the panel discussion was finally held for DPO leaders and PWDs in 2023. Mr. Kyrmen Shylla also agreed to raise the agenda during the assembly session given he gained power again after the elections to be held in March. Unfortunately after winning the election he became the Minister of a different department.

NOVEMBER 2022 TO APRIL 2023

- Cross disability training on accessible transportation for DPOs in collaboration with State Resource Centre on Disability Affair, in November 2022 at State Resource Centre conference room where 24 DPO leaders participated in the training. DPO leaders' post that started followed it up with conducting similar sensitization workshops for their target community.

- He received a letter of appointment from the Deputy Secretary of Transport Department in January 2023 directed the Managing Director of Meghalaya Transport Corporation to meet him and he went to meet the Managing Director. However the officer did not come to work on two occasions therefore he put up an appointment with MTC in February 2023. He followed up on the same and the meeting did not happen with MD not being available.
- Continued unstructured interviews to develop case studies and generate social media awareness by recording and circulating the same over social media.
- Press conference was conducted on accessible transportation on 23rd March 2023 at Shillong Press Club. The recommendations on accessible transportation were discussed with 12 media partners. The Meghalayan again showed interest towards the topic and started it again. They started to regularly cover the activities of Ferdinand.
- The Federation of Persons with Disability in Leadership of Ferdinand gave a set of recommendations to the social welfare minister in April 2023. The newly appointed Social Welfare minister Mr. Paul Lyngdoh had to be contacted to brief about the issues of accessible transportation but the minister directed the appointment to the Director of Social Welfare Mr. D. D. Shira.
- December 2022, Chief Election commissioner requested Ferdinand and barefoot trust to conduct training for all government officials for **accessible elections** given that they had done it before in 2018. From 7th -27th Jan 2023 the training was conducted in 12 districts of Meghalaya. He then reached out to DCs of the district and asked for an appointment. During the meeting he explained to them about accessible transportation and gave them suggestive measures to make the upcoming elections accessible in terms of transportation as well. Two DCs, West Garo Hills and East Garo Hills requested for actionable points and rest advised him to reach out to the social welfare department.

- The barefoot trust took the responsibility and has yet not submitted the recommendations. The delay in proactive measure as part of advocacy is equally required by the advocates, else delay may lead to change in human resources leading the department, or showcase an unprofessional outlook which cannot be trusted henceforth, or even lead people to draw flak towards the community itself at another extreme.
- He wrote articles in The Meghalayan and published it.
- He wrote to the Deputy Commissioner, East Khasi Hills on 7th February 2023 for introducing wall painting on accessible transportation and the permission was denied.
- He also wrote to the President of the Shillong Bar Association on 8th February 2023 for support for Accessible Transportation.

MAY 2023 TO OCTOBER 2023

- The Director of Social Welfare Mr. D.D. Shira sent a letter on 1st May 2023 to give an appointment to Ferdinand at the **Directorate of Social Welfare Department** to discuss the issues of Accessible Transportation. During the meeting the superintendent of Social welfare, Assistant Commissioner for persons with disabilities Mrs. Brigit Warshong was also present in the meeting. During the meeting, the Director decided to call a High Level Meeting. He then decided to get an appointment again with the Minister of Social welfare to inquire about the formation of the **State Level Action Committee** but the Minister was so busy that he made him wait for hours without honoring the commitment of the meeting. Ferdinand demanded for a high level meeting with DPO leaders and other government officials related to transportation and submitted a letter to the Director demanding for 1. Implement Accessible India campaign related to transportation 2. To implement provisions of RPwD 2016, related to accessible transportation. Received a letter of appointment from the Director of social welfare Mr. D.D Shira for a meeting on the 4th May at the Directorate of Social Welfare.

- He wrote a letter to **Deputy Chief Minister** on 16th May 2023 who is also the minister of Public work department to request compliance with Harmonised Guidelines during any constructions of the footpath in Laitumkhrah area.
- He wrote a letter to the **Local MLA** Mrs.Ampareen Lyngdoh on the 18th May 2023 to request support and take necessary action to make accessibility possible for PwDs.
- He also wrote a letter to the **Commissioner for persons with disabilities** on the 1st June 2023 to request information related to Accessible Transportation taken by the social welfare department.
- DPO leaders shared their experiences at the **Meeting at Secretariat** that was called in the month of June 2023 at the Secretariat Main building. They shared recommendations to make transportation accessible, and discussion regarding the letter submitted by Ferdinand during the high level meeting and it was concluded with him demanding for a State Level Action Committee.
- Assistant commissioner of PwDs will give sensitization training to service providers in transportation.
- The training has yet to happen however, a crucial outcome was that they formed a state level consultative committee consisting of 12 members and Ferdinand became a part of it and is chaired by Chief Secretary of the State. In the process of formation, he has also requested the Minister of Social Welfare, Mr. Paul Lyngdoh to expedite the process who gave verbal affirmation. The Commissioner and Secretary through the Deputy Secretary had directed the Commissioner for Person with Disabilities to submit the report about the demand had taken action.
- He reached out to the **Director Directorate of School Education and Literacy** to request support for accessible transportation on the 27th June 2023.

- He also Wrote to the Commissioner and Secretary of Social Welfare Department Mr. Parvin Bakshi on the 10th July 2023 to fast track the formation of the committee and to request to take action as per the discussion during the High level meeting held on the 5th June 2023.
- He also wrote to the Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities on 11th July 2023 to inform them about the issues and the delay of the action as per the High level meeting and he received a letter from the office of the Commissioner for persons with disabilities stating the office is taking up the matter with concerned authorities relating to accessible transportation.
- Received a letter from the Joint Director of School Education and Literacy on the 13th July 2023.
- He again wrote to the Social Welfare Minister Mr. Paul Lyngdoh on the 21st July 2023 to request to take action for making accessible transportation for PwDs in the state.
- Received a Copy letter from the Deputy Secretary of Transport Department Smti P. M. Sangma to the Commissioner of Transport To take the necessary action for making transportation accessible for PwDs in the State.
- Wrote a letter on the 21st August 2023 to the Director of Sports and Youth Affairs Mrs. Isawanda Laloo to ask for financial assistance to conduct the Run for Accessible Transportation. He called the Director of Sport and youth affairs to get permission and sponsorship to organize a run for accessible transportation. She responded to meet later which could not happen given her responsibilities leading 4 different departments.
- So, he was advised to meet Assistant Director, Mr. Lari Kharpran and then promised to look at the available budget for accommodating it.
- He put an appointment with the Sports Minister but no response from him.
- Wrote a new letter on the 28th August 2023 to the Deputy Commissioner of East Khasi Hills District. Mrs. R. M. Kurbah asked the financial assistant to conduct the panel discussion for different stakeholders as per instruction from the dealing officer.
- Received a letter from the Joint Secretary of the Social Welfare Department Ms. S. B. Marak to the Commissioner for persons with disabilities to take necessary action to make accessible transportation for PwDs.

- He writes to the Commissioner for Person with Disabilities to enquire about the First meeting of the State Consultative Committee but no response from them.
- He met the Leader of the Opposition Party Mr. Charles Pyngrope in October 2023. To highlight needs and issues of accessible transportation during the assembly session, he was advised to meet a sitting MLA from the opposition party Mr. Brightstar Marbaniang well regarding the same. He also apprised him that raising of question means the request has to be placed in advance with legislature in advance and thus the same can be picked by in the later session of assembly.
- He then planned his visit to the aforementioned MLA who promised to raise the question in the upcoming assembly session and helped in establishing contact with the Chief Minister's office.
- He made an appointment with the Chairman of the Committee to discuss the first meeting of the Committee but no response from him.
- Wrote to the Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs Mr. Shakliar Warjri to get an appointment to request financial assistance from the directorate of sports and youth affairs to conduct the Run for accessible Transportation.
- He followed up the request with Deputy Chief Minister, Mr. Prestone Tyngsong who also handles Public Works Department on November 2023 to make the footpaths accessible for persons with disabilities and copied the request to local MLA of Laitumkhrah Dr. Ampareen Lyngdoh; who promised to follow up with Deputy CM. The same meeting also served for Ferdinand to update the Minister about the ground scenario and he highlighted issues like absence of tactile footpaths, inaccessible footpaths, accessibility of buses, reservation of seats and problems with concessional rates in buses tickets. She was able to get a broken patch of footpath repaired and introduce tactile paths in certain patches. He met the Local MLA of Laitumkhrah area to discuss on the Accessible footpaths that are under construction with ramps.

- He met with the equal opportunity cell of St. Anthony's college and Shillong College in 2023 to collaborate in organizing the awareness cum signature campaign in the respective colleges. He also organized an awareness campaign for Lady Keane and Women's College.
- 3022 students from the colleges were made aware about Accessible transportation.
- It was further decided to have a sensitization workshop for operators of taxi services and the same was proposed to the office of Commissioner of disability, who agreed for it and also advised to do it for human resources deployed with state run bus services. A request was placed by their office with the Transportation department and the latter was requested to furnish the number of participants to take part in the sensitization programme so that the office of the CPWD could plan for the workshop and expenditure. A response from the transport department was not received and thus the workshop did not take place.
- To establish regular connection with the stakeholders a second sensitization drive was conducted on the **International Deaf Day** where a short sensitization program was done for the taxi drivers association of Shillong. It also gained support of Commissioner for persons with disabilities Ms. Isabella Marak, Assistant commissioner for person with disabilities Mrs. Brigit Warshong, Executive Director Bethany Society, Ms. Bertha Dakhar and President of Taxi Drivers Association of Shillong region at Police Bazar (Khyndailad). It also helped in sensitization of taxi drivers on basic sign language which will help them in facilitating a welcoming outlook towards people, hard of hearing.
- A panel discussion with the support of State Resources Centre on Disability Affairs attended by organizations of persons with disabilities for sharing their views on the different issues of accessible transportation. Detailed agenda that was discussed.
- He wrote to the Principal Secretary of the Social welfare Department to review the Functioning of the Committee after the suggestion from Mentor.

- Meeting with the dealing officer of the Finance Department Mrs. D. Kurbah to inquire about the financial assistant for Panel Discussion and he received a letter from the Assistant DC that the proposal had been rejected.

NOVEMBER 2023 TO APRIL 2024

- He organised a Panel Discussion with Federation for person with disabilities in collaboration with Forefront media on Accessible transportation.
- The Government of Meghalaya had notified the urban department about the Shillong Urban Mobility policy 2024
- He convinced the government through the office of commissioner for Persons with disabilities to organise a training for taxi driver and other stakeholder.
- The Government called for a Second meeting of the State level Consultation Committee on Accessible Transportations.
- Review of functioning of the Committee on accessible Transportation. The government had added the following functions of the committee.
- Meeting with DGP. The first woman DGP of Meghalaya had a meeting to discuss on issues with transportation for PwDs and other public issues.
- In a significant step towards inclusive public transportation, an awareness programme was organised at Soso Tham Auditorium by the Transport Department on 10th June 2024 Tuesday.
- The event, aimed at sensitizing drivers about accessible transportation for persons with disabilities, was attended by numerous drivers, heads of various drivers' associations, and several specially-abled individuals from various societies.
- The programme had SB Marak, Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) as the chief guest, and A Tyngkan, Assistant Commissioner of Transport, Meghalaya as the guest of honour.
- In her address, Marak highlighted the recent measures taken to enhance public transport accessibility for persons with disabilities.

- Meeting With Chief Minister with collaboration with Federation of Person with disabilities in relation to the 50 EV buses and other disability rights. The meeting was held on the 28th June -2024 at the Main Secretariat building Government of Meghalaya, to discussed about the issues of accessible Transportation in Meghalaya related with the 50 EV Buses to ensure that 25% from these buses should be made accessible for Persons with Disabilities and other Issues related with the rights of Persons with Disabilities.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- He was able to convince the Local MLA of Laitumkhrah Constituency Dr. Ampareen Lyngdoh to make the footpath of Laitumkhrah Main road accessible with ramps.
- He was able to get the government to form the State Level Consultative Committee to look into issues related to transportation for PwDs.
- He was able to get the support of the Social Welfare Minister to look into the matters of Accessible Transportation.
- He was able to conduct cross disability training for PwDs, DPOs leaders and other youth to empower them with leadership skills.
- He was able to collaborate with NGOs and DPOs in the State to organize awareness programs to the public as well as to the society.



EXPERIENCE IN THE FELLOWSHIP

- Trainings: Capacity building, Advocacy, Health, Policy, Livelihood, Media advocacy, Press release training, Collaboration, Management, Leaderships Role and Research Design are the major experience that help me to go through the fellowship and it change him on what he become today and it encourage him to go forwards and find his vision till achievement.
- Learning: Learning on Cross Disability Network with the Fellows and learning how to face new challenges, understanding the mechanism/ functioning of the government, lobbying the government, tackling the challenges on how to work with cross disability, lack of opportunity for PwDs in decision making/ programs/ events etc.

- Exposure: International Visitor Leadership Program (Everyone Counts! Building Capacity in the Persons with Disabilities Community.) The International Visitors Leadership Program is one of the best opportunities in my life which I will remember for a lifetime. It will bring about many benefits in the field of Disabilities especially for my communities in the State of Meghalaya, India. From the beginning of the program I had an expectation to gain more knowledge, experience, to learn new ideas, get exposure to different culture and also to use the experience for the welfare of Persons with Disabilities and youth to bring about an impact in the society. When I reached in the United States of America, my first experience was to witness the excellence hospitality of the organizers and the program is well prepared which included accommodation. Transportation is also accessible for all which includes accessible information. The similarities that I had witnessed in the four States are accessibility for all people and every meeting was conducted on time. Everyone was punctual. The following are my experiences during the tour and meeting.
- CAP Technology and evaluation Center – provide personal needs assessments to DOD employees with disabilities and wounded/ ill and injured services members. Assistive Technology. Education and demonstration.
- Methodology Research on Sign language Accessible Library for Deaf Students & deaf Blind students.
- Artificial intelligence and Algorithmic Fairness Initiative. Youth@work to educate young workers about their workplace rights and responsibilities and to help employers create positive work experience for young adults. E-RACE is an initiative of EEOC to ensure workplaces are free of race and color discrimination.
- Disability rights in the U.S and global foreign policy of the US.
- Activities of National Disability Employment Awareness Month.
- Sport Equipment for People with Disabilities.
- Mentoring program, Youth Leadership Raising and Youth Leadership Forum.

- Accessible Adventure equipment for boat ride, climbing high on a rock or sliding down a zip line. Building social and Character Skills, forming teams and transforming people's views.
- Collaborative efforts to ensure accessibility and inclusion in all programs, policies, public rights of way, and municipal buildings in Boston.
- Youth transition service, accessible transportation and Emergency preparedness.
- Family support network, Family to Family Health information & Family transition project. Advocates for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to ensure that they can live, learn and play in communities across the state. Family Support Network that helps these families to connect with the right resource/professional. Family transition project helps families and guardians of the institutionalized PWDs to understand the options of living in a community. Family to Family Health Information Centre assists families on their health related concerns about PWDs under the age of 22. Consumer Stipend Program provides stipend to PWDs with ID or DD for attending conferences or training on disability issues.
- Equal Employment Division:- The Equal Employment Division enforces the Georgia Fair Employment Practices Act by investigating claims of unlawful discrimination made by those seeking employment within the State of Georgia government or those that believe they have been discriminated against as an employee within the State of Georgia government. It also provides educational programs that promote voluntary compliance with equal employment laws.
- The Equal Employment Division is committed to promoting an understanding of the Georgia Fair Employment Practices Act.
- Fair Housing:- The Fair Housing Division enforces the Georgia Fair Housing Law by investigating claims of unlawful discrimination in housing throughout the State of Georgia. In addition, the Fair Housing Division provides educational outreach and training to promote voluntary compliance with Fair Housing laws. It is committed to promoting an understanding of the Georgia Fair Housing Law.

- Education & Outreach program. The program includes providing education and outreach throughout the state of Georgia by conducting technical training and workshops in the areas of Equal Employment & Fair Housing. The Agency also hosts and participates in conferences, symposiums, panels, and other related events.
- Family and Special Saturday Program is an Initiative wonderful time for the children to enjoy free play, music therapy, and extra attention from FOCUS caregivers and volunteers. Oh, and the parents enjoy the break!
- Equipment Grant Program. It provides grants for children with developmental and physical disabilities who would benefit from the equipment to support participation in daily life.
- Challenges: One of the main challenges during the fellowship is the barriers in communication especially during the meeting with policy makers, government officials and with private organizations/ institutions as none of the above institutions/organizations have their own interpreter. Sometimes an interpreter is available and sometimes interpreters are not available during meetings and conversation. Therefore the only solution for me is to go ahead through a written form of communication. The second challenge is the unwillingness of many private organizations to be partners without pay and the slow process for any work from government officials tends to lead to the pending work and it affects the timeline according to the action plan.

RESOURCES

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on their social media**

