



# A Right for an Equal Life (Empowerment & Employment of Young Adults with Intellectual Disability)

Ebtessama Foundation



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(Empowerment & Employment of Young Adults with Intellectual Disability)

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| Region         | MENA   |
| Country        | Egypt  |
| Organization   | Ebtessama Foundation   |
| Name           | A Right for An Equal Life (Empowerment & Employment of Young Adults with Intellectual Disability)                        |
| Category       | Skills Development   |
| Start date     | 2010   |
| End date       | Ongoing  |
| Partners       | Social Fund for Development (Funder), Mobinil (funder)<br>Ministry of Education (Partner), Ministry of Tourism (Partner) |
| UN involvement | UNICEF (Funder & Partner)  |

## 1. Background and description <sup>2</sup>

In Egypt, until early adulthood, most young adults with mental disabilities are enrolled in either public or private specialized schools. Several NGOs target young adults with mental disabilities and provide them with basic training in life skills, some basic academic skills and vocational training, as well as many extracurricular activities like sports, music and art. However, none promote and facilitate the integration of young adults with mental disabilities in the labour market.

Existing rehabilitation programmes offer vocational training, focus on traditional crafts, create artificially closed welcoming environments and offer superficial jobs to some of their graduates in their vocational centres. Individuals with mental disabilities are often excluded from the work sphere because of employers' misconceptions and rejection. Employers perceive individuals with mental disabilities as being difficult to deal with in terms of communicating and integrating with colleagues and unable to be productive and fulfil job requirements. They and therefore assume that they will not be able to fit into the work environment and interact with people.

This reality was confirmed in Egypt by a study conducted by the Ebtessama Foundation in early 2008, which covered 30 public schools for young persons with mental disabilities, 20 private schools and NGOs, and 20 hotels. The study revealed the social and cultural barriers that affect the employability of the young adults with mental disabilities. The main reason

<sup>1</sup> Desk Review (May-September 2014); Inquiry Form (5 September 2014); Interview (02 March 2015); Write up (04 March-26 May 2015); Final validation (October 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Ms. Magda Samy, Chairperson of Ebtessama Foundation, 2 March 2015.





that individuals with mental disabilities are almost absent from the labour market is their poor education/rehabilitation, in addition to the negative attitudes of parents, businesses and society as a whole.

Before the programme was officially launched, a pilot phase was conducted between 2009 and 2010. Ms. Magda Samy personally trained 15 young adults with mental disabilities and secured jobs for them in the hotel where she works. Of the 15, 12 were able to complete the programme successfully, be employed and maintain their jobs for more than one year. Some have been promoted within their departments and others were moved to guest contact positions. Based on that experience and observation and on positive feedback from hotel managers, a full-fledged programme, the 'A Right For An Equal Life' initiative, was launched in 2011.

### Organization profile <sup>3</sup>

The Ebtessama Foundation was established in 2007 by Ms. Magda Samy with the aim of supporting people with disabilities and their families to acquire equal opportunities in life and tackle problems they face; raise the quality of needed services; and support their inclusion and integration in society.

Despite the multiplicity of organizations working in this field, most focus on the childhood stage and there is a lack of organizations working to develop the competencies and skills of young adults with a disability, preparing them to be ready for leading independent lives with dignity and pride. Based on the findings of a survey it conducted, which shed light on the social and cultural barriers that

affect the employability of young adults with mental disabilities, the mission of the Foundation is to advocate for the rights of young adults with mental disabilities to lead a decent and productive life, in addition to a secure future. Therefore, the Foundation developed a capacity-building intervention entitled, 'A Right for an Equal Life'.



**Name:** Ahmed Moustafa  
**Department:** Steward  
**Hotel:** Moevenpick Al Sokhna  
**Disability:** Intellectual  
**IQ:** 40

<sup>3</sup> www.ebtessama.com (Arabic).



## 2. Goal and objectives <sup>4</sup>

### 2.1. Goal

This intervention aims at empowering and employing young adults with mental disabilities, support their inclusion and integration in the work sphere, grant them decent jobs and help them to become productive members of society in order to secure their futures.

### 2.2. Objectives

*The short-term objectives are to:*

- Enhance the integration and acceptance of young adults with mental disabilities;
- Improve the employability of young adults with mental disabilities;
- Increase the income of young adults with mental disabilities;
- Change the perception of employers regarding the productive capacity and ability of young adults with mental disabilities to integrate smoothly into society.

*The long-term objectives are to:*

- Increase the nation's productive labour force;
- Establish the independence and security of young adults with mental disabilities;
- Introduce a productive new social segment;
- Diminish social inequalities.

## 3. Target group

### 3.1. Age group

The target group was young adults with mental disabilities, aged 18 (the working age in Egypt) to 30 years.

### 3.2. Gender considerations <sup>5</sup>

In the targeted schools, whoever is in the classes is enrolled in the intervention regardless of gender. No specific strategies were used to ensure equal numbers of males and females because the target group depends on who is available in the class. The number of males in a class usually exceeds the number of females as many parents prefer to have their daughters get married when possible regardless of the mental disability, rather than having them at school. Parents of those who do stay in school reject the idea of having their

daughters employed far from their homes and prefer to have the social security pension granted to people with disability by the Ministry of Social Solidarity rather than having them be employed.

### 3.3. Ethnic / disability considerations <sup>6</sup>

According to the Vancouver Declaration (1992) by Disabled Peoples International, people with disabilities are known to be the poorest of the poor. Work is the major means of generating income for the majority of humanity. When disabled individuals who are totally dependent on their families without chance to work in dignity are given the right to work and be employed, they are able to earn a living, become independent, receive social and health insurance and earn a government pension. They thus gain the right to lead a decent life, have a secure future and be responsible for themselves.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Ms. Magda Samy, Chairperson of Ebtessama Foundation, 2 March 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



In terms of any restrictions, the participants should have an IQ of 40 or higher to be enrolled in the programme. However, implementers try to give everyone a fair chance to work, especially because many beneficiaries have exceeded their expectations. Beneficiaries with certain severe mental conditions or who take certain strong medications cannot be enrolled as they are unable to adapt to the routine of work.

### **3.4. Targeting the most marginalized / most at risk <sup>7</sup>**

Parents of children with mental disabilities do not perceive their children as being able to be productive in society or be employed. Usually, young adults with mental disabilities find themselves either sitting on the streets waiting for charity or working in supermarkets in mediocre jobs in exchange for pay.

The Egyptian labour law obliges employers to have at least 5 per cent of people with disability among the total number of employees, but this law is not always enforced. Employers circumvent it by: (1) hiring workers with minor work injuries or chronic diseases and registering them as people with disabilities, in order to comply with the aforementioned quota; and (2) hiring people with disabilities and paying them a very low salary, i.e., 300 Egyptian pounds, which is equivalent to around \$50. Moreover, they do not require the actual presence of these workers on site, who only must put their names on the records for reporting purposes to indicate their compliance with the law.

This intervention aims at reducing the inequity facing young adults with mental disabilities and enabling them to acquire the ability to develop their own careers to ensure their financial security.

### **3.5. Human rights programming <sup>8</sup>**

When it comes to employment, there is discrimination between disabled and non-disabled people. ‘A Right for An Equal Life’ aims at equalizing opportunities and eliminating the social, cultural and physical barriers that may prevent people with a disability from having equal opportunities for employment.

According to a study conducted by the United Nations, although Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights acknowledges the right of the disabled to have an equal chance to work, have decent jobs and earn a living, “When persons with disabilities are employed, they are more likely to be in low paying jobs, at lower occupational levels and with poor promotional prospects and working conditions. More often than their peers, they are in part-time jobs or temporary positions, often with few possibilities for career development”. <sup>9</sup>

### **3.6. Youth involvement**

*Youth are involved in three main activities:*

1. Youth with mental disabilities, together with students and recent graduates of the Department of Psychology (Faculty of Art), Cairo/Ein Shams Universities, take part in round-table discussions used to develop the physiological activities that are part of the ‘social incubator’ sessions (see below). They are selected based on several interviews, which most of the time result in their selection as future implementers of the programme. The round tables are used as a basis for tailoring activities for developing the ‘soft’ skills of programme participants.
2. Young adults with a disability who previously were enrolled and are now employed participate every three months

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> [www.ebtessama.com](http://www.ebtessama.com) (Arabic).

<sup>9</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2012).



in awareness-raising sessions for parents and students of their schools to present their experiences. This allows students and parents to ask questions and raise any concerns they might have and encourage the young people to enrol in the programme.

3. The empowerment programme is implemented by social workers and 'shadows' / 'best buddies' who themselves must be young people so the candidates feel comfortable in sharing their thoughts and worries throughout the duration of the programme.

## 4. Strategy and implementation

### 4.1. Strategies / theoretical approaches / methodologies <sup>10</sup>

The programme's empowerment and training of young adults with mental disabilities is based on modern methods focusing on development of personalities; enhancing communication skills; increasing knowledge; improving soft (social) skills; developing mental abilities; and equipping them with work environment skills and job-related knowledge.

### 4.2. Activities <sup>11</sup>

Based on this strategy, a mechanism was devised for the empowerment of these young adults through supporting their inclusion and offering them equal opportunities to be integrated in the work sphere. The programme encompasses six phases:

1. Raising the awareness of school management and parents about young adults with disabilities

A psychologist trained on each phase of the methodology, with support from the

chairperson of the Foundation, engages the management of schools and NGOs as well as parents of young adults with disabilities to seek their participation, support and enrolment of candidates. Specific activities include:

- (i) A monthly meeting with the schools' management to present the programme, change their perception of the competence of young adults with disabilities, seek their support and follow up on the progress of those in the programme.
- (ii) A quarterly meeting with parents to change their perception of their children's competence and seek their feedback on changes in their attitude and independence.
- (iii) Select and enrol appropriate candidates.
- (iv) Complete all documents required for enrolment (rehabilitation certificate, military documents, health certificate and insurance clarification). The Ebtessama Foundation provides staff (called 'shadows' or 'best buddies') to work hand in hand with parents to



**Name:** Hassan Farag

**Department:** House keeping

**Hotel:** Moevenpick Al Sokhna

**Disability:** Intellectual / Speech

**IQ:** 45



complete the paperwork needed.

2. Social Incubator (6-months duration).  
Psychologists are responsible for this phase of the empowerment programme.

The social incubator programme entails capacity-building of young adults with disabilities to equip them with the skills needed to integrate smoothly in the work environment and be accepted by the non-disabled. It focuses on enhancing social and life skills such as: healthy habits; modifying behaviour and manners; personal hygiene; controlling temper and anti-social-behaviour; relating and dealing with others on an equal basis; punctuality and discipline; independence, self-reliance, competence and self-confidence; active listening and verbal communication; problem solving for day-to-day issues; accepting and coming to terms with reality; following instructions; team work; and public and personal safety. The target is to work with 30 schools and NGOs and 1,000 young adults with disabilities. The specific activities are:

- (i) Individual psychological sessions (according to each case).
  - (ii) Group psychological sessions for two hours on weekly basis. Sessions will address all aspects of life and to help young adults with disabilities to be integrated in society and be accepted by the non-disabled.
3. Theoretical training and career guidance (1-month duration). Psychological workers and business partners deliver this phase.

This phase aims to introduce young adults with disability to the work environment and prospective jobs suitable to their capabilities, and to boost their morale.

Field trips are organized for participants to visit the work places of different organizations

participating in the programme. Activities include:

- (i) Orientation sessions to introduce the work environment and jobs matching their capabilities in different departments.
  - (ii) Participants spend five working days in on-the-job training, after which they are evaluated in terms of their commitment to the training, ability to integrate easily in the work environment, compliance with job tasks, personal hygiene, general safety, ability to follow instructions and capacities relating to serious productive work.
4. Awareness and orientation for employers (hotels, fast food outlets, supermarket chains), in parallel with previous interventions. The Programme Manager delivers this phase.

The aim is to establish partnerships with hotels, fast food outlets and supermarkets to provide on-the-job training for young adults with disabilities, and to prepare their staff to deliver this training. The activities include:

- (i) Meetings with owners, business managers and department heads to get their approval for the implementation of the programme at their premises.
  - (ii) Orientation sessions about the programme for the staff of departments where the young adults with disabilities will be trained.
  - (iii) Selection of supervisors and mentors who will train the participants.
5. On-the-job training (3-months duration). Business partners, with the presence of a psychological worker and shadows/best buddies.



The objective is to provide participants with the technical skills needed for enhancing their employability. Activities include:

- (i) Assessment of the candidate's capability to work in a particular job by human resources managers of the private sector partner and Ebtessama Foundation.
- (ii) Placing participants in departments which respond to their capabilities and providing them three months on-the-job training.

An essential part of the programme is working hand in hand with employers to monitor, assess and rectify accordingly the performance of trainees, while simultaneously monitoring and assessing the working environment. Also crucial are the observations of the trainer, evaluation of the participants' performance and the assessment of their adaptation to the work environment. It is important to highlight that most of the technical training will be on the job.

6. Placing young adults with disabilities at suitable jobs (simultaneously with the on-the-job training). The Programme Manager is responsible for this phase.

The aim here is to place young adults with disabilities in actual jobs that fit their skills through:

- (i) Mapping and identifying job vacancies at companies and organizations which are suitable for the skills of the participants.
- (ii) Introducing the young adults with disabilities to those companies and organizations.
- (iii) Working closely with the companies employing participants to develop working conditions and environments that best serve the needs of the

disabled.

- (iv) Monitoring the performance of the young adults with disabilities at the workplace for a period of one year.

### 4.3. Innovativeness <sup>12</sup>

Most interventions designed for people with disabilities only teach arts and crafts, carpeting, etc., and eventually organize exhibitions to promote the work they have done. A Right for An Equal life is the first programme to focus on developing the characters and personalities of young adults with mental disabilities, and on enhancing their communication skills and equipping them with the soft and social skills needed for inclusion in the work environment and acceptance by the non-disabled.

Programme implementers have also engaged the tourism industry (hotels) where young adults with mental disabilities can develop the ability to work and be integrated in the work environment, performing the same tasks as anyone else. This programme allows them to build a strong character and be independent.

### 4.4. Cost and funding <sup>13</sup>

The running cost of the programme is covered by funders. For every participant enrolled, there is an estimate cost of \$1,500, including an allowance for the participant, an allowance for the parents to attend awareness sessions and personnel and miscellaneous expenditures. The programme currently is implemented in 22 schools, and a psychologist and a shadow/best buddy are needed for every two schools. The management team includes the Programme Manager, Training Manager, two coordinators and a financial officer.

<sup>12</sup> www.ebtessama.com (Arabic).

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Ms. Magda Samy, Chairperson of Ebtessama Foundation, 2 March 2015.





## 4.5. Sustainability

The sustainability of the programme is based on the constant demand for productive and loyal workers due to the high turnover in job vacancies in certain areas. Employers are impressed by the quality of work done and keep asking to have more employees. Based on the success stories at some hotels, many other hotels want to host young adults with mental disabilities and allow them to become staff members, thus expanding the reach of the programme. The echo of the programme has reached other countries in the region and many are looking forward to have it implemented in their own countries.

## 4.6. Replicability

The programme has been replicated in Cairo, Giza, Menia, Asuit, Alexandria, Suez and Red Sea governorates. However, it was not replicated with other age groups.

## 5. Evaluation of effectiveness <sup>14</sup>

The Ebtessama Foundation has been monitoring the progress and outcome of the programme on the beneficiaries. In 2011, 'A Right for An Equal Life' was selected by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as one of the top 10 programmes that target youth employment in the Middle East. Consequently, the Ebtessama Foundation was selected to be part of the Taqueem Fund (initiative which aims to provide grants and technical assistance to help selected programmes improve the impact and effectiveness of their youth employment and entrepreneurship programmes), and an adequate monitoring and Evaluation plan was developed by ILO Geneva. Initially, 1,000 young adults with mental disabilities were interested in the programme, of whom

500 continued in the programme. Of those 500, 100 were able to work sporadically and were not fully committed to one job; 250 were successfully employed and maintained their jobs; and 150 did not reach the employment phase for various reasons. In addition to monitoring the employment rate, the evaluation of the programme relies on a series of thorough observation forms that are completed before and after each phase of the programme as follows:

1. Pre-social incubator. Person responsible: psychological worker
  - Parents' questionnaire
  - Parents' focus group
  - Young adults' observation forms
2. Post-social incubator. Person responsible: psychological worker
  - Parents' questionnaire
  - Parents' focus group
  - Young adults' observation forms
3. Post-theoretical training and career guidance. Person responsible: monitoring and evaluation specialist
  - Observation forms for young adults with disability
  - Observation forms for partner organizations' human resources managers
4. Post-on-the-job training observation forms. Person responsible: monitoring and evaluation specialist
  - Parents' questionnaire
  - Parents' focus group
  - Young adults' observation forms
  - Human resources manager questionnaire



Additionally, feedback is received from employers who call and express their admiration for the young adults whom they consider to be the hard workers, very disciplined and committed to work for a long time.

## 6. Strengths and opportunities <sup>15</sup>

This programme is first of its kind in Egypt as it builds the capacity of young adults with mental disabilities to become productive workers and overcome all the obstacles that they usually face. Instead of being locked at home or working on the streets or in mediocre jobs, these young adults are able to have and maintain decent jobs. Many of the young adults are themselves becoming employers and acquiring independence and are no longer bound to their parents.

## 7. Challenges <sup>16</sup>

The implementation of this programme encountered certain challenges.

1. At the level of employers: it takes a long time to convince employers to host and afterwards employ young adults with mental disabilities. A lot of outreach work and advocacy was required to disseminate information about the programme and show its effectiveness, but this is necessary to expand the pool of stakeholders willing to participate.
2. At the level of parents: many parents resist the idea as they consider their children too fragile and unable to become productive. Many think their children can get more money by sitting on the streets without making much of an effort. Additionally, the stigma that comes with having a child with a disability results in

parents keeping their children locked at home and not even attending school. In addition, most parents prefer to keep the minimal social security allowance granted by the Ministry of Social Solidarity as it is guaranteed, rather than having their children work and be insured by the employers; they have little confidence that their children will continue being employed. Most of the parents do not value the idea of having decent jobs with contracts, social security, health insurance and a pension.

3. At the level of young adults with mental disabilities: most of these young adults are not used to the routine imposed by the programme as it requires discipline and following a time schedule similar to the work schedule. They prefer to generate income without being committed to such an effort, simply through sitting on the streets or working in simplistic jobs. Not all of the young adults value the idea of having decent jobs with contracts, social security, health insurance and a pension.

## 8. Next steps and the way forward <sup>17</sup>

The implementers aspire to have an independent academy where they can operate the programme instead of working in schools. This academy will serve young adults with disabilities whether or not they are enrolled in school. Many young adults with disabilities are not enrolled either due to parental negligence or the unavailability of schools for students with a mental disability where they live. Unfortunately, despite the fact that several donors and funders support the empowerment programme, none of them have agreed to support the establishment of an academy. Many efforts

15 [www.ebtessama.com](http://www.ebtessama.com) (Arabic).

16 Interview with Ms. Magda Samy, Chairperson of Ebtessama Foundation, 2 March, 2015.

17 Ibid.

are being undertaken in collaboration with partners to establish this academy. Expanding to other countries in the region is also among the plans but this requires more funding, partners and a network to be established. In addition, engaging more young women in self-employment and entrepreneurship programmes is needed.

## 9. Lessons learned and recommendations

The main recommendations for future implementers of the programme would be to properly select the employers. Building a strong network with employers and partners would facilitate the implementation and expand work opportunities for beneficiaries. It is crucial to have both the passion and patience required for the programme to succeed, and to ensure the programme's ability to reach the biggest possible number of mentally disabled young adults.

## 10. Resources

For the time being, there are no specific resources for this programme, but manuals are currently being prepared for people who wish to implement it.

## 11. References

Ebtessama website: [www.ebtessama.com](http://www.ebtessama.com) (Arabic)

Interview with Ms. Magda Samy, Chairperson of Ebtessama Foundation, 2 March 2015.

OHCHR (2012). Thematic study on the work and employment of persons with disabilities-Report of the Office of the

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.



Group picture for the first 3 employees at Sheraton Dream Land Hotel

Waheed Nour – Steward

Ismail Abd Rabo – Lenien at the Staff locker room

Mahmoud El Saadani – House Keeping Department

With a member of the International Labour Organization

Sheraton Dream Land General Manager

Sheraton Dream Land Training Department Manager

Ebtessama Foundation Chairman of the Board

Photo credits: Ebtessama Foundation.