

Programme Area Summary

Country: Guyana

Programme Area: Disability 2005-2009

What is the aim of the programme area?

Women, men and children with disabilities demonstrate self-confidence, participate fully in society and are respected as having rights, needs and priorities like any other citizen.

Why is VSO working in this particular programme area and region?

A number of issues surround working with disability in Guyana:

- Low general awareness on disability issues
- Disability not a priority for policy makers
- Lack of legislation to ensure the rights of disabled persons
- Very low capacity, collaboration and networking by Disabled People Organisations resulting in persons with disabilities not having a voice
- Lack of access to quality services provided by both government and NGOs, including early detection and intervention programmes
- Lack of access to education and employment

Disabled People's Organisations DPOs and services for disabled people are almost exclusively based in the capital Georgetown. This must be seen in the light of a population of only 750,000 people with the majority living in the capital and surrounding areas. The few existing organisations and services in the regions don't have the capacity to accommodate a full-time volunteer. Therefore VSO assists in building the capacity of Georgetown-based organisations to expand into and strengthen their services in the regions. For example, the Rehabilitation Services of the Min of Health are opening up departments and strengthening the medical and advocacy capacity of Community Based Rehabilitation groups in regions that did not have any services before.

Key beneficiaries and partners

The key beneficiaries are women, men and children with disabilities.

VSO Guyana has consciously decided to move away from the medical approach to adopt a more holistic partnership approach. The programme emphasises partnerships with civil society organisations while also improving the capacity of government agencies to deliver social services.

VSO Guyana has signed 5-year partnership agreements with four key partner organisations with whom nearly all volunteers are based:

- Division of Rehabilitation Services of the Ministry of Health, which offers programmes in Audiology, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, and Speech Therapy.
- The National Commission on Disability (NCD), a president-appointed advisory body to the government, which has a mandate to promote the rights of people living with disabilities and develop and implement programmes that equalise opportunities for people living with disabilities.
- Guyana Community Based Rehabilitation Program (CBR), which is a well-established and prolific empowering NGO working through local volunteers in a number of regions beyond the capital.
- Eye Care Guyana, committed to the Vision 2020 Strategy Plan for the Caribbean which aims to prevent blindness and restore sight, and to create and/or facilitate opportunities for persons whose sight cannot be restored.

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In addition to the 4 key partners VSO works with a number of other organisations such as The Guyana Association for the Visually Impaired (GAVI), The Guyana Society for the Blind, The Blind Cricket Association, The National Federation of and for the Disabled, The Ruimveldt Parents Support Group, Kitty Deaf Club, Diamond Youth Club and Bartica Support Group. Since these organisations don't have the capacity to have a full time volunteer VSO Guyana uses the strategy of Programme Office Based Volunteers (POBVs) assisting a number of organisations at the same time. In addition to this volunteers based at one of the four key partners liaise and support the smaller organisations and build and strengthen networks between them.

Key objectives of the programme and the cross-cutting themes

- Local disability organisations advocate effectively on rights and policy issues of interest to people with disabilities through research, work, lobbying, campaigning and coalition building.
- Woman, men and children with disabilities have increased access to quality rehabilitation services provided by regional departments of the Rehabilitation Service, CBR and Eye Care Guyana
- National Rehabilitation Services plans for and trains national rehabilitation personnel to expand existing quality and quantity of services and reduce the dependency on expatriate personnel.
- Children 0-11 years have access to early detection programmes and receive appropriate treatment/rehabilitation services for their impairments.

Inclusive Education is the cross-cutting link between VSO Guyana's Disability and Education programmes. As an outcome of the Programme Area Review VSO will explore the area of enhancing opportunities to employment for disabled persons. This will create a link to secure livelihoods, an programme area that VSO Guyana is also currently exploring.

Current programme activities

Focus of International Volunteer Placements

- In April 2007 the programme had a total of four Short Term Volunteers and ten Long Term Volunteers including Youth for Development and VSO Business Partnership volunteers. These volunteers work in the areas of physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, optometry, curriculum development, advocacy, communication, literacy and recreational activities for the Deaf, organisation development and DPO capacity building.
- New placements for 2007 include an early identification and intervention specialist, Deaf Education Programme Advisor, DPO Capacity Builder, Audiologist, Speech and Language Therapist, Optometrist, Social Worker / OT for the Blind, Small Business Advisor for PWDs, Disability Capacity Builder and a MIS advisor.
- Currently the majority of the volunteers are based in the capital, often travelling into the regions on a regular basis as well as training people from all regions in Georgetown. VSO Guyana is strengthening the capacity of organisations in the regions so that in the future volunteers can be based there to offer further support.

Support to national volunteering

- The recently initiated National Volunteering Programme (including Diaspora volunteering, co-ordinated by VSO in the UK) will contribute to strengthening partner capacity.

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Research

- As an outcome of the Programme Area Review VSO Guyana will explore the areas of employment for disabled people and the possibility of including mental health in the disability programme area.

Advocacy and Global Education

- Monitoring and advising the development and implementation of the Disability Legislation.
- Awareness raising on disability issues and legislation via media (e.g. programme on national TV on the International Day of the Disabled).
- Mainstreaming activities in Programme Office and amongst volunteers and partners.

Other partnership activities

- Facilitate networking between different actors in disability field
- Advisory and networking role to various organisations on disability issues, e.g. advice to the University of Guyana in making the university more accessible.

What makes VSO's work in this programme area special?

VSO Guyana is the only international organisation in the country that works in the field of disability.

Historically, there has been a lack of networking so VSO, working with governmental and non-governmental organisations functions as a catalyst, bringing (fragmented) organisations together for a more cohesive approach to a national goal. For example, despite the fact that elections put a temporary hold on the passing of the anticipated disability legislation, the supporting public consultations raised the awareness of disabled persons and their rights. VSO Guyana will continue to play a key role in ensuring the legislation will pass through parliament and it will be effectively implemented. It will be an important actor in facilitating a move within Guyana from charity towards a Rights Based Approach to disability. This shift also needs to take place within DPOs that still very much function on charity level. VSO will strengthen their capacity to make this shift and to advocate for rights. The findings of a VSO-supported nationwide survey provide evidence in support of this approach.

Deaf VSO volunteers have been role models for the Deaf community in Guyana. They have increased Deaf awareness and empowered many, especially young, Deaf persons. In general, VSO is instrumental in enhancing the visibility of and media attention towards disability.

VSO Guyana has a long history in strengthening the medical rehabilitation services through formal training programmes and on the job training. Over the years this has resulted in expansion of services into the regions. VSO will continue to help partner organisations in making their services accessible to a greater number of persons and especially the most disadvantaged people in the regions.