



CONTENTS

PROPOSAL FOR FUNDING

of

THE LIVING LINK

Background Information & Mission Statement

The Living Link services



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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

People living with intellectual impairments in South Africa

In South Africa there are at least 2, 5 million people with disabilities who have an impairment leading to difficulties with daily living. People with intellectual disabilities form a significant part of this group, and have traditionally faced a number of different barriers that prevent them from enjoying a decent life and gaining access to the same choices and opportunities as non-disabled people. The Living Link is the only organisation of its kind in South Africa and has successfully challenged these barriers by advocating for and working towards economic participation, inclusion and social justice for people with intellectual impairments enabling them to participate in mainstream society.

According to the statistics on Disability an **estimated 99% of disabled people are excluded from employment in the open labour market**. These extremely high levels of unemployment amongst people with disabilities can be attributed to a number of factors:

1. Low skills levels due to inadequate and inappropriate education;
2. Discriminatory attitudes and practices by employers;
3. Past discriminatory and ineffective labor legislation;
4. Lack of enabling mechanisms to promote employment opportunities;
5. Inaccessible public transport;
6. Inadequate and inaccessible provision for vocational rehabilitation and training;

People with intellectual disabilities are able to provide unskilled or semi-skilled labour, can be trained to cope with highly skilled manual labour and are able to work in the open labour market.

How we originated – The personal touch

THE LIVING LINK is a non-profit organisation that supports the inclusion of people with intellectual impairments into society and facilitates their transition from school to work to independent living.

The organisation was founded in 2000 by Julia Wilkinson and Ingrid Menzel, sister and mother of Nadine Wilkinson who has an intellectual impairment. In a society that provided limited services and support for such adults, it was through dedication and perseverance that they themselves taught Nadine essential living and social skills. Their input has contributed to Nadine's phenomenal level of independence and intellectual growth. Nadine now works and lives independently and is proud to be an actively integrated member of the community.

They were inspired to share their knowledge and allow other such adults to become more valuable members of society...and so THE LIVING LINK Centre was established to provide these very special people with the opportunity that they deserve.



MISSION STATEMENT

At The Living Link we promise to continuously develop and enhance the potential of intellectually impaired adults,

Our aim is to nurture the opportunity for full integration and equal participation in mainstream society so improving the quality of their lives,

We strive to facilitate growth and change by empowering our members, their support network and the community thus creating an environment of understanding, acceptance and possibility.

SERVICES

1. Adult Integration Program

The Adult Integration Program forms a critical part of The Living Link's services and is a one-year full time course that consists of several components:

Person Centred Planning

An individualised plan for each adult is developed outlining their achievements, goals and their expectations of the future. Personal Centred Plans (PCP's) involve the impaired adult as well as their entire support network. The plan is continuously reviewed throughout the program.

Skills Development

Skills Development covers four different areas of skills, as outlined below:

EMPLOYMENT ORIENTATION

- Applying for a job
- Assessment, matching, job trial, job coaching
- Employment contracts
- Employment Equity Act and disciplinary action
- Understanding your salary and retirement
- Entrepreneurship
- Communication in the workplace
- Time management
- Self-advocacy and speaking
- Electronic communication - telephones, faxing, photocopying, and basic computers



PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT

- Stress management
- Anger control
- Conflict resolution
- Diversity and multi-cultural communication
- Self esteem
- Communication
- Assertiveness
- Team building
- Problem solving
- Goal setting
- Relationships
- HIV, AIDS, and sex education



LIFESTYLE MANAGEMENT

- Personal hygiene and healthy eating
- Cooking
- Cleaning and washing
- Basic home maintenance
- Running a household
- Catching public transport
- Basic banking and money management

COMMUNITY SURVIVAL

- Human rights
- Voting and census
- Safety in the home and environment
- Basic first aid



Job Sampling

Job Sampling is basically the short-term placement of an intellectually impaired adult in a company. The purpose of which is to offer the individual the opportunity to experience different types of jobs and the realities of work. Onsite training is provided to the individual, the employer and the co-workers. Prominent companies in the community provide sites for this component of the course.



Relationship Coaching & Parent Workshops

Relationship coaching – Individual sessions with the intellectually impaired adult and their parents or caregivers to improve communication and enhance relationships.

Parent workshops – Support workshops empowering parents or caregivers with valuable skills and providing regular feedback on course content.

Independent Living Tour

An outdoor experience where real situations are created allowing the intellectually impaired adult the opportunity to demonstrate and practically apply their newfound skills and to experience independence.



2. The Gap Project

The Gap Project is a transition project for intellectually impaired adults who have graduated from the Adult Integration Program and are waiting to be successfully placed into permanent employment. The Gap provides graduates with an opportunity to work in the open labour market on short-term contracts and ensures that they are meaningfully occupied while The Living Link assists to source permanent jobs for them. The project offers the following:

- An environment where graduates can refine their work skills and repeatedly put those skills into practice
- An opportunity for graduates to grow their work experience which makes them more marketable to an employer
- Open labour market practices, policies and procedures are implemented which further assists in preparing graduates for permanent placement
- Graduates and Gap site staff are supported by a Job Coach from The Living Link
- Students will earn a minimal wage for contracts completed
- Members will leave the project once The Living Link has sourced permanent employment for them



3. Placement in Employment

The organisational process that is followed in order to successfully place intellectually impaired adults in open labour market employment is aimed at placing individuals in ordinary working environments, doing regular work, where salaries and benefits are real and reflect work performance. The Living Link has successfully placed many adults into permanent employment in a range of industries including hospitals, schools, warehouses, factories, gardening services, TV production studios and offices.

The services we offer to the adults and employers include the following:

- Job market screening
- Informational interviews with employers
- Job site observations
- Job analysis
- Job sampling
- Recommendation on job restructuring
- Data base of prospective employees
- Job matching
- Placement
- Job coaching/ onsite training and support
- Long term support
- Employer and co-worker sensitization & training



4. Independent Living

A crucial aspect of the Centre is to ensure the long-term independence of its members and attention is given to the following criteria:

- Assessing readiness for independent living
- Establishing support network infrastructure and availability
- Identifying residential options
- Considering legal implications
- Establishing needs and lifestyle of independent living member
- Matching housemates
- House visits
 - Meal Planning
 - Grocery shopping
 - Budgeting
 - Home maintenance & cleaning
 - Safety and security
 - Transport
 - Health and sexuality



5. Social Environment

Student Social Club

Regular social events exposing students to real events, venues and experiences aim to realize full social participation and integration into the community. Students have attended events such as: Theatre productions, Ten Pin Bowling, Dinner dances, Soccer days, a day at the horse races and many more.



