

The role of CBR in Parent Initiated Projects

By Joyse Arthur Mallya (Kilimanjaro CBR Program)

Message: By adopting CBR strategies, parents of children with disabilities can facilitate the education of their children.

Introduction

Every child has a right to education and every parent hopes that their child will someday get the chance to go to school irrespective of their circumstances. Tanzania has a policy of equal educational rights for all children. However, there are many children with disabilities who are unable to access quality education due to a lack of government resources. There is no reliable data country-wide that show the number of children who are not enrolled in school. Kilimanjaro Community Based Rehabilitation (KCBR), a program under Comprehensive Community Based Rehabilitation Tanzania (CCBRT) carried out a survey in 1996 in Moshi Rural District. According to this survey, there were — children with disabilities who were not in school. Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programs can conduct meetings to inform and encourage parents to assume responsibility for their children's education. This article focuses on children with deafness and shows how through guidance and support, parents adopted a CBR strategy and facilitated the start of a school.

Educating and Informing Parents

Dissemination of information is a primary responsibility of any CBR program. Informed parents are more likely to accept their children's disability; therefore this transfer of knowledge gives them the tools they need to participate in their rehabilitation.

The KCBR program for example, organized a three-day seminar for the parents of the deaf children. This seminar was facilitated by a multidisciplinary team comprising Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) specialist, a speech, language and hearing therapist, community rehabilitation workers, a teacher for the deaf and a self employed deaf adult. The parents were educated and given information about the:

1. Causes of hearing disorders and deafness
2. Psychological and social effect of lack of communication on the child
3. Role and importance of parents in the rehabilitation process
4. Need for the family to learn basic signing and total communication

Apart from the knowledge acquired during the seminar, the parents had the opportunity to discuss, share, support and exchange ideas. The above seminar suited the needs of these parents. Another group of parents may have different needs, which will determine the selection of facilitators, content of the training and method of delivery.

Involving Educational Officials

In order to promote and strengthen a system of equal educational services for children with disabilities, the education officials need to be involved. There are many deaf children around the country who are not attending school due to various reasons:

1. Teachers in the regular schools lack the knowledge to teach deaf children

2. Parents are intentionally or unintentionally over protective
3. Children refuse to go to school because they cannot cope in the regular classroom

CBR programs can promote multi-sectoral coordination and collaboration that can facilitate the creation/improvement of educational services within the existing system. This collaboration creates a forum for discussion and exploration of delivery of quality services. The parents in this case had direct discussions with the District Education Officer (DEO). She explained the government's policy and the logistical barriers that made it impossible to establish a school. However, if the parents would show their commitment, the municipal council would:

1. Provide teachers
2. Lobby with community leaders to find a plot to build a school
3. Give written permission to enable the parents to find support from interested people or organizations.

As a result of this meeting, the parents formed a committee to plan and oversee the establishment of a school. Within two months of organizing themselves, they had rented a house and a parent-initiated class was started for 20 children. The Municipal Council provided two teachers.

Involving Self Help Groups

The establishment, support and involvement of self- help groups in communities is an effective strategy for lobbying the government to improve service delivery. Support groups can be used to create awareness, spread information and sensitize the community. In the case of this parent initiative, the DEO was very active in organizing support from the community through meetings with leaders and community representatives at the local government level. Her personal involvement prompted one community to offer land for the parents to build a school.

Collaborate with Service Clubs, NGOs and Religious Leaders

There are service clubs and other groups of service providers willing to support community projects. Dissemination of information and good collaboration promotes involvement by these organizations. In the case of this parent- initiative, it was Lions Club Moshi, Kibo who took the challenge to support this project. There are other clubs such as Rotary who would also support community initiatives if approached.

Positive Developments

The class, which started with 20 children in a rented house, is now a municipal council school, Msandaka Deaf School. It had 50 children and 5 teachers. The community donated the land, which is next to a regular school; this allows integration with children from the other school during playtime. There are four classrooms and two dormitories. The Municipal Council pays the teachers, security guards and are also in the process of building houses for teachers. The parents pay the matrons, the cooks and a deaf young lady who helps the children with their homework.

They also cultivate maize and beans on part of the land for the children's food. The children live within a radius of 30km. Due to this, they are allowed to go home two weekends a month. As one of the conditions for admission, parents should be willing to pick their children every two weeks. A board runs the school with representation from the education office, Lions Club Moshi Kibo, parents, the community and KCBR.

Conclusion

From this article it is evident that collaborative strategies used by CBR programs can empower parents to play an important role in the rehabilitation of their children. This article has outlined a parent-initiative that facilitated the establishment of a school for deaf children. The success of this initiative lay in the combined efforts of different people and organizations.