ISSUE 4 2026

ROLLING INSPIRATION

The leading magazine for people with mobility impairments

Wholley, stubbornly independent

Shaun Maclean's wheelchair trolley

Writing

Assistive Devices

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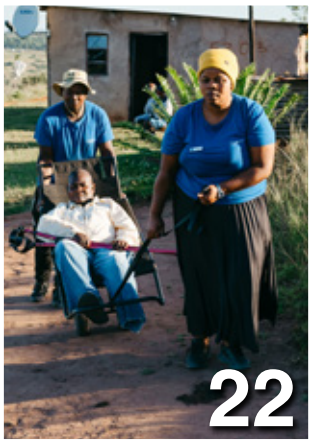

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Recycled bottle tops for wheelchairs

Over the past few months, QASA has seen tremendous support of its Bottle Tops project. Nedbank in particular has shown incredible initiative. Over the past three months, the company has been collecting bottle tops in all of its provinces.

At the end of September, the first of the collections arrived at the QASA head office. The Durban-based Nedbank staff collected a whopping 192 kilograms!

With many more tops on the way, QASA extends its sincerest thanks to Nedbank and its staff for their commitment and support of the programme.

Another very big donation was made by Hollywood Bets. They collected 93 kilograms of bottle tops.

These tops will be recycled and all the proceeds will go toward funding members with a new wheelchair. If you want to collect bottle tops for QASA, or drop them off, reach out at info@qasa.co.za. R

TOP: Nedbank delivered the first of the bottle tops collected over the past three months, which came up to 192 kilograms.

ABOVE: Hollywood Bets delivered 93 kilograms of bottle tops in September.

Reaching into rural areas

In August, the QASA team travelled to Mpumalanga to strengthen their reach in the area by building relationships with dedicated therapists and identifying Community Partners who can continue QASA's work in the region. A big thank you to all the hospitals and organisations that welcomed QASA.

In October, the team plans to visit rural parts of KwaZulu-Natal. Starting in Durban, the team will work their way up to the most Northern part of the region ending their travels in Manguzi. Keep an eye on the QASA social media for updates or reach out to the team at info@qasa.co.za for any comments, questions or recommendations for future outreaches. R

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The **QuadPara Association of South Africa** (QASA) is a non-profit organisation established and managed by quadriplegics and paraplegics that aim to empower quadriplegics and paraplegics to live their lives to their full potential.

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Ode to Occupational Therapy

Some wealth is intangible and infinitely more important

What will your life's work be worth? Not what it will pay you. Not what title it will give you. Not what car it will buy or house it will build. What will your life's work be worth to another human being?

What will it contribute to the occupational economy of South Africa; to a society where every person has the opportunity to live, work, participate, contribute and belong?

Very few people become wealthy by becoming occupational therapists. If financial wealth is your measure of success, perhaps you chose the wrong profession. But if success is measured by the lives you change, the hope you restore, the dignity you return and the independence you help reclaim, then you have chosen one of the richest professions on earth.

Occupational therapy is ultimately about something greater than a clinical intervention. It is about life. Every day, somewhere, someone's life changes in an instant. A spinal cord injury. A stroke. A traumatic brain injury. An amputation. A devastating illness or accident.

The familiar can disappear. Work becomes uncertain. Relationships change. Independence can feel like a distant memory. Beneath every clinical assessment is a question rarely written on the form: "Will I still be able to have a life?"

Then that person meets an occupational therapist. Not someone who can erase the injury or promise that everything will return to the way it was. Rather someone who can sit beside them and say: "Let's discover what is still possible." That is the extraordinary power of occupational therapy.

The occupational therapist sees beyond the diagnosis, the wheelchair, the impaired hand and the inaccessible environment. They see the mother who still wants to mother, the young person who wants to study, the worker who wants to contribute, the entrepreneur who wants to build, and the human being who still wants to belong.

We describe occupational therapy through assessment, rehabilitation, assistive technology, functional training, environmental modification and evidence-based practice. These are important, but they are not the

destination. They are the vehicle. The destination is participation in life. They do not teach someone to dress simply because dressing is a functional activity. We do it because dressing may mean getting out of bed, going to work, attending a family gathering or feeling like oneself again.

They do not teach a transfer merely because it is a clinical goal. They do it because that movement may be the first step towards independence. They adapt a cooking utensil because perhaps that person wants to cook for their children again. This is the magic of occupation.

Eating, bathing, working, parenting, studying, creating, driving, cooking, socialising, loving and dreaming give our lives structure, identity and meaning. When disability disrupts those occupations, the loss can be profound. The occupational therapist's role is to help a person rediscover possibility.

> **People never forget the occupational therapist who helped them believe in themselves again**

I have had a spinal cord injury for 42 years. That experience has taught me something no textbook could adequately explain. People may forget the equipment, the assessment or even the exercises, but they will never forget the occupational therapist who helped them believe in themselves again. They remember the person who did not see disability as an ending, but saw the possibility.

A little more confidence. A little more independence. A renewed sense of purpose. These may not appear in a discharge summary, but they are outcomes, and they matter. This is why clinical practice can be one of the most powerful vehicles for disability inclusion. Every assessment can restore dignity. Every intervention can unlock participation. Every conversation can challenge assumptions.

Disability inclusion does not begin and end with legislation. It happens in clinics, homes, workplaces, schools, public transport and communities. It happens when we stop asking only, "What is wrong with this person?", and start asking, "What is preventing this person from participating and what can we change?".

In South Africa, with its profound social and economic inequalities, this responsibility is even greater. Inclusion is about creating the conditions in which people can contribute, create, earn, care, lead and belong.

To students entering this profession, the academics teaching them and the clinicians who have spent years doing this work, remember what you have chosen: A profession at the intersection of health, humanity and possibility. You have chosen to work in the space between what a person can no longer do and what they might still become. You have chosen to help people reclaim not only function, but identity, independence as well as dignity, participation and belonging.

So, ask yourself again: "What will your life's work be worth?" At the end of your career, perhaps your greatest wealth will not be found in your bank account. It will be found in the lives you touched. In the people who returned to work. In the families who found hope. In the individuals who discovered that disability had not taken away their future.

The true currency of occupational therapy is not money. It is human possibility. That is why occupational therapy is one of the richest professions on earth. R

Ari Seirlis is the former CEO of the QuadPara Association of South Africa and now serves as the Treasurer of QASA. He is also, presently, a member of the Presidential Working Group on Disability. He is a wheelchair user and disability activist. Ari has recently published his biography, titled *Wheels of Fire*.

Get in touch: aris@iafrica.com

Wholley, stubbornly independent

In his headstrong pursuit for greater independence, Shaun Maclean founded Wholley Shopping Solutions which provides accessible trolleys for wheelchair users

There are those who are born with an innate, unrelenting stubbornness. They ignore their perceived limitations and societal expectations to pursue their dreams and desires. Many see this stubbornness as a flaw. But, it can also be a gift. The stubborn, the headstrong, the unrelenting are often the ones to create, innovate and forge a new path.

Shaun Maclean is stubborn. He is headstrong and unrelenting in his pursuit for greater independence for himself and for others. He is an innovator, a visionary and now an entrepreneur with a dream of greater access and transparency for people with disabilities.

This tenacity is Shaun's greatest gift and greatest challenge. Earlier this year, he broke his leg trying to push up a step into a building.

"That day I was adamant on entering by myself, like I had done in the past for well over a year" Shaun shares. He had managed to pull himself out of chair, falling forward and fracturing his distal tibia on his right leg.

"It probably was my fault because I tried the first time to get up and almost slipped out of my chair. I should have asked for help, but I kept going; kept trying," he reflects.

"I suppose it stems from how I was before my accident. I don't like asking someone to do something for me that I could've done myself."

Shaun is paraplegic. In 2013, while travelling to Pretoria, he crashed his motorbike. He recalls: "I t-boned the car in front of me. I thought the driver was turning into the driveway on the right as they crossed some of the dotted-lines."

"They suddenly swung left causing me to brake a metre out, which didn't help. It caused me to slow down enough to go down the bonnet at an angle and headfirst through a wall."

He had broken his T10/12 vertebrae and sustained numerous other injuries. Fortunately, there were four doctors having a braai across the road. They were able to step in and keep Shaun going until the ambulance could arrive.

He was rushed to a local hospital before being airlifted to Milpark Hospital where he spent six weeks in an induced coma before being transferred to intensive care and finally rehabilitation.

"Thank you to the four angel doctors for saving me that day," Shaun shares.

> **Thank you to the four angel doctors for saving me**

When he returned home, he threw himself into exercising. He says: "I used to be heavily involved in the gym scene. That's what kept me going. I used to gym five days a week, minimum, in my wheelchair."

When COVID struck in 2020, Shaun couldn't go to the gym. The isolation inspired him to dream even bigger and pursue entrepreneurship. He notes: "On the entrepreneurial side of things, I always wanted to work for myself, but I don't see myself as a very good salesman. I like to just create things."

His first venture was a clothing businesses. It didn't last long as Shaun wasn't happy with the quality of the products being produced. But, he is headstrong, determined … with a great idea.

Last year, Shaun reflected on his own shopping experience: "When I just wanted to go into the store to get my things, I used to actually balance what I could on my lap."

He had an idea for a wheelchair trolley. While these already exist, they are rare and often

ABOVE LEFT: The original wheelchair trolley design is made entirely of steel.
ABOVE RIGHT: Shaun Maclean and his team reverse engineering the wheelchair trolley.
RIGHT: The redesign allows shoppers to use baskets for their shopping.

bulky. Shaun shares: "The original wheelchair trolley has been around for over a decade, probably about two decades. I've never seen one of those before in a shop."

"There might have been a few stores across the country that have kept it, but because it wasn't pushed, it never seemed to gain any traction," he adds.

The original design is a heavy steel frame and chassis with one or two tier wire-mesh baskets that connect to the wheelchair frame. Shaun dreamt of something much lighter: "I thought, 'Why does it have to be so big and bulky and heavy? Why can't you just use baskets?'"

With no previous trolley design or building experience, he sourced some samples in Cape Town that had gone unsold for years. From there, he reversed engineered the trolleys to understand how they connect to the wheelchair.

By chance, Shaun met a welder who was able to assist with building the first prototype. They built the first Wholley in a weekend.

Designed for commercial use, the Wholley is a lighter trolley that houses two baskets for your shopping and has pliable arms that can attach to several different wheelchair sizes.

It is much more manoeuvrable with the trolley moving as you push your chair. It can even fit through a standard doorframe.

"We created the first prototype in about a weekend, because then we had a meeting with Pick n Pay the following Monday," Shaun recalls. They pitched the first design at the head offices in Kensington, Johannesburg.

The trolleys have been sold to Waltloo Boitekong in Rustenburg, Superspar Blackhealth and Karaglen Superspar in Edenvale. It is being mass-produced by TrolleyQuip International with Shaun earning a small royalty for the design.

While a promising start, there is still a long way to go for Shaun to achieve his full vision. First, he aims to make the trolley as user-friendly as possible by refining the design.

LEFT AND ABOVE: The newest design of the Wholley is super light.

They have already shaved off about 10 kilograms from the original design. It is now rougly seven to eight kilograms, which is easier to pick up and manoeuvre. While the current design is meant for commercial use, it can fit into a family-size car. The goal, however, is to make a fold-up trolley for private use.

"It's going to be like a case that opens up with a carry handle when it is closed. It will be big enough for one basket. If you want to buy more things, then you might as well use the shop's trolley. You can leave yours in the boot," Shaun shares. To pursue this design, he requires a business partner or investor to purchase the steel for the mock-ups and refinements to the design.

Additionally, he wants to create a universal marker to let shoppers with disabilities know if the trolleys are available at their local store, but also if the store is accessible. The goal is to save shoppers time. They will see the sign and know about the accessibility without leaving their vehicle.

"If you're in a wheelchair and you're driving, you can see a sign and know that you'll be alright," Shaun explains. "My goal is to make shopping accessible everywhere, giving wheelchair users the discretion and freedom to shop in any store they choose."

> **My goal is to make shopping accessible everywhere**

With the growing popularity of online shopping with Sixty60 and ASAP, Shaun argues that people with disabilities can enjoy an in-person shopping experience with more ease; reclaiming the space for themselves.

"Shops are a lot quieter. It should give people with disabilities more freedom to roam and go shopping while everyone is at home. It gives us more opportunity to not be shy and embarrassed because there'll be more place for us," he argues.

For Shaun, it is important to get out of the house, although he confesses that there are some benefits to isolation: "I don't like

ABOVE: Shaun Maclean testing out the Wholley.
RIGHT: The Wholley attaches to your wheelchair for easy manouvreability.

being stuck at home, but maybe being stuck at home makes me think of all these different ideas."

Finally, born from his fall and broken leg earlier this year, Shaun wants to advocate for better accessibility. He shares: "Above all, I want to make wheelchair living far more bearable in public, and this matters to me personally."

He does note that he is in an unique position with his determination to be independent. Shaun shares: "A lot of wheelchair users are not like me, and they don't get themselves into positions where they can break their leg."

While his tenacity puts Shaun in a precarious position, it is also what lead him to design the Wholley, to establish Wholley Shopping Solutions and fight for better access. For those who dream big and are innovators like Shaun, he encourages resilience.

"Others will try persuade you not to try, either because they can't see the value and don't want you to succeed or personally they don't have the gusto to," he says.

"If you really believe in something, don't give up. You could have a five-minute meeting with someone that changes your whole world," he adds. "Something massive can come along that could drastically change your life for the better in the blink of an eye!"

To promote the Wholley, Shaun is planning a shopping trip at Cresta Shopping Centre in Johannesburg followed by a visit to the Superspar Palm Court in Weltevredenpark. Anyone who is interested, is invited to test the trolley at the shopping centre. For more information on the event, or to enquire about investment opportunities, reach out to Shaun at shaun@wholley.co.za or 083 792 1952. Visit the official website for more information on the Wholley at www.wholley.co.za.

Finally, Shaun would like to thank his mother Bev Maclean, Kim Januarie his landlord, Wesley Kruger who assisted in making the Wholley prototypes, Gero Olbeter from Wandi Trolleys, Detlef Moser from Demos Engineer, Marcio Leite from ML Metal Customs, Darryn Letley from Pick n Pay head quarters in Kensington and his medical aid provider Discovery. R

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A lifetime with Friedreich's Ataxia

The slow decline that comes with Friedreich's Ataxia has proven challenging, but George Louw has found a silver lining

As a bit of a clumsy child, I wasn't very good at sport; always tripping over every obstacle in my way. At the age of sixteen, my parents became concerned about my broad-based gait. They took me to an orthopaedic surgeon who diagnosed me with Friedreich's Ataxia, a rare disease that damages nerves in the spinal cord and the cerebellum of the brain. This results in a mobility impairment that can worsen over time.

As this was a neurological diagnosis, my parents took me to a neurologist who then made an alternative diagnosis: Arnold Chiari syndrome (herniation of the cerebellum through the opening in the back of the scull that allows the spinal cord to connect with the brain). A week after I finished my matric examinations, I underwent fairly serious brain surgery.

As you can imagine, this was a painful and traumatic experience with a protracted recovery period during which I had to learn to walk from scratch. Once I recovered, it was found that the surgery had no impact on my condition and was totally unnecessary!

At that time, the early 1980s, MRIs came into vogue and my neurologist decided to give it a go. I was subjected to the banging, clanging

and other outlandish noises during an hour of incarceration in an MRI tomb. The finding was early atrophy of my spinal cord.

Clinically, the fallout was the loss of the ability to orient position in space from my knees down, which was the reason for my clumsiness. Friedreich's Ataxia was proclaimed as the most likely cause. Just to be sure, I was subjected to a zillion blood tests to exclude other possibilities. With these all negative, we settled on Friedreich's.

By now I was in my fourth year in medical school and just married my wife of the past 51 years. It was at this time that I received advice that kept me going all these years and still holds true.

"Go and live your life to the best of your ability

A neurologist at the (then) Coronation Hospital sat me down and said: "Look, we know three things about this condition. One, it is progressive, so it is going to get worse with time. Two, it is highly unlikely to be passed on to your future children; and three, there is absolutely nothing we can do about it. So, stop being a patient and go and live your life to the best of your ability."

That is exactly what I did for the past 51 years, now happily retired with my wife. We have three middle-aged children and eight grandchildren who are our pride and joy.

SLOW DECLINE

Navigating life with Friedreich's Ataxia was no bed of roses. The biggest challenge was, and still is, that there is no new norm to settle into. You drop a notch and loose certain abilities. So, you adapt to the changes.

After a few months (sometimes years), all of a sudden, more abilities just become impossibilities and you have to readapt to new norms with new challenges. I migrated from free walk to a single walking stick to two sticks to a walking frame and finally, for the past 20 years, to a wheelchair.

MAIN: George Louw was diagnosed with Friedreich's Ataxia as a teenager.
ABOVE TOP: George has been married for 51 years.
ABOVE BOTTOM: George, his wife, daugther and granddaughter.

It wasn't only the progressive loss of mobility that challenged me. Even worse was the impact on my bladder and bowel function. In fact, it was my tendency to urge incontinence that drove me into a wheelchair. Ambulatory sphincter control became an oxymoron.

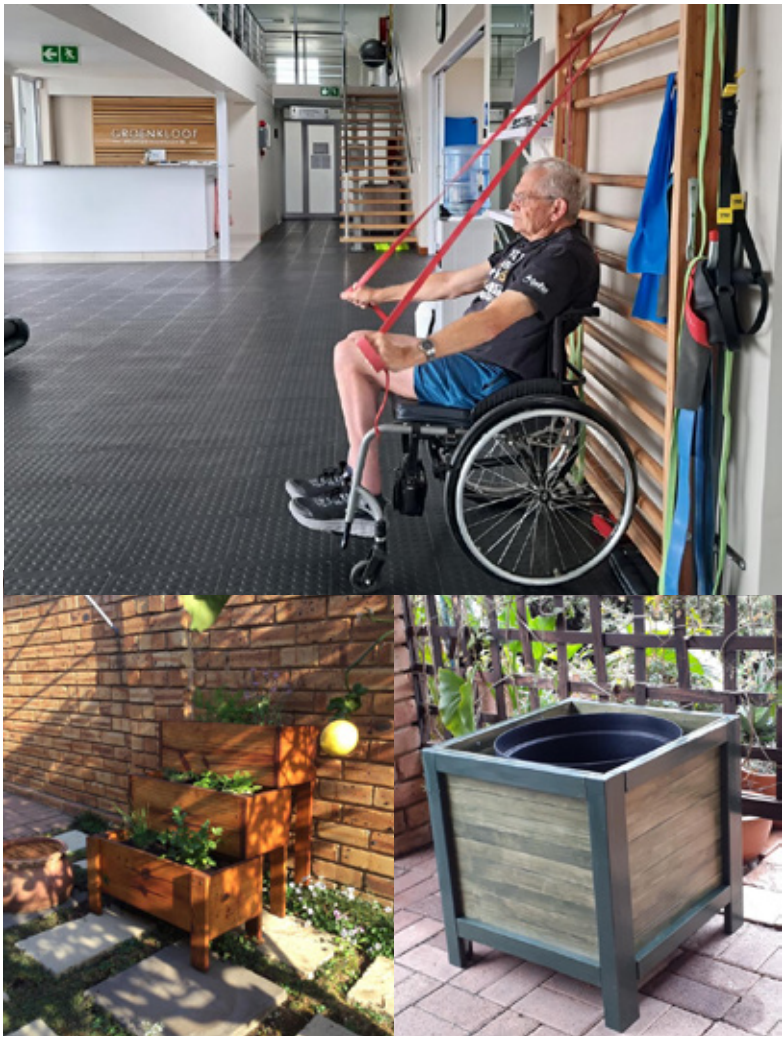
I was introduced to adult incontinence wear and Mr. IP Inbottle. As time progressed, sleave catheters with urine bags became a way of life. They are very cumbersome but it relieves anxiety, especially where toilet accessibility is an issue.

My latest and current challenge was confirmed by MRI in May of this year. The atrophy of my spinal cord has progressed to my cervical (neck) spine with fallout to the Brachial Plexus (the nerve bundle that serves my arms and hands).

I am on my way to quadriplegia. Currently, only the fine movements of my fingers are affected. I write with a writing aid, struggle with buttons and eat with a spoon. Yet, this is not a doom-and-gloom article!

SILVER LINING

In the early years, I became very despondent and anxious as the goalposts continued to shift. People prayed for me and I subjected myself to one or two hair-brained treatments, all to no avail except for temporary escalations of despondency when they failed.



TOP: George tries to stay active, but will slowly loose his abilities because of the disease.

ABOVE: George enjoys building planter boxes as a way to stay active and engaged in his retirement.

> **I have made peace with myself and live my life one day at a time**

Of late, I have made peace with myself and live my life one day at a time with my God. About Godly healing, I was given a wonderful perspective. There are three types of healing: Physical cure of the affliction; spiritual healing; and social healing.

A physical cure would be curing the affliction temporary, because when you die, the cure dies with you. Spiritual healing requires you to entrust your soul to God and building a relationship with Him, which has eternal value.

Finally, social healing is about the impact of your faith and fortitude on those who live and work with you. You may light a fire of faith where previously there was none. Again, the value-gain is eternal.

If I had a choice, I would choose the eternal over temporary every time. If God chooses to use my physical deterioration to build a resilient faith into my soul, I live with the knowledge that He will be with me every step of the way and that, although He will stretch me, He will not test me beyond my capacity. I am happy and I am at peace. R

George Louw qualified as a medical doctor, but, due to a progressing spastic paralysis, chose a career in health administration. The column is named after Ida Hlongwa, who worked as caregiver for Ari Seirlis for 20 years. Her charm, smile, commitment, quality care and sacrifice set the bar incredibly high for the caregiving fraternity.

Get in touch: yorslo@icloud.com

Little hero becomes a man

With the right multi-disciplinary team and rehab protocol, Owethu was able to flourish after several amputations as a child

Owethu was only seven-years old when he lost both his legs below the knee, his left hand through the wrist and some of his right hand's finger digits, due to meningitis that developed into gangrene. As a little boy, he was transferred to the Netcare Rehabilitation Hospital where we started his treatment.

Several amputations are a massive amount of trauma to deal with, especially if you are only seven-years old. Through the years, we have watched him grow, go to school, learn and adapt, and simply get on with life.

Owethu has turned into this unstoppable go-getter! His attitude and fighting spirit are definitely the key factors in his successes.

This is also testament to what can be done if a multi-disciplinary team pulls together and works towards a common goal with the patient in the centre of this goal.

After 25 years in rehabilitation, I can definitely tell you, your rehabilitation team and their rehab protocol are as important as oxygen! The photos can tell the rest of the story. R

MAIN: Owethu today, all grown up.
ABOVE LEFT: Heinrich Grimsehl (far left) with a seven-year old Owethu (front) and the multi-disciplinary team who helped him during his rehabilitation.
ABOVE RIGHT: A seven-year old Owethu being fitted for his below-the-knee prosthesis.

Heinrich Grimsehl is a prosthetist in private practice and a member of the South African Orthotic and Prosthetic Association (SAOPA).

Get in touch: info@hgprosthetics.co.za

NeighbourGood the accessible option

An unexpected change in accommodation led Mandy Latimore to discover a gem for travellers with disabilities

On a recent work trip to Cape Town, I had to change accommodation. The original booking turned out to be completely inaccessible even though they confirmed that the room was an accessible room! So, rapidly scrolling through the accessible hotels nearby on Booking.com, I came across a real gem: The NeighbourGood Newlands Hotel, just six kilometres from the city centre.

A vibey, pet friendly and accessible hotel with one access room on each of the five floors offers easy access to the city and suburbs. It is great for those who are looking for multiple rooms in one place for travelling groups or sports teams.

The facilities include free private parking with undercover accessible bays, 24-hour front desk, bar, restaurant and fitness centre. The staff are friendly and attentive.

There is a large open plan working area and some trendy seating options. The restaurant is more café-like with an interesting menu. The breakfasts offer a wide variety of options. The coffee bar is a delight.

The accessible room is reasonably laid out, but there is limited space between the bed and the cupboard, making access to the cupboard difficult as there are hinged doors.

The wet room has ample space and there is a handy glass panel that opens both ways to enter and exit the shower. The expandable mirror is placed too high, outside reach ranges, and there isn't a lower peephole in the door.

The auto closer on the door is extremely stiff, which makes entering and exiting the room difficult when trying to push or pull the door. The assistant manager was really interested to hear my feedback and said that he would be making the adjustments as soon as he can. They also have plans for expansion, which means that the new rooms will be more spacious and will include accessible ones as well.

MAIN PHOTO: The accessible room at NeighbourGood Newlands Hotel.
ABOVE: NeighbourGood is just six kilometres from the city centre.
RIGHT TOP: There are five floors with an accessible room on each floor.
RIGHT MIDDLE: The wet room has ample space.
RIGHT BOTTOM: There is a step-free shower with a glass panel that opens both ways (right); although there are small improvements needed like adjusting the height of the expandable mirror (left).

Another surprise was that there is a large "Hello" in sign language behind the reception counter and there are staff available who are fluent in South African sign language. This is a great opportunity as DeafSA has offices within the property.

This hotel chain has properties in Cape Town, Franschhoek, San Francisco and New Haven (USA), but not all their properties have accessible rooms.

So, the next time you are looking for a reasonably priced, smaller hotel with all the facilities in Cape Town and are happy not be on the beach … Try the NeighbourGood Newlands! Happy travels! R

Mandy Latimore is a consultant in the disability sector in the fields of travel and access.

Get in touch: mandy@noveltravel.co.za

Well-oiled wheels with Q20

Lubricating the moving parts on your wheelchair are essential for a smooth ride

Similar to any equipment with moving parts, your wheelchair can benefit from regular lubrication. This can help reduce friction, minimise squeaks and stiffness, and keep moving parts operating smoothly.

It is recommended to apply lubricate about once a month depending on how often you use your chair. Key focus areas includes your wheels, hinges and folding mechanism if your chair includes these.

SMOOTH SPIN

Lubricant will be especially useful on your wheels. For the large, rear wheel, you can put lubricant on the axle and release pin to help prevent stiffness. For the caster wheels, you can place lubricant on the fork so that it rotates freely as you change direction.

Some wheelchairs can fold away. For these, it is helpful to add lubricant on the hinges or pivot points to prevent stiffness.

APPLYING LUBRICANTS

Lubricant should be applied to a clean surface. When applying it, first wipe the area with a damp cloth to ensure any dirt is removed. Wait until it is dry before applying a small amount. Too much lubricant could attract dirt.

Be conscious of where you put lubricant. It shouldn't be added to tyres, hand rims or fabric areas.

While a small amount of lubricant can help the brake lever move smoothly, be careful of how you apply it. Lubricants on the braking surface can cause it to slip.

Follow the manufacturer's maintenance recommendations as designs vary.

WHEN TO CONSIDER A REPAIR

While stiffness and squeaks could be a sign that your wheelchair needs some lubricants, it could also indicate a fault. If you have

MAIN: Photo generated through ChatGPT.
ABOVE: The QASA team delivers Bags of Hope with Q20 cans to patients.
RIGHT: Q20 has donated cans of lubricant for the QASA Bags of Hope.
BOTTOM: Bags of Hope provides important resources and information to newly injured quadriplegics and paraplegics.

cleaned the area and applied lubricants but the issue persists, you will need to contact the manufacturer or supplier to arrange a wheelchair repair.

PARTNERING WITH Q20

The iconic, multi-purpose lubricating spray, Q20 has partnered with the QuadPara Association of South Africa (QASA) to provide cans for their Bags of Hope programme.

Through the programme, QASA visits newly injured persons with spinal cord injuries during their rehabilitation to provide them with practical resources and information.

The aim is to help new quadriplegics and paraplegics navigate the challenges that may accompany their disability going forward. With the generous support of Q20, new wheelchair users can take greater care of their assistive device.

A big thank you to Q20 for their commitment to supporting people with disabilities. Secure yourself a smoother ride by bagging a can of Q20! R

Work, wheels and the power of starting over

Restarting her recruitment business, SCallaghan, after a spinal cord injury has proven challenging, but promising for Sharon Callaghan

A quick trip to the bathroom was just that. Quick. These days it involves planning, timing and, depending on the day, a backup plan. That's just one of many things that changed after my accident in January 2025, when I became a wheelchair user. Suddenly, things I'd done without thinking required a completely different approach.

By January 2026, I needed to get back to work. Restarting my recruitment and HR business, SCallaghan, was also about rebuilding routine, confidence and independence. With almost 20 years' experience gained locally in South Africa, in the United Kingdom and most recently in Australia, I thought I was ready.

STARTING OVER

Yet, the real test started when I started getting back into everything after a year of being down, especially with barriers I hadn't expected. I still do executive search and recruitment, but my work now also has a much stronger focus on inclusive employment and return-to-work support.

Through this work, I support Rand Mutual Assurance's Rehabilitation, Reintegration and Return-to-Work (RRR2W) initiative, helping people who have been injured at work, gone through rehabilitation and are ready to start exploring what work could look like again.

I've been blessed to have support from different places, including my family, friends and organisations like the QuadPara Association of South Africa (QASA). Before I properly understood what life after the accident was going to look like, QASA was one of the first places I turned to after finding their information online.

Sometimes you don't need someone to fix everything. At that point in my life, I just needed someone who had some understanding of the world I'd suddenly landed in and was willing to listen. I also found strength in reading stories like

the autobiography of Ari Seirlis, Wheels of Fire. It reminded me that life can change in a second, but you can still find your way forward.

INFORMED DECISIONS

If I could give one piece of advice to anyone entering or re-entering the job market, it would be this: Make it an informed decision and prepare yourself. The job market is competitive, so preparation matters.

> **The job market is competitive, so preparation matters**

Read the advert properly. Research the company. Understand what they're looking for and know how your own skills and experience relate to the position.

AI AND JOBS

Another thing changing the job market is artificial intelligence (AI). Candidates are actively using AI to help them prepare, practise and think through how to present themselves. It also doesn't have to cost anything.

There are free AI tools available that can help you understand a job advert, improve your CV presentation and prepare for interview questions. While doing this, you'll also learn how to prompt AI, a skill that's becoming useful in the workplace.

If you're not sure where to start, try giving Google's Gemini AI tool a job advert and asking:

- What are the five most important things this employer is looking for?
- Based on this job advert and my experience, what interview questions could I be asked?
- These are my skills and previous jobs. Which of my skills are valuable for this position?

You can even ask it to interview you and practise answering the questions out loud.

BE TRUTHFUL

Just remember that AI doesn't know you better than you know yourself. It can get things wrong! Don't allow it to add qualifications, experience or skills you don't have. Your CV still needs to be truthful and the person who arrives at the interview still needs to be you. Don't let AI speak for you. Let it prepare you.

> **Don't let AI speak for you. Let it prepare you**

The job market isn't easy. You can't control who else applies for a role or what an employer decides, but you can control how prepared you are, how well you understand the opportunity and how clearly you explain what you can offer.

I'm continuing to build my knowledge within this space while finding my rhythm and getting to know more people in the sector.

I look forward to contributing to this publication and would love to hear from readers about the challenges you are facing in the job market, especially when looking for work that recognises your skills, experience and value. R

Sharon Callaghan is an Executive Search and HR professional specialising in disability inclusion and inclusive employment. Through SCallaghan, she works with employers to create more accessible, practical pathways into sustainable employment.

Get in touch: sharon@scallaghan.com

Off-road Transporter an all-terrain solution

In collaboration with Susan Holmes, ShonaquipSE is introducing the Off-road Transporter to rural communities across South Africa

Sometimes, meaningful innovation doesn't begin in a laboratory or a design studio. Sometimes it begins with a moment that is impossible to forget. For Susan Holmes, that moment came more than a decade ago while travelling through South Africa's Tugela Valley.

She witnessed an all-too-familiar reality in many rural communities. A person with a disability being transported in a wheelbarrow because there simply wasn't another way to navigate the terrain.

"It stayed with me. I knew there had to be a better way," she recalls. What Susan saw was not simply a transport problem. It was a reminder that for many people with disabilities, the greatest barrier is often not the assistive device itself, but everything that happens before and after it.

A wheelchair may restore mobility and independence. A supportive seating system may improve comfort and improve function. Yet, if the route from home to school is a muddy footpath, if the journey to a clinic crosses loose gravel and steep inclines, or if public transport is inaccessible, the promise these technologies provide remain frustratingly out of reach.

This is what many in the disability sector refer to as the first- and last-mile of inclusion. While the term "last mile" is often used in transport planning to describe the final stretch of a journey, for the majority of people with disabilities the journey begins at their own front door.

It is those first few hundred metres that often determine whether someone can attend school, access healthcare, earn an income or participate in community life.

For Susan, the answer was not to look away. She began designing a practical transport solution that could cope with the realities of

MAIN PHOTO: The Off-road Transporter offers a solution for transporting people with disabilities over rough terrain.
ABOVE: It is common for people to make use of wheelbarrows to transport people with disabilities.
RIGHT: The Off-road Transporter offers a safe, comfortable alternative.

rural South Africa. The first prototype proved there was value in the concept, but it also revealed important lessons.

Heavy wheels struggled in muddy conditions, the design was difficult to store, and improvements were needed before it could truly serve the communities it was intended for.

For many ideas, this might have been the end of the journey. Fortunately, years later, she discovered that Shonaquip Social Enterprise (ShonaquipSE) had already developed a similar, effective design. There was an opportunity for their shared thinking and passion for unblocking barriers to inclusion to change lives. This brought to life the Off-Road Transporter.

“One of the greatest lessons has been recognising that a device on its own is never enough,” says Susan. Working alongside ShonaquipSE, Susan found renewed purpose within a broader conversation about how to rethink communities access, mobility, participation and inclusion.

“Real inclusion happens when people can actually use technology to reach the places that matter in their lives,” she shares. This philosophy shaped the work that ShonaquipSE pursues.

For decades, the organisation has worked alongside assistive technology users, families, innovators, clinicians, and communities to develop solutions that respond to the realities of everyday life.

> **“Real inclusion happens when people can actually use technology to reach the places that matter in their lives**

Rather than asking whether a product simply works, the team asks a more important question: Can this solution solve the problem where the user lives and needs it?

Across South Africa, the answer depends on far more than engineering. Rural communities

ABOVE: The Off-road Transporter can also be used in disaster situations to transport or evacuate people with disabilities.

often contend with long distances, uneven terrain, seasonal flooding, and limited transport infrastructure. These environmental realities influence whether someone can get to school, reach a healthcare facility, visit family, their church or simply participate in community life.

Designing for those realities requires listening first. It also requires recognising that the people who use assistive technology are experts in their own experiences. Their knowledge shapes better solutions, stronger communities, and more sustainable systems.

This innovation is viewed as only one part of a much larger picture. ShonaquipSE is now working with partners to explore how the Off-Road Transporter can contribute to a community-driven Micro-Mobility as a service model.

This would generate opportunities for local skills development, employment, and community ownership. It is an approach that recognises inclusion must be designed and built together with community when planning policies, pro-cesses and products.

The same thinking is becoming increasingly important in disaster preparedness and resilience planning. The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction has repeatedly highlighted that people with disabilities are too often excluded from emergency planning, transport systems and evacuation strategies.

> **People who use assistive technology are experts in their own experiences**

When accessibility is overlooked, exclusion becomes part of the crisis itself. Building resilient communities therefore begins long before disasters occur. It begins by ensuring that people with disabilities can move, participate and contribute every day.

The Off-Road Transporter has become part of a growing movement that asks communities to think differently about mobility, dignity and participation.

Shonaquip Social Enterprise (SSE) builds inclusive ecosystems where people with disabilities and their families can live full lives. SSE provide a range of unique, locally designed and manufactured paediatric assistive device suitable for intermediate and advanced seating requirements, as well as training and outreach programmes that support disability awareness, inclusive education and employment, disability advocacy and empowerment. **Get in touch: info@shonaquipse.org.za**

Supporting documents for SARS

The South African Revenue Service (SARS) requires specific documentation from you when filing for disability tax rebate

For many families, submitting a disability-related tax claim can feel like a big step. You gather your documents, complete your tax return and hope the process goes smoothly. In many cases it does. But SARS may ask for additional information, or even decline a claim. While this can feel discouraging, it is important to know that it is not unusual.

SARS regularly performs verification checks on tax returns, especially when medical expenses or disability-related claims are involved. In most cases, they simply want to confirm that the claim is supported by the correct documentation. The most important supporting document remains the ITR-DD form, which confirms that the person qualifies as having a disability according to the SARS definition. This form must be completed by a registered medical practitioner and submitted when SARS requests it. If the form is incomplete, outdated, or not properly signed, SARS may reject the claim.

Beyond the ITR-DD form, SARS will typically request proof of the expenses that were claimed. This can include:

- Medical aid tax certificates issued by your medical scheme;
- Invoices and receipts for therapy sessions, such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, or speech therapy;
- Proof of payment for assistive devices, wheelchairs, communication devices, or other specialised equipment;
- Invoices for home modifications related to accessibility, such as ramps or bathroom adaptations;
- Educational or care-related invoices where specialised services are required because of the disability; and
- Logbooks for any travel related claims.

It is important that these documents clearly show the service provider, date, amount and nature of the expense. In many cases, SARS will also require proof that the expense was actually paid, which is why bank statements or payment confirmations are often useful to keep.

If SARS reviews your claim and decides to disallow part of it, the first step is not to panic. A declined claim does not always mean the expense is invalid. Sometimes, it simply means the documentation was incomplete or unclear.

In these situations, taxpayers have the right to request a correction or lodge an objection. This allows you to submit additional documentation or explain why the expense qualifies under the medical tax rules. The key is to provide clear supporting evidence and in the correct format. When the documentation aligns with SARS guidelines, many issues can be resolved through this process.

Navigating the tax system should not be another unnecessary burden. With organised records and a clear understanding of the process, families can approach tax season with far greater confidence.If you are stuck or need more advice you are welcome to contact us on e-mail at info@yourdisabilitytax.co.za. R

Lammert Stavast is a qualified chartered accountant, tax practitioner and founder of YourDisabilityTax, which assists persons with disabilities or families with their disability tax rebate claims and disputes to the maximum refund within the legal framework.

Get in touch: info@yourdisabilitytax.co.za

What paid AI can offer

Artificial intelligence subscriptions can simplify tasks, but does require some caution

When deciding on an artificial intelligence (AI) subscription, I ask a fairly practical question: Does this tool help me do something worthwhile with less effort?

For people with disabilities, this question carries considerable weight. A task that takes one person 10 minutes may require someone else to manage fatigue, difficult keyboard access, inaccessible information or several rounds of asking for assistance. Reducing that effort can create space for work, learning and participation.

I pay for ChatGPT Plus largely because I am a software programmer. I also use Gemini through Google AI Pro with the South African student offer discounting the cost.

These serve different purposes for me. Owning more than one AI tool is not a requirement. What matters is understanding the help you need, what the tools offer and whether its contribution justifies the expense.

VALUE AND PITFALLS

Programming exposes the value and the weaknesses of AI. A coding assistant can suggest an approach, explain unfamiliar code or help investigate a fault.

However, a generated solution that appears to work is not necessarily reliable. It may fail when someone enters unexpected information. It may introduce security problems or create difficulties for people using assistive technology.

My responsibility doesn't disappear because a machine produced the code. I still need to understand the problem, inspect the result and test what happens beyond the easiest example.

This distinction applies far beyond programming. Someone can produce an impressive business proposal without understanding the figures. A student can receive a convincing explanation without recognising that a key fact is wrong. A beautifully written letter can confidently refer to a policy that does not exist.

The output looks finished and that can encourage us to believe that the thinking is finished too. We may feel knowledgeable because we can repeat an answer, even when we cannot explain it or recognise when it stops being useful. This is a risk for anyone using AI.

The output looks finished and that can encourage us to believe that the thinking is finished too

Disability does not make a person less capable of judgement. However, when a tool removes a barrier that has been frustrating us for years, it is understandable that we might be eager to trust it.

CHECKING AND LEARNING

The answer is to build checking and learning into the way we use AI. After receiving an explanation, ask for a concrete example and try to explain the idea back in your own words. Ask what assumptions the answer depends on.

Where factual accuracy matters, open the original source and check whether it actually supports the claim. Asking a second chatbot can reveal a disagreement worth investigating. However, two systems agreeing does not prove that either is correct.

CONVERSATIONAL AI

Conversation AI allows you to keep working through an idea. It can help give shape to what someone is trying to say. For a person who finds writing physically demanding, this could reduce some of the effort involved in preparing a message or organising a document.

For someone who becomes overwhelmed by a complicated task, it could provide a manageable starting point by breaking an assignment into smaller steps. It could turn rough notes into a clear e-mail or explain unfamiliar terms in everyday language.

GIVING INSTRUCTION

The way we give instructions matters. “Help me with this document” leaves considerable room for guessing. A more useful request might be: “Explain this document in plain language, keep all the dates and conditions, and separate what it says from anything you are assuming.”

Someone managing fatigue could add: “Give me one step at a time and wait for me before continuing.” These instructions do not guarantee accuracy. They make the response easier to work with and check. Learning to describe the support you need is more valuable than memorising a collection of supposedly perfect prompts.

Learning to describe the support you need is more valuable than memorising a collection of supposedly perfect prompts

TESTING FOR REAL ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility must be judged individually. Speaking may be easier than typing for one person, while another needs reliable text input. A blind user might consider how the interface works with a screen reader. Someone with limited hand movement may depend on switch access. A feature

described as convenient is only useful if the person can actually operate it.

Before paying, I would encourage readers to try a real task using their own device and normal access method. Notice the whole process, including correcting a mistake, finding an earlier conversation and saving the result. An impressive demonstration tells us less than completing an ordinary task on a difficult day.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

There is also a financial reality to consider here in South Africa. A subscription competes with data, transport, electricity and other essential expenses.

My student discount affects what Gemini costs me. Google's student offers have eligibility requirements, and readers should check the offer available to their own account, including what happens when any promotional period ends.

For either service, look at the amount you will actually be charged and the limits attached to the plan. Start with a recurring problem you want to solve.

Try the access already available to you, measure how much useful effort it saves and consider upgrading only when you can identify the benefit. Saving 10 minutes of exhausting input may be more valuable than generating 50 pages nobody needs.

PRIORITISING PRIVACY

Privacy belongs in this calculation too. A request for help does not require sharing your identity number, full medical history or somebody else's personal details. Remove information that is unnecessary for the task and understand the service's privacy settings before sharing sensitive material.

Practical training should cover these judgements alongside the buttons and features. It should help people recognise uncertainty, check a source, protect personal information and decide when the tool is making a task harder. It should also leave room for different disabilities, levels of experience and ways of communicating.

Employers, educators and service providers retain their responsibility to make their systems accessible. Giving someone a chatbot does not repair an inaccessible application form or excuse a website that cannot be used with a keyboard.

> **Giving someone a chatbot does not repair an inaccessible application form**

For me, the value of these subscriptions rests on whether they support useful work and better decisions. For people with disabilities, the possibilities extend into everyday communication, study and employment.

Real progress means being able to participate with greater control, while understanding where the tool's contribution ends and our own judgement must take over.

If you would like help choosing an AI tool, understanding your subscription or learning to use these systems effectively, please reach out to me. I can help with practical guidance and training shaped around your needs, so that the confidence you gain is supported by understanding and useful skills. R

Sandile Mkhize, a T5 complete paraplegic and drone industry research and development software developer. Passionate about improving accessibility through smart engineering, assistive technology, and global collaboration.

Get in touch: mkhizenathan@gmail.com

Future skills and the QCTO landscape

With new updates in the legislative landscape, the workplace may become more inclusive for employees with disabilities

A massive shift is underway that directly impacts how we, as wheelchair users and individuals with mobility impairments, access and thrive in the workplace. The Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) is changing the rules of the game. What does this shift actually mean for you?

ACCESSIBLE ASSESSMENTS

One of the most critical changes under the QCTO is the introduction of the External Integrated Summative Assessment, which requires assessment centres to be strictly compliant and fully accessible. Assessment models must structurally accommodate specific physical disabilities. The days of arriving at a testing centre to find a broken elevator or inaccessible bathrooms are being legislated out of existence. Compliance now demands barrier-free mobility access and ergonomic workplace adjustments as a mandatory baseline.

CONVERTING EXPERIENCE

Many individuals with mobility impairments have years of practical, lived experience but were denied formal qualifications due to inaccessible transport, unaccommodating institutions or systemic barriers. The new QCTO framework strongly advocates for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). This allows you to convert your existing skills and on-the-job knowledge into a formal, recognised occupational qualification.

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

The updated legislative landscape forces host employers to look beyond basic physical compliance. True reasonable accommodation in 2026 is operational and digital. We are seeing a mandated push towards flexible working hours and asynchronous learning delivery models. For quadriplegic or paraplegic professionals, managing physical energy and navigating unpredictable accessible transport are daily realities. Asynchronous learning allows you to engage with training materials on your own schedule through accessible digital hubs. It allows you to deliver peak performance without the friction of a traditional, rigid nine-to-five commute.

TAKE UP SPACE

This shift is our opportunity! Skills development is no longer just a box-ticking exercise for employers, but a genuinely accessible pathway to economic empowerment. By understanding these new standards, you are better equipped to advocate for your rights, demand compliant reasonable accommodation, and take your rightful place in the South African economy.

Rustim Ariefdien is a disability expert who assists businesses to "let the Ability of disAbility enAble their profitAbility" through BBBEE, skills development, employment equity and socio-economic development. His purpose is the economic empowerment of persons with disability in Africa. As a person with a disability himself, he has extensive experience in the development and empowerment of persons with disability.

Get in touch: rustim@rustimariefdienconsultants.onmicrosoft.com

Hidden labour of belonging

It is exhausting work to try and prove that you belong

The greatest burden I carry into work every morning is not my wheelchair. It is the quiet, exhausting work of proving that I belong. For years, I thought this was simply the price of having a disability. I accepted it the way that I accepted inaccessible entrances, broken lifts, steep ramps and the sideways glances that quietly asked, “Are you sure you should be here?”.

I learned to phone ahead before meetings to ask whether there was a ramp. I learned to memorise which buildings had accessible toilets. I learned to calculate whether asking for help today would make me seem less capable tomorrow. I learned to arrive early so that I wouldn’t inconvenience anyone.

I learned to smile through awkward comments because correcting people every day is exhausting. Eventually, I became so good at carrying these invisible burdens that other people stopped noticing they were there. Perhaps I stopped noticing them too.

Then I became a researcher. As part of my Master’s research, I spent months listening to black women with physical disabilities from across the Eastern Cape speak about their experiences in the workplace. I thought I was going to collect data.

> **I found pieces of myself in every interview**

Instead, I found pieces of myself in every interview. One woman carefully measured when to ask for assistance because she feared being seen as a burden.

Another described arriving at work every day determined to outperform everyone else because she believed one mistake would confirm every stereotype people held about employees with disabilities. Others

spoke about inaccessible offices, delayed accommodations, opportunities that quietly disappeared and the emotional exhaustion of constantly having to explain themselves.

As I listened, one thought refused to leave me. The greatest burden these women carried was not always their disability. It was the relentless effort of trying to belong.

That realisation changed me. Not simply as a researcher, but as a woman with disabilities in the rural areas of South Africa; as someone who had spent years believing that if I just worked hard enough, adapted enough and proved myself enough, belonging would eventually come.

But belonging was never something we were meant to earn. It was something every human being should have been given from the very beginning. A ramp may allow me to enter a building, but belonging allows me to enter without wondering whether I must justify my presence.

South Africa has some of the strongest laws protecting the rights of people with disabilities. Those laws matter. They were hard won and they remain essential. But legislation, no matter how progressive, cannot make someone feel that they belong. People do that. Workplaces do that. Communities do that.

The women I met during my research were never asking for extraordinary treatment. They were asking for something profoundly ordinary. The freedom to arrive at work and simply be seen as colleagues. To contribute without first overcoming unnecessary barriers. To be recognised for their ideas before their disability. To belong without having to prove that they belonged.

The older I become, the more I understand the wisdom I grew up with in the Eastern Cape. *Umntu ngumntu ngabantu*. A person becomes a person through other people. Ubuntu is not measured by the speeches we make, the policies we draft or the promises we publish. It is measured by how we make one another feel.

Do people leave our workplaces feeling respected? Do they leave feeling valued? Do they leave believing there is a place for them? Because the opposite of belonging is not simply exclusion. It is the slow erosion of dignity. It is waking up each morning knowing that before you can contribute your skills, your knowledge or your leadership, you must first convince someone that your presence is justified.

> **Belonging allows me to enter without wondering whether I must justify my presence.**

No one should have to carry that burden. Not because they are people with disabilities. Not because they are black. Not because they are women, but because every human being deserves to know what it feels like to arrive somewhere and think, “I don’t have to prove that I belong here”.

Perhaps that is what inclusion has always been about. Not ramps alone. Not policies. Not employment statistics, but creating a South Africa where belonging is no longer something anyone has to earn.

The greatest gift we can offer another person is not access to a building. It is the certainty that they were always meant to be inside.

Thuthula Ida Sodumo is a disability and gender scholar with a focus on the intersectionality of race, gender, disability and rurality, storyteller, government practitioner and accessibility advocate. Her writing draws on lived experience, research and public service to explore disability, identity, culture and social justice, inviting readers to see the world through a different lens.

Get in touch: sthuthula@yahoo.com

Writing with limited hand dexterity

With the right assistive device, writing can be easy for someone with limited hand dexterity

MAIN: Photo is AI generated.

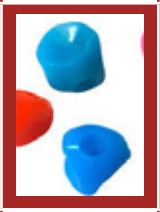
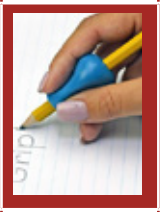
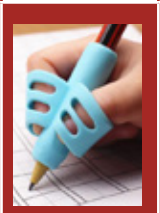
LISTING: Photos were sourced through ChatGPT.

There are many assistive devices on the market that can assist with writing. These range from simple grippers for only a few rands to weighted pens that are a couple hundred rand. We've compiled a list of the writing aids available.

Most of these products can be found on Takealot or Amazon as well as at Waltons. Temu also has some options available although the shipping for these might take some time. The costs listed below are only a rough estimate. It is recommended to do your own research to confirm the price.

Depending on your hand dexterity, you can also consider some at-home adjustments. For example, you can wrap your writing tool with duct tape to provide more grip, or even stick your pen through a tennis ball! There are some truly creative solutions. R

ITEM NAME	PHOTO	DESCRIPTION	ESTIMATED COST
Foam Pencil Grip		Soft foam sleeve increases pencil thickness and improves comfort for weak fingers.	R15 to R40
Slanted Writing Board		**Inclines paper to improve wrist position, posture and handwriting control.**	**R649**

ITEM NAME	PHOTO	DESCRIPTION	ESTIMATED COST
Triangular Pencil Grip		Helps position the thumb, index and middle finger correctly for improved pencil control and reduced finger fatigue.	R18 to R20
Moulded Pencil Grip		**Ergonomic grip with finger moulds that assists users who struggle to maintain a functional pencil grasp.**	**R13 to R20**
Crossover Pencil Grip		Prevents fingers from crossing over the pencil and encourages a comfortable tripod grasp.	R39 to R50
Easi-Grip Pencil Gripper		**Soft, larger grip designed for children and adults with weak grip strength or arthritis.**	**R129 to R160**
Universal Cuff (Pen Holder)		Adjustable hand strap that securely holds a pen or pencil when finger grasp is limited.	R920
Weighted Pen (Large Grip)		**Heavy pen with a thick barrel that improves control for people with tremors or weak hand muscles.**	**R169 to R620**
Jumbo Grip Ballpoint Pen		Oversized barrel reduces the amount of finger strength required for writing.	R60 to R150
Ergonomic Pen/Pencil Holder		**Fits around the hand and stabilises the pen without requiring a tight grip.**	**R40 to R60**

Through the lens of a wheelchair photographer

Johann Meintjes shares his experience of Ellis Park, Loftus and Kings Park as a wheelchair photographer

As a sports photographer who uses a wheelchair, I have learned that every stadium presents its own challenges. While accessibility has improved at many venues, my experience covering the 2026 Nations Championship at Emirates Airline Park (Ellis Park) highlighted both the obstacles that still exist and the willingness of people to make a difference.

EMIRATES AIRLINE PARK

The day began on a positive note. The media parking was excellent with a secure parking bay located inside the designated media area. Security personnel were on hand should assistance be required, although I was fortunate to have fellow photographers helping me unload my camera equipment from my vehicle.

The first accessibility challenge came almost immediately with the entrance to the media centre reached by two large steps, creating a significant obstacle for a wheelchair user. Fortunately, the security officer on duty was quick to offer assistance. Inside the media centre, the South African Rugby Union (SARU) officials welcomed photographers and members of the media with professionalism and friendliness.

Getting to the field presented another hurdle. The usual route to the pitch involves a very steep ramp that rugby players use when walking from the changing rooms to the field. Recognising the difficulty, SARU officials immediately found a solution and safely assisted me down the ramp.

Once on the field, another problem became apparent. The pitch-side advertising boards are too high for a photographer shooting from wheelchair height, severely restricting photographic opportunities. Once again, the SARU team responded positively. They arranged for me to work from alongside the reserve players, providing a much better position from which to capture the action.

MAIN AND ABOVE LEFT: Photographer Johann Meintjes on the rugby field. Photographs by Charmain Visser.
ABOVE RIGHT: Photograph by Johann Meintjes.

At the end of the match, the steep climb back to the media centre remained a challenge. Thankfully, several ball boys willingly pushed my wheelchair up the long incline, ensuring I could return safely after the final whistle.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Mohrike Muller, media operations coordinator from SARU, whose kindness, professionalism and determination to find practical solutions made the day both productive and enjoyable. Her willingness to help demonstrated how much difference one person can make to the experience of a media professional with a disability.

While my experience as a photographer highlighted several accessibility issues behind the scenes, spectators using wheelchairs are better accommodated. Emirates Airline Park offers excellent accessible parking, and the North and East stands provide approximately 75 wheelchair spaces, together with seating for accompanying companions.

Accessibility, however, should extend beyond spectator areas. Media facilities should also be designed to accommodate photographers and journalists with disabilities, allowing them to work independently and with dignity.

Looking ahead, Nyaniso Sam from Lions Media and I will be exploring the possibility of adapting one of the stadium's suites into an accessible workspace for wheelchair users.

Such an initiative would represent another positive step towards making Emirates Airline Park a venue where everyone (whether spectator, photographer or journalist) can enjoy and perform their role without unnecessary barriers.

The Nations Championship showcased world-class rugby. With continued improvements in accessibility, Emirates Airline Park can also become a leader in ensuring that every member of the rugby community has equal opportunities to experience the game.

LOFTUS VERSFELD

For my visit to Loftus Versfeld, Mohrike arranged an accessible parking permit for me, which allowed me to park on the servitude road between Loftus Versfeld and Loftus Park. It made a significant difference before I had even unpacked my camera equipment. I never take for granted the support I receive from the SARU.

The security personnel were welcoming and immediately offered assistance, helping me unload both my wheelchair and photographic gear from the vehicle. Small gestures like these make the start of a long working day much easier.

The difference between Emirates Airline Park and Loftus Versfeld from an accessibility perspective is remarkable. From the moment I entered the stadium, the journey to the media centre was smooth and well designed.

A lift provided access to Level 1, followed by a ramp leading directly into the media centre, making the entire route fully wheelchair

ABOVE AND LEFT: Spectators with disabilities enjoy a rugby match from the field. Photographs by Johann Meintjes.

accessible. Returning from the media centre to pitch level was equally straightforward, allowing me to move efficiently between work areas without unnecessary obstacles.

Photographing the match presented one challenge. The advertising boards surrounding the field are relatively high, making it difficult for a photographer working from a wheelchair to capture clear action shots from behind them.

Recognising this, SARU officials kindly allowed me to work from the field alongside the substitutes' bench. This position not only solved the visibility issue, but also provided an outstanding angle from which to capture the intensity and emotion of the game.

Loftus Versfeld also offers dedicated facilities for spectators who use wheelchairs. Wheelchair-accessible seating is available in the front row of the Northern pavilion, providing an excellent view of the field.

In addition, the stadium includes an accessible suite on Level 1 of the Northern pavilion. Unfortunately, during this test match, the suite was allocated for general public use, leaving wheelchair spectators with access only to the ground-level viewing area.

While this was disappointing, my overall experience at Loftus Versfeld demonstrated that thoughtful planning, accessible infrastructure, and a willingness from stadium staff to accommodate individual needs can make a major sporting event far more inclusive.

HOLLYWOODBETS KINGS PARK

I have noticed an interesting change over the years. When fellow photographers first encounter a colleague working from a wheelchair, they quickly begin to appreciate the practical challenges that people with disabilities face in environments that many others take for granted.

Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the Springboks vs Wales Test at Hollywoodbets Kings Park in Durban. I therefore asked my colleague, Charmain Visser, to assess the stadium's accessibility, focusing on accessible parking, the media facilities,

TOP: Spectators enjoy the rugby from the stands. Photos by Johann Meintjes.
ABOVE: Johann Meintjes captures the action.

access to the playing field, and the experience for spectators using wheelchairs. The findings were encouraging.

Parking for visitors with disabilities at Kings Park was well organised and conveniently located. However, as with Emirates Airline Park, the entrance to the media room where photographers collect their bibs is not fully wheelchair accessible. A small step at the entrance creates an unnecessary obstacle for wheelchair users.

Once inside the stadium, the experience improved significantly. The lifts to the main media centre on Level 4 were fully accessible, allowing wheelchair users to move around with ease. Access from the media area onto the rugby field was equally straightforward, making it possible for photographers with disabilities to work alongside their colleagues without difficulty.

The facilities for spectators using wheelchairs were equally impressive. Dedicated viewing areas are located alongside the field, providing excellent sightlines and easy access, demonstrating that accessibility for fans has been carefully considered.

Based on observations from recent visits to South Africa's major rugby venues, it appears that Emirates Airline Park remains the only stadium where the media facilities require meaningful upgrades to accommodate photographers and journalists who use wheelchairs. In contrast, parking and spectator accessibility at all three major stadiums are of a high standard.

One further improvement could make these venues even more inclusive: The introduction of a dedicated hospitality suite designed specifically for guests with disabilities. Such a space would ensure that supporters, sponsors and media professionals with disabilities can enjoy the same premium match-day experience as everyone else.

South African rugby has made significant strides in improving accessibility for supporters. With a few targeted upgrades to media facilities, the game can become even more inclusive for everyone who wants to be part of the action.

Diana Sello crowned fastest Quad at SABAT Raceday

Annual SABAT Batteries Race celebrates mobility and a long-standing partnership empowering power wheelchair users

The 2026 SABAT QASA Raceday brought the SABAT Batteries team and QASA members together at the Tarlton Internation Raceway on 24 September 2026 for a day celebrating mobility and a partnership that has made a meaningful difference in the lives of power wheelchair users.

For decades, SABAT Batteries have donated batteries to QASA members who use power wheelchairs. This has played a vital role in keeping these members active, independent and engaged with their community. In the past year, over 70 sets of batteries were donated.

The annual Raceday is an opportunity to celebrate the mobility in a unique and exciting way. Power wheelchair users take to the racetrack and put their skills, determination and wheelchair control to the test.

This year, the title of fastest power wheelchair user went to Diana Sello. Congratulations to Diana on an outstanding performance and on taking the honours at the 2026 SABAT QASA Raceday!

Beyond the racing itself, the event is about connection, camaraderie and recognising what becomes possible when people have access to the mobility support they need.

QASA extends its sincere thanks to the SABAT Batteries team for its ongoing commitment and support, and to all the QASA members who attended and helped make the 2026 Raceday a memorable occasion.

The organisation looks forward to many more years of partnership, mobility, competition and celebration with SABAT Batteries.

RACE DAY

First Adaptive Esports Tournament in Africa

Konke Gamers hosted the first Adaptive Esports Tournament in Africa this past July

On 4 July 2026, Konke Gamers proudly hosted KGAET26, Africa's very first Adaptive Esports Tournament. What started as a dream to make gaming more accessible became a day filled with excitement, emotion, fierce competition and unforgettable moments.

The day before the event was exhausting. Our team spent hours setting up the venue, testing equipment, arranging gaming stations and making sure every detail was just right. By the time everything was finished, we stood back, looked around, and felt an incredible sense of pride. It had all come together.

That evening, over dinner, we spoke about what the next day might bring. We wondered how many people would arrive, whether everything would run smoothly and whether people would understand the vision behind the event.

We had done everything we could to prepare. Now, it was simply time to open the doors and hope people would share in what we had worked so hard to create.

For many people, gaming is just a hobby. It's something they enjoy after work or school. Yet for many of the people who walked through our doors the next morning, gaming means so much more.

It can build confidence, improve motor and cognitive skills, create friendships, reduce isolation and provide a sense of independence.

Sadly, many people with disabilities are still unable to enjoy something that millions of others take for granted. KGAET26 was created to show that, with the right adaptive technology and support, everyone deserves the chance to play.

The response exceeded anything we could have imagined. More than 100 people attended the tournament, including players, families, therapists, healthcare professionals, volunteers, gaming enthusiasts, and members of the public.

ABOVE: (From the left) Jordan Kough, executive director of Able Gamers, with the Konke Games team including Bruce Cardoso, Liesl Gerber, David Williams and Karen Veldsman.
RIGHT: Gamers with disabilities compete at the first-ever Esports Tournament in Africa.

Considering our original goal was simply to see double figures through the doors, seeing the venue buzzing with people was both surreal and incredibly rewarding.

From the moment the event began, there was an energy in the room that is difficult to put into words. Laughter echoed across the venue, cheers erupted during close matches, complete strangers encouraged one another and everywhere you looked people were smiling. It felt less like a tournament and more like a community coming together.

> **It felt less like a tournament and more like a community coming together**

One of the biggest honours for Konke Gamers was welcoming Jordan, Director of Able Gamers, who travelled all the way from the United States to be part of the event.

Able Gamers has been a global leader in adaptive gaming for many years, and having Jordan there reinforced just how significant this moment was. His support and encouragement reminded us that accessibility is a worldwide movement, and that South Africa now has an important place within it.

Visitors had the opportunity to experience gaming across Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 5, and PC, all equipped with adaptive controllers and customised setups. We also had classic arcade machines on display, which quickly became a favourite as different generations gathered around to play together.

One of our biggest challenges during the day wasn't setting up the equipment, it was knowing when to hand the controller back because we were enjoying ourselves just as much as everyone else!

One of the things that made KGAET26 so special was that no two gaming stations looked exactly alike. Every participant had different abilities, so every setup was adjusted to meet their individual needs. For some, it was the first time they had ever played a video game independently. For others, it was their first opportunity to compete on equal terms and show everyone just how skilled adaptive gamers can be.

There were countless moments throughout the day that will stay with us forever. We watched nervous players become confident competitors within minutes. We saw people who had never picked up a controller before suddenly celebrating their first victory.

Families stood watching with tears in their eyes as sons, daughters, mothers and fathers experienced something they had once believed would never be possible.

Those moments reminded us exactly why Konke Gamers exists. No trophy or sponsorship could ever compare to seeing someone discover that they can play. The tournament was about far more than gaming. It also brought together organisations and businesses that are making a real difference in the disability community.

> **The tournament was about far more than gaming**

Visitors had the chance to meet the amazing teams from Made For More, ICON Durban, Niki Singh Occupational Therapy, Dusted Ink and SensePilot to learn about products, services and technologies that continue to improve people's lives.

None of this would have been possible without the incredible support of our sponsors and partners. Gooderson Tropicana Hotel generously sponsored the venue, providing the perfect accessible location for the event. They also donated the raffle prizes, adding even more excitement throughout the day. DIY Electronics proudly sponsored our tournament trophies, giving competitors something special to celebrate their achievements.

Behind the scenes, an incredible group of volunteers worked tirelessly from start to

finish. Whether they were helping set up equipment, assisting players, answering questions or simply offering encouragement, every volunteer played a part in creating an environment where everyone felt welcome, supported and included.

When people ask what the biggest success of KGAET26 was, it isn't the attendance numbers or the tournament winners that come to mind. It's the confidence we saw grow throughout the day. It's the friendships that were formed, the conversations that challenged perceptions of disability and the smiles that never seemed to disappear. Those are the moments that mattered most.

Events like KGAET26 also remind us that gaming is about much more than entertainment. Research continues to show that gaming can improve problem-solving, communication, hand-eye coordination, cognitive function and mental wellbeing. For many people with disabilities, adaptive gaming also provides independence, meaningful social interaction and opportunities that extend far beyond the screen.

Hosting Africa's first Adaptive Esports Tournament is something Konke Gamers will always be proud of. We remain committed to growing adaptive gaming across South Africa, building new partnerships, introducing more accessible technology, and creating even more opportunities for people with disabilities to play, compete, connect and thrive. R

Konke Gamers is a volunteer-driven, non-profit initiative focused on making gaming accessible to people with disabilities. Working with **Able Gamers**, they provide adaptive controllers and specialised, inclusive gaming solutions to break down barriers in the gaming community.

Get in touch: Konkegamers@gmail.com

Craving praise and growing beyond it

While encouragement is important, becoming reliant on it can be detrimental to our confidence

Be honest now, who does not enjoy a good pat on the back? Someone says, “Well done!”, “You handled that beautifully”, or “I am proud of you”, and suddenly your step feels a little lighter. Your shoulders sit a bit straighter. Even grown adults, who pretend they have life all sorted out, still quietly enjoy a bit of praise. Why?

Because, whether we admit it or not, we humans are wired for affirmation. From the moment we are born we seek approval. A baby smiles and waits for a smile back. A toddler proudly holds up a messy drawing for applause. At school we chase stars, certificates and recognition. Later in life we seek promotions, compliments, appreciation, and yes, even the odd social media “like”.

At our core, most of us want to know one simple thing, “Do I matter?”. Praise reassures us that we do. Psychologists tell us that affirmation feeds our sense of belonging and self-worth. It tells us we are accepted, valued and perhaps even needed. In many ways, encouragement is emotional fuel. A kind word at the right moment can lift a person who is hanging on by their fingertips.

But, there is another side to this story. What happens when we begin needing praise like a plant needs water? That is where things can become a little tricky.

Somewhere along the line, many of us unknowingly become dependent on outside approval. We begin measuring our worth by what others think of us. If people clap, we feel good. If nobody notices us, we feel invisible. Criticism suddenly hurts more than it should. Silence feels like rejection. Sound familiar?

Now, let me gently add another layer to this conversation: Disability. For many people with disabilities, this issue becomes even more complicated. When disability enters your life, especially suddenly, it often steals more than movement or physical ability. It can rob you of independence, confidence, identity, purpose, employment and sometimes even relationships.

The person who once fixed everything, worked full time, provided for the family, played sport or simply felt capable, may suddenly feel reduced to what they can no longer do. That loss runs deep.

As a paraplegic myself, I know this road only too well. There are days when disability whispers ugly lies into your ear: "You are not useful anymore"; "You are a burden"; "You are less than you once were". And so, praise becomes powerful.

A compliment can feel like oxygen. Someone saying, "You inspired me", or "You handled that so well", can momentarily refill an empty emotional tank. There is nothing wrong with that. We all need encouragement. In fact, many people with disabilities are starving for genuine affirmation because the world often notices disability before ability.

But here comes the important question … How do we know when healthy encouragement has quietly become emotional dependence? Here are a few clues worth reflecting on.

- Do you feel flat or disappointed when nobody notices your efforts?
- Does criticism or rejection hit you harder than they should?
- Do you constantly seek approval before making decisions?
- Do you feel valuable only when someone praises you?
- Do you often find yourself trying to please everyone, sometimes at the cost of your own wellbeing?

If you answered "yes" to some of these, do not panic. You are human. Most of us have been there. The good news is this can change. Here is where growth begins.

The answer is not to stop appreciating praise. We all need encouragement. Even the strongest among us occasionally need someone saying, "Keep going, you have got this".

The shift is learning to move from external applause to internal acknowledgement. In simple terms, learning to clap for yourself. That does not mean arrogance. It means recognising progress.

Maybe today you managed pain better than yesterday. Maybe you finally sent off that CV. Maybe you got out of bed when depression wanted you to stay under the blanket. Maybe you simply survived a difficult day … Celebrate that. Growth happens when we stop waiting for permission to feel proud of ourselves.

Another important lesson is this, stop comparing your life to someone else's highlight reel. Comparison is one of the fastest ways to destroy confidence. Your journey is your journey. Someone else may be running while you are relearning how to stand emotionally, financially, or physically. That is okay. The only person you should ever compare yourself with "is who you were yesterday".

Ask yourself this question regularly: "Am I growing, or am I simply glowing in borrowed praise?" There is a difference. Glow fades when applause stops. Growth stays with you.

Yes, affirmation matters. Praise can heal wounds we do not speak about. Encouragement can pull a person back from the edge of giving up. Especially after disability, those words can matter more than most people realise.

But true confidence begins quietly, inside. It starts the day you can look in the mirror and honestly say, "I am not where I want to be yet, but I am proud of how far I have come". Now that, my friends, is growing, not glowing! R

Len Davey is a qualified life coach. To book a session, contact him via his website: www.theworldwithin.co.za. A free "goal setting" session is offered without any obligation so that you can experience life coaching first hand.

Get in touch: len@theworldwithin.co.za

Challenging accessible barriers

There are numerous ways to challenge accessible barriers and demand inclusion to play your part in taking rights from policy to practice

Entering a restaurant, municipality, or workplace shouldn't feel like an exercise in negotiation. In South Africa's constitutional democracy, accessibility is not a charitable favour or a matter of goodwill. It is a legal obligation. Here is your practical guide to understanding your rights, demanding inclusion, and asserting your dignity under the law.

BATTLE FOR ACCESSIBILITY

To understand why accessibility remains a daily battle in South Africa, we must look at our history. Under apartheid, legislation and systemic neglect severely marginalised persons with disabilities, compounded heavily by racial discrimination against black South Africans with disabilities.

As recorded in the national White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), persons with disabilities were historically cut off from education, housing, transport, employment and public life.

Building a single ramp today does not automatically erase that past. Physical and attitudinal barriers stem from a flawed historical assumption: That a person with a disability is an "outsider" who must adapt, rather than a full member of society for whom our public spaces must be designed. True accessibility is fundamentally about equality, dignity, independence and full participation.

YOUR RIGHT TO ACCESS

South Africa has one of the most progressive legal frameworks in the world. You don't have to accept exclusion as normal. Here are the core pillars protecting you:

- **South African Constitution**: Section 9 expressly prohibits unfair discrimination on the ground of disability. Crucially, equality does not mean treating everyone identically. If a building has stairs, treating everyone "equally" by forcing all visitors to use stairs is not equality. Section 9 mandates measures that advance disadvantaged groups. Recognising that equality sometimes requires different treatment through reasonable accommodation.
- **Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (PEPUDA)**: Section 9 of PEPUDA specifically outlaws disability discrimination. It explicitly covers denying or removing enabling facilities; failing to eliminate obstacles that restrict persons with disabilities;

breaching accessibility standards; and refusing reasonable accommodation. Discrimination isn't just someone saying "you aren't allowed in". It occurs when a building, service, policy or practice excludes you.

- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**: Ratified by South Africa in 2007, Article 9 shifts the goal from separate "special facilities" to access on an equal basis with others across public infrastructure, transport, information, technology and services. Accessibility is recognised as a core civil right under national standards like SANS 10400-S.

SEEKING LEGAL ADVICE

Not every broken lift requires a lawsuit, constructive dialogue with property owners or institutions can often solve problems quickly. However, you do not have to wait until discrimination becomes catastrophic before seeking legal advice.

Consider consulting a legal professional or advocacy body if:

- **Express Refusal**: You are explicitly refused entry or service because of your disability.
- **Public Service Obstruction**: A service open to the public is unusable due to disability barriers.
- **Ignored Accommodations**: Your reasonable request for accommodation is ignored or unreasonably turned down.
- **Repeated Failures**: A business, municipality or public body repeatedly fails to fix known barriers.
- **Humiliating Alternatives**: You are forced to use a separate, humiliating, or inferior arrangement (e.g. forced to enter through a dirty service kitchen).
- **Injury Suffered**: You sustain physical or emotional injury because an accessibility barrier was neglected.
- **Blocked Fundamental Rights**: The exclusion prevents you from accessing healthcare, education, employment, transport or justice.

ACTION CHECKLIST

If you encounter an accessibility barrier or unfair discrimination, follow these steps to protect yourself and build a solid case:

- **Step 1**: Document everything promptly. Take clear photographs of the barrier. Note the exact date, time, location and institution. Record names of staff involved.
- **Step 2**: Pinpoint the specific barrier and impact. Don't just say, "The building is inaccessible". State clearly (for example), "The main entrance has five steps with no ramp or lift preventing independent entry in my wheelchair".
- **Step 3**: Get written reasons. If staff claim accommodation is impossible, politely request that reason in writing. Keep all e-mails, letters and message receipts.
- **Step 4**: Submit a formal written complaint. Give the business or institution a reasonable opportunity to address and remedy the barrier.
- **Step 5**: Escalate to Equality Courts or the SAHRC. If ignored, approach an Equality Court. Located in local Magistrates' Courts across South Africa, designated equality clerks will assist you in lodging a complaint with no expensive private attorney required.

TAKING RIGHTS FROM PAPER TO REALITY

Persons with disabilities are not visitors in public spaces, we belong here. Ramps, accessible toilets, sign language interpreters and inclusive policies are not charitable favours. They are the tools through which constitutional equality becomes real.

By knowing our rights, documenting violations and asserting our voices together under "nothing about us without us", we transform legal promises into everyday freedom and dignity. R

Aaron Togarasei Mupeti is an attorney, disability rights activist, and member of the QuadPara Gauteng South (QAGS) management committee. He is passionate about advancing disability rights, promoting accessibility, and advocating for the full inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in all areas of society. Visit his practice at www.mupetilaw.co.za.

Get in touch: info@mupetilaw.co.za

Preventing lower back pain

While common, lower back pain can be prevented with good posturing and by strengthening your back and core as Demarco Dos Santos shares

Lower back pain is one of the most prevalent and enduring problems that wheelchair users experience. The lower back is under constant pressure while sitting. Good posture is thus essential. The good news is that back pain can be controlled and frequently avoided with awareness, appropriate setup and focused activities.

WHY PAIN OCCURS

The lower back muscles and spine are not built for extended periods of static sitting. For stability, transfers and propulsion, wheelchair users mostly rely on their back and core. Over time, strain and discomfort can result from bad posture, weak abdominal muscles and improper wheelchair set up.

Sitting with a slouched pelvis or rounded spine puts more strain on the lumbar discs. Chronic pain can also result from unequal weight distribution caused by inadequate padding or improper seat position.

> **The lower back muscles and spine are not built for extended periods of static sitting**

PREVENTING PAIN

Small daily adjustments can make a big difference in comfort and mobility, such as:

- **Improve posture**: Sit upright with your pelvis slightly tilted forward and shoulders relaxed. Avoid slouching or leaning to one side.
- **Check wheelchair setup**: Ensure your seat height, cushion, and backrest support your natural spinal curve.
- **Strengthen your abdominal area**: A strong abdominal stabilizes your spine and reduces strain on the lower back.

- **Take regular breaks**: Shift your position or perform gentle stretches every hour to relieve pressure.
- **Use proper transfer techniques**: Avoid twisting your spine when moving in or out of your chair.

STRENGTH AND MOBILITY MATTER

Stretching and strengthening are essential for maintaining the health of the lower back. You can perform these exercises at home to help:

> **Stretching and strengthening are essential for maintaining the health of the lower back**

Seated Side Stretch

- Place one hand on your wheelchair armrest and reach the other arm overhead.
- Lean gently to the opposite side until you feel a stretch along your waist.
- Hold for 20 to 30 seconds, repeating on both sides.

Resistance Band Core Twist

- Attach a resistance band to a stable object beside you.
- Hold the band with both hands and rotate your torso away from the anchor point.
- Keep movements slow and controlled.
- Repeat 10 to 12 times per side.

Seated Back Press (Supported Extension)

This exercise uses the wheelchair's backrest for support, so there's no risk of falling forward.

- Sit upright with your back against the wheelchair's backrest.
- Place your hands on your thighs or armrests for stability.
- Gently press your lower back into the backrest, engaging your core muscles.
- Hold the pressure for five to 10 seconds, then relax.
- Repeat eight to 10 times.

Supported Shoulder Rolls

This exercise relieves tension in the upper and lower back by mobilising the spine without leaning forward.

- Sit upright with your back supported.
- Slowly roll your shoulders backward in a circular motion.
- Repeat 10 times, then roll forward 10 times.
- Keep movements slow and controlled.

LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

Pain is an indication that something needs care. Seek advice from a biokineticist or physiotherapist if the discomfort continues.

> **Pain is an indication that something needs care**

They can create a customised plan by evaluating seating, posture and muscle balance. Early management is essential since neglecting pain might result in long-term problems.

ROLLING FORWARD

Wheelchair users frequently have lower back pain, but it does not have to limit your movement. You can keep your spine healthy and stay active with good posture, abdominal strength and frequent exercise. Resilience and motion are sustained by each modification, stretch and conscious moment. R

ENABLE CENTRE

The **Enable Centre** is an outpatient physical and cognitive rehabilitation centre with branches in Cape Town and Durban. It operates as a social enterprise, meaning it provides therapy to people from all socioeconomic backgrounds whilst incorporating innovative technology and evidence-based treatments.

Get in touch: admin@enablecentre.org

Where the road ends, adventure begins

From off-road tank chairs to 4x4 vehicles, the Adaptive 4x4 Experience hosted by the Adaptive Sports Fund had something for everyone

Adventure isn't about where you can go. It's about having the opportunity to get there. For many people with disabilities, off-road experiences can seem out of reach. Adaptive Sports Fund set out to change that with a first-of-its-kind Adaptive 4x4 Experience at Rebel 4x4, bringing together a range of adapted vehicles and equipment for participants to experience.

The event was about much more than simply getting behind the wheel. Participants could explore several different forms of adaptive off-road technology, with the Polaris side-by-side, fitted with adaptive hand controls by Shoprider, being one of the biggest attractions.

The Polaris proved surprisingly easy to operate for people with disabilities, while still delivering the speed, excitement and adrenaline expected from a side-by-side. For many participants, taking control and tackling the terrain themselves was an unforgettable experience.

Another major highlight was the tank chairs. With their incredible versatility and off-road capability, these machines can tackle terrain that would be impossible for a conventional wheelchair. Participants had the opportunity to operate the tank chairs themselves, experiencing first-hand the freedom and independence they can provide.

For those looking for an even bigger adrenaline rush, the extreme 4x4 vehicles were ready to deliver. Expert drivers took participants over some of the venue's most challenging obstacles, creating plenty of jaw-dropping moments, laughter and excitement. Watching the vehicles climb, tilt and conquer terrain that looked almost impossible was an experience in itself.

What made the day particularly special was that it wasn't just for participants with disabilities. Family and friends were encouraged to join, creating an environment where everyone could enjoy the experience together. Whether driving, riding, watching the action or simply enjoying the day with loved ones, there was something for everyone.

The turnout was incredible, making it a definite one for the record books. More importantly,

the event demonstrated what can happen when adaptive technology, adventure and inclusion come together. It gave people the chance to try something new, challenge themselves and, perhaps most importantly, discover that disability doesn't have to mean giving up on adventure.

A huge thank you goes to Rebel 4x4 for hosting us and embracing the vision of an inclusive adventure experience. We would also like to thank our incredible sponsors, Verder, Joey Evans and the STM Team, whose continued support helps Adaptive Sports Fund create opportunities like this.

At Adaptive Sports Fund, we believe adventure shouldn't stop where the tar road ends. Sometimes, the greatest experiences begin when you leave the road behind. R

Jeffrey Yates writes for the Adaptive Sports Fund (ASF) is a non-profit company, committed to supporting individuals with disabilities and breaking down barriers and creating a more equitable and just world for all people, regardless of their abilities. and with the following objectives: Supporting, enriching, encouraging, motivating and providing resources that empower individuals with disabilities to achieve their goals for them to live their best lives and creating a more accessible and equitable society for all.

Get in touch: info@adaptivesportsfund.org

Overcoming insurmountable odds

Despite the odds stacking against him, Thinus van Wyk was able to survive a spinal cord injury and still thrive in his life and career

A life-changing injury on a rugby field in Namibia and the harrowing ordeal that followed saw Thinus van Wyk go to hell and back almost 30 years ago. Through remarkable resolve and an unwavering support system, he overcame one obstacle after another and is living a healthy and happy life.

At just 16, Thinus broke his neck while playing tighthead prop for Hoër Tegniese Skool Windhoek against a combined Walvis Bay-Swakopmund team on 11 June 1997.

"I was too strong in the scrums, and the opposition coach was getting desperate to avoid penalties, so he basically took the largest guy on their team, the eighth man, to scrum against me. From the first scrum against him, it was clear to me that he'd never played prop before," he recalls. "The sad part is that if there had been any paramedics present, I could still have been walking today since what happened was preventable."

"The bulk of the damage to my spine occurred when, after the second or third reset of a scrum from collapsing on impact, I felt heat shooting from my neck into my back and shoulders, and it took me a while to get up," he adds.

"If any medical personnel were present, they would've seen I could barely walk straight, but being a fourth-degree brown belt in karate and Namibian under-16 rugby player, I succumbed to pride and pressure, and

slowly made my way towards the next scrum … my last," Thinus shares.

"It was instantaneous …the eighth man gave me another short shoulder on my head. The impact was so hard that my C7 vertebra slid over my C6, cutting the power switch to the rest of my body. It turned out that no neck braces or stretchers were loaded onto the bus, and the match was played in Karibib, one of the smallest towns in Namibia, which had no medical centre at that stage," he explains.

"While arrangements for an airplane were being made, my coach cut up an old mattress and bystanders found planks to make a makeshift stretcher and did what they thought best, which was to carry me into the back of a bakkie to get me out of the cold," Thinus says.

"The plane had landed and the paramedics were on site, but the state ambulance called to transfer me to the airport from Usakos hadn't even left yet. By this time, the few 'golden hours' to administer cortisone to minimalise the swelling had passed, and my hand and arm functioning had deteriorated significantly," he shares.

"After the ambulance finally arrived, I was loaded into the plane and heavily sedated. It turns out my lungs collapsed and I picked up some type of flu. When I was finally stable enough, I woke up in Mediclinic Windhoek ICU with more pipes going in and out of me than a nuclear power plant."

"My parents later got me a bed at then-Libertas Hospital and my mom and I, along with another lady, were loaded into a small medical plane headed for Cape Town. I deteriorated so badly that I lost consciousness or had to be sedated, I'm not certain."

"It turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as what followed earned the pilot and crew international recognition. One of the worst storms in history hit Cape Town. The wind was so strong that, when the pilot miraculously landed the plane, airport staff had to come out to hold it steady long enough to be safely offloaded," he continues.

"Just when I thought the worst was over, I started getting extreme fever spikes, so bad that my eyes would roll back into my head and I'd lose consciousness. After a few days, the fever finally passed and I was moved to the rehab centre."

After returning home in October, an incredibly determined Thinus went on to complete matric and become an integral member of the Geka Pharma team, which he joined in 2001.

"I do telephonic and e-mail sales. I work via VPN and my IP phone is also directly connected to the main switchboard. I moved up to middle management for a few years, but put in a request to work from home a few years ago, so I resigned my managerial duties at that time," Thinus shares.

Outside of work, he lives a full life: "My major passions are hunting, fishing and modifying cars, and I love experimenting with ways to prepare and cook meat. I have built quite a few smokers and a gigantic pizza oven."

A grateful Thinus concludes by praising the pillars that have held him up since his injury: "I wouldn't have made it or achieved a quarter of what I have without my family. Doctors told my parents that I would be bedridden for the rest of my life, but they refused to accept that. They made turns so that one of them was always present during my rehab process, and every day since."

"The Chris Burger Petro Jackson Players' Fund has also played a crucial role in my life. They've been there from day one, and my life would've turned out very different without them," Thinus says. R

Quintin van Jaarsveld writes on behalf of the Players' Fund. If you would like to support the Chris Burger Petro Jackson Players' Fund, visit their website at www.playersfund.org.za and select any number of the giving options available, which include EFT, payfast, Snapscan and Zapper.

Get in touch: contact@playersfund.org.za

TUKS a Titan of the Game

As part of a series profiling wheelchair rugby clubs competing in the South Africa Wheelchair Rugby (SA WCR) league, we head to Pretoria to meet TUKS Wheelchair Rugby Club

TUKS Wheelchair Rugby reaches all the way back to the birth of the sport in South Africa. Originally known as Pretoria Wheelchair Rugby Club, the team was based at Pilditch Stadium in Pretoria West. It was one of the founding clubs when wheelchair rugby took root in 1998. The original squad numbered around 10 athletes.

Those were pioneering days. Purpose-built rugby wheelchairs were not yet available and players took to the court in modified basketball chairs. There was no South Africa Wheelchair Rugby organisation coordinating the game nationally. The survival and growth of the sport depended largely on a handful of committed athletes and local champions willing to build something from scratch.

Pretoria's place in that history runs particularly deep. Jakkie Pieters, Arthur Piercy and Andre Maree, the three founding members of wheelchair rugby in South Africa, all came from Pretoria Wheelchair Rugby. As national structures began to emerge, Jakkie would become the first chairperson of the organisation that eventually developed into South Africa Wheelchair Rugby.

More than a quarter of a century later, the club that began at Pilditch remains a permanent fixture of the South African game.

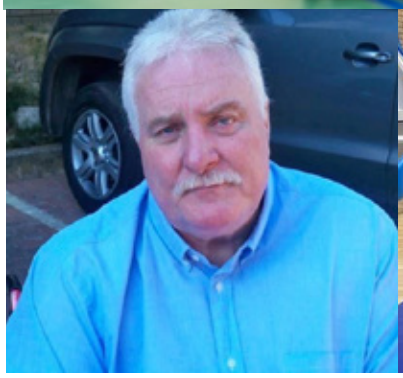
BECOMING TUKS

The relationship between Pretoria Wheelchair Rugby and the University of Pretoria began taking shape around 2000. A key figure was University of Pretoria lecturer Caroline Rule who helped build momentum towards bringing the team into the university environment.

TUKS occupational therapy students also became involved, organising fundraising and creating greater exposure for the sport. One memorable initiative saw Pretoria Wheelchair Rugby take on the Blue Bulls rugby team in an exhibition wheelchair rugby match.

The relationship became formal in 2003 when Pretoria Wheelchair Rugby affiliated with the university under the banner of TUKS Rugby. Former Springbok eighth man and then head of TUKS Rugby, Wynand Claassen, became an important supporter of the fledgling programme. The club gained access to funding assistance, facilities and equipment storage. Wheelchair rugby was also given exposure at TUKS sporting events.

Claassen took a personal interest in the team, regularly attending practices and occasionally joining the athletes on court. Dedicated training and storage facilities at Groenkloof Gymnasium and the LC de Villiers Sports Complex gave the club something especially



MAIN PHOTO: Okkie Anker, current National Team Vice Captain, in action.

ABOVE: The TUKS Wheelchair Rugby Club squads over the years.

RIGHT: TUKS player and National Team veteren Yolande Oosthuizen.

BOTTOM LEFT: Jakkie Pieters, the first chairperson of South Africa Wheelchair Rugby.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Former TUKS athlete and current Administrator of SA WCR Victor Buitendag.

valuable: stability. The significance of that stability reached well beyond TUKS itself.

EXPANDING THE SPORT

From 2001, athletes from Filadelfia School in Soshanguve had begun training alongside the Pretoria squad. This created an early development pathway for young athletes with disabilities and helped establish the foundations from which Vikings Wheelchair Rugby Club would later emerge.

TUKS also played an important role in taking wheelchair rugby into other parts of South Africa, including Stellenbosch through Maties, East London through the Bullfrogs, and Natal. A major development initiative in Bloemfontein in 2008 helped establish wheelchair rugby in the Free State. This ultimately contributed to the emergence of Mustangs Wheelchair Rugby Club; one of the dominant clubs of a later era.

Pretoria and later TUKS became a base from which wheelchair rugby knowledge, experience and enthusiasm could spread into other centres. The university environment created opportunities beyond playing the game. Occupational therapy and physiotherapy students became involved as table officials, referees and classifiers. TUKS provided a stable platform from which athletes, officials and expertise could flow into the wider sport. By 2010, the club had grown from its original 10 athletes to more than 20 players fielding two teams.

FROM CONTENDER TO CHAMPION

As wheelchair rugby expanded nationally between 2003 and 2010, TUKS steadily moved towards the front of the field. The dominant

rivalry of the period was largely between Mandeville and the Bullfrogs. However, TUKS was increasingly close behind.

Under Jaco Dorfling, who coached the team from 2006 to 2010, the club continued to mature. Dorfling served as South African National Team coach in 2009. It was an early example of a defining TUKS characteristic: The club was developing not only national players, but national coaches.

From 2010, TUKS moved into another gear under Coach Kobus van Zyl. By 2012, TUKS had overtaken the dominant Bullfrogs and claimed the national league title. It would hold that position for the next four years, marking an era of TUKS dominance in South African wheelchair rugby.

FINDING A WAY

The 2010 FIFA World Cup temporarily displaced the club from its university training facilities. TUKS had to find another court in the interim for training and practice. For many teams, losing a venue for a year could have threatened their survival. However, the TUKS team made a plan.

With the assistance of Air Force Colonel Gerhard Jansen van Rensburg, the team relocated to Waterkloof Air Force Base where players spent the year training inside an aircraft hangar. It is an unusual chapter in the club's history, but an appropriate one. Across different venues, coaches and generations of athletes, the underlying story has remained remarkably consistent: TUKS keeps playing!

PRODUCTION LINE FOR GREEN AND GOLD

Few measures demonstrate TUKS' contribution to South African wheelchair rugby better than the number of national athletes who have passed through the club. That lineage reaches back to the earliest days of the sport and includes: Jakkie Pieters, Andre Maree, Arthur Piercy, Nikkie Coetzee, Clyde Holland, Victor Buitendag, Lucas Sithole, Jeff Yates, Freddie Koch, Lisa Kirkland, Yolande Oosthuisen, Bennie Dorfling, Metz van Wyk, Cat Swanepoel, Andre Fourie, Luan Degenaar, Bonga Khumalo, Okkie Anker and Bennie Erasmus.

It is an extraordinary roll call spanning different generations of South African wheelchair rugby. The same is true of coaching. Following the earlier contribution of Jaco Dorfling, Suzette Muller, assisted by Armand Muller, coached TUKS from 2015 to 2023. The pair maintained the club's place among the leading teams during an era in which Mustangs emerged as a dominant force in the league. In 2023, Gary Burnard took over as TUKS head coach. He has since also become head coach of the South African National Team.

Today, the connection could hardly be clearer. Around half of the current National Team comes from TUKS. National Captain Bennie Erasmus and Vice-Captain Okkie Anker are both TUKS athletes, while Burnard leads both the club and national coaching structures. TUKS is one of its major feeder organisations for the national team.

BACK ON TOP

More than two decades after first affiliating with the University of Pretoria, TUKS remains exactly where it has spent much of its history: Competing at the front of the field. The club claimed the 2025 SA WCR Paralympic-format title, returning to the top of the national standings. It is also a strong presence in the rapidly growing Fives Format, finishing third in 2025.

There is something significant about those results when viewed against the club's history. The athletes have changed. Coaches have changed. South African wheelchair rugby has grown from a handful of pioneering teams into an organised national league. New

ABOVE LEFT: Gary Burnard is head coach for TUKS and the National Paralympic Team.

ABOVE MIDDLE: Bennie Erasmus is also a proud TUKS player and National Team Captain.

ABOVE RIGHT: The TUKS team at the 2024 National League Finals.

formats have emerged and new clubs have risen to challenge the old order, but TUKS is still there.

A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

The partnership between TUKS Wheelchair Rugby and the University of Pretoria has become one of the enduring institutional relationships in South African wheelchair rugby. The university has provided facilities, visibility and organisational support.

In return, the wheelchair rugby programme has contributed to the University's sporting identity while creating opportunities for students to become involved in disability sport through disciplines such as occupational therapy and physiotherapy.

TUKS Wheelchair Rugby is also an affiliated member of Blue Bulls Rugby, represented within that structure through TUKS Rugby. Together, these relationships have allowed the club to maintain a reliable footprint across Pretoria and the wider Gauteng North region. Connections with rehabilitation facilities and the disability community continue to provide pathways through which people can discover the sport.

TITAN OF THE GAME

Some clubs are remembered for a particular championship team or a remarkable period of dominance. TUKS has had both. Its greater achievement, however, is endurance. From the three Pretoria athletes who helped found wheelchair rugby in South Africa, through modified basketball wheelchairs at Pilditch Stadium in 1998, the move into the University of Pretoria and the championship years that followed, TUKS has remained a constant presence in the game.

More than 25 years after Pretoria Wheelchair Rugby first took to the court, TUKS remains a national champion and one of the principal pipelines into the South African squad. That combination of history, performance and sustained contribution makes TUKS more than one of South Africa's founding wheelchair rugby clubs. It makes TUKS a titan of the sport.

For more information or to get in touch with the TUKS Wheelchair Rugby Club contact phone 076 637 3715 or send an e-mail to metzvanwyk95@gmail.com. R

South Africa Wheelchair Rugby (SAWCR) is the official administrator of the wheelchair rugby in South Africa. The association is involved in all aspects from development and local club support to game officials and managing the national wheelchair rugby league. For more information, please contact admin@sawcr.co.za or visit the official Facebook page at @SAWheelchairRugby.

Get in touch: admin@sawcr.co.za

Managing AD in the bedroom

Autonomic Dysreflexia doesn't have to put a damper on your love life. The right approach can help you enjoy intimacy safely

Discussions about sexuality after a spinal cord injury (SCI) often focus on the emotional, relational and practical aspects of intimacy. However, there is one medical consideration that doesn't always get the attention it deserves, and that is autonomic dysreflexia (AD).

For individuals with SCI at T6 and higher, AD is a genuine risk during sexual activity. The anxiety surrounding it can limit sexual expression in various ways. With the right knowledge and preparation, it doesn't have to stand in the way of a fulfilling and satisfying sex life.

AD is the body's exaggerated alarm response to a stimulus below the level of injury. Because the nervous system often struggles to regulate blood pressure the way it used to, blood pressure could rise suddenly while simultaneously causing irregular heartbeats.

Although AD is a common complication affecting a significant amount of individuals, it can be a very distressing experience, especially if you're not sure what's going on.

Sexual activity is one of the recognised triggers of AD due to blood pressure increases and occur commonly during stimulation and ejaculation in people injured above this level. Other common causes are a full bladder or bowel, physical pain below the level of injury, blocked catheters and infections.

KNOW THE SIGNS

Being able to recognise the signs is an important part of managing the risk. The most common symptom is a sudden pounding headache, which could be accompanied by flushing, sweating, and nasal congestion above the level of injury, along with goosebumps, blotchy skin or cold clammy skin below it.

Some individuals also report blurred vision, nausea, or a sense of unease that seems to arrive without explanation.

It could also happen that AD occurs without noticeable symptoms, which is why having a plan in place is very important.

KNOW HOW TO RESPOND

If symptoms arise during sexual activity, the response is relatively straightforward. Stopping the activity, sitting upright rather than lying flat and loosening any tight clothing, binders, or compression garments will usually allow blood pressure to settle.

If the symptoms persist, this becomes a medical emergency and requires urgent attention. Individuals who experience AD regularly should also speak to their doctor about keeping appropriate medication accessible.

> **Emptying your bladder before sex removes the single most common trigger**

PREVENTING AD

Prevention, however, is the most effective approach, and it is often simpler than people expect. Emptying your bladder before sex removes the single most common trigger. Making this a consistent habit substantially reduces the likelihood of an episode.

Equally valuable is having the conversation with a healthcare professional to fully understand what is happening, so that both partners understand what may happen and what to do about it.

With a little bit of preparation, AD doesn't have to be an obstacle to intimacy but could instead make relaxed intimacy possible.

When intimacy carries a known physical risk, avoidance becomes a natural response, and that avoidance might not be understood by a partner who has never been told about the fear.

Sex gradually stops, and both partners are left drawing their own conclusions about what has changed between them.

Although the process of learning about AD could make intimacy feel clinical or frightening initially, talking about it can assist with staying emotionally connected.

Learn more about AD and sexuality in the QASA Hidden Consequences of SCI booklet, and download the QASA AD Card to keep on hand. R

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Dr **Danie Breedt** is a passionate scholar-practitioner in the field of psychology. He divides his time between training, research and clinical practice. Danie works from an integrative interactional approach in psychotherapy, dealing with a wide range of emotional difficulties and sexual rehabilitation for patients with disabilities. He is the co-owner of Charis Psychological Services, a psychology practice that specialises in physical rehabilitation across South Africa.

Get in touch: danie@charispsychology.co.za

Finalists for Disability Empowerment Award

The SAB Foundation has selected its finalists for the 2026 SAB Foundation Social Innovation and Disability Empowerment Awards, which includes the following companies:

The Lita Chair is an assistive seating solution designed to support children with movement and sensory challenges.

NAVU Mobility's NK Gen-1 is an affordable, locally manufactured prosthetic knee designed for above-knee amputees that allows components to be replaced individually, reduces costs while improving mobility, stability and independence.

nXtABLED is an entrepreneurship platform for persons with disabilities that combines accessible skills training, mentorship and business support to connects disability-owned businesses with customers, funders and partners.

The Pneumatic Prosthetic Foot is an affordable, semi-active prosthetic designed to help lower-limb amputees walk more naturally with less effort by using compressed air to provide active push-off power.

Shumela Hayani, meaning "Work for Home", is an inclusive agribusiness programme enabling persons with disabilities to become greenhouse farmers and cooperative business owners.

Wheels of Change creates economic opportunities for persons with disabilities through its "Train-Produce-Trade-Sustain" model where participants gain practical skills and enterprise experience across textile production, catering, farming and wheelchair repairs.

The winner will be announced on 15 October. We wish the finalists the best of luck! Thank you for their commitment to empower people with disabilities.

For more information, visit the SAB Foundation website at www.sabfoundation.co.za. R

2026 Events Calendar

CAPE TOWN DISABLED OPENS
15 to 17 November 2026
South African Disabled Golf Association (SADGA) will host the Cape Town Disabled Opens in November at the King David Mowbray Golf Club. The event will serve as the primary open event for the 2026 season. For more information visit the SADGA website at www.sadga.co.za.

DISABILITY RIGHTS AWARENESS MONTH
3 November to 3 December 2026
Disability Rights Awareness Month takes place annually from 3 November to 3 December. It is a time to highlight the rights of people with disabilities along with the challenges that they face. Keep an eye on our social media for more updates on events.

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES
3 December 2026
International Day for People with Disabilities is commemorated on 3 December every year. This year, the theme is on: Amplifying the leadership of persons with disabilities for an inclusive and sustainable future.

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Website: www.qasa.co.za
Telephone: 031 767 0352
E-mail: info@qasa.co.za
Address: 17 Hamilton Crescent, Gillitts, KwaZulu-Natal, 3610

QASA Regional Office

WESTERN CAPE

Telephone: 021 975 6078
E-mail: info@qawc.org
Address: 18 Hafele St, Durbanville, 7550

GAUTENG SOUTH

Telephone: 031 767 0352
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