

PROGRAM REVIEW

“Shining a Light on Disability”: Supporting and Promoting Disability Inclusion in Lesotho





Cover > Australian volunteer Occupational Therapist with the Government of Lesotho (Ministry of Social Development), conducts a wheelchair assessment with a student in a disability-inclusive school in Pitseng, Lesotho. **Photo** > Kylie Harrington / AVI



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An Australian Volunteers International research project undertaken with the support of the Australian Government's Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program and DFAT.

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ACRONYMS

AVI	Australian Volunteers International
AVID	Australian Volunteers for International Development
CRPD	(United Nations) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DPO	Disabled Peoples' Organisations
LNFOOD	Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MOSD	Ministry of Social Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Since 2007, AVI has managed **10** highly skilled volunteers across **six** government and NGO partner organisations to support disability inclusion in Lesotho through the Australian-government-funded volunteer program, now known as Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID).

This report outlines the findings of a review that sought to:

- Gain an understanding of the disability context in Lesotho and the place of AVI support within that context.
- Critically analyse the contribution that AVI-managed Australian volunteers have made to supporting and promoting disability inclusion in Lesotho.

KEY FINDINGS

The review revealed that Australian volunteers directly enhanced the capacity of AVI's disability-focused partner organisations, encompassing both civil society and government, to carry out their important work. The main findings of the review are captured in three broad areas:

• Strengthening collaboration and coordination among AVI's partners

Australian volunteers' contribution to disability inclusion in Lesotho was perhaps best encapsulated by one partner organisation representative: *"There is a role for AVI to play in bringing people together."* Demonstrating this, the review revealed:

- Australian volunteers promoted and strengthened collaboration and coordination among AVI's disability-focused partner organisations in Lesotho.
- In particular, AVI partner organisation representatives described the benefits that accrued when volunteers actively collaborated and shared their expertise across AVI's six partners (and with non-AVI partners also engaged in disability-inclusive efforts).

• Supporting effective advocacy

AVI's partners articulated a strong sense that volunteers in a range of roles, both clinical and non-clinical, have *"... played an important part in shining a light on disability in Lesotho"*. The review found that Australian volunteers:

- Strengthened the capacity of AVI's partners to advocate more effectively for the rights of People With Disability. Partner representatives described an increase in public awareness of and interest in disability issues among the Lesotho community which can be directly attributed to the long-term support of Australian volunteers.

• Transferring clinical skills and knowledge

Australian volunteers provided important clinical expertise and training to the staff of four partner organisations, which provide critical services to People With Disability across the country. Key volunteer outcomes include:

- Increased staff understanding of communication challenges in Children With Disability in one of Lesotho's only 'disabled schools', resulting in improved knowledge and practices which school staff described as very likely to be sustained.
- A volunteer Physiotherapist modelled impairment-specific physiotherapy practices with her colleagues which, when practiced by staff, resulted in children with severe physical disabilities being able to attend school for the first time.
- A volunteer Occupational Therapist increased awareness of the importance of appropriate wheelchair prescription and fitting, resulting in increased referrals to services and identification of need within the communities she reached.

In attempting to understand the way in which these positive outcomes came about, an important theme that ran through interviews with partner representatives was the facilitative nature of certain volunteer approaches. These included: knowing (or attempting to learn) the Sesotho language, developing genuine connections with the community, engaging in community activities outside of work, and adopting a collegial and 'enquiring' approach to working with partner organisation staff and communities. The review revealed that sustainable, positive change was most likely to be visible where volunteers employed some or all of these approaches.

AVI's approach to supporting disability inclusion in Lesotho has been to establish partnerships with a small but diverse range of organisations and to place volunteers with complementary skillsets. The review found that this approach enabled the program to maximise its contribution. Taken together, the diversity of AVI's partners and various volunteer skillsets enabled a response to the Lesotho disability context that was more than the sum of the individual efforts of volunteers. This approach was commended by AVI's partners. It laid the foundation for Australian volunteers to provide wide-ranging clinical and non-clinical expertise to staff within their own organisations but also, importantly, across AVI's other partners. In the critically under-resourced Lesotho context, this marks a valuable contribution to the country's collective efforts to create a more inclusive, accessible and equitable society for People With Disability.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Since 2007, AVI has managed **10** volunteers across **six** government and NGO partner organisations to support disability inclusion in Lesotho through the Australian Government-funded volunteer program, now known as Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID). AVI has a keen interest in identifying achievements, models of good practice and challenges encountered as a result of its work. This report outlines the findings of a review that sought to document these aspects of AVI's disability inclusion program in Lesotho.

1.2 REVIEW OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the review were to:

1. Gain an understanding of the disability context in Lesotho (across three levels; national/institutional, organisational and individual) and the place of AVI support within that context.
2. Critically analyse the contribution that AVI-managed Australian Volunteers (funded by the Australian Government) have made to supporting and promoting disability inclusion in Lesotho.

1.3 REVIEW METHOD AND SCOPE

The coordinator of the review undertook a desk-based analysis of program monitoring and evaluation (M&E) records for all ten volunteer assignments. Of these assignments, ten Volunteer End of Assignment (EOA) reports and eight Partner Organisation EOA reports were available.

The review was principally informed by eleven semi-structured interviews with partner organisation representatives. These interviews took place across Lesotho in July 2013 and were conducted with at least one representative of all six partner organisations (and in some cases, several representatives).

The review team also interviewed representatives from four Disabled Peoples' Organisations, which are members of the Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled (LNFOD, the 'umbrella' organisation for disability in Lesotho and an AVI partner).



Above > Interview at the National Association of the Deaf, Lesotho. Photo > Kylie Harrington / AVI

2.1 PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

TABLE 1: AVI PARTNER ORGANISATIONS IN LESOTHO

AVI PARTNER ORGANISATION	DESCRIPTION
GOVERNMENT	
Lesotho College of Education	The Lesotho College of Education (LCE) is a public training institution for primary and secondary school teachers in Lesotho. LCE offers training programs at diploma level, including in Early Childhood and Special Education. The philosophy of the college encompasses the principles of life-long education, and the continuous professional development of quality practitioners in education.
Ministry of Social Development	The Ministry of Social Development (MOSD) aims to lead and facilitate the provision of sustainable social development services that are universally accessible to all groups in Lesotho, in collaboration with other key stakeholders. MOSD provides welfare programs and services to People With Disability, among other vulnerable groups, and offers avenues of vocational skills training and self-employment to People With Disability. MOSD also works closely with other government and civil society partners to develop and implement socially-inclusive policies and legislation.
NATIONAL NGO	
Lesotho National Federation of the Disabled (LNFOD)	<p>Established in 1991, the Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled (LNFOD) is an umbrella body for disabled peoples' organisations (DPOs) in Lesotho. Membership consists of the Lesotho National Association of Physically Disabled (LNAPD), Intellectual Disability Association of Lesotho (IDAL), Lesotho National League of the Visually Impaired Persons (LNLVIP) and the National Association of the Deaf Lesotho (NADL).</p> <p>LNFOD's mission is to support DPOs and empower their members with financial and resource support. LNFOD also plays an important leadership role in communicating DPOs' needs to government and other development partners, in addition to advocating for the rights of People With Disability among the wider Lesotho community.</p>
LOCAL NGO	
Phelisanong With Disabled People	Phelisanong is a rural, community-based organisation that provides social welfare, education, health care, shelter, food and protection for the most vulnerable children in a remote area of Lesotho. Phelisanong is one of few centres recognised by the Ministry of Social Development. The organisation accommodates approximately 140 children and 480 children from the area attend Phelisanong's inclusive school. There is a critical shortage in Lesotho of special schools, particularly in remote locations, and Phelisanong plays a critical role in providing access to treatment for children in these areas.
St Angela's Cheshire Home for Disabled Children	St. Angela's Cheshire Home for Disabled Children is a centre that provides temporary care and accommodation, principally to Children With Disability. The organisation's goal is to improve the quality of life of these children through rehabilitation, support services and facilitating community involvement. St Angela's also develops projects that address social and economic inequalities, thereby alleviating poverty and facilitating the social integration of Children With Disability into mainstream society. The centre accommodates 31 children and is located within a community; this makes it unique as it enables St Angela's residents to attend an inclusive mainstream school.
Thuso E Tla Tsoa Kae Handicapped Centre	The Thuso e Tla Tsoa Kae Handicapped Centre is a community-based centre for children with multiple disabilities. It is a vocational school and residential facility which cares for and educates children with a wide range of physical and intellectual disabilities. Thuso is a crucial provider of services for these children; it is the only centre in Lesotho that caters for children with multiple disabilities.

TABLE 2: AVI & DISABILITY INCLUSION IN LESOTHO: PARTNER ORGANISATIONS AND VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENTS; 2007 - 2014

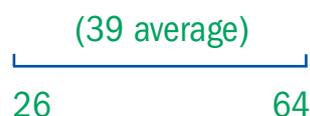
ORGANISATION TYPE	PARTNER ORGANISATION	ASSIGNMENT TITLE	ASSIGNMENT LENGTH (months)
Local NGO	Thuso E Tla Tsoa Kae Handicapped Centre	Community Speech Therapist	21
Local NGO	Phelisanong With Disabled People	Physiotherapist	12
Local NGO	Phelisanong With Disabled People	Agricultural Adviser and Trainer	24
Local NGO	St Angela's Cheshire Home for Disabled Children	Finance and Donor Relations Officer	17
National NGO	Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled (LNFOD)	Advocacy Officer	24
National NGO	Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled (LNFOD)	Finance and Donor Relations Officer	18
Government	Lesotho College of Education	Special Education Teacher Educator	21
Government	Lesotho College of Education	Special Education Curriculum Development Expert	23
Government	Lesotho College of Education	Early Childhood Education Teacher Trainer	24
Government	Ministry of Social Development	Occupational Therapist	19

THE VOLUNTEERS

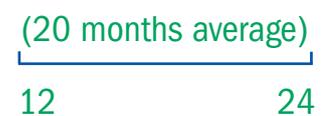
GENDER BREAKDOWN



VOLUNTEER AGE (YEARS)



LENGTH OF ASSIGNMENT



QUALIFICATIONS AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE



7 of the 10 volunteers had a postgraduate qualification
Professional experience: Average of 15.6 years

2.2 PROGRAM CONTEXT

2.2.1 AVI Program in Lesotho

Since 2007, AVI has placed **10** skilled volunteers across **six** government and civil society partner organisations to support disability inclusion in Lesotho through the Australian Government-funded volunteer program, now known as *Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID)*.

2.2.2 The Global Disability Context

It is estimated that 10-12% of the world's population is living with some form of disability and that 80% of People With Disability¹ live in the developing world. Of those living in the developing world, only 2% receive any kind of support.²

At the global level, the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD, or 'the Convention'³) was adopted by the United Nations on 13 December 2006 and came into force on 3 May 2008 after receiving its 20th ratification.

The CRPD explicitly applies a rights-based approach to the area of development, pointing out that People With Disability should no longer be seen as 'objects' in the process of development, the passive recipients of charity or social protection, but rather as 'subjects' with rights, capable of exercising those rights and making decisions regarding activities that affect them.⁴

In line with the CRPD, contemporary approaches view disability as a 'social construction'. This implies that disability is the result of the interaction between people living with impairments and an environment filled with physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers. It therefore carries the implication that the physical, attitudinal, communication and social environment must change to enable people living with impairments to participate in society on an equal basis with others.⁵

'LIVING' DISABILITY AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

"If I lived in a society where being in a wheelchair was no more remarkable than wearing glasses, and if the community was completely accepting and accessible, my disability would be an inconvenience and not much more than that. It is society which handicaps me far more seriously and completely than the fact that I have spina bifida."

– Source: Australian Federation of Disability Organisations

2.2.3 Disability in Lesotho

According to the Lesotho Demographic Health Survey 2009⁶, 4.2% of the population has some form of impairment that results in disability and about one-third of these are children under 15 years. However, due to widespread under-reporting and unreliable data, these statistics do not objectively present the magnitude and prevalence of disability in Lesotho.⁷

People with Disability in Lesotho are among the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups in the country. They face isolation and exclusion from Basotho⁸ society and are often forced to be highly dependent on relatives or other caretakers. People With Disability in Lesotho face barriers to social and economic participation that lead to poverty and isolation, including discriminatory attitudes towards disability and a lack of national legislation to protect their human rights.⁹

Lesotho ratified the UN Convention in December 2008, the same year that it came into force. Despite this early ratification¹⁰, full implementation requires countries to translate the Convention into local law in a process known as domestication. In Lesotho, this process is still ongoing. Since 2008, civil society organisations have been advocating for the development of a Disability Equity Act which will provide practical legal protection against discrimination for People With Disability. In 2013, for the first time, the national budget allocated funds towards the development of this Act. Despite this progress, People With Disability continue to face significant disadvantage in terms of their legislative rights and social status.

There are positives, however. Disabled Peoples' Organisations (DPOs) have played a crucial role in advancing the rights of People With Disability in Lesotho. Their coordinated advocacy efforts, and those of other civil society actors, have succeeded in bringing disability rights into the national consciousness. DPOs have also been important providers of services for People With Disability.

The Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled (LNFOD), also an AVI partner organisation, is an 'umbrella' body for organisations that promote disability rights. AVI partner representatives interviewed for the review commented that LNFOD plays a crucial role in the disability movement and has been very effective in working with government. One international donor and LNFOD partner commented that *"LNFOD has become increasingly recognised as a model organisation for successful lobbying and advocacy by civil society in Lesotho."*¹¹ However, review participants also noted that civil society organisations need greater coordination, stating that *"for example, LNFOD is the umbrella, but they are only working with four DPO members, so that is weakening the movement a little."*

¹ The term 'People With Disability' is used consistently throughout this report to refer to people(s) with one or more forms of impairment that results in a 'disability'.

² Source: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=150>

³ Source: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>

⁴ A 'rights-based' approach is the internationally recognised way to view and address 'disability'. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) marks the official paradigm shift in attitudes towards people with disability and approaches to disability concerns.

⁵ <http://www.pwd.org.au/the-social-model-of-disability.html>

⁶ <http://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-FR241-DHS-Final-Reports.cfm>

⁷ <http://www.infod.org.ls/disability-in-lesotho.html>

⁸ Basotho is the collective term for the people of Lesotho.

⁹ Kamaleri Y & Eide A, LNFOD & SINTEF Joint Project, *Living Conditions among People with Disabilities in Lesotho: A National Representative Study, February 2011*, available at: http://www.infod.org.ls/uploads/1/2/2/5/12251792/report_lesotho_3101111.pdf

¹⁰ Lesotho was the 42nd country (of 193 United Nations Member States) to ratify the CRPD.

¹¹ Norwegian Association of the Disabled, *Highlights on Important Results Achieved in the Period 2010-2013*, p7, available here: <http://www.infod.org.ls/resources.html>

2.2.4 Australian Aid and Disability Inclusion

A strong commitment to disability inclusion is reflected in Australia's overseas aid program. The Australian Government declared its intent to be a global leader in disability-inclusive development, the strategy for which is outlined in the 2008 Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID, now DFAT¹²) publication, *Development for All: Towards a Disability-Inclusive Australian Aid Program, 2009 - 2014*.¹³

The AVID program, funded by the Australian Government as part of the Australian aid program, has consistently promoted and supported disability inclusion, most recently through partnerships with DPOs, but also through organisations that support People With Disability in broader areas such as allied health, sustainable livelihoods and inclusive education.

2.2.5 AVI's Disability Inclusion Program in Lesotho

Since 2007, AVI has taken a multi-stakeholder approach to supporting the disability sector in Lesotho and has developed strong relationships that include both government and civil society. AVI's partners in Lesotho include a government ministry, one national education institution, three local NGOs and one national NGO.

Volunteer assignments have been similarly varied. Using a capacity development approach,¹⁴ AVID volunteers have supported the increased capacity of organisations and institutions through the transfer of clinical skills, through advocacy and organisational strengthening efforts, and through developing the technical capacity of the government ministry that is primarily responsible for disability inclusion in the country (see *Program Snapshot* on page 6 for all partner organisations and assignments).



Above > (l-r) Australian volunteer and Occupational Therapist at the Ithuseng Vocational Rehabilitation Centre, Maseru, Lesotho. Photo > Kylie Harrington / AVI

¹² AusAID was incorporated into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in November 2013. AusAID is referred to as DFAT for the remainder of this report.

¹³ Available here: http://aid.dfat.gov.au/Publications/Pages/8131_1629_9578_8310_297.aspx

¹⁴ See text box, 'Capacity Development through International Volunteering' on page 13.

3 MAIN FINDINGS

3.1 DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED BY AVI'S PARTNERS

The review provided an opportunity for AVI's partners to articulate their perspective on the current situation for Basotho People With Disability and the challenges that they face. It also enabled partner representatives to reflect on progress made in the country, at both institutional and community levels, towards strengthening the 'disability sector' – that is, the individuals and organisations that advocate for disability rights and work towards improving services for People With Disability.

AVI's partners unanimously expressed the viewpoint that, whilst progress has been made in recent years, it has been protracted and many challenges remain. They felt that despite a stated commitment at the national level to promoting inclusion and participation of People With Disability, this has to date had limited tangible impact on their daily lives and that of their families.

The issues that AVI's partners raised focused on the cultural prejudices that exist in terms of community understanding of disability, the challenges of policy implementation and effective coordination among stakeholders, and the insufficient allocation of resources to fully bring to life the ideals of the CRPD and national disability strategies in Lesotho.¹⁵

3.1.1 Prejudice towards People With Disability

A number of AVI's partners articulated the need for greater 'sensitisation' of the Lesotho community to promote an understanding of disability issues, and felt that this was a crucial part of their work as disability advocates. In describing the current context for People With Disability, partner representatives expressed that *"the culture here is against the disabled people, especially if they are a girl."*¹⁶ *Parents feel that they are useless and the tendency has always been to hide them away from the public gaze."* For many Basotho, People With Disability are seen as a kind of a curse or *"as if they have been bewitched or you didn't do some of our cultural practices properly and so you were given this child as punishment. I think that attitude is not really changing, or maybe only a little. People are still not aware what disability is and they need to be more sensitised."*

A consistent theme in interviews for the review was that social exclusion of People With Disability is a critical issue. This view was captured in comments expressed by a range of AVI partners:

"Children [With Disability] are denied an education; they are just kept at home. Even the parents with their wills, they do not give their assets to their disabled children. And often they are not allowed to go to church. Lesotho is a Christian country and many disabled children are not allowed in there. For many people, it is like they don't exist."

"There are no services for [People With Disability] - they are still not accepted by the community. For example, if you go out there you will find that a mother has a child with a disability and she doesn't even know where to go. Sometimes she doesn't even know the child has a disability, and no one will help the mother. So we still need to create awareness about assessment, treatment and services. But actually, those services don't really exist so it is a double problem - no awareness and no services".

"There is a notion within the community that disabled people are just a national burden... that they can't work or learn, so we [DPOs in Lesotho] are trying to eradicate that notion". *"People With Disability in Lesotho are the poorest of the poor; they've been severely disadvantaged because of their disability. They are also victims of a lot of physical and sexual abuse."*

"There are so many misconceptions in the community, often based on cultural traditions and beliefs. Changing perceptions about disability takes a very long time. Even with new policies and services, we need to educate the community again and again."

Community misconceptions regarding disability appear to make effective policy implementation a challenge in the Lesotho context. Despite some improvements in the policy and legislative environment, interview participants for the review felt that these cultural barriers act as an impediment to the possible advantages that could come about as a result of these improvements.

¹⁵ The UN CRPD states that 'National plans are an excellent method of bringing laws, policies and practices into line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.'

¹⁶ Globally, women and girls with disability face 'triple discrimination': being female, having a disability, and being among the poorest of the poor. Source: Australian Disability and Development Consortium, *Advocacy for All: A Quick Guide to Including Disability in Development Policy*, available at: http://www.addc.org.au/documents/resources/advocacy-for-all-guide-to-including-disability-in-development-policy_1059.pdf

3.1.2 Access to Services

Interview participants routinely held the view that ‘access’ - that is, People With Disability having full access to their *rights* and to *services* that are appropriate for them - is a fundamental challenge.¹⁷ AVI’s partners outlined a number of key areas in which conditions and services for People With Disability are inadequate. These areas cut across all levels of society: education, health, employment, infrastructure and mobility, and access to justice.

Entrenchment of poverty is also a major issue for people living with a disability: *“Overall the challenges in Lesotho are that there are so many People With Disability and they have a very poor background, they can’t get an education, then they can’t get a job, then they can’t afford good food and healthcare. So it... is a cycle.”*

For the key areas outlined above, review participants articulated the following based on their understanding and experience of the Lesotho disability context:

Education

According to AVI partner representatives, there is a dire shortage of schools that are equipped to teach children with disabilities and very few mainstream schools which cater for children with disabilities. For example, partner representatives commented that there are only two schools for the blind in Lesotho, both of which are based in the capital city (Maseru), restricting access to rural children or forcing them to be separated from their families for the duration of their schooling. One partner representative remarked: *“Many disabled children have physical disabilities but they can still go to school and learn. We just need the teachers and the resources. They get a certificate to say that they have gone to a disabled school but they can’t do anything after that, they don’t learn anything. That is really sad”*. Additionally, *“there are only three schools in Lesotho that can deal with severely intellectually disabled children, so it is not many”*.

Perhaps most significantly, *“... besides serious challenges with access to school and resources, there is a total lack of trained teachers [who know] how to work with children with disabilities... I think in teacher training, education of people with disabilities is just a new phenomenon in our country.”*

For deaf Basotho children, *“there is a clear lack of teachers for them and no access to hearing aid services. Also, the few teachers available don’t have sign language skills so deaf people don’t have access to effective information and therefore education. Those who are deaf are really abandoned; their parents don’t know where to take them. Maybe worst, there is no Sesotho sign language.”*

One partner representative outlined the breadth of need that exists: *“For our children, they don’t just need teachers, they need occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech therapists, for those with mild disability they need special attention, and teachers have sometimes sixty students per class, so they leave our children alone.”*

AVI’s partners also argued that whilst a model of inclusive education is being implemented in Lesotho, it is *“not working yet because what we need is special units within the schools, and also resources and materials. We don’t have these things yet.”*

Health

It is very common for People With Disability to be denied access to health services. Interview participants remarked that People With Disability often do not have transport to reach health care facilities (largely due to mobility issues) and that the health centres themselves are often not accessible. According to partner representatives, the vast majority of People With Disability in Lesotho do not have the means to afford adequate health care and treatment.

Employment

Interview participants commented that the employment rate for People With Disability in Lesotho is extremely low. Article 27 of the CRPD outlines that parties to the Convention ‘recognise the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.’¹⁸ AVI partner representatives stated that Lesotho has not yet legislated national employment quotas for People With Disability, nor do equitable conditions exist for them to participate in employment: *“Employment is a disaster; I can’t say one of our youth with [a particular disability] has a job. Not a single young person, even with a mild disability, can get employment.”*

Another partner representative discussed how, despite good intentions, specific opportunities for People With Disability were often short-lived: *“We had one young adult working at the [foreign company] factory because they had a special disability project, which was positive, but it didn’t last. We tried to place some of our young people in [footwear production company] too, and also we placed a teenage boy in a woodworking factory. They were all given a job but they couldn’t stay long. It was too hard for everyone.”*

¹⁷ Accessibility is a precondition for an inclusive society for all. Within the context of the United Nations, it is not only an inherent right of persons with disabilities, but a means of ensuring that persons with disabilities are able to exercise all rights and fundamental freedoms and are empowered to participate fully in society on equal terms with all others. Practically, any place, space, item or service, whether physical or virtual, that is easily approached, reached, entered, exited, interacted with, understood or otherwise used by persons of disabilities, is determined to be accessible.” United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Accessibility and Development: Mainstreaming Disability in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, p3, available at: http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/accessibility_and_development.pdf

¹⁸ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Article 27, available at: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>

Infrastructure & Accessibility

AVI's partners described accessibility and mobility as major challenges for People With Disability. This is largely due to Lesotho's low-income status, its vastly rural population and mountainous terrain. Partner representatives described the situation as follows:

"For many people with physical disabilities, our main challenge is mobility; our country is not accessible so it is very difficult for us to get around, most of the buildings and schools in our country are not accessible. We can't move around our country, even if we want to improve our livelihood. That is the number one priority."

"We [People With Disability] need to be included in infrastructure planning. If there is a new building, access for everybody should be included, for all the types of disability. If there is a new road, they should make sure there is a wheelchair-friendly pavement for us too."

"The roads in Lesotho are a huge problem. If they are constructed by people who don't have a disability then they don't consider them, and the pavements don't allow free movement - there are huge kerbs! It's so simple but they don't do it."

Access to Justice

Access to an equitable and appropriate judicial system was described by several partners as an issue for People With Disability: *"In the court system and with the police, we have many challenges. For example, police don't know sign language and... the system doesn't know how to deal with people with impaired judgement and limited intellectual capacity. So for these people, they are over-represented in the system and [yet] they do not have anyone to represent their interests."*



Above > Wheelchair basketball in Lesotho. Photo > Justice Kalebe / AVI

3.1.3 Challenges at the National Level

The national government in Lesotho is still in the early stages of providing adequate support for persons with disabilities. In addition to becoming an early signatory to the CRPD, the government, working closely with LNFOD and partners, has developed a number of initiatives which are aimed at embedding disability rights in the country's development agenda, examples of which include a Disability Equity Bill and a National Disability Mainstreaming Action Plan. Most participants of the review commended these inclusion policies but collectively expressed frustration that, to date, they remain in draft form. This again highlights consistent challenges relating to *implementation* of the disability rights agenda.

In 2012, the Government of Lesotho established the Ministry of Social Development (MOSD), which has now become the entry point through which disability issues can be coordinated among all government ministries. AVI partner representatives commended this move, the relative prominence it gives to the disability movement, and the 'social' model it promotes in favour of traditional notions of disability as a 'health' issue. They described this as progress and cited specific income generation projects for People With Disability as evidence of the government's move away from a welfare approach to disability. Despite this, interview participants outlined initial challenges relating to limited capacity and resources:

"It seems that [the Ministry] often does not understand the role of government and the role of civil society, and they get confused about that. Sometimes they play the role of civil society in terms of lobbying but what we really want them to do is to change laws and implement policy"

"I don't see much change or new things. There is still not much money [for disability]. The Government says that it is a priority now and they do some things, but it is small and very slow."

Bringing 'disability' into a dedicated Ministry of Social Development has brought other challenges, with AVI partner representatives commenting that the move has somewhat weakened the engagement of other crucial ministries. Engagement of all ministries is necessary if disability-inclusive policy and practice is to be 'mainstreamed' across government. Overall, interview participants expressed the need for greater resourcing and for more work to be done at the national level to sensitise and build the capacity of government to support disability rights and improve services in the country.

3.2 AUSTRALIAN VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTIONS

The review found that Australian volunteers in Lesotho have made an important contribution to the disability rights movement in Lesotho. Through ten assignments with six partner organisations within a seven year period, Australian volunteers have contributed in a number of areas, which can be broadly described in two 'spheres': strengthening the 'rights environment' through working with AVI's partners on advocacy activities, and through the provision of critical expertise in a range of clinical areas related to disability. These are expanded on in more detail in this section.

The findings regarding volunteer contributions, however, first require some commentary regarding the way in which they came about. That is, what approaches did volunteers take that enabled them to contribute effectively? Perhaps instructively, one NGO partner representative revealed that *"there has been something immensely different about the Australian volunteers compared to the other volunteers we have hosted"*. Another interview participant from a government institute reflected a similar feeling:

"The [three Australian] volunteers conducted themselves in a manner that made them become part of everyone else. When you know you have expertise, you know you have it, and you don't have to demonstrate it. So they have been very humble and not wanting to dominate proceedings, but they've taken leadership where it became necessary."

In addition to the technical capabilities of volunteers, an important theme that ran through interviews with partner representatives was the facilitative nature of certain volunteer approaches. These included: knowing (or attempting to learn) the Sesotho language (*"She has learnt a lot of our language! That makes a big difference in communicating with the kids and they really love her"*), developing genuine connections with the community (*"He... became a member of our community, not just an outsider"*), engaging in community activities outside of work, and taking an 'enquiring' and open approach to working with local staff.

A number of interview respondents also revealed that volunteers instilled a sense of self-confidence in them, and this made them feel more motivated in their work: *"She made us believe in our students too, not just ourselves, because she didn't judge us or them. [The volunteer] showed us one kid who we thought couldn't do anything, but she showed us that he can and now he's amazing. Even the parents have more confidence in their children, one mother said 'we love our boy now, he is lovely, now can come out with us as a family'. These things mean I feel more confident too."*

"Their presence within LNFOD has just brought life to the organisation, honestly speaking. We had many volunteers before but [the two Australian volunteers] are motivated and have covered so much."

– LNFOD representative during interview

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING

AVI's approach to development through international volunteering utilises 'capacity development' to facilitate sustainable change. Organisations in the countries where AVI works ask AVI to support their organisational development objectives. This support is in the form of volunteer assignments, which are devised to improve capacity at individual, organisational and institutional levels. These three levels describe capacity development within an individual, of an organisation, and of the environment in which the organisation operates.

A key objective of the review was to understand how Australian volunteers (who supported partner organisations working in disability inclusion in Lesotho) contributed to the development of capacity at these three levels.



Above > (l-r) Colleague and Australian volunteer, Community Speech Therapist, at the Thuso E Tla Tsoa Kae Handicapped Centre, Lesotho. Photo > Kylie Harrington / AVI

"We always want a volunteer because they bring changes in our organisation. We have had quite a few but I feel that those who came before [Australian volunteer], maybe they didn't get a good advice in their orientation, when they came in they felt like they were superior. But with [Australian volunteer], we just connect. We are colleagues; no one is superior to anyone."

– AVI partner representative during interview

3.2.1 Supporting Effective Advocacy

Effective advocacy is an important component of any disability rights movement. The review found that Australian volunteers have played a key role in supporting the advocacy efforts of several AVI partners; the Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled (LNFOD) and its four member DPOs. One interview participant described this contribution as having an effect at the national level, remarking that *“the two volunteers have been very powerful in putting people with disabilities in front of the eyes of the nation... and I think disability in Lesotho is well known around the world now because of them”*.

To support an improvement in the rights environment for People With Disability in Lesotho, AVI took the approach of placing two volunteers with LNFOD, the ‘umbrella’ organisation, with the intention that these assignments would also support the increased capacity of LNFOD’s four members, each of which represent particular disabilities. A volunteer Advocacy Officer (2011-2013) and a volunteer Communications Officer (2012-2013) were placed with LNFOD and the review found that their assignments were an effective way to utilise a limited number of volunteers.

This strategy enabled a two-fold contribution: volunteers directly supported LNFOD’s capacity to work with and lobby government. It also enabled volunteers to listen to the DPO members’ issues and organisational objectives, and to help them more effectively communicate their message to LNFOD and the wider community. One interview respondent commented that the volunteers *“encourage the DPOs to be more upfront, to really present their issues. Before the volunteers, LNFOD would shape the needs of the disability areas and present that to the DPOs. But [the volunteer] has pushed for the DPOs to turn this around.”* Partner representatives felt that the volunteers enabled the DPOs to be more active in terms of their lobbying, encouraging them to say *“this is what we want and this is what we need”*.

A volunteer Advocacy Officer (2011-2013) assisted LNFOD to manage an effective advocacy program, contributed to the drafting of disability-inclusive policy and legislation, facilitated training on applied disability rights for staff, and provided mentoring in the design and implementation of the Disability Equity Act. The volunteer’s counterpart commented on the impact of this support, on a personal level: *“I have gained a lot from working with [volunteer]... She has exposed me to different sources of advocacy and human rights, international standards and convention. Just being with her, it means that we debate the activities and campaigns we want to implement and that has been very good for me”*.

A volunteer Communications Officer (2012-2013) developed a number of communication strategies to support the advocacy initiatives of the DPOs to counter discrimination against people with disability. She then provided training and mentoring to her colleagues, giving them the skills to maintain their communication programs. An interview respondent confirms the outcome of this work, remarking that *“through her efforts, our organisation is now known much better because before we tried to advocate, but we were not increasing awareness at all. Now people know who we are, she gets the media very involved. The result is better than we imagined”*.

3.2.2 Transfer of Clinical Skills and Knowledge

In addition to supporting the advocacy efforts of civil society partners, AVI complemented these roles by developing three volunteer assignments that would provide direct *clinical skills* support to partner organisations and their communities. These assignments provided a combined total of over four years of high-level support which, in the Lesotho context which is small and severely under-resourced, was a significant input in terms of service provision for People With Disability. Demonstrating this, a volunteer Community Speech Therapist (2012-2014) was described by a review participant as *“to my knowledge, the only Speech Therapist currently in Lesotho”*.

Volunteers strengthened partner organisation programs through transferring clinical skills to their local colleagues in three organisations; two NGOs and one government partner. A volunteer Occupational Therapist (2012-2013) worked with a government partner institute to train a large number of local staff in the regional districts in Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR), which is regarded as an important tool for implementation of the UN Convention. The volunteer also increased awareness of the importance of appropriate wheelchair prescription and fitting, resulting in increased referrals to services and identification of need within the communities she reached. Of her work, the volunteer’s manager commented *“she has achieved so much with her training and outreach here, I honestly don’t know where to start”*.

Another AVI partner organisation, a regionally-based NGO which provides educational and other support for children with physical disabilities, commented on the situation prior to - and after - receiving the support of a volunteer Physiotherapist (2010-2011):

“The problem here was that most children were inside the houses and no one saw them. They were invisible. Physiotherapy was a very immediate need. [The volunteer] came to us and... some of the children are still walking since she was here! We were so surprised with the things she did. She managed to train our caretakers on how to handle the children. Certain children would always have broken bones because the caretakers didn’t know how to handle them. But in a positive and caring way, [the volunteer] helped us so much to know a better way to do it. She was really opening the eyes for us to realise how much we can do [for children] with physical disabilities.”

An organisation-wide improvement in communication skills was regarded as the most significant outcome of a volunteer Community Speech Therapist (2012-2014) assignment. The volunteer supported a regional community school that provides educational, vocational and life skills support to children with a range of disabilities. An interview participant revealed that the volunteer’s contribution to the school was both far-reaching and likely to be sustained, in that *“she worked with all of us, seven teachers including the principal, and she has done more than enough for the work to be carried on by us here”*.

Prior to the volunteer's arrival, the teachers admitted to feeling overwhelmed by the behaviour that many of the children displayed. One interview participant revealed: *"I had never even heard of a speech therapist before, I didn't know what she was coming to do"*. However, staff remarked that the volunteer gradually imparted on the school staff the importance of effective communication, particularly with those children with more severe learning challenges:

"For example, with the behaviour of the child, they're not being bad, they are trying to communicate! We have kids that bang themselves, roll on the floor, and we thought they were bewitched or crazy, but [the volunteer] showed us that, no, this child is trying to communicate with you and you need to pay attention to it. So we started to realise that, oh ok, there is a different kind of language here that these kids speak, and we can learn it too."

The volunteer conducted behavioural workshops for the school staff and established a process so that they could carry out assessments of each child: *"That was so important because she really helped us to know where to start with the kids and to track their individual progress"*. The volunteer's contribution was also couched in terms of 'interpersonal' outcomes, with interview participants citing that she had taught them how to motivate the children through positive reinforcement techniques. With the introduction of a task analysis, the volunteer showed her colleagues how to break down a child's progress into very small steps. As a result, one such colleague commented:

"We've seen the kids improve beyond my imagination! I've broken things down like brushing teeth, going to the toilet, holding a pencil a certain way, and you can track the baby steps that each child takes. Such tiny things [add up to] big things. So [the volunteer] helps us to see how the kids are progressing and then we can reward and motivate them. It's like a circle."

Pointedly, one interview participant revealed that her interaction with the volunteer had a profound impact on her professional development and the dreams she holds for her own future:

"Being able to see the progress [in the children] makes me want to wake up every morning. And sometimes you never know if you are good at something but [the volunteer] helped me to believe in myself. I would love to be a speech therapist now because we don't have any [in Lesotho] and she has been such a great help to our country".

3.2.3 Increased Capacity at an Institutional Level

The review revealed that AVI's disability inclusion program in Lesotho has, in addition to supporting civil society, made a substantial contribution to a government education institute. Three volunteer assignments supported a teaching institution which, in addition to offering secondary teacher training, is the only institute for primary teachers in the country. The institute is mandated to prepare teachers in accordance with national education requirements, in which policies of access and equity are prescribed. To this end, Australian volunteers helped to develop the capacity of management and teaching staff, with a volunteer Special Education Teacher Educator (2007-2008), a Curriculum Development Expert (2009-2011) and an Early Childhood Education Teacher Trainer (2012-2014). This represents almost six years' of Australian volunteer support to the institute.

AVI partner representatives interviewed for the review commented that *"education of people with disabilities is a fairly new phenomenon in Lesotho, so there is not a lot of capacity at the country level"*. Australian volunteer expertise was cited as key, therefore, in developing a curriculum for the institute's emerging Special Education and Early Childhood programs. Volunteers also developed the capacity of teaching staff to implement those programs, the benefits of which are visible in the large numbers of graduating teachers who are employed in public schools across the country.

As a result of this support, an interview respondent declared: *"We are a better institution now in terms of understanding issues of inclusive early childhood education. We are now offering a Special Education program that is unprecedented in Lesotho. AVI volunteers made a wonderful development contribution to this. They have also improved our collaboration with NGOs, [a sector] which is very important for us if we are to be effective."*



Right > Australian volunteer Occupational Therapist with the Government of Lesotho (Ministry of Social Development), conducting a wheelchair assessment. Photo > Kylie Harrington / AVI

THE ADDED VALUE OF VOLUNTEERS - AN EXAMPLE

A representative from an AVI partner organisation, a community school for disabled children, discusses the unexpected benefits of a volunteer Physiotherapist (2010-2011): *“A big thing she contributed was helping to get legal documents for our children, such as passports so that they can access treatment in South Africa. That was such a long process and difficult for us to do. She also helped our children access money they are entitled to... from fathers who died working in the [South African] mines and left it to their children, but not their disabled children. She did a lot of advocacy and those children can now equally access the will of their parents. [The volunteer] also wrote directly to the Minister of Home Affairs as some of our children are very ill and need special attention... So for us the assignment has gone so much beyond a physiotherapist.”*

3.2.4 Strengthening Collaboration within the Disability Sector

“We must work together to be a strong sector” was a comment made by one interview participant and a familiar sentiment shared by AVI’s partners. The review revealed that Australian volunteers in Lesotho played an important role as ‘linking agents’ within the disability sector, with numerous examples cited during interviews of the benefits that accrued when volunteers shared their expertise beyond their own host organisations. In fact, this emerged as a key review finding and is perhaps quite contextualised; the relatively small size of the disability sector in Lesotho and the capacity and resourcing gaps that exist mean that a moderate input of Australian volunteer expertise (ten assignments over seven years) added substantial value. The benefits of this expertise would arguably not be as visible in larger, more crowded civil society and donor settings.

With this context in mind, AVI’s approach in Lesotho of partnering with a small but diverse range of disability-related organisations, and placing volunteers with varied skillsets, enabled the program to maximise its contribution. The review found that volunteers actively collaborated and shared their expertise among AVI’s six partners, with the majority of interview participants recounting that their organisations benefitted from the expertise of *other* AVI volunteers and from participating in volunteer-initiated workshops. Topics included effective communications and advocacy, proposal writing, grant-seeking, planning for capacity development and community-based rehabilitation techniques. In essence, the review found that volunteers with clinical skillsets supported other NGO and government partners with their skills and knowledge, whilst volunteers with generalist advocacy and organisational strengthening skills in turn supported some of AVI’s smaller partner organisations in these areas. The result was greater collaboration and coordination within the sector. An interview participant neatly summarised this: *“The AVI volunteers have made a huge impact because they connect us with other NGOs in disability, and with LNFOD. AVI connects us where there are other volunteers and we learn from them too. The volunteers are so motivated and they are great at networking.”*

One partner organisation benefitted ad hoc from the skills and knowledge of three additional volunteers over the life of the AVI program in Lesotho, in addition to the volunteer who directly supported them for a two-year period: *“We have found that this partnership [with AVI] has given us benefits and [access to] networks that we never planned, unexpected but very much welcome.”* Another partner organisation representative shared similar thoughts on the added benefits of the AVI partnership: *“We used to work well with LNFOD, but since [two AVI volunteers with LNFOD] came, we have a great relationship with [LNFOD]. I say our relationships are much better and we feel stronger.”*

3.3 REFLECTIONS ON PARTNERING WITH AVI

Partner representatives consistently expressed satisfaction with AVI's approach to partnership and the way in which volunteer assignments were structured to support disability inclusion in diverse ways. Interview participants felt that their experience with AVI reflected a true partnership, in which their capacity needs were genuinely identified and responded to together. One interview respondent summarised this outlook, based on his experience:

"A lot of our successes have been because of the partnership itself; there was open communication from the start and it has not been an imposed partnership, it has not been a partnership with any domineering elements. There are other partnerships where I have felt that, but we haven't had that with AVI. So credit goes to the nature of the partnership, people are relaxed, and we have cherished it for that reason."

When asked to describe the challenges encountered during their partnership with AVI, several themes emerged during interviews. Lack of resourcing within partner organisations (both NGO and Government) was cited by all interview participants as a significant challenge, impacting their capacity to carry out their core business but also in utilising volunteers. A key challenge related to a lack of available funding to facilitate and implement volunteer activities. AVI's partners typically struggle with limited resources and review participants felt that additional funding could have enabled some volunteer capacity development activities to be more effective. This challenge is illustrated by one NGO partner representative who commented that *"...with [volunteer Agricultural Adviser and Trainer], we have his great skills for our income generation projects, but not the materials he needs to carry out his work. This is frustrating for him and for us."* Another partner representative commented that *a volunteer was only able to be effective because she "came with many books and resources, so she brought everything she needed to do the work"*.

Another organisation identified a challenge related to AVI's approach of placing two volunteers with LNFOD. LNFOD's DPO member representatives understood AVI's strategy of supporting the umbrella organisation and were broadly supportive of this. However, they expressed a strong feeling that they would greatly benefit from volunteer expertise because their organisational capacity is so low. The DPO members *"often operate on an almost-zero budget"* and many staff work on a voluntary basis. Interestingly, both LNFOD and DPO member representatives felt that AVI could ideally provide greater support directly to the DPOs. AVI attempted to address this with a volunteer Communications Officer, who was officially placed with LNFOD but provided part-time communications support to one DPO member (in addition to ad hoc support to others). The benefits of this approach for that DPO were very evident, and the remaining DPO members expressed a strong desire to benefit in a similar way.

3.4 FUTURE PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED BY AVI'S PARTNERS

For People With Disability in Lesotho to have full access to their rights and the ability to participate fully in society, the review demonstrated that current 'needs' significantly exceed available resources. With this context in mind, the review provided an opportunity for AVI's partners to reflect on their capacity priorities and the way in which volunteer assignments could be developed to support these.

Partner representatives emphasised an ongoing desire for the technical skills that Australian volunteers have already brought to their organisations, in particular clinical skills specific to disability and special needs education: *"We will never have enough of those skills. The country makes progress at the [national level], advocating and drafting bills, but after that we need a strong workforce. Right now, we lack many skills in the disability area."* For AVI's NGO partners, sustainability of their organisations is a particular concern and they described a need for skilled volunteer expertise to support innovative income generation projects that will enable them to operate in the long-term.

Interview participants also clearly felt that volunteers have a unique role to play in advocating for the rights of People With Disability in Lesotho: *"We still don't accept people with disabilities. We have to make disabled children more visible in the community and show that they are valuable. Having international volunteers really helps us to do that."* To support advocacy efforts at the national level, partner representatives expressed a desire for volunteers to support both LNFOD and the smaller DPOs. In fact, the need for organisational capacity development (improving the systems and processes) of DPOs in general in Lesotho was a prominent theme to emerge from the review.

Perhaps most significantly, there was consensus among all partners that *maximising* volunteer expertise is important, given the limited capacity of AVI's partners and small volunteer numbers. There was also a shared understanding that AVI cannot respond to all identified needs. To that end, partner representatives described the way in which their organisations had benefitted from participating in volunteer-led workshops and expressed a desire to participate in future sessions: *"Bringing all of us together in disability, whether in workshops or other activities... of course we learn so much from your volunteers but we also learn from each other! I think that has been a lot of value [for us]."* Several partner representatives described workshops as a major benefit of their partnership with AVI. Suggestions for future workshops were broad but consistently repeated across partner organisation interviews, revealing shared interests and scope for Australian volunteer support in these areas. The most commonly stated workshop topics were strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation, HR and finance systems, resource mobilisation, and communications/advocacy.

Supporting disability inclusive-development is an important tenet of the Australian Government Volunteer Program (now AVID). Demonstrating this, AVI supported ten highly skilled Australian volunteers to share their expertise with six diverse partner organisations in Lesotho between 2007 and 2014. The combined efforts of these volunteers made a valuable contribution to the vital work of AVI's partners, both NGOs and government, to support People With Disability in the country.

4.1 THE LESOTHO CONTEXT

The review provided an opportunity for AVI's partner representatives in Lesotho to detail the community-level challenges confronting People With Disability. It also asked them to comment on progress made and the challenges encountered in implementing disability-inclusive policies and legislation at the national level. There was a united sense among AVI's partners that the needs, at both levels, currently far outweigh available resourcing. Review participants acknowledged Lesotho has made some progress but felt that this has been protracted and outlined factors that impede attempts to implement the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons With Disabilities (CRPD). Partner representatives also spoke of 'cultural barriers' for People With Disability, citing long-held and often discriminatory preconceptions of disability among the wider community. Their comments provided an important part of the context for assessing the contribution of volunteers to disability inclusion in the Lesotho setting.

4.2 UNDERSTANDING AUSTRALIAN VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTIONS

The nature of the contribution of Australian volunteers to disability inclusion in Lesotho was perhaps best encapsulated by one partner organisation representative: *"There is a role for AVI to play in bringing people together."* This attitude was consistently echoed across AVI's diverse partners during interviews and emerged as a key finding of the review. The review found that Australian volunteers helped to strengthen *collaboration* and *coordination* among organisations working to support disability inclusion in Lesotho (the 'disability sector').

In particular, partner representatives all noted the benefits that accrued when volunteers actively collaborated and shared their expertise across AVI's six partners. This was typically achieved through volunteer-led workshops and training sessions made available to all partners (and other non-AVI partners) or via ad hoc volunteer engagement. They also spoke enthusiastically of the way in which Australian volunteers facilitated more positive collaboration between the Ministry of Social Development and disability-focused civil society actors.

Lesotho currently experiences a critical shortage of professionals equipped with clinical skills that are appropriate for physical and intellectual impairments. In this context, the review found that Australian volunteers provided important clinical expertise and training to the staff of four partner organisations and to individuals within the communities they serve. Partner representatives described how one volunteer improved her colleagues' understanding of communication

challenges among Children With Disability in one of Lesotho's only 'disabled schools', resulting in improved staff knowledge and practices which are likely to be sustained (*"She [volunteer] has done more than enough for the work to be carried on by us here"*). An added benefit of this volunteer's work was evident when local staff indicated that working closely with the volunteer had made them feel more motivated in their work and more confident in the children and themselves.

The provision of services that are appropriate for and accessible to People With Disability can empower those individuals to participate more fully in their communities. Demonstrating this, an Australian volunteer modelled impairment-specific physiotherapy practices with her colleagues which, when practiced by staff, resulted in children with severe physical disabilities being able to attend school for the first time. A volunteer Occupational Therapist also increased awareness of the importance of appropriate wheelchair prescription and fitting, resulting in increased referrals to services and identification of need for many individuals within the communities she reached.

Finally, AVI's partners articulated a strong sense that volunteers in a range of roles, both clinical and non-clinical, have *"... played an important part in shining a light on disability in Lesotho"*. Well-coordinated advocacy efforts are crucial to any disability rights movement and the review found that Australian volunteers strengthened the capacity of AVI's NGO and government partners to advocate more effectively for the rights of People With Disability in their country. Partner representatives described an increase in public awareness of and interest in disability issues among the Lesotho community which can be directly attributed to the long-term support of Australian volunteers. They also commented on the specific role of Australian volunteers in advancing progress of Lesotho's Disability Equity Act.

When viewed collectively, the Australian volunteer outcomes outlined above reveal a program that made a tangible contribution to disability inclusion in Lesotho. These contributions can be understood in three key areas: strengthening collaboration and coordination within the disability sector, transferring important clinical skills and knowledge, and supporting effective advocacy. In the Lesotho context, which is critically under-resourced, this represents further progress towards creating a more inclusive, accessible and equitable society for People With Disability.

5

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Above > (l-r) Colleague and student of Australian volunteer, Community Speech Therapist, at the Thuso ETla Tsoa Kae Handicapped Centre, Lesotho.
Photo > Kylie Harrington / AVI



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

The Australian Government is working in partnership to send Australian volunteers overseas through the Australian Volunteers for International Development program.