IDENTIFY SOMEONE WITH A DISABILITY WHO HAS MADE A NOTE-WORTHY CONTRIBUTION TO TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO. IDENTIFY THE FACTORS WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO THE SUCCESS OF THE INDIVIDUAL.

KATHY-ANN BERNARD

Written by Maria Clarke-Hoyte,
Student of the Social Disability Studies Class, SOWK 2007 (SW24A)
The University of the West Indies
St. Augustine Campus
Trinidad and Tobago

April 4th 2006
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATURE AND EXTENT OF DISABILITY</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HISTORY OF THE INDIVIDUAL</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSESSMENT OF CONTRIBUTIONS</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHALLENGES FACED AND STRATEGIES USED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TO OVERCOME THEM</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LESSONS LEARNT</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION:

This case study is based on Kathy-Ann Bernard, who is hearing impaired. It informs about the nature and extent of her disability, gives a brief history of this individual, identifies the theoretical framework used to guide the study and assesses her contributions made to society, the challenges she has faced and strategies used to overcome them, as well as, to gauge my overall response to the experiences gained.

NATURE AND EXTENT OF DISABILITY:

Presently, the extent of her hearing impairment is significant, in that, Kathy-Ann does not hear a single word that is spoken; but relies heavily on the skill of lip-reading to understand what is said. However, her speech is lisped and as a consequence, she is understood partially. Mrs. Bernard was not deaf from infancy but began to develop this condition from the age often (10) years. Her speech deteriorated as her hearing problem became worse. From the age of fifteen (15) years, she began using a hearing aid, which assisted in her hearing capabilities and allowed her to be more confident in her socialization and dealings with friends and members of her family, and generally with persons in her environment. However, when she lost her hearing aid, this deprived her of the opportunity to hear the sounds of the spoken word. The impact of this loss further deteriorated her speech even though she continued to try to live a normal life.

HISTORY OF THE INDIVIDUAL:

Mrs. Kathy-Ann Bernard is a self-employed, single mother of three (3) children none of which has a disability. Her husband has walked out of the marriage. She is a small entrepreneur providing breakfast, lunches and dinner to members of her community in Enterprise, Chaguanas. Mrs. Bernard’s business activities are well supported by the people in her area and the takings from this business venture go a long way to support her three children, and herself.
Mrs. Bernard is the second child of five children. She has three sisters and one brother. From birth until she was ten years of age, her growth and development was considered to be normal. During this period, she attended the Carapichaima Roman Catholic Primary School and subsequently, the Chaguanas Junior Secondary school. Her academic performance at the primary level was considered to be very good since she never failed to come in the first five positions in her class whenever there were end of term examinations.

Her socialization with peers from her school and other members of her family was considered to be normal and progressive. However, from the age of ten, it became noticeable that Kathy-Ann was experiencing some hearing problems. She began complaining about pains in her ears, her school grades also showed evidence of a decline, and her teachers and friends started to express concerns about her stubbornness and her failure to respond immediately to instructions. It took the intervention of her aunt, who was the driving force, to unearth the fact that Kathy-Ann was suffering from a hearing impairment. This realization materialized after Kathy-Ann went to spend some holidays with her aunt and it was discovered that she was not responding to instructions promptly and accurately.

The aunt became suspicious of Kathy-Ann's ability to hear properly and followed up her suspicion by investigating the matter further. Subsequently, she went to her school and her teacher confirmed her suspicion by reporting a decline in her grades and in her level of understanding of the spoken word. The aunt then took her to the doctor and it was discovered that there was a hearing problem. Referral was made by the doctor for her to see a specialist but it took over seven (7) months for this visit to materialize because her parents were experiencing serious financial constraints. When the visit was eventually made, Kathy-Ann was diagnosed with a hearing impairment. It took over four (4) years, spanning from that point of diagnosing the problem to the point of organizing some relief vis-à-vis a hearing aid, for Kathy-Ann to experience some ease to her problem.
Once again, her aunt was very instrumental in getting friends of the family to pool some financial resources to purchase a hearing aid for her use. Therefore, Kathy-Ann received this hearing aid at a time when she had already passed through the Junior Secondary School system and had already experienced a significant decrease in her hearing capabilities. It must be noted that after Kathy-Ann left the Junior Secondary School system, she did not go on to the Senior Comprehensive School system as was the natural progression for a child to leave one system and go to the other. She was taken out of the school system because her parents were not in a financial position to purchase a hearing aid and without it her learning process became progressively more difficult.

Kathy-Ann received her hearing aid after her experience at the Junior Secondary system. This encouraged her to go back to school at the Post Primary level where she sat the School Leaving Examination and was successful. However, at this level of education, the teachers treated her like a child because of her disability and she was uncomfortable with the treatment. After five (5) years of using the hearing aid, Kathy-Ann suffered the misfortune of losing it at a function she had attended in which there was a fracas. Since then, she has lived without the use of the hearing assistance with the hope that some day soon, she will be able to amass the funds to purchase one.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

The philosophy used to drive this study is heavily dependent on the logic of two models on disability. These two models are the medical ideological perspective of disability and the social ideological perspective. On the one hand, the medical model assumes that full participation in a society of people with disabilities, can only be promoted through medical cure. The ideological perspective of this model is non-inclusive and advances the argument that disabilities are medical problems and medicine is the only solution.

Whereas, on the other hand, the social ideological model suggests that it is not impairment that causes disability, rather, it is the way in which society has failed to make allowances for people with disabilities to enter the mainstream of the society. In fact, this
model postulates that people with disability are "differently able" and as such, can achieve their goals if they are integrated into the society. Gibilisco (2003) argues that people with disabilities are capable of outperforming people without disabilities.

In this regard, this model emphasizes the removal of the social, economic, political, cultural and environmental factors attributable to society that hinder their inclusion into the mainstream of community life. This will give them the opportunity to maximize their potentials by promoting their participation and productive involvement in the society.

**ASSESSMENT OF CONTRIBUTIONS:**

Mrs. Kathy-Ann Bernard economic activities have been a welcome and noticeable contribution in the field of community service to her community and by extension, to the national community. The sale of breakfast, lunches and dinner at reasonable prices and prepared under sanitary conditions, as well as tasting deliciously, brought her many accolades from her clients for her service. This author had the opportunity to witness the positive feedback being given by some of her clients. They were highly appreciative of her activities.

Equally significant, her activities demonstrated to many within her community that one can make a living by honestly, intelligently and diligently pursuing one's goals; thus exemplifying positive business skills. Her activities brought home the message that one's disability does not mean that one is unable to contribute. According to Russell (2003), people with disabilities suffer physical, social, political, economic and cultural barriers. Mrs. Bernard's economic activities broke many of these barriers enunciated by Russell. In my view her activities shattered the psychological barriers harbored by many and further lessened the dependency syndrome that the society ascribed to disability. In fact, her success to date gave meaning and substance to Article 1 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

This is so because Mrs. Bernard moves with dignity and pride, fully conscious of her contributions to her community and sending the signal that all human beings should be afforded the respect and treated with equality whether they are hearing impaired or not. In this regard, not one should be socially excluded from our society.

**CHALLENGES FACED AND STRATEGIES USED TO OVERCOME THEM:**

Mrs. Bernard challenges were many. Her history revealed that our education system failed to treat her equally and to practice the ideals of the social model. The social model on disability according to Motion (1995) who was cited by Gibilisco (2003), suggests that persons with disability are made disabled by the social behaviour or barriers promoted by those without disabilities. He further emphasizes that the removal of social exclusion and discrimination can bring change to the lives of the disabled people. Additionally, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that, "Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit”.

The social behaviour of our administrators and service workers in the education system did not cater for children with special educational needs since within the elementary and secondary school systems there were no provisions to treat equally with the hearing impaired. Such cases were dealt with at the School for the Deaf in Cascade. In this context, Kathy-Ann had to contend with an elementary school system and a secondary school system that did not take into consideration her needs. Indeed, she had the assistance of the use of the hearing aid; but this was after she was taken out of the school system and not due to any policy of inclusion pursued by the education system.

Another significant challenge Mrs. Bernard had to face required that her activities dispelled the notion that hearing-impaired persons are illiterate, cannot communicate with
others or even understand what others are saying, are useless and probably should be left alone. To some extent, these notions found a fertile social environment since social inclusion was not practiced throughout the society. However, Kathy-Ann's history taught us that she was a very capable academic student. In the elementary school system, she was at the top of her class and when she had access to the use of her hearing aid she passed the School Leaving Examinations.

Her academic maturity also allowed her to develop lip-reading skills that perplexed many clients. According to Russell (1998) who was cited by Gibilisco (2003), inclusion of the differently able goes beyond raising awareness. In my view, it requires making the differently able feel useful and their participation be appreciated in the mainstream of community life.

Equally significant, Mrs. Bernard has had a major challenge in terms of bringing up her three children, all girls, ages six (6), four (4) and one (1) respectively, without the daily assistance of a father. However, her husband makes regular visits and assists in the care of the children. In this regard, a critical aspect of her relation with her children has to be the way she communicates her thoughts to them. Indeed, the use of the skill of Sign Language becomes a vital medium of dialogue between Mrs. Bernard and her children. Also, it will lessen any state of dependency she might have had to entertain with other members of family and close friends in terms of administering parental guidance.

LESSONS LEARNT:

In the execution of this case study, I realize that whilst disability demands a medical response; it also warrants a social response. The case study of Mrs. Bernard has made this author cognizant of the fact that persons with disabilities are differently able, even though constraint by medical problems. Mrs. Bernard has demonstrated that she is capable of doing a task just as good as anyone without disability in her environment. In fact, she does not want to be viewed as a handicap, since she is quite capable of running her own affairs with a high level of success.
However, my interaction with this differently able person taught me that I must exercise patience when dealing with hearing impaired persons. This element in the author's character is important especially under the circumstance that both Mrs. Bernard and this author have not been trained in sign language. The lack of this skill on both sides did not contribute to alleviate the problem of taking long hours to conduct the exercise of interviewing Mrs. Bernard. Equally important, I have learned that being differently able does not imply that a person with disability cannot run a business. Mrs. Bernard has proved otherwise since her business activities are well-organized and professionally executed, so much so, that she has gained the respect and admiration of others in her community as well as this author. It is also evident that Mrs. Bernard is a loving person with strong integrity who gives of her best and is genuine in her dealings with others.

Undoubtedly, the leaders in all facets of life in our society must ensure that policies are established to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities to equality of opportunity and to be inclusive in the mainstream of community life.

CONCLUSION:

This case study about Mrs. Kathy-Ann Bernard reveals the common experience faced by many persons with disabilities, that is, their needs are not adequately addressed by the society as a whole. In the case of Mrs. Bernard, her needs were not properly addressed in the school system. More so, as a hearing impaired person, those responsible - teacher, principal & the Ministry of Education - were not prepared to treat urgently and professionally with her emerging problem. Indeed, her aunt acted as the catalyst to bring some early assistance to her distress.

However, Mrs. Bernard is just one of many differently able persons whose medical and social problems are not acted upon with the alacrity necessary for such persons to be included in the mainstream of community life. As such, this revelation of Mrs. Bernard's story has served as an impetus for this author to work to realize that differently able persons are afforded their respect, equity and inclusion in all facets of national life.
Bibliography


United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)