

**Speaking Up for Ourselves:**  
**persons with intellectual disability in Malta have their say**

by

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The way that persons with intellectual disability in Malta spend their day, and their hopes and ambitions were the subject of a recent study. The research was designed by the National Commission Persons with Disability and the Department for Elderly and Community Services. The latter is responsible for day services for persons with intellectual disability.

The study was carried out as part of a series of activities that the two organisations are organising in order to promote self-advocacy in Malta. These activities are part of the European Year of Disabled Persons.

In total, there were 52 day service users who were interviewed, that is 13% of the total number of adults with intellectual disability who use day services in Malta and Gozo. They described the activities that they are involved in both when they are using day services and when they are at home. They were also asked what activities they would choose to do both at day services and at home, especially when it came to those activities that they do not do at the present but which they are interested in doing, both at day services and at home.

Among the most significant findings were the facts that all the persons interviewed are happy to attend day services and that, in general, they are happy with the activities that they do. However, this does not mean that they wouldn't like to try out new activities.

**Day Centre Based Activities**

Table 1 indicates the recreational activities that the service-users would like to do that they do not do at the moment. The fact that some percentages (for example for physical activity) are low means that there is already a large number of service-users who are involved in these activities.

**Table 1**

<b>20%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>Crafts</b>	<b>Soft-play</b>	<b>Table Games</b>	<b>Top Drama</b>	<b>Physical Activity</b>

When it comes to personal development, the percentage of service-users who would like to follow these activities are higher, indicating that there are few service-users who are involved and that a large number of those not involved are highly interested. It is worth noting that, according to Table 2, the percentage of clients interested in sexual education is very high. This indicates both that they do not have this programme and that they are very much interested in it.

**Table 2**

<b>22%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>57%</b>
<b>Self-Advocacy</b>	<b>Speech Therapy</b>	<b>Occupational Therapy</b>	<b>Literacy and Numeracy</b>	<b>Independent Living Skills</b>	<b>Sexual Education</b>

**Work**

The world of work is an area of much interest to the respondents. 33% of those interviewed work on a part-time basis, usually through arrangements made by the day services they use. 80% of those who do not work would like to work, most of them on a part-time basis. The places where they would like to work are indicated in Table 3.

**Table 3**

<b>40%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>Office</b>	<b>Cleaning</b>	<b>Factory</b>	<b>Hand-work</b>	<b>Hotel</b>	<b>Rest-aurant</b>	<b>Shop</b>	<b>With Children</b>	<b>With elderly people</b>

**Home Based Activities**

As for the evenings and during weekends and holidays, most respondents mostly occupy themselves with activities that they can carry out on their own at home. These are set out in Table 4

**Table 4**

<b>96%</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>61%</b>
<b>TV</b>	<b>Radio</b>	<b>Crafts</b>	<b>Looking at books</b>	<b>Games</b>

Many of the respondents do not have a computer or play station but would very much like to be able to use them.

Very few of the persons interviewed go out on their own. Most often they go out with family members. When they do go out alone, it is usually to go the local shop, to go to church or to visit relatives who live within walking distance. Many expressed the wish to be able to go out on further afield, either alone or with friends from day services.

**Exercising Choice**

In order to gauge to what extent the interviewees have the opportunity to exercise choice, the study focused on three aspects:

- a) choice of clothing
- b) outings
- c) spending money.

It is interesting to note while 70% of the respondents choose what to wear, only 55% actually have a choice when it comes to buying clothes. On the other hand, as Table 5 indicates, most of those who are given money to spend, spend it on clothes.

**Table 5**

<b>4%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>Saved directly by respondent</b>	<b>Is kept by relative</b>	<b>Is kept in the bank</b>	<b>Spent on jewellery</b>	<b>Spent on clothes</b>	<b>Spent on shoes</b>	<b>Spent on food and sweets</b>

The main conclusions from the research are that, while the persons interviewed are quite happy with their lives, they also wish to be less protected. They would like to lead less sheltered lives, in an interdependent society that treats them as adults, gives them their own space, and in which they have a voice and can participate fully. They would also like to be a part of the world of work, to be able to exercise more choice and to have their individuality respected.

The findings from this study were presented during a seminar entitled 'This time we speak out ourselves'. This was attended by the persons who participated in the research, members of their families, and professionals who work with persons with intellectual disability. The presentation of the research was done by some of the respondents themselves and was accompanied by a leaflet that explained the main findings in an easy-to-read format. It was followed by a discussion during which the persons with intellectual disability present emphasised their wish to find work. It is planned that the study will be followed up with the implementation of person-centred planning in day services in Malta in order to ensure each and every service-user is consulted about the use they would like to make of day services.