

# Disability Conference, Expo opens early Sept

The Airports Company South Africa Disability Conference runs 6-7 September 2012 at the Sandton Convention Centre, alongside the three-day Disability Trade and Lifestyle Exhibition, which runs until 8 September.



The theme of this year's is 'Solutions for Delivery to People with Disabilities' and will focus on real benefits for people with disabilities in South Africa. "The theme reflects a determined move towards a more action-orientated and solutions-driven programme," says conference chairperson Ari Seirlis, also vice chairperson of the South African Disability Alliance.

"The conference is a comprehensive knowledge and resource event that addresses all disabilities, and offers numerous benefits to anyone involved in the disability arena. Various organisations take part including government, corporate institutions and NGOs. The event also enjoys support from businesses keen to help develop and employ people with disabilities. Of course, a bonus for delegates is the accompanying trade and lifestyle exhibition."

The primary aim of the conference is to improve the environments inside and outside the living and working spaces of people with disabilities.

"The conference also aims to provide a platform for people with disabilities to express themselves, engage with like-minded individuals, groups and stakeholders and explore possibilities and opportunities."

## **Entrepreneurship - new enabling mechanisms**

Employment equity and entrepreneurship for people with disabilities will form the major focus of the conference on day one, with speakers from business and government. Entrepreneurs with disabilities will share their methods and strategies for optimising opportunities across numerous private and public marketplaces.

Conference discussions on entrepreneurship will focus on empowering all entrepreneurs. Epilepsy South Africa established an entrepreneurial development programme in 2005, based largely on training programmes developed by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The association has enjoyed a long and effective relationship with the ILO based on interaction around the development of potential and existing entrepreneurs with disabilities and particularly in terms of women

entrepreneurs.

"There are excellent entrepreneurship programmes out there that we will be introducing to delegates," says Marina Clarke, national director of Epilepsy SA and a participant in the programme.

"Very often people with disabilities do not consider entrepreneurship as a realistic career choice. This can be addressed through business awareness workshops which are an element of our Pan-African Capacity Training Intervention."

Mpho Ndebele, the deputy director for disability mainstreaming at the dti, will also participate in the discussions, particularly on what is needed to develop more entrepreneurs with disabilities. "We need equal participation when sharing information," says Ndebele. "Therefore we must acknowledge the people with disabilities in our communities by making shared information available to them in formats they can access and are comfortable with."

"This conference is an opportunity for all stakeholders and provides a valuable opportunity to gain access to information, share knowledge and best practices - and to network."

## **Employment equity - disability inclusive**

"The fact that 25% of employable South Africans are unemployed is shocking," continues Seirlis. "But what is more shocking is that of the 10% of the South African population (five million people) who have disabilities, less than 1% is employed."

"There is a high level of awareness in the public service of the need for transformation that reflects the diverse nature of South Africa and for workplaces universally accessible for all citizens, including people with disabilities," says Barbara Watson, chief director of the Department of Public Service and Administration. Watson is one of the conference speakers and will focus on what government is doing in terms of Employment Equity.

Watson says that there are challenges in translating the awareness into actions, such as removing physical and psychological barriers to the recruitment, appointing and retaining people with disabilities and women in particular. She believes that government is committed to creating equity in the public service.

## **Other speakers**

Other confirmed speakers include Peter Strasheim, managing consultant at DLM who will discuss employment equity; AK Dube, CEO, Secretariat of the Africa Decade of Persons with Disabilities, who will update delegates on the United Nations Convention on the Rights for People with Disabilities.

Mogwailane Kenneth Mohlala, acting CEO of PioTrans will participate in a panel discussion on transport issues for people with disabilities with representatives from the City of Joburg, City of Tshwane, City of Cape Town and City of eThekweni.

The office of the Gauteng premier is actively partnering this year's event. "This year's conference creates a forum for all participants to learn more about disability and discover the latest news, trends and technological developments enabling ability in the disability sector," says Zain Bulbulia, acting deputy director general: special programmes in the office of the premier. "From that, we can develop and implement new, better, modern solutions for the challenges affecting people with disabilities."

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