

Lesotho Society of the Mentally Handicapped Persons (LSMHP)*Bring them to the open, let them be seen*

In the rural areas of Lesotho, disability is still not well understood. It is regarded as punishment or a curse inflicted by God on the parents of the disabled. Referring to her six-year old son Paseka, 'Maitumeleng commented that *"I used to hide him at home as I was afraid of what people would say."* This highlights how deep-rooted the belief is. 'Maitumeleng comes from Bokong, Khohlo Ntsó, a remote area in the mountains of Lesotho. She was very happy when a branch of the Lesotho Society of Mentally Handicapped Persons was established in her area. She attended several workshops which empowered her to understand her son's condition, to support him and to take better care of him.

Photograph shows Paseka Nkhabuthane.

"Because of the training I no more hide my son. I send him to the local shop and the shop owner is now used to him and the people do not stare at him as they used to do. I was so happy when the shop owner told me that Paseka is able to point at what he needs at the shop. He likes going to the shop because when he gets there the owner allows him to come round and pick for himself and this makes Paseka very happy. The presence of LSMHP in Bokong has brought life to my son."

The joy of 'Maitumeleng is shared by many parents with disabled children at Bokong. With the help of awareness-raising campaigns organised by LSMHP, the parents feel free to bring their children to the public and even send them to school. 'Maitumeleng is one of the parents who feel the impact of the support which Skillshare International provides to LSMHP.

Established in 1992 in Maseru by parents of children with mental disabilities, LSMHP has grown from a group of twenty five (25) parents to one thousand and eighty (1080) members incorporating parents of children with other disabilities.

Skillshare International has been working with LSMHP through both skills development in the form of a development worker and leadership training for the co-ordinator. The impact of LSMHP through its advocacy role has been quite significant as manifested by:

- Inclusion of disability issues in the technical and vocational education and training policy
- Integration of children with mild / moderate disabilities in mainstream schools and a change of attitudes towards children with disabilities
- Provision of funding in the regular budget of the Ministry of Sports to support sporting activities by the disabled and developing an advocacy strategy for uniform application by members