



Beit Issie Shapiro
Changing the lives of people with disabilities
On the Willie & Celia Trump Campus

6th International Conference on Disabilities

Unity & Diversity in Action

July 6-9, 2015 – Tel Aviv, Israel

Under the auspices of the Trump International Institute for Continuing Education in Developmental Disabilities

Vanessa Dos Santos, South Africa



Vanessa dos Santos has passionately been involved in the disability sector since the birth of her son 19 years ago. He was born with Down syndrome and soon after diagnosed as also having Cerebral palsy.

She was instrumental in setting up the national Down Syndrome South Africa office in 2003 and secured funding for the organisation from both local and international sources, which has brought the organisation to the forefront in terms of advocacy and lobbying on the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities amongst others. She has been a strong advocate of inclusion in all areas of life for people with Down syndrome and other intellectual disabilities.

Vanessa has been responsible in setting up Outreach Support groups, Self Help groups in rural and township areas to assist parents of and people with Down syndrome and other intellectual disabilities throughout South Africa as well as in Africa. Furthermore she has assisted many young adults with intellectual disabilities gain employment and advocate for themselves. She has also been instrumental in setting up Self Advocacy groups in all the DSSA branches as well as in Uganda. Her area of passion is assisting families of and people with intellectual disabilities in the poverty stricken areas to be included into society with recognition of their rights enabling them to access services and support.

She has also been a strong advocate for the inclusion of people with Intellectual disabilities on the Right to Education and presented at many local and international congresses on this topic amongst others.

Vanessa completed her Masters in Philosophy in Disability Studies in 2011 and currently is the President of Down Syndrome International (DSI). She further represents DSI as a governing body board member of the International Disability Alliance, which has direct links to the United Nations.