

Housing Authority: Scheme 7 O.T. and Housing Adaptations for the Disabled.

The following article has been adapted from a presentation given by Ms Vickie Sciberras MSc SROT on the occasion of the O.T. National Day on the 28th October 2000 at the Preluna Hotel Sliema.

This article will present an aspect of occupational therapy which all of us as Occupational Therapists have been involved in, since the beginning of our careers but which has recently taken a wider perspective. It refers to our being part of a National Board which is responsible for the provision of financial aid to persons with a disability for adaptation works required in their residences to facilitate their leading a more independent life.

The Scheme (i.e. Scheme 7 of the Housing Authority) had been launched in order to provide assistance to persons with a disability and their families, to render their residence adequate for their needs, or to convert part of the existing premises into a separate dwelling so

that the person with a disability lives in an independent or semi independent manner, close to the family.

This scheme provides that, prior to granting financial assistance, the Authority gives technical advice as regards the nature of adaptation works which need to be carried out for the best benefit to the applicant or to the person with a disability.

The scheme combines the financial assistance with the needs of the person. Hence assistance will only be given according to the needs of the person with the disability.

What type of work does the scheme subsidise?

1. General alterations. (e.g. extensions)
2. Approaches to rooms (e.g. ramps, modifications of steps, handrails)
3. Doors and windows (e.g. widening, substitution to folding doors).
4. Staircases and vertical circulation (e.g. additional handrails, gates).
5. Water services (e.g. substitution of lever for screwdown taps).

6. Electrical and heating services (e.g. refixing of socket outlets at a convenient level).
7. Kitchens (e.g. alterations to heights of working surfaces for wheelchair users)
8. Bathrooms and Toilets (e.g. substitution of bath to a walk-in shower)
9. Lifts or stairlifts (including structural alterations if needed).
10. Works necessary for the installation of lifting aids (e.g. support to ceiling for the installation of a ceiling hoist).

For the installation of a stairlift, for example, an applicant can receive up to Lm1500; and for the adaptation of a bathroom the scheme allows up to Lm800.

The person who qualifies for assistance under this scheme, forwards an application on the prescribed form to the Housing Authority presenting the type of adaptations he/she deem necessary in their residence.

Upon request of the Board, the Occupational Therapist then visits the residence of the person who has presented his/her request and carries out an assessment of the works

requested, the functional ability of the person with the disability, and the relation between the two. The O.T. not only considers the physical abilities of the person but also his psychological and social needs, such as the support network around that person. Recommendations are then given to the applicant or the family as to which alternative methods and/or adaptive equipment are best suited to the person's needs. The benefits to be gained by the person through the granting of this financial aid are then outlined. A professional opinion at the end of the assessment summarises the relationship between the works requested and the person's particular disability.

The O.T.'s assessment is crucial for the decision of the Board as to whether to approve the application or not. During the Board meeting, in fact, the occupational therapist, presents various applications which are then discussed and validated according to the eligibility and genuinity of each request. The O.T. also indicates where the need arises for an architect to carry out another visit in order to provide the technical advice regarding the structural adaptations needed in some cases, for example,

where widening of doors or breaking through ceilings are required in order to install lifts or make the environment wheelchair accessible.

One of the future plans in this project is that the occupational therapist and the architect carry out a final visit to the applicant's residence together, so that the person with a disability would be receiving the best professional technical and clinical advice for his/her particular needs.

The Board, which meets once a month, is made up of representatives from the Housing Authority, the Kummissjoni Nazzjonali Persuni b'Disabilta', the Department of Social Security, the

Department for the care of the Elderly, and the Department of Health.

The above was a brief outline of the Occupational Therapists' role within the Scheme. Through the O.T.'s valid contribution the applicants are not only receiving the opportunity for financial aid, but also professional advice as to what is most appropriate for their specific needs and awareness as to what services are available for them. In this way, the Occupational Therapists are also facilitating the person with a disability to lead a more independent life thus remaining longer within the community and away from residential institutions.

PUBLICATION OF REVIEWS

The journal committee has decided that as from next publication the MJOT will start including book or article reviews. Thus we would urge the reader to help us out in this new venture. We would appreciate any reviews of recent O.T. books and any medical related publications which we can reproduce in the journal.