

Having the opportunity to prove yourself - Lirije Sadrija

I am Lirije Sadrija, 46 years old. I come from a village near Klina. I am a journalist, as well as an administrator.

At the moment I'm unemployed. I have had work experience during my lifetime, but unfortunately it was very short. I'm always searching for a job position that suits me.

In 2000, after the war, I started to work at a media organization in Klina. Radio Driona it was called, and there I worked for six years. My greatest desire was to be a journalist.

Unfortunately the organization was closed due to financial issues. After that, in 2011, I started studying journalism. To pursue my dream of being a journalist.

I studied journalism, but unfortunately I still haven't found myself in the profession I always wanted. I have continued my studies pursuing a master's in Public Administration and Diplomacy, believing that it will help me to find a job somewhere else, because of my physical condition.

For us disabled people, the conditions we find ourselves in are not improving, unfortunately our lives continue to get more complicated. So I have chosen Public Administration and Diplomacy to find another job that it is easier for me to do.

Unfortunately, until now, even in this profession, I haven't found a job.

I was born with my disability and I had it as a child. I am the fourth child in my family and they treat me very well. Before me came my sister and two brothers. My mother has always shown great love towards me, not only as a disabled child, but almost as if I have fulfilled her... to be the second girl in the family. Two boys and two girls, is common in our families, there always has been that, to have both girls and boys.

As a family, they have always supported me in life.

Society has supported me a lot. But there's something that new families should be careful of, that they shouldn't treat us differently from other family members, they should not give us more attention than we require, only as much as we need.

I say this because of the great care shown for us, we can start to rely on others. And this dependence gives us doubts. This brings about difficulties, which we have to face during our lifetime.

So I would suggest to each family that has disabled members, I mean, children, to not pay them special attention, but treat us equal with others, except for the special cases when we need more support... Normally, each of us has that support, even those children which are not disabled.

The first job that I worked was in radio. My first love. I mentioned earlier that I worked there for six years. The access was easier, because of the place where I lived and my work colleagues treated me very well, the staff members.

I never felt discriminated against, whether at my workplace, or the society that surrounded me. It is interesting that I always felt equal to the people that surrounded me. Maybe I never had the chance to meet people that have prejudices about us disabled people.

Maybe prejudices were present but they never expressed them in front of us. Personally, they were never expressed in front of me.

Even society in general, during my time at elementary school, high school or during university, I had friends that supported me a lot. They didn't give me special treatment, my family members did treat me differently, not with bad intentions, but with good ones. Taking into account that our condition gradually deteriorates. It doesn't get better, it just gets more difficult.

We are not allowed to carry heavy weights, to not walk a lot, this is to prevent us having more complications in the future.

When talking about people with disabilities, it is... it makes you feel bad to say that this person needs to be treated differently because it implies that "it's a pity." It makes you feel bad. Any self esteem you have, you lose. It lowers your self-esteem, because those are societal prejudices that imply that these people cannot achieve the same as someone that doesn't have a disability.

In fact, each of us needs to have the opportunity to show that we are role models for new generations. While speaking about younger generations, I would like to express that I strongly believe and hope that now, many new parents have more knowledge about disabilities. They have become very aware. They have different approaches toward their kids, they treat them differently compared to us, the previous generations.

I have been unemployed for most of my life. This means that throughout all my life, I have only worked for six years. Even though these last five months I have worked as a manager in a Handikos project. But this unemployment doesn't relate to my condition, but the small number of job vacancies that Kosovo has for the population in general.

During my working life, back then, we worked without written contracts, most of the people that were employed, didn't have work contracts. I would like to add something here, in fact, when a job vacancy is open, experience is required, one to five years experience in the workplace. How can you have work experience if you never had the chance to work? Automatically, this pushes you to not apply for that job, both for us disabled people and others.

With regards to media organizations, I would say that the reason that we, disabled people, don't have the chance to work there is because the media requires you to be beautiful, to look beautiful. They prejudge that disabled people are not capable of working in that institution, in that media organization.

And I would like to call out to all the media, in case they have disabled candidates as job applicants, to give them an opportunity and see that their bias is unfounded, because we really can do the same job as others.

Maybe there are some specific jobs that we cannot do, let's say, on the front lines of war. We cannot run as much as someone that is not disabled. But we can go out and have an interview, create a story and to realize the work that is done in the media. I am ready and well prepared for a role like that.

So, I would call out not only the media, but all institutions as well, to not have prejudices that disabled persons cannot do the work that they do.

If a person has a physical disability, cannot walk, he can do office work, work in a factory, or other institutions that don't require walking, to create access to workplaces.

I think that most disabled people are willing to work, all they need is the opportunity to do so. The state needs to create these opportunities.

I believe that there are experts on people with disabilities. If there haven't been any until now, then institutions need to look out for experts. The best experts would be disabled people themselves, because they know the abilities of others with disabilities and know how much they can achieve in life and what they are qualified for.

If someone doesn't have a bachelor's degree, and has finished high school, or a training...

If they are required in administration, they are willing to work in administration, if IT assistance is required, they are willing to work in IT, depending on the qualification that he or she holds and their physical condition.

Normally, you cannot make a disabled person in a wheelchair compete in a marathon. But there are wheelchair marathons.

I think that if any of us cannot walk with our legs, we can walk with our mind. Places where you take steps, we walk there with our mind. It is not necessary that I have to step in the same place you do, I can step there with my mind, with an article of mine, and I can walk together with you.

Each of us should be given the opportunity for society to understand this category of people. When you know someone, you approach them with ease, have different thoughts, you don't have the prejudices that you used to, because a part of society hasn't had the chance to meet a disabled person. You don't know their world. You only see their physical condition, maybe not intentionally, but it comes up as the preconception that "he or she cannot do it."

You start to understand them from inside, and when you start knowing his or her inside world, you realize that we are the same as others.

