

## From the Field

# Street Law for Specific Communities: A Project for Persons with Disabilities

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## Abstract

This article will discuss the need for legal education programs for Persons with Disabilities, how an innovative Street Law Program was created, and the benefits of such a program. Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of Law's (JSW)<sup>1</sup> Human Dignity Clinic (HDC)<sup>2</sup> developed a multi-faceted legal community education program for Persons with Disabilities soon after the law school was founded in 2015. This article will discuss a law clinic project at JSW in the Kingdom of Bhutan, where the HDC reaches out to educate Persons with Disabilities about their legal rights and responsibilities.

This is an ongoing, law student led clinic project. Surveys were conducted of students and participants to gauge the success of the project. Some of the results will be shared in this article. It is hoped that the readers may adapt some of the lessons learned from this project to similar projects in their communities.

**Keywords: Diversity Equity Training, Street Law, Persons with Disabilities, Community Education, Law School Clinics.**

## Introduction

The focus of this article is to help others create projects in their community. Some of the lessons learned from this community education project are unique to serving a specific population, in this case Persons with Disabilities. However, many of the lessons are transferable to other projects, populations, and communities.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on JSW go to <https://jswlaw.bt/>

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the HDC go to <https://jswlaw.bt/clinics/human-dignity/>

This article will describe the Persons with Disabilities Project conducted by HDC. It will discuss how the project was started, collaborations that took place and how it led to the creation of the Persons with Disabilities Advocacy Toolkit. After this, the paper will discuss the Street Law Program which was conducted in line with the Toolkit. The reader will learn practical information on how the program was developed and conducted, the challenges faced, its benefits to the community and the students. It is hoped that this information will encourage others to consider such a project and make it easier for the reader to carry out similar projects.

The project began with collaborations with others in the community. Often, law clinics and other service providers work in a silo. There is an informal process of seeing a need, or the ability to meet a perceived need, and moving to use what resources are already available to address those needs. In this project, different agencies collaborated with the HDC to create this project. The agencies ranged from those with general missions to serve vulnerable populations, to agencies with the specific mission to help Persons with Disabilities

From this collaboration the idea for a Persons with Disabilities Toolkit for Bhutan was born. The Toolkit is a booklet on how to navigate the civil and criminal legal system. It covers a lot of legal topics with practical information. This includes how the Bhutan court system works, basic rights like the right to an attorney and the right to remain silent. Charts and graphs are used to help convey this information. However, the educational value of written material is limited. Any audience is likely to have questions about the material, or fail to read through a booklet, no matter what the topic is or how well it is written.

Learning how to navigate a legal system using a reference tool works well in some circumstances. If you want to file a small claim in court, a written reference like the Toolkit may work well. But if suddenly you find yourself interacting with the police, there's no time to consult a toolkit to learn what your rights are and how to try to exercise them. Realizing this, the Street Law Program was created to educate people about what was in the toolkit.

### **The Street Law Program**

In conjunction with the creation of Persons with Disabilities Advocacy Toolkit, HDC and the Appropriate Dispute Resolution Clinic (ADRC)<sup>3</sup> executed advocacy programs through a street law initiative, targeting Persons with Disabilities to further enhance their understanding of legal processes and rights.

The street law approach was specifically chosen for advocacy, owing to its unique pedagogy centered on learners. This was one way through which the team could ensure that the program transcended mere advocacy and became a platform where the Persons with Disabilities not only gained information but also actively participated in discussions about their rights and legal procedures.

In essence, the Street Law Program served two main purposes for its audience. First, it introduced Persons with Disabilities to the Toolkit. It provided them with some basic concepts of how the legal system works in Bhutan. The goal was to help this population to start thinking about the legal system as a place where some disputes could be resolved. Bhutan is a new constitutional monarchy.<sup>4</sup> It has a new parliament, a new legal system and a new law school. The population may be less aware of how

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on the ADRC go to <https://jswlaw.bt/clinics/alternative-dispute-resolution/>

<sup>4</sup> The Monarchy was established in 1907. The Constitution was adopted in 2008. See Bhutan, U.S. Department of State Archives, available at <https://2009-2017.state.gov/outofdate/bgn/bhutan/189438.htm>

this new system works than in other countries with longer established dispute resolution mechanisms. Second, the Street Law Program engaged the Persons with Disabilities participants in how to navigate some of the more stressful types of interactions with the legal system - how to deal with the criminal legal system. This can be a difficult, stressful experience for anyone. Vulnerable populations are likely to feel even more stress in such interactions.

### **Developing Curriculum for the Street Law Program**

The program started with an orientation on Street Law which enabled the students to understand what it is and how it functions. Following this, the students started working on the curriculum. Since Street Law employs a learner/student-centered approach to learning, it was important to come up with a curriculum that would allow Persons with Disabilities to actively participate in it, while taking into account what their needs were to enable active and full participation. One important note to be made here is the consideration for varying types of disabilities within the community of Persons with Disabilities. This meant that a variety of possible barriers had to be taken into account for the development of the curriculum. The program would have to be sensitive and inclusive of all the participants regardless of their disability types. Fortunately, prior to the commencement of the program development, the students had already attended a one-day training on Disability Equality Training (“DET”). This served as a very useful resource as it enabled the students to view disability through an empathetic lens, which in turn contributed to designing a program that was not only inclusive but also sensitive.

### **The Disability Equality Training<sup>5</sup>**

The one-day training on Disability Equality Training (“DET”) was organized by the Disabled People’s Organisation (“DPO”).<sup>6</sup> In Bhutan, knowledge on disabilities amongst the public, as well as the organizations, is limited. This affects the support provided to Persons with Disabilities.<sup>7</sup> Addressing this, the training was developed by DPO in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Population Fund to foster an empathetic perspective of disability in society. It was a part of the implementation of the action plan for the National Policy for Persons with

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<sup>5</sup> Disability Equality Training is a participatory process where people are introduced to the real issues and discrimination faced by Persons with Disabilities with a view to change their behaviors, policies, and practices. Liz Carr, Paul Darke, and Kenji Kuno, *Disability Equality Training Action for Change* at 5 (MPH Publishing 2012) available at [https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/egms/2015/Kenji\\_Kuno\\_Change.pdf](https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/egms/2015/Kenji_Kuno_Change.pdf). DET is often used to sensitize the workplace environment. It is implemented by companies as part of their obligation to a diverse workplace. Studies on whether it has been effective are numerous, but few have rigorous methodologies, with the exception of the Phillips study. See Brian Phillips, Jon Deiches, Blaise Morrison, Fong Chan, and Jill L. Bezyak, Disability Diversity Training in the Workplace: Systematic Review and Future Directions 26(3) *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation* 264 (2016).

<sup>6</sup> DPO is a Civil Society Organization in Bhutan with Persons with Disabilities serving on the Board of Directors, Technical Committee and Management Team. For more information, go to <https://dpobhutan.org/>

<sup>7</sup> See Preece, Murray and Rose, 2020; Royal Government of Bhutan and United Nations Children's Fund, 2017.

Disabilities, 2019.<sup>8</sup> Acknowledging the Social Model of Disability<sup>9</sup> as its conceptual foundation<sup>10</sup> the training entailed content surrounding the topic of real issues, challenges, experiences and aspirations of the Persons with Disabilities from their own narrative and was facilitated by the Persons with Disabilities.<sup>11</sup>

The initial sessions of the DET focused on building understanding on the national situation on disabilities. The session unveiled and addressed the various myths, stereotypes, misconceptions, and biases people have towards disability. Later sessions delved into details on the various types of disabilities. For example, one of the disabilities covered under the training was physical disability. Leading the session, a wheelchair user explained that physical disability is a physical condition that affects a person's mobility, physical capacity, stamina, or dexterity which may be hereditary or acquired from birth, through accidents, and medical conditions. Stressing the lack of disability-friendly infrastructure as one of the many challenges which limits their accessibility, the presenter shared how such a challenge is further aggravated due to a lack of skills and knowledge among the people to assist Persons with Disabilities. Following this, an essential guide on how to assist a wheelchair user was provided. Starting from the crucial point of familiarizing students with the parts of the wheelchair to providing guidance or instructions on how to help the wheelchair users, the session provided the participants with a comprehensive understanding of using a wheelchair. Similar sessions provided insights into persons with intellectual disabilities and persons with visual impairments.

### Lesson Plan and Content Development

This training was crucial in helping the students understand the importance of considering the implications that disability would have on the participants' learning capacity. For instance, the training had pointed out that not all Persons with Disabilities would have the capacity to sit for long periods in the workshop. Likewise, some might find it hard to concentrate for extended durations.<sup>12</sup> Considering these factors, the students decided to conduct the program in not more than 3 hours, allocating one

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<sup>8</sup> The National Policy on Persons with Disabilities mandates government support for awareness and advocacy programs on persons with disabilities in the country. The policy mandated the Gross National Happiness Commission to coordinate and support awareness and advocacy programs on disability issues. DET is being conducted in line with this mandate. See Bhutan's National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2019 available at See Save the Children, 2021. See Bhutan's National Policy for Persons with Disabilities available at <https://dpobhutan.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/National-Policy-for-Persons-with-Dsiabilities.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Liz Carr, Paul Darke, and Kenji Kuno, Disability Equality Training Action for Change, 5, (2012). Malaysia MPH Group Printing (M) Sdn Bhd. The Social Model of Disability considers disability as not merely a physical or intellectual condition but also the inadequacy of inclusive structures of society that causes disability. This view was developed as a critique of the Medical Model Theory that viewed disability as a medical condition which required medical interventions.

<sup>10</sup> Id. at 104.

<sup>11</sup> DET is designed and delivered by qualified trainers with disabilities who experience disability and therefore truly understand the reality of living in a disabling society. Id. at 3.

<sup>12</sup> Different types of disabilities can have varying implications on learning capabilities for the Persons with Disabilities. For instance, while a person with physical disabilities may have a problem with posture which might affect their capacity to sit for long hours, a person with a neurological condition might face difficulty processing a lot of information. Likewise, a person with a hearing impairment may face difficulty remaining attentive. This information was acquired from an online course developed by the Anglophone Postsecondary Institutions of New Brunswick, Canada. It is an English version of a similar online course developed in French by the Université de Moncton. The course provides detailed information on types of disabilities and its implication on learning capacity along with means to provide reasonable accommodation and adjustments for the students with disabilities. The course is available at <https://alc.ext.unb.ca/modules/introduction/the-big-picture.html>.

hour each for three clinic student groups to cover their part. Therefore, the topics had to be selected very carefully.

Each group came up with different ideas on specific areas to be covered. The groups also had to provide reasons as to why they felt the topic was critical to cover. Though most of the information from the Persons with Disabilities Advocacy Toolkit was important to cover, a guide to decide which of the competing choices to use was to assess what information would one require at hand and be of utility in one's everyday life.

Preparing a lecture alone on the content was not enough as it cannot engage learners in the material.<sup>13</sup> The program had to be complemented with engaging activities. The framework for the lesson plan included a hook, content, application of the content through an activity, and debrief. Since the time allocation for the entire program was three hours, the students decided to allocate one hour for each topic. The hook would take 5 minutes of the session, 20 minutes for the content, 15 minutes for the application exercise and 5 minutes for the debrief. In total, each session would take around 45 minutes with 15 minutes break in between each session.

### **1. Hook**

A hook is a presentation opening tactic used to immediately capture the audience's attention and interest in the presenter and their topic.<sup>14</sup> It is also what creates the first impression and sets the tone for the rest of the presentation. Therefore, it is crucial that one employs compelling hooks. However, in this case, the students not only had to develop compelling hooks but also tailor the hooks in a manner that would be engaging to Persons with Disabilities who have differing disabilities. Aligning to the subject matter of their individual topics, each group successfully designed an interesting hook unique to their group.

The first group, whose content was on introducing the key institutions when coming in conflict/contact with the law, employed a "question and answer" type of method for the hook to engage the audience. The second group which worked on the criminal proceedings content made use of a combination of hooks such as hypothetical scenarios, open-ended questions, and rhetorical questions. While developing the scenarios, the group had to make sure that the scenarios could be tied in with the content of the presentation later. To make the participants engage with the hook, the hypothetical scenarios were developed using the participants as characters and asking what they would have done in a particular situation in the scenario presented. The third group on civil proceedings employed a quick quiz as their hook but with options presented to choose from as the answer. Like the other two groups, the questions were related to the content that would follow thereafter. The same questions were asked at the end of the presentation. This way, the students could assess the participant's comprehension of the topics presented and clarify the doubts if there were any.

### **2. Legal Content**

The first session on the introduction of the institutions focused on the three key institutions in the justice system of Bhutan namely, the Royal Bhutan Police, the Office of Attorney General, and the Judiciary. The facilitators covered the basic functions of these institutions, the contact details, and

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13 David McQuoid-Mason, *Street Law and Public Legal Education: A collection of best practices from around the world in honour of Ed O'Brien* (2019) at 29. South Africa. Juta and Company Ltd.

14 See Bruna Martinuzz, *Twelve ways to hook an audience in 30 seconds*. Brand Knew, February 12, 2019, available at <https://www.brandknewmag.com/12-ways-to-hook-an-audience-in-30-seconds/>

circumstances under which one might encounter the institutions. Specific attention was given in differentiating civil and criminal proceedings/cases.

The following session was particularly dedicated to covering civil cases which included a comprehensive understanding of rights such as dispute settlements, withdrawal of the case, e-litigation services, and legal aid. Most importantly, it included demonstrations on how to avail the service of e-litigation which would be very beneficial, especially to Persons with Disabilities.

The final session focused on the criminal cases delving into the most basic and fundamental areas of criminal proceedings such as detention, arrest warrant, bail, Miranda Rights,<sup>15</sup> and the trial procedures.

### 3. Application Exercises

Interactive application exercises are also one important component of the Street Law approach. These exercises allow for participants to apply what they have learned from the presentations on content thus allowing for a greater chance at information retention. Such exercises also help instructors to get an understanding of how well their participants understood the content. Appreciating the effectiveness of such an exercise, all three teams leading each session integrated various application exercises based on the content covered. The interactive application exercises that were employed ranged from interesting game-playing to critical hypothetical scenarios.

### 4. Debrief

All three presentations concluded with a debrief for 5 minutes during which the summary of the key points were presented. The principal aim of the Persons with Disability Community Outreach Workshop transcended mere advocacy; rather, it centered on the empowerment of individuals in the Persons with Disability community by fostering accessibility and disseminating legal knowledge. This initiative provided a platform where Persons with Disabilities could not just gain information but actively participate in discussions about their rights and legal procedures. One important principle the students embraced was the acknowledgment and appreciation of the diverse and unique needs of the Persons with Disabilities community. They not only understood that inclusivity was not just about physical accessibility but also about accommodating thorough considerations of visual, auditory, cognitive, and physical impairments ensuring effective communication that resonated with all participants. Another principle revolved around the right to information. The students strive to empower Persons with Disabilities by imparting knowledge about the law and by intertwining these principles of inclusivity, accessibility and rights to information. The students aimed not just to educate but to empower. It was about creating a space where Persons with Disabilities felt not only informed but also heard and supported in their journey towards justice and empowerment.

#### a. Why roleplay?

The law student experiences in Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) courses provided them valuable insights and the power of interactive and experiential learning. Therefore, the students opted for an experiential approach for Persons with Disabilities: role-playing. Role playing was not just a creative

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<sup>15</sup> In Bhutan, a suspect's rights at the time of arrest are commonly referred to as "Miranda Rights", named after the United States case *Miranda v. Arizona*, 384 U.S. 436 (1966). This case is famous in the U.S. as establishing the rights of a suspect upon arrest by the police under the 5th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The rights include a requirement that the police tell a suspect that they have a right to remain silent, that if they do say something it can be used against them in a court of law, and that they have a right to an attorney. The consistent granting of these rights can be difficult to achieve.



way to provide information, but also a way to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, ensuring a more effective and impactful legal advocacy session.

### **b. Preparation for the role play**

The students divided themselves into two groups with one group focusing on civil proceedings and the other on criminal proceedings. For the civil proceedings, the group deliberated and settled on exploring a prevalent civil matter in Bhutan: a marital case. The criminal proceedings group chose to simulate a battery case.

Once both the groups decided on the cases, they worked on the scripts and character profiles, aiming for a comprehensive role-play experience that could inform the Persons with Disabilities about their rights and judicial proceedings. While preparing for the roleplay, the students ensured that their script was not just informative but also easily comprehensible for their target audience. Legal concepts can often be complex to comprehend, thus their primary goal was to simplify the legal concepts. This emphasis on simplicity drove the students to structure their script, breaking down convoluted legal terminologies into easily understandable language. An element that they strategically incorporated into their roleplay was humor. Recognizing that legal discussions can sometimes feel overwhelming, the students wanted to include an element of enjoyment and relatability. Their intention was to strike a balance between educational content and an enjoyable experience, ensuring that the audience not only understood but also retained the information in a memorable and engaging way.

After developing the script, the students did their first trial in front of their clinical supervisors. This trial served as a constructive platform for assessment and improvement. The feedback and suggestions received from their clinical supervisors helped the students to realize the importance of careful consideration in their delivery, understand how to connect with their audience, and ensure the audience felt heard and engaged. It pushed the students to embrace versatility in their approach, adapting swiftly to the diverse needs and expectations of the audience.

### **Challenges and Issues When Developing the Street Law Program**

Designing the Street Law Program for Persons with Disabilities came with its own set of unique challenges. The major challenge was to make the project accessible both in terms of physical accessibility as well as informational accessibility owing to various reasons.

#### **1. Variations in the Types and Degrees of Disabilities**

Disabilities in people vary from one person to another. It is not a homogenous group of people.<sup>16</sup> Even if the disability is of the same type, it can vary in its degree. For instance, a person using a wheelchair may be able to walk if adequately assisted whereas another person using a wheelchair may be completely paralyzed in their lower body. Likewise, a person with a visual impairment may have limited vision while another may be completely blind. Such variation in the types and degrees of disabilities meant a diverse range of needs that would have to be considered to allow for full participation. This required the students to be creative in developing the program. Each segment would have to be tailored in a way that would accommodate the varying needs of all the participants.

#### **2. Lack of Disability-Friendly Space to Conduct the Program**

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<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Education, Bangladesh. Department of Technical Education and International Labour Organization. *Including Persons with Disabilities in Technical and Vocational Education and Training: A Guide for Administrators and Instructors to Disability Inclusion* (2016).

Locating a proper venue that would cater to the varying requirements of an audience with disabilities was a difficult process to navigate. Inaccessibility to infrastructures and facilities is still a challenge for Persons with Disabilities in Bhutan<sup>17</sup> despite policy requirements to have disability-friendly infrastructure and buildings in the country.<sup>18</sup> This meant that there were not many disability-friendly venues to choose from. However, easy accessibility to basic facilities such as the conference hall, lunch area and restrooms was essential for full and comfortable participation. This meant that adjustments, modifications, and compromises would have to be made where and when necessary or possible. Such a process has been termed as “reasonable accommodations”,<sup>19</sup> which the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) defines as

*“[N]ecessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure Persons with Disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.”<sup>20</sup>*

As per the convention, State Parties are required to take all appropriate steps to ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to promote equality and eliminate discrimination. Bhutan only ratified the convention in the year 2023.<sup>21</sup> However, the concept can be seen incorporated in Bhutan’s National Policy of Persons with Disabilities, 2019, which contains several provisions stating that the government shall make reasonable accommodations for Persons with Disabilities in various areas such as education, health, employment, and the justice sector.<sup>22</sup>

In a training situation, reasonable accommodations are actions taken to address the specific needs of the trainee.<sup>23</sup> Some ways through which the program tried to provide reasonable accommodations for physical accessibility were:

- Choosing a venue with a conference hall on the ground floor especially for those using wheelchairs.
- Ensuring accessibility to tables for wheelchair users.
- Ensuring the place had elevators.
- Making the seating arrangements in a way that would be comfortable for persons with wheelchairs to move around freely.

<sup>17</sup> United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) *Disability Inclusion High on Mountain Kingdom’s Agenda*, 29 (2023) available at <https://www.undrr.org/>.

<sup>18</sup> Bhutan’s National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2019, available at <https://dpobhutan.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/National-Policy-for-Persons-with-Dsiabilities.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> The term was first used in the United States Civil Rights Act of 1968. The concept was further extended to the disability context in the Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990.

<sup>20</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Art. 2, Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>

<sup>21</sup> Poudel, YK (2023) ‘NC Approves NA’s terms on UN Convention on the RPDs’, *Kuensel*, 7 October <<https://kuenselonline.com/>>.

<sup>22</sup> Bhutan’s National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Education, Bangladesh. Department of Technical Education and International Labour Organization, Including *Persons with Disabilities in Technical and Vocational Education and Training: A Guide for Administrators and Instructors to Disability Inclusion* at 8 (2016).



- Assigning students with tasks to assist the participants and their caregivers right from the point of entry through the training.
- Ensuring participants with disabilities such as blindness or hard of hearing have their seats in the front or near the speakers.
- Orienting the participants, especially those with visual impairments to the hall, restroom, lunch area and so on.

Note: it is recommended that an emergency situation plan be developed prior to the workshop. The team could not do so in the workshops conducted before, but it is recognized as a lesson for the workshops which will be conducted in the future.

### 3. Inclusive Curriculum

Aside from physical accessibility, informational accessibility to the content of the program was another essential prerequisite to ensure full and active participation. This meant that the curriculum would have to be accessible to every participant regardless of their disability. It had to follow the concept of universal design<sup>24</sup> which the UNCRPD defines as having the design of products, environments, programmes and services as such that it would be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. In a training situation, universal design for a curriculum could be ensured by employing a variety of training techniques and flexible approach not only with the content but with goals, methods, and materials.<sup>25</sup>

This posed a challenge for the students to anticipate the method of content delivery, activities, hooks and other interactive sessions that would cater to the needs of every disability. This would not have been a challenge if at each training the audience constituted persons with the same or a very similar type of disability. However, since the audience constituted different types of disabilities at most venues, developing an inclusive curriculum was a difficult task. For instance, brainstorming interesting activities that would align with the content, and to further curate them to deliver to each disability was difficult. What seemed to work for one disability would turn out to be problematic for the other. For instance, the hook inspired by the growing trend of choosing an answer to a question by tilting your head on the Tik Tok app was initially customised to moving hands to the left or right to choose their answers. This was planned by the HDC students after confirming with the partner organization that the participants for the first workshop would constitute persons using wheelchairs and their caregivers. The hook would clearly not have been accessible to a person with a disability in using their hands. However, at the last minute the law students learned that one of the participants had a disability with their hands in the first workshop. The hook was changed last minute to a format of responding by imitating the sounds of animals. The second workshop had participants with speech disorders which meant the hook had to be changed again. The first type of hook which was to move hands to the left or right to answer was employed for the second workshop.

Likewise, other aspects of the curriculum also had to be tailored with such flexibility to accommodate the various types of disabilities. Some other ways through which the concept of universal design was incorporated in the curriculum were:

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<sup>24</sup> UNCRPD Art. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Education, Bangladesh. Department of Technical Education and International Labour Organization, *Including Persons with Disabilities in Technical and Vocational Education and Training: A Guide for Administrators and Instructors to Disability Inclusion* at 8 (2016).

- Developing the presentation slides with minimal usage of words and larger font sizes than were normally used;
- Use of many pictures with heavy contrast and infographics;
- Loud and slow method of delivery with short and simple sentences;
- Repetition of information and instructions;
- Ensuring every table had at least one student from the project to assist the participants throughout the workshop;
- Having sign language interpreters;
- Ensuring sensitivity towards proper use of terminologies such as using Person-First language when addressing the Persons with Disabilities.

A good solution for the challenge of addressing various disabilities at once was to group the persons with the same or similar type of disability together. This would have allowed an audience with common needs, ultimately easing the difficulty of having to consider every disability in designing the activities. Such approach would provide for more targeted solutions and streamlined communication which can be able to enhance the effectiveness of the project. Since it was not always possible to have only the same or similar disabilities together, it was crucial to be flexible and have the program content and delivery prepared or developed in such ways that it would be easily adaptive to the varying needs of the participants. As challenging as it has been to deliver to various disabilities, it has been equally rewarding to find solutions to navigate through the complexities.

#### **4. Grouping the Participants**

While it is helpful to group the participants with similar disabilities, it was not easy to bring them together. With the Persons with Disabilities spread across the country, it was difficult to reach out to them. Then the project had to ensure an efficient logistics arrangement as there was an inadequate number of participants with similar disabilities residing in one sparsely populated area to carry out the program. However, with the help from DPO, the subsequent programs had diverse participants.

#### **5. Communication Barriers**

Having participants with deafness or who were hard of hearing and participants with speech disorders meant high risk of miscommunication either through misunderstanding or missing out on the information altogether from both sides be it the participants or student facilitators. Some of the ways to address such barriers included developing the program with heavy use of visuals, captioning the videos or multimedia content, having the participants write out what they wish to express or utilizing sign language interpreters. However, not all of the participants understood sign language nor were all of them literate to be able to communicate in writing thereby adding another layer of challenge to navigate.

#### **6. Time Constraints**

Three hours can be a short time to cover vast and significant areas of legal rights. Nevertheless, considering the specific needs of each disability, it was the maximum time with which to conduct the program. Of some difficulty, was the need to bring down the content from the Toolkit to three sessions. Moreover, conveying the information in three hours whilst integrating interesting activities further challenged the team. Though it can be easily planned on paper, the real test is delivery. Despite

the preparation and the hard work put in to ensure that the presenters do not lose time due to nervousness or lack of preparation, there remains the issue of the time limit. Factors such as the ability of the audience to comprehend the content, their response to the activities, exchanging dialogues (doubts and views), are areas which determine the time use, yet cannot be compromised. The struggle is striking the balance between delivering effective content, while addressing the factors mentioned above, and at the same time ensuring that it is not too lengthy or troublesome for the participants. Hence, it was crucial to be mindful of the time and stay on track.

## **Assessment of the Workshops for both Populations**

### **Methodology**

#### **Survey Development and Training**

Developing a survey from literature research into the topic is one of the most important parts of a research project, an assessment of a clinic program, or a Community Needs Assessment (CNA). CNAs can be useful for starting a project like the Persons with Disabilities project in Bhutan. For one, the researcher develops their research skills and learns about a substantive area of law. Research projects like this are excellent learning tools for a student in an independent research project or a clinic.

Any survey should collect more than just the immediate data needed. It should also ask demographic information to provide context for the data collected. The survey can be a collaborative process. It can include an entire team within a classroom or a clinic project. CNAs have also been done on the same issue across various continents and universities. Each research team member should contribute to the survey based on that member's research and collaborate on the survey with the other researchers.

Surveys must be developed carefully to avoid bias. The surveyor must also be careful to do no harm. This is especially relevant when conducting surveys on sensitive topics. For example, surveys should not ask about personal victimizations to avoid traumatizing the persons interviewed.

Program assessments and CNAs should not be avoided just because these challenges exist.<sup>26</sup> A lot of research similar to that done for this Persons with Disabilities Street Law program can be conducted without broaching such sensitive topics. The research reported in this article did not require sensitive questions. The survey of the clinic students experience was administered electronically because all the participants had access to email and were technologically adept. The surveys of Persons with Disabilities was done on paper, with the help of the HDC and ADRC students, because of barriers to answering the surveys themselves.

#### **Administering the Survey**

When law students are involved in this kind of research, they must learn how to interview subjects much like they might interview clients. Confidentiality is important for survey results much like for practicing law. Therefore, a CNA provides ethical lessons to student researchers in being client-centered and observing confidentiality; similar to working in a law office.

Researchers should conduct any research survey in a safe, confidential environment; similar to interviewing a client at a law firm. If paper surveys are used, they must be hand tabulated, which can

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<sup>26</sup> There is an excellent reference for inexperienced researchers who want to conduct CNAs if more information is wanted. See, American Bar Association, Access to Justice Assessment Tool: A Guide to Analyzing Access to Justice for Civil Society Organizations, 2 (2012).

take a significant amount of time. Use of Google Forms to tabulate the surveys can save time. In most cases, names should not be taken during the survey process, which is one of the few differences from a law office environment and must be covered in training to ensure this is not violated. However, surveyors, like law office personnel, should be trained to appropriately greet their subjects or clients, start the interview, and finish the interview.

## **Student's Impressions of the Street Law Project**

### **Methodology**

The Street Law for Persons with Disabilities workshops were first conducted in the calendar years 2022 and 2023. In both cases students in the last half of their fourth year of law school and the first half of their fifth year of earning their LLB conducted the workshops for Persons with Disabilities. This represents the last year on campus for each JSW cohort. During this year students typically travel across Bhutan to engage in community advocacy during their 8th and 9th semester clinic. The Persons with Disabilities Street Law project was one of the projects the students engaged in each of these years.

This survey was conducted in November 2023 after the second cohort had completed its share of the Persons with Disabilities Street Law workshops. The survey was created on Google forms and JSW official email was used to disseminate the survey to all Persons with Disabilities Street Law participants. Students were advised that the survey was voluntary, and the results of the survey were strictly confidential.

The sampling size was small, so the results should not be overgeneralized. Still, there were several goals for the survey. Instructors want to know what worked well, but also how to create a better program. More importantly, did the program change the law students in a meaningful way.

### **Results**

There were 24 students across the two cohorts who participated in the Persons with Disabilities Street Law workshops. There were 13 students in the first year of the project and 11 students in the second year of the project. Initially only 9 students replied to the emailed surveys. The former student co-authors of this article sent out reminders asking students to complete the survey. The result was 22 of the 24 student project participants answering the survey.

The students were asked several Likert scale questions (i.e. 1. Strongly agree; 2. Agree; 3. Neutral; 4. Disagree; 5. Strongly Disagree). There were also open-ended questions to gain more insight into student thoughts about the Persons with Disabilities Street Law project.

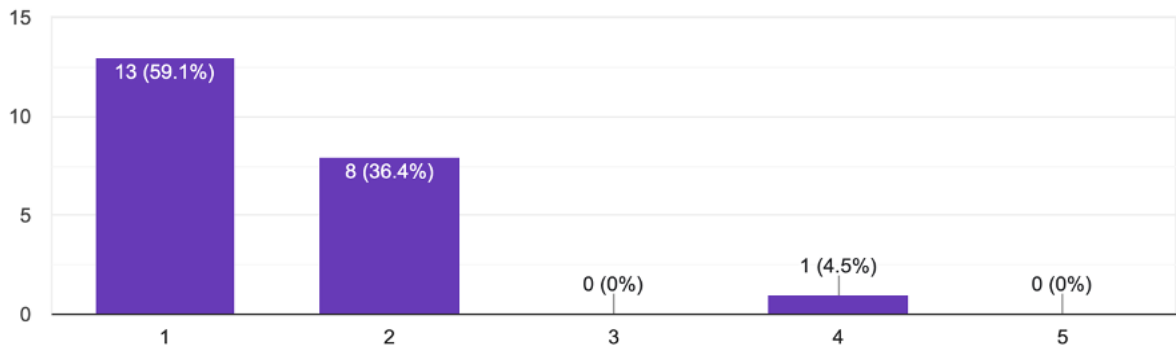
The survey responses were positive. Over half the students who participated strongly agreed that the project went beyond their degree requirements in value to their education. Of the 22 respondents 19 explained their responses. These responses discussed learning more about the law, developing presentation skills, and becoming more aware of Persons with Disabilities and their lives. This student's comment captures much of what was said by the students in one paragraph.

*'Through this experience, I learned profound lessons about the power of the law in shaping lives, especially for those facing systemic barriers. Witnessing the transformative potential of legal advocacy reaffirmed my commitment to a legal career centered on social justice. Moreover, working closely with Persons with Disabilities revealed their resilience, strength, and untapped potential, inspiring me to challenge stereotypes and champion the rights of marginalized community.'*

### Student Learning Satisfaction

1. The PWD Toolkit and Street Law Project (The Project) furthered my legal education beyond just earning the credit needed for my degree.

22 responses

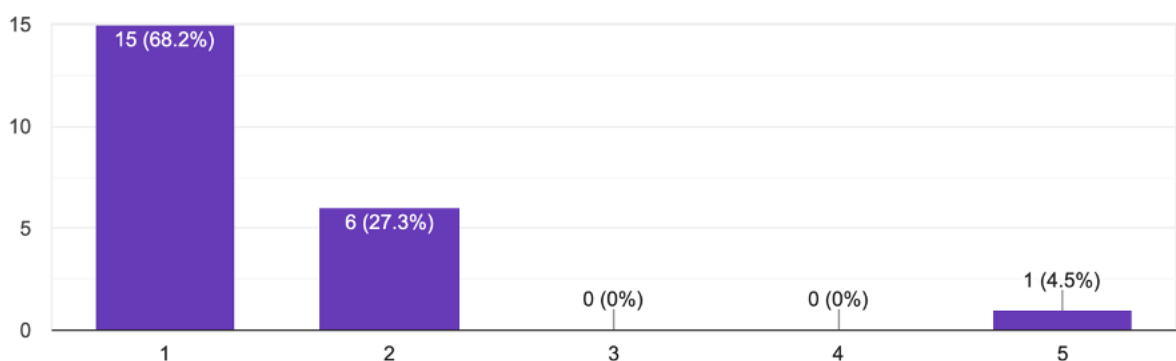


The design of this project incorporated knowledge skills and values into the lesson. Student feedback indicated they learned what it was designed to teach. While the sample size is small, it is reasonable to expect such positive results with similarly designed projects. There was no comment by the outlier on this question so we do not know why the one student strongly disagreed with the statement.

### Student Personal Growth

3. The Project contributed to my personal growth.

22 responses



The next question asked students about the challenges. The answers often identified communication issues, especially in workshops with a mix of disabilities. This was an initial concern of the organizers, but it also provided an opportunity to engage in problem solving and developing unique communication approaches. Since Bhutan's education system is in English, but the workshops were conducted in Dzongkha (the official language of the courts and a more commonly spoken language of

most people in Bhutan), communication could be especially difficult. Dzongkha does not have some of the key legal terms needed to be understood by the audience.

*'[T]he major challenge that I faced was when I had to deliver the content into simple terms in Dzongkha which can be very difficult especially with technical terms and high chances of miscommunication. Second was making sure that the presentation we develop [sic] was accommodative [sic] to various disabilities which is quite difficult.'*

The project also helped review past learning and develop professional skills:

*'It refreshed my learning in past courses, provided me an opportunity to act in front of others which boosted my confidence and also helped enhance my research knowledge.'*

But one student felt ill equipped to conduct the workshops:

*'Although we were able to come up with some measures to communicate with the Persons with Disabilities, I felt that we aren't fully equipped. Besides, another challenge was that I had to walk on eggshells as and when I used terms like 'blind' and 'deaf' because it wasn't clear as to how we should refer them. At times we were asked to use the aforesaid terms while at other times we were asked to refer them as people who are visually impaired or hard of hearing.'*

This underscores the importance of teaching a basic vocabulary for the subculture you are working with when teaching law students, or attorneys cultural sensitivity.

Over two thirds of the students saw this project as different from other classes or law school in general. This response seems low given the nature of the project. It may be explained in part because JSW School of Law already provides a rich experiential education curriculum. A full year of clinic is required from the last half of year four through the first half of year five. A full semester externship is then required in the 10th semester. There are also some other courses that incorporate experiential learning. One student noted that they learn about human dignity from year one in law school. Another said it was not much different from their other clinics. Some students saw the project as similar to presenting in the classroom, while other students felt presenting in the community was a form of advocacy that was much different than anything they had a chance to do before.

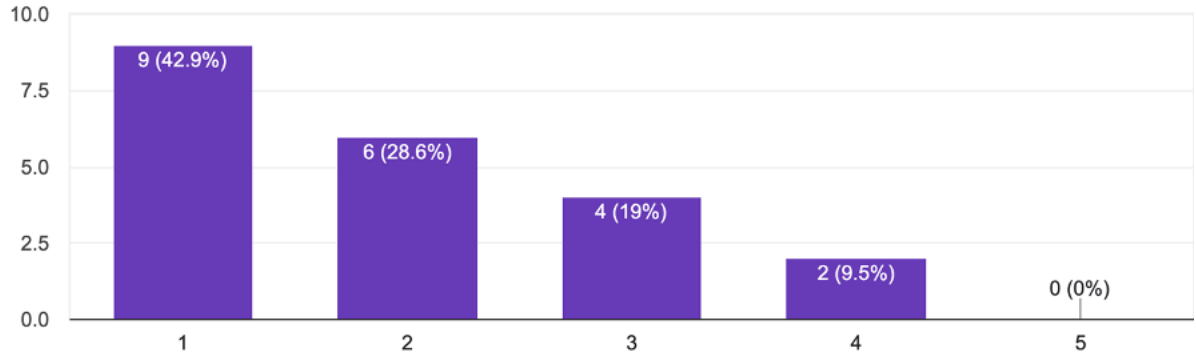
*'Like I mentioned, engaging with the public with no legal background in itself was a very unique experience to me. Moreover, our audiences coming with diverse disabilities only made it more unique and fulfilling for me especially when a few individuals shared the difficulties they faced and how our project could now benefit them.'*



**Student Clinic/Class Comparison**

5. This Project differed from my experience in other classes or law school in general?

21 responses



The reader who uses this model to develop a similar project should count on most students having a unique learning experience that takes them out of their comfort zone.

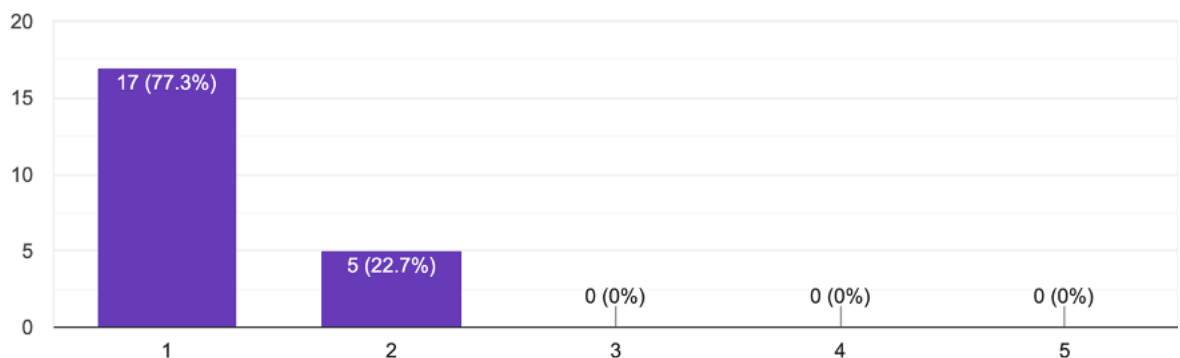
Whether the students felt the project was unique or not, they rated their experience highly.

*‘Human dignity is something that I am very passionate about, so, the project is very close to my heart as it provided me with the opportunity to meet and interact with the Persons with Disabilities community in Bhutan and listen to their stories and experiences, which further shaped my outlook on the Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities.’*

**Student Experience Rating**

8. Please rate the experience of The Project.

22 responses



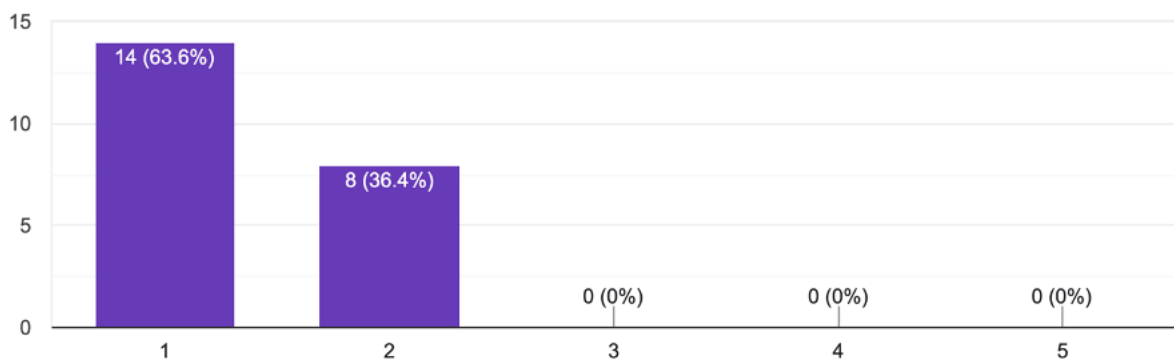
The law students were also asked to assess the Persons with Disabilities sensitivity training they were given to prepare them to give the Street Law workshops for Persons with Disabilities. All the law students felt that the training to sensitize them was effective in preparing them for the Street Law Project.

*'We got to learn about the various needs and capacities of Persons with Disabilities and that prepared us well for our advocacy project. We understood the complexities of the challenges faced by Persons with Disabilities and that enabled us to design our project more effectively.'*

### Effectiveness of Disability Equality Training

10. The Disability Equality (sensitivity) training, which was conducted by PWDs to sensitize us to their challenges, was effective in preparing me for The Street Law Project.

22 responses



When asked if the sensitivity training was necessary, all responses were affirmative. This response sums all of them up well:

*'Yes, absolutely. The training is a must before carrying out such project as we need to learn how to deal, approach and talk with them so that they do not feel that we are just doing it because we feel pity on them. No matter how good the presentation or the information may be, if they are not treated right, it might be all in vain.'*

### Persons with Disabilities Impressions

#### Methodology

The first Persons with Disabilities Street Law project was conducted on 21 October 2022. The Persons with Disabilities in this first workshop were identified as having at least one physical disability. This demographic was chosen in hopes that presenting to Persons with Disabilities with one type of disability would make the first workshop a little easier.

The survey was administered to 18 of the Persons with Disabilities by the student Street Law presenters immediately following the workshop. Unfortunately, the students who had just conducted the workshop had to administer the surveys as well. This creates a risk of bias. The respondents may

have been reluctant to answer questions in a critical way. Under the circumstances, the researchers were not able to administer the survey any differently. The primary goal of the survey was to determine whether adjustments to the workshop were needed. However, some of its results are worth discussing here.

## Results

Only one Person with Disability respondent had previous experience with the legal system. Someone had killed the respondent's cow. This happened before the respondent had become disabled. Most of the respondents indicated that they felt *'a little uncertain'* about the legal system before the workshop. A small minority claimed *'no knowledge at all.'* They all claimed increased knowledge of the legal system after the workshop. Most felt they were *'competent'* after the workshop, which is what the organizers had hoped. The workshops should not have made anyone feel like an *'expert'*.

Almost all Persons with Disabilities replied that the information provided in the workshop was very helpful. One replied that the information was somewhat helpful, but no one disagreed that the workshops were helpful. Similarly, they found the workshops to be *'very engaging and educational'* and *'workshop was so informative & helpful to me.'*

All respondents strongly agreed that the workshops were very understandable. Most of the participants also agreed that the workshops were too basic. However, the participants did not feel like the workshop should be changed. To be accessible to some, presenters may have to be too basic for others. Most participants agreed or strongly agreed that the workshops took their disability into consideration. They also felt included in the workshop. One participant stated that they felt included *'Because the surrounding for wheelchair is accessible.'*

These factors go hand in hand. These issues were also the most important factors for the organizers to consider. The clinic worked closely with the Persons with Disabilities organizations to make sure the curriculum, timing, logistics, and venue took disabilities into account. This can be difficult in a community with limited accessibility. Finding a building with newer, more accessible construction can be important for this.

## Conclusion

Vulnerable populations are often especially at risk when they come in contact with the legal system. A civil case can be intimidating. A criminal case, where liberty is at stake, can create even more anxiety. Persons with Disabilities are one such vulnerable population. Providing them with education about their rights and responsibilities can help them to avoid serious legal problems. JSW's HDC collaborated with its community to develop and conduct Street Law programs that would help Persons with Disabilities learn how to interact with the legal system. Funding from key organizations was obtained to help with the project. The results included a written toolkit for Persons with Disabilities, sensitivity training by Persons with Disabilities for law students, and an interactive Street Law program developed and taught by law students for Persons with Disabilities.

Assessments indicate that this project had many benefits. As anticipated, law students engaged in experiential learning that touched on ethical issues, substantive law knowledge and skills that they will use in their profession. They also learned about their community and gained empathy for a vulnerable population. Persons with Disabilities learned about the legal system, but they also learned that the community could be supportive of their needs.

This project is replicable in other places, with other populations and in other substantive areas. Collaborating with the community throughout the project is essential for success. This kind of project can be done in a research class, a clinic, or on a volunteer basis.

### **Acknowledgements/Funding**

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