

Shafallah annual forum begins

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H H Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al Missned and other distinguished guests interacting with one of the students during the 4th International Annual Forum at the Shafallah Center yesterday. MAHER ATTAR

DOHA: Fifty percent of the graduates from the Shafallah Center are now employed in around 40 companies here, spokespersons of the center announced during the 4th International Annual Forum – “Achieving Independence,” which started yesterday.

They said the forum will help increase the number and spread awareness that people with disabilities are able to work.

Concerns on the availability of employment for the disabled and supporting them in accessing their right to employment were tackled during the first day of the forum, which was formally opened by H H Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al Missned.

Cherie Blair, wife of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, said providing work for disabled people is instrumental in building confidence and giving them the opportunity to contribute to society.

“The right to work is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights... Work is undoubtedly crucial to giving people financial security and the opportunities and freedoms that this brings with it... Work supports social independence and inclusion in a range of other ways... Work will give disabled people the opportunity to contribute to society and help overcome the traditional stereotype of disabled people as passive dependents who have little to offer wider society,” said Blair, who co-chairs the forum with Hassan Ali Bin Ali, chairman of the Shafallah Center.

Five papers will be presented during the three-day forum, a major one, which was mentioned yesterday that is authored by Heyam Nasser Al Suwaidi, Shafallah director of Special Education, and Layla Hussein, Shafallah’s unit supervisor for Girls’ Vocational Studies, discussed Shafallah’s efforts in helping their students achieve independence and get employment.

“In their vocational training sessions, we look at the interests of the students and we expose them to work that are useful in the office. In looking for work for our graduates, we do a market survey, we talk to the companies... ask them what they need, and we also ask the students about their interests, then we match them... We have more than 40 companies who have hired and expressed their interest to hire our students... We have a hotline service where employers can call 24 hours in case they have questions or concerns regarding our students,” said Hussein. Al Suwaidi said Shafallah is also planning on having a job-awareness week at the center sometime next year.

Blair, said, however, that discussing is not enough. “As what Sheikha Mozah said, what matters is what we are going to do about it.”

Speaking in front of the guests at the center, Sheikha Mozah sought the support of the community to help people with special needs achieve the right to be independent and contributing members of society.

“You can have all the technology in the world, and all the good intentions as well, but without a supportive and energetic community, progress will be limited. Shafallah has done a wonderful job in advocating for people with special needs throughout the region and in fact, the world. And without the generous support of families, parents, and the larger community, we would not have achieved what we have,” she said.

The event was attended by Maria Kaczyńska, first lady of Poland; Teuta Topi, first lady of Albania; Xiomara Castro de Zelaya, first lady of Honduras; Vivian Fernández de Torrijos, first lady of Panama; Dorrit Moussaieff, first lady of Iceland; Hoda Siniora, wife of the Prime Minister of Lebanon; Princess Lalla Amina of Morocco; and Sir Phillip Craven, President of the International Paralympic Committee; and all dignitaries who are dedicated to advocating the cause of people with special needs.



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