

Better Start Early

Julienne Munyaneza, Programme manager, WACC

“Changing attitudes towards intellectual disability remains a big issue in the Arab world”, says Wimco Ester, the Managing Director of MediaHouse (MH), a WACC partner based in Cairo, Egypt.

In 2007, MediaHouse embarked on a documentary initiative dubbed **“Early Start”** to challenge discriminatory attitudes towards children who are intellectually disabled and their families. MediaHouse produced a series of 12 video programmes to raise awareness on the difficulties faced by children and young people with learning disabilities and to show the importance of early intervention. MH used an interactive methodology where the filming crew, while preparing and shooting, discussed the common misunderstandings and wrong ideas they had about these issues before meeting with disabled children and their families.



“Children face many challenges in Egypt. But if you’re a child with a special need, life will be even more complicated,” says Wimco. “Many parents don’t have access to a special day care for their disabled child therefore many children stay at home and a lot of parents don’t know what to do with them. They struggle with the disability and don’t have a clear picture of other abilities that their child has”, She says.

In the documentary series ‘ **Early Start**’MediaHouse wanted to give parents and professionals working in the field, practical tools to live and work with children with special needs. “This is not an act of mercy, but a rights issue where children receive appropriate treatment by professionals” says the Managing Director. “MH tried to focus on existing opportunities and real life stories that would lead to social change around the issues of disability and the needs of disabled people especially children.”



The **“Early Start”** series is now being used by different centres that actively participated in the production and a strategy has been put in place to ensure a further and wider distribution to other centres, individuals, national and international channels. Parents, teachers, social workers are happy with this important resource and are using it extensively, says Wimco. “Furthermore, the series is already being broadcasted by some channels while others are reviewing it.”

For more information about this interesting initiative, please contact Mrs Julienne Munyaneza, WACC Programme Manager at JM@waccglobal.org or Media House people at wimco@mediahouse.org or jstrengolt@a2bmail.net