

Empowering People With Disabilities

“The greatest limitations imposed on people living with a disability often come from people in the rest of society who equate being blind or deaf with some inherent mental disability. Why shouldn’t we have the same aspirations everyone else has?” Mohammed Ali Loufty asks.

Mohammed lost his eyesight when he was seven, but that hasn’t stopped him from striving to achieve the same things that sighted people take for granted.

Here what he said: “Growing up in a developing country like Lebanon, very little is invested in trying to integrate disabled people into everyday life.

When I was born, I could see out of one eye but not the other. I had a rare hereditary condition and eventually lost my sight in both eyes.

I got used to being blind as a child. My older sister was also blind and my family was familiar with it by then. My parents were so aware of the need to support us and pass on their wisdom and encouragement.

I used to go to a regular school. Two of my hobbies were painting and riding my bicycle. When I lost my sight, I lost these two hobbies. It’s especially sad because my father is a painter. I eventually went to a school in Beirut that had a blind teaching facility. I learned all the educational curricula at this school, and was anxious to know more. But the school was segregated into kids who could see and those who couldn’t.

Also, teachers would actively discourage blind students from wanting to study at higher levels, telling us ‘look, you’re not going to be able to get jobs out there, so you’re better off staying at home and learning to perfect handicrafts. Don’t go to university, it’s not good for you.’ So instead of advocating for us, they were discouraging us.

I went out of my way to meet sighted people because I wanted to be part of my local community. I managed to fight my way into a regular secondary school. It wasn’t accessible for blind students and the teachers weren’t terribly good at relating to someone who was blind, but I just refused to let this get in the way.

Then I decided to study law at university in Beirut. I graduated in

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SPOTLIGHT


Mohammed Ali Loufty is


a Junior Professional Associate in the Human Development


Network. He works with World Bank Disability Adviser Judy Heumann in the Disability and Development Team. He’s advocating to empower those with disabilities, especially those in developing countries.




Mohammed Talks About ...

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 Audio: [How an NGO helped him assimilate into society and raise awareness about disability](#)

2000. In Lebanon I joined an organization called the Youth Association of the Blind. Through its ‘National Talking Library Program’ I was able to learn to more. Its training opportunities increased my leadership and advocacy skills. This also raised my awareness, so that I could better understand my related issues as a disabled person.

The Youth Association eventually nominated me to become the chairperson of the Youth Committee of the World Blind Union. As a result of that opportunity, I was offered this position at the Bank. Now is a good time in my life. In addition to working at the Bank, I’m finishing up my master’s degree in human rights law at the same university in Beirut. What sustains me in my life is making the most of opportunities all around me, refusing to ever give into limitations put on by others.”

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