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CBM: Applies Thought Leadership to Deliver Disability-inclusive Safety and Security

How in-depth analysis and understanding of real-life challenges fosters inclusivity

CBM, the winner of International SOS Foundation's 2018 Duty of Care Award for Thought Leadership, recognised the unique challenges faced by employees with disabilities when it comes to their safety and security in the field. To address this it built a disability-inclusive Safety & Security framework and risk management programme.

CBM is an international NGO dedicated to improving the quality of life of persons with disabilities in the poorest countries of the world. Its people work in highly challenging environments: conflict and disaster zones, refugee camps and remote field settings. CBM invests dedicated resources in its Duty of Care (DoC) for the wellbeing, safety and security of staff residing and travelling in such places.

CBM, and the 376 partners it works with, employs significant numbers of persons with a disability.

To mitigate the unique risks these employees might encounter, CBM's Health, Safety and Security Unit developed an innovative approach. Together with a core group of travellers, each with a disability, a ground-breaking programme was set up, fine-tuned and field tested. NGO staff with a disability can now fully participate in many aspects of work-life that were previously considered off-limits.

Tom van Herwijnen, Health, Safety & Security Manager at CBM International explains:

"Approximately 10% of our global workforce consists of persons with a disability. Their disability potentially exposes them to additional risks. Recognising this we decided to champion a unique approach to Duty of Care. Even though extra costs and efforts were unavoidable, we received full support from CBM's leadership. This meant we could reflect our core value of inclusion in our approach to health and safety."

Listen and learn

The team started by identifying the specific risks and vulnerabilities faced by people with disabilities, and the appropriate mitigating measures. To do this they asked colleagues with a disability the type of difficulties they face when travelling. They also spoke with personal assistants about the dilemmas they experienced when travelling with their client.

Further insights were gained when their employees with disabilities were actively included in security and crisis management training. A key learning is that there are no standard solutions. For instance, individuals who need to use a wheelchair may face a great variety of diverse challenges. This depends on the level of independence, arm strength, ability to get in/out of the chair, etc. Plus, like everyone, there is a varying degree of personal risk acceptance. All these factors needed to be considered.

Address specific challenges

Having identified the specific challenges faced by their employees with disabilities, the team then developed detailed guidance. Few standards exist in this field and good practice is not yet written. The team at CBM created its own tailor-made HS&S training and briefing systems.



Above CBM's Health, Safety and Security Unit during a training exercise.

For example, CBM's Travel Risk Preparation now includes advice on how to:

- Overcome physical barriers in airports, hotels, potholed streets and traffic.
- Ensure that staff who require assistive devices know how to prepare for delays, problems with luggage and damage to wheelchairs.
- Communicate openly about needs and vulnerabilities to colleagues, managers, travel agents and hotel staff.

Guidance also addresses some of the real risks faced in the field and the specific challenges of different disabilities. These include:

- A blind employee safely passing a checkpoint.
- A deaf employee and a hearing colleague responding when shots are fired.
- A team member in a wheelchair and a Personal Assistant exploring hotel escape routes in an earthquake zone.

The delivery of information took account of the specific needs of people with disabilities. For some HS&S training sessions a sign language translator was employed to assist deaf people, and written materials were made accessible for blind people using a screen reader.

Again, much was learnt on-the-go. Fine-tuning took place after receiving post-trip feedback from pioneering staff with disabilities travelling to programme countries.

Include and inspire

The CBM approach went beyond simply training staff with a disability. The wellbeing of team members depends on the willingness and ability of ALL travellers to help each other. All employees practice together throughout the training. Non CBM staff working as Personal Assistants, and staff of partner organisations participated in the HS&S training too.

The concept has attracted interest from diverse stakeholders. It has been presented at international corporate security and Duty of Care forums and has featured in magazines. CBM is keen to further share its expertise and guidelines to inspire others.

Tom van Herwijnen concludes:

“CBM senior leadership, aligned with our company ethos, are committed to inclusivity and enablement. We strive to make the working environment accessible and safe for all our employees, providing opportunities to fulfill their career expectations. Our investment in meeting this aim helps us to provide critical support in reaching people in need in the poorest communities in the world.”

KEY ELEMENTS

Listen and learn from the people you are trying to help.

Address the specific challenges they face and regularly review procedures.

Spread the learning and involve all stakeholders so everyone can benefit.

For more information please visit www.cbm.org or look at CBM's publications <https://www.cbm.org/Publications-252011.php>

For information on the 2018 Duty of Care Awards winners in all categories, go to www.dutyofcareawards.org