



## Beyond mobility

### Description

International Wheelchair Day on 1 March celebrates the freedom and independence wheelchairs bring to millions globally, but it's not without challenges. We chatted to colleague and wheelchair user Xolani Sello to gain insight into his life.



**Q: Can you tell us a bit about yourself and your role in the organisation?**

**A:** I am from Rockville, Soweto. I was born in Matatiele in the Eastern Cape and moved to Johannesburg in 2008. I studied in a special school called Adelaide Tambo. I joined AfroCentric Group in 2013 and now work for Corporate Schemes.

**Q: How has using a wheelchair shaped your daily experiences, both at work and outside of work?**

**A:** Living with a disability is challenging, from waking up in your bed, getting ready to start your day, and getting a wheelchair into the car – I need someone to assist me. Getting to work is another challenge as the public transport system doesn't accommodate wheelchair bound people, which forced me to get a licence so I could use my own car. I used to use the Rea Vaya bus, which was frustrating because sometimes the equipment that lifts the wheelchair into the bus didn't work, forcing me to wait for a bus that had a working system. To go through these challenges and then get through the work day is another challenge.

Physically, I've had to undergo many operations to help me function on a day-to-day basis, and at times I wake up and my body is in pain but I still have to work. Winter is especially challenging and affects the time I'm able to get to work. I am happy to be part of an organisation like AfroCentric, where differently abled colleagues' needs are met. For example, my working hours have been adjusted to accommodate delays, so I start at 08:30am. The nature of my job requires me to spend most of my time at my work station but I encounter delays when going for a body break, which means I have to rely on my colleagues to assist, for instance in warming my lunch. I would like to acknowledge my team leader, Valencia, for accommodating me and for being very supportive.

**Q: What are some misconceptions people have about wheelchair users that you wish more people understood?**

**A:** Many people still require a lot of education to understand people living with disabilities. We might be limited with some things, but we are more than capable of doing other things. Some people think when they see you in a wheelchair you are mentally disturbed. Some have partners who need to be mentally strong as they too can be questioned. Some don't even believe you would be capable of making children etc. A lot of awareness education needs to be done. I am open and speak out about my condition and tackle difficult topics.

I think people need to understand that those living with a disability did not choose this. Our society as a whole is not compassionate and treats us differently. We always have to prove ourselves. For instance, learning to drive was one of those times where I had to show people that I am as capable to drive as an able-bodied person.

**Q: Can you share a moment when you felt particularly supported or included in the workplace?**

**A:** Receiving recognition for going the extra mile shows you are not being treated differently. There is also one time I remember where I got to the office and my clothes were wet, and a colleague helped me to dry them.

**Q: What are some of the challenges you face at work that others might not be aware of?**

**A:** Having to propel the wheelchair is a challenge – you always hope the surface on which

you are travelling is smooth because rocky surfaces are difficult to navigate. And it takes longer to get some things done compared to an able-bodied people, e.g. warming up your lunch, bathroom breaks etc.

**Q: Are there any changes, big or small, that you believe could make workplaces more accessible and inclusive?**

**A:** Yes, one would be to ask for support in getting an electric wheelchair to use around the office for mobility. Am very happy with the facilities as they are inclusive. Working from home some days could also help, especially when I am working only on email.

**Q: What message would you like to share with colleagues as we recognise International Wheelchair Day?**

**A:** I would like my fellow colleagues to know that we are also human, we have a lot to offer beyond our disabilities. We are just the same and capable – the only difference is mobility.

**Q: On a lighter note, what motivates or inspires you in your day-to-day life?**

**A:** My son. Since he came into my life, he inspires me to keep working harder. I want to provide for him and offer him a good life. Reflecting on my background and where I come from motivates me to work harder. I am a breadwinner and I'm motivated to provide for my family. I have a positive mindset.

**Q: What's on your playlist, or maybe your favourite TV series that you're bingeing?**

**A:** I love gospel and house music.

**Q: And your favourite thing to do?**

**A:** I love spending time with my son and my family.

**Category**

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