

**MESSAGE BY COUNCILLOR RETIEF ODENDAAL
THE HONOURABLE EXECUTIVE MAYOR OF THE NELSON MANDELA BAY
MUNICIPALITY**

**TO: SPAR WHEELCHAIR WEDNESDAY CELEBRATION 2022
WEDNESDAY, 07 DECEMBER 2022, NELSON MANDELA BAY STADIUM AT 10H00**

Programme Director: Ms Nique Cloete

- *Pastor Billy Paulson*
- *Mr Noel Smith (Chairperson: Association for Persons with Physical Disabilities -APD)*
- *Executive Members of APD*
- *Ms Cecilia Fourie (Executive Director: APD)*
- *Mr Alan Stapleton & Roseann Shadrach: (Spar Eastern Cape)*
- *Mr Bartho de Vries: (Guest Speaker)*
- *Representatives of Access Management*
- *Corporate Sponsors*
- *Beneficiaries of Wheelchairs*
- *Distinguished Guests*
- *Members of the Media*
- *Ladies and Gentlemen*
- *All Protocol Observed*

Greetings!

Thank you for your warm and gracious welcome, affording me the opportunity and platform, as your First Citizen, to partake in this meaningful day in celebration of the Wheelchair Wednesday 11TH anniversary. I am profoundly touched by the enthusiasm of everyone present here this morning as it bodes well and gives immense courage and hope for the future development and growth of persons living with disability in the Nelson Mandela Bay. Thank you so much.

As we observed International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3 December, the challenges faced by people living with disabilities are in the spotlight. The Coalition Government in the NMB, view this celebration with such importance because access issues for people living with disabilities must be given priority and because we believe that this government can make a huge difference in the lives of persons living with disabilities in our city – in the way we design, build, and maintain infrastructure developments, such as streets, footpaths, and recreational amenities in line with the needs of persons living with disabilities.

The responsibility for achieving an accessible community does not just rest with people with disabilities – it rests with all of us. Persons with disabilities have a right to have good conditions in the workplace, to live independently, to equal opportunities, to participate fully in the life and times of the Nelson Mandela Bay community.

Today we celebrate and applaud 11 years of Wheelchair Wednesday that have taken to heart the rights of citizens living with disabilities. This is a best practice model initiative by the APD and Spar. It reminds us that even the most longstanding barriers and prejudices can be overcome if only we work closely with persons living with disabilities to make the NMB a better place to live. Our goal must be that of a city where everyone can enjoy the same rights and opportunities. Where we are all equal, with all our differences. A NMB where we can stand united in diversity!

Our vision is a NMB in which people with disability enjoy the broadest possible participation in all aspects of mainstream community life. We want people with disability to have the same opportunities as other citizens – a quality education, health care, a job and access to buildings, transport, and social activities. We want for persons living with disability a life lived in the community, shaped not by exclusion and discrimination but by everyday ordinariness. That is our vision!

Our appreciation goes out to the Spar Eastern Cape and the APD today, in celebration of 11 years of dedicated partnership and combined efforts. They have made it their priority to accomplish just one thing, and by doing this, the APD through the generous support of sponsors, is in a better position, but most importantly, better, and more effective in the service of persons living with disabilities in the Nelson Mandela Bay.

The Spar Eastern Cape has clearly shown through this initiative that the fundamental purpose of business is to add value. It also indicates that business can only flourish if marginalized communities around it experience an acceptable quality of life. This kind of social intervention is critical if we are to meet the needs of the rapidly changing society in which we live.

My office applauds such efforts intended to bring about better living conditions and quality of life, especially to our marginalized communities. Your collective involvement over the many years in the wellbeing of persons living with disability speaks volumes. On behalf of the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, I want you to know how much our City appreciates this phenomenal initiative as it certainly highlights the plight of marginalized people living with disabilities and raising awareness regarding the need for universal accessibility in our magnificent city.

It is said that among the yardsticks by which to measure a society's respect for human rights, is to evaluate the level of its maturity and its generosity of spirit by looking at the status that it accords to those members of society who are most vulnerable, disabled people, senior citizens, and children.

Through your efforts the concept of a caring society is strengthened and deepened in the Nelson Mandela Metro, by recognising that the persons living with disability enjoy the same rights as we do and that we have a responsibility towards the promotion of their quality of life.

We therefore commend the APD and sponsors Spar Eastern Cape for their sterling support and to Mr Noel Smith and Ms Cecilia Fourie and their dynamic team we say, thank you for your vision, energy, strength, and courage to realize this noble project. A special thanks to all of you!

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Association for the Physically Disabled (APD), for spearheading this initiative. I particularly would like to express my appreciation of the effort made by the Executive and its Director together with the sponsors for all their effort and hard work for putting together this exercise of imagination, "Wheelchair Wednesday", a fundraising and awareness initiative that gives concrete dimensions and real-life experience to able-bodied people of what life is in a wheelchair.

I wish to take this opportunity to invite all our social partners, members of the public and interested organisations to join the multi-party coalition in this important and vital task that faces us: of building an inclusive society.

The energy, the devotion that you bring to this endeavor must light our city and all who lives here. May the outcomes of this initiative light up our world and let us pursue the same high standards of strength and sacrifice. With good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us work together to ensure the wellbeing of persons living with disability.

Our future relies heavily on our togetherness, hard work and compassion and living out the dream and making it a reality for all persons living with disability in the NMB - "*One City One Future*".

Yes, we are extremely proud of the achievements of the APD since its foundation in 1940. So, we encourage you to continue your advocacy role and build on the splendid record. We all owe you a huge debt of gratitude. Congratulations to Spar Eastern Cape and the APD Nelson Mandela Bay, for 11 years of magnificent work through "Wheelchair Wednesday".

Wishing you all a joyous and safe Festive Season!

We thank you.