

**Thematic Session
Disability**

Labor is self-esteem

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My name is Jo Eun-hye. I am a worker employed by Jeonnam Province's right-based public job project for persons with severe disability.

According to Jeonnam Province's original policy, this job was supposed to be terminated after seven months. However, as a result of the struggle of many organizations and activists last year, it was extended to 12 months this year, and severance pay will be paid at the end of the period.

As the previous discussants already explained what the right-based public job is, I will focus on how my daily life has changed since this public job.

I have been physically disabled since birth due to a rare, incurable disease called syringomyelia of unknown cause. While I was spending my 20s studying hard to become a lawyer, three months before my graduate school entrance exam, I suddenly felt pain all over my body. Although I underwent two major surgeries, I wasn't able to return to my previous daily life. Because of the pain, I take painkillers several times a day, which made it difficult for me to sit in a wheelchair for a long time, so I gave up working for more than eight hours and stayed at home. I tried to get a job, but there was no private company where a person with severe disability could work flexible hours by utilizing their major in a work environment centered on non-disability. People with developmental disabilities could get limited jobs, such as getting a barista license and getting a job at a cafe, but only rarely. Even before the right-based public job project, public jobs for persons with disabilities were mostly for those who could assist in office work rather than work that they could do on their own. It was difficult for people with severe disabilities like me to even enter the workforce.

That is why the right-based public job for persons with severe disabilities, which were implemented for the first time in Jeonnam Province last year, was a tailored and desperately needed form of work for me.

I am currently working with 26 colleagues, including 14 right-based workers, 10 labor supporters, and two dedicated coordinators, for 15 hours every week, three hours from Monday to Friday. The three major tasks performed in right-based public job are activities to improve awareness of disabilities, cultural and artistic activities,

and activities to advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities.

In this context, the activities I participated as a member of the Center for Independent Living such as campaign, resolution conference, facility monitoring and self-help meeting were recognized as labor that are paid for. This means more than just financial reward.

This means they are recognized as individuals who can create the value of labor, rather than as persons with disabilities who are socially and economically useless and merely objects of grace. This experience of being recognized also affects a person's self-esteem. Furthermore, these various activities we are performing make people not only recognize the existence of people with disabilities in our community, but also inform people of the inconveniences they are experiencing and what improvements they need. As we exercise our right to work through the right-based public job, the rights of more people with disabilities can be guaranteed. With this alone, the right-based public job will hold sufficient social significance and value.