



**Mrs Babalwa Tyabashe-Phume**

*Psychiatry and Mental Health, Division of Intellectual Disability*

*Funded by SAMRC -RCD: Bongani Mayosi National Health Scholars Programme from 2021 to 2022*

Babalwa is a social worker who is passionate about social justice, health, and community building. Her work is centered around the development and mental health of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She intends to contribute knowledge through the dissemination of her research work and in turn influence policy. She believes that in order for meaningful change to happen there must be a change in legislation. Thus, she believes that conducting research and capturing the voices of the marginalized through research will meaningfully influence public policy.

My current research is about the development of a conceptual framework to inform self-advocacy for social and health-related policy priorities of adults with intellectual disability. This conceptual framework will help guide the inclusion of people with intellectual disability in policy making and implementation processes. It highlights the importance of concerted effort to ensure that there are policy participation opportunities which will permit inclusive participation of people with intellectual disability. This is a wholistic approach that is needed to increase policy makers understanding of how best to improve policy environments for people with intellectual disability to provide input to public policy decisions which can improve the quality of their lives.

I heard about the SAMRC from my former supervisor while I was studying towards my master's degree. It was too late for me to apply but I intended to apply for the funding as soon as I enrolled for a Doctoral degree. A few years later, I applied for the funding because I was in need of the funds as I was unemployed and had a strong desire to complete my PhD in record time without having to drop out and seek employment. This award has helped me to complete my PhD in record time, it enabled me to give 100% towards my studies. It reduced the financial burden that me and my family felt due to me being unemployed and being a full-time student. In addition to this, I was able to present my research at two international and one national conference. I was able to translate the conceptual framework into an easy-to-read format that will ensure inclusion of people with intellectual disability in policy. Furthermore, I was able to write manuscripts that I intend to submit for publication in scientific journals. I foresee a bright future for myself in research and it is all thanks to this scholarship.

I would like to thank the SAMRC RCD team for their support towards my studies. This funding did not only help me complete my degree, but it benefited my family and for that I am truly thankful. I would like to urge future postgraduate students to apply for RCD funding, the team's support goes beyond finances. It is through this programme that I gained and enhanced public speaking skills that I proudly utilize when presenting at conferences.