

**EUROPEAN PLATFORM FOR REHABILITATION**  
*The network of leading service providers to people with disabilities*

# NEWSLETTER

## Editorial

### Special:

- Latest developments in EPR member centres
- EPR New Strategy
- Thematic Communities
- Public Affairs
- Projects

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Dear EPR Members,

On 1 October Jan Spooren left EPR and, in the transition period until a new Secretary General is appointed, as President of EPR, I am responsible for the continuity of the Platform. It is with great pleasure that I take the opportunity to address you in this editorial of the last EPR newsletter of 2014. With the holiday season coming up it is a good tradition to look back at what has been achieved during the last year and to set the goals for next year.

In the last quarter of 2014 we finalised the process leading to the new EPR strategy for the period 2015 - 2017. With the input from the SWOT-analyses that was done during the General Assembly in June 2014 in Cologne, we had a more in-depth discussion during the workshop for directors at the beginning of October in Lisbon. Thanks to the excellent preparatory work of the secretariat, supported by Harald Hauben, we managed to get consensus about the strategic direction for the coming years. Finally during the general Assembly on 2 December in Brussels, the concept version of the strategy 2015 – 2017 was unanimously adopted by the members. The next step will be translating the strategy into a work plan. To make sure that the work plan meets up with your expectations, last week you received a questionnaire allowing you to make your priorities known to me and the staff in the

secretariat thus helping us in developing the work plan.

Although the mission and vision of EPR stays more or less the same in the next years, there will be much more emphasis on the mutual learning aspect and transforming EPR into a more member driven organisation. To maximise the possibilities for mutual learning for all members we need to broaden up and balance the membership by looking for new members in the work fields where we traditionally only have a few members. One of the first tasks of the new Secretary General will be to work out an acquisition plan.

This is also the right moment to thank the secretariat and Paul Kurvers. Taking up the responsibilities during the transition period, until the new Secretary General is appointed, is asking a lot of the flexibility of the staff. I would also like to thank the EPR's board for their involvement over the past year, a year with a lot of changes in staffing of the Board. I want to thank you all for your contribution in guaranteeing the continuation of the EPR activities.

With this new strategy plan, EPR is ready for the future and I am proud to be the president of this organisation. Thank you all for your support and I wish you all, also in the name of the vice-president Sabina Lobato, Happy Holidays and a Healthy and Successful 2015!

Christmas greetings,

Jean-Paul Essers

President

## News from the members

### News from Heliomare

#### Agis Grant for Optimumcare

Heliomare is the first rehabilitation centre to start with good and safe rehabilitation beds that are fast available for patients that need complex care (and possible artificial respiration).

At this moment, those patients need to stay longer than desired in hospital in intensive care/medium care. Necessary rehabilitation treatment in this hospital phase is not possible.

It is a medium care ward with possibilities of intensive specialized rehabilitation treatment. Early rehabilitation treatment gives better outcomes, is cheaper and gives relief to IC/medium care wards in hospitals. Agis is a health insurance company. With their grant Heliomare can start with six beds in 2014.

#### A new vocational rehabilitation/ROC

##### Leiden: TOPklas

The TOPklas is meant for students from higher special education or students with a valid 'cluster indication' that have a diploma but are not (yet) ready for a regular senior secondary vocational education institute. The TOPklas is tailor-made path that is composed of individual subjects and group subjects.

Students start with 'orientation', followed by 'training' and 'project lectures'. This aims to prepare students for more self-supported regular education.

#### Heliomare prepares for another 'Helioheroes' Handbike battle in summer of 2015

Clients of Heliomare Rehabilitation, Special Education and Sport, supported by staff, are in training for the 2015 handbike battle in Austria.



#### Heliomare signs contract for child and youth centre (rehabilitation and education) in Heemskerk

This means special education will leave Wijk aan Zee within about two years for a totally new building and concept in the close by the Council of Heemskerk.



#### E-health

Heliomare has gone e-health in addition to regular treatment of patients. This is one of the projects that are in the (draft) appointed ICT plan of Heliomare 'Heliomare Connected!'.

It is the first organization to invest in a specific form of online coaching in the field of rehabilitation. The development of the various treatment modules is done in a co-creation with Minddistrict. The first modules are put into operation in spring 2014.

#### Heliomare "Dutch Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine" (DCRM) Prize

Heliomare researcher Justine Aaronson won the prize for best presentation at the DCRM 7-8 November 2014. The presentation was entitled: "The impact of obstructive sleep apnea on cognitive and functional status in stroke patients".

More information at: <http://handbikebattle.nl>

e-mail: [helioheroes@heliomare.nl](mailto:helioheroes@heliomare.nl)

## MEREK

### Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships for vocational education and training : Advancing Competences in the European Senior Services Sector



Erasmus+

Together with another 4 partner organisations (Czech, German, Italian and Lithuanian), at the end of August 2014, we received the good news that our submitted application on Advancing Competences in the European Senior Services Sector has been successful.

The coordinator organization is the ACZ Czech partner. The project aims to develop and test innovative training practices in the field of senior care services and to foster transnational recognition and validation of knowledge, skills and competencies acquired in the field.

In many European countries there are numerous job profiles developed in the field of social, caring and nursing professions. In some countries the range of alternatives is extremely broad. Thus it is, in general, not easy to achieve recognition or validation of acquired skills in these fields across national borders. In spite of this fact, mainstream job profiles are very similar and the activities they involve are almost identical. In selected job profiles our partnership will identify such learning outcomes that are common across the partnership borders and group them in units.

We will apply the units in preparation of innovative

training system for senior service providers' employees and for development of learning outcome based ECVET system, which will support better job transparency and workforce mobility in the senior care services sector across national borders within the European Union.

The main characteristics we will adopt and utilize in our development of the training system are:

1. Unified training system: employing a single learning content across the partnership boundaries with integrated competence recognition and validation tools, which will achieve better job transparency and will support workforce mobility in the senior care service sector.
2. Modular design: training modules should be concise and short since this offers higher scheduling flexibility of classes for trainees with different competence backgrounds and work experience and lend a sharper focus in targeting specific competence elements. Modular design will also permit future extensions of the instruction contents when a need for training of new competencies arises.
3. Employing web-based training in combining classroom instruction and e-learning training elements (blended learning concept), which will allow differentiated learning in a classroom, including validation of informal or non-formal competences when utilizing ECVET tools.

### MEREK funded renovation project

During the summer of 2014, the Hungarian National Agency of the European Structural Funds accepted our application for the energetical rejuvenation for the MEREK's two main building parts, in a total sum of 2.121.760€. In the frame of this rejuvenation project, all the old windows will be replaced with new insulated windows, also the exterior facade will be insulated, and the electrical and heating system will be renewed. With the new solar cells and collectors we will be able to reduce the cost of the purchased energy.

According to our plans, the project will start in February 2015 and should be finished during the summer of 2015. During this period the placement of our clients from the internship rehabilitation department, and the assurance of the different rehabilitation services will be a real professional issue. Hopefully with the reduction of the overhead costs, we will be able to rise more the level of our rehabilitation services.



## Josefsheim Bigge INDIVERSO: European project develops VET concept for people with mental disabilities



Led by Josefsheim Bigge, a project partnership of 11 partners from 5 European countries set out to develop a VET concept for young adults with physical and mental disabilities. The project named INDIVERSO connects people with disabilities, self-help organisations, vocational rehabilitation centers and companies to analyse the demand and to develop a training concept, enabling the target group to successfully complete a vocational training.

School education and vocational training are connected with barriers and exclusion risks for young people with physical, cognitive and additional mental impairments. The number of people with psychiatric diagnosis and behavioural problems in vocational training is increasing

strongly. This presents challenges for employers, trainers and teachers, who do not have a sufficient interaction repertoire and are lacking appropriate support.

INDIVERSO started with a kick-off meeting in Bigge at the end of November and will run for 3 years. It is financially supported by the European Union under the Erasmus+ programme. Among the project partners from Estonia, Italy, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland and Germany are several EPR members. Scientific support is provided by the University of Kassel. The aim of the project is to develop a tool box for people with disabilities, trainers, teachers and other professionals, but also for employers.

## Marie Homes Mette Marie Home describes all its methods in one document

The Mette Marie Home in the Copenhagen suburb of Vanløse, Denmark is the home of 16 residents with mental illnesses and active use of drugs (dual diagnoses). They have been working along the principles of harm reduction and recovery since the Mette Marie Home opened in 2001, but in November 2014 they published a comprehensive work method description booklet. The booklet– entitled ‘Creating Opportunities for Life Development’ (in Danish ‘At skabe muligheder for livsudfoldelse’)- was written in close cooperation between 2 academic project staff (a philosopher and an anthropologist who both worked on a 3 month contract) and the Mette Marie Home’s director and board chairperson.

Director of the Mette Marie Home, Marlene K. Engel, explains about the process of writing the document:

*“It has been a highly rewarding process where we as staff have had the chance to analyse, reflect and describe our professional methods, values, culture and day-to-day practices. We have had the opportunity to reflect in a much more comprehensive way on our common professional approach and methods, which adds a lot of extra meaning to our work. We are constantly developing our practices and strive to show a high degree of professional competence, therefore, we often ask ourselves the question that regularly pops up in all social work: Are we really doing what we claim to do? This method description has given us competent grounding for answering this question – and we now know where we can develop and where we need to re-focus.”*

The method description (in Danish) can be downloaded at [www.mariehem.dk/mette/wp-content/uploads/AT-skabe-muligheder-for-livsudfoldelse-Bogen-samlet.pdf](http://www.mariehem.dk/mette/wp-content/uploads/AT-skabe-muligheder-for-livsudfoldelse-Bogen-samlet.pdf)



Director Marlene Engel thanks all the contributors for their work with the method description



Board chairperson Preben Brandt received a bicycle helmet for all his extra work with the method description from director Marlene Engel

If you want to learn more about the rewarding process of opening up to describe your methods, culture and day-to-day practices, please contact the director of the Mette Marie Home, Ms Marlene K. Engel on [mke@mariehem.dk](mailto:mke@mariehem.dk)



## Astangu teams up with VRC to learn about change management in the social services sector

Astangu Vocational Rehabilitation Centre and Public Institution Valakupiai Rehabilitation Centre (VRC, Lithuania) are participating in a training programme for managers – Change Management in Social Services Sector, facilitated by Fred R. McFarlane, Ph.D., who is Professor Emeritus and Co-Director of the Interwork Institute at San Diego State University.

Astangu and Valakupiai face similar challenges in terms of employment of people with disabilities in our countries. We both participate in creating better services not only our own organisations but nationally by supporting our ministries and other service providers with our knowledge and experiences. Mutual training enables us to go deeper into understanding each other's daily challenges and discussing possible solutions for the future. The project helps Astangu and Valakupiai to build up long-lasting cooperation and exchange of good practices that are easy to implement due to our similar backgrounds.



*This programme is made possible by funding from the Baltic-American Freedom Foundation .*

*For more information about BAFF scholarships and speaker support, visit [www.balticamericanfreedomfoundation.org](http://www.balticamericanfreedomfoundation.org)*

The training programme combines theoretical information provided by the facilitator with practical change initiatives created by training participants. This allows for more effective change management in the future, as participants gain skills necessary to manage projects in a very well-analysed manner and to avoid potential problems.

The first training session took place in October 28–30, 2014 in Tallinn, Estonia. 10 people took part in the training, 6 of whom were from Lithuania. The second training session will take place in March 2015 in Vilnius, Lithuania.

## Astangu employees successfully start developing the world's first interactive assistive technology assessment tool



In late November, Astangu employees Mari Rull, Minna Sild, Tiina Kalevik and Toomas Urbanik participated in – and eventually became the overall winners of – an innovative creative marathon Garage48, where ideas are developed into functioning prototypes within 48 hours. While Garage48 is actually a series of international events, this particular event was named Garage48 Enable Tallinn, aimed at making the society a better place for people with disabilities through innovation and technology.

In the evening of Friday, 28 November over 90 participants from over 10 different countries gathered in Tallinn, Estonia in order to pitch their ideas – 24 in total. An idea pitched by a team of Astangu employees was 1 out of 10 that proceeded into the development round.

The pitching was followed by 48 hours of intensive development in order to create a prototype. At this stage, a programmer Margus Pärt joined Astangu team.

By Sunday evening, the prototype, named ATAT (Assistive Technology Assessment Tool), was ready. ATAT is the world's first interactive tool that therapists and doctors have long been waiting for, as it makes it possible to map the disability of a patient with only a few mouse clicks, find the necessary assistive device (e.g. wheelchair) and measure the impact of it on the patient's life. It is based on two internationally used classifications, so it can be used not only in Estonia, but worldwide

The highlight of the productive weekend was the final ceremony where all the prototypes were presented to a panel of mentors, and various awards were given out. ATAT was chosen as the overall winner, receiving 2000 euros in order to continue developing the prototype.

The pitching and the Q&A sessions can be seen at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2f94kbUljs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2f94kbUljs)

## ONCE Foundation

### The Bequal Certificate: CSR and DISABILITY

The Bequal Foundation (<http://www.bequal.es>) is a non-for-profit organization founded in 2012 by CERMI (the Spanish Committee of Representatives of Persons with Disabilities) and the ONCE Foundation, with the aim of creating a certificate to recognize those companies acting in a socially responsible manner towards people with disabilities, with the support of the Seeliger y Conde Foundation, which contributed to a former existing model and certificate on Excellence in Diversity.

The decision was based on the ONCE Foundation's broad experience in advising companies on how to be more inclusive for people with disabilities, particularly in the field of employment and accessibility, as well as regarding CSR (CSR and Disability Guide, European CSR+D Network), and as employers themselves of people with disabilities through ONCE and ONCE Foundation's business group.

Given that in 2010 similar initiatives emerged which lacked solvency and accuracy, the ONCE Foundation felt it had to take the lead and offer a reliable product endorsed by people with disabilities, with the following goals:

- ⇒ Externally auditing legislation compliance in relation to the reserve quota for people with disabilities.
- ⇒ Providing visibility to the commitment of companies towards people with disabilities.
- ⇒ Offering a tool on CSR & Disability allowing a continuous improvement.
- ⇒ Promoting and improve accessibility and design for all in products and services.

#### What is the Bequal certificate?

In order for a company to be considered socially responsible towards people with disabilities, it must at least show commitment in three essential areas: Strategy and Leadership, Human Resources and Universal accessibility.

According to those commitments, Bequal has designed a standard structured in 7 categories, 19 indicators and 66 sources of verification from an auditing point of view. The 7 categories correspond to business management aspects having to do with Governance, Equal opportunities and non-discrimination, and implementation of positive action

beyond legal compliance.

The Certificate is awarded by the Bequal Foundation, which also develops the standard, provides training and authorizes external auditors. The audit is conducted by an external audit firm, which reports on findings to the Certification Committee of the Bequal Foundation, which is the collegiate body awarding the Certificates. Prices vary depending on number of employees, turnover and number of facilities to be audited (accessibility).

There are 3 certificate levels: Bequal, Bequal Plus and Bequal Premium, a system that allows a continuous improvement for the company. A certificate can be also issued for those companies just meeting the Law regarding the reserve quota or adoption of alternative measures.

The certificate is valid for 3 years, but revised annually in order to assess the maintenance of the accredited criteria, as well as continuous improvement.



#### What is the value proposition for companies?

- ⇒ Responsibility (opportunity to include in the business people with disabilities as employees, customers and suppliers)
- ⇒ Reputation (recognition and improvement of the public image)
- ⇒ Profitability (improvement of economic results)
- ⇒ Continuous improvement
- ⇒ An external check of compliance with employment legislation for people with disabilities in Spain
- ⇒ A basis to report on international standards like GRI.

11 companies have been awarded up to date, including important multinationals such as Repsol, Abertis, Acciona or PwC.

In order to increase the public visibility of the certificate, the Bequal Foundation launched a campaign by Leo Burnett under the title "What's Behind Brands?" The provocative and ground-breaking campaign was intended for producing a strong impact on spectators and a viral effect on social networks.

Watch the campaign (in Spanish) at:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIgKbPxTZzY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIgKbPxTZzY)



## Panagia Eleousa

### Awareness Event in Agrinio

Panagia Eleousa, for people with intellectual and related disabilities, Down Syndrome and Autism, in Messolonghi and Agrinio cities, Greece, held a very successful raising awareness event on 3 December 2014, in Agrinio, in the framework of the International Day of People with Disabilities.

The event had as a topic "Archaeological Treasures of Aetolia and Acarnania from prehistoric and classical period". Since the beginning of the operation of Panagia Eleousa we believe that through the Greek civilization we will manage to bridge the gap between the local community and our service users, in order that they manage to be integrated into the community and achieve social cohesion, justice and solidarity.

Mrs. Dionysia Samanta, the President of "Panagia Eleousa", spoke of the great social work done by the organisation, its values and its objectives, the scope of its activities and future goals.

The distinguished speakers were: Mr. Stavros Benos, former Minister for Culture and President of the Association "DIAZOMA"; Mr. Vassilis Lambrinoudakis, Professor of Classical Archaeology, University of Athens and Secretary General of the Association "DIAZOMA"; and Ms. Olympia Vikatou, Head of curators of Etoloakarnania and Lefkada. The moderator of the event was the Archaeologist Mr. George Stamatis.

The event closed with the team of traditional dancers of Panagia Eleousa's service users- they danced traditional folk songs to the accompaniment of the traditional instruments of Mr.Frintzos' orchestra.

This event was a great success. It was also attended by representatives of the State and Universities, presidents of associations and many citizens who support "Panagia Eleousa".



# EPR Strategic Plan 2015-2017

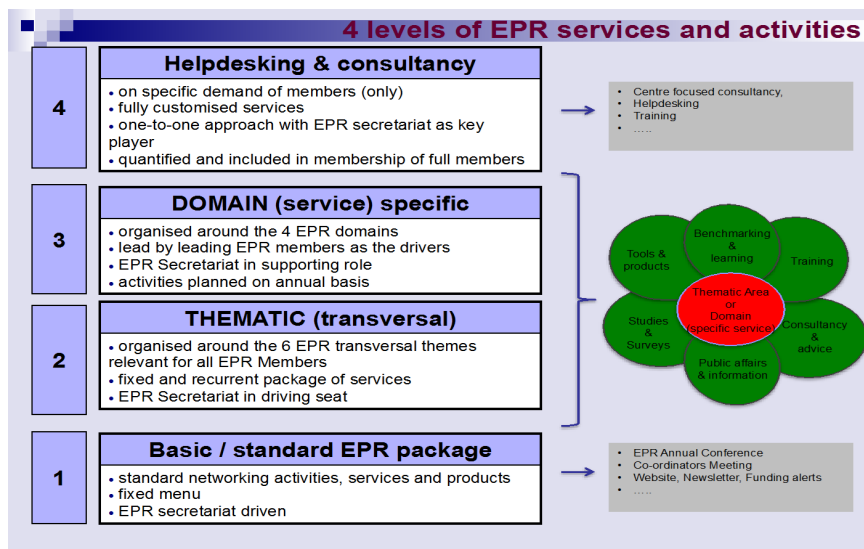
On 2 December, the EPR General Assembly approved the final EPR strategy. This strategic plan sets out the key directions and objectives of the EPR for 2015-2017. The main strategic pathways of the EPR are reflected in this strategy, which ultimately will lead to a profound change of EPR's operations while largely maintaining the EPR network's vision, mission and core value propositions. The 4 strategic objectives are as follows:

**1. An expanded and more diverse membership base** – with an increased number of members; more balanced diversification of members in regard to domain and country; an adjustment of pricing /fees for different types of members; and the attraction of non-members on a paid basis.

**2. Towards an EPR Menu of services and Products** - this aims towards a more integrated and comprehensive EPR menu of services/products with more transparent pricing policies and clearer value for money. This will be organised as a menu of 4 different levels of EPR services and activities: basic EPR service package; thematic services; domain services; and specific helpdesking and consultancy services.

**3. Towards a more product oriented approach** – with the gradual development of new products related to the 6 thematic areas and 4 domains; development and promotion of both EPR and EPR members' products; inclusion of existing tools/instruments into EPR; and designing, developing and offering of certified courses for professionals.

**4. Leading network of social service providers in EU** – with the strengthening of EPR's position as a leading network of independent service providers in the EU; and successful implementation of EU project structural funding.



## 6 Thematic (Transversal) Areas:

- ⇒ Quality
- ⇒ Outcome measurement
- ⇒ Empowerment and quality of life of clients
- ⇒ ICT & ATs
- ⇒ Professional development
- ⇒ Organisational performance

## 4 EPR Domains

- ⇒ Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment
- ⇒ Education & Training
- ⇒ Social Care & Housing
- ⇒ Medical Rehabilitation

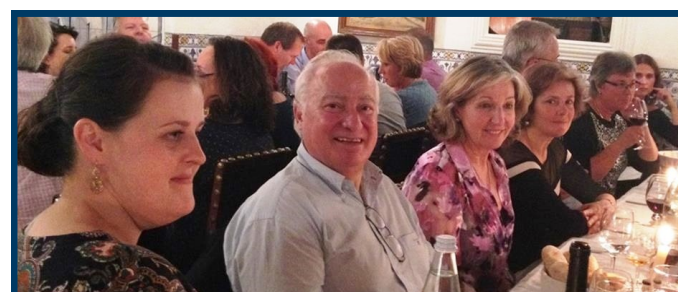
The strategy will be implemented through the Annual Work Plan 2015, which will transpose the main strategic lines into an operational plan for the calendar year, through specifying the activities, responsibilities and corresponding indicators for achievement. There will also be a mapping of the products, tools and methodologies of EPR and its members. This mapping will be carried out by the EPR Secretariat, with the aid of member collaboration.



## Centre Action Plans (CAPs)

### Strategic Workshop for Directors on 2-3 October 2014

The EPR Workshop for Directors took place on 2 and 3 October in Lisbon, Portugal and was hosted by Fundação AFID. The focus of this event was to support the Directors of EPR member organisations in strengthening their strategic planning skills. The workshop was facilitated by Andreas Knoth and Harald Hauben. They engaged participants in reflecting on past strategic decisions, and presented innovative ways to design consultation processes for future strategic planning sessions. Finally the workshop specifically addressed the EPR's own strategy consultation process for the years 2015-2017 and gave members the opportunity to express their vision for the membership activities and orientation for the years to come.



### Training Seminar on EU Funding opportunities and EU employment policies

On 28 and 29 October 2014, professionals from EPR gathered for two days of learning in Oslo to gain greater understanding and knowledge of topics such as: the new cycle (2014 – 2020) of EU funding programmes with particular focus on the Disability Sector; the state of play of the different Programmes; how to prepare and win project proposals; how to implement and manage projects. The expert, Kerstin Weertz facilitated the first day's training and proposed interactive working groups reflect about the challenges of building a partnership and writing a project proposal.

During the second day, participants had the opportunity to explore, under the guidance of the expert Michael Coucheir, the initiatives proposed by the EU Commission to achieve the ambitious Europe 2020 strategy's objectives. The second day focused on EU employment policies and on the importance of the social service provider involvement in EU level initiatives in order to address societal challenges.

Participants evaluated both trainings positively. Training material is available on [EPR website](#), in the Disability Policy section.

## Focus on Thematic Communities

### Thematic Community on Services to People with Mental Health issues

#### Awareness-raising event in Spain on housing for people with mental illness from the recovery approach

On 4 December 2014, the EPR Spanish member Intrac Foundation based in Castilla y León in collaboration with EPR and the Regional Government of Social Services organised an event to promote recovery among the mental health sector. The seminar aimed at exploring a variety of critical issues in relation to housing and creating a home, using a mental health recovery lens.

The meeting was chaired by two experts, Tom O' Brian and Martin Rogan, who combined presentations with an interactive workshop aiming at transferring their experiences and stimulating reflection on housing for people with mental illness from the recovery approach. 44 professionals working in the mental health sector attended the event. Many of them were representatives of the regional government, others were members of organisations from the third sector (NGOs, foundations, associations...) and a few were representatives of companies/service providers. The event has provided a valuable chance for participants to consider service developments in the Spanish context, current best practice models and to address key opportunities and challenges for service users, service providers and wider communities. It was an excellent opportunity for Spanish professionals to

make a deep reflection about the public and private mental health sector and also about the challenges that this area will have to face in the future, as well as the possible solutions. A great engagement of the audience was perceived during the interactive workshops. Participants raised critical issues which were deeply discussed with the experts. The experts expressed their satisfaction and positive feedback about the seminar results. The exchange of different points of views and experiences of the professionals coming from a variety of organisations was fully achieved, making possible a very enriching exchange of understandings.

The event was supported by the EU Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity – PROGRESS (2007-2013). The report is available on [EPR website](#) in the section “Mental Health & Recovery”.



### Awareness-raising event in Copenhagen, Denmark

#### Empowering people with mental or intellectual disabilities to move from specialised services to independent living

On 9 December 2014, LOS representing private social services in Denmark organised, with the support of EPR, an awareness-raising event around the theme “empowering people with mental or intellectual disabilities to move from specialised services to independent living”. Professionals from the Danish rehabilitation centre Grennessminde and from the EPR Dutch member Pluryn presented good practices to empower young people with mental health problems. Participants were active involved in the discussion on methods and tools to empower users’ ability and foster their participation in the labour market and in society as a whole. Participant gave positive feedback on the event that was supported also by the EU Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity – PROGRESS (2007-2013). The report of the event will be available later on EPR website.

## Thematic Community on Cooperation with Employers

### Online webinar on Job Coaching

On 25 November, EPR organised an online seminar on the role of Job Coach/Employment Support Worker in ensuring that people with disabilities secure and maintain appropriate jobs and those employers are supported to employ people with disabilities or people with disadvantages.

The training was facilitated by Mike Evans, experienced trainer in the field of cooperation between providers of services to people with disabilities and employers. Participants explored the so-called 5 stage process of Supported Employment that describes the broader role of the job coach involving Client Engagement, Vocational Profiling, Job Finding, employer Negotiations and On and Off the Job Support. The webinar lasted 3 hours and gave to

participants the opportunity to learn different methods and practical tools towards successful job coaching. The discussion focused also on how to develop a wider range of support to employers and on specific issues to assist progression in the work place. This seminar was supported by the EU Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity – PROGRESS (2007-2013).

The theme “Partnership strategies with employers” will be tackled in the framework of the Thematic Community in 2015 through a benchmarking seminar and bench learning activities. All interested EPR professionals are invited to continue the discussion on the online EPR forum in the section “Work and Employment” on EPR website: [www.epr.eu](http://www.epr.eu)

## USEL hosts Disability Awareness Event on 18 December 2014

Ulster Supported Employment Ltd (USEL), the largest supporter of people with disabilities and health related conditions into open employment in Northern Ireland in partnership with the European Platform for Rehabilitation and Luovi Vocational College, Finland hosted an event at their head office in Belfast to raise awareness of employing people with disabilities.

The event featured presentations from USEL and Luovi Vocational College to transfer knowledge on the support services they provide to help people with disabilities and health condition move into the workplace. Guests from the Department for Employment and Learning and the Northern Ireland Regional European Forum were also in attendance to

share good practice and discuss the various opportunities available within the European Union to help people with disabilities and disadvantaged people into employment. Sam Humphries, Chief Executive, Ulster Supported Employment Ltd commented “This has been an excellent opportunity to learn from other organisations and think about new ways in how we can help people with disabilities access employment”. Petri Hämäläinen, guest speaker from Luovi Vocational College commented “Participating in events like this provides me with a deeper understanding of how to help people with disabilities access employment opportunities. It has definitely given me a lot of new ideas to bring back home and implement within the college”.

## Annual Conference 2015

The EPR Annual Conference 2015 will take place in Valencia, Spain on 28 and 29 May 2015. This year, the conference is organised in cooperation with EPR’s Spanish member ONCE Foundation. The programme of the conference focuses on employment of people with disabilities and their active participation in the society. The Annual Conference Committee 2015 has been established and it will work in close collaboration with ONCE Foundation to draft the programme.

More information will be available as soon as possible on the [EPR website](http://www.epr.eu), “upcoming events” section.

The conference will be held in the Hotel Confortel Aqua 4\* and 3\*, in C/ Luis García Berlanga, 19-21 46023 Valencia, Spain. A number of rooms have been pre-booked for participants who are invited to book their accommodation by contacting directly the hotel by **Friday 27 March 2014**. The registrations to the Conference will be open from **2 February 2015 till 30 April 2015**.



## EPR Innovation Prize Competition

Also this year EPR will launch the Innovation Prize competition.

The Prize winner will be selected by the EPR Centre Coordinators based on a series of pre-defined criteria on the quality and innovative aspects of the practice. The winning organisation will be given the opportunity to present its best practice during the Innovation Prize Awarding Ceremony, at the upcoming EPR Annual Conference, on 28 and 29 May 2015 in Valencia, Spain. Be ready to submit your best innovative practice! The contest will open in **March 2015**.

## Public Affairs

### Public Affairs Event 2014

On 3 December 2014, the EPR Public Affairs event gathered European stakeholders in order to reflect on **employment of people furthest from the labour market and transition from school to work**.

The event, chaired by Sabina Lobato—Vice President of EPR and Director of Employment, Training and Projects at Fundación ONCE—explored the European strategies and best practices for promoting the employment of persons who are further from the labour market, with perspectives from European policy and research experts.

Luk Zederloo, EASPD and chairman of Social Services Europe— presented a social and health sector perspective on employment of people excluded from the labour market.

The event also welcomed Irena Kowalczyk-Kedziora, from the Anti-discrimination and Social cohesion department of the Council of Europe, to give her insights on employment of people furthest from the labour market from the perspective of the Council of Europe.



the methodology and results of this report, which has been funded with financial support from the PROGRESS Programme and aims to produce a thematic reference document with comparable data and reliable facts and figures from the field, as well as recommendations for policy makers and service-providers.

A few national-level practices on transition from school to work of persons with disabilities, identified in the course of the study were also presented. Marijke Boone, of GTB Belgium, presented their successful Transition programme (Transitietrajecten) and ONCE's 'No te rindas nunca' (never give up) plan was presented by Virginia Carcedo.

For more information on this event, please visit the [EPR website](#) on the Public Affairs Event 2014 page.

The event was supported by the EU Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity – PROGRESS (2007-2013).

*The Transition from school to work for persons with disabilities European Study will be published shortly on the EPR website.*



The second part of this event was devoted to transition from school to work for persons with disabilities. Fred McFarlane Ph.D of San Diego State University presented, via video call, the EPR European study on the topic. He presented both



## Projects

### Learnabil-IT

### Mutual Learning on Skills for the ICT Labour Market for People with Disabilities

#### Learnabil-IT Final Conference

On 3 December 2014 the Learnabil\_IT Project drew to an end with the final conference hosted by EPR in Brussels. All project partners contributed to this conference which was chaired by Bela Gor — from the Business Disability Forum — and explored the good practices and presented the main recommendations and trends identified during the Learnabil-IT project.

Through informative speed presentations, project partners from 6 different EU countries presented the main findings of their national mappings of cooperation between employers and VET providers.

The conference followed with reflections on how European representative organisations can strengthen mutual learning on ICT labour market skills for people with disabilities, including presentations from Brendan Roach of the Business Disability Forum, Peter Lambreghts from ENIL and Marie Dubost from EPR.

With a view to further such cooperation, innovative practices were shared with stakeholders in order to allow for mutual learning and future reflection. Linda Coone from NLN, Manus Hanratty from FIT Ireland, Julia Denis from TREEMPLIN and Piret Tank from Astangu VRC presented their successful and forward-thinking practices with participants. Those practices, explored in-depth during the site visits, showed how structured cooperation mechanisms between VET providers and employers can empower a person with disabilities to access to the labour market and to increase the job retention.



Participants were also presented with examples of exploitation plans aimed at preparing the ground to transfer innovative practices (or some elements of such practices) into their own organisation and context. In this regard, Andreja Švajger from University Rehabilitation Institute, Slovenia, Natalja Markovskaja Valakupiai Rehabilitation Centre and Ron Reeuwijk from Pluryn shared such exploitation plans.

Paul Kurvers, on behalf of the EPR Secretariat, wrapped up the conference, thanking all project partners for their commitment and all participants for their interventions.

The conference was well received by participants who expressed a good rate of satisfaction (4.36 out of 5). A networking lunch gave participants the opportunity to continue to share opinions and feedback on the topic.

Find further information on the [Learnabil-IT Project page](#) of the EPR website including the summary report and the presentations from the conference.

*All national reports and the European report are available on [EPR website](#) on the Learnabil-IT platform.*



## Norwegian evaluation report on impact of EQUASS

In October of 2014, the independent research institute Nordlandforskning published its report on the impact of the quality assurance system in the Norwegian vocational rehabilitation and sheltered work enterprises, and the extent to which these enterprises comply with the standards of NAV (Norwegian labour directorate). The report is overall very positive about the role of EQUASS in this sector in Norway, and shows that EQUASS has been important in improving the quality of these services. For more on this topic, please see [www.equass.be](http://www.equass.be)

## EQUASS Consultancy Training - Part II



On 13 and 14 October 2014, the second part of the Consultancy training series that was launched this year was carried out, and took place in the university town of Coimbra, in Portugal. The training days focused on the implementation strategy, by giving tools and techniques to the consultant to support social services organisations; and gaining a deeper understanding of the human rights approaches that shape the social sector, and their impact of the work of a quality consultant.

## Quality event in Uppsala

The EQUASS team organised a quality seminar to interested stakeholders in Sweden on 18 November. The information session presented various issues around quality in social services in Sweden and Europe and was supported by contributions from local EQUASS Auditors, Leena Mellenius and Anja Kivimäki.

## EUROPEAN PLATFORM FOR REHABILITATION

*The network of leading service providers to people with disabilities*

*Wishes season's greetings and a very happy new year!*

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