

# Webinar on Autism and Social Inclusion

## Report

1<sup>st</sup> October 2019

### Participants

Madli Vaidlo	Astangu Vocational Rehabilitation Centre
Jana Iljitšova	Astangu Vocational Rehabilitation Centre
Aurélie Baranger	Autism Europe
Rosie McNaughton	The Cedar Foundation
Nathalie Renaudin	CRM
Didier Roche	CRM
Ana Almeida	CRPG
Marijke Boone	GTB
Michael Backhaus	Mariaberg e.V.
Anja Brus	URI
Matic Kovše	URI
Roberto Zanon	EPR
Ola Eloranta	EPR
Alvaro Rebelo	AFID

### Summary of the Webinar

Fourteen professionals from 7 countries and 10 different organizations (EPR and its members GTB, CRPG, CRM, ASTANGU, URI, MARIABERG, AFID, CEDAR) and Autism Europe introducing some of their projects. The objective of the webinar was to increase understanding on how to improve services for people on the autistic spectrum, and plan future activities among EPR members.

Madli Vaidlo and Jana Iljitšova from Astangu (Estonia) presented their organisation and practice: Astangu was established in 1996, and the centre consists clients in the ages between 16-69 years with special needs. The centre is both a school and a rehabilitation centre, where autistic people are included in every course – no separate courses. Upon completion of one's education or rehabilitation, Astangu helps students find traineeships and job opportunities, and will support graduates in finding and keeping a job, up to one year after they graduate.



The learning at Astangu is in small groups (max 8 people), and in a quiet environment. They provide adaption year courses, and students can try every kind of profession throughout the year to see what fits them best. The adaption year is to focus more on teaching social skills and everyday life skills (cooking, laundry etc.), and the centre offers courses to help tackle social anxiety or other communication problems. The students are provided with student accommodation, and the evaluation period to see how one adjusts is between 3 to 30 days, instead of one day which is common elsewhere. This allows for the students to have more time to adapt the environment, and a more suitable environment for people with autism and other special needs.

Aur lie Baranger is the Director of Autism Europe and was invited to share their innovative and inspiring projects to promote the social inclusion of people on the autistic spectrum.

Autism Europe (AE) is representing 7 million people all over Europe, and their goal is to improve quality of life of people with autism. AE want to implement the UN CRPD, and are in frequent contact with the EU Parliament and Commission to ensure its implementation. Other tasks the organisation perform is awareness-raising and policy research on disability related topics, publishing papers, sharing good practices, making policy recommendations, and hosting an annual conference with over 200 participants from over 80 countries, from all kinds of professions – including people with autism and their families.

Autism Europe is a member of the European Disability Forum, and work closely with several NGO's. One of their priorities is access to employment, with focus on inclusion in the workplace and making labour easier for people with autism. A part of this focus is sharing good practices to help other workplaces welcome employees with autism. AE takes part in many European projects:

- Equity and Social Inclusion through Positive Parenting (ESIPP) was completed in 2018 – a parent education programme;
- Autism Spectre Disorder: Empowering And Support Teachers (ASD-EAST) is an Erasmus+ project started in September 2018, which is empowering specialist educators to support effective inclusion of children with autism;
- Inclusion of People on the Autism Spectrum in Europe (IPA+) was completed in December 2018, and aimed to train professionals to work with autistic people. The IPA2 project is about to start, and is aiming to prevent school failure – specially in secondary school;
- DE-ENIGMA project is about playfully empowering autistic children through working with robots;
- The Early aTTention for the inclusion of children on the autism spectrum in Early Childhood Education and Care Systems (ETTECEC) project is creating videos for young children on inclusion of autistic children in mainstream schools;
- Innovative Vocational Education for Autism (IVEA) project started in October 2018, and is fostering social inclusion of autistic people through employment;
- The ChildIN project is an Erasmus+ project started in November 2018, and is developing a training for European childminders to foster inclusion of children with autism;
- Vocational training on Communication and Teaching Approaches in Autism Spectrum Disorders (Train-ASD) project started in December 2018, and aims to create a European-level strategic partnership and know-how exchange network for vocational training of professionals in the field of autism in order to support autistic children and individuals through training, education and familiarization of professionals on alternative systems of communication.

Rosie McNaughton of the Cedar Foundation presented their organisation and practices:

Cedar Foundation is a service provider in Northern Ireland with 25 locations and employs over 500 people. The organisation works mostly with physical disabilities, but have lately focussed more on autism and other mental disabilities. Clients are usually children and youth transitioning from school to employment, and an increasing number of students with autism and Asperger's. They are working on reducing social exclusion and using the local community to include people with autism



through awareness-raising and encouraging the community to take part in their programmes. Cedar tries to build the confidence of the client even just to do small things, by working closely with the project officer and building the trust between the two, and evaluation shows that 8 out of 10 clients established new friendships and answered that their confidence has improved from Cedar's programmes.

Nathalie Renaudin of CRM presented their organisation and practices:

CRM attracts several people with autism and Asperger's syndrome in their training programmes, but is not a specialist on mental disabilities which is why they are trying to learn from others and improve the situation of their students. The organisation is having a challenge with transitioning the students from their training into employment, as well as helping the students to take on the same interests as the employers work on and in students keeping their jobs after they get hired.

Ana Almeida from CRPG (Portugal) presented their organisation and practice:

CRPG do not specialise in autism, but have students with autism in their classes. Therefore, they try to include students with autism in the education through inclusion plans and to arrange the best environment as possible. Attended the web meeting to learn from other organisations and their practices.

Marijke Boone of GTB presented their organisation and practices:

GTB work with Autism Central and their plans for social inclusion of people on the autism spectrum. One needs to understand autism in order to work with autism, which is why they teach their staff how an underdeveloped brain works and how autism works. Simple and clear communication makes it easier for the clients and the staff to bond and understand each other. Understanding that everyone is unique and not the same is important – not everyone likes the same things. GTB have developed methods to map the different interests of their clients or to help clients develop new interests. Phrasing of questions has a meaning because one does not always get an answer or the answer you are looking for if you are asking the question the wrong way. In such a case, it shows how important clear and simple communication is.

Michael Backhaus of Mariaberg e.V. presented their organisation and practices:

Mariaberg experience challenges with working hours in the workplace for people with autism and how to best organise their working days. Mr. Backhaus raised the discussion on little knowledge on how to work with youths with autism in non-specialised schools, an issue the other participants agreed was a challenge in several countries. The result is often the person with autism dropping out of school, and is therefore a challenge which needs to be solved.

Mariaberg's practice on this matter is first level support (Early Empowerment), where they help newly-born or young children in their first years when a family reaches out for help. In the case of autism, they help structuring the day from morning to evening. Everything is structured from left to right, which gives security and clarity for the child. Tasks on the left are yet to be done, and the ones on the right are finished. This system helps build confidence and safety in the life of people with autism. Germany is not too good at inclusion, stated Backhaus, which has resulted in special needs classes and special needs schools. Mariaberg attempts to council the regular schools in how to deal with mental disabilities such as autism, as they are not able to receive all students with mental disabilities.

Key success factors:

- Awareness-raising and counselling the communities on how to tackle, employ, educate and work with persons on the autism spectrum.
- Clear and simple communication are important, specifically for bonding between client and service provider/staff and to receive the answer for what one is actually asking.



- Working on confidence building with clients on the autism spectre results in higher self-esteem, more friendships and better social skills for an autistic person.
- Small and quiet environments improve the adaption time of people with autism in schools.
- Extended evaluation periods in educational settings improves the level of adaption of people on the autism spectre to the learning situation.

Participants were asked to rate the overall event from 1 (poor quality) to 5 (excellent). The average rating of the event was a **4.5 out of 5**.

For more information, presentations are available on the EPR website [here](#).

