



## My Rights, My Voice

NEWSLETTER 1

Many persons with disabilities throughout Europe receive support by a service providing organisation. The quality of the supplied service depends mostly on the quality of the staff working in the service providing sector. Although staff education differs from country to country, the presence of persons with disabilities involved in staff training is virtually inexistent.

Our experience at innovia shows that qualified persons with learning disabilities are more effective trainers on disability issues than those without a disability. The “My Rights – My Voice” project implements this approach perfectly: it aims at empowering people with disability to use their skills and unique perspective to improve the quality of their lives by teaching persons with disabilities to become trainers and deliver training to staff. The content of the training is linked to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), one of the most important documents on disability issues.

The impact envisaged is to implement this ‘train-the-trainer’ approach into the curriculum of educational institutions providing training and education for staff of service providers in the disability sector. In this regard, in 5 of the partner countries, educational institutions will be involved in the training of persons with disabilities as coaches of professionals working in the field of service provision.

The project will have an impact on the educational system by involving the ‘trainers-with-disabilities’ perspective on the quality of services provided to persons with disabilities and improve their quality of life as provisioned in UNCRPD. With this aim in mind, “Nothing about us without us” becomes reality.

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Johannes Ungar – innovia

Today 20 EU member states signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability (UNCRPD) and others will follow soon. More than a year ago, the European authorities agreed on making the UNCRPD the point of reference for all policies relevant for persons with disabilities. This is one of the most important developments with regard to the sector and with further societal growth. The UNCRPD indeed is about disability... but it is also about our society and how we want to ensure that all citizens can enjoy their human rights.

The convention is based on a view on society that values diversity and sees differences as an opportunity, not as a danger or threat.

But the challenges are enormous. Building a fully accessible environment, removing barriers for participation and inclusion are not self-evident. Authorities will have to review the legal frameworks and structures while mainstream and specialized support providers should innovate and start using new concepts. Empowered persons with a disability will have to take the steering wheel of their lives.

It is crystal clear that the organisation of people with disabilities is one of the most important drivers of change in this process.

The project “My Rights -My Voice” wants to contribute to the implementation process of the convention by empowering people and by bridging the gap between professional service providers and the needs of people. By facilitating the understanding of rights, the project paves the way for a better enjoyment of these rights. A fascinating journey... aiming at a higher quality of life for all citizens.

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Luk Zelderloo – EASPD

## Organisations involved



**innovia (Austria)** is a non-profit organisation which aims at providing service and consulting on issues regarding equal opportunities by involving persons with learning disabilities as experts on disability issues. Within our organisation, four persons with learning disabilities are trained experts on equal opportunities, barrier-free environments, evaluation and quality assurance and are employed to provide service and consulting.

Equal opportunities for persons with disabilities represent our main concern, especially on the labour market. In this regard, we consult enterprises on

hiring persons with disabilities as staff. This process involves awareness-raising among managers, training of mentors or specific adaptations within work places. In many cases, persons with disabilities need further training on certain issues in order to perform and maintain a job on a long-term perspective. At innovia, we offer this kind of training for persons with disabilities who are already employed or who are about to be employed. We translate information into easy-to-read material and check the product with persons from the target group – in many cases, persons with learning disabilities.

It is very important for us to be actively involved at the European level in order to learn from others on the different ways of involving people with disabilities as well as to share our experience with European partners.

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### **innovia – Service & Beratung zur Chancengleichheit gem. GmbH**

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**The Diaconal Academy (Germany)** provides adult education and training for service providers' staff within the social sector in Germany, with programmes focused primarily on special education and rehabilitation, elderly care as well as children and youth services.

With our experience in organizing and implementing such educational programmes, we are well-aware of the direct link between the level of education and information of the staff and the quality of services for people with disabilities. "My Rights – My Voice" helps improve the level of information of service providers'

staff by giving a voice to people with disabilities in our further education. More concretely, with our involvement in the project, people with disabilities in Germany will become and work as qualified trainers of staff.

We believe that by involving people with disabilities in the education of service providers' staff, the quality of the received support and implicitly, the quality of their life will be improved. "My rights-My voice" provides us an excellent opportunity to implement the UNCRPD in the professional work with people with disabilities and also in our society. In addition, the project facilitates the exchange of ways and practices in which the other project partners handle the convention in their countries.

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### **Diakademie – Diakonische Akademie für Fort-und Weiterbildung e.V.**

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**Learning Disability Wales** is an umbrella organisation for over 100 voluntary sector organisations (NGOs) in Wales in the field of learning disabilities. Our

members include large and small service providers, parent/carer groups, self-advocacy groups (called People First Groups) and community organisations. Our members work with children and adults delivering services such as childcare, school support, short term care, training, supported living, leisure activities, life skills, job coaching and advocacy. We work closely with other organisations including local authorities, health services and the Welsh Government.

We are delighted to be a partner in 'My Rights – My Voice' as we believe that promoting the rights set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is a vital part of our role. The UNCRPD provides an excellent opportunity across

Europe to ensure that rights are promoted in a wider policy context. The training package on the UNCRPD will be an excellent tool to raise awareness of these rights among students on educational courses and service provider staff as a way to recognising people's rights and improving the quality of the services they deliver.

We believe in 'nothing about us without us' so we look forward to involving people with learning disabilities in the whole project including developing the training package, becoming trainers and delivering the training. We already regularly involve people with learning disabilities and their families in our work, gathering views, keeping people up-to-date on relevant issues, delivering training, being employees and being trustees.

Our main role in this project is to co-ordinate the recruitment and training of the 48 trainers with disabilities and 12 co-trainers without disabilities from 5 partner countries.

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### Learning Disability Wales

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**ICSS (Bulgaria)** is a non-governmental organisation, established in 1998 with the mission to protect children and adults with disabilities from being institutionalized and isolated. It works actively

for the development of individualized and flexible social services in the community – services which are closer to peoples' homes, everyday life and common environment.

ICSS main activities include: promoting community-based social services through professional and users' networks; developing methodological tools for social service management; provision of domiciliary

services and day-care services for children and adults; conducting training and consultancy for capacity building of service providers in Bulgaria.

For our team, the "My Rights -My Voice" Project represents a useful tool that supports and empowers people with learning disabilities to use their voices and skills in order to improve the quality of their own life. The project designs a common training programme in UNCRPD that will bring together both people with disabilities and service providers acting as trainees. The training programme and the project itself help changing the traditional roles and attitudes toward "disability" by hearing the voice and respecting the rights of different abilities.

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### ICSS – Institute for Community-Based Social Services Foundation

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**The European Association of Service Providers for People with Disabilities** represents 10 000 service providing organisations across Europe and across disabilities.

To achieve our goals, we are committed to user participation in the development and delivery of services, the implementation of governance principles and active lifelong learning opportunities for staff. The main focus of the work is always on the so-called 4 A's: accessibility, availability, affordability and adaptability of services.

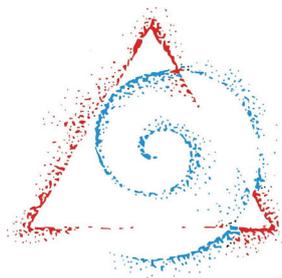
Our main objective is to promote the equalization of opportunities for people with disabilities through effective and high quality service systems facilitating full participation and inclusion in society in an appropriate way for persons with a disability.

With our participation in the “My Rights-My Voice” project we want to ensure that practical steps are being taken towards guaranteeing an effective participation and full citizenship of persons with disabilities in society. We believe that by actively involving people with disabilities in the education of service providers’ staff their needs and rights will be better understood and valued.

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### **EASPD – European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities**

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Established in 1999, the **Symbiosis Foundation (Hungary)** provides a wide range of social services for people with intellectual disabilities as well as with autism, their parents, and persons

related activities. Within our Rehabilitation Farm, we produce and sell organic products such as goat cheese, organic fruits and vegetables and provide workplace for people with special needs. Within the farm guesthouse we host families of disabled children. An open-air school and summer camps are also regularly organized for schoolchildren. We also organize institutional, transit and supported employment programs and provide special transport service and supervision for people with disabilities.

with reduced work ability in North-Hungary. Our main aim is to improve the quality of life of these people and their families. We support the education, training, employment and social integration of persons with special needs through several activities.

Our motivations for participating in the “My Rights- My Voice” project are to improve the quality of our residential and day-care services and to deliver a new approach for training organisations and other social service providers. As we also want to become a training organisation in the future, the project represents a great opportunity for us to learn about the ways of actively involving trained people with disabilities in different activities.

Our social services involve a day-care center for 40 disabled people and a residence for 28 disabled and autistic adults. The day-care center supports community and leisure-time activities for disabled people through therapy, sports or other leisure-

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### **Symbiosis – Symbiosis for the Harmonic Being Together Foundation**

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