

September 2009

Policy news



400 Wheelchair Users have been received by the European Parliament for the Freedom Drive 2009

On 16 September 2009, 440 people from 21 European countries met in Strasbourg for the Freedom Drive. The group included disabled people with their personal assistants. The common cause was Independent Living: deinstitutionalisation, the right to personal assistance and the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability.

“The segregation of people with disabilities in long-stay institutions is a violation of disabled people’s human rights” says Freedom Driver Ines Bulic of the UK.

She was one of the speakers at the conference “Implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability” which kicked off the Freedom Drive week.

The UN Convention is the first legally binding instrument with comprehensive protection of the rights of persons with disabilities.

Therefore, one of the 8 demands of Freedom Drivers handed over to EU Parliament President Jerzy Burzek and to Richard Howitt MEP was for the European

Community to ratify this human rights convention.

Freedom Drivers furthermore asked for a continuation of the development of community-based services to achieve deinstitutionalization across Europe.

They called for the implementation of their human right to a personal assistance service, which is fundamental to guarantee the enjoyment of Independent Living.

When handed over the demands, Jerzy Burzek, MEP and Richard Howitt, MEP said they were committed to fight for the rights of people with disabilities. They also encouraged Freedom Drivers to keep lobbying their national MEPs to promote Independent Living in their countries.

Freedom Drivers ended with a celebration of the 20th anniversary of the European Network on Independent Living (ENIL) which is one of the organisers of the Freedom Drive.

8 Freedom Drive Demands are available here:

http://www.enil.eu/enil/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=239



Report of the Ad Hoc Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care officially handed over to Commissioner Vladimír Špidla

On Wednesday, 23 September 2009, the Ad Hoc Expert Group on the Transition from Institutionalised to Community-based Care officially handed over their final report to Vladimír Špidla, EU-Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. EASPD is part of this group, together with representatives from the Children's High level Group, AGE (European Older People Platform), COFACE (Confederation of Family Organisations in the EU), ECCL (European Coalition for Community Living), EDF (European Disability Forum), Inclusion Europe and Mental Health Europe.

The goal of the report is to support the rights of persons with disabilities, elderly

people, children and persons with mental health problems to live independently and to be included in community.

EASPD hopes that this report will convince European and national authorities to opt for smaller, more personalized care options which are based in the Communities and to review their rules and quality standards to guarantee individualized, needs tailored services and to promote the full inclusion in the community of persons with disabilities.

The report will soon be translated in all European languages and promoted all over Europe. If you wish to read the full report in English, please contact the EASPD office on

charlotte.boetticher@easpd.eu



Sign languages still discriminated

Sign languages are still discriminated in many EU countries. Therefore the Group of European People's Party appeals to the Commission for the recognition of sign language as an EU language.

Two members of the European Parliament, Adam Kosa and Philippe Juvin, asked the newly-elected President of the European Parliament Jerzy Buzek "to translate all European Parliament debates into sign language and broadcast them live on the screens located in the Strasbourg hemicycle with immediate effect". Such intervention would enhance integration of people with disabilities within European society.

Sign languages are an important part of Europe's multilingual diversity. They are autonomous, visual languages based on

non-verbal communication such as specific manual signals as well as posture and facial expression developed by deaf people over generations. So far only five countries recognised their national sign language on a constitutional level:

- Austria (2005)
- Czech Republic (1988)
- Finland (1995)
- Portugal (1997)
- Slovakia (1995)

Other Member States have used other measures and laws to give sign language official status: the French speaking community in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom.



“Chambres d’autres”: an innovative and original hotel project in Brussels

A new hotel will open in 2011 in Brussels. The original aspect of this project is that the staff of this small 11 rooms hotel will be composed of people with intellectual disabilities supervised by educators.

The idea behind this, as Ms Claudia Leoprechting, cofounder of this project, explained us in an interview, is that some persons with intellectual disabilities have great abilities in interpersonal relations. She would like to enable these “extraordinary employees”, as she likes to call them, to develop their skills, to find a place into society and to get training in hospitality professions, which is not always easy for them to have access to. In return, they would offer a friendly and comfortable environment to the clients of the hotel, at a time when more and more people are tired of receiving a standardized welcome in hotel chains.

Moreover, not only will this hotel be located in the neighbourhood of the European institutions, thus ensuring this new establishment plenty of overnight stays from 2011 onwards, but it is also a

success story in the small world of social economy.

As Ms Leoprechting told EASPD, there are already 27 hotels and restaurants of that type throughout Europe and they all proved to be successful: the first one that opened in Hamburg in 1993 is flourishing.

The association “Chambres d’autres” also managed to obtain support from the local city council to get started in this adventure. When asked what motivated her to keep on going, her first thought was for the “friendly climate surrounding this project and all the admirable people” that she has met on that occasion and who are willing to get involved in it.

So, when coming to Brussels to attend an EASPD event or simply to enjoy the city, be sure to stop by to enjoy the warm welcome of the “Chambres d’autres”!

Update on the Snowball project

The Bulgarian organisation Vision Varna is the lead partner of the very young network called NASO (National Alliance of Social Responsibility). This network involves service providers, parent associations, authorities and other stakeholders throughout Bulgaria, and is so far composed of about 120 organisations. With the support of the project SNOWBALL, the network is able to build up knowledge and capacity across regions and the sector of service provision. This is done by the development of a helpdesk, a number of twinning initiatives between Bulgaria and Flanders, and the organisation of 2 training sessions of 4 days each involving Flemish and Bulgarian experts and representatives of authorities.

The first training session took place on 1 - 4 October 2009 in Varna and was a big success. Over 100 representatives of service providers and authorities attended the seminar. Both trainers and participants had the opportunity to not only exchange ideas and expertise, but also lobby and form alliances with other organisations that

resulted in twinning partnerships. From November on Flemish (and Bulgarian) organisations will have the opportunity to visit these partner organisations.

The next training session will take place in Sofia at the end of April 2010.

During the seminar, FAQ's and bottlenecks of the social care sector, results of the different plenary sessions and workshops, were collected. These FAQ's and bottlenecks will be put on the helpdesk together with other relevant information and links. The website will also contribute to accessibility and visibility of high quality information and this in three languages (Dutch, Bulgarian, and English) on staff training, networking opportunities, project development opportunities and fundraising.

PPG, EASPD and Vision Varna commit themselves to keep the website open and up to date even after the lifetime of the project. For more information please contact Sonia.staskowiak@easpd.eu and/or visit www.naso.bg and www.easpd.eu.

On 12th-13th November 2009 the next EASPD conference on 'Salamanca, 15 years on – Inclusion, A school for all' will take place in Dublin (Ireland).

The Salamanca Statement was made 15 years ago. This statement is the outcome of the UNESCO Conference on Special Needs Education in 1994 and is an important manifesto for inclusion as a way of achieving high quality education for all. Retrospectively a lot has been achieved to move both educational policy and practice in a more inclusive direction, but we can conclude that there is still much to be done.

For that reason we decided to organise a conference about the Entitlement to Education in close cooperation with the Council of Europe, the National Federation of Voluntary Bodies in Ireland and other important stakeholders.

Based on the declaration of Salamanca, this conference is supposed to give rise to the creation of a new European Network of experts providing 'examples of inclusion'. Furthermore, we want to offer guidance and active help to all parties interested in transforming mainstream schools into 'schools for all' to improve inclusion in Europe. In order to adhere and analyse the outcomes of the conference, the agreement on a 'Dublin Statement and Action Plan' is the overall aim.

We would be honoured to welcome you to this conference. You can register on http://www.fedvol.ie/International_Conference_on_Inclusive_Education/Default.1216.html

More information on www.fedvol.ie or www.easpd.eu

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF VOLUNTARY BODIES

Providing Services to People with Intellectual Disability