

Press Release

Ljubljana, February 3, 2011

3rd international ACE Project conference on active inclusion of persons with autism

A conference organised in the framework of the ACE (Autism Connections Europe) project, coordinated by Center for Autism Slovenia and financed by the European Commission through the European Lifelong Learning Programme, took place today in Ljubljana (Slovenia). European experts were gathered to raise awareness and promote active inclusion of persons with autism in the policy-making process in order to improve their quality of life. The conference gave persons with autism the opportunity to take the floor and express their concerns and expectations. European Commission representatives also attended the conference.

Vesna Melanšek, the President of Center for Autism Slovenia opened the conference by presenting the difficulties faced by adults with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) in Slovenia. She outlined the lack of support services adapted to their specific needs. **Janja Kranjc**, psychologist at the Center for Autism Slovenia and coordinator then explained that the ACE project aims at allowing adults with ASD to become active citizens and advocate for their rights, since their specific needs are not adequately taken into consideration in the policies at local and national level. **Marianne Kuzemtshenko** from the Estonian Autism Society and **Liuba Iacoblev** from Autism Romania described the situation experienced by persons with ASD and their families in their respective countries as well as the existing legal framework and the possible opportunities for change. **John Lawson** from Oxford Brookes University presented the special support services available to adults with ASD in the UK as well as the "Autism Act", the first ever disability specific law, which came into force in 2009 and specifically addresses issues linked to autism.

Aurélie Baranger, the Director of Autism-Europe, highlighted the importance of the ACE project to promote empowerment of persons with autism. She presented the guiding principles of the UN convention on the rights of people with disability and the European disability Strategy 2010-2020. Emphasizing the importance of the motto "Nothing about us, without us", she explained that *"the participation of self-advocates with autism in the decision-making process is very important and that the ACE project is an opportunity to allow them to speak up for their rights"*. Afterwards, young adults with ASD from Slovenia, Romania and Estonia shared their daily life experiences. They also gave their opinion on adequate solutions to improve the quality of life of persons with ASD. **Nastja Trtnik**, a 22 year old Slovenian with Asperger syndrome touched participants with her remarkable story. She was diagnosed late, at 15 year-old. "It would be easier if I had been diagnosed earlier and if there had been any specific intervention program for people with autism in my childhood or now when I'm adult. I'm often embarrassed when I am with other persons because I don't know how to react in certain situations. I would feel much better if more people would try to understand me and include me".

After the conference, participants with autism from the various countries enjoyed activities organized by Center for Autism Slovenia: including a visit to the Railway museum, swimming, bowling, sports games and dancing activities and also developed their culinary skills on the cooking workshop.

Photo materials are available on this link:
<http://press.imeldaogilvy.si/aceprojekt/ljubljana2011/>.

ACE – Autism Connections Europe – about the project

Autism Connections Europe consortium's objective is to provide adults (18 years old and more) with autism spectrum disorder with the opportunity to enhance their communication and social skills, participate in online communities, travel to other countries (Slovenia, Italy, Great Britain and Estonia) and become active citizens by presenting and enforcing their rights. A manual for using Facebook for persons with autism was prepared in the scope of the project and published in Slovenian, English, Estonian and Romanian. Furthermore, it encompasses a research on the possibilities of internet use, led by Oxford Brookes University (UK). It studies the possibilities of better social inclusion of persons with autism. The project is coordinated by Center for Autism Slovenia and financed by the European Commission through the European Lifelong Learning Programme.

More Information

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