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PRESS RELEASE

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Valentine's Day true meaning - promoting the equal right to love

Sexual Education for Adults with Disabilities, their parents and staff

Valentine's Day is an important reminder that it is essential to support the equal right of all Europeans - including people with learning disabilities - to make informed decisions regarding their romantic and sexual lives.

If we look at the story behind Valentine's Day, we see that it is both a celebration of love and a statement in support of freedom of choice. Popular legend says that in Ancient Rome, Saint Valentine was imprisoned and martyred for performing wedding ceremonies for those who were not allowed to get married. Times have since significantly changed, and while we do not always choose who we fall in love with, as adults we have the right to engage in consensual relationships, form families and become parents.

Unfortunately, not all adults are allowed to make their own decisions when it comes to romantic relationships, marriage and reproductive rights, as people with learning disabilities continue to face discrimination in Europe and around the world, in terms of freedom of choice and access to information.

Article 23 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) provides that people with learning disabilities have a right to "found a family", "freely decide on the number and spacing of children" and "retain their fertility on an equal basis with others". Furthermore, Article 25 on Health, upholds that "free and informed consent" must be the basis of providing healthcare, including reproductive health

Although the UN CRPD provides that people with learning disabilities should be given both the choice and the support to enjoy the same degree of freedom in deciding over their intimate lives just as everyone else, the reality is very different. Throughout Europe, forced sterilisation and coerced abortions are also too often considered an acceptableⁱ way of dealing with the lack of available sex education for people with learning disabilities. One of the reasons is that providing accessible information to people with learning disabilities about sexuality and relationships requires taking a more creative and supportive approach.

Sexual Education for Adults with Disabilities, their parents and staff, or SEAD, is an initiative promoting accessible sex education and empowerment of people with learning disability regarding contraception, sex and relationships. SEAD is a pan-European project which designs and promotes effective and accessible ways of teaching sex education and family planning to people with learning disabilities. Its aim is to address the lack of accessible information and knowledge of adults with disabilities through the development of a comprehensive toolkit combining activities like role and drama play, with pictures, audio/video materials and illustrated guides.

The reasoning behind SEAD, which is offering everyone the possibility to make informed personal choices, resonates with the real meaning of the 14th of February. Valentine's Day could not exist without being given the right and the opportunity to freely fall in love, and the 7 million Europeansⁱⁱ with learning disabilities must not be deprived of their right to live life to the fullest, including the choice to engage in romantic relationships, get married and start a family.

More information and interviews, please do not hesitate to contact Aurélie Baranger, Director of Autism-Europe, in Brussels. Tel: +32 (0)2 675 75 05 Email: aurelie.baranger@autismeurope.org

SEAD website: <http://sead-project.eu>

www.autismeurope.org

ⁱ <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/11/10/sterilization-women-and-girls-disabilities>

ⁱⁱ http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_projects/2002/monitoring/fp_monitoring_2002_frep_05_6_en.pdf

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