

Press Release

Tartu, 3rd June 2011

## V international ACE Project congress in Tartu Estonia

Autism Connections Europe consortium's objective is to provide young adults with autism spectrum disorder with the opportunity to enhance their communication and social skills, participate in online communities and travel to other countries (Slovenia, Italy, Great Britain and Estonia). In the framework of the project, a conference took place in Tartu – the “city of good thoughts” (Estonia) to raise awareness about autism and give the opportunity to persons with autism to take the floor and address Estonian officials and a wider public with their concerns and expectations.

The conference aimed at giving an overview concerning the inclusion and available services for persons with autism in Slovenia, Romania, UK and Estonia. Situations are diverse, depending on the level of resources, recognition of autism and legislative advancement in the various countries. **However in all countries a better acknowledgement and response to the specific needs of persons with autism are needed to promote their full participation in society.** Tiina Kivirand, the representative of the Ministry of Education and Research from Estonia said that progress has to be made to fully respond to the needs of persons with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD). She also said that “legislation alone is not enough, a **change of attitude is also necessary and there is still a long way to go. More resources must also be allocated to vocational training and transition to work for persons with autism.**”

Echoing her call for more awareness and understanding in society, participants with autism gave an account of their experience in the project and of their daily lives, as well as suggestions of solutions to improve the quality of life of persons with ASD. Indeed one of the objectives of the ACE project is to **allow young people with ASD to become active citizens by raising awareness of their needs at local and national level.**

Eight participants with ASD from all countries gave presentations. Mircea from Romania called on society to be more tolerant of persons with ASD, who have to make a lot of efforts to conform to society's expectations. Tom from the UK said that the ACE project helped him to “better understand the world” and that he wants to “help other autistic people”. Gabriela from Romania gave a moving description of her life “having no friends” due to her difficulty to forge friendships; she said that even though she leads an independent life “she still needs support”. Mina said that her **“biggest hope is to cope alone in the future and that the project helps her to see world in reality and widens her horizon”**. Several participants underlined that on top of giving them the opportunity to enhance their social skills and forge friendships, the ACE project also helps them in a very practical manner to acquire daily-life skills and better organize themselves.

Photo materials are available at this link: [http://www.autism-ace.eu/ace\\_congresses.html](http://www.autism-ace.eu/ace_congresses.html)



www.autism-ace.eu



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### **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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