

## European Days of Autism 2007 - 5/6 October 2007, Brussels

*Under the Patronage of the European Parliament*



### Conference : « Rights, Quality of Services and involvement of citizens with ASD in the European Union » - 5 October 2007 »

On 5<sup>th</sup> October 2007, Autism Europe celebrated the European Day of Autism in Brussels with a conference devoted to the theme: « Rights, Quality of Services and involvement of citizens with ASD in the European Union » under the Patronage of the European Parliament and with the support of MEP Bogdan Klich. The conference was opened by MEP Kathy Sinnott and gathered various stakeholders from the disability movement and from the EU institutions as well as the international scientific community. The main aim was to raise awareness among political decision makers, public administrators and the public at large concerning the issues faced by persons with autism spectrum disorders to lead a dignified life. Quality support services represent the condition in which persons with ASD can enjoy their fundamental rights to health, (re)habilitation and lifelong education and consequently develop their maximum individual potential, for them to benefit from equal opportunities. Quality of the services is not a secondary issue in ensuring the full enjoyment of human and fundamental rights to persons with autism. The availability, reliability and quality of the support services can make the difference for a dignified life.

The issue of the quality of services for persons with disabilities is high on the EU agenda. In April 2006 the EU Commission adopted a Communication on Social Services of General Interest<sup>1</sup>, taking the specific nature of social services into account at European level and clarifying, to the extent that they are covered, the Community rules applicable to them. Furthermore, the European Disability Action Plan 2006-2007<sup>2</sup> has established as a priority to promote access to quality support and care services. It is therefore a priority for Autism-Europe to promote shared Quality Standards for Services that are oriented towards the

rights and individual needs of all persons with ASD across the European Union.

Wallis Goelen, the head of EC unit Inclusion of persons with disabilities presented the work of the European Commission in cooperation with representatives of the member states, organisations representing people with disabilities and services providers, notably to draft guidelines on the quality of the Social Services of General Interest (SSGI) (on this issue, see also the article under the « European Commission section »). The objective is to provide guidance and inspiration on how to promote quality social services addressing the particular needs of people with disabilities. It is addressed in particular to actors active in the areas of social protection and social inclusion, including the Member States. This initiative is also to be considered in the context of the European Social Fund programming for 2007-2013, which includes a priority on reinforcing social inclusion of people at disadvantage, including people with disabilities. During the conference, good practices in the field of services benchmarking and policy planning for services at local level were also shared with the participants by various speakers from the disability movement and research sector.

### Training seminar and Workshop about Quality Standards for Services

On 6<sup>th</sup> October 2007, a training seminar on EU structural funds and a workshop about the Rights-based Quality Standards for services to persons with complex dependency needs took place. During the training seminar, **Javier Güemes** from the European Disability Forum presented the various EU funds and how they can be used to promote equal opportunity for people with disability. Further information about the structural funds available on EDF website :[http://www.edf-feph.org/Page\\_Generale.asp?DocID=13854&thEbloc=13858](http://www.edf-feph.org/Page_Generale.asp?DocID=13854&thEbloc=13858).

**Zsuzsanna Szilvazy** (Hungarian Autistic Society) presented some best practices for autism specific services in Hungary.

<sup>1</sup> Communication from the European Commission "Implementing the Community Lisbon Programme: Social Services of General Interest in the European Union COM(2006)177 final 26.04.2006

<sup>2</sup> Communication from the European Commission on the situation of disabled people in the enlarged European Union COM (20005) 604 final 28.11.2005

Participants then exchanged views concerning a document on the **Quality of the Social Services of General Interest (SSGI) from the viewpoint of disability** drafted by the European Commission and the High Level Group on Disability (for more information see the article under the European Commission section). This document has been largely inspired by the AE document on the Quality of services for persons with ASD (2005).

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Autism-Europe intends to hold the European Days of Autism every year during the first week-end of October with a thematic conference. It has been initiated to raise the profile of Autism Spectrum Disorders issues

both at European and national level and to foster policy developments in line with an approach based on rights and participation. The objective is also to promote exchange of best practices and mutual learning, while highlighting the latest policy and legislative developments at EU-level and fostering change. In the future, Autism-Europe members will be encouraged to echo this event at national level and to diffuse common messages, by organising conferences, open-doors days and other events.

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