

Autism-Europe organised the European Day of Autism

Autism-Europe is a European network of national, regional and local organisations of parents representing all persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and notably those who are not able to represent themselves. Its aim is to raise awareness across Europe on the fundamental rights and needs of people with ASD by representing them at EU level, and to promote positive actions and policies built on the social model of disability for the active inclusion of people with ASD.

On 5th 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 Interest¹, 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 2006-2007² 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 organisations representing people with disabilities and services providers, notably to draft guidelines on the "Quality of the Social Services of General Interest (SSGI) from the viewpoint of disability". Its purpose 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 paper 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

¹ 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

² Communication from the European Commission on the situation of disabled people in the enlarged European Union COM (2005) 604 final 28.11.2005

people at disadvantage, including people with disabilities. 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.

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.