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## POLICY DOCUMENT

# SUSTAINABLE INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN SOCIETY

*(approved of by the ECCE General Meeting, May 7<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> 2009)*

### Our convictions

#### **ECCE is an association in the service of people with disabilities**

ECCE - European Cooperation in anthroposophical Curative Education and Social Therapy - is a non-governmental organisation established in the Netherlands in 1992 with the objective of representing people with disabilities at the European level, in particular those who need support to express themselves.

ECCE represents about 400 organisations of families of the disabled who have close links to curative education and social therapy and of professionals and trainers who work on the basis of anthroposophy. It concerns some 90 000 people.

#### **People with potential**

Every human being has the potential to develop and acquire skills that he/she wants to put at the disposal of society. It is very important to give everyone the possibility of contributing in his own way. As we provide and take care of people with a disability, we must be aware of dignity and autonomy and, by doing so, offer opportunities that enable them to feel integrated, involved and respected.

#### **We believe in the strength of co-operation**

ECCE keeps its structure simple; it prefers co-operation between its members and with other organisations in order to realize its aims.

#### Co-operation between members

In most European countries there are professionals in the field of curative education and social therapy who take care of children and adults with disabilities. Bonds are cultivated between these professionals – and particularly between the educators working in these initiatives – their trainers and the families of the children and the adults. It is one of the objectives of ECCE to encourage these bonds. That is why, every year, ECCE organizes an assembly of its members in order to exchange ideas and experiences with experts in the field. ECCE organizes or supports events such as congresses and meetings in order to promote exchanges between its members.

#### Co-operation with other organisations aiming for inclusion of people with disabilities in society

ECCE is a founding and full member of the EDF, European Disability Forum, which was established in 1997 with the aim of promoting equal opportunities and the fundamental rights of people with disabilities (about 50 million) in Europe. ECCE is also an associate member of

Inclusion Europe, an umbrella of parent associations aimed at the inclusion of people with disabilities in society. Reciprocally, Inclusion Europe is an associate member of ECCE. For its department of service providers, ECCE is a member of EASPD (European Association of Service Providers for persons with Disabilities). ECCE participates in initiatives that aim at allowing professionals to work according to the methodology they have chosen, such as ELIANT (European Alliance of Initiatives for Applied Anthroposophy, [www.eliant.eu](http://www.eliant.eu)).

#### Co-operation within other European organisations

Through its participation in European organisations such as EDF, Inclusion Europe or EASPD, ECCE contributes at European level in discussions regarding policies to benefit those with disabilities and the drawing up of such reports and documents. ECCE is also intermediary with European authorities for projects financed by European funds such as Life Long Learning.

### **We promote the concept of sustainable and reciprocal inclusion**

It is becoming more and more evident that sustainable development of the economy is necessary. It is also evident to us that sustainable economic and social inclusion of people with disabilities is of equal necessity. Art. 19 of the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities supports this.

We are convinced that mainstream society has a moral obligation to include those with disabilities. On a daily basis people with disabilities show a capacity to include us in their lives. We want to create opportunities to make this reciprocity possible, because if this could be brought about it would, in our view, be an enormous advantage for society.

### **Our challenges**

In order to create the conditions for a reciprocal and thus sustainable inclusion, it is necessary that people with disabilities have a real choice to profit from their rights:

- to choose a life within the framework of an environment that supports and favours personal development;
- to benefit from education, training and work matched to individual need and potential;
- to contribute fully to society according to ability.

These rights are contained in the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities and in the preface of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. However there are still too many obstacles preventing people with disabilities to fully enjoy these rights. We aim to do everything possible to ensure that these rights are upheld according to the free and autonomous choice of the individual, and where the individual cannot define and/or express this choice, in consultation with family and eventually the professionals immediately concerned.

### **Empower people with disabilities to live in the way they have chosen**

Modern society tends to hold the opinion that everyone has to be included in “*mainstream*” society. However realistic this idea is for those who can be supported while participating within the mainstream, we believe that other more vulnerable individuals, and in particular the person with complex dependency needs, should be allowed to participate in quieter parts of the mainstream, in their own rhythm and in conditions adapted to their needs. We want to ensure that these people are free to choose a more protected lifestyle in order to live a dignified life as autonomously as possible, at their own pace, away from the competition and stress they are unable to cope with.

The first thing required is adapted housing.

Living physically in an “ordinary” building does not necessarily mean that the person is included in the life of that building: inclusion is not decided in a unilateral way. For the most vulnerable people, physically and intellectually, common conditions of life on the basis of small group homes can be an alternative guaranteeing security, the possibility of a social life and the most favourable conditions of support. Others might prefer an individual home in protected surroundings or in a town, on condition that they can benefit from services offering support adapted to their needs. Another choice might be to live with their family, if the family can offer – eventually with professional support - the environment to unfold their potential. Whatever lifestyle and housing choice is made, it should meet acknowledged quality criteria.

People with disabilities should benefit from the necessary medical, therapeutic and educational support they require according to their choice, for example bath or art therapies. This care should be available in the framework of community or individual living.

### **Offer people with disabilities specially adapted education, training and work**

Children with disabilities need to benefit from education and instruction which aims to unfold their potential to prepare them for adult life. We strive to adapt training facilities and conditions in a manner appropriate to the nature of their difficulties, especially with respect to the type and pace of training.

It is also in this field that inclusion cannot be imposed in a unilateral way. As Professor Reinders said: “Rights can open doors but not hearts.” That is why we consider that, for those children who – because of their vulnerability – would be likely to suffer in a world of competition, mutual inclusion could be encouraged by certain alternative activities (such as sports, artistic activities, discovery etc.).

Since for everybody work contributes to dignity and to inclusion, people with disabilities should also be in a position to live a professional life, and work, according to their ability. This means that man should be considered as a creator and not as a producer who must be profitable: whatever his activity, he should be allowed to express his creative strength. A professional life in a protected surrounding has a therapeutic aspect and favours social inclusion.

That is why we defend the right of everyone to work in such conditions that he or she can unfold his or her potential and capacities in order to participate in economic life. People with disabilities should find full recognition, allowing them to live a decent life.

### **Encourage people with disabilities to participate fully in social life**

No one can unfold his/her potential without a social life. The inclusion of people with disabilities in society forces us to look at them apart from their disability and to listen carefully. If we do so, we discover this person to be full of qualities and gifts. It is up to us to encourage the expression of their potential.

Including disabled people in parties, festivities, cultural excursions, sporting events and artistic projects is just as enriching for them as for us. It is particularly easy to organize reciprocity in many social and cultural activities. That is why we think that these types of activities should be encouraged by all means available.

A high standard of support for people with disabilities in all these aspects of daily life including schooling, professional or social life should be made available by those well trained in the relevant skills and attitudes.

That is why we consider that professionals and educators or companions should benefit from a threefold vocational training that should include studies in theory, practical skills and the creative arts.

## Our legitimacy

If we take up the challenge, in dialogue with the Recognized European Bodies, to promote sustainable and mutual inclusion for persons with disabilities, it is because we know it is possible and feasible: we practise it every day.

- A few hundred organisations founded on Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy already offer people with disabilities conditions of life and support based on individual need and choice whether living in community based services or in group homes, by offering people the support needed to live in an independent way.
- These organisations provide those with disabilities schooling, training, education and professional activities adapted to their abilities.
- They organize a rich social, cultural and artistic life in which everybody can participate.
- Acknowledged training centres in different countries train educators and professionals by combining theoretical, practical and artistic developmental studies.

It is possible. However the conditions for real choice for people with intellectual difficulties have still to be fully realized, and the training of qualified professionals needs to be further encouraged and supported.

### **Who are we?**

**We are an association of parents and professionals in the service of people with disabilities.**

### **How do we work?**

**We work by deploying the strength of co-operation and exchange with those who share the same human values.**

### **What do we want?**

**We want sustainable inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in society and reversed integration.**

**In order to achieve these aims we want to support the conditions necessary for a real choice of life, training and work so that all can contribute fully to society and fulfil their potential, supported by qualified professionals.**