

ECCE and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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In 2008 ECCE (the European Co-operation in Anthroposophical Curative Education and Social Therapy) organized a congress in The Hague, Netherlands, for 700 persons with disabilities under the theme "Living in the Encounter." Immediately following, high school students who helped implement the Congress were asked to what extent their views had changed with regard to persons with an intellectual disability. "We had no view at all!" was the answer. "We never meet these people, but now we know we have gotten to know them!"

In 2016 it is exactly ten years ago that on 13 December 2006 the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRPD) was adopted. It went into effect 3 May 2008 after - in accordance with the Convention – 20 states had ratified it. The German Bundestag ratified it in 2009 and the European Parliament finally in 2010. This treaty is no longer just about the elimination of the consequences of disabilities but rather about a way of living together: inclusion. Society is changing in such a way that all people can, with equal rights, find their place in education, work, health care, security, etc. Such a cultural change requires perseverance, patience, and allies to work together in the interest of people with disabilities toward implementing an inclusive society.

ECCE has the task to recognize the interests and needs of people with disabilities at the European level from the perspective of anthroposophical curative education and social therapy and to promote this in the European Union. ECCE was founded in 1992 for this purpose at the initiative of the International Council for Curative Education and Social Therapy in Dornach, Switzerland, which in turn coordinates the worldwide anthroposophical curative-education movement. At the European level ECCE has since been working closely with other European NGOs (interest groups and service providers). ECCE is a co-founder and member of the European Disability Forum (EDF), it cooperates with Inclusion Europe (IE), which is in turn an associate member of ECCE, and with the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD). Here ECCE is part of the "Policy Impact Group" through which on the European level politically active lobbying is done on behalf of people with disabilities.

The volunteer board of ECCE represents anthroposophical curative education and social therapy in these organizations. This corresponds to about 150 working days per year. The board members reflect on their impressions and plan actions. Thus, for example, a contribution to the shadow report of the EASPD for the periodic report of the European Union on the implementation of the UN-CRPD was developed. This addresses the five key issues: ethics; people with complex needs; living independently and being included in the community; work and cultural activities as a way to self-realization; inclusive (vocational) education.

How do we build up an inclusive society? Inclusion is a word that sounds good. The reality is, however, that a rather profound cultural change must take place in society so that inclusion can actually be achieved. This is possible only in small steps that must be sustainable and purposeful. The mind-set has to change. What matters is giving people with disabilities a face and a voice. For this, encounter is the best means. It starts by focusing on what is really necessary, with inclusive education and inclusive training. And another way of thinking is necessary: not thinking in terms of costs but rather of investments in people. It is also necessary to create a framework of ethical points of departure and ethical values. It is our move!

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