

ABRACADABRA AND THE DREAMS COME TRUE

Leonardo project



Between March 25 and March 27 in the beautiful town of Nijmegen, The Netherlands held the second workshop of the the Leonardo Da Vinci programme, funded by the European Union. Among other objectives (co-operation to develop inovative practices for social integration, creating a better world for people with disabilities) this programme mostly aims to improve or find new strategies for professional training and integration of the individuals with spina bifida and hydrocephalus into the labour market.

The project, managed by Martin Künemund, brings together eight partner organizations of five countries: Germany, Holland, Switzerland, Romania, U.K, as follows.:

- The Cedar Foundation, UK
- Berufsbildungswerk Neckargemünd GmbH, DE
- Josefsheim Bigge, DE
- Pluryn Arbeid, NL
- SCHWEIZERISCHE VEREINIGUNG ZUGUNSTEN VON PERSONEN MIT SPINA BIFIDA & HYDROCEPHALUS, CH
- Asociatia Romana Spina Bifida si Hidrocefalie, RO
- Technische Universität Dortmund, DE
- Arbeitsgemeinschaft Spina Bifida und Hydrocephalus e. V., DE

The workshop had 40 participants, of whom almost half were persons with spina bifida and hydrocephaly. In attendance were representatives of the associations mentioned above, persons responsible for vocational rehabilitation of those affected by spina bifida and hydrocephalus. Together they were involved in the development of support tools to enhance career opportunities for these people.

The workshop was structured into three distinct phases, with clearly defined objectives: critique, utopian and implementation. The participants were divided into two groups: that of people with spina bifida and hydrocephalus and the group of experts, of the professional social workers. Then, everyone had to criticize their colectivity for a non-fulfillment of one's dream or desire because of a lack of tolerance; in the utopian phase, illusions of a better world were created and in implementing phase these illusions lead to the development of practical ideas for the concept of professional support.

For me it was a great experience that made me return home in topshape and with a heart full of hopes and many plans for the future in mind. I had meet there exceptional people who

motivated me and understood my needs and I know I can rely on their help, no matter what. Now I'm not feeling lonely anymore knowing that somewhere in the world there are persons who face the same difficulties as me, but most important, that there are people who support our cause and wanna help us. Together we can and we'll fight for a brighter future.

I was amazed to notice that although we were coming from different countries and cultures, we are the same. We all face the same obstacles and prejudices, we all kinda have the same dreams. I was impressed to see that each and every participant had the right to reply, to improve one's remark, and everyone got involved and contributed with suggestions. It meant a lot to me that my ideas and those of my colleagues from A.R.S.B.H. have been heard and approved by people from five countries, especially because until now I felt ignored and excluded from society.

Discussions in working groups and plenary ended with conclusions which, in their essence, sought to change. They are summarized as follows:

1. Youths with spina bifida and hydrocephalus wish to have more support from job centers; family; colleagues; teachers; social workers; psychologists and people who understand their disability.
2. Obstacles often faced by people with spina bifida and hydrocephalus are:
 - driver licences hard to obtain;
 - finding right university courses or jobs;
 - acceptance;
 - study in regular schools;
 - none or very few wheelchair accessible buildings or public transportation.
3. An ideal world for people with spina bifida and hydrocephalus will be:
 - barrier free places all over the world;
 - work in the regular labour market;
 - study in regular schools;
 - driver licences easy to obtain;
 - people with and without handicap work and study together;
 - everybody to be treated equally;
 - 100% accessible houses for independent living, buildings, transport and streets;
 - spina bifida and hydrocephalus to be identified and cured before the child is born when the mom is pregnant;
 - everything to be wheelchair accessible;
 - more space to move around;
4. Those objectives would be possible if:
 - teachers would understand that everyone has their own style of learning;
 - employers would perform some personality tests to certify skills;
 - special training to employers in which they learn about what kind of problems involve spina bifida and hydrocephalus and how to behave with people who have this disease;
 - employers should be motivated enough to engage young people with spina bifida and hydrocephalus, including through a payment of harsh sanctions when he is treating with indifference a young patient with spina bifida and hydrocephalus;

- people with spina bifida and hydrocephalus would be taught how to discover their strengths and weaknesses and how to be aware that their weaknesses can be transformed in qualities anytime;
- at the work would be always available an assistant whom they can ask for help or questionate when they need; still, this supervizor must not to put pressure on them or frustrate them with continuous questions regarding their needs;
- people with spina bifida and hydrocephalus would be taught to accept themselves as they are before being accepted by others;

At all the meetings I've attended together with young people with spina bifida and hydrocephalus, we all have been waiting anxiously for knowledge activities and the evenings of social cohesion. The first evening I participated to a very interesting presentation centers from Germany and I tasted the chocolate and Swiss cheese. Unfortunately, we, from Romania and our coleagues from Northern Ireland did not understand correctly the tasks established by the organizers and we haven't brought any representative product for our country. But we promised that we will be even with that at ne next meeting will attend, when we will invite the character that we are most often asked - Dracula.

During the last evening of the future workshop, the participans selected the logo of the project. The highest number of positive votes received the logo designed by Pascal from REA College in the Netherlands. We like it very much; don't you?

With or without magic, we are committed to change the world to accept us. We don't want to be a burden for no one; we only fight for a normal life and the chance to have equal opportunities as the rest of the people. We want to change the laws, we want to eliminate the obstacles that are blocking our way to a normal life; we want to design and apply effective strategies and methods for integration at work and into society. We have no fault we were born that way and we do not blame anyone for this. But we blame the ignorance of the society and those who want to isolate us from to its periphery. We do not want that. We want to be equal in rights and obligations with everyone. Do you think we can do this? We, who have participated to this meeting said YES!

ADACADABRA!

The Participants of Asociatia Romana Spina Bifida si Hidrocefalie, RO