

TRAIL (TEENAGERS: THE ROAD WITH AUTISM TO INDEPENDENT LIVING) ERASMUS+ KA2 PROJECT

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Abstract

TRAIL is an ERASMUS funded project seeking to respond to gaps in support and funding which exist in meeting the needs of people with ASD, to lead independent lives. The project aims to research the different ways each Country supports teenagers and young people as they move into adulthood, to establish commonalities and differences, in order to define a common approach.

Objective: Identification and sharing of best practice for professionals in supporting and enabling young autistic people lead ordinary lives, to promote inclusion and equality.

Activities:

- Compare national plans for autism; share best practice and make recommendations that decision and policy makers can use.
- Identify frameworks and toolkits and provide a set of resources and competencies for professionals who work with young people can use to improve their lives.
- Transfer innovative methods and tools into different countries
- Create a website to host resources and to sustain collaboration between different stakeholders.

Products:

- Research study & survey to capture the social policies of the member Countries
- Survey for best practise, training needs and experience of professionals
- Creation of a Guide to Innovation, which will include technical and teaching materials

Consortium: **France:** SAMO, PASSEPORT EUROPE and APAJH38. **Greece:** REGIONAL DIRECTORATE THESSALY and INTERMEDIAKT. **Spain:** FORO TECNICO FORMACION. **UK:** THE NATIONAL AUTISTIC SOCIETY and **Sweden:** TP TEATERN.

In addition, the support of the Health French Ministry and Autism European Network has been secured

Keywords:

ASD teenagers, independent life, professional competencies, training, mobility, ECVET accreditation, interactive theatre, mobile units, best practices, ERASMUS+

1 THE INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that autism affects 3.3 million people in the European Union – about 1 person out of 150 is diagnosed with this disability in Europe. Because autism is a hidden disability, and a variety of approaches to diagnosis exist across Europe, many professionals are not prepared and do not have the skills, knowledge and experience to adequately support the needs of autistic teenagers and young people. Autism affects each person differently, and

the needs of people who have autism are different to those with a learning disability, mental health needs or other disabilities.

Specific efforts have been made through the provision of the various autism plans which exist across Europe, with regards to diagnosis, specialised education and access to employment. Despite this, as teenagers mature and move into adulthood and independence, a particularly critical phase, the plans are inadequate to support and fund this stage of life. Teenagers and young people who have autism go through the same developmental stages as everyone else, and without the right support to understand these changes, learn new skills, understand personal development and adapt to adulthood, skills and knowledge gained through childhood or at school, can be quickly lost. The biological changes which everyone goes through during adolescent are equally puzzling to understand for the autistic teenager. Without adequate support, the young person risks becoming increasingly isolated from their peers and society more widely, with all the risks this incurs. In the worst cases, teenagers and young people who have autism can become lost or forgotten, with no opportunities to socialise, work, undertake further education or participate in society.

Numerous initiatives, like toolkits and resources, are available in the USA for professionals, autistic teenagers and families, but are less commonly found in Europe.

With all this in mind, it is essential to identify what currently exists across Europe and across the various sectors, public and private, to be able to gather these and share them amongst professionals, (e.g. Education, Social) to help support the positive transition towards adulthood and an independent life. Sharing best practise will enable professionals to become aware of and give access to networks and existing practices for both training and support processes.

Ensuring teenagers who have autism are appropriately supported to transition to adulthood and independence will help ensure that the skills and knowledge gained through childhood and school are not lost, but built on in a way which is right for each person.

2 THE OBJECTIVES

2.1 General objective

TRAIL is a 2 years ERASMUS+ funded project in Key Action 2, collaboration for innovation, exchange of good practice between strategic partnerships for adult education. It aims to contribute to the identification and the implementation of best practice for professionals and of intervention frameworks that support the adolescence phase and access to ordinary life. The final objective is to make recommendations, based on the findings, to make recommendations for change National or European plans for autism.

2.2 Specific objectives

To give professionals access to a wider range of training options to enable them to better support teenagers through adolescence.

To consolidate the collaboration of the existing public and private networks.

To contribute to helping better approaches for the support of the transition phase for young adults to be created, by making recommendations which enable professionals and public authorities' & decision makers to co-develop the right framework and structures .

To identify research work or tools which facilitate and support individuals, in a way that is right for them, to access an independent life (for example, identifying criteria and indicators which demonstrate this, or identify indicators of autonomy).

To participate to the general awareness of this critical phase of adolescence and to the very special attention required in the transition to independent life in order to guarantee health and security of the young people concerned.

2.3 Operational objectives

To identify existing good practice, by researching examples from the States and in Canada for instance, “toolkits” and also practice or initiatives existing in Europe.

To transfer 3 innovative methods and tools already identified.

To set up and enrich professional communities, using the website and social media, and promote collaboration between different stakeholders who rarely work together (researchers, professionals, institutions, decision-makers and financiers).

To define the criteria and indicators that would help teenagers’ lead ordinary, independent adult lives.

To research the support options (and identify what these are) of the range of agencies, resources and financiers which need to be involved to enable young autistic people lead independent lives, within the partnership countries.

3 THE INNOVATION

TRAIL has three identified ways of transferring of innovation:

Interactive theatre and scriptwriting (Sweden – TP TEATERN) to personalize accompaniment and also to set up collaborative solutions between different stakeholders and teenagers themselves.

Mobile units (APAJH38 – Lyon) intervening directly during the independent life as a tailor-made support.

HIPE course (TOI Leonardo project 2012) which will be completed with the specificities of transition phase.

And the TRAIL innovation in itself is to set up dedicated communities and first experimentations with multi-disciplinary competencies. The specific place reserved to public authorities will give them the possibility to follow this experimentation enriched by the benchmark work undertaken in Europe. Autistic teenagers will have a supervised zone to express their expectations and their problems but also to benefit from exchanges with other teenagers and professionals.

4 THE CONSORTIUM

PAPILLONS BLANCS de Dunkerque – SAMO (France-promoter) is an association dealing with the accompaniment of people with all kinds of disabilities and more recently with young adults with autism.

PASSEPORT EUROPE (France) was the coordinator of HIPE4ASD and responsible for the valorization process.

APAJH38 (France) – a social organization implementing innovative support for autistic people, such as community based units for autistic people.

REGIONAL DIRECTORATE FROM THESSALY (Greece) will help teenagers for the transition from school to independent life as they work in close relationship with family associations.

INTERMEDIAKT (Greece) the expert for ICT based tools

FORO TECNICO DE FORMACION (Spain) a national certified training center for vocational training.

NATIONAL AUTISTIC SOCIETY (UK) is the leading UK charity for people with autism (including Asperger syndrome) and their families. For this project, leading on providing frameworks and surveys for professionals, gathering and analysing information for best practise and innovation

TP TEATERN will provide their expertise of interactive theater to support professional, youngsters and families.

Additional partners such as **French Ministry of Health** (Inter-ministry committee for handicap) and **European network of Resources centers for Autism** will support the project.

5 THE PARTICIPANTS

5.1 Direct beneficiaries

Professionals (who support or work with young adults, like social care support or teachers) will participate, by actively contributing to the identification of good practice, and also by working together with academics and researchers, for the cultural changes and adaptation of identified tools. They will also have access to the range of resources identified, so be able to adopt innovative approaches used by other Countries in their own work. Professionals will be vital to ensuring the practical implementation takes place, by using and assessing the impact of these tools, with the people they support. They will have the opportunity to benefit from increased access to a wider range of training options, and to accessing the HIPE project framework.

In addition, professionals will have the opportunity to link in with the TRAIL website and social media.

Autistic teenagers will be contacted, via project partners and their networks, and given the chance to express their needs & share ideas. They will also have the chance to participate in workshops as the project finds ways in each country to transfer learning through the active theatre and mobile unit. They will have the chance to experience this, provide feedback that will enable the examination between anticipated needs and actual need. This group will have the chance to be the link between research and development. They will be offered the chance to create their own profile in the form of an ePortfolio which can also be used for work, based on a competencies approach.

Theater companies are associated with the transfer of TP-TEATER and its methods, through training staff from partner organizations, who will then use this approach themselves as part of their future support activities.

Professionals from health and social care will have the option to utilize the resources gathered through this project, through the website, and adjust their practice to meet the needs of each young autistic adult they work with.

5.2 Indirect beneficiaries

Researchers, universities, foundations, observatories and resource centers linked to autism will be able to access the website and social media, to help identify useful or innovative practices, tools, methods or resources that meet the needs, or can be adapted or be adapted to meet the needs of adolescence.

Structures and experts from other countries that have set up networks and tools such as “toolkits” will be contacted during the project to ask them to share their experience on what has been set up. They will be shared through the website, and may be promoted through the social media channels.

Public authorities, will be able to see the progress of the research on national, regional and local policy in relation to autism plans. They may use the website to set up networks of stakeholders which they need or want to engage with.

Parents who are very much involved in the partner organizations and their networks, (associations, federations) to enable them to voice their experience and share this with the professionals who link in with the project.

6 THE IMPLEMENTATION

The project will be based on 4 pillars:

A complete environment (MOODLE open-source) which will support all the project activities : website with public access, social media, on-line questionnaires (survey, evaluation), group management, project management including an intranet, hosting of DDBB (databases created by FTF), hosting also the Resources which will be detected, on-line part of the HIPE4ASD course, project information and communication tools (downloadable) and finally the Guide of innovations.

A survey which will be disseminated via questionnaires

To get an overview of the European policies which relate to young adults transitioning into adulthood
To ask the professionals to express their development needs and the competencies that they need to better help those young adults

To research, collect and gather a range of initiatives and innovative practice, (courses, tools, methods, software, toolkit, websites, publications, research)

To collect sufficient information to provide a resource or toolkit for professionals (similar to what exists in Northern America)

To provide a set of recommendations and options for public authorities to help them to better define the best ways to support and organize support for these young adults.

Transfer of 3 innovative approaches, to help professionals explore how to develop individualized help, care and support which can be adapted to meet each teenager’s needs, as autism affects each person differently.

Interactive theater which is a Swedish expertise developed by TP-TEATER and which will be taught to a panel of social workers, educators, nurses and also other theater companies - the groups will then implement those techniques with colleagues and also with young adults themselves - scriptwriting will also be a transferred competence (a complete follow-up and evaluation process will be developed during 1 year)

Mobile units which is a French initiative selected as an innovative process by the Health authorities and which is developed by APAJH38 in Isère - this pilot service, already dedicated to persons with autism will be demonstrated during a mobility phase in situ.

The professionals will observe and then will explore the possibilities to test or to prepare similar units in their region.

HIPE4ASD course : a 4 days course which is the result of a previous LEONARDO Transfer of innovation 2012 has been developed and identified a best practice as it is suitable to any kind of professional whatever the level of qualification and whatever the sector

This course will be partly adapted on-line (knowledge part) and an additional day dedicated to the specific target group of teenagers will be developed with the same pedagogical approach.

Guide of Innovation which will gather all the results : comparative survey (synthesis), evidence and interviews of the participants to the TRAIL social web (searchers, social workers, educators, managers, teachers, trainers, ...), innovations which have been selected inside the resource center and any other topic contributing to help professionals to support the access of teenagers to independent life.

7 TRAINING ACTIVITIES (MOBILITY)

7.1 TP-TEATER interactive theater form and interactive scriptwriting

In order to provide a specific tool to professionals, a mobility session will take place in Sweden where TP has facilities to train people. The objective is to transfer the two methods they use so that professionals will have the option to organize tailor-made pedagogical support, in their own Country. After the course in TP, they will test their new competencies with a group of teenagers and with other professionals. This testing phase is done to include the final beneficiaries of the project (teenagers) and also to guarantee the deployment of the expertise. Two categories of professionals will be addressed: social workers and theater staff involved in the social field. APAJH38 will participate in this activity as the method seem very valuable for the way they support people.

7.2 APAJH38 mobile unit

A group of professionals from each country will have the opportunity to come in Lyon to visit the mobile unit in APAJH38 which has been selected as innovative project by the Health authorities. This visit will be organized as an observation, exchange of practices and experiences and will include the opportunity to check the potential for implementation in the partners' countries. After this session professionals will have the chance to test it in their country and feedback about the feasibility of using this in their country.

The service provided is relatively new, and the implementation is on-going. They have 40 places for persons and currently support 6 people.

7.3 HIPE4ASD course

This may take place as part of another mobility as a complement for professionals who are not directly either social workers in the field of autism or who has not already been trained in the HIPE project, so that they can share the same knowledge and know-how about autism.

8 THE EXPECTED IMPACT

8.1 For professionals

They will get access to a range of resources to use when supporting teenagers, this will include tools, methods and new ideas. They will also benefit through gaining access to new contacts, new networks and the opportunity to co-build the resource center and their own community. This approach is quite new in the social field and will open new options for other topics where saving time is important. The professionals from the social and education sectors need to network and to build capacity in order to meet new requirements. It is essential for them exchange experiences and practices as it is not possible for everyone to be an expert in everything. For example, autism affects everyone differently, and sharing best practice, innovative ideas and outcomes of working with other young people will help to build confidence and knowledge amongst professionals. New ideas, such as interactive theater will enable them to tailor their work and support to the teenagers by building the scenario or problem to solve, with colleagues, external partners and the youngsters themselves.

8.2 For organisations(social associations, education)

As it has been implemented in the HIPE project, the collaboration between social and educative sectors has proved very interesting, creating fruitful exchanges and bridges. Cross-fertilization is essential in the specific theme of transition as both education and social life are an essential aspect of adulthood, for the teenagers (and their families). Originations must work together in order to offer the best possible support and outcomes for young people. Links with the employment sector will also be vital to raise awareness among businesses of the strengths and opportunities which employing young autistic people can bring.

A very important impact will be new services for young people, the first ones being a personalized approach for each person (using knowledge learned through mobile unit and interactive theater). Other services will probably be discovered and they will be encouraged to share their methods and tools as part of the resources gathered through the website.

Training centers will also benefit from new courses to be included both in initial and continuous training. Some like HIPE are already in a process of validation and it will enable to continue this direct effect.

8.3 For public bodies

Across the partner countries, decision-makers and funders will have the ability to take advantage of the outputs of the project. The information gathered and analyzed through the surveys will be at the disposal of each Country, as will the innovation guide resources.

Decision makers will have up to date information which they can use to build and strengthen national, regional and local policy and guidance. TRAIL aims to provide cross sector information, which will be useful to look at the range of needs young autistic people have as they transition to adulthood and an independent life.