Less is more?
Rethinking resources for quality services
EPR Annual Conference 2019

Report

4th – 5th June 2019

Astangu Vocational Rehabilitation Centre, Astangu street 27,

Nordic Hotel Forum, viru valjak 3

Tallinn, Estonia

The beautiful city of Tallinn was the setting for the 2019 edition of the EPR Annual Conference, which saw the participation of around 90 people from 16 European countries.

This year's theme Less is more? Rethinking resources for quality services had the objective of highlighting the process of internal renewal within EPR but also of giving participants new stimuli and new tools to transform and improve the working process and their competences.

During the Opening Reception a small Ceremony was held to award the 2019 EPR Innovation Prize winner and runner-ups. Climbing - Achieving high goals together by Josefsheim Bigge (Germany) was this year winner, with a project aimed to promote the employability of cognitively impaired people at the sheltered workshops. Theotokos Foundation with Peer teaching in yoga practices on Empowerment and Self-regulation development and CRPG with Recuperação e Atualização de Competências Básicas – RAC-B on Supporting Customized Upskilling Pathways were also mentioned and awarded as runner-ups.

The entire Conference was facilitated by Sandra Lizioli, who led the ceremony and guided participants through the intense program of the two days.

The first morning opened with the greetings of the Estonian Minster of Social Affairs, Mr. Tanel Kiik, who recalled the progress made in Estonia in the context of social inclusion of people with disabilities and who stressed the need to continue on this path and not be satisfied with what has been achieved so far.

The opening greetings continued with the words of Frits Wicher, at his last Conference as President of EPR, who brought his feedback on the activities of the network and re-launched the need for EPR to seek new members, without forgetting the needs of the old ones.

Laura Jones, EPR's Secretary General, connected with Mr. Wicher's words and explained how EPR is changing its structure explaining the reforms that the secretariat and the netwotrk are putting in place to achieve better goals with less resources.

Kert Waldaru, director of Astangu Vocational Rehabilitation Centre then thanked for choosing Estonia as a venue for the Conference and recalled that the digitalisation of services, of which his nation is one of the models to follow, should never put in the background the one-on-one contact with people and instead must be its natural complementary element.

Hannaloore Taal, digital health specialist at Cognuse OÜ took then the stage with her speech "Harnessing the Power of Digitalisation in Healthcare and Rehabilitation".

How can we use digital technology in health care? She asked. How can we Empower people through digital solutions? As she stated, empowerment can be considered complete when people gain power over their lives and what is important for them. The focus has to be put on elements that a person thinks are important for him/her, not on what others think should be important. She also emphasised the different perception in digitalisation in health care compared to other fields. Health care is so conservative that we still discuss e-health or digital healthcare, but in the financial sector for example, there is no point in specifying digital banking anymore. We take it for granted because it is such a big part of our lives. Why can't it be the same with health care? Digital solutions and tools are good in supporting people to become more active, healthy and taking control over their lives.

This topic was then deepened in a panel discussion with Veronika Kaska (Head of the Personnel and Administrative Department at Astangu Vocational Rehabilitation Centre), Frank Sioen (Advocacy Officer at the European Network on Independent Living) and Rait Kuuse (Deputy Secretary General on social policy in the Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs).

In particular, these messages have been launched:
- We need to remember that digital resources are not positive or negative tout court, but to understand that their effectiveness depends on the more or less conscious and constructive use that can be made of them;
- It is important also to consider the long-term consequences that the adoption of digital tools in services may imply;
- It is important that policy makers ensure that digital resources help people without invading their privacy;
- Technology must be a tool, but the thinking and decision process must be done personally.

Kristof Das, lecturer-researcher at University College-Leuven Limburg (UCCL), gave then his speech entitled "New authority, a refreshing perspective on silence, presence, empowerment and supporting networks".
Mr Das offered interesting insights into the necessary change in the authority model. From an old model based on distance / blaming / shaming / punishment, where the relation is built on control, immediate reaction, top down approach, to a new model, based on self-control and escalation avoidance. In this new approach, the so-called PEN model (Presence, Empowerment, Net-Support) in which adults know how to react and maintain their role (We need to reclaim and reconstruct our authority), the concept of net-support is explained through a metaphor that describes it as a net rather than as a pyramid. Finally, the concept of reconciliation, started by the adult, shows the other that recovery / rehabilitation will always be a possibility. His reflections have resulted in some key messages sent to the public on how to handle conflict situations:

- "10 seconds of silence are more valuable than 10 minutes of chatter";
- "Keep on talking about the benefits instead of the challenges";
- "Beat the iron when it's cold". Wait until you are calm, because if you try to solve the issue when it is hot you will say things you will regret.

His speech was followed by a panel discussion with Jerónimo Sousa (Director of CRPG – Centro de Reabilitação Profissional de Gaia and previous EPR President) and Frank Sioen.

The discussion developed around the concepts of control and support in educational systems. These are some of the key point emerged:

- Flexibility is necessary for students to show their strengths;
- Investment in capacity building is needed and integrated education in schools and among schools required;
- We need to model and to train people, remembering that these verbs refer to very different actions, they are different. Modelling people helps them improve their skills independently, without being taught.

The morning ended with groups discussions on the meaning that the participants and their organisations gave to the concept of Less Is More / Rethinking Resources and on possible inspirations generated by the morning session.

In the afternoon, after the networking lunch, 4 workshops took place simultaneously. Each participant could choose which one to join in:

Workshop on Enable Employment, led by Roberto Zanon of EPR.
The aim of this workshop was to provide participants with good practices and projects already carried out that achieved good results in supporting the labour inclusion on PWD. Four good practice was presented and deepened through a dedicated discussion table during the workshop.

COMÈTE: A French network and model for professional integration, presented by Julie Mettling and Noémie Nickiel of Centre de Réadaptation de Mulhouse. The methodology developed by Comète France places the professional integration of clients as a priority, as well as medical treatments. This innovative approach is based on 4 key elements: Early Intervention, Interdisciplinarity, Comprehensiveness and Individualised support.

Basic, personal and social skills: a leverage to training and employment, presented by Ana Almeida of CRPG – Centro de Reabilitação Profissional de Gaia. For some people with disabilities the lack of basic and/or personal and social skills is preventing them to undertake successful experiences on training pathways and on job. Therefore, CRPG designed RAC-B, a multimodal approach that aims to support upskilling, while leveraging, in a second stage, personal and social skills.

Labour Inclusion of People with disability and people in social exclusion through new sources of Sustainable Employment, presented by Pablo Sanchez of Fundacion INTRAS. This project is based in the experience of a Crossborder Cooperation project implemented by 14 organisations from Spain and Portugal. The main aim of the project is to open new sources of employment for social exclusion: Accessible Tourism for people with disability; New models of employment linked to environmental activities; Services provision to elderly people in rural areas through social employment.

Research into Vocational Rehabilitation practices, presented by Timo Beemster of Heliomare. Research has shown that multi-domain vocational rehabilitation (VR) is beneficial in achieving sustainable levels of work participation in sick-listed workers with chronic musculoskeletal pain. However, the effect sizes reported are moderate. The presentation has drawn from a PhD thesis examining these research gaps.

Workshop on Live Independently, led by Alicia Gomez Campos of EPR,
The aim of the workshop was to highlight good practices that could support people with disabilities in their independent lives. Taking into consideration the person as a whole and how his rehabilitation, his intimacy, his interaction with digital tools could lead to independent living.

3 projects were presented for discussion:

Psychological wellbeing as a cornerstone of vocational rehabilitation and reintegration, by Sandra Guerreiro of CRPG – Centro de Reabilitação Professional de Gaia. Mental health issues are highly prevalent after an accident, brain injury or chronic illness, leading to disabilities, with several negative impacts on quality of life, as well as on the success of the persons' vocational rehabilitation and reintegration projects. A study on anxiety, depression and suicide risk assessment and intervention in a vocational rehabilitation context.

Social Skills and Sexual Education, by Aphrodite Korogiannaki of Theotokos Foundation. Working on developing social skills and sexual education for adolescents and young adults with developmental difficulties.
Group intervention based on discussing and practicing, usually coordinated by a Psychologist and a Social Worker, focused on the sensitive topics of relationship, proximity and intimacy. Every second year, Theotokos forms groups with teenagers/young adults, divided in men and women. The methodology is group discussion, written tasks, tables, videos (never real persons to prevent expectations and wrong impressions), and role playing games. Discussing differences between men and women (body, culture, expectations, roles etc.), personal identity, personal hygiene, feelings and where they see themselves in ten years.

Digital Speech Therapy Platform, by Hannalore Taal, of Cognuse OÜ. The presentation gave an overview of the progress of the digital speech therapy solution called Kõneravi, and shared experiences and challenges, as well as the lessons learnt in Estonia. Through this digital solution, speech therapists can create their own exercises, using already saved templates, and add photos and text in their own language. It can then be used to personalise exercise plans and keep track of clients, motivating the patients and knowing what they need to work on. For audio in the online platform though, the programme is struggling to work with PWD because, in some cases, the recognition of words might be harder and more difficult to achieve.

Workshop on Think Digital, led by Sandra Lizioli.

The objective of the workshop was to share good practice and to discuss the issue of digitalisation and the use of technology in the context of disability. During this workshop, 3 presentations where shared:

Creating learning modules using "Articulate Storyline" (e-learning - software) for applications using the ILIAS platform (learning management system) by Waldemar Striker of Mariaberg. His presentations showed how to create online learning modules that can be useful for teachers, underlining the importance of this kind of tools not only for professionals but for organisations too, for their relation with students and in case some teachers leave. During the discussion, however, the need for teachers to be supported during the creation of the digital content for the platform and for its subsequent use was reported, also taking into consideration the level of their digital skills.

A30 Program – Building staff digital capacity to design better services for a digital scenario by Sabina Lobato Lobato of ONCE Foundation. The program is based on a methodology where participants learn in their working environment, using digital tools and applying knowledge to projects that really create value for the organisation. Again, the need for teachers, staff and clients to be trained has been emphasised by participants during the discussion. Participants found also that these kind of programs are particularly useful in rural areas, even though the economic situation and low access to technology represent often an obstacle to the spread of these projects.

Ethics and security in the digital age by Veronika Kaska of Astangu Vocational Rehabilitation Centre.

This presentation analysed the risks associated with the misuse of data collected by companies and their use to redirect their business model and services, raising new ethical issues. In particular, sensitive data that online and accessible can be easily manipulated. The following discussion recalled that there are large differences in data security in different countries and that there is often no clarity as to who should be responsible for protecting customers. The potential of data sharing, however, should not be underestimated and understood only in negative terms, especially in the medical and rehabilitation field.

Workshop on Manage Smarter, led by Herma Veltman

Enough is more
Herma Veltman, Director, Rea College
Easycracy in management: enough is more and leads to better performance.
Participants will be challenged to change from "less is more" to "enough is more" from a management perspective. The workshop will start with an introduction to different management methods and approaches such as Scrum and Lean, the organization methodologies of Marie Kondo and on how to deal with organizations and social challenges in a world increasingly focused on profit.
Participants will then be invited to share their challenges and solutions, successes and failures in different areas: Business performance, quality of services, network and corporation, systems and IT, staff commitment and development.

The aim of the workshop is to facilitate mutual learning among the participants among the areas above and give ideas on how organisations might implement an Easycracy process in their organizations.

The second day of the Conference was opened by Laura Jones, EPR Secretary General, with her words on the theme of doing more with less, introducing the EPR secretariat staff and inviting all participants to share their thoughts about the direction and the priorities that EPR will have to take in the future.

To support the discussion on the theme of Rethinking Resources, participants were divided in groups according to the specific role they have in their organizations. They were asked to think about what they would start or stop doing in their everyday job, as a consequence to their participation to the Conference.
These are some of the main outcomes of the discussion:
- More use digital technology is needed to train staff and improved digital skills are necessary to have more effective services;
- It is important to raise public awareness, involve more mass media is a key element to attract investors, more networking, prioritise further our work;
- The use of SMS is important, allowing clients to find their own solutions and networks. use more e-learning tools to teach people skills, adopting better ways of communicating for long-distance services;
- Smart management, using both human and digital solutions will support managers to deal better with fast-changing tasks.

Participants in the group discussions were also invited to find key trends on which EPR should work this year and in the next ones.

These are some of the main topics emerged from the discussion:

- The relation between Computers and humans;

- A common position for EPR as a network on the different topics;

- Digitalisation, digital evolution. What are the new methodologies we should use (e-learning modules, programmes, practical exercises)?

- Social economy and lack of resources;

- Lack of staff in organizations;

- The challenges of an ageing population;

- The balance between control and more choices for the users;

- Develop further training courses and more mutual learning;

- EPR could find more funding for projects and mutual learning opportunities;

- EPR could connect its members more with EU policy, explaining it, presenting what is happening on EU level more often, and clarifying what policy processes and legislation means for its members.

- EPR could promote its members and introduce them more often to each other.

The last panel of the conference was held by three participants in the project The Future You(th) Want: Frank Sioen, Robbe Mertens (student at GTB) and Joel Phakla (student at ASTANGU). The project, funded by Erasmus Plus Key Action 3 and concluded last year, was summarized by the participants and inspired the following discussion.

These are the most important elements that emerged from the panel:

- PWD know what they want and need, but often others don't and just assume things. This reflection seemed particularly valid for policy makers, otherwise If they know the problems, why don't they make the changes?

- It is important for young PWD to plan more for their future, knowing what they want and be aware of their limitations;

- It is important for PWD to be heard in policymaking, being the ones that, more than any other, know the issues, challenges and often the solutions;

- There is the need to stop talking and start acting. That is why the project (TFYW) made a manifesto. It is important to keep on renewing it and bringing it to policymakers;

- It is important to talk to people and create awareness on disability, sometimes people are afraid to hire PWD or even talk to them. This can lead to shame for PWD and worse.

The topic of inclusive education and special schools raised many questions from the public, these reflections emerged:

- Often people attending special schools are labelled as less worth, unemployable, troubled or weird. These labels are wrong, and we need to fight these (also) through education;
- Many students want to achieve full inclusion in normal schools, but the teachers/schools aren't educated or funded sufficiently, leading young PWD to another disappointment/failure and forcing them to return to special needs schools;
- Inclusive education can't be properly inclusive when financial and resources support is lacking. This pushes all students through the same system, but one system does not fit all and this represents one of the main barriers;
- Positive publicity will help the promotion of special schools and building down barriers;
- The best way to reduce stigma is bringing everyone together. By doing so, when a person completes the school cycle, doesn't have to return to basic and experience segregation;
- Exchange information to de-mystify disability would make PWD everyday life easier. The project got people thinking, especially because it brought people from different sectors together, so it is important to follow that path;
- It is important for schools to take part in the ERASMUS projects, exchanging students with special needs between European countries and showing that PWD can function the same as everyone else.

The last intervention of the Conference was that of Jakob Rosin with his performance "The Story and Sound of Accessible Music: How one company transformed the world for blind musicians and producers". Through the use of digital tools and applications that he himself helped to adapt and improve, Jakob demonstrated how, even for a blind person, it is possible to compose and play music. Jakob has transformed his passion into a job, currently also dealing with a radio broadcast.

The closure of the Conference was entrusted to Laura Jones, Sabina Lobato Lobato (Director of Training and Employment, Operations and Transformation at Fondacion ONCE) and Veronika Kaska, (Head of the personnel and administrative department at Astangu Vocational Rehabilitation Centre). Some of the key words and elements that emerged during the Conference were remembered and the participants were greeted, giving an appointment to the next edition of the EPR Annual Conference.

Identified common interests for future collaborations:
- Study and implement solutions and projects on the relationship between elderly people and disability;
- Technology/digital tools and their use in VET, rehabilitation, service provision in general;
- Implement services and projects to support people in the autistic spectrum.

Policy recommendations:
- It is important that policy makers ensure that new digital resources help and support people with disabilities without invading their privacy. Clear and safe guidelines must be provided to avoid the possible danger intrinsic in such an epochal change, with implications in every component of personal and social life.

- It is important to consider the long-term consequences that the adoption of digital tools in services may imply;
- Investment in capacity building is needed and integrated education in schools and among schools required;
- Data sharing, also in medical and rehabilitation field, has an enormous potential. Adequate control on data flows must be supported and training on how to use it must be given to professionals in order to keep the whole process safe, both for service providers and clients/end users.
- Health care, as a very conservative field, needs to be supported in the digital transition. Other sectors have shown to be more reactive on this topic. Given the particularly delicate nature of the services offered by health care, this sector must be supported with ad hoc tools, which allow it to take advantage of the digital transformation, without distorting its contents and human based characteristics.
- Social economy is under strong pressure, both for the structural changes that the digital transformation implies, and for the legislative changes related to their economic subsistence that are affecting them. For this, the entire sector must be supported by adequate policies, well aware of service provision daily intervention and challenges.
- An increasingly aging population requires specific measures to fight the social exclusion that aging (especially with a disability) may imply. For this reason, policy should support service providers in investing in new projects and resources dedicated to this emerging target.
- It is important for people with disabilities, especially young ones, to be heard in policymaking, being the ones that, more than any other, know the issues, challenges and often the solutions for their own lives.

Participants were asked to rate the overall event from 1 (poor quality) to 5 (excellent). The average rating of the event was a 4.2 out of 5.

All presentations are available on the EPR website here.