

TOWARDS A BETTER SOCIETY

"It is important for every human being to have an influence on his/her daily life, to be a part of the neighbourhood and of society. It is important for every human being to make one's own decisions, to be listened to, and to be treated with respect."

(Inclusion International)

Many people with intellectual disabilities are not listened to, experience little control over their lives and feel they are not treated with respect. This is often the result of under-estimating their abilities. Many family members and professionals still see people with intellectual disabilities as children and do not allow them the freedom to take decisions, make mistakes and exercise some control over their lives.

Inclusion Europe believes that family members and professionals have a crucial role to play in giving persons with intellectual disabilities opportunities to express what they want and to take their own decisions. This will help them to build their own identity and thus people with intellectual disabilities can start to live a life of their own. They will become less dependent on parents, brothers, sisters, or professionals.

Inclusion Europe also believes that most people with intellectual disabilities have the ability to participate and make a contribution to society. It is in everyone's interest to develop their abilities in order not to miss their positive contributions to the diversity of our societies.

Among people with intellectual disabilities and their supporters, these efforts to speak up for oneself are called "self-advocacy".

SELF-ADVOCACY IN EUROPE

Self-advocacy groups of persons with intellectual disabilities exist today in almost all countries in Europe. The last years have seen the emergence of a new profession of supporters and facilitators who have developed the approaches and skills to assist the autonomous development of self-advocates. This shows how important the movement of self-advocacy has become in recent years.

Many national or local self-advocacy groups have joined the European Platform of Self-Advocates (EPSA). Inclusion Europe, the European Association of People with Intellectual Disabilities and their Families, supports it in its work.

The European Platform of Self-Advocates is lead by a Steering Group of five persons with intellectual disabilities. The platform:

- helps people with intellectual disabilities to decide more by themselves;
- tells other people about the abilities of people with intellectual disabilities;
- supports groups of self-advocates at local and national level;
- works for more accessible information and websites.

For more information on self-advocacy and on the European Platform of Self-Advocates please visit the website www.inclusion-europe.org/self-advocacy or write to the Self-advocacy Officer of Inclusion Europe at self-advocacy@inclusion-europe.org.

People with intellectual disabilities can decide more by themselves

How family members
and professionals can
promote self-advocacy



www.stop-discrimination.info



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With the support of the European Commission



Inclusion Europe



EPSA

HOW TO SUPPORT PERSONS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES IN DECISION-MAKING

"Self-advocacy is the process whereby disabled people are empowered through the acquisition of appropriate skills and with the support of appropriate facilitators. Self-advocacy empowers disabled people to represent themselves, to have choice and control over their own lives."

(Disabled Peoples' International - EU Committee)

To help persons with intellectual disabilities to become self-advocates, you should:

1. Ask them about their opinions

Persons with intellectual disabilities can have a different opinion than you would expect. Often, people have ideas about what is best for another person that this person does not share. Therefore you should always ask the persons first what they want.

2. Learn to listen to people with intellectual disabilities

In the course of their lives many people with intellectual disabilities have learned that their opinions did not count. Therefore, they are often careful in expressing themselves. They may also not have a clear idea about what they want or find it difficult to express it. Therefore, learning to listen carefully to what is said and how it is said is most crucial for family members and professionals who want to support self-advocacy.

3. Provide appropriate information and opportunities for expression

People with intellectual disabilities often lack appropriate information to take a real decision. They may not be able to read or may need a clear personal explanation of difficult concepts. The provision of information in an appropriate and understandable form is often one of the biggest challenges for self-advocacy.

4. Do not over-protect

It is natural and positive to protect other people from harm or from the negative consequences of bad decisions. But on the other side, people do not learn if they cannot make mistakes and feel the consequences. For family members and professionals it is important to treat people with intellectual disabilities with respect and neither over-protect them nor expose them to serious consequences of decisions which they could not anticipate.



5. Provide the necessary training

To assert one's self takes time and support. Training may be necessary to help people to develop this skill. Training in different skills and in inclusive settings is crucial for the development of a person throughout their lives.

6. Help to develop self-esteem

People with intellectual disabilities have often experienced many years of disrespect. As a consequence, their self-esteem may be low. All activities to strengthen their self-esteem as equal members of society are therefore important.

7. Ensure contacts with positive role models

Peers with intellectual disabilities who already have developed more independence and decision-making abilities are the best role models for other people with intellectual disabilities. It is important to facilitate contacts with such people.



8. Facilitate self-advocacy groups

Self-advocacy groups play an important role as places where people with intellectual disabilities can exchange their views and develop positions regarding issues that affect them as a group. Family members and professionals should support the creation and work of these groups, but be very careful not to influence the contents of their work. Self-advocacy groups are the most effective way in which people with intellectual disabilities can influence policy. They should exist in each service and at local, regional and national level.

"We can speak up for ourselves."

"I know what I want.

So why do people not listen to me?"

Members of the European Platform of Self-Advocates

