



TOOLKIT

“EMPOWERING ADULT EDUCATORS TO
ORGANISE ACTIVITIES WITH
PARENTS/GUARDIANS OF PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES”

TITLE:

Toolkit "Empowering adult educators to organise activities with parents/guardians of people with disabilities"

PROJECT:

"Encouraging independent living of persons with disabilities through empowerment of their parents and guardians", funded by the Nationale Agentur Bildung für Europa beim Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung, the German National Agency for the Erasmus+ (Adult education) programme.

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- LINK DMT SRL, Italy
- Fondazione Don Giovanni Zanandrea Onlus, Italy
- Company for professional rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities ITECCION, Serbia
- Centre for Non-formal education and Lifelong learning (CNELL), Serbia
- Centar za mladinski aktivizam CMA KRIK, North Macedonia
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2024



Table of Contents

ABOUT THE PROJECT	1
BACKGROUND OF THE TOOLKIT	3
PART 1: Concepts and Recommendations	4
1.1. Key relevant concepts in working on empowerment of families and individuals with disabilities	4
1.2. Recommendations for adult educators working with parents and guardians of persons with disabilities (PWDs).....	6
Assessment and planning	6
Cultural and emotional considerations	7
Support and community building	7
Skill development and empowerment	8
Family and community focus	8
Evaluation and improvement	9
1.3. Mentoring the beneficiaries (parents and guardians of persons with disabilities) as a follow-up after the workshops	11
PART 2: Workshops for adult educators when organising activities with parents/guardians of persons with disabilities (PWDs)	13
2.1. Identifying all aspects of independent living of their children with disabilities	13
2.2. Developing positive attitudes of parents/guardians towards their children with disabilities' independent living	16
2.3. Overcoming fears of parents/guardians in the process.....	19
2.4. How parents/guardians can support their children with disabilities in a progressive path of autonomy for independent living.....	22
2.5. How parents/guardians can contribute in encouraging safe and healthy socialisation activities and promoting intrapersonal relationships of PWDs	25
2.6. Organising a system of peer volunteer support within the group of parents/guardians of PWDs.....	27
2.7. (Digital) Tools to use in the process of mentorship of parents/guardians	30
2.8. Body-mind techniques which can support the parents/guardians overcoming their personal fears and doubts.....	33
2.9. Strategies and techniques which can support building self-confidence of parents/guardians in the process of building independent living of their children with disabilities	36
References	39

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Title of the project: “Encouraging independent living of persons with disabilities through empowerment of their parents and guardians”

People with disabilities still face difficulties in participating equally in different aspects of daily life. Their parents/guardians, on the other hand, lack the necessary skills to support their learning in life, including support to be more independent and able to experience appropriate participation, civic engagement, and integrity in the community. In addition to the education they receive and the potential support they could receive from institutions to be included in various activities in the community, they still depend on the willingness of their parents/guardians to accompany them. While parents/guardians are the first factor that needs support in understanding the importance of independence for their children with disabilities, their educators and the environment are the second factor that can contribute to positive changes and sustain the quality of life for young adults with disabilities. It is necessary for adult educators to address this issue and at the same time find an innovative response to support educational staff with new approaches, materials, and digital tools that will help improve the impact on solving this problem.

This project directly develops their skills by providing educators, institutions, and organisations with innovative and relevant data, tools, and educational materials to educate parents/guardians of people with disabilities. These intellectual achievements provide them with practical tools and activities to use for future programs, so the project increases the level of quality work, as well as inclusion and diversity in education and training, and its ability to address urgent and emerging issues.

How would we feel if we were not allowed to decide what and when to eat, what time to leave the house, or when to meet friends? We make these decisions all the time and take it for granted that we do it ourselves. People with disabilities living in institutions do not share this freedom. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities commits both the EU and all its member states to realise the right of persons with disabilities to live independently in the community, which includes achieving the deinstitutionalisation for those who reside in Institute settings. In Europe, still, residential facilities are the most common accommodation for people with disabilities when they lose their family caregivers.

Thinking about their children's future for a parent of a person with a disability means helping their children decide how to live, where to live, and who to live with when they no longer have their parents or family members beside them. It is important to begin this process as early as when the parents and family members of people with disabilities are still well and healthy and when they can help them begin to become independent. Addressing this issue at this stage will be beneficial for both parents and guardians, as well as for people with disabilities.

The path leading to the achievement of a life plan is far from simple for a parent. The aspects to be considered are housing, employment, legal, and financial, all amidst a context of fear and regulatory insecurity for parents/guardians. While these aspects are difficult to deal with at the time when parents/guardians are healthy and young, it is even more difficult and sometimes impossible for them in old age. For this reason, it is important that they are offered support and education to help their children achieve a certain level of independence. Likewise, adult educators should be supported with innovative methods developed for the empowerment in the education of parents/guardians of people with disabilities.

Our project addresses defined needs and aims to empower parents, guardians, caregivers, and adult educators to provide individualised support for people with disabilities to live independently.

Project goals:

- Empower parents and guardians in fostering the independent living of young adults with disabilities through the development of an inspiring, innovative and up-to-date manual and the development of an intensive course dedicated to them;
- Empowering our adult educators and improving our organisations' knowledge management in theory and practice to build skills of educators for independent living of (young) adults with disabilities through an innovative curriculum for educator training and a useful toolkit with workshops for beneficiaries.
- To share project results, exchange good practices at the local/national level, as well as further develop a quality strategic partnership among partners from 4 European countries with different realities regarding the opportunities available for adults with disabilities.

Project activities are:

- A1 – Project Management
- M1 – Kick-off meeting
- O1 – Handbook on independent living of (young) adults with disabilities
- O2 – Experiential Methodology of Intensive Mentorship Course for parents/guardians and their children with disabilities for independent living
- M2 – Second meeting
- O3 – Toolkit with workshops and recommendations useful to adult educators when organising activities with parents/guardians of people with disabilities (PWD)
- O4 – Curriculum for “Training of adult educators on how to support, educate and mentor parents/guardians of persons with disability for independent living of theirs”
- Local multiplying training courses
- E1, E2, E3 – National conferences in Italy, North Macedonia, Serbia
- E4 – International conference in Germany
- M4 – Final evaluation meeting

At the end of this project, the project partners, as well as other organisations and stakeholders, will have at their disposal more effective tools and more competent staff to engage in empowering and encouraging parents/guardians of (young) adults with disabilities for a more independent living.

BACKGROUND OF THE TOOLKIT

The toolkit “Empowering adult educators to organise activities with parents/guardians of people with disabilities” is envisioned as a resource material that will serve as a theoretical and conceptual resource for educators and trainers in adult education institutions and organisations. It aims supporting adult educators with a set of workshops and activities to organise with the beneficiaries - parents and guardians of persons with disabilities.

This toolkit serves as an inspiration for those organisations and institutions who seek to create meaningful connections and foster collaboration between educators and parents/guardians of people with disabilities. Programmes and educational materials are often designed with the purpose of educating people with disabilities or their educators in certain aspects, while parents/guardians who mostly spend time with their children with disabilities lack of proper education and approach towards different life situations.

The content of the toolkit is divided into two parts. It presents essential information such as key relevant concepts to educate and empower adult educators in working with parents/guardians of people with disabilities, continuing with practical recommendations on how to organise activities with these beneficiaries – parents and guardians of persons with disabilities. All these aspects are presented in the first part of the toolkit.

The second part of the toolkit is comprised of 9 workshops that adult educators can use in their work with parents/guardians of persons with disabilities. The design of the workshops is based on NFE principles and methodologies. Besides workshops, this part of the toolkit includes presentation of useful digital tools that adult educators can use for mentorship purposes with their beneficiaries, and relevant strategies and techniques that contribute to self-confidence building and overcoming fears and doubts. In specific, the second part of the toolkit consists of the following workshops and sections:

- Workshop 1: Identifying all aspects of independent living of their children with disabilities;
- Workshop 2: Developing positive attitudes of parents/guardians towards their children with disabilities’ independent living;
- Workshop 3: Overcoming fears of parents/guardians in the process;
- Workshop 4: How parents/guardians can support their children with disabilities in a progressive path of autonomy for independent living;
- Workshop 5: How parents/guardians can contribute in encouraging safe and healthy socialisation activities and promoting intrapersonal relationships of PWDs;
- Workshop 6: Organising a system of peer volunteer support within the group of parents/guardians of PWDs;
- Workshop 7: (Digital) Tools to use in the process of mentorship of parents/guardians;
- Workshop 8: Body-mind techniques which can support the parents/guardians overcoming their personal fears and doubts;
- Workshop 9: Strategies and techniques which can support building self-confidence of parents/guardians in the process of building independent living of their children with disabilities.

Overall, this toolkit is a comprehensive resource that provides adult educators with knowledge, skills, and practical tools necessary to educate and mentor, parents and guardians of persons with disabilities (PWDs) on their journey to enhance the lives of their children empowering and supporting them towards the quality independent living.

PART 1: Concepts and Recommendations

1.1. Key relevant concepts in working on empowerment of families and individuals with disabilities

When designing programmes that support independence of young adults with disabilities, it is crucial to involve their parents and guardians from the beginning. Often, those parents and guardians fear of the changes for their families and show certain resistance at first. Thus, it is important for adult educators and social workers to provide an inclusive setting when addressing those beneficiaries. Organising programmes, local workshops and activities is crucial in creating an inclusive and supportive environment for persons with disabilities and their parents/guardians. They offer a space for learning, sharing and personal growth. This non-formal approach is not just about developing knowledge and skills, but more about offering understanding and emotional support and an important step in building a community that values independence, inclusion and mutual support.

The key concepts outlined in this toolkit—such as independent living, adult education, mentorship, advocacy, and empowerment—serve as guiding principles in designing and conducting these programmes. These concepts are essential for adult educators and professionals working to support the independent living and inclusion of persons with disabilities. Workshops presented in the 2nd part of the Toolkit are as well developed and designed by following those concepts.

Concept title	Definition
Independent living	Independent living refers to the ability of individuals with disabilities to live, work, and participate in their communities with autonomy, self-determination, and full inclusion. It encompasses the skills, resources, and support necessary to lead a self-directed life.
Adult education	Adult education comprises organised learning activities and programmes designed for individuals beyond the traditional age of formal schooling. In the context of this toolkit, it focuses on educating and equipping adults—particularly parents and guardians—to support the independent living of people with disabilities.
Mentorship	Mentorship is a dynamic relationship in which an experienced and knowledgeable mentor provides supervision, guidance and knowledge to a less-experienced mentee. In the context of preparing the independent living of young adults with disabilities, mentorship plays a vital role in supporting parents and guardians to proactively contribute to their children's independent living.
Advocacy	Advocacy involves speaking up and taking action to promote and protect the rights, interests, and well-being of individuals or groups. In the context of parents and guardians of young adults with disabilities, it means speaking up for their children's rights within various settings, including educational, social, and community contexts.
Inclusion	Inclusion is the practice of ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, have the right to

	participate fully in society. It emphasises equal opportunities, access, and respect for diversity.
Support network	A support network is most commonly a group of individuals, organisations, and resources that provide emotional, practical, and informational support to parents and guardians in their efforts to promote the independent living of their children with disabilities.
Empowerment	Empowerment is the process of supporting individuals to become stronger and more confident to gain control over their lives, enabling them to make informed decisions and take actions to accomplish respective goals, take initiative, solve problems to enhance their own well-being but also the well-being of their families and surroundings.
Accessibility	Accessibility is the quality of being easily reached, entered or used by persons with disabilities. In the context of independent living, it refers to the design of products, environments and services to ensure they can be used by persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others. It includes physical accessibility, as well as accessible information and communication. Accessibility is one of the key aspects when working with persons with disabilities and their parents and guardians.
Individualised planning	Individualised planning means developing an individual plan with goals and actions tailored to the specific person's needs and abilities. It acknowledges that each person's journey towards independence is highly individualised.
Peer support	Peer support involves individuals with shared experiences providing emotional, informational, and practical assistance to one another. In the context of independent living, it fosters a sense of community and shared learning among parents and guardians.

1.2. Recommendations for adult educators working with parents and guardians of persons with disabilities (PWDs)

Organising activities with parents and guardians of persons with disabilities (PWDs) requires careful planning and consideration of their unique needs and circumstances. Besides organising activities, the adult educators have other tasks and professional involvement with this group. This involves their tasks on supporting parents/guardians towards the journey of lives of their children with disabilities and key activities they participate in. Therefore, it is essential for adult educators to be attentive and helpful when working with parents and guardians of persons with disabilities. There are various elements and suggestions that should be taken into consideration to facilitate the work of adult educators in this aspect. Some specific recommendations for adult educators to consider when working with parents and guardians of persons with disabilities are listed below, structured in certain categories.

Assessment and planning

When designing effective educational and mentorship programmes for parents and guardians of PWDs, educators should do a careful and thorough assessment and planning. By following a structured approach that includes needs assessment, clear communication, accessibility considerations, and flexible scheduling, educators can optimise the impact and inclusivity of their initiatives:

- When developing the programme and activities involving parents and guardians of PWDs, it is important to have as a starting point the assessment of needs, challenges and requirements of theirs (through surveys, interviews, or focus groups). This helps to identify areas where the support is most needed. Thus, the educators can focus on the defined needs and tailor the programme activities and prepare resources to directly address those needs. In that way, the developed programme activities become truly relevant and effective for the parents and guardians of PWDs.
- Educators should use clear and effective communication towards parents and guardians about the purpose and settings of each programme activity before its start. Thanks to this transparent and timely communication the participants get information in advance and they understand what they can expect to gain from the activities and how they can contribute to those. In this way, they can prepare fairly for their active participation and commitment.
- When planning activities that involve parents and guardians of PWDs, it is important to ensure that the venue and materials used in the activities are accessible to individuals with disabilities, as there might be activities in which parents and guardians will participate with their children with disabilities. Thus, it is important to plan the venue that is welcoming also towards the participants in wheelchairs. It is valuable to ensure the sign language interpreter if hearing impaired or deaf participants are expected. Printing materials and handouts should be provided in accessible formats including large prints, images and braille.
- Usually parents and guardians have diverse schedules of their family, work and free time. Thus, it is recommended to offer flexible scheduling options when planning timing of the activities. For this reason, educators should be open and available to schedule sessions also in the evenings or weekends, if some parents/guardians are not available during the working days due to their employment. If possible, it would be good also to offer online possibilities

for participants, as then more parents and guardians can adapt to such schedule with more options, participate and benefit from the programme.

Cultural and emotional considerations

When working with parents and guardians of PWDs, to foster trust and mutual respect, the educators should have high level of intercultural understanding and acceptance of diversity, which should be shown through their full respect for the diverse cultural backgrounds and beliefs of the parents and guardians of the young adults with disabilities. Educators should use examples, case studies and handouts that are relevant for the participants and their cultural backgrounds and beliefs. Also, educators should promote the intercultural learning and dialogue in a respectful manner and facilitate it in a quality way during the activities with the parents and guardians.

This will further contribute to the establishment of the inclusive environment during the activities, where educators should make sure that all participants feel comfortable expressing themselves without fear of judgement or discrimination.


Recognising the emotional challenges that parents and guardians may face in the process of supporting their children towards the independent living is essential for providing holistic support to them and increasing chances for quality independence of the PWDs. Educators should be responsive, empathetic and understanding to the emotional needs of participants and provide quality emotional support through active listening, validation of feelings, and offering resources such as counselling services or referrals to mental health professionals when needed.

Adult educators working with parents and guardians of PWDs, should be able to identify signs of emotional distress among their participants and provide appropriate interventions, like organising additional workshops on stress management, offering counselling sessions, or establishing and facilitating peer support groups. Providing these resources demonstrates a commitment to holistic well-being and contributes to the overall success of the programme.

Support and community building

Parents and guardians of PWDs quite often are burned-out or near that state. They are in the constant stress state as they are trying to be available and attentive to their children's needs constantly. Thus, they could benefit greatly from **peer support**. Adult educators working with parents and guardians for future independence of their children with disabilities, can positively influence creation of the respective peer support groups for their participants. They can encourage sharing and networking of the participants, the parents and guardians of PWDs, during the educational activities organised. Thus, the peer connections and support among participants could increase, which would further contribute to the development of the sense of community with their peers. This kind of community is very beneficial to the parents and guardians of PWDs, as they can relate to each other's challenges and successes, exchange valuable insights, empathy, and encouragement in a safe environment. Some of the important tasks of educators in building such a strong sense of community among their participants is in facilitating an inclusive and supportive environment where participants feel understood and supported, through methods of support groups, social gatherings, and collaborative projects.

Even though all parents and guardians of PWDs are under similar constant worry for their children, every parent or guardian's situation is unique and different. It is important that the adult educators recognise this and support every participant individually, their needs and circumstances. The



personalised approach is needed, even if organising group activities and peer support methods. When the situation asks for it, educators should offer additional individual activities, like mentoring sessions one-on-one and providing resources and support measures for each participant in respect of their specific challenges faced.

When possible, adult educators should invite guest speakers, experts for different areas relevant to our participants. Their knowledge and experiences can be highly beneficial for parents and guardians of PWDs. They can offer valuable insights and perspectives, practical tips, and encouragement. Direct interaction with experts allows participants to gain a deeper understanding of relevant topics and explore solutions to specific challenges they may encounter. Guest speakers also can provide inspiration and motivation through their good practice examples, empowering participants to advocate effectively for their children's needs.

In addition to organising programme activities themselves, the adult educators working with parents and guardians of PWDs for their independent living should also provide support to their participants through promoting connections with existing / ongoing local support networks, advocacy groups and community resources. If our participants engage with these community networks, groups and resources, they will get access to additional support services, information and opportunities for collaboration. It will also strengthen the broader community's awareness and responsiveness to the needs of families with disabilities.

Skill development and empowerment

Adult educators should organise practical workshops for parents and guardians of PWDs, to deal with their daily challenges and to be able to prepare themselves and their children with disabilities for independent living of theirs. The practical workshops should cover topics like: aspects of independent living of PWDs; parents/guardians' positive attitudes and overcoming fears for/of independent living of their children with disabilities; contribution of parents/guardians to the independent living of PWDs; peer support for the parents/guardians and the PWDs; Strategies, techniques and tools for parents/guardians in the process; etc. By organising such workshops for the parents and guardians, adult educators can empower them with useful resources and competences that they can apply during the process of supporting and encouraging their children with disabilities in their independent living progress.

Educators should empower and encourage parents and guardians of PWDs in setting realistic and achievable goals related to their children's path towards independent living. Educators play a key role in guiding participants to break down larger goals into manageable steps, ensuring that goals are attainable and aligned with their specific circumstances.

Family and community focus

The family and community focus in programmes supporting parents and guardians of children with disabilities is essential for fostering a supportive and empowering environment. This approach emphasises celebrating achievements and adopting a family-centred perspective that recognises the critical role of families in supporting individuals with disabilities.

While working with parents and guardians on their path to independent living of their children with disabilities, the educators are encouraged to recognise and celebrate every achievement of parents and guardians in the process. This increases the parents and guardians' well-being, morale,

confidence, motivation and resilience. While celebrating achievements of participants, the adult educators are reinforcing the importance of the parents and guardians' contributions and efforts in the process of building the independent living of their children with disabilities. This further contributes to increasing a positive mind-set of participants and guardians and encouraging their continued progress.

Adult educators Teachers should use a family-centred approach that puts families at the centre of supporting their children with disabilities on their path to independent living. This means understanding that families are very important for the well-being, growth and independence of the young adults with disabilities. For this reason, educators should work with whole families to make decisions and plans for their child's school, health and overall development towards the independent living. As mentors, educators should provide support not only to the parents and guardians of PWDs, but also to brothers, sisters and other respective close relatives and family members. Educators should provide them with the tools, knowledge and skills needed to contribute effectively to their children with disabilities' independent living.

Evaluation and improvement


Evaluation is a way for adult educators to see how well an educational and mentoring programme is working and what needs to be improved, to achieve the set objectives. By looking at the evaluation results, educators can recognise the impact of the activities on participants and adapt the coming activities accordingly. Evaluation results can also prove that the programme is working, as the parents and guardians who participate feel empowered for providing quality support to their children with disabilities in their independent living path.

When planning and organising the evaluation of the adult education programmes for parents and guardians of young adults with disabilities, educators should incorporate the following:

- Assessing the desired outcomes and goals of the programme, such as improved parental skills in empowering and facilitating PWDs for independence, their increased knowledge of available support services, enhanced emotional well-being, etc.
- Getting feedback from parents and guardians through surveys, interviews or focus groups to learn what they liked, what they didn't like, what was useful, what was not useful, what were the key learning points and what could be areas for further improvement.
- Examining the broader impact of the implemented educational and mentoring programme on the whole families (not only parents and guardians), while including changes in behaviour, attitudes and quality of life as a family and independently.
- Assessing how programme activities are implemented, including adherence to the programme plans and expected timelines, engagement levels of parents and guardians, as well as any problems/challenges faced during the programme implementation.
- Engaging stakeholders (e.g., participants' children with disabilities, family members, other relevant community members) in the evaluation process to ensure diverse perspectives are considered.

Based on the evaluation findings and participants' feedback, the educators should make necessary adjustments to improve the programme effectiveness, like:

- Modifying programme activities or content to better meet the needs of parents and guardians directly, and the needs of their children with disabilities indirectly.
- Addressing the problems/challenges identified through the programme evaluation, to ensure the success of the programme.

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- Enhancing communication strategies to increase engagement and participation of the parents and guardians.
 - Incorporating new resources or activities based on what has been identified as needed.
 - Implementing additional tailored and targeted empowerment of adult educators to improve the programme delivery, the quality of mentorship provided and the impact on participating parents and guardians of PWDs.

Evaluation and improvement should be viewed as an ongoing cycle rather than a one-time event. Adult educators should regularly revisit programme objectives, assess and monitor the progress towards goals, and adapt strategies based on the defined needs and feedback. Continuous improvement ensures that the programme remains helpful, relevant and effective over time.

1.3. Mentoring the beneficiaries (parents and guardians of persons with disabilities) as a follow-up after the workshops

Mentorship programmes are long term programmes dedicated to providing tailored support and guidance to parents and guardians who are starting the journey of promoting independent living for their children with disabilities. Due to the nature and specificity of the topic and target group, the mentorship programmes should be designed with a deep understanding of the unique challenges and aspirations of each family and offer a structured step-by-step approach to mentorship.

The goal of a mentorship programme is to provide parents and guardians with the needed knowledge and skills, as well as to give them the needed emotional support. Mentors gradually lead the parents/guardians on the path of their child's independent living by setting personalised goals, developing needed skills, and most importantly through peer interactions.

Mentorship process of beneficiaries (parents and guardians of persons with disabilities) as a follow-up after the workshops

An effective mentorship process follows a structured step-by-step process to ensure that parents and guardians receive the support and guidance they need to promote independent living for their children with disabilities. In the landscape of educational and support services, a significant number of mentorship programmes exist, each tailored to meet diverse needs and objectives, but most of all to foster personal growth. A detailed mentorship programme and process is presented below, in order to facilitate the pathway for parents and guardians in this process, as well as to provide them with needed tools, skills and attitudes to further advocate for and support their children's journey toward independent living.

Step 1: Orientation and needs assessment

First step is focused on orientation and needs assessment. This process should always start with 1 or a few orientation sessions that are introductory and serve as an opportunity to assess the needs of the mentees. In this step it is crucial that mentor and mentee start building a connection, discuss about the importance of trust building throughout the mentorship process, as well as discuss on the challenges, needs of parents and guardians. This will further help in creating objectives and have a more personalised mentorship programme through all the steps. It is also useful in identifying areas where parents and guardians need support, such as communication skills, managing daily living tasks, or developing emotional coping strategies.

Step 2: Goal setting

Setting clear, personalised and achievable goals is very important and serves as a guide in the journey to independent living. Mentor and mentee should define one to three main goals and then break them down to specific objectives and activities. Mentors have to make sure that the goals are realistic and measurable in order to allow parents/guardians to track progress in the set timeframe.

Step 3: Individualised support plan

In order to achieve the defined goals and objectives it is necessary to break them down to specific activities and tasks in a defined timeframe. This can be done through developing an individualised support plan which will be easy to follow by the parents/guardians and their children. Mentors can suggest to the mentees also setting milestones which represent indicators of progress. For example, a milestone can be the child successfully completing a specific independent living task for the first time, such as preparing a simple meal or using public transportation with assistance. These milestones, when achieved, should be celebrated, as they are strong motivators.

Step 4: Regular mentorship meetings

Mentors and mentees need to agree on how often they will meet and where. This should be done according to the needs and possibilities of the mentees, and it can vary over time. In the beginning it might be once a week or twice a month. Meetings can be in person, via phone calls or video call, all depending on the given circumstances. Occasionally, children of the mentees can be involved in the meetings. The goal of the meetings is to regularly review the individualised plans and progress, discuss challenges, setting priorities for the upcoming weeks, as well as provide emotional support to the mentees.

Step 5: Skill development

Skill development refers equally to the parents/guardians and their children. Depending on the needs, circumstances and type of disability, this can include use of assistive technologies, practical daily living skill, communication skill, etc. Gaining a new skill can be very motivating and empowering both for the parents/guardians and their children.

Step 6: Peer support and networking

In the journey to independent living emotional support and connecting with peers is an important segment. Mentors can organise group meetings or connect families which are facing similar challenges. It should be taken in account that sometimes just sharing your frustration and feeling of helplessness can bring a big relief. Beside that emotional support, practical advice and tips can be shared among mentees.

Step 7: Access and introduction to useful resources and information

Mentors should provide parents/guardians with useful materials and resources, such as practical guides, articles, information about and contacts in support services or local organisations relevant to their child's disability. This will further support them in gaining new knowledge and developing needed skills, but also encourage them to reach out to existing support services.

Step 8: Progress monitoring and adjustments

The mentor should review the progress of goals set and make necessary adjustments.

Monitoring the progress in achieving the set goals and objectives is crucial since it gives insights in whether the approach and strategies are giving results or need to be changed. In the beginning mentors need to lead the monitoring process in order to teach the mentees how they can do it themselves in the future.

Step 9: Empowerment and advocacy

In order not to overwhelm and overburden the mentees with tasks, mentors should make sure that they have developed and integrated the necessary skills to support their child in everyday tasks, before they introduce this step of developing the self-advocacy skill. It takes a lot of strength and determination to advocate for your child within the educational and community setting, so the mentors need to be sure that the mentees are ready for this step.

Step 10: Evaluation and feedback

Regular feedback is collected from both, mentors and mentees, to assess the effectiveness of the mentorship program. Feedback helps identify strengths and areas for improvement in the programme. The feedback will be essential in the after-mentorship process, when parents should be more independent in their journey. It is recommended that mentors have regular communication with parents to facilitate their tasks completion and the process towards their child's independence.

PART 2: Workshops for adult educators when organising activities with parents/guardians of persons with disabilities (PWDs)

2.1. Identifying all aspects of independent living of their children with disabilities

Workshop title: Identifying all aspects of independent living of their children with disabilities

Duration: 120 minutes

Background:

When discussing about the independence of people with disabilities (PWDs) there are different aspects to consider such as their social life, work life, school, and family. All these aspects comprise of different activities, dedication and interaction of different stakeholders/actors/persons who are part of the PWDs' life. For this reason, it is important that each of those aspects is discussed and covered thoroughly, while at the same time looking at the whole picture holistically. This workshop is designed to broaden parents' and guardians' understanding of what independent living really means for youth adults with disabilities. It is a vital step towards recognising and supporting the autonomy and the full potential of their children.

Aim of the workshop: To explore and discuss different aspects of independent living of young adults with disabilities and to highlight its significance for their parents and guardians.

Objectives:

- To create space for reflecting on the notion of autonomy;
- To discuss on the independent living aspects;
- To explore the aspects of social life, work, school and family life of people with disabilities;
- To create space for discussion on the importance of essential knowledge for parents of PWDs for autonomy.

Competences addressed:

- Personal, social and learning to learn competence;
- Analytical competences;
- Cooperation and communication;
- Citizenship competence;
- Literacy competence;
- Creative thinking;
- Teamwork.

Methodology and methods:

- Word association/Brainstorming;
- Work in pairs;
- Small group work – 4 corners method;
- Presentations;

- Discussion and Reflections.

Workshop flow:

I. Word association and definition: Independency and Adulthood (40 minutes)

The trainer/educators welcomes participants to the workshop. He/she starts the workshops with a small activity where participants should form pairs. Then, the trainer gives each person in the pair a paper which contains words related to either “Independency” or “Adulthood”. After a few minutes of analysing these words, they discuss with each other the meaning and merging their insights to have a more collective understanding.

The words given to each pair are:

- For Independency: Self-reliance, Autonomy, Empowerment, Freedom, Self-sufficiency, Choice, Responsibility, Initiative, Personal growth.
- For Adulthood: Maturity, Responsibility, Resilience, Stability, Self-awareness, Decision-making, Life skills, Financial independence, Civic engagement.

After 10-15 minutes of the pairs’ discussion, the pairs combine into groups of four, integrating their definitions into a broader context. Now in groups, they discuss the meaning of each word and why these words are under the Independency or Adulthood category. They have 10 minutes for this phase. Then, the educator instructs that the groups further merge into sets of eight. In this phase, they have to come up with a definition of their own for ‘Independency’ and ‘Adulthood’.

In the last phase, each group of eight members presents their consolidated definition to the rest of participants and educators. Then, the trainer/educator invites the groups of eight to merge and define altogether what independent living encompasses. This definition is written in the flipchart by the educator.

II. Independent aspects of living (50 minutes)

In the next activity, the educator introduces the Corners method where different corners in the working room represent a certain topic/cause. In this case the corners represent the aspects of independent living: Social, Work, School, and Family. Participants are briefed on how to navigate the discussions that are part of this activity.

Initially, participants join the corner that resonates most with their interest or experience. In these corners, they engage in thorough conversations about the specific independent living elements and understanding assigned to that aspect. They use 30 minutes for this group discussion and prepare a short presentation with key findings from their discussion and work as a group.


When all groups are ready, everyone joins the plenary and representatives from each corner share the findings of their discussions. The educator highlights how the aspects of independent living are interconnected to each other and are crucial to the concept of living.

III. Group discussion, Reflection and Closure (30 minutes)

The workshop continued with a discussion and reflection session facilitated by the educator. Participants are invited to discuss on the following questions:

- Where does autonomy stay within the covered aspects of independent living?
- Where can we create spaces for autonomy to grow?

After the discussion, the educator invites participants to use 3-5 minutes and reflect on the learning and experience they got during the workshop and how this is supportive to independency of their children with disabilities.



Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, pens, pencils, markers, flipchart and flipchart papers, cut small papers in two categories 'Independency' and 'Adulthood', set room with 4 different corners for the group work.

Background documents and further reading:

- Taddia, E., Bronzino, M., et al. (Eds.). (2023). Handbook on independent living of young adults with disabilities. Outreach Hannover e.V. <https://outreach-hannover.de/our-publications/>
- Milestones Autism Resources. (n.d.). Adult independent living skills. <https://www.milestones.org/map/adult-living-skills>

Recommendations for future adult educators multiplying this workshop:

- This workshop requires from educators to have a solid knowledge on the concepts covered and independency of PwDs. It is important that educators give practical examples during the activities and be competent to successfully facilitate the discussion sessions.
- During this workshop is important that educators create an inclusive, safe and welcoming space for participants so that they feel comfortable to express their opinions and concerns.

2.2. Developing positive attitudes of parents/guardians towards their children with disabilities' independent living

Workshop title: Developing positive attitudes of parents/guardians towards their children with disabilities' independent living

Duration: 110 minutes

Background:

Parents/guardians of children with disabilities very often tend to find themselves as inseparable from their children and guiding them in every aspect of life. This is due to the need for support of their children. However, in later stages of life, as they get older, they are unable to provide the needed support to their children. This has impact on both, the life of the children and of the parents/guardians. It is essential to focus on the independent living of people with disabilities and think about the "After Us" life project, so that people with disabilities can be able to support themselves in essential life activities while their parents/guardians are still active and can help them in this process of building their independence. This workshop is designed to broaden parents' and guardians' understanding on different concepts and life independency aspects to encourage their positive thinking and attitude towards their children's independent living.

Aim of the workshop: To create space for learning, discussion and reflection for developing positive attitudes of parents/guardians in transforming the lives of their children with disabilities towards independent living.

Objectives:

- To transform the perspective of parents/guardians from considering their children as "eternal child" to a "companion" through interactive activities and reflection;
- To understand the concept of companionship and its significance in one's life;
- To learn about the life project and its importance for young adults with disabilities;
- To further explore the life project and adulthood as essential processes towards PWDs' independent living.

Competences addressed:

- Personal, social and learning to learn competence;
- Analytical competences;
- Cooperation and communication;
- Citizenship competence;
- Literacy competence;
- Creative thinking;
- Critical thinking;
- Teamwork.

Methodology and methods:

- Reflection/visualisation;
- 24 hours of a person's life - Understanding the Life Project concept;
- Theoretical input;
- Reflection;
- Group discussion.

Workshop flow:

I. Exploring the concept of “companionship” (30 minutes)

The educator starts the workshop with the short introduction of the concept of “companionship”. He/she invites participants to think of a moment, captured in a photograph or a memory, where they felt that the companionship’ needs of both, parents/guardians and children, were met. Participants either draw an image or select a photo from their phone that symbolises companionship for them. They then spend time individually reflecting on the chosen image/memory, focusing on feelings of fulfilment and mutual support. After 10-15 minutes of this self-reflection the educator invites participants to form pairs and discuss the image/memory and emotions associated to it. The goal of this dialogue is to raise awareness about the value of companionship.

II. Understanding the “Life Project” – 24 hours of a person’s life (40 minutes)

The educator introduces to the participants the “Life project” concept. They are instructed that in this activity, they will go through different activities that lead to a clear understanding of this concept. Initially, they are invited to work individually and develop a list of daily activities for a person, including the timing, actions taken, and who is responsible for supporting these activities. They are given 15 minutes to do the list and then there is space for them to share the lists in front of the group. The sharing part lasts about 10 minutes. Then, the educator opens a short discussion session related to consider changes for more independence and the types of support needed to facilitate these changes. In specific, the educator asks the following questions:

- What are the similarities among the routines that you heard from others?
- Which can be the factors that impact these routines?
- Is there anything that you would change?
- What is the support you would like to receive for the independence of your children with disabilities?

III. Theoretical input: “Life Project and adulthood” (10 minutes)

The workshop continues with a short theoretical input by the trainer/educator on the topic of "Life Project and adulthood". The trainer/educator uses this session to connect the topic with the previous discussion activity and emphasise the balance between desires, expectations and the reality of independent living of persons with disabilities. The input is taken from the “Handbook on independent living of young adults with disabilities”, page 14.

IV. Reflection on desires vs. reality (10 minutes)


The trainer/educator invites the participants to reflect on their own desires and expectations for their children’s adulthood in general, and on the interaction of theirs (children with disabilities and their parents/guardians), in specific. The participating parents/guardians are instructed to also reflect on how these desired/expected scenarios align or conflict with the current reality of theirs. Participating parents and guardians are given 10 minutes for this reflection and are encouraged to write down some key words/notes for themselves.

V. Group discussion (20 minutes)

The next activity is a short discussion facilitated by the trainer/educator with the following question:

- What can be some practical steps you can take to associate your expectations with reality in supporting your child’s path to independence?

During this part of the session, the trainer/educator moderates the discussion and asks the relevant sub-questions towards the direction of providing an opportunity to the participating



parents/guardians to evoke and express their commitment to contributing to their child's independence. During this facilitated discussion, the trainer/educator fosters positive attitudes among the participants and identifies areas for growth and support in this process.

Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, pens, pencils, markers, flipchart and flipchart papers, post-its, laptop, projector.

Background documents and further reading:

- Taddia, E., Bronzino, M., et al. (Eds.). (2023). Handbook on independent living of young adults with disabilities. Outreach Hannover e.V. <https://outreach-hannover.de/our-publications/>
- Benefits of companion care for adults with Non-Physical Special needs. <https://www.redi-nurse.com/benefits-of-companion-care-for-adults-with-non-physical-special-needs>

Recommendations for future adult educators multiplying this workshop:

- For the "24 hours of a person's life" activity, the trainer/educator should provide an example that is helpful in guiding participants to visualise and articulate the daily routine of their children with disabilities better. The trainer/educator can also create a template and share it with participating parents/guardians, so they can fill it in and have it for the future.

2.3. Overcoming fears of parents/guardians in the process

Workshop title: Overcoming fears of parents/guardians in the process

Duration: 120 minutes

Background:

Raising a child is, in general, related to fears and challenges. Parents/guardians of children with disabilities have an extra load of them - concerns about safety, societal acceptance, or doubts about the readiness of their children to manage life's various demands, etc. This workshop focuses on these fears of parents/guardians. During this workshop, we will discuss and address these fears directly, acknowledge them and debate various strategies on overcoming them. The Fear Ladder method used in this workshop, is a progressive technique that helps participants rank their fears and work through them systematically. By addressing fears in a supportive group setting, parents and guardians could find solidarity and understanding of their peers, which is important for emotional resilience.

Aim of the workshop: To provide a supportive space for parents and guardians to articulate and manage their fears regarding the independent living of children with disabilities, thus emphasising their role in nurturing an environment of growth and self-reliance.

Objectives:

- To create space for participants to identify and express their specific fears concerning their children's journey towards independence;
- To discuss how certain fears can affect both the parents'/guardians' and children's approaches to independence;
- To create space to develop and share strategies for overcoming fears, thus enabling parents and guardians to become more supportive allies in their children's lives.

Competences addressed:

- Personal, social and learning to learn competence;
- Cooperation and communication;
- Literacy competence;
- Creative thinking;
- Critical thinking;
- Teamwork.

Methodology and methods:

- Fear Ladder method;
- Discussion.

Workshop flow:

I. Introduction (5 minutes)

The trainer/educator introduces participants to the workshop and its topic. Then, he/she introduces the 'Fear Ladder' method, highlighting its purpose in mapping and understanding fears related to the

child's independence. This method and activity is the key one for the workshop so it is very important to start the workshop with a proper introduction and explanation.

II. Fear Ladder I – Individual reflection (15 minutes)

The trainer/educator invites participating parents and guardians to use the next 15 minutes to individually reflect and write down their fears related with their child's journey towards independence. This reflection sets the stage for deeper exploration in the following steps of the session's activities.

III. Fear Ladder II – Fear listing (10 minutes)

In the second step of the Fear Ladder method, the trainer invites participants to share their listed fears with the whole group. The trainer/educator should make sure to have a safe and supportive environment and encourages participants to freely share their lists and actively listen to each other.

IV. Fear Ladder III – Discussion in pairs (20 minutes)

Next, participants are invited to choose one fear from their list and focus on that. In this step, the trainer/educator invites them to form pairs and discuss the chosen fear. The discussion is stimulated by asking the following questions:

- Is this chosen fear related to your expectations? If yes, how?
- Which concerns are behind this fear?

V. Fear Ladder IV – Overcoming fears: strategies to overcome fears (10 minutes)

After the discussion, participants have another task to do in pairs. Now, they have to discuss potential strategies for overcoming the chosen fear, based on personal experiences or suggestions from the trainer/educator. They use 10 minutes for this step.

VI. Fear Ladder V – Supporting independence amidst fears (20 minutes)

In the last step, participants are instructed to discuss in pairs how they can continue to support their child's independence while acknowledging their fears. They are instructed to think about practical steps and techniques that they can use at home. This discussion lasts 20 minutes.

VII. Group discussion and sharing (40 minutes)

After the last Fear Ladder step, participants join the plenary to share key outcomes from their work in pairs. The educator facilitates the process of sharing. Then, participants are invited to share and discuss specific steps/actions to support their child's independence while managing their own fears. While they give ideas about this, the educator writes them on the flipchart paper.

The workshop ends with a wrap up by the trainer/educator on the topic while reminding participants that sharing and addressing fears is an ongoing process, and that they are encouraged to seek support from the group or professionals if needed.


Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, pens, pencils, markers, flipchart and flipchart papers, post-its, laptop, projector.

Background documents and further reading:

- Taddia, E., Bronzino, M., et al. (Eds.). (2023). Handbook on independent living of young adults with disabilities. Outreach Hannover e.V. <https://outreach-hannover.de/our-publications/>

Recommendations for future adult educators multiplying this workshop:

- This workshop is designed in a way that requires supportive and non-judgmental atmosphere where participants feel comfortable to share personal concerns. The trainer/educator should



mention this aspect at the beginning and during the workshop, and should be attentive throughout each activity.

- It is important that trainer/educator have a list of guiding questions that can help participants to reflect on their fears and understand their source throughout Fear Ladder steps.

2.4. How parents/guardians can support their children with disabilities in a progressive path of autonomy for independent living

Workshop title: How parents/guardians can support their children with disabilities in a progressive path of autonomy for independent living

Duration: 160 minutes

Background:

Being a parent/guardian to a child / young adult with disabilities brings specific worries. One of them is facing the frightening question of 'What happens after us?' It is a concern that touches on the aspects of care, independence and quality of life that their children will have in the future. This workshop focuses on these concerns by introducing the concept of progressive autonomy. The progressive autonomy is an approach that emphasises a gradual transition towards independence for young people with disabilities. Through this workshop, participating parents and guardians of young adults with disabilities will explore different methods and strategies that can help them and their children. The main aim of the workshops is to provide parents/guardians with both peace of mind and practical approaches for supporting their child's journey to independence.

Aim of the workshop: To equip parents and guardians with strategies and information for supporting their children with disabilities in developing progressive autonomy, as well as to focus on long-term planning and the transition towards independent living.

Objectives:

- To educate participants about the 'After Us' concept and emphasise the importance of long-term independence planning for children with disabilities;
- To identify and discuss effective strategies that help parents/guardians gradually introduce their young adults with disabilities to independent tasks and responsibilities;
- To explore the types of support networks available and discuss how these can be developed or strengthened to support young adults with disabilities in their journey towards independence;
- To create a safe space for discussion and support among parents and guardians of children with disabilities.

Competences addressed:

- Personal, social and learning to learn competence;
- Analytical competences;
- Cooperation and communication;
- Citizenship competence.

Methodology and methods:

- Brainstorming;
- Input;
- World café;
- Presentations and Discussion.

Workshop flow:

I. Introduction to the workshop and the topic (15 minutes)

The adult educator welcomes participating parents and guardians of children with disabilities to the workshop and introduces them to the topic. Then, he/she introduces the concept of progressive autonomy, emphasising the gradual and supportive transition of persons with disabilities (PWDs) towards independent living. The educator then asks participants why this is crucial for both the well-being of the children and the peace of mind for the parents/guardians. Participants share their thoughts. The educator then highlights the key words mentioned.

II. Brainstorming: the 'After Us' concept (15 minutes)

After the introduction, the trainer/educator opens a brainstorming session. He/she invites participants to share their opinions and understanding of the “After Us” concept. The key words and inputs are written on a flipchart paper by the trainer/educator. The activity lasts approximately 15 minutes.

III. Input: the 'After Us' concept (10 minutes)

The trainer/educator uses the next 10 minutes for a short input to introduce the “After us” concept while reflecting on the key words written on the flipchart paper from the brainstorming session. He/she emphasises that the concept focuses on planning for the continued independence and well-being of children with disabilities after the parents/guardians are no longer able to support them as they used to. The input and presentation of this session is based on the description given in the “Handbook on independent living of young adults with disabilities”.

IV. World café: How can we support our children with disabilities in a progressive path of autonomy for independent living (60 minutes)


The educator introduces the World Café method for working in this activity in small groups. Participants are informed and instructed that in this activity they will join an initial group, and then will rotate among several stations, each hosted by a different facilitator or knowledgeable participant who remains at the table to tie together the discussions as a host. Participants are divided into 4 small groups. Each group has a topic/question to cover such as:

- Group 1: What can be potential effective strategies to help parents/guardians to introduce their children to independent tasks and responsibilities?
- Group 2: In what ways can we address and soothe fears related to separation and independence, including the perspective of the child and the parent/guardian?
- Group 3: Do we know what kind of support networks are available or can be developed? How do we involve our children with disabilities in the process of building these networks?
- Group 4: What are some key emotional supports that parents/guardians can provide during this transition of independent living?

Groups use 15 minutes to contribute to the questions in their original groups. After 15 minutes, they rotate to the next table, while the host remains in the original table. The following rounds last 10 minutes each. Then, in the fourth round, participants reach their original table, and use the next 15 minutes to summarise the input and contributions given by other participants. They need to prepare a short presentation.

V. Presentations and discussion (60 minutes)

After the World Café activity, each group uses 5 minutes to present the summary of input on their question. Each presentation is followed by a short Q&A session. This part of the workshop aims to turn theoretical ideas into practical actions that support progressive autonomy for PWDs.



Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, pens, pencils, markers, flipchart and flipchart papers, post-its, laptop, projector.

Background documents and further reading:

- Taddia, E., Bronzino, M., et al. (Eds.). (2023). Handbook on independent living of young adults with disabilities. Outreach Hannover e.V. <https://outreach-hannover.de/our-publications/>

Recommendations for future adult educators multiplying this workshop:

- For the World Café session, the educators should prepare posters or handouts and place them on each station/table. These can help stimulate discussion and make the abstract concepts more tangible.
- Educators can give more time for the World Café group presentations in the end, in case participants seem to like the discussion, or have more questions to ask for the groups.

2.5. How parents/guardians can contribute in encouraging safe and healthy socialisation activities and promoting intrapersonal relationships of PWDs

Workshop title: How parents/guardians can contribute in encouraging safe and healthy socialisation activities and promoting intrapersonal relationships of PWDs

Duration: 120 minutes

Background:

Just like anyone else, persons with disabilities (PWDs) need to socialise to personally grow and develop a sense of belonging. This process of developing a social network can be difficult for them and requires the support of their parents/guardians, especially in the early years. In this workshop, parents/guardians will learn how they can support their child's socialising process by considering the complex aspects of well-being: physical, material, emotional and social.

Aim of the workshop: To equip parents and guardians with the knowledge to actively support and encourage safe and healthy socialisation activities, as well as to promote strong intrapersonal relationships among children with disabilities by using the individual support plan and the bio-psycho-social model.

Objectives:

- To educate participants on the importance of individual support plans that address clinical, functional and personal objectives tailored to the unique needs of PWDs;
- To provide an understanding of the bio-psycho-social model, explaining how it integrates biological, psychological and social elements to support the overall well-being of PWDs;
- To explore and discuss the eight critical areas of the bio-psycho-social concept (physical, material, emotional, self-determination, personal development, interpersonal relationships, social inclusion and rights and empowerment).

Competences addressed:

- Personal, social and learning to learn competence;
- Analytical competences;
- Cooperation and communication;
- Critical thinking;
- Citizenship competence.

Methodology and methods:

- Input;
- Silent floor brainstorming;
- Discussion.

Workshop flow:

I. Individual support plan – Input (10 minutes)

The trainer/educator starts the workshop with a welcoming and introduction to the topic. After that, he/she presents the concept of Individual support plans, and the three key objectives of theirs:

clinical, functional, and personal. The trainer/educator explains the objectives in details and emphasises that the Individual support plan and objectives can be developed and accustomed to the needs of the person with disabilities.

II. Introducing the “Bio-Psycho-Social concept” – Input (20 minutes)

The workshop continues with an input of the adult educator on the bio-psycho-social model. The trainer/educator highlights that this is a holistic approach that can be used to assess and support the overall well-being of persons with disabilities (PWDs). Furthermore, participants are introduced with the integral factors of the bio-psycho-social model which are biological, psychological and social factors. These are considered critical in understanding and fostering healthy social interactions.

III. Silent floor brainstorming – exploring the Bio-Psycho-Social key areas (60 minutes)

For the next part, participants are going to explore the eight key areas of the bio-psycho-social model by using the silent brainstorming method. The trainer/educator explains how silent brainstorming method works and that all participants can give input based on their knowledge and thoughts to different areas.

The educator then places different materials (post-it notes, markers, large sheets of paper) in several corners/stations around the working room. Participants are invited to individually visit each paper in the next 30-40 minutes and silently write down their understanding, ideas and experiences related to each of the eight areas:

- Physical well-being;
- Material well-being;
- Emotional well-being;
- Self-determination;
- Personal development;
- Interpersonal relationships;
- Social inclusion;
- Rights and empowerment.

IV. Group discussion (30 minutes)

The last activity of the workshop consists of a group discussion on the input from the silent brainstorming session. Participants join the plenary and together with the trainer/educator they discuss on the input given in each paper corresponding to a certain bio-psycho-social model area.

Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, pens, pencils, markers, flipchart and flipchart papers, post-its, laptop, projector.

Background documents and further reading:

- Taddia, E., Bronzino, M., et al. (Eds.). (2023). Handbook on independent living of young adults with disabilities. Outreach Hannover e.V. <https://outreach-hannover.de/our-publications/>

Recommendations for future adult educators multiplying this workshop:

- Educators should prepare thoroughly for the session. They should be ready to explain and demonstrate the bio-psycho-social model in a manner that's both accessible and actionable. The educators should be able to show how the bio-psycho-social model intersects with everyday life and the specific improvements it can bring to socialisation and intrapersonal relationships of young adults with disabilities.

2.6. Organising a system of peer volunteer support within the group of parents/guardians of PWDs

Workshop title: Organising a system of peer volunteer support within the group of parents/guardians of PWDs

Duration: 110 minutes

Background:

All parents/guardians of children with disabilities need formal and informal support from others at times. Seeking and accepting support is good for them, as well as good for the child. Support from the family, friends, social workers or service providers is all valuable, but the help from fellow parents/guardians of children with disabilities is an especially important category. In this workshop, the concept “Source of power” will be introduced which will help participants to identify their existing knowledge, skills and experience. The workshop aims to motivate them to organise their own peer support system.

Aim of the workshop: To empower parents and guardians of PWDs by developing a structured peer volunteer support system that utilises the collective experiences, skills and networks within the group to enhance mutual support and advocacy.

Objectives:

- To create space for reflection and acknowledgment of the collective resources available within the group, including parenting experience, educational backgrounds and professional competences;
- To familiarise participants with the 'Sources of power' methodology to explore and utilise their personal and collective strengths in a supportive network;
- To develop communication strategies and group norms that promote an appreciative, inclusive and empowering environment for all participants;
- To create space for discussion on planning and implementing a sustainable peer volunteer support system, defining roles, responsibilities and mechanisms for ongoing support and interaction.

Competences addressed:

- Personal, social and learning to learn competence;
- Literacy competences;
- Analytical competences;
- Cooperation and communication;
- Teamwork;
- Critical thinking;
- Presentation skills.

Methodology and methods:

- Input;
- Sources of Power method;
- Discussion and Brainstorming.

Workshop flow:

I. Introduction to the workshop (10 minutes)

The trainer/educator starts the workshop with a welcoming and an introduction to the topic. He/she emphasises the objectives of the workshop, which are focused on the importance of peer support and creating a peer support system.

II. Sources of power I – Introduction and setting the rules (15 minutes)

The educator introduces the concept of 'Sources of power' that will be used to discover the participants' strengths. Participating parents and guardians are invited to set ground rules for the workshop, such as open communication, active listening and encouraging group learning. The educator then explains how to answer three key questions to identify the group's resources and strengths.

III. Sources of power II – Mapping peer power (35 minutes):

In the next activity, the trainer/educator invites participants to stand in a circle. Then, he/she puts 3 papers in the middle of the circle, each containing one question that each participant should answer. This is done in three steps.

Step 1: Age and parenting experience

Firstly, participants are asked to answer the question about their age and their experience as a parent, including for how many years they've been parents/guardians of children with disabilities. Then, the educator with participants altogether sum up these years to visualise the extensive experience present within the group. This step takes 10 minutes.

Step 2: Educational and professional background

In this step, each participant writes down their educational background and professional competences. This information is collected to highlight the diverse skills and knowledge within the group. The educator helps them remembering and identifying certain competences according to their role and involvement in the children's life activities. This lasts approximately 15 minutes.

Step 3: Support network size

The third step, containing the answer of the third question is when participants are invited to reflect and create a list of people in their support network. This list can consist of doctors, siblings, neighbours, etc. In the end, they calculate the number of supporters, continuing with a rank list of the support system. This last step lasts about 10 minutes.

IV. Sources of power III – Group discussion (30 minutes)

The educator invites participants to review the three steps and results achieved altogether as a group in the mapping process. Then, participants engage in a discussion about what it means to share their stories. The educator draws their attention to the values of sharing experiences, the benefits they can get in gaining new knowledge, creating new connections, relieving their emotions, etc.

V. Brainstorming: Establishing a peer volunteer support system (20 minutes)

After the activities, the trainer/educator invites participants to reflect on the discussion they had previously and the activities before that. Then, he/she opens a brainstorming session. Participants are asked to share their ideas how to formally organise a peer volunteer support system, including the roles, responsibilities, meetings, methods/tools of communication that are more suitable for their group. The trainer/educator writes on the flipchart paper key ideas and input given.

Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, pens, pencils, markers, flipchart and flipchart papers, post-its, laptop, projector.



Background documents and further reading:

- Taddia, E., Bronzino, M., et al. (Eds.). (2023). Handbook on independent living of young adults with disabilities. Outreach Hannover e.V. <https://outreach-hannover.de/our-publications/>
- Lee, E. (2023, April 20). Encouraging active participation. CPD Online College. <https://cpdonline.co.uk/knowledge-base/care/encouraging-active-participation/#:~:text=Physical%2C%20emotional%20or%20psychological%20barriers,the%20individual's%20right%20to%20privacy>

Recommendations for future adult educators multiplying this workshop:

- For the “Source of power” activity, the trainer should emphasise to participants the importance of recognising their experiences, education background and professional skills as they are valuable aspects on their journey as parents/guardians of persons with disabilities.

2.7. (Digital) Tools to use in the process of mentorship of parents/guardians

Workshop title: (Digital) Tools to use in the process of mentorship of parents/guardians

Duration: 150 minutes

Background:

Assistive technology helps to maintain or improve an individual's functioning related to cognition, communication, hearing, mobility, self-care and vision, thus enabling their health, well-being, inclusion and participation. Children with disabilities and their parents/guardians can benefit from improving access to assistive technology and learning how to efficiently use it in managing their daily routines. This workshop focuses on assistive technology available. During this workshop, participants will have the opportunity to explore various digital resources, such as safety devices, autonomy-enhancing tools and communication technologies.

Aim of the workshop: To equip parents and guardians of PWDs with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively utilise digital tools that enhance safety, promote autonomy and facilitate communication in the caregiving process.

Objectives:

- To introduce participating parents and guardians to a range of digital tools that can support the safety, autonomy and communication of their children with disabilities, ensuring they understand the functionality and application of each tool;
- To create space for exploring specific categories of digital tools (safety, autonomy, dialogue and communication), and to identify the advantages and characteristics of each selected tool;
- To foster skills in using communication and collaboration tools that facilitate more efficient management of caregiving tasks and improve interactions within the support network of persons with disabilities (PWDs).

Competences addressed:

- Digital competences;
- Literacy competences;
- Personal, social and learning to learn competence;
- Analytical competences;
- Cooperation and communication;
- Citizenship competence.

Methodology and methods:

- Input;
- Sharing in plenary;
- Work in small groups;
- Presentations and Discussion.

Workshop flow:

I. Introduction to the workshop (10 minutes)

The trainer/educator starts the workshop with a welcoming and introduction to the topic. After that, he/she presents the agenda and emphasises the utilisation of digital tools in supporting the mentorship process and the routines of parents/guardians and their children with disabilities.

II. Sharing in plenary: Initial assessment on current use of digital tools (30 minutes)

To better determine the needs of the group on digital literacy, the trainer/educator invites participating parents and guardians to share their knowledge and experience on using certain tools for caregiving, particularly focusing on safety, autonomy and communication. The trainer/educator then facilitates an open plenary discussion on the most common digital tools useful organising for communication and coordination in general, and especially in the lives of persons with disabilities and their families:

- Video conferencing tools for remote communication (like Skype, Zoom, Webex, etc.) - useful for virtual meetings and family connections;
- Messaging apps (like WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram, etc.) - useful for private and group chats, voice messages and file sharing;
- Voice-activated assistants (like Amazon Alexa, Google Assistant, Apple Siri) - useful for helping with daily tasks, providing information and for controlling smart home devices through voice commands;
- Tools for managing schedules and tasks (like Trello, Microsoft Teams, Google Calendar, Slack, etc.) - useful for organising schedules, managing tasks and collaborating with others, as well as for coordinating care and appointments.

III. Small group work: digital tools to use in the process of mentorship of parents/guardians of young adults with disabilities (60 minutes)

After getting familiar with the idea of the workshop, participants are divided into three small groups, each focusing on a different category of digital tools:

Group 1 – Safety tools:

- Nest Protect: A smart smoke and carbon monoxide detector that can send alerts to your phone and tell you where the danger is.
- Arlo Pro 3: A high-definition security camera system that offers weather-resistant cameras with colour night vision, two-way audio and smart home integration.

Group 2 – Autonomy tools:

- Whill Model Ci: An innovative electric wheelchair that offers superior manoeuvrability in tight spaces and a mobile app to control its settings and drive it remotely.
- OrCam MyEye: A wearable device that uses artificial intelligence to assist people who are visually impaired by reading text, recognising faces and identifying products.

Group 3 – Dialogue and Communication Tools:

- Amazon Echo Show: A smart display that connects to Alexa to provide video calling, messaging, streaming media and real-time information through voice commands.
- Ava: An app that provides real-time captioning for deaf and hard-of-hearing users, making conversations more accessible.

The trainer invites each group to explore the tools given, including the advantages and characteristics of the tools. They use laptops or tablets to do this task and prepare a presentation. The presentation should also include information on how these tools can be integrated into daily caregiving practices, their benefits and any potential challenges.

IV. Presentations and Discussion (50 minutes)

The trainer/educator invites groups to present their work. They are given 15 minutes to do their presentation and a short Q&A session takes place afterwards. After all groups presented their findings, the educator starts a discussion about integrating these digital tools into participants' daily routines and asks the participants about their opinions regarding the presented tools.

Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, pens, pencils, markers, flipchart and flipchart papers, post-its, laptop/tablets, projector, internet connection.

Background documents and further reading:

- Taddia, E., Bronzino, M., et al. (Eds.). (2023). Handbook on independent living of young adults with disabilities. Outreach Hannover e.V. <https://outreach-hannover.de/our-publications/>
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Recommendations for future adult educators multiplying this workshop:

- Since the educators will know prior to the workshop which disabilities the children of the participating parents and guardians have, they should select assistive tools that are the most relevant ones for the group. Besides that, workshop organisers and educators should offer separate trainings on each category of assistive tools, so that participants can interact with the tools and directly understand the benefits of their use in their daily routines, as well as for the mentoring process.

2.8. Body-mind techniques which can support the parents/guardians overcoming their personal fears and doubts

Workshop title: Body-mind techniques which can support the parents/guardians overcoming their personal fears and doubts

Duration: 120 minutes

Background:

Parenting a child with disabilities is stressful and challenging in many different ways. Understanding and dealing with the stressors and actively contributing to your own well-being can and will reflect on the parenting approach. In this workshop, parents/guardians will have the opportunity to learn different body-mind techniques for managing and overcoming stressors. Another important step in fostering well-being is to become aware and understand one's own responses to stressors, which participants will, as well, explore during this workshop.

Aim of the workshop: To equip parents and guardians of persons with disabilities (PWDs) with body-mind techniques that enhance their emotional resilience to effectively manage personal fears and stress.

Objectives:

- To educate participants about the physiological and psychological benefits of controlled breathing exercises as a fundamental technique for managing stress and anxiety;
- To provide participants with hands-on practice in simple, effective breathing exercises that can be used daily to manage stress and promote calmness;
- To familiarise participants with different coping styles that can be used to manage stress and personal fears, including problem-focused, emotion-focused, avoidance and social support coping;
- To use self-reflection activity for helping participants to identify which coping styles they currently use and assess their effectiveness;
- To create space for sharing and discussing on the utilised styles among participants.

Competences addressed:

- Literacy competence;
- Personal, social and learning to learn competence;
- Self-reflection;
- Creative thinking;
- Critical thinking;
- Analytical competences;
- Cooperation and communication;
- Citizenship competence.

Methodology and methods:

- Input;
- Group sculpture activity;
- Breathing exercise;
- Guided self-reflection;
- Group discussion.

Workshop flow:

I. Introduction to the workshop and the topic (10 minutes)

The adult educator welcomes participants and introduces the workshop's focus on body-mind techniques to address personal fears and stress management. The importance of recognising and managing stress is emphasised as a crucial skill for caregiving.

II. Group sculpture activity (30 minutes)

The trainer/educator divides participants into small groups to do a short activity. Each group is composed of 2-3 members and asked to discuss in their group about what stresses them and how they react to situations when they are stressed. Then, depending on the outcome of their discussion, they are tasked to create a sculpture (by using their bodies and/or some available materials) that represents their discussion outcome. They have 20 minutes to do both tasks. Then, there are 10 minutes given for sculptures' exhibition.

III. Input and exercise: Essence of breathing (30 minutes)

For this next activity of the workshop, the educator needs to be prepared as he/she gives an input on breathing as a stress management technique. The input consists of at least the following elements:

- an overview of the breathing influence on the autonomic nervous system;
- how it affects the stress response and relaxation response;
- the physiological effects of deep breathing, including the decrease of cortisol levels and boost of blood oxygenation, which might lead to an immediate sense of calm.

After the input, the trainer/educator puts the theory into practice by guiding/facilitating a short breathing exercise of participating parents and guardians. This breathing exercise lasts about 1-2 minutes. It is done with the purpose for participants to experience the calming effect of controlled breathing. The exercise consists of the "4-7-8 technique" where the person inhales for 4 seconds, holds their breath for 7 seconds, and then exhales for 8 seconds. The trainer/educator encourages participants to close their eyes and focus on the breathing exercise to fully experience its impact.

After the exercise, the trainer/educator continues with the input on different coping styles of handling stress and personal fears. This input consists of descriptions of different styles, emphasising how they can be beneficial or not, depending on the situation. The coping styles that the trainer/educator includes in this input are:

- Problem-focused coping style - entails tackling the problem directly to reduce the stress (e.g. time management for workload stress).
- Emotion-focused coping style - entails managing emotions rather than managing the problem (e.g. using meditation to calm anxiety about an unchangeable situation).
- Avoidance coping style - entails evading the issue or stressor to prevent stress responses (e.g. procrastinating on a daunting task).
- Social support coping style - entails seeking emotional or tangible support from others.

IV. Guided self-reflection (20 minutes)

The next activity introduced by the trainer/educator is a guided self-reflection activity. The trainer/educator explains that the purpose of this activity is to reflect on the presented coping styles and on those which the participants use. Furthermore, they need to analyse whether the current coping style that they prefer using is the right one to effectively meet their needs and if this could need extra development. The trainer/ educator gives participants the following tasks:

- Think about a recent stressful situation and the coping style you used in that case.
- Reflect on how effective this style was in addressing both your stress and the situation.

They have 20 minutes for this self-reflection.

V. Group discussion (30 minutes)

After completing the self-reflection, the trainer/educator invites all participants to share their insights. During the discussion, the participating parents and guardians share their experiences and strategies that they use, which further creates a learning environment and peer support within the group at the workshop. During the discussion, the educator encourages participants to think about how they can apply new coping strategies in their daily life.

Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, pens, pencils, markers, flipchart and flipchart papers, post-its, laptop, projector.

Background documents and further reading:

- Taddia, E., Bronzino, M., et al. (Eds.). (2023). Handbook on independent living of young adults with disabilities. Outreach Hannover e.V. <https://outreach-hannover.de/our-publications/>
- The Contentment Foundation. (2020, December 8). Mindful Moment #2: five finger breathing [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKdApTxsDP0>

Recommendations for future adult educators multiplying this workshop:

- The trainers/educators should encourage and motivate participants to integrate the techniques learned into their daily routines. They can repeat the breathing exercise at the end of the workshop, too.
- The educators should focus on the practical, easy-to-learn breathing exercises and body-mind techniques that participants can immediately apply to manage stress in their daily lives.

2.9. Strategies and techniques which can support building self-confidence of parents/guardians in the process of building independent living of their children with disabilities

Workshop title: Strategies and techniques which can support building self-confidence of parents/guardians in the process of building independent living of their children with disabilities

Duration: 100 minutes

Background:

Supporting a child with disabilities on their path to independent living demands not only patience and resilience but also a strong sense of self-confidence of parents and guardians. This workshop's focus is strengthening the self-confidence of parents/guardians by integrating positive psychology practices into their daily routines. During the workshop, the participating parents and guardians will get a chance to practice gratitude and mindfulness to enhance own emotional well-being, through the practical exercises prepared and facilitated by the trainer/educator. The reflective activities within this workshop will allow participants to capture moments of presence and self-encouragement. The main take away of the workshop for the participants is the understanding that consistent use of these techniques helps both the parents/guardians and their children with disabilities.

Aim of the workshop: To increase the ability and willingness of participants, by providing the participating parents/guardians with effective strategies and techniques to build self-confidence to support their children's independence.

Objectives:

- To engage participants in exercises that foster gratefulness and help them recognise and appreciate the positive aspects of their caregiving journey;
- To provide space for creativity and self-expression through activities, allowing participants to articulate their current feelings and aspirations visually and emotionally;
- To create space for discussion on various confidence-building strategies, exploring how these can be integrated into daily life to support effective and positive parenting for PWDs.

Competences addressed:

- Personal, social and learning to learn competence;
- Self-reflection;
- Creative thinking;
- Critical thinking;
- Analytical competences;
- Cooperation and communication;
- Citizenship competence.

Methodology and methods:

- Reflection and input;
- Mindfulness – postcard creation activity;
- Presentations and discussion.

Workshop flow:

I. Introduction to the workshop (10 minutes)

The adult educator welcomes the participants and facilitates a short ice-breaking activity for the participants to get into a relaxed mood needed for quality implementation of this workshop. Then, the trainer/educator presents the purpose, the main idea and the key concepts of the workshop. He/she highlights the importance of self-confidence of parents and guardians in/for supporting independent living of their children / young adults with disabilities.

II. Practicing gratefulness – exercise (20 minutes)

The workshop continues with an exercise in practicing the gratefulness (one of the many possible practices for gaining/improving self-confidence). The trainer/educator instructs participants to reflect on their life journey with their child with disabilities and that they list aspects of their life and experiences with their child that they are grateful for. After 10-15 minutes of reflection, the trainer invites participants to share some of these aspects with the group and that they shortly discuss how focusing on positive aspects can enhance emotional well-being and confidence.

III. Practicing being in the moment – Mindfulness’ exercise (30 minutes)

The facilitator then introduces the concept of mindfulness to the participating parents and guardians. More specifically, he/she introduces the importance of being present and fully engaged in the current moment as a quality method/strategy for reducing anxiety about the future. The trainer/educator then gives instructions to the participants to design a postcard to themselves using magazines, cards and other craft materials. Through this activity, for the creation of these creative postcards, the participants are encouraged to think about one of the following two things:

- a moment or a feeling that they have experienced during the workshop and that they would want to remember; or
- a message of encouragement/inspiration to their future self.

Participants should get approximately 25 minutes for this activity of creating postcards.

IV. Presenting the postcards and discussion (40 minutes)

Lastly, the sharing of created postcards takes place. Participants are encouraged to share their created postcard and afterwards the trainer/educator opens a discussion in the plenary. The following questions are used for this facilitated discussion:

- Can you build confidence by starting with being grateful with your life and things/people that surround you? How can that be done?
- What techniques can you use daily to stay present and reduce anxiety about your child’s future?
- How can these practices/strategies improve your approach towards supporting your child’s independence more effectively?

The trainer/educator facilitates the discussion and ensures that each participant gets the opportunity to speak and share their thoughts and insights.

Materials needed: A4 and A3 papers, pens, pencils, markers, flipchart and flipchart papers, post-its, laptop, projector, magazines, cards and other craft materials.

Background documents and further reading:

- Taddia, E., Bronzino, M., et al. (Eds.). (2023). Handbook on independent living of young adults with disabilities. Outreach Hannover e.V. <https://outreach-hannover.de/our-publications/>
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Recommendations for future adult educators multiplying this workshop:

- The trainers/educators need to encourage and motivate participants to regularly use different reflective practices for building their self-confidence. It would be good that the educators prepare a list of those different reflective practices and shortly describe them to the participating parents and guardians. Some of the examples to take into consideration are journaling, mindful meditation, etc.

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PUBLISHER:

**O Outreach
H Hannover**



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.