



REPORT

On the dynamics of development and implementation of the project activities

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This report has the objective of presenting in brief the work, which the consortium carried out with the children and young people from the targeted locations in Bulgaria, Italy and the UK during the implementation of the VISION project.

As of February 2015 until June 2016 inclusive (17 months) were carried out a total of 112 meetings with children and young people, who were interested and willing to work in the sphere of drama techniques and approaches in order to consciously and subconsciously develop skills for verbal and physical expressiveness and communication.

- 30 in Sofia, where one meeting accounts for the meetings of both groups, when they were separate or for a single meeting with all children/young people
- 27 in Veliko Tarnovo, where each meeting involved all participants from the region
- 40 in Palermo, where one meeting accounts for interaction with one of the two age groups, into which the participants were divided¹
- 15 in the UK

Those, who were brave enough to work with the theatrical teams were 70 blind or visually impaired children and young people - 22 in Sofia, 13 in Veliko Tarnovo, 20 in Palermo and 15 in the UK. These numbers show the steady-goers, not those who came for one or two meetings and

¹ From March 2015 to December 2015 – group 1 - ten children (age 8 - 12) meeting on Tuesdays for two hours - 10 meetings with the first group (20 hours). Group 2 - ten young people (13 -19) meeting on Thursdays for three hours - 18 meetings with the second group (54 hours) in 2015. From January 2016 to May 2016, 12 meetings of two hours and a half (30 hours) took place on Thursdays, with the group of youths and some of the really devoted children.



due to some reason decided to drop out. We need to make this statement, because due to the broad outreach to the local visually impaired communities of the school for v.i. children in Sofia, UCAN Productions in Wales and the Institute for the blind in Palermo, the visually impaired people who were in touch with the project represent a much larger group. UCAN productions for example has an outreach of 259 v.i. children and young people who were involved during the workshops conducted in various locations throughout the UK.

The meetings in **Sofia** were taking place at the school for v.i. children "Louis Braille", in a dedicated game-room. All the meetings, except the last few ones for 2016 as well as those related to the dance process, organized by Ina Gerginova, took place on Fridays, because the school agenda allowed it. Most of the time the children were separated into two groups – not just because they were too many, but also a part of them were not staying at the school dormitory, but were being taken home by a regular school bus, leaving at 15:30. Thus, we were meeting group one from 13:30 till 15:30, and with group two – from 16:00 till 18:00. At the mere end of the school year – in June – our meetings transferred to the school-hall, so that the children would get to know the area of the stage and to practice approaching and navigating it. The meetings were facilitated by Tsveta Baliyska, Ina Gerginova, Konstantin Kuchev, Aleksandar Evtimov and Zornitsa Staneva with the support of members of the school staff.

The meetings in **Veliko Tarnovo** took place on the premises of the children's center of the Association "Hope for all", as well as at a small local theatre hall, and were carried out by Rositsa Todorova (all meetings) and Veselin Vasilev and Margarita Marinova from "Theatre Vesel" (the last 12 meetings) .

The meetings in **Palermo** took place on the premises of the Institute for the blind in Palermo and were carried out by Stefania Vitale and Casimiro Alaimo. From March 2015 to December 2015 a group of 20 people joined the Italian team to discover the world of theatre games, exercises and exploration of the self. The group was divided into two smaller groups, basically because of the age difference. We worked with ten children (age 8 - 12) on Tuesdays for two hours and with ten young people (13 -19) on Thursdays for three hours. We had 10 meetings with the first group (20 hours) and 18 meetings with the second group (54 hours) in 2015. For most Italian participants this was their very first approach with drama and they were eager to start, but they also felt shy and insecure. VISION meetings had the objective to work on self-confidence and self-esteem and soon became every participants' favorite activities. After December 2015 it was difficult for the group of ten children to continue, but those of them, who really, really wanted to continue, decided to join the group of young people on Thursdays. From January 2016 to May 2016, 12 meetings of two hours and a half (30 hours) took place.

The meetings in **the UK** took place in several different locations due to the expansion of the territory and the v.i. group. The meetings were taking place at the OPTOM in Cardiff, Wales at the RNC of the Blind in Hereford, England as well as at the premises of the association of parents of visually impaired children and young people - VICTA – in Milton Keynes, England. During the project period 15 meetings with a large group of visually impaired young people took place



under the facilitation of prominent UCAN drama trainers. The national report provided by the partner holds a bouquet of inspired comments and evaluations from workshop participants, proving the efficiency of the exercises used.

The project evolved in **Luxembourg** in a direction different from the initially envisaged one. This was due to the lack of collaboration on the side of the local institute for the blind, which stated that the local v.i. children and young people are too busy already and have no possibility to join a new initiative. This misfortune however did not discourage the local partner, which recognized the amazing potential and importance of VISION. With support from the entire partnership and mainly the FDCBPSC in the face of Claudio Ingoglia and UCAN Productions in the face of Jane Latham, Megan John and Mared Jarman, Daniela Maniscalco from Societa Dante Alighieri in Luxembourg organized five local workshops for a total of 62 children. These workshops took place on the premises of the partner organization and the European school in Luxembourg and were led by visually impaired facilitators – Megan and Mared. These workshops turned out to be unforgettable manifestations of the strength of human spirit and will and left memorable impressions on both the children and their parents, most of whom representatives of European institutions such as the EC and the European Parliament. Details concerning the events in Luxembourg are available in the report kindly provided by the responsible partner.

Considering that young people and children with impaired vision are in need of some extra safety measures especially when working in new environments and new people, here are the rules, which the project followed when interacting with the groups as well as when preparing the working environments.

Risk Assessment

Once the venue and participants had been identified a risk assessment is drawn up to ensure that all risks to all those attending had been identified and minimized.

Before organizing any activities with the Children, Young People or vulnerable adults every aspects of the potential participants' safety was taken into consideration. All those in direct contact with visually impaired young people must have successfully completed Visual Awareness Training. All volunteers were trained and supervised at all times.

The UCAN Productions national report holds the risk assessment of the building of the Institute of the visually impaired in Palermo, where all the activities during the common VISION week were about to take place.

It has been vital for the project that all staff and volunteers have previous training and have read and studied the safeguarding policies (the UCAN safeguarding policy is the one adopted and followed by the project partners). Before each workshop it is decided who will be the overall designated person responsible for the safety of all those attending and who people should go to in the case of an emergency or if they have any concerns about the participants welfare – these were the so called chaperons, people providing support to v.i. workshop participants in order for



the work with the others to continue uninterrupted. Chaperons were used both during the national/regional workshops as well as during the international workshops. When during one workshop session there are more than one facilitator the one who is leading takes the drama responsibilities, while the other/s take the chaperon responsibilities. In case a workshop was to be carried out by one drama expert only, a chaperon was automatically and obligatorily assigned to the activity.

Consent Forms for Workshops and for Travel to Palermo

In order to safely design and deliver a workshop it is vital to know as much about a potential participant as possible. In order to collect the information we need, we developed a consent form, which a parent/carer or guardian had to complete and sign.

Training the Volunteers

It has proved extremely useful for the partners to involve volunteers in all activities as they play an important role in helping the professional trainers keep the participants safe as well as in monitoring the workshop and the effects it has on all involved. As with all staff and arts trainers training in Visual Awareness has also been delivered to all volunteers.

Preparing for Workshops

Knowing the abilities, ages of participants in advance has been very helpful in the planning process. It is particularly helpful in making sure that all activities are age appropriate and the duration of the workshops suits the physical abilities of the participants.

Venue

When choosing a room or venue to hold a workshop for visually impaired young people it has been very important for us to consider access by public transport, how accessible the whole building is in terms of stairs, lifts and bathroom facilities. We also considered the acoustics of a workshop space, which is very important because of noise pollution. Thus for example other workshops being run close by or traffic noises have been found to be very disruptive and difficult for the participants. Where appropriate and with the assistance of visually impaired advisors we often mark potential hazards with high visibility/contrast tape. The lighting in a venue is also very important and probably one of the most difficult things to get right for all participants, because of the different kinds of visual impairments. For example while some of the participants may see much better in the dark, others find natural bright light more useful. Following the excellent example of UCAN, we all adopted the approach that when in doubt we should always ask the participants what works best for them, because they are the experts in their eye conditions.

During the meetings with the children, our objective was not to create actors out of them, even if some seem to be really tempted by the prospect and their talents would easily allow them to



make wonderful artists. The objective was, via theatrical techniques and exercises, to help them become more aware of themselves, of the environment that surrounds them, of the other people in this environment, of their skills, qualities, knowledge, talents interests, abilities and to teach them to use these resources and to express themselves verbally and physically with self-esteem and in the most confident way possible.

We shall not specify names here, but there were children within the groups, who came to the first meeting and then persisted being shy and unconfident also on a number of follow up meetings, but for whom we can now say that they have made great progress and have literally blossomed and achieved greater confidence and openness in communication. When we speak of openness we don't mean openness in communication with the teachers, tutors, facilitators or with the immediate environment, including the fellow students and friends. It is not about that. Because in those relations there is a background of multiannual companionship and acquaintance, deep sharing, perfect knowledge of the other. We speak about freedom of communication with the world beyond, which starts one step to the side from the school, from the bus, from home, from the goal-ball gym.

All participants achieved wonderful results, which the entire VISION team is very proud of. For some of them though the progress was more visible to us, because the contrast from the first meeting to the last one was more substantial and palpable.

Mentioning the team renders us all speechless, because the project is what it is thanks entirely to this mixture of children, artists, facilitators and educators, who create the magic together. Starting from the theatrical teams in the partner regions, the ever patient and supportive hosts in the school, the children's center, the department of optometry at Cardiff university, the institute in Palermo, the parents and carers of those involved participants who needed accompaniment in order to participate in the project activities, the experts from the "Louis Braille" school Braille print-house, who took care of all the Braille needs of children and project – we were all in a symbiosis that, at least for me, has never been witnessed before. Complementing each other, supporting each other whenever necessary and in the ways necessary, explaining to and learning from each other for one common goal – to create something useful for the children – we bore through the invisible walls barring communication and separating one human being from another.

Some of the most relevant **results** for the children, shared by project participants from all involved regions, are:

- strengthened confidence when formulating a statement or sharing their position with others, regardless whether the listeners are people they know or are new acquaintances;
- considerably improved language skills – they started using a larger vocabulary in their own language, as well as in EN, thanks to the exchange and activities which were led in a foreign language;



- they upgraded themselves to people with excellent listening skills – they learned that communication runs best and most efficiently if you wait and listen carefully to what the others have to share and then expect the same care and patience when your turn for sharing comes. They understood the difference between being silent during someone else's speech just because you are waiting for your turn to come, but not really hearing what they have to say, and being silent and attentive to the other's words, trying to understand their point;
- they started using their bodies in a much freer way – they move in a more confident way, they use gestures that bring them closer to those with normal vision;
- they gained access to an amazingly huge life-experience bank through the various stories and roles they played – this is invaluable life wisdom, which have been encoded in them consciously and subconsciously. Accessing and studying in their depth – emotions, reasons, manifestations, consequences, relationships, etc. – various every day situations supported and prepared them to some extent for the unlimited diversity of life. This inevitably enhances their empathy and teaches them to be nonjudgmental when communicating with others;
- they increased their confidence level and self-esteem and started to believe in themselves and their abilities to succeed, which is a considerable progress;
- the participants started taking moderate risks and ventures and discovered that they being braver than before opens new opportunities and chances for them, which had previously been considered impossible and out of reach.

Enormous gratitude to all who worked and will keep working with the visually impaired group. VISION is a magnificent base for further work and multiplication and, we sincerely hope, a life-changer for a great number of both visually impaired children and their families and the specialists who support them. Now we have even higher objectives – we would like to turn the leaders among the visually impaired young people into workshop facilitators. Let them add to their set one more precious skill, which would make them useful to other visually impaired children and young people, so that we all witness the expansion and manifestation of the amazing potential of theatre to empower the human being.

Flying on the invisible wings of theatre is what we have been doing with the children and young people since the moment we discovered each other.



For further reference and details you are kindly invited to read:

Report from the activities in Sofia, BG.

Report from the activities in Veliko Tarnovo, BG.

Report from the activities in Palermo, Italy.

Report from the activities in the UK.

Report from the activities in Luxembourg.

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