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Together
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Deliverable 4

Intellectual Disability Inclusion Advocacy Toolkit

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Who is this toolkit for?

The Parenting Together Advocacy Toolkit is targeting parent leaders and community educators that can use the tools for their own advocacy work towards the implementation of the PAT approach, a joyful inclusion approach focusing on the parents of children with intellectual disabilities, especially young ones. Using this toolkit they will be able to influence and convince decision makers at all levels of policy and practise with special focus on national and local level policy makers, school leaders and other leading practitioners, as well as labour market stakeholders in education and disability healthcare.

Introducing Parenting Together

The Parenting Together project’s main objective is to improve quality of life of people with intellectual disabilities (PWID) by empowering family members and especially parents of PWID, focusing on the age group 0-7, and offering parents and professionals an awareness of how better to support the needs of children and young adults with ID. The consortium aims to achieve this goal by four main deliverables produced in the scope of the project:

1. An e-learning platform that provides interactive educational modules that cover the main areas identified that families of PWID need training, awareness raising and/or attitude change, such as: Road to getting a diagnosis, Collaboration with professionals and development at home, Inclusive and specialised education choices, Universal design, Family and community inclusion and Parent well-being. The training is available in English, Greek, Hungarian and Portuguese.
2. A case management system handbook targeting professionals.
3. Training and mentoring framework for parent and peer advocates to inform and involve teachers and parents of typically developing children in efforts to promote more inclusive practices. The training toolkit with the title “Better together” is addressed to parents of children without special educational needs and disabilities and teachers in order to change negative attitudes and inform them about the benefits of coeducation.

What is advocacy and why is it important?

(Policy) advocacy is the process of negotiating and mediating a dialogue through which influential networks, opinion leaders, and, ultimately, decision makers take ownership of your ideas, evidence, and proposals, and subsequently act upon them (Eóin Young & Lisa Quinn, 2012).

Anyone can be an advocate, all it takes is to be wanting to achieve change in society in general, but more typically in a specific field or area. Social, educational and healthcare systems have often been failing parents in all countries of the world, but it doesn’t mean that you need to accept it. Advocacy is a way to fight for change by offering better alternatives to decision makers.

It is not enough to have strong arguments, and well working evidence-based methods, you will also need to find a way to reach the decision makers, and convince them to act.

How to plan your advocacy activities?

Advocacy is an activity that you will need to plan yourself by customising it to your own political, social and financial reality (see SWOT analysis below). You will need to define who you will need to address, position your message in the current reality, and define what can the “selling point” be (see Stakeholder mapping below).

Advocacy needs to be planned in a SMART way. SMART is an acronym that stands for

Specific - you need to define what exactly want to achieve
Measurable - you should be able to judge if you have achieved your goals fully or partially
Achievable - you must set realistic goals to avoid major disappointment
Relevant - invest money, effort and time in what really matters and what can result in better opportunities for children
Timed - you need to set a time-frame for your activities so that you can properly focus

International policy context

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

While the EU has not concluded the UNCRC, all the EU Member States have ratified the Convention. The UNCRC explicitly recognises the rights of children with disabilities under its Article 23. In addition, Article 2 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of disability and Article 3 calls for the best interests of the child to be at the heart of any decision affecting children, including those with disabilities. Articles 5 and 18 recognises the sole right, duties and obligations of parents for the upbringing of their children and obliges member states to provide support for parents to fulfil this role in forms they require. At EU level, Article 3 TEU defines the protection of the rights of the child as a European Union objective which requires to actively develop appropriate legislative or policy initiatives according to its competences.

UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD)

In December 2010, the European Union became a party to the CRPD. In doing so, the EU recognised the challenges persons with disabilities face in securing the fulfilment of their rights and assumed the responsibility for its implementation alongside Member States. The EU's responsibility towards the implementation of the UNCRC is of a different scale. Despite the lack of ratification by the EU, the UNCRC rights and principles guide the EU policies and action since the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) recognises the rights of the child as an EU objective.

The CRPD provides a legal framework for the protection of the rights of children with disabilities as particularly vulnerable EU citizens. Its Article 7 is specifically devoted to children with disabilities and requires Member States to take all necessary measures to ensure that children with disabilities can fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms on equal footing with other children. These obligations relate, inter alia, to the right to education and the respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities, the right to family life and care within the community, the right to health and access to goods and services including leisure activities. In addition, Article 16 requires States Parties to take all necessary measures to protect children with disabilities from exploitation and abuse. The EU, together with Member States in areas of shared competence or national competence, is bound by the CRPD obligations.

Rethinking education

The UNESCO report "Rethinking education: towards a global common good?" is an update by UNESCO of the approaches of one of the reports that has most influenced the world of education: the 1996 Delors Report "Learning: The Treasure Within". The document is based on the enormous changes that the world has experienced in the previous 25 years. These changes are characterised by new degrees of complexity and contradiction, which imply an even greater need to transform education than indicated in the Delors Report. Among other things, it examines issues related to the governance of education, and in particular the principle of education as a public good. The report presents a humanist vision of education as an essential common good. This distinction is important in many European countries. Public good has a bad connotation in former socialist countries meaning not only that it is the state that is obliged to provide for them, but also that it does not really belong to anybody while not being transparent and accountable enough. As compared to this, the notion of common good emphasises the angle of all people being responsible for education – both as learners and as educators.

ECD (Early Childhood Development) vs. ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care)

There are currently two main views on early childhood and the different roles of parents and institutions promoted in Europe: Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).

UNESCO generally advocates for ECD, meaning that the family needs to be empowered to care for their children and the role of institutions is only secondary in the process.

The European Union advocates for Early Childhood Education and Care, focusing on providing institutions that allow parents to reintegrate to the labour market as quickly as possible and have children attend formal care from a very early age.

The Parenting Together consortium advocates for the freedom of choice for families, and as per the UNCRC the best possible education for all children, may that be at home or in an institution. We believe all families should be free to choose what works best for them, and should receive equal support regardless of it. Parents are responsible of their children’s education and financial circumstances should not prevent them to opt for their desired solution.

European Pillar of Social Rights

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) was set out by the EU in 2017 to act as a compass for a strong social Europe. The EPSR sets out 20 principles in three main areas: (1) equal opportunities and access to the labour market (2) fair working conditions and (3) social protection and inclusion.

The EPSR principles include that:

- Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market.
- Regardless of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, everyone has the right to equal treatment and opportunities regarding employment, social protection, education, and access to goods and services available to the public. Equal opportunities of under-represented groups shall be fostered.

- Children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality.
- People with disabilities have the right to income support that ensures living in dignity, services that enable them to participate in the labour market and in society, and a work environment adapted to their needs.

European Education Area

The main policy target of the European Union in the field of education is achieving a European Education Area by 2025 and resetting education and training for the digital age. The European Education Area is underpinned by six dimensions, one of them being inclusion. The European Union (EU) will channel more funds than ever into education and training over the years 2021-27 through the Recovery and Resilience Facility, amongst other policy instruments. Major support will be made available for necessary reforms and investments in education and training from infrastructure and building construction to the training of teaching staff, digital devices and funding for open educational resources. The Commission is providing specific support to local, regional and national authorities to make the best use of available funds through mutual learning and the exchange of best practices regarding investment in education infrastructure.

Moreover, to achieve inclusion in education, there is a major focus on teachers, and their skills and competences.

European Child Guarantee

The European Child Guarantee, adopted by the European Commission in 2021, was created with a view to ensuring that every child in Europe at risk of poverty or social exclusion has access to the most basic of rights like healthcare and education. It emphasises the basic right to free access to necessary education, health care and other supportive services that are key to the development of all children, including children with disabilities. While most children in Europe theoretically have access to these services, they are still mostly not fully inclusive as they are not free.

Main definitions

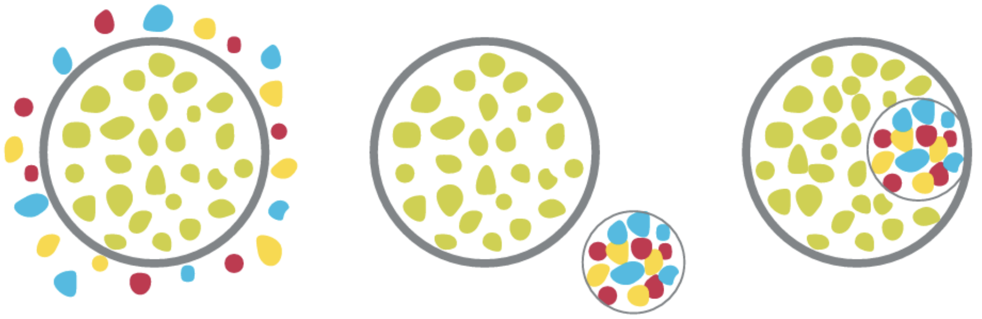
It is essential when starting advocacy work, to make sure that everyone understands the same thing under key phrases and terms.

Inclusive education

Inclusive education allows students of all backgrounds to learn and grow side by side, to the benefit of all (UNICEF).

Sustainable Development Goal 4 aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. It defines inclusive education, including formal early childhood and primary education, as an education that is available for all boys and girls and leads to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

Inclusion is a difficult concept to define and there is no one agreed definition between practitioners or those who study inclusion academically. An easier starting point might be what inclusion is not, rather than what it is:



(Source: www.thinkinclusive.us)

Exclusion Segregation Integration

Exclusion: some children and young people are prevented from accessing quality education. Many children with intellectual disabilities have no access to quality education that fits their needs, often because the only options are financially not affordable for them, or there simply is not any opportunity locally.

Segregation: some children and young people are educated separately from others, for example in different classrooms but in the same school or through constant ‘setting’ or ‘streaming’ of groups throughout the curriculum.

Integration: children and young people are seemingly involved in learning together, but in reality are still educated separately. An example of this would be when a child is present in the same classroom as other children for classes but receives one-to-one support from an adult and does not interact with the other children. Inclusion, in contrast, could be described as ‘with’, not just ‘in’.

Early childhood intervention

As defined by European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. "A composite of services/provision for very young children and their families, provided at their request at a certain time in a child’s life, covering any action undertaken when a child needs special support to: ensure and enhance her/his personal development, strengthen the family’s own competences, and promote the social inclusion of the family and the child. These actions are to be provided in the child’s natural setting, preferably at a local level, with a family-oriented and multidimensional teamwork approach."

Special education

Special education is instruction that is specially designed to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. This means education that is individually developed to address a specific child’s needs that result from his or her disability. Since each child is unique, it is difficult to give an overall example of special education. It is individualised for each child. (Center for Parent Information and Resources) While definitions on special education always focus on children with disabilities, it is important to highlight that ultimately every child regardless of disabilities or lack of them has special needs, and thus requires special education. An inclusive education system is supposed to be able to cater for the individual needs of all children.

Parent

A parent is a person who brings up and cares for another. However, being a parent does not necessarily mean that you biologically passed your genetics to a child. A parent can take on different forms, such as stepparent, grandparent, legal guardian, or a combination. Apart from love and passion, the shared feature is responsibility for the child and their upbringing that defines a parent.

Stakeholder

In education, the term stakeholder typically refers to anyone – people or organisations - who is invested in the welfare and success of a school and its students, including administrators, teachers, staff members, students, parents, families, community members, local business leaders, and elected officials such as school board members, city councilors, and state representatives. In short, stakeholders have a “stake” in the school and its students, meaning that they have personal, professional, civic, or financial interest or concern.

Formal education

Formal learning or formal education is education normally delivered by trained teachers in a systematic, intentional way within a daycare centre, kindergarten, school, university, another higher education institution or a vocational training provider. It is one of three forms of learning as defined by the OECD, the others being informal learning and non-formal learning.

Informal education

Informal education is the wise, respectful and spontaneous process of cultivating learning. It works through conversation, and the exploration and enlargement of experience.

Non-formal education

Education that is institutionalised, intentional and planned by an education provider. The defining characteristic of non-formal education is that it is an addition, alternative and/or a complement to formal education within the process of the lifelong learning of individuals. It is often provided to guarantee the right of access to education for all. It caters for people of all ages but does not necessarily apply a continuous pathway-structure; it may be short in duration and/or low intensity, and it is typically provided in the form of short courses, workshops or seminars. Non-formal education mostly leads to qualifications that are not recognized as formal qualifications by the relevant national educational authorities or to no qualifications at all. Non-formal education can cover programmes contributing to adult and youth literacy and education for out-of-school children, as well as programmes on life skills, work skills, and social or cultural development.

Case management

Case management is a collaborative practice in which a professional provides help to an individual in order to meet their health, educational or any additional needs. The practice is used in healthcare and education systems, as well as social work around the world and is considered to be an efficient and low-cost method used in many different fields.

Stakeholder mapping

One of the greatest challenges to advocacy activities is identifying and understanding the target audiences and their needs/motives. At the planning stage you need to consider that policy and decisions in general are made by people, not institutions. Therefore, advocacy activities must be targeted at individuals. Successful advocates carefully analyse their target audience to ensure their efforts and resources are directed in the most efficient manner.

When making the first steps in identifying and understanding the target audience, it might be useful to create a distinction between primary and secondary audiences. In other words, advocates need to answer the questions:

- Who has the authority to make the changes that need to be made? and
- Who influences them

The primary audience includes decision makers at any level with the authority to directly affect the outcome of the advocacy goal – be it policy change or other crucially important factors like funding. These are individuals, for example, who must approve a change of legislation. The secondary audiences are individuals and groups that can influence these decision makers. The opinion and actions of the latter group of individuals are important in achieving the advocacy objectives, since they have the potential to affect the opinions and actions of the decision makers – both as supporters or as adversaries.

For example, if you would like to achieve the systemic introduction of a case management system in your country, and you are a parent with an intellectually disabled child your stakeholders can be:

- The families whose children are affected, they will be your supporters
- The professionals (psychologists, therapists, doctors, teachers) can be your allies or maybe they need convincing as well
- Formal education that will have to collaborate with case managers and understand that it is support not extra work
- NGOs working in the field of education or disability may be your allies to help amplify your voice
- The political decision makers who are influencing or deciding on the implementation of such policy (might be education or health ministers, state secretaries, local council members) that need convincing
- Financial decision makers that have an impact on the available funding
- Training providers and other institutions that would have a role in training people for participating
- Parent organisations that can help you achieve your goals
- Disability organisations that can support you, but also benefit from the approach

Stakeholder Map: Who Needs What?

For each target group (and in the case of very influential people e.g., a minister or mayor, each target) you can make decisions on which quadrant they belong to and what tools can be used for engaging them answering a few simple questions:

1. What do they know about children with intellectual disabilities and their families?
If you provide too basic information, that may be redundant and you lose their interest. If you do not ensure a common ground, it can cause problems later on.

2. What beliefs may influence them in supporting your goal?
What do they think about inclusive education? How do they view the role of parents? Who do they think is responsible for different roles concerning children with diverse education needs?

3. What personal interests can have an impact on their support?
Do they have children with intellectual disabilities? Are they up for re-election? Could it offer media coverage for them? – and other similar factors can have major influence.

4. What can be the impact of their support on your goals?
It is important to understand how their direct support can help you in implementing inclusive education or a case management system, but it is equally important to see what might be the impact of their not doing anything or directly acting against your goals.

SWOT analysis

SWOT analysis is a simple and well-known tool. If done properly, it can be the basis of your advocacy work (and the method can be used for other goals, too.) SWOT is another acronym that stands for
Strength - what you or the idea/method/product you are trying to convince people about is really good at
Weaknesses - what can the challenges be, what may be too difficult to embrace or implement, what may need to much effort
Opportunities - what element of the environment (media coverage, legislation in the pipeline, wish to change) can help the realisation of what you want to achieve
Threats - what are the main obstacles that can be in your way
It is important to remember that Strengths and Weaknesses are internal, you may even be able to improve and eliminate some weaknesses, while Opportunities and Threats are external, they do not depend on you, and it may take a lot of advocacy effort to minimise threats.

We invite you to perform a SWOT analysis of the policy environment, the institutional environment, financial provisions and the public opinion in your own context to assess what are the main barriers to achieve your goal, and what are the supporting factors.

Policy environment

When we talk about the policy environment, we mean all the laws and regulations that are applicable and are influencing your situation.
Later in this document we have summarised the most important international policy documents impacting the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities and their families, but additionally to this there will be national regulations that can differ a lot or even contradict international policy. Some international policy documents, namely international treaties are binding, while others are recommendations that you can use in your advocacy work. Is your national/local policy environment supportive (at least on paper) of an inclusive system? Are there any laws or regulations currently in place that explicitly prevent your country from adopting a case management system?

Institutional environment

While institutions are supposed to follow the laws and regulations, in reality they might be stricter, and controlling, or the opposite, they are willing to go against some rules to provide extra support. Analyse and list the practices that are in your favour, or that are preventing a system to realise that is truly taking into account the needs of children with intellectual disabilities or special education needs in general and their families.

Financial provisions

Often the first question from decision makers when hearing a new idea is “how much will it cost?”. While many changes can be made without any extra financial burden, you need to assess the financial resource needs of what you want to achieve, the current financial provisions in place, what are they supporting, how flexible are they. International treaties on child rights and rights of people with disabilities all require states to provide support, you might need to argue that the current support does not meet the needs of the target groups.

Public opinion

Your advocacy efforts can be tremendously easier or more difficult depending on how widely supported your messages are. Prejudices and misconceptions are sadly not uncommon in the topic of disability or parenting, by being aware of the general trends of public opinion you may customise your messages and activities specifically targeting negative beliefs, or building on positive ones.

Evidence base

Benefits of inclusion

When we remove restrictive policies, biases or obstacles and create opportunities for persons with disabilities, the whole world benefits.

Inclusion and inclusive education are described as benefiting not only children with SENDs (e.g., friendships, increased social initiations, relationships, and networks), but also children without SENDs, their parents and teachers (e.g., increased opportunities to master activities by practising and teaching others, development of empathy skills, increased appreciation, and acceptance of individual differences).

A system that caters for different needs helps foster the talents of all while helping to overcome barriers together.

Role of parents

Parents as primary educators need empowerment support in order to become gate openers and scaffolders for better learning of their children. They need to understand why new educational paradigms are more beneficial for their children than old pathways they experienced in their own childhood. More and more parents have well-being concerns for their children (while others put extra workload on their shoulders), and it is a global trend that needs to be stopped that those who can afford it, opt out of public education or formal education as such. In a world where schools are exploring new ways of working and parents are concerned, the only way forward is to engage parents, all of them, into transforming formal education for 21st century needs, and define new pathways together. Parents and teachers need to engage the children themselves, too, and explore unknown territory together. We live in times when the type of education we need to offer children is not like anything experienced by the majority of adults of today, and educators - be them parents or professionals - need to explore together. Furthermore, parents bring in the perspective of reality outside of schools as they are the policy makers, the future employers, the influences apart from being parents.

Needs of parents

In order to provide useful materials, before creating the online training materials for parents and the Better Together handbook, the Parenting Together consortium has conducted focus groups and surveys with parents and professionals.

Based on the responses, research and the consortium members professional experience the most important needs highlighted are:

- It is very important for parents to have a therapist that communicates well with not only their child but them as well
- Most children with intellectual disabilities work with multiple therapists, and the majority of parents would find it very helpful to have a case manager to coordinate. It is important to note though that not everyone feels that way, so it is important to keep the option for those parents who wish to do it themselves the opportunity to do so, and they still need to be

supported. Communication, logistics, teamwork, the adaptation of routine in everyday life, and trust are the most common challenges of parents concerning therapists

- Parents found it very important to have the therapist enhance their skills and self-confidence concerning their child’s development and learning. They are eager to learn more
- Some parents have many positive experiences with inclusion through interaction with peers, teachers providing information, agency of children with intellectual disabilities, or having an adequate curricula and activities provided for their child, but sadly this is not true for every parent with an intellectually disabled child
- Their strategies for inclusion include supporting their children's emotions and autonomy, co-working with the therapists, collaboration and exchange of information with professionals, proactivity and participation in school activities. This is only possible however if they are given the space and opportunity to do so
- They still often struggle to debunk myths that the inclusion of intellectually disabled children hinder the development of typically developing children, that lack of confidence in the intellectually disabled children's ability to achieve big accomplishments
- The special educational resources are still low, not every child has access to the adequate professionals
- Parents often struggle to push the cooperation between the school and the therapists as it is often happening
- While most parents with intellectually disabled children make great effort to learn about legislation, they often struggle to understand and fight for their and their children's rights

Why the proposed methodology works

Case management

The philosophy of case management is based on the fact that everyone benefits when the client reaches the optimal wellness and functionality level, as their well-being not only affects them – but their family, their support system, and even the healthcare system itself. Therefore the main goal of case management is to reach the client's wellness and improve their overall life quality through advocacy, assessment, planning, care coordination, communication, education, resource management, and service facilitation - with a main focus on evaluating the options and services needed and linking the family/client to the relevant providers and resources.

Case management is an effective, inexpensive, and client-centred method if implemented, since a case worker could mean a lot of help to families in different circumstances: such as families with children that have to attend several different therapies or families with special needs children. The case manager coordinates and helps to make decisions for the child – ensuring their medical, physical and emotional needs. With their client-oriented mindset, case workers help families navigate complex systems, making it easier for them to find applicable resources and services they need for their children.

Case management can make a huge difference when it comes to gathering information quickly. To meet the clients' fast-changing demands, the case manager's approach is not only fundamentally adaptive, but the management can also be applied to several, different types of unpredictable and complex work, all involving – mostly data based – fragmented resources. In addition, to achieve better and faster outcomes, case management initiates a sort of connection between the client and the service delivery system. Case managers interact more accurately with a wider range of information, services and sources

Training parents of children with (intellectual) disabilities

All parents are responsible for the upbringing and education of their child. It is defined as the hardest profession, however parents rarely receive any training or professional support. In the case of children with intellectual disabilities, parents require a lot of additional knowledge that parents may not have any experience with and that are quite specific. Training them will make them feel more competent and self-confident by knowing what they do and how they do it, their mental wellbeing will also improve. Institutions and professionals are not constant in a child's life, only their parents are, thus training them is what serves the interest of the child best. Parents of children with special needs also need support in maintaining their own well-being that is also included in the training we propose

Training professionals and other parents

Inclusion is beneficial for everyone, but while for the minority groups it might be obvious why, it isn't necessarily for majority families and professionals. They may struggle to understand the reality of families with children with intellectual disability, by training them prejudices and stereotypes can be eliminated.

In the overwhelming majority of countries, collaborating with parents is not part of teacher training curricula. Parent leaders also do not usually receive any training or capacity building while they play a crucial role in education institutions.

Advocacy tools

Anything can be an advocacy tool that is helping you carry your message in a positive way to your target groups.

What you already have

Once you have reviewed your target groups, the enabling factors and the barriers in your environment, it is time to assess what tools do you currently use to promote your views on the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities and their families. Do you already have some established channels to decision makers? You might just need to specify your messages or be more mindful to use them as an advocacy tool.

Examples of advocacy tools you already have:

- International treaties and policy documents - use relevant quotes
- Research articles
- Outcomes that you can share - better learning outcomes, higher level of well-being, etc. proven by piloting activities
- Photos - but please be aware of children's privacy rights and never share photos with recognisable people in them
- Media articles
- Methodology already developed

What you need to develop

If you realise that there are some groups of people who are essential to be convinced are still not yet targeted, it is time to develop some new tools to reach them.

Examples of advocacy tools that you can provide:

- Testimonials
- Own research outcomes
- Infographics of what you are promoting
- Videos, audios, photos - again being mindful of privacy rights
- Newsletters
- Website
- Social media posts

Advocacy Brief 1 - The Parenting Together Course

Capacity building needs of parents

What we know

Parents already know that they have the responsibility to care for their children, but professionals have the responsibility to support them, for the benefit of the child. All parents want the best for their children, and by supporting them with knowledge and service they can build their capacity in doing so.

How we know it

There is a strong body of research evidence supporting the idea of providing capacity building for parents and it is also known from previous research that online trainings offer the desired flexibility for the learning of parents who are often overwhelmed by their day-job and parenting combined. Parents of young children with intellectual disabilities have further support needs that are based on their special challenges. We could fine-tune our knowledge based on the focus groups and surveys the consortium has conducted in the Parenting Together project.

What policy can do?

European/international level

European and international policy makers can ensure the available funding for appropriate trainings, to support that well working practices can be upscaled and transferred internationally, and to mainstream that under educators we not only understand professional educators but parents as well.

National level

National policy has the role of ensuring that all parents have access to training and support services and that they are free to make decisions with the continuous help of professionals.

Local/regional level

There might be large differences in living conditions and attitudes of families within a country, national and regional policy has the role to further customise and assess the need for available support, and to make sure they give voice and opportunity for local stakeholders.

Institutional level

Institutions are the ones that meet the families regularly, their role is to report back to policy makers on their needs, and the training or service gaps that might occur in the institutions. Professionals working in formal education institutions also have a professional responsibility for supporting parents and this message should be regularly reinforced while also considered in leadership decisions.

Advocacy Brief 2 - The Case Management Handbook

Conditions for introducing a case management system

What we know

Case management is an effective, inexpensive, and client-centred method if implemented, since a case worker could mean a lot of help to families in different circumstances: such as families with children that have to attend several different therapies or families with special needs children.

How we know it

When parents face the fact that their children need professional help in their development, they are often confused: where to start, which therapy to choose, how long to do each of them. Due to their lack of information and despair to do as much as possible within the shortest possible time, they may choose therapies that are counterproductive to each other, as therapists do not communicate with each other. They are looking for answers online, not necessarily finding the most appropriate solutions and therapies.

Ideally, there would be a group of experts consisting of movement therapists, speech therapists, psychologists, etc, who see the child as a “case” and would evaluate the condition and suggest the next therapy needed. We know it from international research and looking at the success of those countries and fields that have implemented it.

Case management is one of the most important aspects of social work; it provides a detailed and organised multi-step process to ensure that all relevant aspects are considered to meet the needs and well-being of the individual. Case management helps to assess, plan, monitor and evaluate services and possible options to meet the client's needs. Case management allows social workers to focus individually on the needs of the client and their family to ensure the best possible care and outcomes.

What policy can do?

European/international level

European and International policy makers can support the possibility of knowledge exchange for those nations that already have implemented it and those who have not. They are the ones who can set international guidelines and standards that will then influence national policy makers.

National level

National policy makers are responsible in setting the legal framework that makes case management a possible alternative, and provide the financial background needed.

Local/regional level

There might be large differences in living conditions and attitudes of families within a country, national and regional policy has the role to further customise and assess the need for available support, and to make sure they give voice and opportunity for local stakeholders.

Institutional level

Institutions are the ones that meet the families regularly, their role is to report back to policy makers on their needs, and the training or service gaps that might occur in the institutions. In formal education, school leadership needs to support their staff to embrace the approach, to see that it is not an extra burden, but something that is not only beneficial for children, but also supports their professional work. Conditions might be created for such a system to be in place.

Advocacy Brief 3 - Better Together Training Framework

Capacity building needs of teachers, school leaders, other professionals, and parent leaders in inclusive education settings

What we know

While most professionals know that inclusion is the best way ahead, they often lack the resources both in terms of knowledge and financially. Training professionals is absolutely vital for a sustainable and well working system.

How we know it

The inclusion of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SENDs) in daily classrooms is considered a high priority. Nonetheless, its implementation in practice is affected by a wide range of factors, some of which are related with the involvement and attitudes of diverse stakeholders, such as parents of typically developing children, and teachers. Importantly, inclusion and inclusive education are described as benefiting not only children with SENDs (e.g., friendships, increased social initiations, relationships, and networks), but also children without SENDs, their parents and teachers (e.g., increased opportunities to master activities by practising and teaching others, development of empathy skills, increased appreciation, and acceptance of individual differences).

The Parenting Together evidence-based framework Better Together aims to provide information, activities, and proposals for reflection, to sensitise and promote positive attitudes regarding inclusion and inclusive education. It is addressed to parents of typically developing children and also teachers, who play an important role in promoting equal opportunities and inclusive education, and consequently more social inclusion and fairer societies, where the rights of all children and their families are met.

What policy can do?

European/international level

European and International policy is responsible in setting main guidelines and to define a minimum knowledge requirement for professionals that is ensuring that they can work in an inclusive way. This will then influence national policy makers. Making financial provisions available for knowledge exchange and training is also an important means of promoting capacity building.

National level

National policy makers have the responsibility to ensure that all pre and in service professionals receive appropriate training and have adequate resources to work in an inclusive way. National level can also incentivise parents to take part in capacity building by recognising the value of engagement at school and providing the necessary resources for it.

Local/regional level

Local and regional policy makers have the role of assessing their own regional setting and report back to national level, in case of additional services are needed.

Institutional level

Institutions need to have regulations that allow their professionals to have the opportunity for continuous professional development in the field of inclusion, and closely monitor the needs of their clients and employees and the report back to regional and national policy makers. Similarly, school leadership should promote and support the learning of parents. Joint and/or mutual learning opportunities of parents and professionals is also a proven good practice.