



Educational materials developed as a part of the project:

”Against the flowing wave”. Improving the competences of people working with youth with intellectual disabilities in the field of teaching safe use of water (swimming pool, lake, sea, etc.)

Project implemented by the Apertus Association under the Erasmus + Program

Project duration: 01/09/2019 - 31/03/2020

Financing from the European Union Erasmus + program:
EUR 9,128.00

**The importance of physical activity in water in the
process of rehabilitation of intellectually disabled youth
on the basis of exchange of experience under the project:
„Against the flowing wave“**

A healthy person does not think about the restrictions of everyday life that may result from disability. Intellectual and other disabilities can cause many limitations in organizing and leading everyday life.

The intellectually disabled youth, who needs every form of activity for the best psychomotor development and socialization, took part in the project implemented by the Apertus Association under the Erasmus + program. Learning to swim is one of those forms that was the main goal of our project. After a short duration of the project, we have noticed that the development of sports activities also has invaluable effects on:

- breaking stereotypical thinking about people with disabilities as such who are not able to overcome the barriers resulting from disability through their sport activation,
- stimulating or maintaining social activity of these people
- raising self-esteem,
- supporting independence and personal resourcefulness,
- rehabilitation,
- acquiring, developing and maintaining skills necessary for independent functioning,
- use of public facilities such as swimming pools, hot springs etc.

As part of the project, there were classes with instructors and volunteers consisting of swimming lessons, aqua aerobic classes and other games used during safe use and spending time in the water. Observation of participants during job shadowing in Iceland, as well as workshops and webinars have allowed the thesis that this form of activity combines many advantages and is of great importance in the development of people with disabilities. In this study we want to indicate the invaluable importance of classes in water in the process of education and rehabilitation of people with disabilities.

There are many barriers for a person with a disability that impede his functioning and development. Restrictions resulting from disability can affect many areas of life, e.g. tourism, taking up or doing work, attending pool classes or access to public facilities or the possibility of participating in the lives of loved ones and further communities to which a person with disability belongs or should belong.

One of the stereotypes is that e.g. blind or visually impaired people cannot swim because they cannot see anything and lose their orientation in the water reservoir. Another stereotype concerns people with physical disabilities. There is a conviction that a wheelchair user is deprived of swimming and diving, as he does not have functional lower limbs, an intellectually disabled person is not able to be independent and enjoy full public life. Nothing could be more wrong. Of course, we also encounter organizational barriers, but these difficulties are not only generated by disability, and most often by external factors independent of the disabled person. The task of today's world is to support especially young

people to take on challenges and go beyond the routine to minimize social exclusion of these people and allow them the greatest independence in adult life.

Classes conducted in water have a very positive effect on the human body. In the conditions of the aquatic environment, the rehabilitation of people with disabilities, and even practicing swimming, helps the whole body learn new dexterity techniques that shape specific motor features. In addition, unlike other sports, swimming engages almost all muscle groups in a dynamic way. Thanks to this, it is cardio, flexibility and coordination training. The importance of the aquatic environment in development and rehabilitation is highlighted as an extremely positive impact at all ages. This is important in developing motor coordination and resistance to infection. Mental, motor and sensory improvement is also visible. Integration classes in the water create favorable situations for compensating the deficiencies in both their eyes and the eyes of the environment in which they reside.

Recreation, swimming and rehabilitation in water also increase the social adaptation of people with intellectual disabilities. The possibility for people with disabilities to participate in activities conducted in the aquatic environment in the same way as non-disabled people significantly increases their self-esteem and increases the social development effort. Therefore, they do not have to be classes strictly defined as learning to swim, but also all kinds of aqua aerobics, games and activities allowing for familiarization with the water and skillful use of it in indoor swimming pools during visits with family, in hotel pools during rehabilitation stays, trips to the lake, sea, etc.

In our project, we noticed that the initial anxiety and even fear of young people with disabilities from the new environment, new people and challenges was quickly overcome. Classes in the water allowed them to relax, relax and open to new challenges. Surface barriers felt by children with disabilities, especially those with physical disabilities, disappear after immersion in water. This mainly applies to adolescents with limb paralysis, cerebral palsy, mild or moderate disability. Thanks to swimming, people with this type of disability are able to do exercises in the water that they find it difficult to carry out on land or even impossible. Another example is disabled youth with limited joint mobility due to muscle pain and tension. They don't feel any pain when swimming and the general condition improves significantly.

The most important benefits observed during the implementation of the project include:

- benefits achieved physically,
- - benefits achieved mentally,
- social benefits.

In the first group of benefits, it is necessary to indicate first of all the general improvement of mobility and the strengthening of the muscular system and mobility of the osteoarticular apparatus. In terms of psychological benefits, first of all, it is necessary to mention breaking the mental barriers regarding the contact of disabled youth with their able-bodied peers. The atmosphere of relaxation and fun gave them comfort and a sense of security, which resulted in increased self-esteem, less nervousness and greater faith in their own abilities. Social benefits,

on the other hand, concerned the achievement of the integration goal, the goal of socialization, and the ability to level the chances of using the same sports facilities as e.g. a swimming pool, etc.

Activity in the water not only triggers the natural need for movement, but allows you to create independent physical activity. It also shapes the personality traits of the participants. Classes conducted by experienced swimming instructors using attractive and varied sets of exercises - in an interesting and safe way they encourage playing in the water and learning to swim. Exercising and playing in water in a safe and friendly way tame the new environment, allow you to overcome fear and resistance to water. Learning to swim with a variety of pneumatic equipment brings a lot of joy and positive emotions, and independent swimming gives the participant the satisfaction of gaining new, hard to master skills and raises faith in their own strength and capabilities. These people learn basic swimming techniques, which gives them the opportunity to participate and win medals even at swimming competitions organized by clubs and associations for the disabled. Swimming is a form of activity that, due to its health and recreational qualities, occupies a special place in the prevention of posture defects and the formation of correct silhouettes. It is an important complement to physical education and corrective gymnastics classes, which people with disabilities often give up because of their dysfunctions or organizational barriers.

Movement classes in water are one of the many forms of adapted movement activity that clearly influences aspects of human functioning such as shaping movement patterns, developing intellectual abilities, social attitudes, ambitions and conscientiousness, patience and regularity.

It is a source of motivation to work in a group - it affects the processes of socialization and assimilation of norms. Teaches rules, rules and attitudes that can be transferred to family and social life. These classes also prepare people for the role in the group. Friendships and positive relations are established. It is especially important that families of people with intellectual disabilities also see this. They should be encouraged to organize systematic sport activities implemented in a group.

Recently, the popularity of using water as a therapeutic effect has increased.

Exercise in water can be part of a therapeutic treatment or be an essential therapeutic measure. Based on shared experiences, we have found that there is often a correlation between mental retardation and the level of physical fitness. In many cases, the greater the impairment, the less physical fitness.

Participation in therapy conducted in the aquatic environment and in related activities training self-service has significantly improved the motor function and adaptation psychosocial intellectually disabled youth (even with moderate and severe disabilities) participating in our project, which translated into a significant improvement in the quality of life of this group.

Conclusions

Classes in the water for people with disabilities are complex and require extensive experience and proper preparation of volunteers, instructors, teachers and carers. The intended effects are only achievable when a disabled person has safety in the pool, can count on the help of others and does not feel alienated or stigmatized due to his or her dysfunction. It is conducive to conducting classes and carrying out exercises in the form of fun and relaxation in water, in which case it is easier to overcome psychological barriers and make proper contact with another person.

The lecturers should first of all pay attention to the skills and abilities of the participant, not their disability, and in this respect adapt individual games or exercises in the water. The pace of work should also be adapted to the capabilities of a person with a disability taking part in water activities.

In order to fully utilize the relaxation and rehabilitation potential offered by water activities to people with intellectual disabilities, people should be trained to help in using the pool, but also work with these people on a daily basis, because a sense of security and trust is a key factor influence on the positive effect of such activity.

Material prepared on the basis of interviews, surveys, observations, analysis of individual therapeutic programs with instructors of physical activities in water, parents, carers, volunteers, teachers and project participants.