

7. Brief summary of Adapted outdoor activities project L2 – Linkki liikuntaan

7.1 Sport - an ideal instrument for integration and autonomy

Sport is a perfect instrument for people with a disability to develop their personal talents and to gain awareness of their own, individual abilities. Besides, it is often an excellent way of promoting a better participation of people with disabilities in society. People with a disability throughout the world have been participating in sports for decades. The paralympics are the major sport event in the world promoting intergration and autonomy of people with a disability.

Beyond the major sport events such as the Paralympics, local and regional sports are also extremely important. With the help of EYES, two projects improve the sporting situation of people with a disability.

The project "Sports participation for inclusion of persons with a disability in European Countries" executed by the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium) is intended for people with a disability so that they can participate fully in physical education classes, physical recreation and elite sport. The second project supported by EYES is called L2-Linkki liikuntaan organised by Keskuspuisto vocational institute.

7.2 Linkki liikuntaan - EYES takes disabled students to the Finnish outdoors

The main purpose of the project was to contribute to the general well being of the 250 students from the Keskuspuisto vocational institute and to generate an interest in helping disabled people amongst the general public in Finland. Another primary aspiration was to train assisting personnel in the use of equipment required during the physical activities and to stimulate the families of disabled people to increase their knowledge about applied physical and it's positive effects.

The project seeked to encourage physically disabled people to participate in several adapted outdoor activities. The activities were chosen to make the best of the various seasonal conditions, so the participants were able to activate a maximum of all senses applicable to the surrounding environment.

The adapted outdoor activities ran according to seasonal conditions for three weeks with the duration of the single activities ranging from one-day events to three-day outdoor camps. Winter sports were offered, such as tobogganing, kick sledding and skiing. In spring and summer there was for example sailing, cycling, canoeing and swimming. The autumn program offered among other activities ball games, hiking, orienteering and horse riding. All activities had the purpose of taking into account sensorimotoric problems that some of the participants have.

The main event of the year was held on the third of September in Oittaa where students, parents and the general public had the chance to participate in various activities and several associations will demonstrated their activities and materials suitable for applied sports. As a special contribution to the disabled sporting community of Finland the Finnish swimming world champion Hanna-Maria Seppälä and the Olympic gold medalist Tapio Korjus were invited to visit the event, both of whom are ambassadors of the Finnish EYES All Star team. However, they were unable to attend the event.

Project manager Liisa Metsola stresses that "by integration through sport we actively work on a better society." She is convinced the project raises public interest and brings together people from different backgrounds. "The Project is one step towards improving the lifestyle of both disabled and able bodied people in Finland."

Linkki liikuntaan was one of approximately 180 projects at local, regional, national, transnational and communitywide level supported in the framework of the European Year of Education through Sport 2004 (EYES). In an accompanying information, image and experience-oriented campaign, the European Commission promotes the social values conveyed by sport - such as teamwork, solidarity, tolerance and fair play - in all 25 EU Member States as well as in the three EFTA states of Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

EYES aimed at sensitising the European citizens to the importance of sport in an educational context and at increasing the significance of physical activity in school curricula. EYES also highlighted sports participation as a means to integrate people with a disability. Viviane Reding, EU Commissioner for Education and Culture and patron of the European Year of Education through Sport 2004, stated: "Sport contributes not only to an improvement of health, but also to a personal development, training of social competencies and the integration of disadvantaged groups".

