EASPD STATEMENT ON EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION

EASPD is the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities and represents over 12,000 support services for persons with disabilities across Europe.
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The United Nations has adopted two international human rights treaties that, when taken together, articulate the human right to appropriate support and care for infants and young children with disabilities. These treaties, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, Art. 23), including General Comment 7 to the CRC Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood (2005), and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, Art. 7, 8 and 25), also describe the standards by which all States Parties can guide the development of programmes, services, and laws necessary to comply with the Conventions.

In order to articulate how support is provided, the medical and “deficit” oriented model has often been replaced by a bio-psychosocial model. This model develops a more functional approach, as embedded in the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF).

However, this bio-psychosocial model now needs to give way to a human rights model of providing support and care in order to be fully in line with the legal provisions of the UNCRPD. This human rights model puts the focus on the rights and abilities of the individual, where he is empowered and receives adequate support tailored to their needs to fully enjoy their human rights and be included in society.

Socially constructed barriers must also be removed to ensure the full participation of persons with disabilities by creating truly inclusive environments mindful of every person’s individual needs and wishes. ECI services should enable and empower children and their families to be the main actors of the ECI process.
III DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILD THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES

Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) focuses on children’s early development and acknowledges the ever-widening population of very young vulnerable children, in particular following the crisis. ECI specifically focuses on vulnerable children from conception until the age of six years. Infancy is a crucial developmental stage when an individual forms the core of his/her conscience, tests his confidence with his/her body, establishes intensive interpersonal bonds, develops the ability to trust and relate to others, and lays down the foundation for lifelong learning and thinking. Due to rapid brain development, which takes place in the early development of children, the benefits of ECI at this stage are unique and with often more impact than in later stages, both for children and their families.

In this field more so than ever, it is crucial for the development of the child and parents to benefit from community-based services that could provide support from the very early stages of life to both the child and his caregivers. A lack of support or placing young children in institutions not only hampers the child’s development and causes or worsens developmental delays, but in the latter also places him/her in an ongoing state of dependency on institutional care throughout life. Breaking the cycle of institutionalisation and empowering young people to become active participants in our society begins with providing a nurturing and loving environment in the family, with the support of ECI services provided in the natural environment of the child.

Early Childhood Intervention can prevent risk factors (such as biological, neurological or social factors) from exerting negative influences on the development of children. For children with disabilities, ECI not only minimises and in many cases overcomes developmental delays, but also other secondary complications, such as malnutrition and chronic illnesses.
OBJECTIVES OF ECI SERVICES

The aim of Early Childhood Intervention services is to support families and significant caregivers as mediators for their children's acquisition of competences within natural environments, enabling children and their families to meaningfully participate and support their development during their daily routines. In this way, children can maximise their development, achieve their potential and also build strong and enduring relationships with key people in their lives. In this regard, ECI services must operate from the perspective that each child, no matter what developmental challenges faced, will learn and grow through relationships with his or her family and significant caregivers, supported by and in partnership with highly trained skilled professionals under a family-centred approach.

ECI SERVICES SHOULD BE BASED ON THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES

1. Relational – focused on developing positive communication and building strong relationships between children, their families, and their social world, including other families who can provide valuable peer-support;
2. Family empowerment – the focus should be both on the child’s needs and on the family and home environment as the child’s primary place for growing up, while providing respite care for the families;
3. Positive approach – focused on opportunities and abilities of children, and providing hope and perspective to families;
4. Person-centred – building on the child’s needs and strengths as a basis for developing further skills;
5. Inclusive – adapting the environment to the needs of the child and developing skills that allow a meaningful participation in all activities, including especially inclusive education;
6. Based in the community – not only in location but also actively participating in the community’s life and activities;
7. Professional – offering pre and continuous in-service training to professionals, families and informal carers to ensure high quality services;
8. Reflective – reviewing, questioning, learning, thinking and discussing among staff members and families, and paying particular attention to what each child wants;
9. Based on the best available knowledge and practices, and underpinned by scientific evidence;
10. Based on the life cycle approach – facilitating the transition of children from home and nurturing child care and development services to inclusive preschool and primary education, and later to inclusive employment;
11. Available to all children and their families including inter alia children with disabilities and/or those at risk of neglect, abuse, trauma, poverty, social exclusion, regardless of the severity of the child’s impairment;
12. Accessible, of high quality, available, adaptable and affordable for all families living;
13. Integrate necessary medical and health support in order to protect children from harm.
DEVELOPING SUCCESSFUL ECI SERVICES

Professionals working in ECI services should hold high aspirations for children and families, and this should include building successful parent-child relationships. Professionals, formal and informal carers should engage in respectful interactions and relationships with children and families. Families as well as children themselves must be involved in establishing the objectives, processes and services of realistic individual development plans.

Multidisciplinary professional teams, effective and timely communication between professionals and families, and personalized programmes for children are all important dimensions of ECI services.

In order to develop successful and effective early intervention services, it is vital that the State ensures services can be developed effectively through establishing national ECI strategies that focus on the abilities of children. Among others, a comprehensive legal framework, a national investment plan, and professional training should support and empower community-based services, with a focus on working with families. A focus should be put on early detection to provide adequate and timely support to children and families.

Cross-sectoral cooperation, in particular between ECI services and the health, education and child protection sectors, must be essential components of services to ensure each child’s well-being and transition to inclusive preschool and primary schooling. Professional training, service standards, monitoring and evaluation should be cornerstones for the successful implementation of ECI services.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

ECI programmes need to be designed with the understanding that all learning occurs in the context of healthy relationships between infants and children and those who live with and love them. It is only through the inclusion and support of children from the youngest age in their family and community that they will be able to participate in society, be included at school, enter the open labour market, and enjoy the full range of their human rights.
IV REFERENCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT


- Moore, T., Rethinking early childhood intervention services: Implication for policy and practice, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, 2012


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