

Focus Experience

#7

Educating Cities
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Title

Inclusion Drivers Programme

A volunteering initiative which promotes social inclusion of disabled citizens of Montevideo

Basic data

City: Montevideo

Country: Uruguay

Number of inhabitants: 1,325,958

Topics: Associationism and participation, civics and coexistence, culture and leisure, health and sports, lifelong learning, social welfare, and personal development

Principles of the Charter of Educating Cities: 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 14, 16, 17, 20

Summary

The disabled have historically been excluded from the major lines of public policy, and the number of cases in which a transversal action following an inclusion-based perspective have been very limited. Different causes are behind this situation, including the orientation of "special" focussed policies "for minorities" and groups of disabled persons and the creation of a predominant culture of invisibility of the issue.

It is obvious that a change in direction that puts into practice the important principles of the Convention of Rights of the Disabled and fosters the full use of these rights is both necessary and possible.

Another feature is the concept of the participation of citizens in the process of construction and roll out of social changes. Specifically, in the area of disabilities, awareness plays a great role in generating a process of cultural change. The awareness of the social actants is fundamental to incorporating this issue into daily life, no matter in what area.

Thus a working process has been carried out with young volunteers motivated around this specific issue, capable of playing a leading role in the process of making the population, the authorities and public and private institutions aware of the issue.

In the training of these young people we deal with issues relating to disability, awareness proposals, adapted inclusive recreational and sport resources and aspects inherent in the processes of planning events, organisation and evaluation.

The objective is for these groups to act as multipliers of their knowledge and spread the perspective of inclusion, through awareness proposals. At the end of the annual work process, the City Council of Montevideo recognises the individuals who have played an active role in this area.



Volunteers teach sign language

Objectives

- To make the issue of disability more visible in society .
- To train groups of drivers in disabled issues awareness.
- To include the concept of disability in the social life of communities.
- To make the population, institutions and authorities aware of this issue.
- To create groups of young volunteers who develop an active citizenry in line with the policies of the City Council.
- To develop a new concept (paradigm) for volunteering: construction of active citizens collaborating with government bodies.
- To instill the concept of inclusion in society, with a special emphasis in the disabled and their rights.

Methodology

The general methodology of the program has two movements or components that mutually feed each other: the dynamics of groups and intervention activities.

The group dynamics constitute the moment of creation of the strategies for dealing with the issues. Work is based on the characteristics of the context in which action will be taken: the needs of the group are determined, the topics of interest are dealt with through training workshops, the activities are planned and tasks and roles distributed, in relation to each intervention. It is crucial to the action of the groups to identify and define the objectives depending on context and the target community.



Awareness workshop

The intervention activities are carried out in different community and institutional environments. Here we basically seek the active participation of people in awareness activities, games and sports. For example, the participants have the chance to experience the sensations of getting around with the canes of the blind, move around in wheel-chairs or use sign language. They also play and do sport with adaptations, in which people with and without disabilities participate jointly.

During the first year of implementation, 2009, the experience began as a pilot project, with the creation of an initial group of volunteers that made it possible to roll out approximately 20 interventions in Montevideo and in some other departments around the country, such as Salto and Canelones. This first phase brought forth a positive, pertinent evaluation of the project.

In 2010 we sought to multiply the experience with other groups by setting up more working groups and beginning new awareness and visibility initiatives. Thus, two groups of volunteers were organised, one made up of participants from the previous year including new people, the other beginning from scratch with new volunteers. Throughout 2010 various training workshops were held with the groups and we doubled the number of interventions. In addition to consolidating the proposal, the group created in 2009 was reinforced, a new group was added, and experience multiplication processes were begun in the departments of San José, Canelones and Maldonado.

In 2011, the groups to which more young people were added were maintained and awareness and training processes were begun with various groups, in order to foster greater inclusion of groups into the program.

Social and urban context

Montevideo is the political capital of Uruguay. The city has approximately 1,300,000 inhabitants; 1,973,000 inhabitants if you take into account the entire metropolitan area. The city is divided into 59 neighborhoods. The experience takes place mainly in the department of Montevideo, but the impact of the groups transcends these limits.



Independence Square of Montevideo
Photo: Martin St-Amant - Wikipedia
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The areas of intervention of the program are broad and diverse and include neighbourhood initiatives, such as festivals, fairs, recreational events as well as educational centres, institutions events of public and private bodies. The groups are made up of young people from both genders, with and without disabilities. Their action is aimed at the society as a whole, adapting the forms of intervention to children, youth and adults.

Assessment

This volunteer-based experience is the first at the national level to deal with the issue of disability based on a process of awareness and visibility. Based on the start-up of this innovative form of participation of young volunteers, certain changes have been noted:

In the young participants in the groups:

-Creative-participation: active participation of the young people is facilitated in the creation, carrying out, and evaluation of the impact of the different awareness initiatives.

-Analysis of scopes and limitations: stimulation of analysis and identification of individual and collective knowledge on the issue of disability.

-Identification of the necessary knowledge to be included: the specific issues to be included as new knowledge are defined collectively.

-Significant learning process and its transfer: the knowledge on the issue is significantly improved, allowing for the young people to be able to act as drivers of the inclusion process in the most diverse environments.

-Critical reflection: critical analysis and reflection is stimulated and fostered on the causes of the situations dealt with.



Beach activities

In the daily context, made up of:

-Re-signification of the role of young people: the role of the young people acquires a new leadership based on the knowledge acquired, the experiences lived and the proactive attitude assumed.

-Transfer of concepts: the perception of the young people in general is transformed, positively impacting and incorporating the perspective of inclusion in the respective insertion areas.

-Re-signification of disability: a positive change in the perspective of some of the environments in which the young people act on a daily basis has been perceived, either because the issue has begun to be seen in a way more centred on people and not on the stigma of disability.

Incorporation of the perspective of inclusion in the communities, institutions and programs with which we have worked:

In many of the working environments in which we have intervened, the latter have begun to progressively take into account the people with disabilities in different communities and initiatives have been developed that contemplate their aspirations and foster inclusion.

Inclusion of the issue in the City Council:

A similar effect to the above has been seen in relation to the perception of some offices and departments in the City Council, and we have also observed a positive evaluation by the different working teams and motivation to include modifications of procedures and measures aiming at putting a greater emphasis on the perspective of the rights of the disabled.

From “myths” to the “new realities”, a change in our regard:

An important aspect of note is that in many community and academic environments, the issue of disability has been treated as something “reserved for specialists”, which has contributed in part to experts being the only ones to be entrusted to act on this issue. The innovative experience of grouping young people with a collaboration-based attitude, initiative and motivation, has allowed us to roll out a process of acquisition of the basic skills for collaborating on “changing our regard” that our society is beginning to experience in relation to the issue of disability. The social focus of the issue has allowed us to begin individual and social processes, capable of showing that the skills for change are generated and undertaken collectively, through awareness and participation, amongst broad sectors and communities in society.



Wheelchair basketball match



Boccia workshop

Resources

Contact

Short documentary on the project (in Spanish)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBjFQVXL-k>

Organisation: *Intendencia Municipal de Montevideo* (Montevideo City Council)

Secretary of Social Management of Disability

Contact: Mr Federico Lezama

Executive Coordinator

Email: federicolezama@gmail.com

Phone: +598 2 1950 2036

Web : <http://www.montevideo.gub.uy>

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