

INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (IECE) PROJECT

EXAMPLE OF IECE PROVISION: HUNGARY

1. Abstract

The kindergarten's name is Szirombontogató óvoda, meaning 'Kindergarten to open your petals': <http://www.szirombontogato.hu/>. The kindergarten is located in Enying, a small town in the south west of Fejér county with a population of 7,600. The main industry was agriculture, but employment opportunities in this field have been decreasing since the end of the communist regime. This industrially underdeveloped, disadvantaged area has one of the highest rates of unemployment in the country, at 14.3%. The number of disadvantaged families is growing fast.

Families with kindergarten-aged children include 21% who are highly disadvantaged, and 45% disadvantaged. According to surveys, the unemployment rate in Enying is double the rate in the county as a whole. Thirty-two percent of parents finished elementary school, 50% finished secondary school (of which 27% have a General Certificate of Secondary Education) and 18% graduated from higher education. The sociological environment of the kindergarten defines its role and possibilities.

The three kindergarten buildings were constructed one hundred years ago, although of course none of them were designed as kindergartens. The growing disrepair of the buildings poses a heavy burden on the kindergarten budget.

The outdoor play space is ideal for the kindergarten. The education buildings vary in their facilities, but with some organisation they function just well enough to achieve the goals of the programme. The physical location of the kindergarten is not ideal for parents who commute to work, but the basic service is available to all kindergarten-aged children in the town. The institute is currently working with ten groups. Opening new groups is part of the improvement plan.

The kindergarten aims for the harmonic, multi-faceted development of the enrolled 3–6 year old children, their differentiated and individually-focused improvement, and assistance to allow them to reach social maturity. The main tools for the inclusion of disadvantaged children and children with special needs are:

- education in their first language, which provides a foundation for different forms of communication, improving the verbal abilities of those coming from endangered and deprived environments and allowing them to close the gap.
- performing folk tradition-related activities, which provides opportunity for free self-expression. Through the application of a wide range of techniques, children have a better knowledge and understanding of local traditions,



traditional equipment and folk crafts. This also provides the perfect opportunity to further develop talented children.

- environmentally aware education, which is a focus of the pedagogical mission of the kindergarten. This priority is reflected in the pedagogical methods that are used daily.

Kindergarten staff

Teaching staff	With a professional degree	Nurse	Other full-time employees	Other part-time employees	Teaching assistants
21 kindergarten teachers 1 specialist teacher	6	11	1 secretary 1 administrator 1 maintenance worker	3 cleaners 1 office assistant, cleaner	3

2. Inclusive features

Recently, unemployment has affected many families in the town. Lacking job opportunities or vocational training, parents are unable to find employment, so they live on casual work, or, in the worse scenarios, on unemployment benefit.

A number of families face multiple problems: alcoholism is often present, children suffer from educational deprivation due to the lack of emotional support and their basic needs are not met.

Another issue arises when the parents provide income for the family through socially unaccepted methods. Although the basic needs of these children might be met, the circumstances have a negative effect on their personalities.

A phenomenon that is becoming more common is parents not paying enough attention to their children’s education. Poor families struggle to make ends meet, while others are motivated to reach a higher standard of living.

Basic service provision has always included placement, meals and washing opportunities for all children, which compensates for the care that they miss at home.

In spring, before the enrolment deadline, the kindergarten staff visit the families whose children are about to turn three. The teacher gains an impression of the family and observes their circumstances and basic educational practices. In many



cases the teachers know the families personally, as siblings have previously attended the same kindergarten. This process alerts parents to the fact that they and their children are expected at kindergarten.

Following admission, the two kindergarten teachers who will lead the new group the next year visit the families again to invite them to a family day organised by the kindergarten. This provides a further opportunity to meet and become acquainted. The parents can be present in the kindergarten during the transitional period for as long as their children need it. The children are located with assistance from the notary and health visitor. The process focuses on building a rapport with the parents and keeping in touch with them. This provides a solid base for later co-operation and quality of education.

The main aim of kindergarten education is to provide an environment for the child to improve in emotional safety, enhancing their individual abilities.

In Hungary, central policy outlines kindergarten education principles in the basic national kindergarten education programme. This is a holistic approach building on the age-specific needs of children and focusing on the areas to be developed.

This kindergarten prepared a local pedagogical programme which included the institute's specialist features and was based on the basic national kindergarten education programme. In the Enying kindergarten, the care and improvement of children with special needs and social disadvantages are prioritised. The local pedagogical programme includes care for children with special needs and defines their tasks or their education, as well as different kindergarten activities.

The most important kindergarten activity is play. It is also the most effective tool for kindergarten education. The priority status of play must be reflected in daily activities and time schedules. In developmental work, teachers mainly use the following:

- Poems, tales
- Singing, music, play with songs
- Drawing, mark making, crafts
- Movement
- Discovering the outside world.

The theoretical and practical background to the educational work is provided by the competence-based kindergarten programme, which ensures a complex view of inclusive education. The competence-based programme is the result of huge improvements in education over recent years.

Kindergarten teachers either create their own system to monitor the children's



development, or they choose one to match the local educational programme. This documentation is maintained by the teacher until the child starts school.

Child development is constantly monitored by the teachers in four comprehensive areas:

- Social skills
- Cognitive skills
- Verbal skills
- Physical skills.

The teachers keep parents informed of their children's development.

3. Inclusive highlight

Inclusive education is present in several kindergartens in Hungary. This case study is outside of the capital, so its cultural and social environment differs from that of Budapest, as do its opportunities to co-operate with professional services, despite the fact that the same laws and policies apply. Inclusion in this kindergarten means not only addressing the needs of children with organic problems, but also the deprivation arising from social disadvantages (input-poor environment, lack of communicational language patterns, lack of basic motion patterns, poverty). This kindergarten has acquired a lot of experience and knowledge, and their best practices are remarkable.

To fight against social disadvantage, constant, daily contact with parents is vital. The relationship between families and the kindergarten is strengthened by programmes organised by the kindergarten to specifically involve families. One of these is the Family Day. This event allows parents, children and teachers to spend the day together, giving them an opportunity to create personal and community relationships and gain experience together. Besides the teachers, the management and the local community are also involved in the event.

The examples below show particular methods of involving parents:



Activity	Goal	Task	Executives
Enrolment in kindergarten	Inform all parents about the date Enrol all children, particularly the disadvantaged	Keep contact with social organisations, child protection services, family and parenting services	Notary Employees of family and parenting services Health visitors Kindergarten manager Secretary of kindergarten
	Create a positive impression for children and parents on first contact with kindergarten Raise the interest of children Start a personal relationship with the child	Provide an insight into the daily life of the kindergarten, assign host groups	Kindergarten manager Kindergarten teachers, nurses Secretary of kindergarten Child Parent
	Raise interest The family should prepare together for kindergarten life	Hand out invitations for Family Day and parent meetings	Parents' Association Kindergarten manager Secretary of kindergarten
Family Day	Get acquainted with the teachers in the kindergarten Get acquainted with the community Organise programmes	Organise the groups for the next school term The event is open to future kindergarten	Members of the foundation Kindergarten manager Kindergarten teachers, nurses



Activity	Goal	Task	Executives
	for the future groups of children together Fun for families and the kindergarten Create personal relationships, joyful atmosphere Possibility for personal involvement	children and parents	Secretary of kindergarten Child Parents
Spring parent meeting for the parents of the youngest children enrolling next term	Ease the transition Discuss typical healthcare issues Inform about social support possibilities and request processes Ease acclimatisation Solve problems Meet in person Get acquainted with teachers, nurses, parents Find out about the work of the specialist teacher	Invite paediatrician, health visitor, child protection representative, nursery carer Kindergarten teachers present the provision and its educational programme Discuss typical problems regarding acclimatisation Make parents accept natural processes and behaviour Inclusive education	Paediatrician, health visitor Kindergarten teachers Kindergarten manager Child protection representative Parents Nurses
Open weeks	Get acquainted with kindergarten environment	Determine timeframe Provide play	Children Parents



Activity	Goal	Task	Executives
	Get acquainted with kindergarten daily life Start open relationship with parents Stress the importance of play	activities Create and maintain kindergarten ties in the child by having fun together	Kindergarten employees
Family visits	Find out about the family structure, family environment, the position of the child in the family	Meet in person Find out about the educating environment	Children Parents Kindergarten teachers



4. Other evidence of quality IECE

External recognition

Szirombontogató Kindergarten promotes inclusive education through a variety of activities and co-operation with other organisations. The dissemination of an inclusive approach is important to the kindergarten, so it participates in conferences for EU projects, presenting easily applicable methods and stressing the importance of individually-focused development by introducing local best practice.

Preparing presentations, providing practical experience, network learning:

- TÁMOP-3.1.1-08/1-2008-0002, Improving public education in the 21st century, development, co-ordination
- TÁMOP 3.1.4.
- Improving and improvement in kindergarten, RAABE publication
- Green Kindergarten award
- Living Planet Foundation 'Living Gardens' fruit and vegetable garden, creating habitats for birds in our kindergartens.

Participation in research and conferences:

- Open Society Institute, Budapest
- Romani Education Fund
- UNICEF: national consultation regarding Early Childhood Education for Roma Children
- Ministry of Education – Esélypont ('Opportunity Point') offices – kindergarten development based on equal opportunities
- Institute for Education Research and Improvement – workshop

Children and families: To what extent does the proposed example demonstrate evidence of enhanced learning for all children including those with diverse and additional needs?

The example shows that the special needs education inclusion activities that the provision has been practicing for many years allow it to care for and educate children from families with other inclusion issues, such as social problems.

Workforce: What staff qualities make the provision one of high quality?

Candidates applying for work must have a Bachelor's degree in kindergarten education and experience in inclusion is an advantage.



Since 2004, the teachers working in the kindergarten have been participating in further education and training to improve their knowledge. This has motivated a shift of approach across the provision.

Kindergarten teachers are expected to:

- know the provision's educational programme and use it as a basis from which to meet the children's individual needs;
- be able to create a learning environment where the children feel safe and well;
- prioritise their relationship with parents;
- continuously co-ordinate with experts (psychologists, speech therapists) who co-operate with the provision;
- recognise the importance of network learning and work with it.

An inclusive approach is characteristic in all teachers and nurses. Employees participate in training together and discuss case studies.

Staff meet the children and their parents before they enter kindergarten in order to become acquainted with their social environment, family traditions and to introduce them to kindergarten life via purpose-built and proven programmes.

Throughout kindergarten, staff keep close contact with parents, and co-operate with external experts.

Network learning is important, although in most cases we invite pedagogues.

Kindergarten to school transition can be facilitated by the improvement of skills and abilities, mainly in social, intellectual, verbal and motion areas.

Collaboration: To what extent are other relevant stakeholders (e.g. parents, diverse community, health and social and other community agencies) engaged with the provision?

The most important elements of local co-operation are as follows:

- Local government and board of representatives: The functioning of the kindergarten is basically defined by its relationship with the current board of representatives. The board is the decision-maker when it comes to further financial support besides that which is legally provided, and accepting, supporting or criticising the professional work of the provision and the achievement of its aims. The board monitors local expectations, requests, appreciation and criticism of the provision;
- Family, parenting and child welfare service: Mutual information exchange,



search for possible solutions, recommendations, negotiation;

- Nursery: Organising play days together, getting to know each other;
- Schools: Ensuring good co-operation, smooth transition, working on common opportunities;
- Cultural Centre: Events (puppet show, theatre, quizzes, town events) organised by the kindergarten alone or together with other institutions;
- Library: Literary activities with the help of library employees, such as organising programmes together, quizzes, meeting children's authors;
- Pedagogical Service of Fejér County: Diagnosing children with special educational needs, help with their care, mutual information exchange. Support to provide the personnel and equipment necessary for the appropriate inclusive education for children arriving from early intervention.