

A. Introduction

In accordance with their Terms of Reference Irene Westerman and Jane Willis, Trainers accredited by the UK National Portage Association, supported by myself, held Workshops at Mogilev with Professionals and Specialists working with Disabled Children.

These Workshops were a planned development of the Workshops and Presentation Sessions I had held in previous Phases of the Programme, particularly the Workshops held in December 2007, which focused on developing the partnership roles of parents, the disabled child, families and supporting professionals, and their participation in early years development and education of children with disabilities. Similarly, these Workshops were in response to earlier requests by participants for an introduction to Portage by accredited Trainers, and they reflected:

- The Recommendations contained in my Report of the Workshops held in March 2006
- The Needs Analysis developed at the Workshops in Bykhov in October 2006
- The resulting Activities Plan by SDC

In preparation for the Workshops, I identified the Portage trainers, and, in consultation with them, developed in conjunction with CCF Belarus an appropriate format for their participation.

It is noted that this is the first occasion on which the use of the basic Portage Model has been delivered in Belarus by accredited trainers, and therefore it forms a sound, quality-based professional input for ongoing development in accordance with up-to-date Portage practice reflecting the situation in Belarus.

Lists of those attending are with CCF in Minsk. Professionals came from Orsha and Zhodino as well as from Bykhov and the surrounding area.

Staff from CCF Belarus also attended as participants and enablers.

B. Objectives

Building on the previous Workshops and Recommendations, the overarching objectives were enablement and ownership by each participant of the processes, for their sustainable use in families, communities and services.

Ongoing development of partnership working was emphasised so that partnership and mutual support between specialists and parents were enhanced by using Portage methodologies and tools.

The Workshops covered the following basic topics:

- Introduction to Portage
- The Portage Home Visit and holistic assessment
- Helping children to learn
 - Using clear language
 - Planning for success
 - Steps to learning
 - The importance of play
 - Generalisation

C. Methodology

Preparations for the Workshops by the Trainers included a Course Handbook (translated into Russian by CCF) which included:

- Copies of the PowerPoint Presentations
- Exercises for use during the Workshops
- Further reading and references

On completion of the Workshops, all participants were issued with a Certificate of Participation, signed by the Trainers.

All the participants stayed at the Mogilev Hotel, where the training was held, and this was of great assistance in enabling good timekeeping and attendance.

The thrust of the training methodology was to ensure that the participants owned any outcomes of the Workshops, and that models and methods were not imposed upon them. Throughout the Workshops, participation was encouraged through discussion, personal input, individual and group exercises, and this methodology was greatly appreciated by all the participants (see the attached Summary of Evaluation Comments by the Participants).

Specific use was made of current best evaluated practice and this was demonstrated and explored during the Workshops in order to enable participants, in accordance with their own situations, to address the issues involved and to develop appropriate methodologies.

Through Group Work at each Session, the participants discussed items in detail and fed their findings back to the whole Meeting.

In particular, the presence of 2 trainers – leading sessions by themselves or working as a pair – was highly valued by the participants and proved very successful.

The Trainers emphasised that the Workshops only explored the basic elements of Portage and that further training would be required in, for example, Training the Trainer, before participants could work as Portage Trainers. However, one of the objectives was to demonstrate tools which individuals would find useful in their work, and it is hoped that they will take these away and practice them in their own daily work prior to any further specific training.

It is noted here that the original requirement was for 2 interpreters, particularly during Group Work and Discussion Sessions. In the event, only 1 interpreter was available, but this did not prove to be a major problem thanks to the support of the CCF staff.

D. Recording

Contents of the Workshops were recorded by CCF staff, and the materials used are on file as well as being in each Training Pack.

E. Outcomes and Follow-On

At the Feedback and Evaluation Discussion after the Workshops, it was agreed that The Objectives of the Workshops were met, and this is reinforced by the participants' individual evaluations.

The Project Programme includes a Follow-Up Session by the same 2 trainers approximately 6 months after the initial Workshops, and various formats for this second session were discussed, including:

- Developing the Toolbox
 - Confirming the Teaching delivered
 - A Module focusing on Behavioural Issues
 - A Module focusing on the needs of profoundly and multiply disabled children
 - A Module focusing on Autism (this would probably involve a specialist Trainer)
- and/or
- Training the Trainer

It was agreed that the training would be most effective, providing consistency and continuity, if the participants of the follow-up Sessions were those who took part in this, first Session.

Possible approximate dates for the Follow-Up Sessions were suggested as:

- 3rd to the 9th September 2008, or
- 24th September to 1st October 2008

CCF Belarus Staff will discuss these options with the participants in light of the initial Workshops, and will advise the Trainers and me by the middle of April.

John Harris
4th March 2008