

ICLife: Tools for inclusion

How to make life on a campus for higher education more inclusive.

Toolkit Blue Assist



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What's in a name?

The Blue Assist-icon is a worldwide recognized icon that has an easy to recognize shape and structure. The tool exists in different shapes such as paper cards, paper notebooks and even an app for Android, Apple and Windows. Originally this tool was created for people with disabilities, immigrants and elderly people in a coaching centre in Oostende in Belgium. By showing the icon other people easily know that the user needs assistance.



BlueAssist is a communication system that has been developed to help anyone who has a hard time communicating with other people no matter what the cause is. It helps them to find a way to ask questions or request things from people. If you have problems speaking or people have trouble understanding you, or if you suffer from anxiety which makes it rather hard to speak or to ask for help, or perhaps you do not remember things well, BlueAssist can help. BlueAssist cards, notebooks with detachable leaves of paper, and a free phone app can be used to do the talking for you.

The ways in which BlueAssist can be put to use vary from situation to situation. In one situation you will use BlueAssist to ask for information where as in another situation you ask for people to execute a request. In most situations you can

pre-prepare a card at home before you actually encounter anticipated situations, and in such case, you may or may not need to use it. It is however also possible to prepare a card on the spot. In the case of people with intellectual disabilities, an accompanying mentor or even a family member can prepare the card if the people with intellectual disabilities cannot do so on their own.

You may have seen that the cards and the app have small pictures in the bottom corner. That is to help you remember what is written if someone cannot read the words easily and are carrying more than one card.



Target group

This tool focusses more in general on people with intellectual disabilities which means it is easy to forget that the purpose of this tool is to specifically introduce and anchor BlueAssist more on campus. It is necessary that the people with disabilities try out the system with students (see also our Tool on the Buddy System) and the campus staff for this purpose. So the target group for this tool consists of PID and everyone playing a role in their social engagements, such as campus staff, mentors, coaches, family members, buddies, friends and so on.

What's needed?

The tool itself as described earlier is fairly simple and easy to put into practice. The only issue is having the possibility to organize it. For this tool to be put into practise there will clearly need to be a moment where you can teach the people with intellectual disabilities on the use of BlueAssist as well as its possibilities, this is: PID who preferably also visit the campus regularly. Another thing to pay attention to, however not a requirement to use the tool, is to keep an eye on when you put it to use. The best moment to use the tool is when the people with disabilities first arrive on campus because it brings out much more opportunities to use it. Once the tool is ready to be put to practise organizationally, all you really need is to put in a good amount of time to work out the practicalities like a powerpoint for presenting general information and a simple role game to introduce it. It needs to be engaging to the people with intellectual disabilities

Besides teaching people how to use it there are other aspects that are often overlooked but equally important. One way to make BlueAssist more known to people is to show that the campus actually uses it rather just promoting it. Promoting is a very good way to raise awareness. Including it into the structure of the campus would seemingly be the next step however it is not often put into practice. In other words: making sure that people get cards is just as important as teaching them how to use it. BlueAssist cards, notebooks, apps etc. can contain pre-prepared general questions like "can you call my mom at this number", or can be written more specific in the moment questions (if the PID can write, otherwise by a mentor, coach, parent,..).

Budget

As for the budget needed to implement, promote and structurally anchor this tool on campus for the specific use of inclusion of PID, the following is needed;

- Manhours to develop, adapt, implement and promote the tool so it is attractive enough for PID by means of small video clips, powerpoint

presentations of the benefits of the tool and the 'tool-in-use' etc.

- Printing or ordering costs for cards and notebooks and to make them available everywhere (even more important than promotion!). these can be made yourself by printing cards which include the BlueAssist logo or by ordering cards or notebooks on www.blueassist.eu (preferred).
- A co-operative ICT developer which can adapt, disseminate and promote the BlueAssist app by conducting workshops on campus for PID, PID mentors and campus staff.



Who gets what out of it?

Apart from the benefits listed above, and how they specifically link the use of the BlueAssist tool to PID, we include below a non-exhaustive list of benefits for these involved.

- PID: helping out with a bunch of needs, such as travel needs, social needs and so on;
- Mentors/Teacher of PID: reaching timid or introvert PID more easily, signal recurring problems etc;

Family of PID: Being more confident Students in social sciences can practise their role in supporting persons with a disability to participate and express themselves. They act as buddies and make sure that the persons with an intellectual disability are better understood, that they get the space and time to express themselves and are fully participating. On the other hand, these students get more in touch with the engineering world and the benefits technology can bring to the lives of persons with a disability.

The participation of international students makes the experience richer. International students tell about the living conditions for people with intellectual disabilities in their home countries. Communication with local students is in English, communication with the client is in the local language. This raises translation issues that need creative solution in order to move forward in the development of the developed solutions.

At university level, these kinds of projects offer educational opportunities to prepare students from faculties to practice in multidisciplinary skills in a very engaging way. At the same time, it offers natural and inclusive ways to mingle regular students with persons with an intellectual disability.