

ICLife: Tools for inclusion

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

Tool: Buddy system “one-on-one”



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What's in a name?

With 'one-on-one Buddy System' is meant that one regular student helps out one student with an intellectual disability.

The tasks the buddy will do can be filled in freely together with the student with disability. They could go for lunch together, walk to the bus together, go to a bar together, keep each other company, etc. This often causes an attitude of 'nothing is obliged, everything is allowed', which helps their relationship become spontaneous. A buddy is a familiar face, a person who is always helpful to them. This gives them a feeling of safety. The relationship is much like a friendship, but it need not be one. The relationship could be described as 'friendship-ish' and is unique in bringing about a non-directive, reliable emotional connection between the two. The regular student offers informal and social support. The main goal consists of building a durable relationship which would diminish social isolation and exclusion.



Target group

People with an intellectual disability

Psychologically, the buddy system means more confidence and self-assurance for people with intellectual disabilities and a large drop in stress factors. Regarding the socio-communicative part we can conclude that people with an intellectual disability who worked with a buddy before have more positive relationships towards others, make contact more easily and - in the end - have a lot more friends afterwards. An added bonus is that they now tend to ask for help of others more easily and problematic behaviour is lowered. Participating at a university's campus means widening their horizons with a range of interests, hobbies, access to new networks and broadening the look on their living environments.

The regular students

For the buddies helping someone with an intellectual disability is definitely an added value. It brings responsibility, self-confidence and more. Advantages for students are linked on what motivates them to become a buddy in the first place, which can be personal conviction to mean something for someone, learning new skills or just for the fun of it. In some cases the students can be motivated because being a buddy is considered a form of workplacement or internship and they obtain credits by being a buddy. Regular students happen to close themselves off less from other communities and open up more to new cultures when they participate in a buddy system. They gain insight in each other's way of living and the university student develops an eye for discrimination.

What's needed?

Preparation

In the preparation for the first training day, it is good to pay attention to the relocation to the training. The trainee, or his network, is personally responsible for organizing the transfer. For some trainees this can be a threshold. A personal buddy can be a first helping hand in this.

Some people with a mental disability have difficulty orienting themselves in new environments. In that case, it is good to arrange for someone to accompany him from the reception to the classroom. In the first lessons this can be done by the buddy, later on by a receptionist or a fellow student. If something goes wrong along the way, it is best to agree on a telephone number at which the student or someone from his network can contact the buddy.

It is possible that the inclusive course member would like to tell the buddy that he has a disability. For the other course members it can be interesting that they also know how to deal with this disability and if specific things are expected of them. Other course members just don't want this. Also agree if and how the buddy can be introduced and what his role is.



Role teacher

The teacher has an important role in initiating an inclusive culture, as well as stimulating social contact between the inclusive student and fellow Christians. The teacher can be a model for the natural relationship with the inclusive student. He can also use working methods that stimulate the interaction between students. If the fellow

students see the inclusive student as a person, and not primarily as someone with a disability, the contact will also be more natural.

There is a good chance that support will be provided spontaneously by fellow students.

The teacher will report any concerns back to the buddy. If necessary, the support plan will be adjusted, and the care agreement adjusted.

For the inclusive student it is important that he or she has confidence in the teacher. The teacher can build this trust by actively involving the student and by encouraging him or her on a regular basis. Once the student puts his/her trust in the teacher, he/she will also be able to speak to the teacher more easily in case of problems.

We advise you to organise a short meeting in half of the training to follow up the support plan and to adjust it if necessary.

Role regular student

Keep in mind that most fellow students have little or no knowledge of intellectual disabilities, for some of them this can be a barrier to cooperation. Also give the regular students the opportunity to get used to it.

The role of the buddy can be defined according to the inclusive student's need for support. However, it is not the intention that the buddy is continuously present and forms a permanent duo with the inclusive course member.

Among other things, we see the following tasks for the coach

- Informing fellow students. The buddy agrees with the student what information he wants to share and how this will be done. If necessary, he can prepare this together with the PID student. It is also agreed how the buddy will be introduced.
- The buddy is a role model in the adult interaction with the inclusive learner, for helping to structure tasks, in the use of language, ...
- At the start of the training, the buddy calls the student, e.g. before the lesson, to inform him if he feels like it, or after the lesson, to hear how things are going. He makes clear agreements with the PID student in function of accessibility.

Depending on the needs of the student, the buddy calls weekly before or after the lesson, encourages and supports on the sidelines.

The buddy has knowledge of

- intellectual disability and the ways in which persons with intellectual disabilities learn
- language use in communication with persons with intellectual disabilities, both oral and in the
- written communication
- visual support methods
- Universal Design for Learning

The buddy has the following skills

- smooth cooperation with people
- listening carefully to people (inclusive student and teacher, etc., ...)
- ask the appropriate questions
- make arrangements quickly
- structure well
- customize teaching materials
- think along with the teacher and give suggestions for adapting teaching materials

The buddy uses the following mind set

- has communication skills, both in contact with the inclusive student and with other parties involved (instructor, care coordinator, network, job coach, fellow students, ...).
- has a positive attitude, looks for opportunities and chances
- has an inquisitive attitude and a solution-oriented attitude
- can connect people
- can empower people so that they can learn to take control of themselves
- radiates confidence
- has an open attitude
- is enthusiastic and can motivate people
- is empathic and social
- belief in inclusion



Role PID

Give the PID-student responsibility as well. He or she can help to make reasonable adjustments,

such as taking photos or making a step-by-step plan once a template is available. The buddy discusses with the PID what is feasible for him.

Practical information about the duration of breaks, vending machines, nearest toilets and possibly fixed habits in the lesson can be given during the first lesson.

Budget

The buddy system doesn't have to cost much. Actually, almost nothing, although it depends on what arrangements you make with your students. Will transportation costs be refunded? Are other costs, such as cinematic tickets or restaurant fees refunded? That depends from university to university and from country to country...

Even though the buddy system is completely voluntary, we do want to stress that giving buddies credits would definitely be appropriate. In the current educational system, students are often overdemanding, which means they need to handle a lot of tasks in a short period of time. If no credits are granted at all, many students might quit over time. This leads to people with a disability getting turned a cold shoulder and it would be a missed opportunity for regular students. This would also cause a problem for lecturers and management. Since no credits are offered, buddy work cannot be combined with regular schoolwork. Their commitment would also suffer.

By giving credits, a university or course also makes it clear that the buddy system is important for the university or course. This message does not miss its purpose among the regular students: students still learn most from copying the experienced behaviour of what is shown in the programme itself. If the study programme feels that participation is important, it will also implement a student council and take it seriously. This is more important than repeating in theoretical courses how important school participation is. The same applies to caring for and taking responsibility towards people with intellectual disabilities. A well-designed credit system with regard to the buddies seems to be an important signal from the degree programme to us.

Who gets what out of it?

People with intellectual disabilities

Regarding the socio-communicative part we can conclude that people with an intellectual disability who worked with a buddy before have more positive relationships towards others, make contact more easily and - in the end - have a lot more friends afterwards. An added bonus is that they now tend to ask for help of others more easily and problematic behaviour is lowered. When looking at their personal development, improved school performance becomes noticeable. The system motivates them for school and their buddy often assures them enough to make them build up confidence regarding their future.

Regular Students

For the buddies themselves helping someone with an intellectual disability is definitely an added value. It brings responsibility, self-confidence and more. Advantages for students are linked on what motivates them to become a buddy in the first place, which can be personal conviction to mean something for someone, learning new skills or just for the fun of it. In some cases the students can be motivated because being a buddy is considered a form of of workplacement or internship and they obtain credits by being a buddy.



The University/Campus

Like the “design for all” principle, we advise the implementation of the system not solely to help the students with an intellectual disability, but to help all students. The buddy-system is not only great for people with an intellectual disability, it

could be an added value for everyone on the campus. Most certainly for freshmen this could have a lot of positive effects. A freshman at university normally does not immediately know where they should head when problems occurs. That is why implementing the buddy system over the whole college could be advantageous. Having a person who is ready for you in case you have questions is nice and boosts the feeling of inclusion and belonging.

The society

Opposing the ‘passive individual’ whom, as initial consumer, demands his rights, there now is the ‘active individual’, who is socially involved and responsible. In the social and cultural sector, as well as the ones of care and education, the demand for volunteers and informal care is increasing. Underlying motives for moving from the professional to voluntary forces is the increasing criticism about the professional model being too dominant. The reasoning behind this is that realising ‘good care’ is only possible if and only if these two kinds of help are combined. Working as a volunteer is commonly viewed as a great thing by society for a good reason: it stimulates people to get involved with each other and with society.