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**F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K.:**

**Foster Reception for Inclusive Educational Needs:**

**Development of Educational Support for Kids**

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**Intellectual Output 3:**

**F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. HUB & SPOKE MODEL**

**EXPERIMENTATION**

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This output is the result of a joint work conducted within the F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. project. The output was coordinated by FISM - Federazione Italiana Scuole Materne della Regione Toscana (Italy) Coordinator of the project, with the support of the University of Florence (Italy), the Regional Directorate for Primary and Secondary Education of Thessaly and KMOP - Kentro Merimnas Oikogeneias Kai Paidiou (Greece), WUSMED - World University Services of the Mediterranean and Blue Room Innovation SL (Spain), Asociatia Europanet (Romania), Know and Can Association (Bulgaria) as partners.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report is part of the Erasmus+ project ***F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K.: Foster Reception for Inclusive Educational Needs: Development of Educational Support for Kids.***

F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. is a project that aimed to reduce the social exclusion of children aged 0-6 years from marginalised backgrounds through the implementation of an innovative Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Model. The project succeeded in creating and testing an innovative system in which teachers, educators, social and health workers and volunteers can work together to provide the children's families with an inclusive and integrated service.

The specific objectives of the F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. project were:

- Intervening on the cultural and social deprivation of children and families living in more precarious conditions due to low income, recent immigration, job loss, illiteracy, mental fragility, geographical marginality. Children and their families are the main beneficiaries of this project;
- enhancing the professional skills of teachers and educators, experts and school staff through inclusive methodologies and pedagogical approaches;
- create an 'educating community' consisting of kindergartens and primary schools, health services, hospitals and associations and all other actors concerned with children's rights, education and social inclusion.

The project brought together eight partner organisations with long-standing experience in the field of social inclusion and children's education, with the aim of creating and testing an integrated system in which teachers and experts involved in ECEC systems can work together to provide families of children with an inclusive and all-inclusive service environment.

## 2. FISM TOSCANA: THE LEADER OF INTELLECTUAL OUTPUT 3: " F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. Hub&Spokes Model Experimentation".

The coordination of the FISM Toscana with reference to Intellectual Output No. 3 was fundamental because it is an important association in the 0-6 context.

In fact, the Federation is the most significant aggregative reality on the national territory with regard to the world of nursery school parity and, for several years now, also of early childhood services 0-3 years. This was even before the most recent so-called 0-6 legislation, which provides for the development of a truly integrated system centred on continuity between early childhood and childhood.

FISM was founded in the 1970s with the intention of federating and representing all pre-schools that were 'private' at the time, as they were born before Law No. 62, which established the so-called 'parity' in Italy. It is a world that is significantly present in the social fabric of our country, in some cases in a residual manner with respect to state schools and paritarian schools run by local authorities, in particular municipal administrations, while in other geographical areas the presence of paritarian preschools constitutes a majority percentage (sometimes a strong majority) of the response to families and the demand for educational services in the territory. In fact, before the establishment and spread of state preschools, the parish preschool represented practically the only 'organised' response to the needs of working families.

The world represented by the FISM was, at least in its initial phase and until the 2000s, almost exclusively made up of a galaxy of religious congregations, religious orders, parishes. Only in more recent years has this universe seen the participation of Social Cooperatives, Foundations, Associations and the social world, the so-called 'third sector' in general.

On a national level, the FISM represents more than 5,000 institutions and several thousand families and children who attend pre-schools and numerous crèches and similar early childhood services every day.



### 3. THE HUB&SPOKES MODEL: MODELLING

#### 3.1. Context

As highlighted by the Eurydice Report Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019), early childhood education and care is increasingly recognised as a pillar of the lifelong learning process.

However, analysis of the key dimensions of ECEC systems explored by the Report in 38 countries - management, access, staffing, educational guidelines, evaluation and monitoring - shows that the level of service quality is extremely variable, as is the level of training and qualification of educational staff. In fact, only one third of European education systems require at least one member of the service to have a high profile. Moreover, as the analysed 2019 Report points out, a high level of qualification is considered essential during the pre-school phase in only one third of ECEC systems. The topic of staff qualification therefore continues to be at the centre of studies and debates on the quality of ECEC systems, as well as the topic of minimum requirements, standards and continuing professional development (CPD) strategies aimed at ensuring qualified professionals (Boffo & Frison, 2021).

Within this framework, there is the Hub&Spokes (H&S) Model, whose testing and implementation in the context of the F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. project allowed the creation of an organisational model of integrated services to support families of children at risk of social exclusion, as well as the promotion and dissemination of a European culture in the field of ECEC.

#### 3.2. Objectives

In a general sense, the Hub&Spokes Model can be defined as an integrated organisation of educational and training processes, which, by acting on the profound needs for high professionalism and skills of caregivers (educators, teachers, coordinators, parents), is able to intercept appropriate and reflective care.

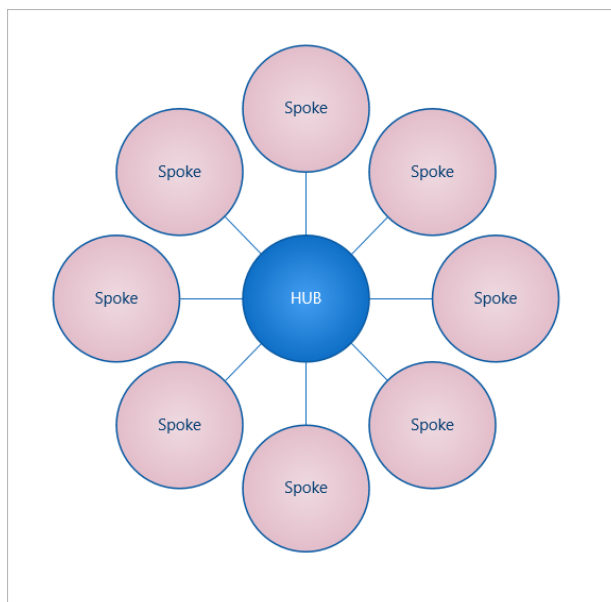
The Hub&Spokes Model addresses the cultural and social deprivation of children, parents and families of origin. It acts as a hub for a series of joint initiatives and services aimed at families of children at risk of social exclusion.

Its fundamental objectives are:

- Encourage a common and widespread culture of early childhood education and care among the community, families, educational services and educators (Jensen & Iannone, 2018);
- Promoting inclusive pathways for children aged 0-6 years by improving educators' knowledge, skills and attitudes (Fukkink & van Verseveld, 2020; Van Laere, et al., 2019).
- Exploring innovative approaches for continuing professional development in early childhood education and care through participatory action-research and a research-based approach (Bennett, 2012; Boffo, 2020; Boffo, & Frison, 2021; Kelemen, 2020; Lazzari, Picchio, & Balduzzi, 2015).

### 3.3. Modelling

Hub&Spokes is a term coined in the air transport sector. It represents a centralised distribution method starting from a HUB (main centre) connected to the different destinations reached through spokes, i.e. SPOKES.



The sustainability and efficiency of the H&S model come from the connections:

–**Hub to Hub**

–**Hub to Spokes**

–**Spokes to Spokes** (uniform by type of activity)

Figure 1: Hub&Spokes Model

Based on this concept, the F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. project partnership designed and tested an H&S Model to be applied in the ECEC context.

The challenge was:

- create an effective organisational model to support families in distress;
- promote the creation of inclusive educational pathways in the 0-6 age group and training for ECEC staff.

This resulted in a model - the F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. Model. -, which is based on:

**The identification of the HUB in the school** as a meeting place to be experienced both: Physically. Here families, children, teaching and non-teaching staff meet daily and build educational and training relationships. Also physically located in schools are the ICT infrastructures that enable virtual relationships;

Virtually. With training and information paths in synchronous mode the meeting place for children, families and ECEC professionals.

The Hub of the F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. Model envisages the identification of a school in each of the areas involved, where families, children, teaching and non-teaching staff can meet on a daily basis and build educational and training relationships.

**The definition of SPOKES as competence centres from** which families and children at risk of socio-educational exclusion can benefit. They are similar to workshops in which families, educational services and the community at large participate. They include: school personnel, health personnel, professionals in the socio-psycho-pedagogical field (psychologists, speech therapists, trainers, social workers, etc.), representatives of municipal services, representatives of employment agencies or job centres, professionals in other fields (accountant, lawyer, etc.).

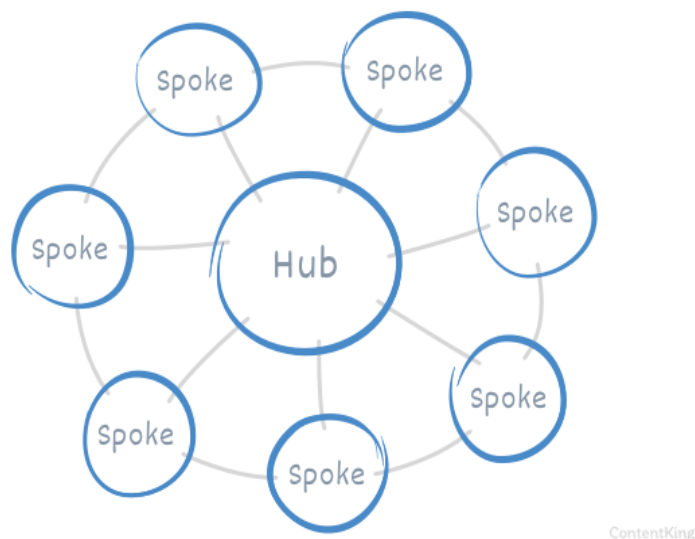


Figure 2: Hub&Spokes Model

In the F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. Model, the Spokes are understood as competence centres supporting families and children at risk of socio-educational exclusion.

Specifically, six key spokes were identified:



Figure 3: The Spokes of F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. Model.

### Spoke Training

Besides being a SPOKE, i.e. a distinctive and present element in every H&S Model, it is the **connecting element** that characterises the model. Without this type of training, the ability of ECEC staff to read, interpret and reflect on the needs of families and children is not created. Its aim is 1) to train ECEC professionals to be able to identify signs of distress in families, 2) to foster the dissemination of a European culture of

training ECEC professionals, 3) to enhance the learning potential of schools as working contexts.

### **Spoke Work and Employability**

Spoke deals with 1) work as an instrument of social inclusion through which families can find the resources to live and prosper; 2) work as a place of learning, personal development and self-determination.

### **Spoke Social housing**

Spoke deals with housing solutions to guarantee all families the right to housing: it provides information on housing options when families cannot buy housing or rent it at market price and promotes good living conditions for children (heating, food, etc.).

### **Spoke Arts and Culture**

The Spoke aims to educate in one or more universal expressive languages (music, painting, etc.) in order to 1) provide children and their families with the tools to understand beauty, 2) bring families and children closer to cultural institutions in the framework of creativity and arts education projects.

Spoke can provide art workshops aimed at educating in one or more universal expressive languages (music, painting, etc.), which can be collectively constructed with specific tools and commonly used objects, as well as construction, mechanics and programming (Arduino) workshops.

### **Spoke Health**

The Spoke aims to 1) support educators and families in identifying developmental problems and related communication/pedagogical/relational strategies with children according to their distress 2) prevent addictions in parents and create support situations for children whose parents suffer from distress or addictions.

### **Spoke Languages and Communication, also digital**

Spoke aims to resolve conflicts related to lack of education, literacy, different cultural backgrounds of educators and families and children.

It can include workshops for teaching Italian L2 for families with migrant backgrounds or ICT workshops for parents.

Based on this modelling, the Hub&Spokes F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. Model was tested, both physically in Florence (Italy) and virtually via the dedicated platform.

## 4. THE HUB&SPOKES MODEL: ON-SITE EXPERIMENTATION

### 4.1. The intervention grids

The testing of the Hub&Spokes Model was based on an intervention grid shared by the partnership, which provided for the following elements to be defined for each Spoke:

GOAL
TARGET GROUP
STAFF
ACTIVITIES

Based on this grid, operational summary sheets were produced for each individual Spoke.

#### Spoke Training

<b>Goal</b>	To train ECEC professionals to let them be able to find the hints of discomfort in families To encourage the diffusion of a European culture of training for ECEC professionals To boost the learning potential of schools as working
<b>Target Group</b>	ECEC professionals, educators.
<b>Staff</b>	See F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. - IO2: Training package for ECEC professional
<b>Activities</b>	See F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. - IO2: Training package for ECEC professional

#### Spoke Work and Employability

<b>Goal</b>	Work as a social inclusion tool through which families can find the resources to live and flourish. Work as a place of learning and self-development and self-determination.
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<b>Target Group</b>	Families. Examples: mothers, fathers, caregivers of children attending school.
<b>Staff</b>	Work agencies and training agencies, public and private, accredited and recognised by local legislator. These should offer employability-oriented training courses and placement services.
<b>Activities</b>	Families are informed by work/training agencies supporting and collaborating with F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. of the work and training opportunities that may help them to satisfy their professional needs. Agencies are physically present within the HUB with one of their representative on a regular basis and can receive parents' resumes.

### Spoke Social housing

<b>Goal</b>	To offer information on housing options when families cannot purchase a place or rent it at market-price. To offer good living conditions to children (heating, food...).
<b>Target Group</b>	Poor or middle-class families when incomes do not allow to rent or buy a house at market prices.
<b>Staff</b>	Front-desk specialist and municipalities. Municipalities are represented by the person of contact who has administrative tasks within the function of findings for schools and housing.
<b>Activities</b>	Information: front desk specialist regularly updates the information regarding funds for social housing and for education of children. Information on tenders and funds, also for school attendance, are collected from regular contact with municipalities.

### Spoke Arts and Culture



<b>Goal</b>	To educate to one or more universal expressive languages (music, ...) to give children and their families the tools to understand beauty. To make families closer and children to cultural institutions within projects of education to creativity and arts.
<b>Target Group</b>	Children and families.
<b>Staff</b>	Educators, coordinators, staff from collaborating institutions with a managerial role so that they can decide on administrative aspects (prices) and administrative-organisational role so that they can decide on organisation of group visit (if any).
<b>Activities</b>	1) Educators and coordinators agree with families group visits and activities or cultural labs with children or with families and children; 2) Museums offer special prices to families of children part of F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K.

## Spoke Health

<b>Goal</b>	To sustain educators and families in the identification of issues in the development age; in identifying communication/ pedagogical/ relational strategies with children, according to their discomfort. To prevent addictions in parents and collaborate to sustain children whose parents suffer from discomfort or addictions.
<b>Target Group</b>	Families, educators.
<b>Staff</b>	Coordinators and educators. Four psycho-pedagogical specialists with +5 years of experience in the school context (0-6 y.o.); accredited and part of the local register of professionals; university level studies or relevant work experience.
<b>Activities</b>	To listen to families to understand children-related issues. To offer an initial psychological service to parents. To identify developmental issues in 0-6 y.o. children. To support parents to reflect on how to talk/relate to children. To sustain educators with special needs children on how to coop with them. To provide educators with tools to build positive class environments. To evaluate the cases where health services need to be involved.

## Spoke Languages and Communication, also digital

<b>Goal</b>	To solve conflicts linked to lack of education, lack of alphabetisation, different cultural background among educators and families and children.
<b>Target Group</b>	Families.
<b>Staff</b>	Educators, coordinators and linguistic and cultural mediators. Cultural mediator is a person with multicultural background that has developed educational skills or a person with specific linguistic and cultural studies at university level.
<b>Activities</b>	Ad hoc meetings among educator, linguistic mediator and family.

## 2. The Hub&Spokes in Florence, Italy

The trial HUB in Italy, in Florence, was located at **the ISTITUTO SCUOLE PIE FIORENTINE - PADRI SCOLOPI** in Via Alfonso la Marmora, 35.

The F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. Hub is the school, the meeting place for children, families and ECEC professionals: the place where families, children, coordinators, teaching staff, pedagogical experts, and care services meet daily and build educational and training relationships.



It was conceived as an ideal and physical place of encounter, of supply and demand, of training and response, a 'black box' aimed at supporting family needs. It responds to needs, but not so much and not only through a 'ready-made or pre-packaged answer', but through an analysis that takes place in the context of a relationship, of a dialogue and, above all, of a 'pathway' term by which we intend to emphasise a real formative process that, in some cases, is a 'getting back into the game'. The project starts from children and the educational context, in fact, to broaden its gaze and its action to the family nucleus, the social context of reference and the other relational and functional dimensions of life.

It was born out of the awareness of the coordinators and educators of the FISM network of schools, who have detected an ever-increasing need on the part of parents to be guided in identifying the educational, health, recreational, cultural and sports resources in the area to which they can turn. Indeed, the school has a privileged view of the panorama of family needs.

For this reason, the F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. project and the Hub&Spokes Model represent a coherent, integrated, innovative response to the activities that the FISM has so far conducted in a non-systematic manner.

It allows for a dedicated desk that, thanks to the network of Spokes, i.e. the different competence centres, is able to provide advice on a wide variety of aspects involving the lives of families of 0-6-year-old children.

The hub-and-spoke structure also enabled and enables a multiplier effect. In fact, it often happened that those who presented themselves with a specific need, once a dialogue had been initiated and a basis of trust had been established, showed other needs for which we were able to provide useful guidance.

During the duration of the experimentation, the Hub was coordinated by FISM staff who carried out a front-office action towards the families, parents, and caregivers who requested information and support; a relationship, information, and coordination action with the professional figures and subjects involved in the implementation of the

actions in the various Spokes; and a monitoring and evaluation action towards the intervention as a whole.

The **Spokes** of the F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. Model represent the competence centres supporting families and children at risk of socio-educational exclusion.

These are the representatives of the institutions that provided information, guided and supported the families in meeting their needs.

The Spokes activated were as follows:

### **2.1. Spoke Training**

**Objectives:** Training of ECEC professionals, delivered online via the F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. Platform <https://platform.friendesk.eu/course/friendesk-course/units>.

The objective of the F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. training course was to develop an innovative training package, aimed at ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) experts and based on the results of IO1: Comparative Studies on ECEC Systems and Hub&Spoke Model Guidelines.

This training was designed with the aim of strengthening the educator's professional competences by presenting inclusive methodologies and practical approaches. This allowed both a strengthening of the professional profile of the educators involved and the possibility for them to apply the acquired knowledge and skills in specific contexts, thus contributing to the improvement of the quality of ECEC systems and the implementation of the HuB&Spokes F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. Model in their respective territories.

In terms of impact and transferability, this training created a 'Community of Practice', a working group that shared information, experiences, and contacts that were useful for both the F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. project and the ECEC system as a whole.

**Staff:** Staff of the FISM and all partner organisations of the F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. project.

**Activities:** The design of the training course was based on the Competence Based Teaching (CBT) methodology. This model was developed by WUSMED - World University Services of the Mediterranean.

The aim of the CBT Model is to bring academic training closer to social needs, and more specifically, to design training that is useful for 0-6-year-old educators to

integrate the social inclusion of children into their educational pathways. A proposal that helps them to improve their daily educational practices and to work together with all the actors involved in this

The F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. course consists of 6 learning units divided into 2 sub-units:

<b>UNIT 1</b>	1.1. Group Dynamics 1.2. Psychomotor Development
<b>UNIT 2</b>	2.1. Involvement of all actors 2.2. Global Evaluation
<b>UNIT 3</b>	3.1. Second Language in Preschool Education 3.2. Risk Management Skills
<b>UNIT 4</b>	4.1. Welcome to ECEC 4.2. The ECEC Net
<b>UNIT 5</b>	5.1. Understanding each other's culture 5.2. Non-formal educational methods for teaching foreign languages
<b>UNIT 6</b>	6.1 Management of Educational Organisations 1 6.2 Management of Educational Organisations 2

Each sub-unit was structured as follows: 1) competence to be developed; 2) competence-focused learning activities; 3) learning materials to support the learning activities; 4) self-assessment activities and criteria. Within each sub-unit, there are various learning activities, both theoretical (articles, essays, handouts, ...) and operational (reflective writing exercises, case studies, questionnaires, ...), closely linked to the participants' professional profile and work activities. At the end of the sub-units, two self-assessment tests were provided: the Self-Assessment Activity, relating to the content learnt and how it was applied in the workplace; and the Self-Assessment Criteria, aimed at assessing the knowledge and skills





developed.

A certificate of attendance was issued for the completion of each unit. A F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. badge was issued to participants who completed at least 4 of the 6 units.

**Target groups:** 70 educators and coordinators in Italy and 50 educators in the partner countries involved.

**Conclusions:** Training for ECEC professionals has enabled the achievement of a broader perspective of the construct of social inclusion and exclusion, clarified and identified concrete indicators of a child-centred approach, enabled a concrete approach towards community- and family-based ECEC.

## **2.2. Spoke Work and Employability**

**Objectives:** The objective of the Spoke is to value and promote work as a tool for social inclusion through which families can find the resources to live and improve, as a place of learning, self-development and self-determination.

The issue of work and the search for employment is closely linked to the educational dimension, not only because the world of work is in a sense conceived as a natural continuation of the school period in a person's life, but also because work itself is an educational dimension of the individual.

One can therefore understand how the dimension of employment and work has more than one point of contact with the other elements of the project and is closely linked to the theme of education. "The adult is to work as the child is to school" could extremely well be summarised in a statement and, while this statement is certainly not complete and absolute, it does contain some elements of truth that link the various aims and results that the project had set itself.

If education is in fact the process through which the individual is led to open up to the world and to become aware of it and of himself, in knowing the links between things and the connection between them, the adult's commitment to work is in a certain sense the amplification of this process because the profession and working activity in general represents for man the possibility of expressing himself, of realising himself

humanly and professionally as well as providing for his own subsistence and that of his loved ones.

The focus on the work dimension, on the dimension of employment within our project has indeed an extremely important practical realisation but also a no less significant symbolic dimension. Dealing with education cannot only concern an age group, a category, an individual aspect, it rather has the breath that looks at life in general, at dealing with problems, the 'adult' reality of personal engagement with reality.

The Spoke is not an employment centre or a temporary employment agency, one does not 'look for work' for people, one rather welcomes the member of the family, of the nucleus, understanding his or her person, skills, abilities, one tries to develop a professionalism within that overall dimension for which one also addresses the issue of work within a complex but indispensable environment and network of relationships.

**Staff:** The FISM staff involved experts from the world of work: educators, experts from the training sector and employment agencies specialised in vocational training and human resources research and selection. These subjects offered a counselling service on training and employment opportunities. The ultimate goal of every activity implemented was the promotion of the human person, with particular reference to the weaker segments of the population.

**Activities:** Memorandum of Understanding with the Training Agency Fismformazione Soc. Coop.va Sociale a r.l. and with the Employment Agency During S.p.A.

## MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH THE TRAINING AGENCY FISMFORMAZIONE SOC. COOP.VA SOCIALE A R.L.

The Fismformazione Training Agency is a training agency accredited by the Region of Tuscany that works to build a future in which everyone has access to training to improve their wellbeing and quality of life, to acquire immediately spendable skills and provide concrete professionalism to those in need, to strengthen employability. It bases its work on passion and innovation, on professionalism and skills development, on the value and ethics of the people who work there, recognising diversity as a resource.

The collaboration with the FISM Training Agency was fundamental because it provided the concrete link with practical actions and declinations in the approach to work and especially 'training'.

An awareness that we have found to be very present in those who have approached the Hub for this problem is precisely that linked to the need to learn, renew oneself, and train (on the most disparate topics and techniques, from safety at work to information technology...) and where this awareness has not been found, we have tried to inculcate it and make it evident. In the dynamism of the years we live in, continuous training is essential, both to 'learn' but also just to have the elasticity and awareness of how necessary it is to get involved.

The Training Agency was therefore useful not only for the link with the world of work, with companies, businesses, offices, and for the awareness of opportunities and new figures that were most sought after and/or employable (even in the difficult months of the COVID that completely revolutionised even the few certainties that existed even in this world), but also for the possibility of training and ensuring that the people involved could understand that they were indeed within a pathway in which they were the protagonists, in which it was they who were being renewed, rejuvenated and prepared for new opportunities, and not where they were simply 'led' or guided in the search for a job or an interview.

The training dimension proved to be fundamental, as a means of personal motivation, a stimulus for learning new knowledge, and effective preparation for work areas and tasks.

Vocational training was the flywheel through which the response provided to those involved did not determine success or failure with respect to employment, whether found or not, deemed adequate or not, professionalising or not, because the training action and the awareness of an enrichment offered to each person was appreciated and considered as such, i.e. as an opportunity for growth that would have come in handy if not now later without any doubt.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH THE EMPLOYMENT AGENCY DURING S.P.A. There was also a collaboration with the employment agency During S.p.A., which was useful both in the phase of analysing the skills and skills assessment of the individuals concerned, and for the valuable contacts established over years of professional activity, useful for finding job opportunities but, even before that, for the individual's personal move within the working universe.

**Target groups:** Families and educators 0/6.



1) Parents who used the Spoke No. 47 of whom:

- Enquiries from parents seeking employment and job offers No. 25
- Enquiries from parents seeking training courses for further education and retraining No. 22

## PARENTS

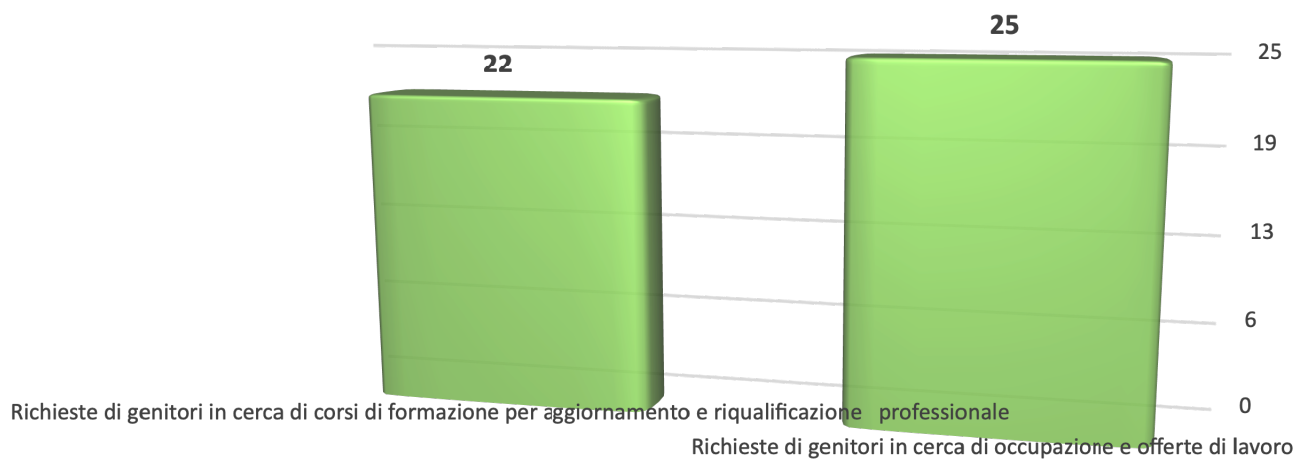


Figure 4: Families of Work and Employability Spoke

2) Educators 0/6 who used the Spoke Nr. 92 of which:

- Applications for families in difficulty No. 52
- Requests for professional refresher and retraining courses No. 40

## EDUCATORS 0/6

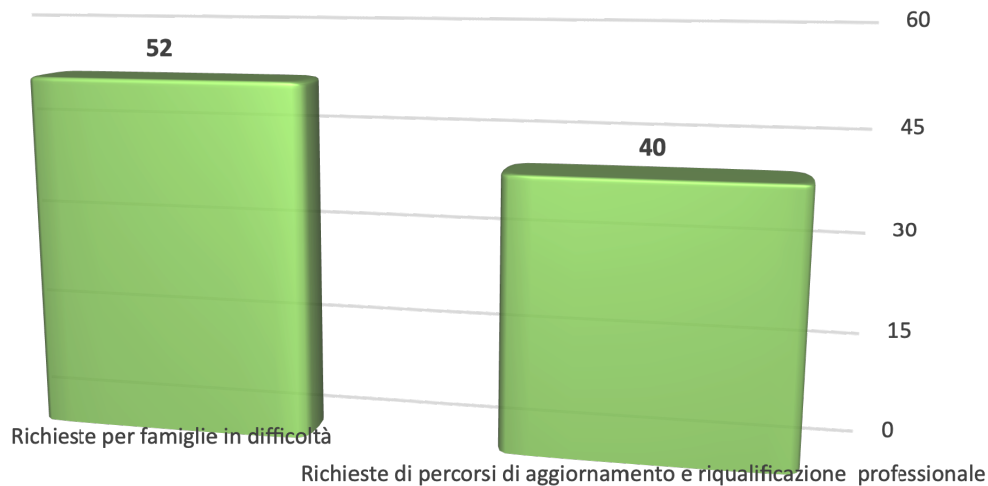


Figure 5: ECEC Educators/Professionals of Work and Employability Spoke

**Conclusions:** If, therefore, as part of the Hub's activities, we had set ourselves the aim of supporting families in this very delicate aspect, that is, the one linked to 'employment', we can say that the attention paid to this difficulty by the Spoke was truly remarkable, not only in terms of numbers, but in terms of intensity and above all in terms of awareness that in the dimensions proper to the person and the adult person in particular, that of implication with reality represents the main sphere through which the person implies himself and puts himself into play.

This also gives rise to an awareness of the 'psychological' importance of work. Work is an indispensable element of balance, of unavoidable harmony, regardless of glamour, correspondence and, almost paradoxically, even the economic aspect (however indispensable to the subsistence of oneself and one's loved ones). This is why a great deal of attention - and above all a great deal of 'human care' - has been paid to the theme of work, in a genuine attempt to accompany and be a companion to those who, approaching the Hub because of their connection with children and the world of childhood, have opened up about this difficulty and sought advice, help or support, on this very personal need.

### 2.3. *Spoke Social Housing*

**Objectives:** The Social Housing envisioned and proposed by the project goes beyond and beyond Housing generally understood as 'social housing', as an intervention of a building character or as the design of dwellings and buildings intended for social housing.

In fact, the project did not have the structure or social purpose, nor the forces to imagine the realisation of housing solutions.

What was experimented was the search for a solution to one of the main and greatest concauses of discomfort, also educational: that of housing discomfort and its critical issues.

It is all too banal to emphasise the link that exists between the child's wellbeing and the wellbeing of the family, and consequently the link that exists between the family as a nucleus, as a sphere of belonging, and the 'home', the dwelling, the nest. Those who experience instability and insecurity in what is in fact one of the fundamental points, the home, project and experience as a reflex an insecurity in all the other spheres of life, and in a child this concern, this anxiety, this lack of a 'bond' with a place are increased exponentially. The living place is not only a physical place but a place of people, of serenity, of belonging. There is a field of psychology called 'Environmental Psychology': on the one hand, it deals with the cognitive and perceptive aspects linked to space; on the other hand, it also touches on the more affective and emotional aspects, the Bond of Attachment to Places.

In the course of the meetings held at the Hub to deal with 'cases' related to housing difficulties (in the most general sense possible as described above), awareness was raised of precisely this, of how an opportunity is often taken for granted that for various reasons is no longer - in recent years - to be considered so automatic. The cases of families without a home or affected by extreme housing difficulties are certainly a very minority, but there are more and more cases of separated families where one of the two parents is in difficulty, where rents are in arrears, where bills to pay are a problem or where, rather, due to inconveniences and concauses of various kinds, housing is itinerant, temporary, occasional.

This is what affects them most, paradoxically, not the ABSENCE of a home, but its instability, precariousness, indefiniteness. These conditions fundamentally undermine the ability of young children to rely on, to become attached to (even a place), to feel a root with a physical location and, much more elementarily, to have their minds cleared of thoughts of another nature in order to be able to devote themselves to what their age would demand. It is clear that children are inevitably affected by the anxieties of their reference adults, and their discomfort is reflected in their everyday life.

Helping a family unit, a parent in a housing and housing-related difficulty, is therefore an act closely linked to the well-being of the child who lives in that family unit or with that parent.

Supporting the difficulties in housing discomfort means tackling that discomfort at its root, trying to eliminate it or at least reduce its negative scope within a family context, just like tackling a health problem or other social discomfort.

Tackling discomfort, potentially eliminating it, means creating a positive context where the child lives in a harmonious relationship with the place and with people, where the child feels his or her own space and with the serenity deriving from this security experiences the educational school context, the peer relationship, the development of his or her personality and skills in a more serene and harmonious way.

**Staff:** FISM staff provided useful information to direct families to the relevant municipal offices, to facilitate contacts with institutions or to link those in greatest difficulty to voluntary associations able to support the most serious emergencies.

**Activities:** Relations with municipal administrations and with religious bodies and Third Sector Associations.

#### RELATIONS WITH MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATIONS.

The realities most involved in the issue of employment and housing are the municipal administrations. In the course of the Spoke's activities, the utmost attention was paid to directing persons affected by this type of difficulty to the competent municipal offices according to their municipality of residence. The territorial areas mainly involved were the Florentine area and that of the immediately neighbouring municipalities.

Over the years, some municipal offices have developed very efficient systems on housing emergency, which, understood in the sense with which we have tried to

describe it in the previous pages, does not only concern the absence of a house, but the general precariousness of the housing condition, and of the usability of a serene, welcoming and functional place. The Municipality of Bagno a Ripoli, for example, offers the possibility of supporting the payment or part of the payment of bills for families in difficulty and below a certain ISEE threshold.

There are, however, some procedures and mechanisms, such as that relating to the allocation of so-called 'council houses', which do not fall within the management capacity of individual offices or individual municipal referents, but which follow very precise procedures and processes, with established rankings and well-codified orders of precedence. In this area, therefore, there is no direct capacity for intervention, but in more than one case, the persons concerned have been directed to fill in forms and participate in calls for applications expressly dedicated to these purposes. It should be borne in mind that in not a few cases the families concerned by the housing issue are foreign families, who add to the housing difficulty the difficulty of language, foreign origin and isolation. In these cases, where administrations have not been able to help individuals with language difficulties, we have also acted as Spoke to facilitate interviews, translations, cultural mediation.

The relationship with the Spoke was also an opportunity to be able to 'present' to the public administration 'cases' that had already been analysed, skipping the initial phase of getting to know each other, analysing the problem and its characteristics, assessing documents, etc. The public administration was able to accommodate the family's difficulties without wasting any more time in between.

#### RELATIONS WITH RELIGIOUS BODIES AND THIRD SECTOR ASSOCIATIONS.

The Spoke has also forged important partnerships with local realities committed to these issues such as voluntary and third sector organisations. For years, in fact, there has been a particular sensitivity, especially in capital cities and larger urban centres, to the housing issue.

Diocesan Caritas are places where one very often encounters offices and people who are prepared and able to give an answer (or at least useful indications) on the subject of housing emergencies. There are also numerous other listening centres or voluntary associations, lay or parish, that support difficulties of this nature by helping numerous households.

**Target groups:** Families and educators 0/6.

1) Families who used the Spoke No. 70 of which:

- Requests from parents seeking rent and housing concessions No. 20
- Requests from parents seeking school attendance facilities 0/6 No. 70

## PARENTS

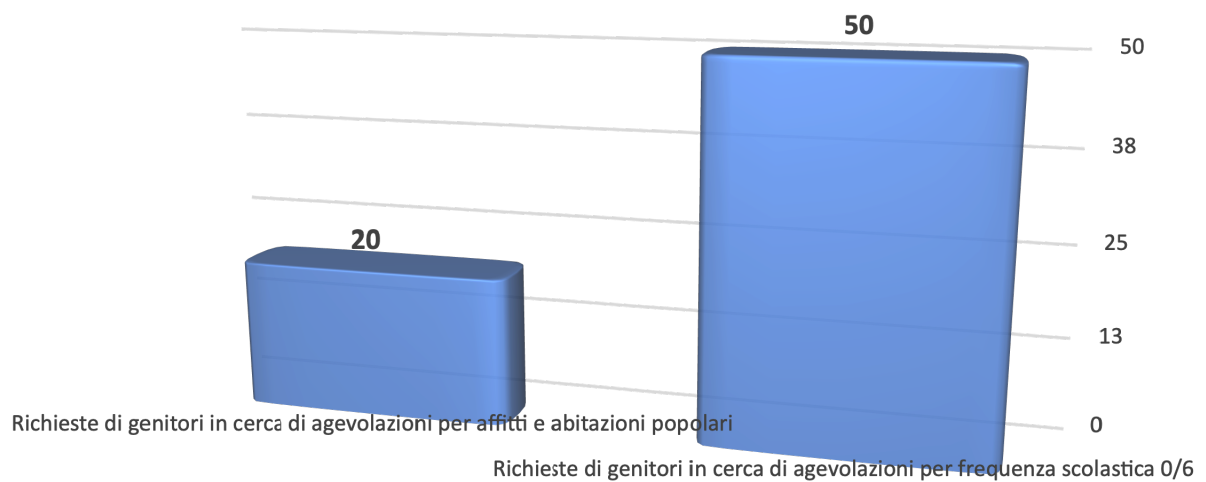


Figure 6: Families of Social Housing Spoke

2) Educators 0/6 who used the Spoke Nr. 50 of which:

- Applications for families in difficulty No. 40
- Personal requests No. 10



## EDUCATORS 0/6

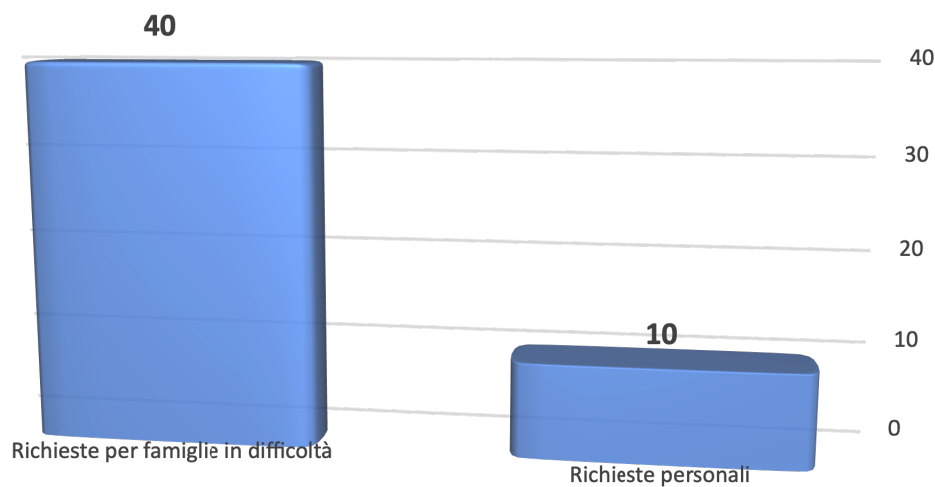


Figure 7: ECEC Educators/Professionals of Social Housing Spoke

**Conclusions:** The issue of social housing, housing hardship and housing represents, like many of the issues addressed by the Hub, one of the lines of action to counter the social exclusion of families of children 0-6 years old.

Of all the Spokes, this is the one that, together with health and well-being, probably has the greatest impact on the stability of families, because of the sense of instability that the absence of a place called 'home' can produce.

The support offered on the actual finding of a home was minor in percentage terms, while interventions with respect to specific problems (economic difficulties in paying utilities or bills) or signals (general economic difficulties in paying school fees) were greater.

### 2.4. Spoke Arts and Culture

**Objectives:** Within the scope of the objectives that the Hub&Spokes F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. has set itself to pursue, the line of intervention related to arts and culture could be considered less urgent and of lesser importance to address the discomfort that many families encounter and experience in the context of their daily lives and in the management of relationships within them, with their children, in the context of society.

Instead, it is necessary to remember how art, culture, beauty, are universally recognised as instruments of personal emancipation, intellectual redemption and cultural and human growth. They are therefore opportunities to address discomfort from every point of view.

In the activated Spoke, the cultural proposal, the encouragement of beauty, art, and interest in what is beautiful and interesting about the places and lives of individuals and families has a twofold value: that of an instrument of cultural elevation or in any case of 'personal movement' as a reaction to hardship, and that of an opportunity for growth, culture and training for children.

It is well known how the positive effects of using 'culture' (understood both as cultural activity and cultural 'fruition') as a tool to combat 'discomfort' - understood in its various dimensions: physical, psychic, social - are confirmed both by emerging scientific evidence and by a growing social awareness, as well as by an increasingly widespread institutional and political sensitivity.

It was therefore designed as a cultural proposal capable of bringing a contribution of positivity, harmony, and perspective to the lives of people (young and old) and families, especially those most burdened by some difficulty.

Therefore, in the conception and design phase, the objectives were:

- educating in one or more universal expressive languages
- give children and their families the tools to understand beauty
- bring families and children closer to cultural institutions as part of creativity and arts education projects

**Staff:** The staff involved was: 1) The FISM coordinators, in collaboration with the schools, organised visits to museums in the city with groups of children. The participating museums - Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi and Opera del Duomo di Firenze - offered special discounts for the families of the children in the F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. project. The FISM coordinators directed families to extracurricular creative and artistic workshops organised by the 'Scuole per Crescere' network. 2) Experts from the 'Scuole per Crescere' network and the Obraz Workshop, with whom memoranda of understanding were signed. Specifically, coordinators of the Schools for Growing approached the Hub to be made aware of initiatives to be proposed to children in the course of their teaching activities, to families as cultural and artistic paths of interest,



and to themselves and their colleagues as paths of personal training and professional updating. 3) Experts from the museums involved lent their experience and advice in order to facilitate and bring families and children closer to art and culture.

**Activities:** Memorandum of Understanding with the Obraz Shipyard and the 'Schools for Growth' Network.

The Spoke was activated along three lines of action:

- 1) Promote and address initiatives resulting from the collaborations and memoranda of understanding signed within the F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. project;
- 2) Acting as a promoter of cultural and artistic actions already present in the territory. Every territory - and the Tuscan one is particularly so - is more or less rich in cultural and artistic proposals and initiatives. Often municipal administrations and departments for educational services or culture identify projects to be dedicated to schools, directly promoting agreements with associations, theatres, workshops;
- 3) To be a point of reference for schools. Within the framework of the protocol signed with the Schools for Growth network, represent a point of information and proposals for schools, for coordinators and, consequently, for families and children.

Based on these lines of action, Memoranda of Understanding were activated with the Obraz Shipyard and the 'Schools for Growth' Network.

#### MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH THE OBRAZ SHIPYARD.

Cantiere Obraz is a cultural association founded in 2008 by Nikolaij Karpov and Maria Shmaevich that deals with training and theatre production. Always active in Florence, it concentrates most of its energies in the Oltrarno district where, since 2010, it has had artistic residency at the Teatro di Cestello. Since 2015, as part of the Summer School project, it has organised "Lessons on Dramatic Art", an advanced training event for actors directed by Maestro Anatolij Vasile'v. CANTIERE OBRAZ is a theatrical production system of lifelong learning aimed at everyone, which aims to spread culture, create an aware audience, lovers of theatre and culture in general, and educate and teach cooperation between human beings. The company's activity, in fact, is driven by a twofold thrust: the link with an international theatrical tradition of Russian pedagogical matrix and an intense training and theatrical production activity mainly aimed at the younger generations.

The memorandum of understanding provides for the collaboration and implementation of activities for children 0-6 years old and families with the following aims:

- promote Art and Culture;
- facilitating families by offering special discounts for participation in artistic activities;
- involve coordinators and educators 0-6 in organising creativity and art education projects for groups of children 0-6.

#### MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH THE 'SCHOOLS TO GROW' NETWORK

'Scuole Per Crescere' is a network of school enterprises, parochial schools and services for Early Childhood present, mainly, on the Tuscan territory. It groups together more than one hundred educational realities and more than 5,000 pupils. These schools were born over time from the initiative of Congregations, Parishes, Associations and parents who had children and their education at heart. In the last decade, these educational realities have been united under the management of several non-profit social cooperatives into a network of institutions committed to schooling and education.

**Target groups:** Families and educators 0/6.

1) Spoke households No. 48 of which:

- Requests from parents seeking cultural and recreational activities for children with disabilities and learning disabilities No. 28
- Requests from parents seeking cultural and recreational activities No. 20

### PARENTS

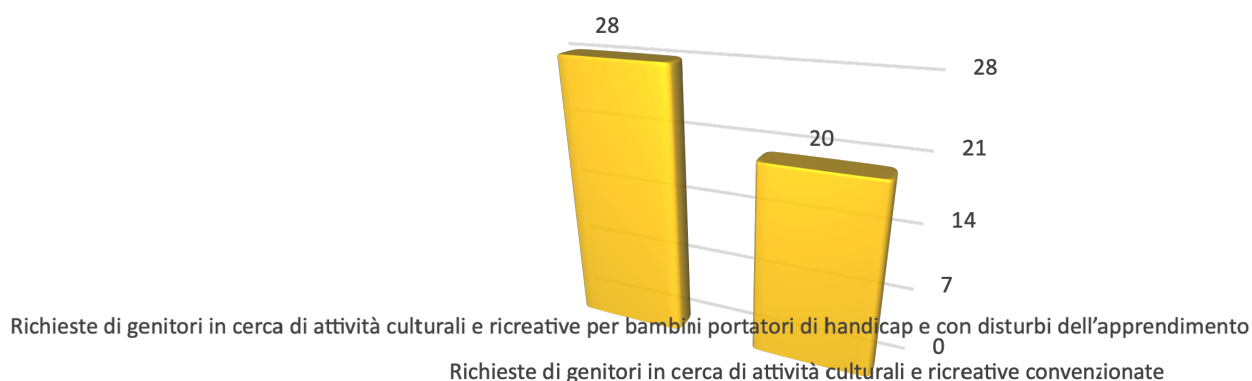


Figure 8: Families of Arts and Culture Spoke

2) Educators 0/6 who used the Spoke Nr. 68 of which:

- Requests for extracurricular cultural workshops No. 40
- Requests for contracted museum and theatre activities No. 28

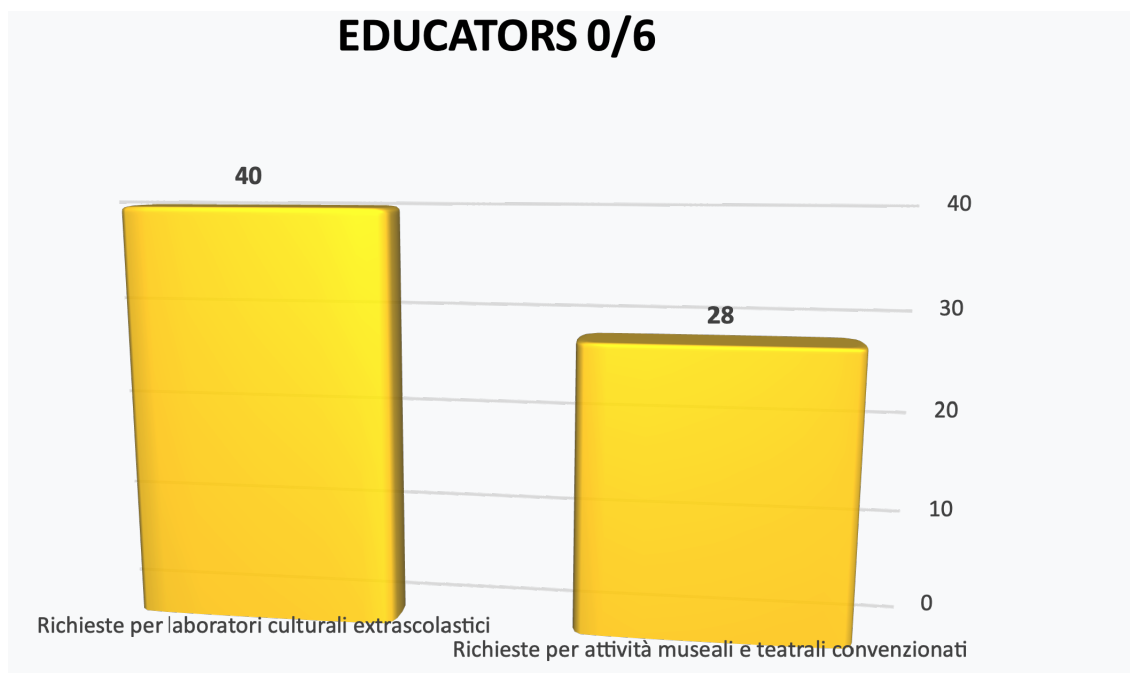


Figure 9: ECEC Educators/Professionals of Arts and Culture Spoke

**Conclusions:** The Spoke functioned as a 'facilitator', as an entity capable of making connections, suggesting and integrating.

One of the specific functions that added value and quality to the action of promoting and enjoying cultural events, exhibitions, visits, was the 'selection' action carried out by the Hub for schools, families and school coordinators on the one hand, the possibility of identifying more favourable conditions, group discounts, reductions, special offers providing an economic benefit on the other. As part of the selection of events and opportunities, the Spoke staff was also able to identify opportunities for agreements and partnerships with cultural institutions in the area, customised visits with specialised guides for children, and 'tailor-made' visits tailored to the needs of families, schools, and classes with very young children.

## 2.5. Spoke Health

**Objectives:** The Spoke aims to support the children of the schools involved, their families, educators and teachers. The support provided is aimed in particular at all those situations of greater fragility, which concern disability or other fragilities for which a more articulated and specific intervention is useful, aimed at accompanying families to the acceptance of the reality that finds them as parents and persons.

During the experimental phase, which coincided with alternating phases of the restriction period due to Covid-19, the Spoke operators noticed a significant impairment in autonomy and relational skills in the 0-6 age group. During the health emergency phase, the children and their families suffered major restrictions that drastically limited their attendance of socialising contexts. Subsequently, the children were less prepared for the demands that the school context placed on them in terms of acquiring tools and skills. Used to frequenting almost exclusively the home context, in which socialisation is restricted to family members and in which the demands are decidedly lower than in the school context, the children lacked the possibility of being in the so-called "zone of proximal development" (Winnicott,) within which the demands made are neither too easy and therefore devaluing and demotivating, nor too difficult and therefore frustrating, but adequate to the child's possibilities and consequently motivating the attainment of new skills, competences and tools.

The return to school, therefore, confronted the children with a context that was not easy to cope with and this forced schools to readjust their schedules and activities in order to make insertion more gradual, but it also destabilised families, who found themselves reformulating a reality check for which they were not prepared.

From this situation, new parental requests emerged regarding the developmental status of their children, for targeted educational strategies and in some cases for a more in-depth assessment of the situation.

**Staff:** The staff involved in the Spoke was: 1) the Psycho-pedagogical Team of the "Schools for Growth" Network (referents for inclusion, disability, learning disorders and special educational needs). The Team consisted of psychologists, pedagogues, behaviour analysts, psychomotricists and educators. This particular multidisciplinary approach made it possible to intervene in a more comprehensive and integrated manner.

These experts were involved with the aim of supporting families and ECEC professionals (Coordinators and Educators). They worked to support the educators and parents in the detection of developmental problems, in the decision-making process and in the search for communication, relational and educational strategies best suited to the child's characteristics.

In particular, the interventions were in support of parenting. Families approached the Spoke in person and by telephone, reporting doubts as to how they could support their children in their development. In some cases, these were purely educational problems, for which it was sufficient to give indications regarding useful strategies in relation to the child's developmental stage and the parents' personal resources. In other cases, these were parents who, noticing a difficulty in their relationship with their children and their children's relationship with various contexts, reported that there was a need to investigate the child's profile in greater depth. In some cases, the work was to accompany the parents in becoming aware of the presence of an atypical neurodevelopment in their child, with the consequent activation of a pathway with the O.D.A. neuropsychiatry team.

2) In order to also have resources in the clinical sphere, collaboration was started with the neuropsychiatry department of the O.D.A. Opera Diocesana Assistenza (Clinical Rehabilitation Centres and Integrated Personal Services), an organisation that boasts a team of experts in the diagnostic and rehabilitation spheres. The O.D.A. is a health-assistance organisation that manages four facilities in the Florence area and offers global care for disabled children and adults, with customised rehabilitation and care programmes thanks to multi-specialist expertise.

3) The staff of the Associazione Progetto Villa Lorenzi (Educational services for the prevention and rehabilitation of youth distress and addiction). The association has made available its expert clinical pedagogues trained in the field of addiction prevention and rehabilitation. The Villa Lorenzi Project supports parents in carrying out their educational role, and helps them equip themselves with skills and tools to deal with the problems that growing up their children inevitably poses.

The interventions served to bring to light risks or addictions to substances, gambling, digital tools and social media within the family unit, and consequently to guide people to adopt lifestyle behaviours that would limit the risk of resorting to substance use.

Other interventions were on behalf of parents who, in addition to having children aged 0-6, also had adolescent children, in some cases from previous relationships, with whom it was necessary to re-establish relationships of dialogue and support.

**Activities:** The activities addressed two target groups: families and educators.

1) Activities aimed at parents with the following aims:

- Listening to parents on issues related to their children.
- Set up a psychological, pedagogical and educational counselling service that can foster and enhance the parent's internal resources.
- Detect the child's developmental problems in both the school and home context.
- Helping the parent to reflect on the communication modalities that characterise the relationship with their children.
- Guide the parent in finding a useful pathway to deal with the problems identified.
- To prevent, through early intervention, the worsening of problems and uncomfortable situations, with possible repercussions also in the school environment. To represent a tool, a modality and an opportunity to support parenting.
- Collaborate in the construction of specific paths useful for dealing with critical situations and for which a possible referral to the competent territorial services is necessary.

2) Activities aimed at educators with the following aims:

- Active confrontation with regard to issues concerning the teacher's educational function.
- Deepen reflection on all those critical situations from which conflictual relationships between the people involved may emerge.
- Working together to build pathways to identify and address problematic situations and possible referral to the competent territorial services.
- Promoting the integration of educational strategies between school and family.
- To represent a tool for the training and retraining of teaching staff.
- Reading pupils' discomfort and conflict dynamics in the classroom to provide strategies that foster positive relationships through paths of emotional and relational awareness and competence.



- Supporting educators in their educational task, particularly in the management of interventions for children with disabilities and other Special Educational Needs.
  - Designing, in cooperation with the teaching team, targeted educational interventions aimed at positively improving the climate within the classroom.
  - Mediating between educators and parents to build shared educational strategies.
  - Building a fertile ground for collaboration between school and family.
  - Building an educational response involving children, parents, teachers and making the most of all the resources in the area.
- 3) Activities to support parenting and the prevention of distress and addiction with the following aims:
- Listening to parents about personal problems caused by addictions and directing them to territorial services and the paths implemented by the Villa Lorenzi Project.
  - Helping the parent reflect on the communicative modes that characterise the relationship with their children in order to find more effective and functional relational modes.
  - Guide the parent in finding a useful pathway to deal with the problems identified.

**Target groups:** Families and 0/6 educators and 0/6 coordinators.

1) Spoke households No. 507 of which:

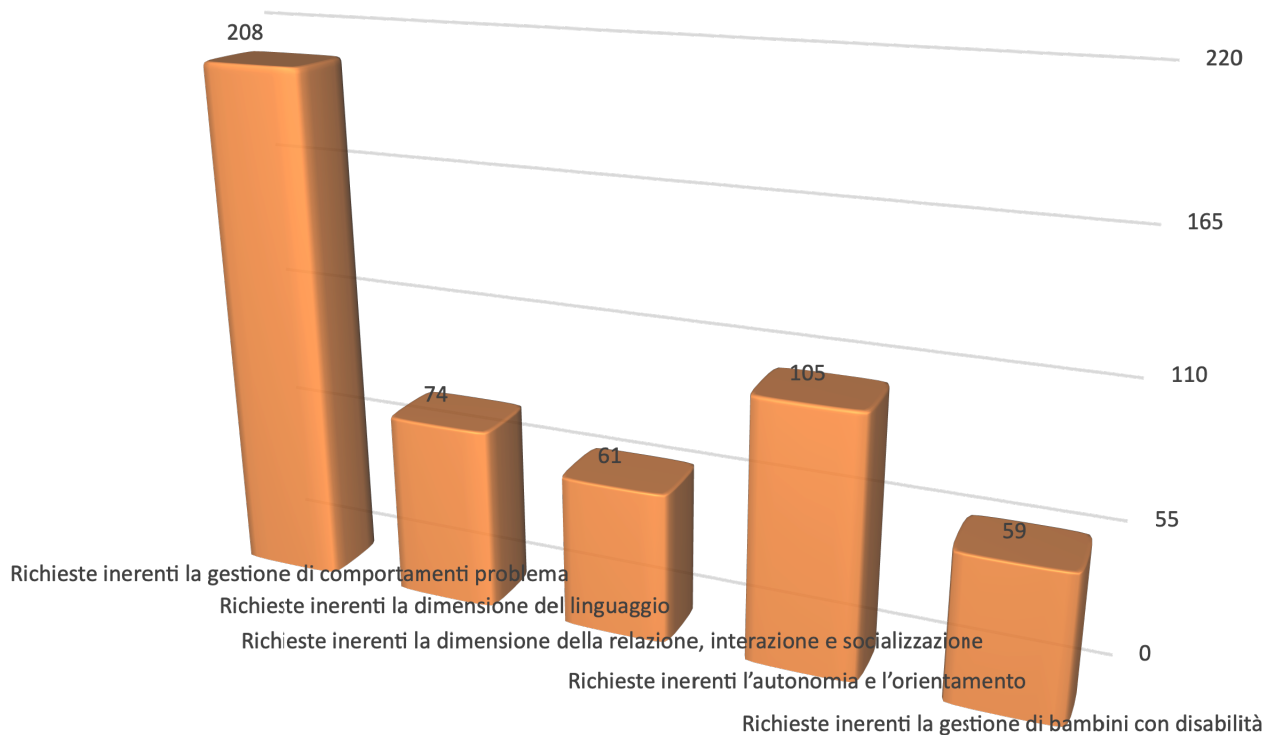
- Requests concerning the management of problematic behaviour No. 208
- Requests concerning the dimension of language No. 74
- Requests concerning the dimension of relationships, interaction and socialisation No. 61
- Requests concerning autonomy and orientation nr. 105
- Requests concerning the management of children with disabilities no. 59

Figure 10: Families of Health Spoke

2) Educators 0/6 who used the Spoke No. 145 of whom:

- Requests concerning the management of problem behaviour No. 56
- Requests concerning the dimension of language No. 21
- Requests concerning the dimension of relationships, interaction and socialisation No. 33

## PARENTS



- Requests concerning autonomy and orientation No. 13
- Requests concerning the management of children with disabilities No. 22



## EDUCATORS 0/6

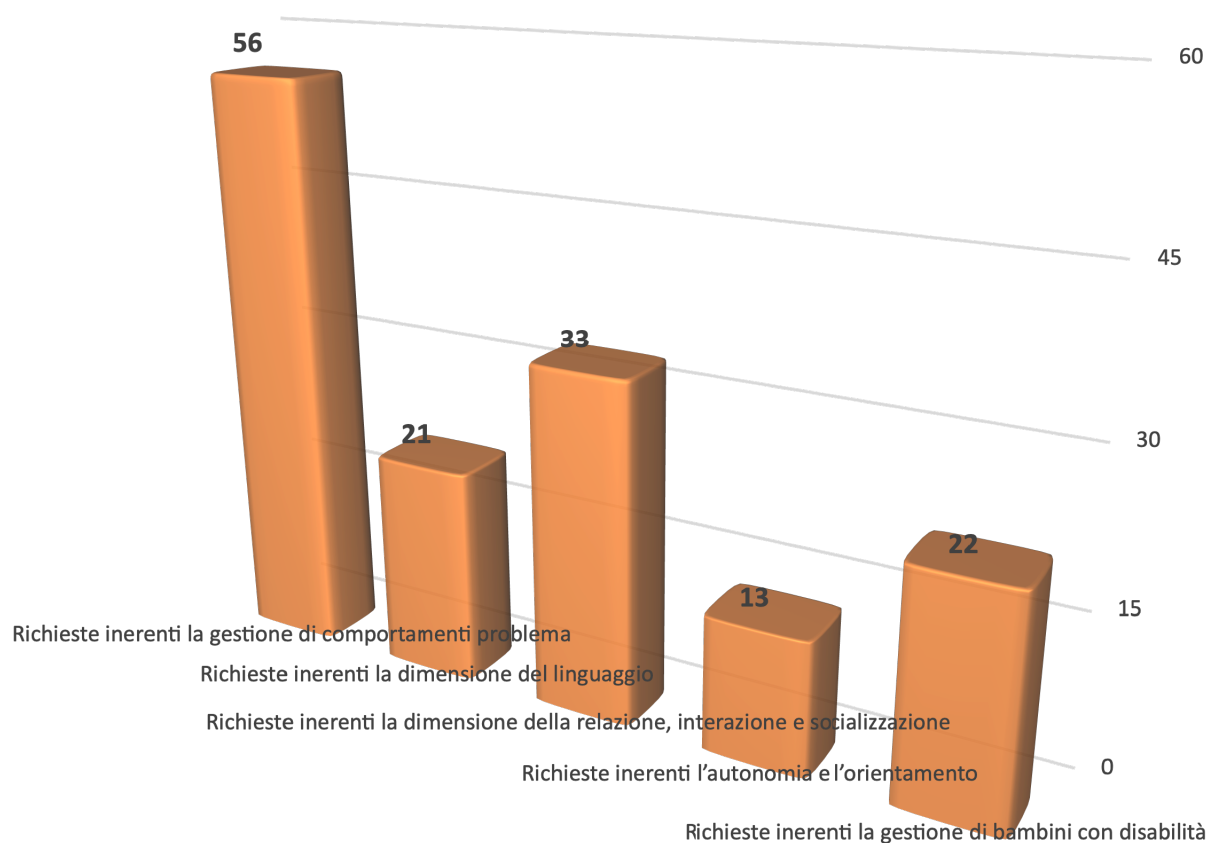


Figure 11: ECEC Educators/Professionals of Health Spoke

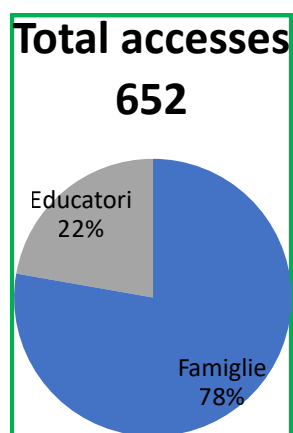


Figure 12: Overall accesses to the Health Spoke

**Conclusions:** The need for families to be guided and guided in the difficult task of raising their children has been noted. This task is even more difficult when they present difficulties related to disabilities, DSA and BES. Certain disabilities, which by their very nature limit the parent-child relationship, entail a re-evaluation of the expectations that a parent commonly formulates in his or her thoughts about the relationship and life with a child. This process of re-evaluation often comes to severely test the sanity of the parents, they need to be accompanied in the search for resources in the area and appropriate paths for their child and often for them as well.

## ***2.6. Spoke Language and Communication, also Digital***

**Objectives:** The Spoke aims to foster the linguistic and cultural inclusion of families and children from migrant backgrounds.

In recent years our schools have in fact witnessed a significant increase in the presence of second-generation foreign pupils according to a diversified distribution in the various school levels: more than 80% are present in pre-school and primary schools; second-generation foreigners are slightly on the rise in first- and second-degree secondary schools. In pre-schools there is a significant percentage of foreigners (45%) attending non-state schools.

The presence of foreign pupils in Italian schools is growing and requires a distinction between pupils with non-Italian citizenship but born in Italy and pupils of recent immigration. The former, despite being of foreign origin, do not differ much from their Italian peers, they have the same schooling and present the same criticalities, they speak Italian with the same idiomatic accents, even if they often do not speak it in the family, they have similar tastes and habits; for them there is often a problem of overall integration, but with not worrying tones. The problem of integration, on the other hand, arises more and mainly for pupils of recent immigration, who do not know the language and often find themselves in situations of real marginalisation, being members of families with well-defined cultural and educational characteristics and who speak mainly their mother tongue.

**Staff:** The staff involved in Spoke was: 1) Mediators from the 'Scuole per Crescere' network, experts in teaching Italian to foreigners of various nationalities. Collaboration meant that their experts, pedagogists, cultural mediators, speech therapists, could be made available to the many families in need.

2) The staff of the Regional Intercultural Centre 'Gli Anelli Mancanti'. This association was established as an aggregative experience of young Italians and migrants, characterised from the outset by the high participation of migrants in the various activities and services offered. Founded as a 'non-recognised recreational association' based on theatrical activities and on teaching Italian to migrants, it has gradually focused both on supporting the latter and people living in situations of social and economic marginality, and on raising awareness of the issues of emigration and

coexistence between cultures, in a constant dialogue with the territory. The association has been present in the Florence area since the 1990s, but also has branches in other Tuscan cities.

**Activities:** There were three types of activities:

1) Activities aimed at parents:

- Listening desk for parents in order to understand their level of proficiency in Italian.
- Provide parents with useful information on access to services.
- Provide support in understanding documents related to daily activities.
- Sending to the partner association's facilities for Italian language courses.
- Presence of language mediators during scheduled meetings with teachers.

2) Activities aimed at educators 0-6:

- Providing good practices to ensure the inclusion of foreign language children.
- Advice and support to foster communication with foreign families.
- Presence of cultural and linguistic mediators in the classroom and at interviews with families.
- Providing useful tools and strategies to foster communication with foreign children.

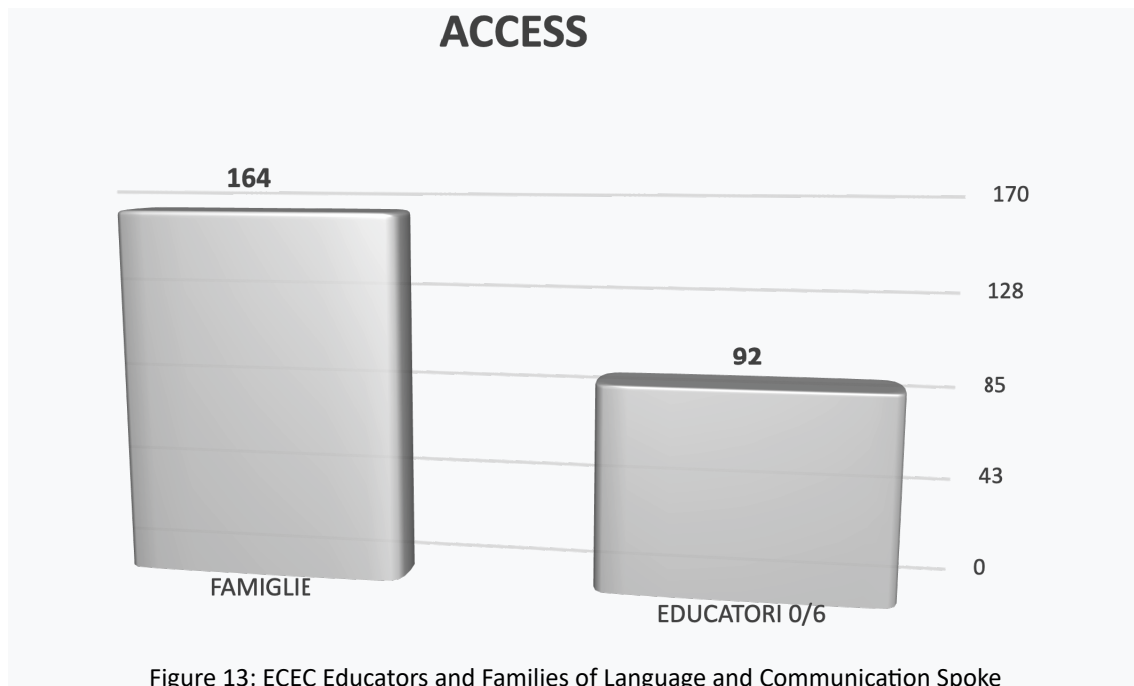
3) Activities for children:

- Presence of cultural and linguistic mediators in the classroom.
- Structuring pathways to foster the use of the Italian language.
- Structuring activities that foster knowledge of different cultures.

**Target groups:** Families and educators 0/6.

1) Spoke households No. 164

2) Educators 0/6 who used the Spoke No. 92



**Conclusions:** The activities implemented with the families made it possible to enter into a relationship with the children's parents and create an educational alliance that is fundamental for their children's educational journey. For these families it was a concrete and functional help to have the possibility to turn to the school and have a support to relate both with the school reality and with the different realities useful for improving the psycho-physical well-being of all the members of the family nucleus. The two realities involved worked for interventions within the school environment, in which it was possible to support the children in their relationships with peers and teachers during the planned educational activities. This enabled a significant improvement in inclusion within the classroom with a positive impact on the children's learning of new skills. This type of intervention also provided educators with the opportunity to observe and subsequently put into practice the indications received in terms of good practices to be implemented for inclusion within classes with foreign pupils.

As far as activities outside the school are concerned, the 'Gli Anelli Mancanti' Association involved children and their families in afternoon Italian language courses. However, as an organisation that generally deals with multiculturalism, it was able to

provide a series of additional services and activities at its premises, with the ultimate aim of including the cultural differences of foreigners in the social fabric of the area.

#### ***4.3. Final considerations on the Hub&Spokes Model***

F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K.'s experimentation with the Hub&Spokes Model had a clear impact on the cultural and social deprivation of children, parents and families of origin.

The H&S Model has proved to be an effective tool and an example of social attention to childhood that, starting from the topic and the educational emergency, has managed to embrace multiple aspects of family and social distress, attempting to solve or at least mitigate them, in a path of inclusion and positivity.

The objectives that our Hub has recorded, addressed and at least partially achieved and resolved can be summarised as follows:

- Enhancing the professional skills of teachers and educators, experts and school staff through inclusive methodologies and pedagogical approaches;
- Intervention on the cultural and social deprivation of children and families living in more precarious conditions due to low income, recent immigration, job loss, illiteracy, mental fragility, geographical marginality;
- Creation of an 'educating community' consisting of pre-schools and primary schools, social and health services, hospitals, associations and in general all those concerned with children's rights, child education and social inclusion.

The model realised an integrated organisation of educational and training processes, which acted on the profound needs for high professionalism and skills of caregivers (educators, teachers, coordinators, parents), and intercepted appropriate and reflective care.

The map in concentric circles, where the Educational Service has been the propelling centre of a human educational transformation, supports and develops an "integrated, relational and collaborative" care of children, families, professionals, and the various institutional and social welfare realities involved and present in the area.

What was experienced with the Hub&Spokes Model and the results achieved were, for all involved, a source of personal and professional satisfaction. In the awareness of having addressed only a fraction of the discomfort that through the youngest is



reflected in the social dynamics that intersect with the life of the Hub, there was nevertheless clear evidence of success in terms of the satisfaction of the people involved, of the actual improvement of some very important living conditions such as the dimension of work, health and housing.

This awareness is confirmed by the ex-post evaluation that was carried out on the families, parents, and caregivers who turned to the Hub. In order to draw a true result, a final telephone interview was conducted in which the level of user satisfaction was collected. We can report that the feedback received had a more than positive evaluation for 100% of the accesses to the various Spokes.

These data indicate that people have a real need to be welcomed and listened to and that they welcome the opportunity to access a range of integrated support services.

For these two reasons, the FISM has therefore decided not to interrupt the Hub & Spokes activities of the F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. project, to make the most of the experience that has emerged in this context to enrich the panorama of its scholastic, cultural and social proposals aimed at children and above all at their families. There is an awareness that supporting the needs of families and parents means supporting the family dimension as a whole, supporting children, dealing concretely with hardship, promoting inclusion from all points of view.

## TREND HUB&SPOKES

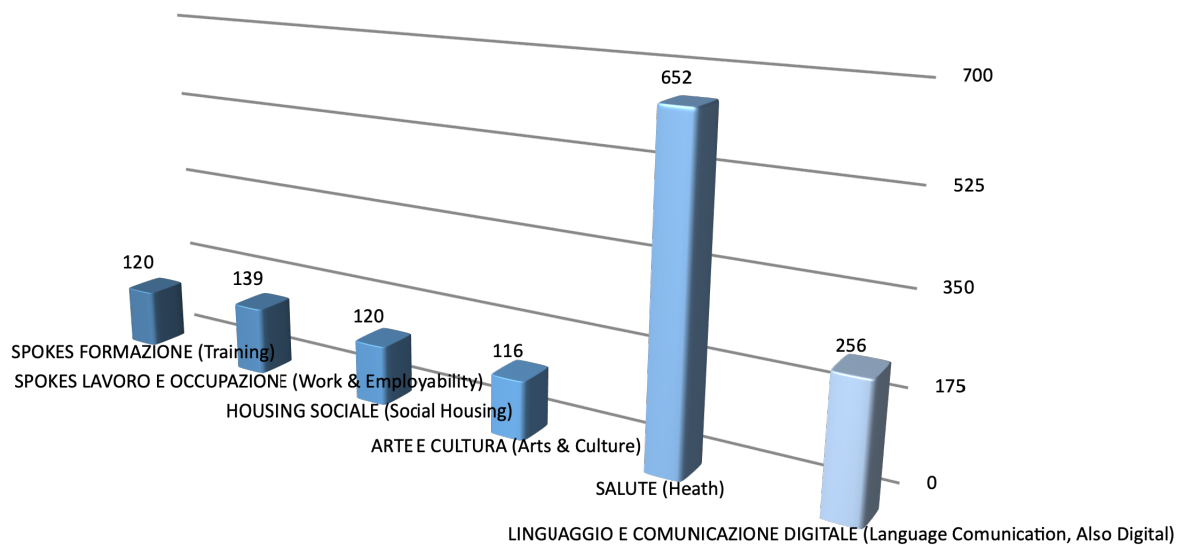


Figure 14: Summary of F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. Hub&Spokes Model

## 5. THE HUB&SPOKES MODEL IN VIRTUAL MODE

### 5.1. The context

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Hub&Spokes Model was also tested in a **virtual mode**, through the F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. Platform <https://www.friendesk.eu/platform/>, realised by Blue Room Innovation (Spain), with the help of KMOP and the Regional Directorate for Primary and Secondary Education of Thessaly (Greece), Europanet (Romania), Know and Can Association (Bulgaria).

The need to implement the Hub&Spokes F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. Model in virtual mode arose during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic first affected the application of the *lockdown* in Italy, which then gradually spread to different European countries. The FISM, as coordinator of the Model, found itself unable to implement the actions planned and planned within the Hub, involving schools and ECEC educators and experts. Schools were closed, educational activities were only at a distance, people were confined to their homes with severe restrictions on mobility and travel.

Secondly, the spread of the pandemic across Europe affected the countries involved in the project differently. The most common situation, within the partnership, was the difficulty in finding common alignment periods for the implementation of the trial: Spain, Greece, Bulgaria and Romania experienced, as did Italy, periods of *lockdown* alternating with periods of relative relaxation of restrictions, but at different times and almost never coinciding.

This entailed, for the partnership, the need to rethink and re-design the experimentation of the Model. Paradoxically, it was precisely the use, during those long months, of IT platforms to be able to continue to communicate, work, and meet, that allowed the Hub&Spokes Model to be revisited, including its online version.

It was decided to use the F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. Platform, which was initially conceived only for the use of the training course for ECEC educators and experts, as a 'virtual place' where families, parents, and caregivers of 0-6 year old children could access to receive

the information, guidance, and support, already provided by the Model as a school Hub.

This made it possible to respond to a twofold objective: the first, immediate, was to offer an alternative solution to the objective impossibility of travelling to the school Hub; the second, of medium to long term impact, led to an improvement in the Model itself.

The virtual Hub&Spokes model, far from being confined to critical moments, in fact responds to a broader need: that of being able to make use, on the part of families, educators and experts, of a 'virtual space' capable of breaking down time limits and geographical distances. Everyone, from their own home, can access it and ask for or provide information, advice, counselling.

From this point of view, we can say that the virtual Hub&Spokes Model represents both an element of innovation with respect to the initial conception and planning, and a factor of inclusion with respect to all those who live in structural situations of relative isolation: think of those who live in remote or rural areas, on small islands or in peripheral or ultra-peripheral regions, in urban peripheries, in areas with reduced services, in inland areas or less developed areas.

## **5.2. The F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. Hub&Spokes platform**

The F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. Hub&Spokes platform is a virtual Help-Desk for families, which aims to provide information and support to families and their children from 0 to 6 years old in relation to their needs. This Family Help-Desk is an integrated system where educators, teachers, experts and volunteers can work together to provide families of children with an inclusive and all-inclusive service.

There are four Spokes, i.e. four virtual rooms, one for each area of competence and intervention. In the HEALTH Spoke, in the ARTS AND CULTURE Spoke, in the LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION Spoke, ALSO DIGITAL, parents and families can find relevant information on the topics of each Spoke, they can participate in meetings with experts, they can ask questions or request specialised support. Newsletters, Podcasts, Blogs, Interviews with experts are available free of charge.

Finally, the Spoke TRAINING is aimed at educators and teachers interested in improving their professional development. The F.R.I.E.N.D.E.S.K. training course is

available free of charge. It is based on 6 units and different learning activities, which are mainly derived from the best educational practices 0-6 and are designed with the approach of self-reflection on one's own daily educational activity.

### **5.3. The experimentations**

The partners KMOP, the Regional Directorate for Primary and Secondary Education of Thessaly, Europanet, and Know and Can Association tested their respective Spokes virtually. Their implementation involved many actors, including mainly teachers, educators, psychologists, professionals working with children aged 0-6, families and children.

The objective of the activities was to work on the Hub&Spokes model, collect data, statistics and interviews with beneficiaries and actors, in order to elaborate a final evaluation and ideas for the future implementation of the Hub&Spokes model. In addition, some good practices were identified for each Spoke.

The criteria used for their identification were:

- Flexibility: the practice can be adapted to different target groups and activities can be modified and changed according to the needs of the educator and the child;
- Applicability: the practice can be applied to different target groups;
- User-friendliness: the practice can be used both by people working in education and with people who have no experience in education; parents can use the practice without prior training;
- Simplicity: the practice is easy to do;
- Connection to the topic.

#### **5.3.1. Spoke Language and Communication, also Digital - Know and Can Association (Bulgaria)**

##### **Field of intervention of the Spoke Language and Communication, also Digital:**

1. Improving children's communication skills in foreign languages.
2. Support the resolution of specific problems such as social rejection and isolation in a child's life.
3. Help children learn a foreign language more effectively through play-based learning, and have a positive impact on their communication skills.

4. Foster communication between classmates and also between students and teachers.
5. Promote communication between classmates, encourage them to cooperate in solving problems and learning together, through peer teaching.

**People involved: the practices were developed together by people with the following backgrounds:**

- Teachers
- Educators
- Psychologists
- Parents
- People working with children aged 0-6 years

**Target audience:**

- People involved in the educational process: teachers, trainers, educators, etc;
- People who work with children: psychologists, pedagogues, etc.
- Families: parents and relatives of the children;
- Children of all ages with emphasis on children aged 0-6 years;

**Good practices:**

Title of good practice: Story-based foreign language learning.

Description: It is suggested that younger learners learn a foreign language more easily. Stories are considered a valuable tool for foreign language learning by young learners, as they offer both linguistic and personal benefits to children in a safe and relaxed environment that reduces stress and anxiety in young learners, thus leading to more successful language acquisition. Recommendations for stories:

- a) The main character can be similar to the students in age and other qualities, so as to be easily identifiable by the children.
- b) The choice of other characters can be based on the children's everyday life (family members, neighbourhood, school) to create an interconnection between their background knowledge and personal experiences and the plot of the stories.
- c) Considering the limited concentration capacity of young students, stories should be short.
- d) Stories can be written in dialogue form to ensure the appropriate conditions for dramatisation.



Stories are used to introduce a wide range of additional linguistic elements to students, without affecting the level of comprehension. They can be used to learn and review vocabulary, to provoke discussion, etc.

Assessment: This method increases students' motivation and participation in the learning process. This method creates a friendly and relaxed environment that allows students to develop their social and language skills, while the playful nature of the activities leads to the development of the children's creativity and imagination.

Title of good practice: Improving peer relationships through dramatic play.

Description: Drama play is the kind of play in which children take on roles and act them out to explore themselves and their environment. By pretending to be someone or something else, children can learn new ways to express themselves, share thoughts and ideas and even get in touch with their feelings. Initiating this activity at school can also help create closer relationships between classmates.

Evaluation:

- It helps to discover a number of positive qualities about oneself and one's companions and to gain self-confidence.
- It encourages students to communicate and cooperate with each other. Engaging in dramatic play helps students learn to recognise and respect the ideas, suggestions and creative perspectives of others.

Title of good practice: Game-based early language learning.

Description: Current language learning theories assume that children learn best through discovery and experimentation and are motivated to learn in a playful and relaxed context. This method involves games based on topics that need to be learnt, e.g. 'school', 'neighbourhood', 'colours', 'personal objects', 'animals', 'places', 'food', 'transport', 'leisure time', 'body', 'nature', 'seasons-weather', 'media' and 'culture', etc. Students are placed in various imaginable situations. The main aim of this phase is to involve the students in the game and get them to 'produce' the language and communicate without worrying about whether they are doing well or badly.

Evaluation: It was indicated that language learning carried out in a 'playful' atmosphere resulted in (a) stimulating students' motivation, (b) making them feel confident and (c)

creating a positive attitude towards foreign language learning.

Title of good practice: Flexible seating.

Description: Types of flexible seating include stools, therapy balls, small portable garden chairs, cushions, boxes, wheeled seating, bean bags and mezzanines. It has been found that non-linear seating arrangements often allow for greater social interaction between students and students and teachers. In addition, it appears to be beneficial for students' health.

Assessment: Flexible seating encourages greater independence and autonomy on the part of the pupil. Flexible seating also allows swinging, rocking, bouncing, leaning or standing, increasing oxygen flow to the brain, blood circulation and core strength. This burns more calories and increases metabolism. It also helps keep young minds more alert and focused. In addition, since students share the learning space and take turns sitting in various positions, they can chat with each other when appropriate and thus improve conversation techniques.

Title of good practice: Peer Teaching.

Description: This method involves the children who understand the topic best explaining it to their peers, helping them to understand and correct their mistakes. Students can also try to search together for answers and explanations in textbooks or other resources.

Evaluation:

- Establishes an environment where students can learn as a team
- Improves students' engagement, communication and autonomy skills
- Promotes critical thinking and problem-solving-based learning
- Increases understanding of course content
- Builds self-confidence and security

**Results and feedback:**

- Language and communication are skills that can be taught to children in many different, non-formal and inclusive ways, not only through formal teaching.

- Language and communication are skills that can be taught to children through everyday activities;
- It is not necessary to be a specialist with a degree in the field of language and communication to teach basic communication skills to children.
- Each activity related to language and communication can be adapted to different target groups of children according to their needs.
- It is good to establish flexible criteria for the development of activities related to language and communication, especially when working with children between the ages of 0 and 6 because each child has individual needs.

### **5.3.2. Health Spoke - KMOP and Regional Directorate for Primary and Secondary Education of Thessaly (Greece)**

#### **Fields of intervention of the Spoke Health:**

- Helping insecure attachment.
- Measuring the inclusion of children with disabilities.
- Involving children with disabilities.
- Helping marginalised children.
- Helping to combat anxiety.
- Promoting inclusive teaching practices to prevent school drop-out, alleviate disadvantages of vulnerable young people and support resilience and lifelong learning through music and artistic activities.

#### **People involved: the practices were developed together by people with the following backgrounds:**

- Educators, psychosociologists or psychological health specialists, animal therapy organisations and/or specialists.
- Educators and professionals working in the field of inequalities
- Educators, psychosociologists or psychological health specialists
- parents (at a certain stage to reach their child - if possible)
- Educators and school administration
- Professional music and dance-movement therapists, educators

#### **Target audience:**

- Children

- Educators
- Young children
- Students

**Good practices:**

Title of good practice: Animal-assisted therapy for children suffering from insecure attachment caused by abuse and neglect.

Description: Animal-assisted therapy can be performed with children who have suffered abuse or neglect in the family. In addition to the usual psychological benefits of therapy, this practice focuses on reducing the likelihood that these children will continue to engage in abusive behaviour throughout their lives. This form of therapy creates a safe bubble between the child, the therapist and the animal. The benefits of animal therapy are many: it reduces loneliness and anxiety, increases mental stimulation, provides comfort and helps relaxation.

Evaluation: Through relations with animals, children can learn and understand their emotions, with the help of specialists and animals they can also heal from their trauma or mental health problems.

Transferability of the good practice: In order to realise this objective, it is necessary to get in touch with organisations that keep therapy animals. In addition, there will be a need for facilities that allow animals and children to have a place to stay. With the help of professionals and specialists.

Title of good practice: Children's Community Health Inclusion Index

Description: Addressing barriers in the environment can contribute to the health and quality of life of children with disabilities and their families. The Community Health Inclusion Index (CHII) is a measurement tool developed in the United States to identify environmental barriers and facilitators of health inclusion in the community. The CHII adopts an adult perspective and aspects crucial to children may have been omitted.

Key points of the index:

- In order to create inclusive communities, a measurement tool specific to the needs of children with disabilities is needed.
- For the development of a comprehensive index, we must consider the diverse and evolving needs of children with various types of disabilities (physical, sensory and

cognitive) and their families.

- The items must be universal (they can be used by different types of users) and generalisable to different sectors of the community (education, health, government and organisations).
- The potential use of this tool can be extended to clinical practice, community and public policy development, to support communities in identifying areas for improvement regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities within their facilities, while presenting guidance on how to respond to these needs.

This tool can be used to establish indicators and benchmarks for community health promotion initiatives and context-based interventions, such as the implementation of accessibility and recreation policies in the community for children with disabilities, and can help promote future health promotion initiatives for these children and their families.

Evaluation: The health inclusion index can identify environmental barriers and facilitators of community health inclusion and help solve existing problems.

Transferability of the good: Involvement of specialists who understand or know the use of this index and know how to apply and evaluate the results, organisations that can make a change if problems are identified.

Title of good practice: Inclusion of children with disabilities.

Description: In Australia, there is a two-tiered approach to ECEC services, with early learning (childcare) supported nationally by the Australian Government and services for 3- to 5-year-olds organised by state and territory governments. With regard to childcare, the National Inclusion Support Program (ISP) supports children with disabilities, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and children with serious medical conditions, speech and language delays or disruptive behaviour. Most of the funding subsidises additional educators to support a disabled child or a child with high support needs, interpretation services or a bilingual worker. Another component, the Inclusion Support Agency, supports a service to develop a Strategic Inclusion Plan, which identifies the need for modifications, training or additional resources, including specialist equipment. Inclusion Support Agency staff can visit the service to provide advice (Department of

Education, Skills and Employment, 2020).

In the state of Victoria, for example, an ISP preschool also provides funding for additional short-term and long-term staff and has some capacity to provide counselling (Department of Education and Training, 2016). Inclusion programmes focus primarily on employing additional staff with minimum qualifications to care for children with disabilities. The Early Years Learning Framework, which guides ECEC services, has a broad definition of inclusion, which includes children's social, cultural and linguistic diversity, learning styles, abilities, disabilities, gender, family circumstances and geographical location (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009), but has not developed from principles to practice.

In Greece, based on the current legal framework, early childhood inclusion is mainly implemented through classroom support by early childhood support staff. The qualifications of early childhood support staff range from a few hours of professional development training on inclusion to a postgraduate diploma in early childhood or special education (Law 3699/2008, Art. 20). Currently, at national or local level, there is a lack of an agreed, evidence-based framework for the implementation of inclusion, such as the publication of recommended inclusive practices and/or specific guidance to support implementation. As a result, in the early childhood and early childhood special education sectors, there are differing perceptions of how inclusion should be implemented, with inclusive practice often perceived as a model of 'integrating' students with disabilities into the mainstream classroom (Fyssa, Vlachou, & Avramidis, 2014). The lack of a shared framework to define and guide the implementation of inclusive practice is also reflected in educators' perceptions of their roles, with many general education teachers viewing special education teachers and support staff as responsible for supporting the developmental and learning needs of children with disabilities in the general classroom (Vlachou & Fyssa, 2016).

Evaluation: Examples from different countries (and Greece) of good practice in involving children in early learning systems.

Transferability of good practice: Systematic change, indolence of various organisations towards inclusion.

Title of good practice: Play therapy.



Description: Play therapy can help children learn more useful and correct behaviour, understand their emotions and resolve inner conflicts. Through play therapy, children also learn self-control and self-respect, how to express their feelings, solve problems, improve their communication skills and modify problematic behaviour.

Evaluation: Play therapy can improve children's communication skills and give them the opportunity to learn.

Transferability of good practice: A therapist specialised in this form of therapy, a place where children can play, toys, music.

Title of good practice: Cognitive-behavioural therapy for children with anxiety.

Description: With the help of CBT (*talking therapy*), children can be helped to understand how their thoughts work, what their emotions are and how they affect their behaviour, and how as their emotions change their behaviour can also change. In addition, children gain control over their thoughts, learn to talk about themselves in a healthy way, find effective coping strategies and, if necessary, deal with the feared situation to show that things are OK.

Assessment: CBT helps people learn and understand their emotions and what is behind them, improving their mental health.

Transferability of good practice: A therapist specialised in this form of therapy.

Title of good practice: Animals in the classroom.

Description: An increasing amount of research shows the benefits pets have on individuals. The presence of animals in a primary classroom can also have many benefits. Students do not necessarily have to be involved in activities with the animal. Even the mere presence is sufficient to see positive results.

Evaluation:

- Animals are known to help calm children during panic attacks and can be considered their friends, helping them to feel less lonely.
- A pet in the classroom can contribute to empowering the students, as it has to be looked after.
- In addition, the presence of an animal has been proven to have a positive impact on students' academic performance.

- Animals can also make children more aware of what is happening around them and increase their social skills.

Transferability of good practice: This practice is only possible if none of the students are allergic to animals and if there are sufficient resources to take care of a pet.

Title of good practice: Project LINK: Learning in a New Key (Body and Music for Listening and Sharing without Words)

Description: The project involved music therapists and art therapists working alongside teachers in order to empower them to use music-centred practices and expressive approaches in their work, help them acquire new and innovative skills and support relational well-being in the classroom, both for the students and for themselves. The role of the trainers was thus to enhance the teachers' listening skills and expressiveness on a mainly non-verbal level through increased awareness. Other objectives were to expand expressive educational strategies in terms of emotional self-regulation. As an example, teachers were encouraged to explore their inner space through breathing and imagination exercises. Music therapy was also used. In addition, students also participated in music therapy and other similar activities. Their final product was a music video that was watched and discussed with the teacher and the therapist-trainer.

Evaluation: In their final, teachers shared and named several attitudes that they were able to experience and develop: they spoke of the importance of listening to pupils' subjective ways of expressing themselves, of valuing their emotional competence and of being more flexible and creative in their interactions. They reported that their observational skills had developed towards a learner-centred way of teaching and that their focus was more on the process rather than mainly on the product of the learning experience. At the same time, they emphasised the importance of having adequate time in the school day for these activities and being supported in developing new practical educational actions related to these skills. Students were also grateful for the opportunity to express their feelings and to collaborate with colleagues.

Transferability of good practice: In order to organise this project properly, a professional psychologist in this specific field is needed.

### Results and feedback:

- With the help of animals, children can understand their emotions and heal.
- Using the health inclusion index, environmental barriers and facilitators of community health inclusion can be identified.
- With the help of play therapy, children can understand/learn about their emotions, learn to resolve conflicts.
- With the help of CBT, children can learn and understand how their emotions work and how their behaviour is linked to them.
- There is evidence that the presence of animals in the classroom can provide a sense of peace and calm for both students and teachers. This helps combat anxiety and improves their mental health.
- Music, the arts and expressive body languages are considered in relation to their positive effects on learning processes and emotional regulation, as well as for their creative and relational potential, thus mainly benefiting the mental health of the recipients.

### **5.3.3. Spoke Arts and Culture - Europanet (Romania)**

#### **Fields of intervention of Spoke Arts and Culture:**

- Familiarise students with different art forms and cultures.
- Using art as a tool to improve engagement in the learning process.
- Developing students' future skills for the creative industries and raising the European spirit through culture and the arts.
- Developing communication skills in the social sphere in students;
- Stimulating collaboration between groups in society.

#### **People involved: the practices were developed together by people with the following backgrounds:**

- Educators
- Artists
- Managers of cultural institutions
- Managers of theatrical institutions
- Theatre studies students
- University of the Arts
- Local public bodies

#### **Target audience:**

- Children
- Educators

## Good practices:

Title of good practice: Integrating the arts into the curriculum

Description: In the Romanian educational curriculum for formal educational institutions, 'ALTFEL Week' is approved, held on a fixed date (from 2022, each school can choose the period according to local specificities).

During this ALTFEL week, the children visit educational institutions, but participation in other activities is encouraged: visits to museums, creative workshops, meetings with various representatives of culture and art, watching performances, etc.

Assessment: The integration of the arts into the curriculum - in this week's ALTFEL (in translation ALTFEL means 'in another way') - offers students and teachers learning experiences through art and culture that are intellectually and emotionally stimulating and challenging. Through these activities, the European spirit is stimulated through a common culture and the creative industries are also stimulated from an early age (see European Plan for Culture).

Transferability of good practice: Requires good access to cultural institutions or flexible access from cultural institutions (artists/cultural representatives) to educational institutions.

Title of good practice: Theatre (Drama in schools) - integration in the curriculum/2

Description: In the Romanian educational curriculum for formal educational institutions, as of 2018, drama in education was accepted as a specific form of 'after-school'. In this way, students from art universities, actors from theatres and theatre cultural institutions were directly present in the educational institutions and had the opportunity to develop drama lessons. In this way, the link between education and art was put into practice - in accordance with the priority of the European Work Plan for Art and Culture.

Evaluation: The integration of theatre in education, the direct theatre hours in schools (also in ECEC institutions) provided students and teachers with learning experiences through art and culture/ developed social skills for the participants and also skills for working in groups (making decisions, listening to others, etc.). For the development of

Transferability of the good practice: Requires good access to cultural institutions or flexible access from cultural institutions (artists/cultural representatives) to educational institutions and also specific locations for drama/theatre in educational classrooms (infrastructure, logistical settlements).

Description: In Romania, local public authorities can support children from rural areas to travel to large cities where cultural events and institutions take place. Local public authorities can provide specific public transport for children. In the case of local rural communities with local development and tax collection, it is also possible to subsidise children's participation in cultural events by covering all participation costs (tickets, meals on the day of the trip, etc.).

Transferability of the good practice: It requires a good dialogue between representatives of public authorities and managers of educational institutions.



### Results and feedback:

- Art can be used to learn about culture, historical events and many other topics.
- Theatre, theatre in education, theatre in schools - can be used to develop social skills, ability to work together, etc.
- Participation in artistic and cultural events - can be used to develop social skills, ability to work together, spirit of tolerance and anti-discrimination education, etc.

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Foster Reception for Inclusive Educational Needs:  
Development of Educational Support for Kids



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