

When peer supporters enable the disabled on stage

The blind hunter

In her article on social exclusion, Kirsten Weir maintains, “A broken heart does not differ much from a broken arm”.¹¹⁹ Social exclusion “hurts”; it often hurts even more than physical pain, especially if the pain is suffered by someone with a handicap. An estimated one billion people (around 15% of the world’s population), have some kind of disability, making them the world’s largest minority (United Nations 2006).¹²⁰ Such individuals feel the need for social interaction and safety as strongly as anyone else, but recent research shows that individuals with special needs are more likely to fall victim to bullying than their peers.¹²¹

With this in mind, a theatrical play on the topic of “difference” was performed by the peer supporters of the 5th Gymnasium of Petroupolis and students of the special needs team of the Municipality of Petroupolis. The aim of this collaborative action, which used ENABLE material, was to raise awareness, enhance compassion and increase respect among teenagers through their interaction with people with special needs.

The outcome of this collaboration was the play, *The blind hunter*, a story set in Africa that extols difference, understanding, acceptance, co-operation, kind-heartedness and love. The cast was made up of high school students and the members of the special needs team of the Municipality of Petroupolis. The play was performed before an audience of students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders and was greeted with great enthusiasm by participants and audience alike. It was recorded as a short film so it could be used as a tool for preventing the bullying of disabled people, both in school and the wider community. The project confirmed the value of anti-bullying programmes like ENABLE, as well as their contribution to changing attitudes, cultivating compassion and promoting respect for diversity. Peer supporter testimonials, some of them cited below, were indicative of the project’s success.

A special day

Through my collaboration with the special needs students in the theatrical play *The blind hunter*, I realised that these children have some qualities that many of us don’t have:

“What I realised on that day, is that we whine and grumble and get angry all the time about unimportant things, while we should be happy and we should see all difficulties as something positive like these young people do ... I am happy that I have had the chance to meet these new friends and I would like to hang out with them, because I can learn a lot of things from them.” – Odysseas, age 14.

Friendly advice

“What I will always remember is a piece of advice that Christos, the blind student, gave me. At some point, during the recording, I couldn’t say my words because I was tired and I spoke very fast. Christos touched my hand gently, and with his soft voice, he showed me kindly how to speak slowly and clearly because just from the