Opening of the first Universal Design for Information and Research Center

 1st October, 2013, Budapest: Today, Miklos Soltesz, State Secretary for Social and Family Affairs of the Ministry of Human Resources has opened the Universal Design Information and Research Centre (ETIKK) of the Budapest Association of Persons with Physical Disability. The Centre has been established with the financial support of the Office of the State Secretary for Social, Ministry of Human Resources. The Conference Venue and Event Center were provided under favourable terms by the Lurdy House Administration. The office and conference room equipment were supported by Kinnarps Hungary Ltd and the colour of the walls can be owned to the support of Poli-Farbe Paints and Coatings Plant.

Miklos Soltesz, State Secretary for Social and Family Affairs, Ministry of Human Resources said at the inauguration that his Ministry gave support of 15 million HUF for the establishment of ETIKK. He added: “The goal is that the universal design conference room and the office become known by more and more enterprises. An accessibility survey of 7,000 buildings were made with the involvement of NGOS and cost 62 million HUF." As State Secretary, he said that making government clerk windows (one-stop shops) accessible has started and this work amounts to 5.2 billion Hungarian forints.

Dr. Laszlo Lovászy, the Hungarian member of the Committee on the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (CRPD) highly commended this initiative. The expert pointed out that, “ETIKK, which is in itself an extraordinary civil, business and government cooperation, combines social solidarity, the market logic, civil courage and government foresight since we are facing a common challenge in the twenty-first century: namely an aging society especially in Europe where there will be orders of more people with disabilities due to the appearance of disability mainly over 50 years of age.”

Universal design is a design method that is based on human diversity. Instead of removing barriers, the focus is on prevention. Design and development of mainstream products, services, systems and our surrounding environment is done in such a way that they will be usable for the widest possible range of people regardless of their gender, age and capabilities. By applying the universal design aspects more users can be outreached, therefore production and investment costs can be reduced, and the products due to their flexibility can adapt to the changing needs through our lifecycle without costly and burdensome alterations in the environment.

“The ETIKK aims to raise awareness that if manufacturers, designers and service providers pay more attention to the needs of persons with disabilities, much less expensive, in some cases aesthetically questionable–special products would be required and the number of physical and communication barriers which hinder the daily lives of people with disabilities would be negligible. Today, there are commercially available products that meet the aspects of universal design. The aim of the Universal Design Centre of the Budapest Association of Persons with Physical Disability is to exhibit and show these products and applications , emphasizing the importance of their education and the employment."- stressed Erzsébet Földesi, president of the Budapest Association of Persons with Physical Disability,

The office, established with the support of the Ministry of Human Resources, as an active workplace, demonstrates conditions necessary for effective and efficient employment for persons with disabilities with products that meet the aspects of universal design and therefore are suitable for everyone, including the employees with visual, hearing and physical disabilities of the Association. The design of the office also makes it possible for people with disabilities to get into it, to do work and training on equal basis with others.

The work of employees is enhanced by ergonomic and adjustable furniture (shelves, chairs, tables) that can be used by anyone, since their height is reachable by anyone and can easily be removed. The height and angle adjustable footrests were also placed under the desks, in line with workers’ needs.

Communication of the staff is supported by a smartphone which provides voice guided navigation for people with visual impairment. This can be used by people with hearing impairment who can connect an induction loop with the headphone jack of the smartphone.

The range of universally designed products is brilliantly complemented by induction loops installed both on the ceiling and at the information desk to filter out the background noise. This provides equal opportunities to the office’s staff members, guests and clients with hearing disabilities. The above examples are illustrative; around thirty types of equipment are demonstrated in the Center.

Conference room no. 7 of the Lurdy Conference and Event Center has been equipped according to the universal design aspects. On the first floor of the building the route from the cloak room to the conference room is marked with a tactile lane. Next to the conference room door, a pictogram and Braille signage has been placed indicating the room. Adequate acoustic conditions and lighting are provided for lip reading and sign language used by people with hearing disabilities. Induction loops have been installed behind the baseboards.

As part of the ETIKK and after some alterations, the already existing accessible toilet fully meets the accessibility requirements.

The web page of the Universal Design Information and Research Center (www.etikk.hu) fully corresponds to the international standards, thus providing access for everybody.

**Test group**

Budapest Association of Persons with Physical Disability has created a test group for the product and service designers. The group is composed of people with different types and severities of disabilities. The goal is to increase the number of designers who involve user groups from the onset in their design work. This co-operation will result in an inclusive environment.

**Co-operations**

The Association has signed a co-operation agreement with two universities: Gustav Bárczi Faculty of Special Education and Budapest Technical University Department of Psychology and Ergonomics. An agreement with the later has also been made on a consultation to be provided by a test group. This will be used by the students in their diploma work and the final presentation of their diploma will be done with the participation of the test group. .

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