The International Conference "Learning, ... From School to Life" took place on October 17 and 18, 2025, at the Hotel M on Derčeva ulica 4 in Ljubljana. The event brought together more than 120 experts from various fields – researchers, educators, other professionals, employers, and representatives of non-governmental organisations and state institutions in the field of education and employment of people with intellectual disabilities, as well as parents and siblings of children with special needs. Participants listened to presentations presented by 54 speakers from 10 countries.

The purpose of the Conference was to present good practices, innovative approaches, and challenges in education, cooperation with parents, and the inclusion of people with intellctual disabilities in various work environments. The Conference provided an opportunity for networking among participants, exchanging experiences, and establishing new collaborations at the international level. The aim of the event was to raise awareness of the importance of equal access to education and employment and to promote the social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities.

At the end of the first day, a round table discussion "20 Years Later" was held, with representatives of students, parents, the Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs and Equal

Opportunities, the Slovenian Institute for Education, the Janez Levec Center in Ljubljana, VDC Tončke Hočevar, and Centerkontura – Social Inclusion Programme.

Conclusions of the round table and lectures by content area:

Education

- **Concretisation of learning process and teaching**: we learned about examples of teaching in practice that is adapted to children with intellectual disabilities – how to illustrate photosynthesis with the active participation of students in class, the importance of having animals in the classroom, opportunities for children to work independently in a special education programme with the help of a silent book, the importance of tactile images for all categories of children with special needs, how children learn about sustainability topics with the help of horses, when inclusion in inclusive classes is meaningful and successful.
- **More examples from practice** - Participants had the opportunity to learn about numerous examples of good practices from different educational environments. Innovative teaching methods, individualized approaches, and effective ways of including children with different special needs in regular and adapted programmes were presented. Practical examples illustrated how cooperation between teachers, counsellors, parents, and the wider community can bring about concrete improvements in the quality of teaching and the inclusion of children. Such exchanges of experience were considered extremely valuable and inspiring.
- **Recognition that we are extremely innovative in educating children with intellectual disabilities** - Discussions have shown that numerous creative and adapted approaches are already being implemented in practice, demonstrating a high level of professional innovation among Slovenian and foreign experts. Teachers and counsellors often work in challenging circumstances, but with exceptional dedication they develop effective methods based on the specific needs of children. This confirms that the field of education for children with intellectual disabilities is one of continuous learning, adaptation, and the search for new solutions.
- **We want even more sharing of ideas and innovations** - One of the conclusions of the series was the need for even greater connectivity between professionals and the creation of opportunities for sharing good practices. Participants expressed a desire for more regular cooperation between institutions, professional associations, and individuals who develop innovative approaches to working with children with mental disabilities. It was emphasized that the open exchange of ideas, materials, and experiences strengthens the community of professionals and enables the dissemination of good solutions.

Employment:

- **Mentoring is key to successful integration into the work environment**. It needs to be provided both by the organization that refers the person to the job and by the employer who accepts the person. Evaluating mentoring and training on how to be a good mentor are essential for long-term success.

- **Advertising should be based on stories, quality, and sustainability**. The focus should be on local, handmade, and sustainable products that carry a personal story. It makes sense to move sales online and support them with modern approaches—social networks, influencers, and digital marketing.
- **Integrated employment is not sufficiently recognised in Slovenia**. There is no national quality label for companies that are socially responsible and employ disadvantaged groups. Special social care and employment centres are not actively approaching companies and are not implementing practices for finding specific jobs, as companies in the West do. However, changes in this area are already taking place. Companies themselves are bringing them to our environment from abroad. It is also necessary to ensure the possibility of choosing employment within protected jobs in workshops within special social care and employment centres.
- **It is necessary to look for new, innovative ideas for employment**. Examples of good practices include mushroom cultivation, internal postal service, attendance checking and meal ordering, setting up an inclusive farm with crops and team-building workshops (involving volunteers). Such ideas enable concrete jobs and greater inclusion in society.
- **Training on occupational safety should be adapted**. Occupational safety training should be presented in an easy-to-read format, using symbols, photographs, and adapted handouts that enable better understanding and greater independence for people with intellectual disabilities. Assessment should not be based solely on written tests, as these only test literacy and not the applicability of knowledge. Cooperation with the providers of these programs is necessary. Schools can help with their experience.
- **The community of people with intellectual disabilities offers an alternative to competitiveness**. These communities are characterized by mutual assistance, empathy, support, and genuine joy in the success of others. Volunteering with them can be a "reset" – an opportunity to connect with the essence of humanity, compassion, and living in the moment.
- **The challenge for the next 20 years** – establishing a portal for offering and searching for work, a link between employers and job seekers.
- **Change in the legal framework** – incentives for companies that cooperate with special social care and employment centres and offer them cooperative work or employ their users in integrated jobs. Re-establish the possibility of student work for pupils in special education programmes who are older than 15 years of age.

Consulting work

- **The importance of developing emotional regulation, communication, and social skills in children with intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorders** - Lecturers emphasized that developing emotional regulation, effective communication, and social skills is crucial for the holistic development of children with intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorder. Contemporary approaches in counselling are based on understanding the emotional needs of children, their social-cognitive functioning, and creating a safe environment through the systematic development and strengthening of self-regulation, social problem-solving skills, communication, self-confidence, and self-efficacy.
- **The importance of empowering and supporting parents/families** - The contributions emphasized that empowering parents and families is a key factor in the successful integration of children with intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorder into the educational and social environment. Counsellors play an important role in strengthening parents' confidence

in their own abilities to understand their child's behaviour and needs and in finding effective parenting skills to cope with everyday challenges.

It was also pointed out that social awareness needs to be strengthened so that parents have greater confidence in the professional conduct of commissions for the placement of children with special needs and the professional staff of educational institutions. This would encourage parents to make decisions that are in the best interests of their children, even when these decisions do not meet their expectations.

- **New, innovative ideas and programmes for children and parents from experienced practitioners** - Innovative methods and programs designed and implemented by experts to improve the quality of life of children with MDR and AM and their families were presented.
- **The importance of teamwork among professionals in the process of counselling children with intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorder and their family members** - Experts emphasized the importance of mutual cooperation among professionals in order to optimize the effectiveness of the counselling process for children and their families.

Creativity

- **Together, through creativity, we build and become part of a wider community** – creative processes represent an important bridge between individuals, groups, and the wider community. Through joint creativity, bonds are formed, a sense of belonging is strengthened, and collaborative learning is encouraged. Participants pointed out that creative projects enable children, young people, and adults to actively contribute to the common good through art, music, movement, or other forms of expression, thereby developing a sense of responsibility and connection to the community.
- **A great deal of ingenuity and personal commitment is required to obtain funding for projects**. One of the important topics of discussion was the difficulty of obtaining financial support for creative and inclusive projects. The speakers emphasized that success in this area is often based on the personal motivation, innovation, and dedication of individuals who seek various sources of funding, from local calls for proposals and donations to international partnerships.
- **Through the creative process, we do something good for ourselves, and the end result inspires others –** The creative process has a dual value: it enables participants to grow personally, express themselves, and relax, while the end result often conveys a message that inspires and connects others. The contributions repeatedly mentioned the importance of the experience of creativity as a path to inner balance, self-awareness, and mutual empathy. Art and creativity are presented as tools that transcend individual boundaries and open up space for shared experience and understanding.
- **With enthusiasm, we can push boundaries** - The concluding messages of the session emphasized that enthusiasm, persistence, and heartfelt commitment are the foundation of every successful creative project. With dedication and a positive approach, individuals and groups can achieve remarkable results, even with limited resources and challenges. Enthusiasm was presented as a driving force that connects people, encourages cooperation, and enables ideas to be transformed into concrete, socially significant projects.

Leisure activities for children with special needs

- **Leisure activities are extremely important for children with special needs**, especially for children with autism spectrum disorders, as there are often not enough suitable opportunities for them to participate. Participation in leisure activities is not only important for the child's overall development, but also has a significant impact on the well-being of the family. Even one hour a week of appropriate activities for a child can give parents valuable time to rest, relax, or socialize—perhaps just a quiet walk, a chat with a friend, or a cup of coffee in peace.
- **Leisure time as an opportunity for community involvement.** Leisure time is one of the most natural opportunities for integrating children with special needs into the wider community. Integration and inclusion often happen more easily and spontaneously in leisure activities than in formal educational settings. Such activities enable children to connect with their peers, build social skills, and develop a sense of belonging.
- **The importance of choice and independence** – Unlike school education, which is compulsory and mostly determined by where you live, leisure activities offer children the opportunity to choose according to their wishes, interests, and abilities. This helps children develop a sense of independence, responsibility, and personal freedom (within the limits of their abilities).
- **Various forms of leisure activities** – The concept of leisure activities does not only include sports and cultural activities such as music, dance, theatre, drawing, painting, or going to the cinema. Social interactions and experiences in everyday life—birthday celebrations, holidays, trips, and other shared activities—are also an important part of quality leisure time. Here, the introduction of a personal assistant has proven to be a positive development. The role of a personal assistant is to enable quality leisure time. Although their primary purpose is to assist a person with special needs, their presence often means support for the whole family. Personal assistants can help organize celebrations (birthdays, holidays, etc.), include children in other leisure activities, and contribute to greater cohesion and relaxation in family life.

Organising and Programme Committee of the International Conference Learning ... From School to Life