

## **COOPERATION PLAN**

**for providing the service of *Companion-assistant for functionally  
impaired persons*  
in Latvia and Lithuania**

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Latvia-Lithuania Cross Border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013  
Project **LLIV-322 MY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY-My Response**

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## Introduction

*Low quality social services, insufficient education for personnel, inaccessibility to the environment* – these are the main hindrances to *social integration* for people with a disability. To solve these problems, the project of the Latvia-Lithuania programme *My Social Responsibility (My Response; LLIV-322)* has been implemented in West Latvia and Northern Lithuania on 2012-2014. 13 Project Partners<sup>1</sup> both from Latvia and Lithuania were working on a cross border exchange of experience, specialist training, new social services and an improvement of the infrastructure, were implementing and introducing with universal design principle as well. Two new services – *Companion-assistant* and *short-time stay* – have been created and tested among other results of the project. *Companion-assistant* services and *short-time stay* services are new possibilities that make every day easier for people with a disability and those close to them.

After finishing the project the need to maintain the services created has occurred. The situation after the project is a new one in respect of the services funding and other circumstances, so in order to ensure the vitality of the services created, new strategies of cooperation of the ex-Project Partners are needful. In this cooperation plan the ways of the Project Partners' cooperation for maintaining the *Companion-assistant* service in the future are being discussed and the possible solutions for ensuring the *Companion-assistant* service stay alive are being proposed. **The goal of the plan** is to analyze the experience of the *Companion-assistant* service piloting during the project and in respect to this to propose a model of the service maintaining in the area of the ex-Project Partners' activities in the future.

The SWOT analysis of the *Companion-assistant* service piloting during the project made and based on this, a conception of ex-Project Partners' cooperation and the service's maintaining is proposed. The main activities for implementing this conception in the practice described, as the calendar plan of those activities and responsibilities of all ex-Project Partners' listed. In the plan the funding models of the service maintaining and cooperation proposed as well as the criteria of the activities' effectiveness set.

The plan is of the recommendation nature, so any part of it may be changed according the situation.

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<sup>1</sup> Kurzeme Planning Region (LP; LV); Ventspils City Municipality Body „The Social Service of Ventspils City Council” (LV); Liepaja City Council (LV); Kuldīga County municipal agency “Social service office” (LV); Dundaga County Council (LV); Nica County Council (LV); Skrunda County Council (LV); Saldus Amalgamated Municipality (LV); PI “Siauliai region development agency” (LT); PI „Educational projects” (LT); Joniskis “Saules” basic school (LT); BI Klaipeda City Social Support Centre (LT); Klaipeda City Municipality Administration (LT).

## 1. SWOT analysis of the *Companion-assistant service* created in Latvia and Lithuania

In this part of the plan the SWOT (*Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats*) analysis will be provided to identify the strongest and the most problematic parts of the *Companion-assistant service* implementing to understand the most potential possibilities for development of it.

<p><b>Strengths</b></p>	<p>The <i>Companion-assistant</i> service for functionally impaired persons provides an opportunity for the disabled people to live an independent life, to be included into the labour market, to be a socially active member of society. Also to live a valuable personal life and to fulfil his personal interests: to participate in the community's meetings, festivals, activity of various clubs and associations. Functionally impaired persons admit that the <i>Companion-assistant</i> service allows them to feel-themselves as the true members of society; parents of the functionally impaired children mark that this service helps them to take care of their child, to have an active career life and also to have a rest from the daily routine. So it may be affirmed that the <i>Companion-assistant</i> service is an effective tool to increase the social integration of the disabled persons as well as the emotional condition of those people and satisfy the daily physical needs of them. Moreover, all the <i>Companions-assistants</i> working with the clients provide them high-quality personalized services, which may not be provided by state services and treats the disabled person from a very personal point of view, not from the social only.</p>
<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p>	<p>The <i>Companion-assistant</i> service is quite a new phenomenon, so it is in its development stage still. Society does not have enough of information on it, so the service is not massively recognizable yet. Lack of additional funds for maintaining the service created during the Project is another one weakness. As it is a personal service, a big number of <i>Companions-assistants</i> may be needful to fulfil the needs of big number of disabled persons. It is difficult to increase the interest in the possibility to become a <i>Companion-assistant</i> as the career perspectives are not clear in this area of activity, so this service may be not the main activity of the <i>Companion-assistant</i> and he/she will not have possibilities to dedicate all of his/her active day time for providing only this service. For the disabled people <i>Companions-assistants</i> are the persons from outside, so it is difficult to create the</p>

	trust between both sides. As the Project is an international one and the <i>Companions-assistants</i> must work in the international environment, a challenge to learn Latvian or Lithuanian language for communicating with the clients is a difficult task.
<b>Opportunities</b>	Development of the <i>Companion-assistant</i> service may become a solution of the long-time unemployment problem, if a decision to involve the long-time unemployed persons into providing of this service would be taken. Also it could be presented as a possibility for young people to gain some practical, organizational, communicational and other skills, raise the empathy and understanding and to prepare themselves for the work in the labour market. The <i>Companion-assistant</i> service provision could be integrated into the process of higher education as the obligatory part of studies for the students of social care, medicine, nursing, etc. A good way to organize the <i>Companion-assistant</i> service in society is a movement of volunteers, which could help to ensure that only highly motivated persons will join this service and offer their help-hand to the disabled people.
<b>Threats</b>	Without a suitable funding, the <i>Companion-assistant</i> service won't become a recognizable phenomenon in the contemporary society and won't gain a respect and support from it as won't gain trust from the clients themselves. In such case the service may stay in its development stage and do not grow into a massive movement. If so, the service may stay as a small phenomenon maintained in few regions of Latvia and Lithuania only. Without communicating the important motives to become a <i>Companion-assistant</i> , a lack of people willing to do this job may be experienced.

Despite the very positive aspects of the *Companion-assistant service* and its importance for the social integration of the functionally impaired persons, the SWOT analysis shows that the visibility of the service in the society must be significantly increased. Also a bigger movement of the *Companions-assistants* must be achieved to fulfil the needs of all the disabled persons. The later conclusions and the results of the SWOT analysis lead down to the proposition to organize the *Companion-assistant* services in Latvia and Lithuania in a form of **voluntary movement**, which would not replace the state organized social care system and its organized service of *Assistant*, but would supplement each other. Provision of the *Companion-assistant* services after the project in a form of the organization of volunteers could be a

solution of a question to keep this service active 5 years after the end of the *My Social Responsibility* project.

## **2. The conception of the *Companion-assistant service's* provision and cooperation in the future**

During the *My Social Responsibility* project it had been noticed that companion-assistant service is very important. To ensure good quality in services the continuing cooperation between PP is much needed. That could be ensured during staff exchanges. Staff exchanges could be used for sharing experiences, best practises, mistakes and ideas of providing services for clients. Cooperation between service provider executives and employees could ensure equal service quality between PP organisations.

Because of the new and innovative service communication and cooperating between clients is also very important. That could be ensured during client exchanges in which they could share their experiences, expectations and suggestions. One of possible ways to engage clients and staff into communicating and cooperation is to create regular joint events, such as Sports Day, holiday celebrations and so on.

Companion-assistant service could provide not only assistance in daily life of a client (such as assistance in bank, health service, labour market etc.) but also enable clients to travel more (participate in clients exchange between PP). In order to ensure high quality of service the client should have a possibility to choose his companion-assistant.

To ensure services there could be used both employees and volunteers. In respect to this, the service of *Companion-assistant* could be presented as a tool for personal growth and a possibility to gain new competencies while helping the disabled persons, local community and the society in common sense. Organizing these services in a form of voluntary work would allow saving the funds and developing them into a big movement. In order to do so, ex-Project Partners in Latvia and Lithuania, who had piloted the *Companion-assistant* service during the project, should implement some actions described below. That could be a platform for collecting the basic information on the clients who need the service of *Companion-assistant* both in Latvia and Lithuania as well as creating the database of volunteers willing to involve themselves into helping the disabled people. Also there could be used already existing databases from both countries ([www.buksavanoriu.lt](http://www.buksavanoriu.lt) and [www.brivpratigais.lv](http://www.brivpratigais.lv)). By implementing such kind of actions, partners would popularize the idea of *Companion-assistant service*, would appeal all the people willing to volunteer and would administrate the process of the *Companion-assistant service* in both countries Latvia and Lithuania. PPs service provider executives would be responsible for providing the information on the clients who need such kind of service in various regions of Latvia and Lithuania.

Also they would be responsible to provide this information for potential volunteers willing to work in particular region. That could be done by publicity on regional media. PPs service provider should ensure adequate amount of companion-assistants for clients who need this service. In order to ensure high quality of services it is very important to provide a possibility for staff of all participating organizations to communicate and cooperate between themselves (via telephone, Internet or regular exchanges).

In case of Partners cooperation three types of support for the disabled people through the assistance service would be organized:

- *Support of the children with functional impairment:* supports assist families with extraordinary child-rearing needs directly related to the child's functional impairment.
- *Support of the adults with functional impairment:* supports assist people with functional impairments to achieve a higher level of independence.
- *Employment and Vocational Supports:* assist people with functional impairment to gain competitive, long term, or supported employment.<sup>2</sup>

Service providers staff and clients should cooperate and communicate with each other via telephone, Internet or regular meetings, so that best practises, ideas, suggestions, comments and mistakes could be shared and discussed. That would help to make services as good quality as possible.

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<sup>2</sup> *Companion-assistant for functionally impaired persons.* (2013). Training module. LatLit project *My social Responsibility*. LLIV – 322, Šiauliai;

### 3. List of activities and calendar plan for cooperation in the future

A list of activities needful to provide the *Companion-assistant services* providers cooperation will be listed in this chapter of the Plan. The detailed descriptions of all the activities will be provided as well as the ex-Project Partners involved in particular activity will be indicated together with the foreseen time of activity. All the activities listed are divided into the separate parts, such as *communicational part*, *organizational part*, etc.

Activity	Description of activity	Ex-Project Partner involved	Time of the activity
<i>Organizational and administrative activities</i>			
<i>Continuing of cooperation</i>	PPs in Latvia and Lithuania should continue the cooperation, which could be a platform for collecting the information on the clients who need the service of <i>Companion-assistant</i> both in Latvia and Lithuania as well as creating the database of volunteers willing to involve themselves into helping the disabled people (or using already existing ones).	<i>Ventspils City Municipality Body „The Social Service of Ventspils City Council”; Nica County Council; BI Klaipeda City Social Support Centre; Liepaja City Council; Kuldiga County municipal agency “Social service office”; Saldus Amalgamated Municipality.</i>	Continuous 2014-2018
<i>Mediating between the staff and the clients</i>	In case of strong misunderstandings of conflicts between staff and the clients, employees from another organisation could mediate between problematic sides and help to solve the arisen problem without fear of favour. That could be done via telephone or Internet or in a meeting.	<i>Ventspils City Municipality Body „The Social Service of Ventspils City Council”; Nica County Council; BI Klaipeda City Social Support Centre; Liepaja City Council; Kuldiga County municipal agency “Social service office”; Saldus Amalgamated Municipality.</i>	Continuous 2014-2018
<i>Communicational activities</i>			



<b>Activity</b>	<b>Description of activity</b>	<b>Ex-Project Partner involved</b>	<b>Time of the activity</b>
<i>Informational campaigns in the regional media. Publicity of services</i>	Informational campaigns in the regional media should be organized repeatedly every year to inform society on the existing companion-assistance service, sharing best practises of LT and LV and information about partners. All the work with the regional TV channels, newspapers and internet news portals should be organized as a part of a journalistic process, it means – no funds should be paid here.	<i>Ventspils City Municipality Body „The Social Service of Ventspils City Council”; Nica County Council; BI Klaipeda City Social Support Centre; Liepaja City Council; Kuldiga County municipal agency “Social service office”; Saldus Amalgamated Municipality.</i>	Repeating every year
<i>Events organizing activities</i>			
<i>Joint activities</i>	The joint events, such as festivals, fairs, events of particular town of LV or LT should be organised. Service providers staff and clients could participate in other partner’s events, that would encourage cooperation and communication between them. Also other organisations providing similar services and people from municipalities could be involved.	<i>All the ex-Project Partners</i>	Repeating every year
<i>Companion-assistants exchange week</i>	Companion-assistants exchange weeks could be organized every year repeatedly, when a group of Latvian companion-assistants would come to Lithuania and would work together with local companion-assistants and vice versa. Such kind of exchange could help to know better the national specifics of the <i>Companion-assistant service</i> providing and to ensure the international cooperation between the ex-Project Partners. Every ex-Project Partner would be responsible for organizing the accommodation and other facilities of visiting companions-assistants when they would come to the particular town.	<i>All the ex-Project Partners</i>	Repeating every year

All the activities planned as well as the ex-Project Partners involved are of the recommendation nature only and may be changed after the discussion of all the Partners.

#### **4. Funding of the *Companion-assistant service's* providing and cooperation**

Each partner should develop its own companion-assistant services financial request and attract external funding from state, local municipality or other finance sources. Sustainable cooperation financing costs can be covered from the raised funds. Part of finance could come from clients or service provider's internal financing system.

#### **5. Indicators and criteria of the effectiveness of PP cooperation**

In this chapter of the plan main indicators and criteria of the effectiveness of the *PP* cooperation after 5 years is provided:

- well recognizable by the society and the functionally impaired people;
- attracting numerous companion-assistants willing to devote their free time for providing this service;
- a joint event was held of PP service providers for clients and staff at least once a year
- a Companion-assistant exchange week was held at least once a year

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