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ACTIVATE Project concludes with new European framework for empowering autistic youth as self-advocates

Malta, September 2026 – After two years of collaboration between six organisations across Malta, Portugal, Belgium and Czechia, the Erasmus+ funded ACTIVATE project – Autistic Community through Advocacy, Learning and Empowerment – is reaching its conclusion with a significant set of resources and learning opportunities aimed at strengthening the participation and advocacy of autistic young people across Europe.

ACTIVATE was established to address the barriers that autistic young people can face in participating in advocacy, policy discussions and wider societal life.

At the heart of the project was a clear principle: **"Nothing Without Us."** Autistic young people were placed at the centre of managing the project, contributing to the development of an advocacy programme designed around their experiences, learning preferences and needs.

Research shaped the programme

A key achievement of ACTIVATE was the research study undertaken on how autistic young people learn and what they need from an effective self-advocacy programme. The research involved 97 autistic young people, whose perspectives helped inform the development of the Advocacy Academy.

The research was particularly important in ensuring that the project did not simply develop a conventional training programme, but instead considered accessibility, flexibility and the different ways in which autistic young people may engage with learning.

The ACTIVATE Autistic Advocacy Academy

The Project developed the Curriculum framework and learning outcomes of the ACTIVATE Autistic Advocacy Academy, a tailored programme designed to give autistic young people the knowledge, confidence and practical skills to advocate for themselves and their communities.

The resulting curriculum consists of six learning units covering advocacy, education, healthcare, employment, legal rights and digital activism. The programme combines learning resources, practical activities and workshops, with the aim of helping young people develop advocacy skills that can be applied in real-life situations.

The Academy was developed for autistic young people, with the wider objective of enabling young people to become more active participants in discussions and decisions affecting their lives.

Investing in the people who will carry the work forward

ACTIVATE also developed a Train-the-Trainer programme, supporting educators, youth workers and advocates to deliver the curriculum and create inclusive learning environments for autistic young people. This element is an important part of the project's legacy, helping ensure that the knowledge and resources developed through ACTIVATE can continue to be used beyond the lifetime of the project.

From learning to participation and advocacy

ACTIVATE has gone beyond the development of a curriculum. The project has sought to create opportunities for autistic young people to connect, share experiences and participate in advocacy at local, national and European levels.

The project website has supported a range of digital advocacy activities, including **#AskAnAutistic** sessions, the **#MyAutismJourney** campaign and autism acceptance activities. Through personal stories and digital advocacy, the project has sought to amplify autistic voices, challenge stereotypes and promote greater understanding of diverse autistic experiences.

The project has also worked towards establishing the **ACTIVATE Project - Community of Practice (CoP)** on Facebook, providing opportunities to connect and exchange knowledge across countries and levels of advocacy.

ACTIVATE brought together six organisations with complementary expertise:

- **Directorate for Disability Issues, Malta** – Project Coordinator
- **Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD), Malta** – Communication and awareness
- **KU Leuven, Belgium** – Research and learning methodology
- **IMPACTsci, Portugal** – Curriculum framework and learning outcomes
- **Associação Portuguesa Voz Do Autista (APVA), Portugal** – Digital advocacy
- **European Council of Autistic People (EUCAP), Czechia** – Stakeholder engagement and autistic-led advocacy

Together, the partners combined expertise in disability policy, research, education, autistic advocacy, digital communication and stakeholder engagement.

A project designed for a lasting legacy

While the ACTIVATE project is coming to an end, its central resources and approach are intended to continue beyond the project period. The Autistic Advocacy Academy, curriculum and Train-the-Trainer resources provide a foundation for continued learning and advocacy, while the networks and connections developed through the project create opportunities for continued collaboration.

For more information about the ACTIVATE project and its resources, please visit the project Website:
www.neuroadvocacy.eu