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Intervention

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Early Childhood Intervention:
Universality, Equity and Quality



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Conclusions and opinions expressed by the author in this Poster do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the city of Ljubljana. Many facts, numbers, data were provided by the courtesy of The City of Ljubljana's Pre-School Education and Schooling Department (Mrs. Marija Fabčić), SEN-CO for preschools/kindergarten (Mrs. Katja Poglajen Ručigaj) and PR service of Community Health centre Ljubljana.

EARLY INTERVENTION IN LJUBLJANA (SLOVENIA)

1. What changes have happened due to an early intervention (EI) in the period of the last ten years in your city/your county/your region?

Placement of Children with Special Needs Act was passed in 2001 and some changes in EI services emerged:

1.1. Children with SEN (1-6 years old) have an **advantage over other children when entering kindergarten/preschools** to benefit from EI services there in case of waiting lists. The inclusion of children in kindergarten is more than 86 % of population. Kindergartens are modern, well maintained, have high quality of equipment, a lot of space for children, high quality of staff, ... Over 90 % of parents are very satisfied with kindergartens in Ljubljana (MOL, 2013). In the period of 2006-2013 there were 84 new units opened in LJ kindergartens.

1.1.1. Early intervention services in kindergarten:

- from 1 - 3 hours per week of individualised instruction provided by special needs teacher (one to one)
- up to 40 hours of group instruction – EI special needs program (usually 5 children with SEN in a group).
- All services are granted at no additional costs for parents.
- **Every child with special needs in a kindergarten has an IP** (individualised program) (1 to 6 year olds).

1.1.2 Decisions of the Ljubljana city council in benefit of SEN children and their families – see 2.1. and 2.2.

1.2. **Education centre PIKA** was opened in September 2013. AIM: Teacher training and on-going education, professional and personal development of teachers, service providers and qualified personnel for children with special education needs (birth to age 15) and their families.

1.3. **Special projects run by NGOs** and co-financed by the city of Ljubljana (social inclusion – learning skills, special gross motor skill activities, therapeutic dogs, horse riding, ...).

1.4. **Special events in the Cinema DVOR co-financed by the city of Ljubljana** to create a public environment in which families with SEN children are welcomed in the community with fairness, enthusiasm, and encouragement (films, talks, discussion groups, topics guides for teachers accompanied films for children).

1.5. Other projects in Ljubljana

Project EI - *Down syndrome Slovenia* is running at the very moment with EI services twice a week (centre-based and home-based) and a new EI team in Ljubljana. EI services started after 80 hours of training program for professionals (with

collaboration of the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences of the University of Zagreb). The project is co-financed by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism.

1.6. NOT NEW BUT STILL THERE for more than 50 YEARS without significant changes

Every community health centre in Ljubljana has a **pediatric unit specialised** in developmental disabilities and treatment of babies/toddlers at risk (specialised pediatrician, accompanied by physiotherapist, sometimes occupational therapist). These services are covered by the basic health insurance.

Every community health centre in Ljubljana has a **centre for mental health** (speech therapist, psychologist, special educator) for children/youth (zero to 18) including EI services. All services are covered by the basic health insurance.

2. Which achievement would you highlight as the most important one?

Decisions of the city of Ljubljana in benefit of SEN children and their families:

2.1. **Children in the evaluation process for SEN** receive 1-2 hours of individualised instruction in kindergarten (one to one). This was a decision of the Ljubljana council (not the same in other cities in Slovenia).

2.2. **Paraprofessional aid - special needs assistant** for some children (severe cases of autism, certain chronic illnesses) in a mainstream group in kindergarten and in special events such as holiday camps, one day trips, swimming, co-financed or fully financed by the city of Ljubljana.

2.3. Many children with special education needs are in mainstream kindergartens in groups with typical children. Teachers and learning environment were not fully prepared to meet all their needs. Education centre PIKA has programs for improving the practice of EI in kindergarten (one-to-one counselling for teachers – how to best meet the needs of a child and his/her family, seminars, workshops, ...).



3. Which of the EI services can be systematically provided to families in need?

4. Who offers EI services? How and when can the family be provided with the service?

- The EI services are offered by health community centres (referrals are written by pediatricians – for a pediatrician specialised in developmental disabilities, for speech therapy, psychological evaluation...).
- Information about NGO services are provided on their own: on the web, in social media, parent to parent.
- Children are eligible for the kindergarten/preschool EI services by team written decisions outside of kindergarten. It often takes more than one year to determine the eligibility for services after the initial assessment is done.

Most of the services are centre-based (one to one or in a group of children – in mainstream or in special settings). Only partly and only a few services are family-oriented, the majority of services are still child-oriented, parents are seen as co-therapists. Families can't choose

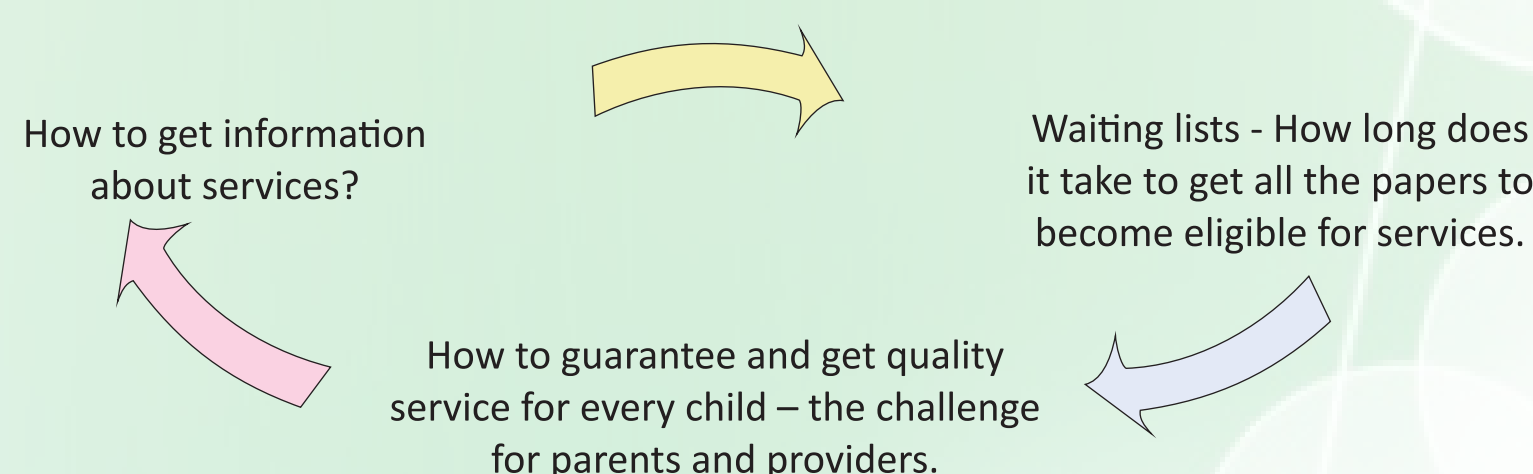
where to acquire an expert support, there are no home-based support EI services offered in Ljubljana. Families can obtain special services for their child free of charge in community health centres and in kindergartens. Many projects are financed or co-financed by the city of Ljubljana exclusively (see the answer to question no. 2). Services are not connected enough, often parents start an initiative or even an organisation of collaboration (communication, report sending) between professionals and teams of professionals.

• Is there a practice to create an individualized plan for each family?

No. Children with SEN have an individualized educational plan, some goals are family-based, but there is no practice nor any knowledge about individualized family service plan.

5. What obstacles families need to face?

5.1. Three main obstacles parents face:



5.2. **Waiting periods for services in Community health centre in Ljubljana** – for evaluation, basic assessment needed for determining eligibility (data by the service provider):

- special educator – 6 months
- speech and language therapist – 8 months
- psychologist – 9 months

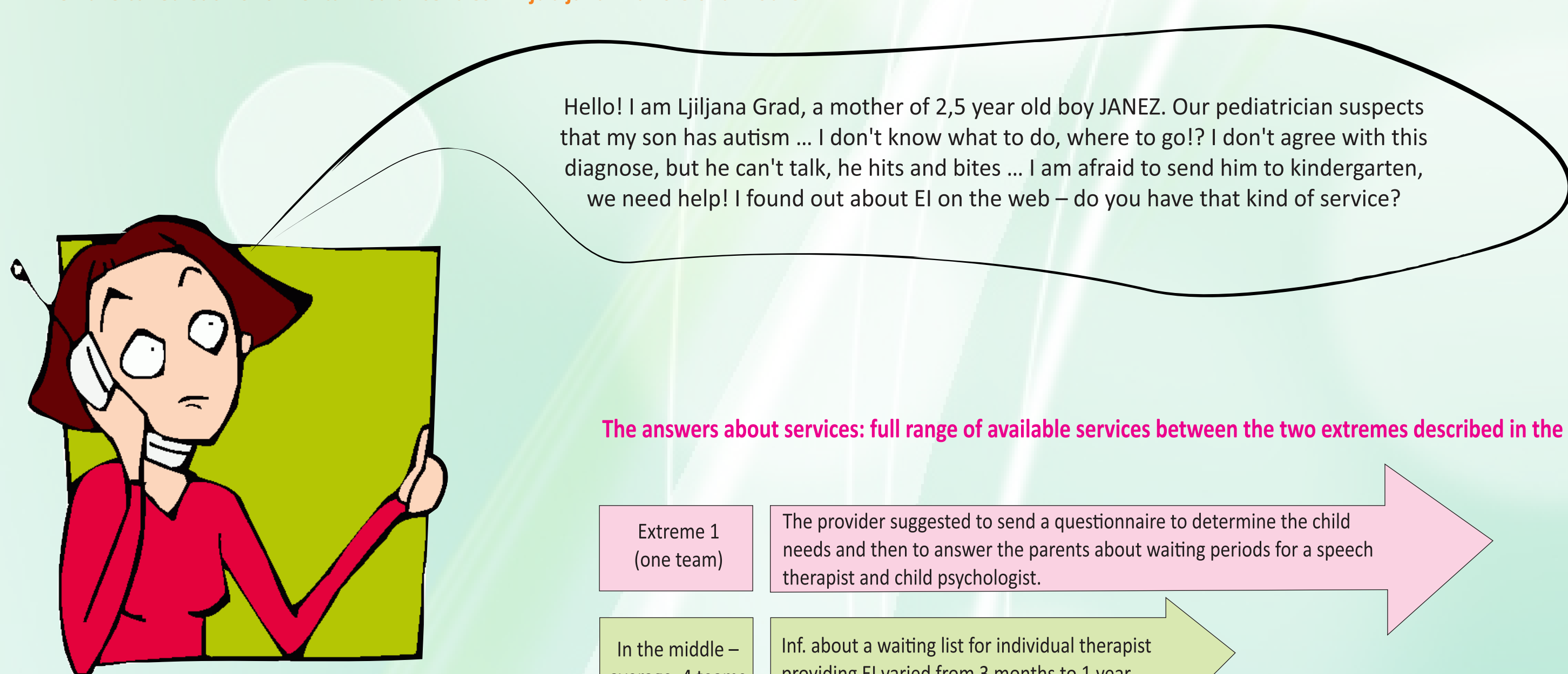
Referrals are not written for a team but for one service provider only, so there are no waiting lists for team assessment. Often parents are caught in a gap between the end of evaluation by one expert and the beginning of evaluation by the other. After several months a speech therapist writes in a report that a child needs a psychological evaluation and parents have to wait several months to get this service.

The result: it often takes more than one year to become eligible for special education services in kindergarten; children in LJ are in benefit – see 1.1.2. Some teams have mutual agreement that children who were evaluated by one therapist are 'IN' – so the other therapist is willing to evaluate that child faster (1 – 2 months) – without going on the waiting list; another child from a waiting list has to wait longer or the evaluation process takes longer.



5.3. What is it like to be a parent of a small child?

We have called each of 6 mental health centres in Ljubljana in a role of a mother



The answers about services: full range of available services between the two extremes described in the table

Extreme 1 (one team)	The provider suggested to send a questionnaire to determine the child needs and then to answer the parents about waiting periods for a speech therapist and child psychologist.
In the middle – average, 4 teams	Inf. about a waiting list for individual therapist providing EI varied from 3 months to 1 year.
Extreme 2 (one team)	Direct answer: EI in Slovenia does not exist. No information at all about waiting periods or available services because the mother had no written referral with inf. which therapists she is asking for. The only advice: Ask a pediatrician and then call us.

6. What is missing, by your opinion? Opinion of the author:

- family-oriented EI (not child-oriented)
- possibility to choose between home-based and centre-based EI
- IFP – individualized family program – more coordination between service providers
- finding children that need EI as early as possible and providing a continuum of services.
- provision of an array of services across programs.
- disciplines working together to integrate all services instead of disciplines working autonomously.

7. What are your goals for the next five years?

Do you plan to practice **trainings for professionals working in kindergartens**, for pediatricians etc.?

Yes, EC PIKA has this goal. This year we plan a training in positive behaviour support for kindergarten children with SEN and a workshop for parents.

The City of Ljubljana's Pre-School Education and Schooling Department goals for the next five years (Mrs. Marija Fabčić):

- relaxation rooms in every pre-school
- program of EC PIKA on state level
- shorter waiting lists for evaluation and assessment – determining eligibility for EI services
- more SEN children in inclusive settings – mainstream groups in kindergarten
- improving collaboration between disciplines, professionals and institutions
- best quality of services for SEN children and families

8. How do you plan to achieve the mentioned goals?

The goals of EC PIKA will be achieved with dedicated professionals and the support of the city of Ljubljana. Some goals of **The City of Ljubljana's Pre-School Education and Schooling Department** could be achieved with collaboration of EC PIKA, some of them with the support of teams in Community health centre Ljubljana, NGOs, Universities and international collaboration. Some additional team members should be employed to achieve transdisciplinary and multidisciplinary EI, home-based services and education of teams to change the approach to family-centered EI and to implement and support evidence based practice.

Facts and numbers provided by The City of Ljubljana's Pre-School Education and Schooling Department (Mrs. Marija Fabčić):

Kindergartens in Ljubljana – EI services for children with SEN

Table 1: Number of SEN groups and SEN children in kindergartens (specialised settings) – Ljubljana kindergartens (2008 – 2015)

Year	SEN groups in kindergarten	SEN children
2008/09	8	47
2009/10	8	46
2010/11	8	47
2011/12	9	51
2012/13	9	49
2013/14	9	41
2014/15	9	46

Table 2: Number of children receiving EI services in kindergarten (1-3 hours per week) provided by special educator and other professionals and number of these educators and professionals

Year	Children with SEN	Special educators and professionals providing EI services
2008	158	15,5
2009	212	19,5
2010	234	19
2011	231	23,5
2012	247	23,5
2013	290	26
2014	302	26



There are 60 children (2015) with suspected developmental delay or other disabilities in kindergartens in Ljubljana receiving EI services in mainstream groups (one-to-one support provided by a special educator 1-2 hours per week) in the (**too long**) period of assessment – determining eligibility – financed by the city of Ljubljana.

In Ljubljana kindergartens 342 children were receiving EI services out of 13.031 children in Ljubljana kindergartens in 2013.