**SOCIAL EDUCIRCATION, PRAGUE, SEPTEMBER 2015**

**INTERNATIONAL CIRCUS WORKSHOP FOR CHILDREN WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES – METHODOLOGY DOCUMENT**

**INTRODUCTION**

Cirqueon has gained quite a lot of experience with regular and intensive circus classes for people with special needs in its five years of existence. Two major projects are ongoing cooperation with Prague Psychiatric Hospital that started four years ago and a Blind Circus project established in 2013. Both of these projects hosted an international workshop already. As a new field of exploring with international participation was chosen circus as a tool of social work, physical exercise and artistic expression while working with children and young people with physical disabilities. Our partner in this project is Jedličkův ústav a školy – Prague school for children with physical disabilities.

**WHY**

The use of circus art as a suitable tool of working with people with physical disabilities is based on social circus principles. Social circus is a universal pedagogical approach that can successfully work with wide range of target groups and can adapt easily to special requirements of each of these groups.

**AIMS**

Social circus activities aim to develop body potential and emotional and social skills of their participants. Flexibility of circus skills allows them to become accessible to everyone and bring maximum of positive effect. It is crucial to define the right methodology according to specific target groups to achieve set goals.

Circus was always able to associate clumsy clowns, flexible acrobats and jugglers with swift reflexes. Therefore it has a tradition to integrate and open to anyone. Everyone has his own place and becomes indispensable. This is a thought we would like to bring into our workshop.

During the week each of the participants becomes a true member of the team and will participate on trainings and preparations of a final performance.

**WORKSHOP TUTORS**

Adam Jarchovský and Katka Klusáková are head teachers of Cirqueon. They are in charge of creation of the curriculum of youth classes and main teachers in our social circus activities.

Adam is a professional juggler, he studied social work at the university and has years of experience of teaching circus skills to various social groups in the Czech Republic and abroad.

Katka is a professional aerial acrobat. She has a degree in pedagogy specialising in physical education and music. She also has experience with social circus activities for children and apart from than established Women Circus classes for abused women in Cirqueon.

**METHODOLOGY**

We do not aim to teach high level of circus skills to anyone this week. We will concentrate on the process of learning instead. It is widely known that most circus techniques are difficult to learn, that´s why circus artist are admired by audience – mostly those who never tried them themselves.

Thanks to our knowledge of circus techniques we will be able to get participants of the workshops

to try tricks and exercise adequate to their skill to achieve a feeling of success as much as possible. It is the feeling of success that leads to building of self esteem and strengthening of will to try new things.

Circus is also a great possibility to train physical skills – juggling is proven to improve motor abilities, equilibristic helps to feel balance, partner acrobatics builds trust etc. All circus skills can be adapted easily to become accessible and useful for people with physical disabilities.

**METHODS OF WORK**

Circus participants of the workshop will work together in a big group, divided into smaller groups and individually during the morning theoretical sessions of the workshop. In the afternoons there will be always two people leading a class with children in the school. Rest of the group will be assisting to children individually to help them with activities planned. We are aware of the fact that each participant will need special care to enjoy the classes.

Most of the morning parts will be spent on preparation for the classes in the afternoon, once we know what kids are present we will know better what activities will work best for them. There are sessions dedicated to adaptive juggling toys, clowning and magic, acrobatic and group activities planned to have a wide range of possible choices for all participating children.

We will write down all ideas that will come up during the week and create a document including them once the workshop is finished. There will be a board accessible to anyone during whole week to write on and evaluation sessions every afternoon to share thoughts, feelings and improvements.

Discussions will be lead by workshop tutors and will focus on application of specific circus disciplines during the classes, feedback from the afternoon sessions, possibilities of future activities in the Czech Republic and home countries of participants.

The text that will come up after this workshop will document all activities, ideas for future development of this field of social circus as well as feedback from circus teachers, children and employees of the school.

**CONCLUSION**

Our project stands on years of work of circus groups teaching circus skills to people with physical disabilities from all around the world. There was no research done in this area in the Czech Republic yet. In this project we would like to find out if there is a chance to use social circus as a method of work with this target group and achieve results comparable to experiments abroad.

The hypothesis to be confirmed or disproved during our workshop is:

“Circus is a suitable tool to work with people with physical disabilities. It is attractive and accessible physical activity that develops personal and social skills. It helps to integrate and gives people with physical disability a chance to find their place in the community and enrich it with their talent.”