



Step by step into inclusive kindergarten and school

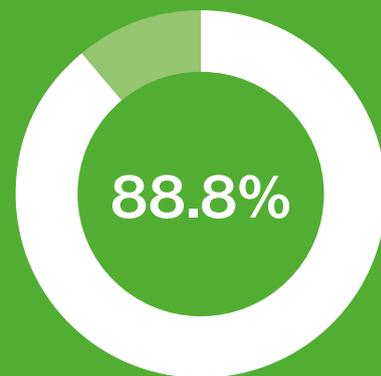
Country: Greece, Athens (Illion) Organisation: Theotokos Foundation

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY: The Theotokos Foundation provides support for children with intellectual or other developmental disabilities and their families. The goal of the Early Intervention Programme is to support the inclusion of as many children as possible in mainstream kindergartens and elementary schools. Parents are actively involved in their child's daily programme, and they regularly exchange information about their child's activities, progress, and any other concerns.

- From 2000 to 2014 a total of 117 children have used the service.
- 87 of these children were integrated into the mainstream schooling system.
- 81 children are being supported through follow-up services.



Including children in kindergartens and actively involve their parents



Parent satisfaction rate in the school-year 2014/2015 with the project

Essential to the child's development is the empowerment of the parents through active engagement in therapy sessions. Parents attend regular counselling and training sessions with all disciplines. Further, there are two meetings per year with all members of the interdisciplinary team. Throughout the week, all children attend individual sessions with the occupational therapist, speech therapist, special educationalist, or psychologist.



THE PROBLEM:

Limited availability of Early Intervention Programmes

In Greece there are very few public welfare and education services that cater to pre-school-aged children with special educational needs, and the availability of parent-counselling services is limited. For-profit service providers offer only very expensive early intervention programmes. The few programmes that are available do not offer an integration support service to ensure a smooth transition from the special setting into the mainstream schooling system.

During the last five years public services in Greece have been inadequately funded due to the country's

financial crisis in general and to a lack of specialized staff members. Consequently, fewer children with disabilities are diagnosed at an early age. In addition, the waiting lists for diagnosis through the national health system can be as long as six months – a critical waiting time for young children with difficulties who need immediate care.



THE DEVELOPED SOLUTION:

A careful preparation for inclusion

The goal of the Early Intervention Programme is to support the inclusion of as many children as possible in mainstream kindergartens and elementary schools by providing intensive intervention from an interdisciplinary team – both on-site in groups and individual programmes, and offsite with integration support.

The target group is children two to six years with diagnoses such as developmental delay, immaturity, language disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autistic spectrum disorder, and/or other learning difficulties. The children must have a valid diagnosis from a government service. The children's parents should be subscribed to the national social security system, but this is not mandatory since a certain number of children from disadvantaged families without social security are admitted per year. Members of these families are usually long-term unemployed or are uninsured by the social security system. Over the years, the Foundation has accepted children from a nearby orphanage.

An interdisciplinary team covering all areas of development (behaviour, speech, communication, movement, daily living skills, cognitive skills, emotions, play) assesses each child. Once the child has enrolled and attended the programme for a short while, the interdisciplinary team prepares the Individual Education Program. Long- and short-term goals are set, based on internationally recognised developmental milestones for young children. The goals are worked upon during both classroom and one-to-one sessions. They are frequently assessed and, if completed, new goals are set. If there is a lack of progress, the issue of how to adapt methods and techniques in order to help the child achieve the desired goals is discussed in detail.

ABOUT GREECE:

The crisis is not over yet

A member of the European Union, Greece is a parliamentary republic in which the President, elected by Parliament every five years, acts as a Head of State. The Prime Minister is the Head of Government, and the Ministerial Council is the collective decision-making body that constitutes the government. Greece has a population of approximately 11 million people, and the main industries are tourism and shipping. The latest Human Development Index ranks Greece in 29th place, with a per capita gross domestic product of \$24,524. During the global financial crisis the Greek economy collapsed, and by 2013 the economy had contracted 26 percent compared with the pre-crisis level of 2007. Under intense pressure from the EU and international market participants, the government accepted a bail-out programme that forced Athens to cut government spending; to decrease tax evasion; to overhaul the civil service, health care, and pension systems; and to reform the labour and product markets. This process is still ongoing.



The Early Intervention Programme is performed on the 52-acre grounds of the Theotokos Foundation in Ilion, located in the north-western suburbs of Athens.

The children participating in the programme come mostly from the surrounding suburbs of Ilion, and access the site using the Foundation's bus service or by their parents' private transportation



THE MODEL:

A team of experts works with children and family

The Early Intervention Programme is performed on the 52-acre grounds of the Theotokos Foundation in Ilion, located in the north-western suburbs of Athens. The programme takes place in a dedicated building with the capacity to host four groups, while individual sessions are held in separate rooms for speech therapy, occupational therapy, and psychology support.

The children participating in the programme come mostly from the surrounding suburbs, and access the site using the Foundation's bus service or by their parents' private transportation. The site is situated close to local shops, a park, and a cinema-shopping complex, making community excursions easily accessible.

Within the framework of a bio-psycho-social model, individualised programmes are created based on a child-centred approach. The rooms are structured based on a kindergarten simulation along with supportive play and educational materials to foster development in a natural environment. Throughout the day, all children attend individual sessions with the occupational therapist, speech therapist, special educationalist, and psychologist. All disciplines are in close collaboration with the group teacher. Goals and progress are recorded daily in the child's Individual Education Programme.

The transfer of skills is an important part of the programme – both among staff and among the children – and this is accomplished through regular co-teaching programmes at which two staff members are present in the group. For example, the co-teaching programmes and staff address the following topics:

- Communication skills (teacher and speech therapist)
- Play skills (teacher and speech therapist/occupational therapist/psychologist)
- Sherborne Developmental Movement (occupational therapist and speech therapist)

- Phonological awareness (teacher and speech therapist)
- Alternative augmentative communication systems (e.g., photos, Picture Exchange Communication System, Makaton). These are introduced in the classroom with the occupational therapist and speech therapist.
- Autism Programme (in the classroom with the speech therapist, occupational therapist, or psychologist).

The above co-teaching programmes involve sharing the planning, organization, delivery, and assessment of the programmes. Planning includes the short-term goal(s) of the day's programme as well as the long-term goals. Goals may include group goals referring to a common expectation of achievement and individual goals according to the level of each child.

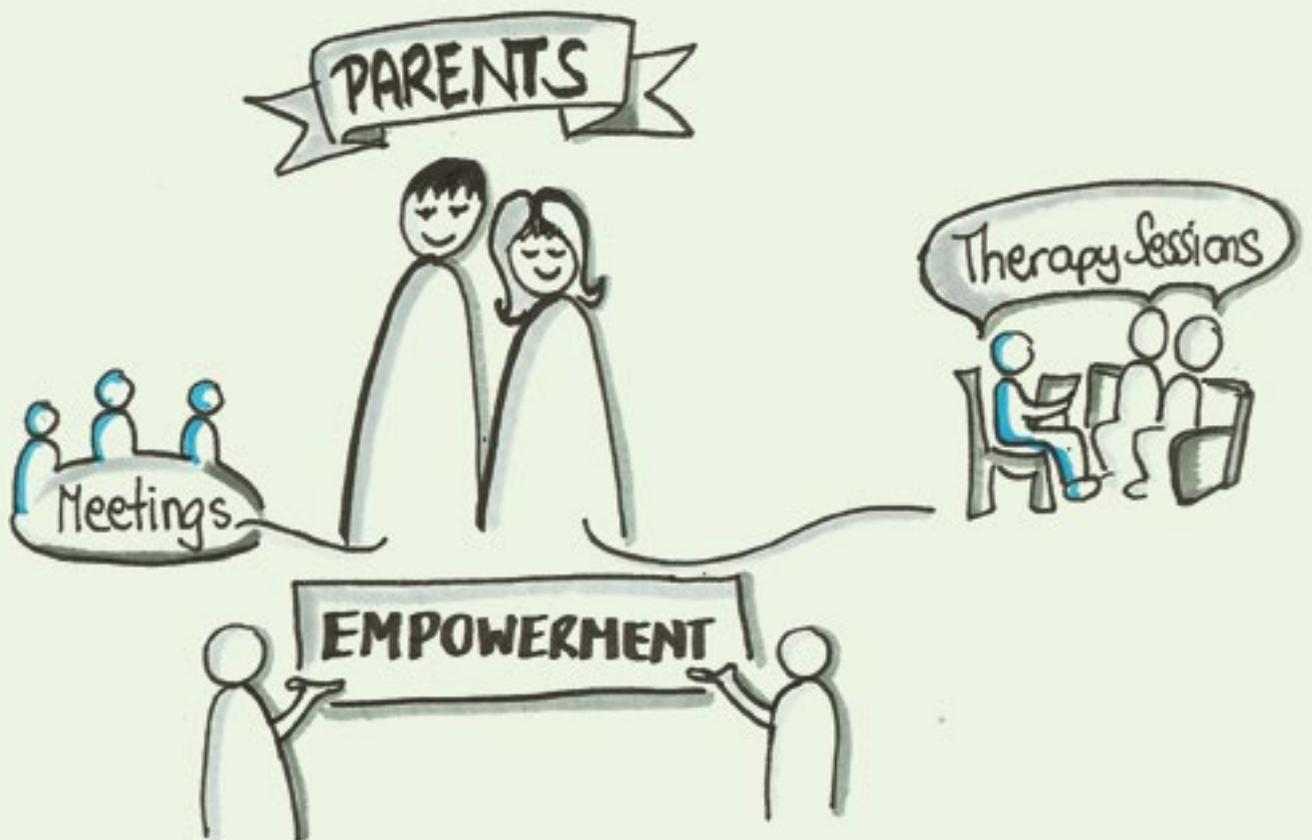
The delivery of the programme varies according to the experience of the teacher and the type of programme. For example, the therapist takes on the lead role in the first few sessions acting as a model for the teacher. The teacher gradually increases the involvement of the children (e.g., giving instructions, prompts, cues, correcting). In some cases, the goal is for the teacher to be able to deliver the programme on his/her own. In other cases, the therapists' methods and techniques act as models for the teacher to use throughout the day.

Step by step integration

Parents attend a meeting with the interdisciplinary team at which the strengths and needs of the child are discussed, as well as the structure and functioning of the service. When the interdisciplinary team, which regularly assesses the students' developmental level, decides that a particular child has reached the developmental milestones required for mainstream inclusion, a meeting with the parents is arranged. The process of inclusion is explained as well as the expectations (the child's strengths and weaknesses) regarding the inclusion process.

In the beginning, the child attends the kindergarten usually for only two days, and during the rest of the week he/she continues to attend the programme. This arrangement is performed for two reasons:

- To avoid side-effects of a sudden and stressful change in the child's daily routine.
- To allow discussion – with the child's support person and kindergarten teacher – of possible difficulties the child might face, and to work on them systematically during the days he/she is still attending the programme.



FACTS AND FIGURES:

Regular monitoring shows high rates of satisfaction

- Currently there are two groups of six children each.
- Each group has one pre-school teacher.
- There are eight therapy staff members and three enrichment programme staff members.
- Individualized Education Programme goal achievement success rates:
2012–2013 89.3%
2013–2014 72.5%
2014–2015 82.5%
- The monitoring mechanisms in place are based on ISO 9001:2008 and on the European Platform for Rehabilitation EQUASS Quality Assurance Certifications. As an organization, the Theotokos Foundation is evaluated every two years by an external ISO auditor.

The Foundation uses all the teaching material and toys that are traditionally used in mainstream pre-schools plus materials recommended for children with developmental disabilities, such as communication boards/books, visual schedules and rules, sensory integration equipment, and computer-based educational games. The teaching programme is supported by various visual aids, depending on the level of the child: for example, object symbols, photographs, drawings, Makaton symbols.



FUNDING:

Foundation funding supported by public budgets

The Early Intervention Programme is one of the programmes of the Theotokos Foundation, and all Foundation expenses are covered by the same funding sources. These are:

- An annual government grant from the supervising Ministry of Labour, Social Security, and Welfare, covering 15 percent of total expenses.
- The National Health Services Provider Organization, which covers a daily rate per service user, as well as the disability benefits from the parents' social security.

Together, this covers 56.5 percent of total expenses. The remaining costs (approximately 30 percent) are covered by donations from charities and private individuals. Children attending special schools/centres receive a government grant of €40 per day of attendance (€8,690 per year).

If a child with special needs attends the general schooling system, the cost per student in pre-school and primary school is €3,763 per year. For secondary school it is €5,009 per year (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2011). During schooling, a child with disabilities would need to be supported by afternoon therapy programmes, which triggers an additional cost of €4,680 per year, to be covered by the government (until the age of 18), for which the government pays a maximum of €440 per month for all therapies.



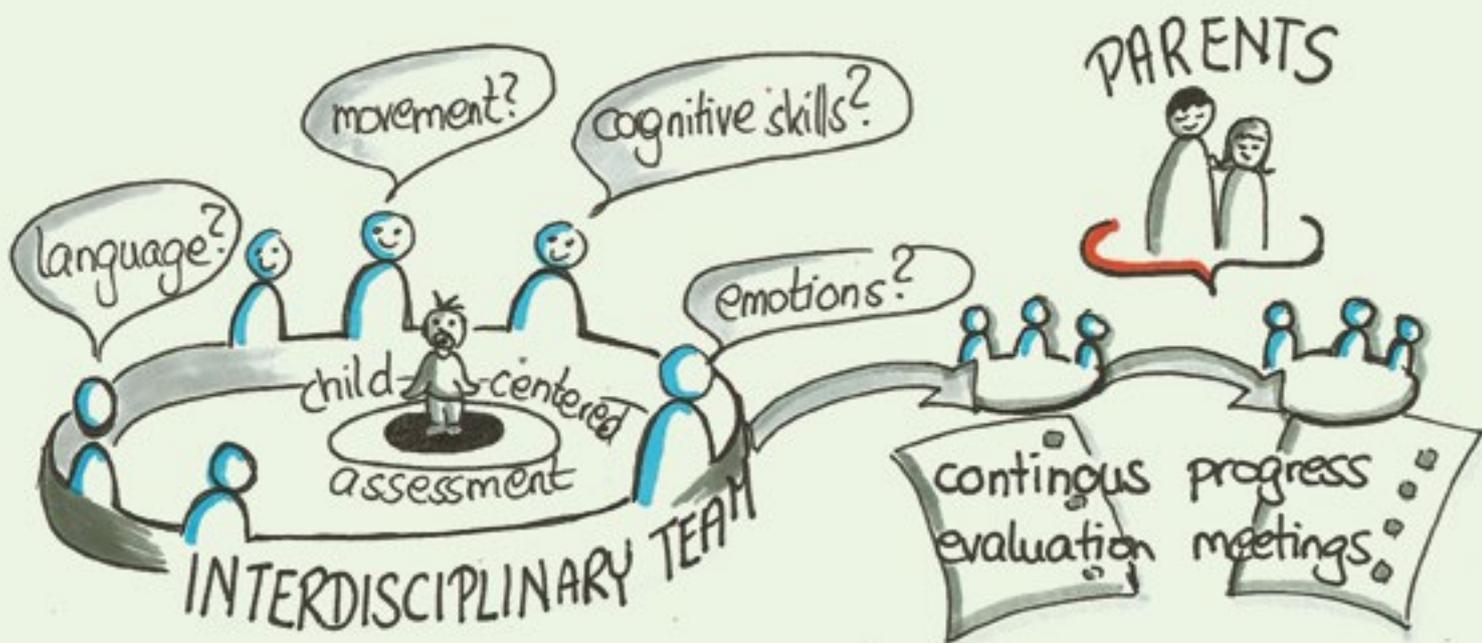
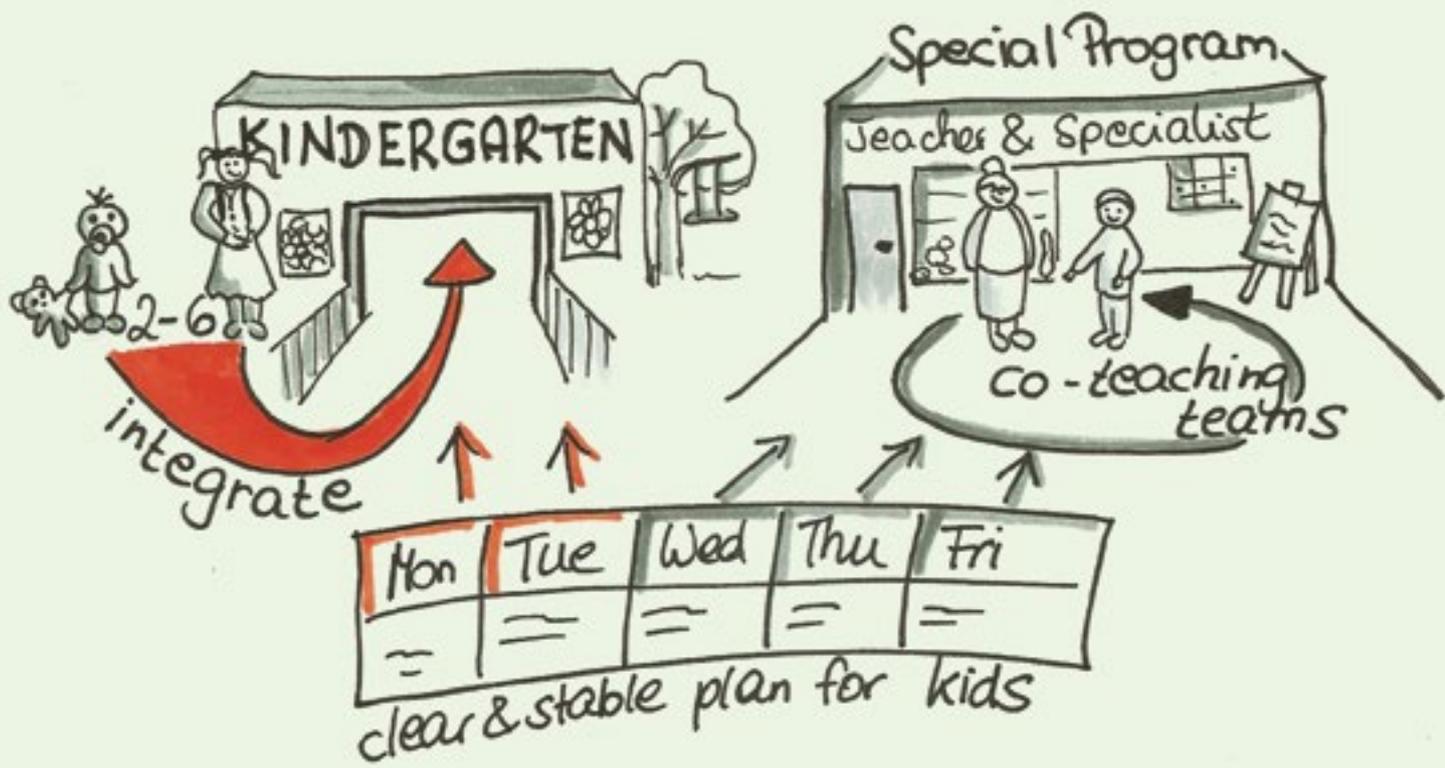
OUTLOOK:

Further cooperations are desired

Due to the overall economic situation of Greece in general, funding continues to be a barrier for the future development of the Early Intervention Programme. The annual government grant from the supervising Ministry of Labour, Social Security, and Welfare has been severely reduced in recent years; and since the Theotokos Foundation is a non-profit organization, its sources of income are restricted to the government grant, some coverage from social security payments, and from parents and donations.

In order to grow, the Foundation hopes to establish a collaboration with the neighbouring municipality of Ilion as an ongoing practice. The Foundation aims to conduct screening tests in all of the municipality's childcare centres on a yearly basis. In this way, the Foundation can ensure the earlier detection of children at risk and will increase the number of children in the offered programmes.

The Foundation believes that its practice can be readily adopted by other organizations and by other countries.





ABOUT THE ORGANISATION:

Theotokos Foundation

The Theotokos Foundation is a private, non-profit organization serving children and young adults with intellectual and other developmental disabilities, as well as their families. The Foundation seeks to provide these children and young adults with the opportunity to learn how to communicate, to function adequately in their everyday life, to care for themselves, and to be able to work so as to become autonomous and active adults. Theotokos has also developed a supported employment service called "Ergaxia," which creates opportunities for people with mental disabilities to participate in the open labour market.

The Theotokos Foundation was established in 1963 and at that time had a Pedagogical Department for children aged 6 to 12 years. Over time, the management of the Foundation realized that applications and referrals of children younger than six years were increasing. Therefore, the Early Intervention Programme was created in 2000.

THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN IN GREECE:

Only 15 percent of children with disabilities have access to education

- There are approximately 576,000 children under the age of five in Greece.
- The number of children reporting that their family's economic situation is "not well off" doubled from 7.2% in 2006 to 14.5 % in 2014.
- In 2000 the Special Education Law established 54 Diagnostic, Assessment, and Support Centres in the capital cities of each prefecture in Greece, providing diagnosis, assessment, and support to all children. However, the reduced economic capacity at both the state and the family level prevents children from fully enjoying their right to Inclusive Education and the right to have access to quality health services and social care support structures.
- According to the NGO ActionAid, only 15 percent of the estimated 200,000 children living with a disability have access to education.



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In-depth Research of Innovative Practices

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This in-depth analysis can be downloaded for free at

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