

LET'S GET A MOVE ON

Athletics course for children and adults with Asperger syndrome and autism needing non-intensive support



Atletica Roma
Acquacetosa

AUTHORS

Mauro Litti: Psychologist, Teacher in courses for Coni-Figc Lazio, Professional Office OfficinaMente Roma (Italy); maurolitti@yahoo.it

Pietro Cirrione: Vice-President of Gruppo Asperger onlus in Italy; Member of the Council of Administration of Autism-Europe as self-advocate; email: pietro@lem.coop; tel. +39 349 7153785

BACKGROUND/OBJECTIVES

The project was born in 2010 of an idea of **Mauro Litti**, a sports psychologist in conjunction with **Atletica Roma Acquacetosa**, a sports club for athletics, under the patronage of **Gruppo Asperger onlus** and **culturAutismo onlus** associations. The goal is the inclusion inside athletics courses of children and adults with Asperger syndrome and autism needing non-intensive support, allowing them to conduct sports activities on a regular basis and adapted to their needs, facilitating their access into new relational contexts and expanding the possibilities of success in the process of social inclusion.

METHODS

Participants carry out a progressive path of both technical learnings about disciplines of athletics, and social, emotional, and relational learnings about being part of a sporting team, interacting with its members, sharing its values and objectives. The trainings are conducted by sporting staff and a psychologist and take place on Saturday in **Paolo Rosi athletics stadium** in Rome. There are two training sessions divided by age that are mixed with male and female participants. The project "Let's get a move on" aims to provide a repertoire of basic motor skills aimed at developing more complex coordination skills by a clear and planned structure of activities to facilitate both the understanding of the demands and the autonomy and the perception of self-effectiveness during the execution of tasks. All activities are constantly presented by visual patterns and broken down into the most basic units of movement that characterize the task. Feedback is frequent, presented in a positive way in simple language and above all directed to reinforce the commitment and fun, as well as to provide technical details. The exercises stimulate the cognitive functions, the ability to solve tasks by appropriate strategies, the executive functions of motor programming, the modulation and maintenance of attention, the memory processes, the ability to integrate information from different sensory channels in order to produce an effective response, the development of coordination skills, interaction and cooperation skills among athletes. In fact, the activities include also team sports such as rugby, basketball, soccer, etc. The group participate in amateur and competitive sports events where they meet people and athletes from different sports clubs and has taken part in parties and assisted at international sports events promoting the development of relations with outsiders. Additional objectives of the course are to increase the capacity of communication and social interaction: to this end situations are proposed with the aim of soliciting participants to produce and/or receive messages and verbal requests, to express needs, desires and moods, to hold conversations, to speak and to perform simple requests. A further aspect taken into consideration is the increase in the threshold of tolerance to frustration and the management of emotional states by the teaching of relaxation techniques that can lower the level of physiological activation in the case of states characterized by anxiety, panic or prolonged physical stress.

RESULTS

Participants increased gradually up to 15, they trained on a regular basis, and this has allowed many athletes to not only get noticeable improvements in cognitive and motor areas but substantial change in their style and quality of life. These results are supported besides by the obtained data also by the positive comments of family members and people close to the participants.

CONCLUSIONS/PERSPECTIVES

The evaluation of the project is very good because it achieved to start to continuous sport practice people diagnosed with Asperger syndrome and autism needing non-intensive support, promoting social inclusion within new relational contexts and performance improvement in cognitive and motor areas. The outlook is to increase the number of participants; participate in more events and championships, including sports gatherings with overnight stay to work on autonomy and independence; broaden and strengthen the personal relational contexts.



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