PRESS RELEASE #3 – JULY 2026

VERA

VIOLENCE PREVENTION THROUGH THEATRE-BASED EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FOR WOMEN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

VERA Project Develops a Peer Ambassador Programme to Empower Autistic Young People in Preventing Sexual Violence

The VERA project has successfully developed the Peer Ambassador Programme, an innovative training programme designed to empower autistic young people to become active promoters of safety, inclusion, and awareness within their communities.

Building on the knowledge and skills acquired during the VERA Youth Training Programme, the Peer Ambassador Programme prepares participants to support their peers by promoting healthy relationships, recognising warning signs of abuse or harassment, encouraging safe online and offline behaviours, and fostering help-seeking when concerns arise.

The programme is based on the principle that autistic young people can become positive role models within their communities when they are provided with appropriate knowledge, practical skills, and ongoing support. By building on the foundations established during the Youth Training Programme, participants are encouraged to share key prevention messages, promote respectful relationships, and contribute to creating safer and more inclusive environments for their peers.

Rather than acting as counsellors or professionals, peer ambassadors learn how to:

- communicate safety messages respectfully and confidently;
- recognise situations that may place themselves or others at risk;
- provide supportive peer responses;
- encourage friends to seek help from trusted adults or professionals;
- understand the importance of personal boundaries, confidentiality, and safeguarding.

The programme consists of three interactive training sessions, using participatory and autism-friendly methodologies such as role-play, collaborative learning, group discussions, and Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. Activities have been specifically designed to be accessible for autistic young people by incorporating visual supports, predictable session structures, concrete language, and sensory-friendly adaptations.

The Peer Ambassador Programme promotes confidence, communication skills, and self-advocacy while reinforcing the message that everyone has the right to feel safe and respected. By empowering autistic young people to share accurate information and model positive behaviours, the programme contributes to building more informed, supportive, and inclusive communities.

The VERA project continues to demonstrate its commitment to preventing sexual abuse and harassment through accessible educational resources that strengthen the capacity of autistic young people, families, professionals, and organisations across Europe.

Co-funded by the European Union

NOTES FOR EDITORS

VERA is co-funded by the European Commission's CERV-2024-DAPHNE Programme (Grant Agreement No. 101194892) and implemented by a consortium coordinated by Anziani e non solo (Italy), with partners GIOLLI (Italy), Tartu Ülikool (UTARTU) (Estonia), MTÜ Naiste Tugi- ja Teabekeskus (Estonia), and Fundación MIRA'M de la Comunitat Valenciana (Spain).

Context:

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) refers to a range of neurodevelopmental conditions that affect communication, social interaction, and behaviour. Research consistently shows that young people with ASD—especially girls and women—are at a much higher risk of sexual abuse compared to their neurotypical peers, with up to 90% of women with ASD reporting having experienced such violence. This vulnerability often stems from difficulties in recognizing social cues, defining personal boundaries, and interpreting risky situations. Individuals with so-called "high-functioning autism" may seek social relationships but lack the tools to build them safely.
VERA aims to reduce these risks through innovative, education-based prevention interventions.

Project: 101194892 — VERA — CERV-2024-DAPHNE

"Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them."