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VIVIEN - Victim Violence Educational Network  
*An educational project to improve the ability to assist women victims of violence*

## REPORT ON THE BEST PRACTICE “NINLIL” – AUSTRIA (Wien)

<https://www.ninlil.at/zeitlupe/index.html>  
<https://www.ninlil.at/kraftwerk/index.html>

### General description of the Centre

Ninlil is an organization founded in 1996 in Wien, Austria, with the goal of combating sexual violence against women with learning disabilities. The Organization was founded by women who worked with people with learning disabilities that noticed repetitive sexual violence against women with disabilities and wanted to deal with this issue. At the beginning, the main activities of Ninlil were education about the topic of sexual violence against women with learning disabilities, lobbying to raise awareness about that topic, and counseling.

When Ninlil was founded there was very little public awareness of the fact that women with learning disabilities are in fact very often victimized when it comes to sexual violence. The consequence of that victimization is that they often encounter violence during their life, especially sexual violence. Since society and professionals who work in counseling with people with learning disabilities were not aware and educated about that field, their response to the problem of sexual

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violence against women with learning disabilities was not effective. After acknowledging that women with learning disabilities needed assistance, Ninlil's founders decided to raise public awareness about the topic of sexual violence against women with learning disabilities and to educate professionals who work in relevant fields.

In 2012 Ninlil got bigger and divided in two parts: Kraftwerk (Eng. power plant), that concentrates on peer counseling for victims of sexual violence who are also women with learning disabilities, empowerment workshops for women with learning disabilities, and networking with organizations that work with people with disabilities and organizations of independent living movement; and the second part, Zeitlupe (Eng. slow motion), that concentrates on peer counseling for women with all kinds of disabilities, from women with disabilities, and regarding any topic, not only sexual violence.

Ninlil tends to empower women with disabilities and solve the issue of sexual violence against them by teaching women to acknowledge their worth, by offering them peer counseling, and by exchanging knowledge with other organizations that work in the mentioned field. People who work in Ninlil strongly believe that the issue of sexual violence against women with learning disabilities can only be solved by empowering women to make their own choices and decisions, not only when they find themselves in situations of violence, but also during their everyday life. That's particularly

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applicable in situations when women with learning disabilities live in care situations. Women with learning disabilities who are beneficiaries of care programs often learn that they have to agree with their carers, despite their own opinion, and when it comes to sexuality, this way of function may have serious consequences.

As mentioned before, Ninlil's employees put a lot of effort in networking with other relevant institutions. They tend to network with organizations that work in the field of women's rights and benefit, that work with people with disabilities, and organizations of the independent living movement. Their work mainly takes place at a national and regional level, but when offered, they are willing to work on international projects.

The Organization has six employees, four of them working in counseling, networking or similar activities, and two people doing administrative work. Elisabeth Udl is the person responsible for the work of the entire organization. She started as a volunteer, and in 2006 she became a paid employee working in addressing sexual violence against women with learning disabilities.

Most of the employees of Ninlil do not work in their basic profession, but have some additional training or relevant experience. Ninlil's employees were not hired because of a specific formal education, but based on experience and knowledge about the independent living movement. Since

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Ninlil's mission is to empower women with disabilities to think for themselves and make their own decisions, it's very important that the employees share specific values and use a specific methodology of work. Usually, they do not have fixed working hours because they always try to adapt to their stakeholders.

There's not many volunteers contributing to Ninlil's work, and most of them are women who founded the Organization. These women make the Board of the Organization and are still legally in charge, but are not present during the day-to-day work of the Organization.

Ninlil is not a widely known organization. Most of the people who work with people with disabilities, are people with disabilities, or have a close person that has some disability, know about Ninlil, especially in Wien. The general population mainly isn't aware that Ninlil or the issue or violence against women with learning disabilities exist.

In spite of the wide number of organizations that offer peer counseling or work with people with disabilities, in the whole German speaking area there's probably no other organization that's specialized in working and offering peer counseling from women with disabilities to women with learning disabilities who are victims of sexual violence. Also, in the same area, there's probably no other organization that offers equivalent trainings for women with learning disabilities, or for professionals who work with them.

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In Austria, there are many institutions and organizations who work with women generally, and younger women with disabilities often rely on their services in situations of violence. This is not the case with grown-up women with disabilities who are victims of violence, since they usually feel unwelcome in institutions and organizations for non-disabled women. Ninlil offers peer counseling for both women with disabilities through Zeiltupe and women with learning disabilities who are victims of violence through Kraftwerk. That's the reason why many women with disabilities have contacted Ninlil during the years. The age structure of Ninlil's beneficiaries varies between 17 and 65 years. Women with disabilities can, and are, victims of violence no matter of their age, and Ninlil's statistic about the age structure of their beneficiaries is a great proof of that. Ninlil's is open for all women with disabilities, no matter of their social status or other similar characteristics.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, Ninlil did not record an increase in the number of stakeholders who needed peer counseling. Since meeting in person was not allowed, counseling was organized via telephone. Even if the numbers of stakeholders remained the same, they're expecting an increase in the near future. The organization feels that the consequences of the lockdown will be fully visible soon, because of unequal treatment of different people, for example women in institutions who are still quarantined.

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### **Training description**

Ninlil's employees organize trainings for professionals once or twice a year. The target group of their trainings are professionals who work in institutions for women with disabilities, but they also do such trainings for women who work in counseling for women victims of violence and women with disabilities.

Trainings last one to two days and have a theoretical and practical part. The theoretical part consists of defining violence, specifically sexual violence, explaining the meaning and different phases of sexual violence, instructing professionals on how to help women to stop sexual violence during the initial phases, and teaching them about different ways to empower women with disabilities during their day-to-day life. The second, much bigger and much more important part of the training, consists of analyzing real-life cases and discussing topics suggested by stakeholders. An important activity of this part of the training is practicing problem-solving of analyzed cases. That's the part where professionals actually learn to recognize cases of violence against women and to act efficiently and appropriately. Ninlil's employees are aware of the importance of theoretical education, and that's why all of their trainings have a theoretical part, but they strongly believe that practical exercises and solving real-life cases are much more effective tools in trainings for women with disabilities who are victims of violence and professionals who work with them. Trainings are held by professionals who work for the Organization, and after attending the trainings, attendees are qualified to be multipliers.

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Ninlil's trainings have various purposes, depending on who are the beneficiaries of the trainings. If beneficiaries are professionals who work with women with disabilities who are victims of violence, the main focus of the training is to teach professionals to recognize women's behaviors that can be connected to experiences of violence and to learn to react appropriately and efficiently.

On the other hand, if trainings are meant for women with disabilities, their concept is different. Trainings for women with disabilities or specifically women with learning disabilities are created and organized in a way to empower these women and teach them to deal with real-life situations.

When trainings are organized for women with disabilities, they are free of charge. In other situations, when they're meant for professionals, the price varies depending on Ninlil's budget and the attendee's budget. After attending the trainings, the stakeholders get an informal certificate. Most of trainings are founded by the City of Wien or the State.

The biggest issue about the training's organization is the insufficient attendance of professionals, which sometimes make it impossible to carry out trainings. Many professionals who work in the mentioned field are often overloaded with their everyday work, and getting an additional education about violence seems unnecessary to them. Apart from being overloaded with work, many professionals are also not aware of the issue of sexual violence against women with learning disabilities or other relevant topics concerning these women, and think that they don't need

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additional education in that field. Their opinion usually changes during trainings and they leave the training satisfied with the knowledge and experience they gained during trainings.

However, Ninlil employees found a great solution to this issue by cooperating with the school that educates operators who work in relevant fields. Ninlil managed to achieve cooperation with the mentioned school, and that cooperation gives Ninlil the possibility to organize one or two trainings or seminars per year, on which they can briefly present their work and the topic of violence against women with disabilities.

Ninlil's employees tend to hold their training sessions in person because in such a delicate topic every element of communication is important. These trainings are not just about sharing information, but also about getting in touch with inner feelings and experiencing practical exercises.

Ninlil's employees have not found a solution in case of a future lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. If possible and needed, they would like to find bigger spaces for their trainings.

Elisabeth Udl, the woman who's responsible for the work of the entire organization, continued organizing trainings in person. From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, since the time when the interview with Elisabeth was held, she already organized workshops for students regarding the topic of sexual violence against women with disabilities. Those workshops were held in person, but in comply with all the prescribed epidemiologic measures. Elisabeth and other

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Ninlil's employees believe that if trainings are organized in an online form, they lose too much context.

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**Description of the told training experiences (positive and negative)**

Many attendees of Ninli's trainings are professionals who are overloaded with work and are often not aware of the issue of sexual violence against women with learning disabilities or think that they don't need that kind of education. At a beginning of each training, most of the professionals are skeptical about the need and quality of such trainings. Also, many of them start with the preposition that the topic of the training does not concern them or their work. As said before, getting people into training is the main issue of training's organization, and the described skepticism is the reason of it.

During the trainings, specifically during the case-study part, almost all attendees change their opinions and discover that they can benefit from these trainings by getting more knowledge on that specific topic and other, correlated topics.

As trainings go by, professionals start learning and being interested in the topic. They often acknowledge that they've found themselves in situations to which the knowledge they gained during training is applicable. By learning and listening about the topic, professionals start to recognize situations of violence against women they've witnessed in the past, privately or

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professionally. After recognizing situations of violence against women from their past experiences, professionals tend to share their stories and discuss about the problem and possible solutions.

During training, professionals gain the skill of recognizing different kinds of women's behaviors that can be connected to experiences of violence. Professionals who work with grown-up women with disabilities, or specifically with women with learning disabilities, for a long time, often tend to lose sight of women's behaviors that can be connected to experiences of violence, and blame the victim's disability for her improper or unusual behavior.

Acknowledging that some behaviors are consequences of previous traumas, helps professionals to improve their approach to women with disabilities. This kind of realization is also helpful during their day-to-day work.

Evaluations of trainings are always extremely positive and professionals leave the training satisfied with the experience they had. During trainings they often gain a new, different point of view that can be implemented in their work and, also, in their personal life.

Trainings could be improved in fewer ways, but the main segment that needs improvement is people's will and motivation to attend such trainings. Ninlil's employees are trying, and gradually succeeding, in their objective to teach professionals who work with women with disabilities, or

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specifically with women with learning disabilities, about the importance of empowering women, with a goal of providing them a better and more fulfilled life, and stopping violence against these women during its initial phases.

Ninlil's employees are willing and ready to adjust to the situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic by getting bigger rooms and other spaces for the organization of their trainings, and eventually, if needed, they'll find the best possible way to conduct their workshops and trainings online.

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