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## **Kinder assistants attend workshop on making nature accessible to early learners**

**Early childhood experiences in nature significantly influence the development of lifelong environmental attitudes and values which are key messages of the Dinja Wahda environmental education programme.**

Staff Reporter

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Kinder assistants from 50 Gozitan schools attended the week-long workshop. The importance of access to nature for child development was the key message of the workshop run by BirdLife Malta as part of a Kinder Assistant training week held in Gozo. The week-long training programme developed by Early Years Education Officers Mariangela Schembri Meli and RoseMarie Privitelli was designed to enhance good practise in the Kindergarten classroom.

The workshop was attended by 50 Kinder Assistants, representing all schools in Gozo. Many of the

- ▶ participants highlighted the challenges they face in getting kinder groups outdoors, and in running nature-based activities with the students. One teacher said “not all areas of the countryside are safe for us to take our young groups, there needs to be more suitable areas identified”.

Part of the workshop looked at how these challenges could be addressed and what new ideas and resources could be developed. BirdLife Malta’s Education Manager Hannah Chisholm said, “BirdLife Malta is looking to further develop our environmental education programme Dinja Wahda to offer more support and resources for Early Years. These ideas will be implemented through a new Erasmus+ funded

project called Lifelong Learning through Nature.”

Each Kinder Assistant was provided with resources and ideas to use within their school. They also shared new ideas and spoke of how they are looking forward to more developments, the teachers came up with ideas such as “coordinating between the schools to run educational outings together”, and identified the need to have; “support from higher up to highlight the importance of educational outings and learning outside the classroom for the early years”.

“This is seen as a key area to develop our work as increasing evidence is suggesting that access to nature and green space provides children cognitive, emotional, and physical benefits, such as increased ability to concentrate, improved academic performance, reduced stress and aggression levels, and reduced risk of obesity,” Chisholm continued.

Research shows that many children today associate nature with the virtual images that they see through media, therefore it becomes exotic and associated with faraway places. Children are losing the understanding of the nature that exists in their own gardens and local countryside, which disconnects them from knowledge and appreciation of the natural world.

Early childhood experiences in nature significantly influence the development of lifelong environmental attitudes and values which are key messages of the Dinja Wahda environmental education programme.

Dinja Wahda is BirdLife Malta’s and Bank of Valletta’s environmental education programme for primary schools, carried out in collaboration with the Directorate for Quality Standards in Education

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