

ECOLE DE CIRQUE DE BRUXELLES - HANDICIRQUE



LOCATION: Brussels, Belgium




TARGET GROUP: Adults, adolescents, and children with disabilities

The Ecole de Cirque de Bruxelles (Brussels Circus School) has a long history in using circus arts as an inclusive, therapeutic, and empowering platform for people with disabilities.

The Handicirque program at the Ecole de Cirque de Bruxelles is a comprehensive initiative designed to empower people with disabilities through the practice of circus arts. This inclusive project is aimed at adults, adolescents, and children with various types of disabilities—physical, mental, sensory, and autism spectrum disorders. Handicirque focuses on helping participants explore and develop their physical, creative, and social potential through tailored courses that inspire trust, respect and joy. The project's core philosophy is centred on well-being, inclusivity, and non-competitive personal growth.

The core value of the Handicirque program is tolerance, ensuring that all activities are adapted to the diverse abilities of the participants. The approach is playful and open, allowing participants to engage in circus activities in a way that emphasizes fun and creativity rather than performance or competition. This inclusive, non-judgmental environment fosters a spirit of mutual respect and pleasure, helping participants develop confidence and a sense of belonging.

Handicirque operates around three key areas of action:

-  *Weekly adapted circus classes:* every week they welcome nearly 150 disabled people from around nineteen different institutions (day centers, specialized schools or accommodation centers).
-  *Continuing education and sharing of experience:* The program also serves as a centre for professional development, offering training to inclusion assistants and circus arts trainers. Handicirque also offers short training courses every two years, allowing future supervisors to gain experience in running inclusive circus courses.
-  *A mixed project:* Handicirque includes children with disabilities in "traditional" courses and internships, promoting integration and interaction with their peers. Each year, about twenty children with disabilities are included in these courses,

supported by one-on-one assistance as needed. This mixed project helps children with disabilities break away from the social stigma that often accompanies their condition, allowing them to participate in activities alongside children without disabilities. It fosters mutual understanding, respect, and a sense of community among all participants.

One of the key features of Handicirque is its focus on inclusive learning, which emphasizes intellectual and physical stimulation, autonomy, and self-confidence for children with disabilities. The program provides a safe and supportive environment where participants can express their creativity, explore new skills, and be accepted as they are. The circus workshops encourage the development of creative potential by offering a space where imagination is nurtured, and personal growth is celebrated.



Handicirque's inclusion efforts aim to break down barriers for children with disabilities, allowing them to leave the confines of their specialized institutions and participate in mainstream activities. By doing so, the program helps remove the label of “abnormal” that these children are sometimes burdened with and promotes their integration into society. The inclusion of children with different abilities also offers a valuable opportunity for their peers to learn about diversity, mutual aid, and respect, further enhancing the sense of community within the school.

The Handicirque program recognizes the importance of supporting parents who wish to integrate their children with disabilities into extracurricular activities. The program provides a pathway for these parents to involve their children in inclusive, community-based learning environments. For families, this can be a crucial step toward ensuring that their children with disabilities have access to enriching experiences that foster personal growth and social inclusion.

Brussels circus school also organizes trainings for teachers who want to work with circus arts and people with mental disabilities and/or psychomotor delays.



Each year, around twenty children with disabilities are integrated into the courses and internships at the Brussels Circus School, with the support of a one-on-one assistant for each child. This program has successfully created an environment where children with disabilities feel welcomed, supported, and encouraged to explore their potential. The inclusion of these children in

traditional courses has had a significant impact, not only on the participants themselves but also on the broader school community. Through interactions with peers of diverse abilities, all participants develop essential values such as tolerance, listening, and respect. This fosters a sense of solidarity and helps dismantle the barriers of exclusion often faced by children with disabilities.

For over 30 years, the Brussels Circus School has collaborated with specialist institutions to offer weekly adapted circus workshops for people with disabilities. The results of these workshops are the following:

- 🎪 Demonstrate that the person with a disability can, and wants to express themselves like others, sometimes with other means or in another way, but that the need is there and remains vital.
- 🎪 Encourage, support and help the person with a disability to achieve the required objectives by overcoming their fears, worries and limits: learning to surpass themselves.
- 🎪 Give the opportunity to enter an imaginary world using each person's own free and spontaneous mode of expression.
- 🎪 Allow children or adults with disabilities to be part of a group that shares the same activities in this place for all that is the circus school and give the opportunity to everyone (employees, students, adults and children, etc.) to rub shoulders with people with other abilities.

Each group presents a show or an open course at the end of the year. This is an objective in itself and allows to maintain or create a link with the institution and the families.

These adapted circus workshops for people with disabilities last between 1 hour and 1 hour 15 minutes each week.

In the space of 30 years Brussels circus school has reached more than a thousand people with disabilities through this project. This represents approximately 150 people with a distribution close to 55% adults, 20% adolescents and 25% children, or around twenty hours of lessons given each week supported by around 30 specialist educators who actively participate in the sessions.



Find out more on their [website](#).

CONTACT: info@ecbru.be