

Foundation Help for Belorussian children harmed by nuclear radiation Förderkreis Hilfe für strahlengeschädigte belorussische Kinder

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1 Project title

Establishment of a model day-care center with a therapeutic-work emphasis to develop vocational and creative skills for children and youth with sever physical and mental disabilities in Mogilev, Belarus.

2 Brief Project Description

In the city of Mogilev, population 365,000, there are currently no institutions for the development of children and young adults with sever physical and mental disabilities. In the entire country of Belarus, population 9.9 million, few resources exist for this population, and the opportunities for their education and vocational orientation are severely limited. Since the beginning of 2003, these youth from ages eight to eighteen have been using the model day-care facilities of the Mogilev community center for developmental correction, education and rehabilitation, including music therapy, massage and sports. And with the establishment of this project, they will also receive training in the fields of ceramics, kitchen work/cooking, laundry/ironing and housekeeping expanding their opportunities for self-care and employment.

Workshops will be available for 32 individuals. On the one hand, time spent in the proposed institution will help fulfill basic human needs, like regular social contact; on the other hand, the workshop, with its therapeutic capabilities, will improve future chances of success in the youths' search for occupation. The support group's special contribution is its ability to organize further training seminars, as well as organize internships for Belorussian professionals in appropriate German institutions (schools and sheltered workshops).

3 Background and reason for the project

The area around Mogilev is home to approximately 12% of the Belorussian population. Similarly, as in the area around Gomel, it is here that a majority of the radioactive fall-out came down after the reactor disaster in the Ukrainian Chernobyl. Of the approximately 1.2 million inhabitants, 53,000 persons have mental or physical disabilities, and 4,100 of those are children. In March of 2003, 2,469 children with mental and physical disabilities were living in the city of Mogilev, indicating a significant rise in the number of persons with disabilities. For many children in Belarus with mild mental and physical disabilities (according to the three-tiered national classification, handicap group 3), new educational opportunities have been created. Along side three specialized preschools in the city of Mogilev, there is a school for children with mild mental and physical disabilities and yet another for children with mental and physical developmental problems. Beyond that, young people with mild mental and physical disabilities can enroll in two urban vocational schools and learn trades, such as carpentry, tailoring, shoemaking or painting. However, the employment prospects of these children and young adults after their training are very limited. For children and young adults with severe disabilities (group 1), it is practically impossible to find work. For these children, there is neither the necessary rehabilitation or education nor are there avenues for occupational orientation or vocational training.

As background information, it is also necessary to know that the young people are mostly forced to live in their parents' apartments. They are not able to experience their social surroundings or engage in active social contact with others. Nor are they able to learn domestic work or exercise their creative abilities. This condition does not only fail to meet minimum international standards regarding the rights of handicapped people but also the national legal requirements. In article 12 of the Laws of the Republic of Belarus, regarding the "social protection of handicapped people in the Republic of Belarus" (status 14 July 2000), the following statement was made: "the state guarantees the necessary education and vocational preparation of handicapped. However, the lack of day-care and therapy offers little possibility of outside employment for parents of youth with disabilities, because they are constantly busy with the support and care of their children. This situation leads to fears about the future and creates acute financial problems and permanently stressful domestic environments, especially for single mothers.

Since people with handicaps are not taught to perform simple domestic tasks, caring for them in the home becomes more difficult. In addition, the negative or passive social attitude toward the problems of people with handicaps makes the situation even worse. They are seen as "not contributing anything."

Because of these factors, it is extremely important to develop day-care and educational opportunities for children and youth with severe mental and physical disabilities.

4 Objectives of the project

The children and youth attending this model day-care with a work-therapeutic emphasis will acquire skills in the areas of ceramics, sewing, kitchen work/cooking, laundry/ironing and housekeeping. Development of these abilities, with an emphasis on occupation-preparation, will improve their daily life with family and others, and help them to discover and develop their creative, artistic inclinations. The goal of the submitted project is to create slots for 32 people, with plans to increase the capacity to 60 persons in the future.

Continuing education and internships in institutions located in Berlin and Brandenburg will be available and encouraged for the caretakers. They and other specialists from the Mogilev area, as well as students from the Mogilev Pedagogue University/Emphasis Special Education program, will be able to gain international knowledge and practical experience in the area of holistic work with handicapped children and young adults. The emphasis of these educational opportunities will be on vocational training.

Families of children and youth with disabilities will benefit in a number of ways. With their children in day-care, the parents will be able to work away from home, which will contribute to decreased fears about the future and thus, a decrease in the physical and psychological stress placed on the families. Consultation to the families about governmental and non-governmental help available for parenting and physical care of their children will also be available. This work will lead to an increase in the self-esteem of the handicapped individuals and their families. This will also help people with handicaps and their families know their rights and increase their ability to successfully articulate those rights within their society. From this project, a multiplicative effect could create new, organized structures to benefit children and young adults with handicaps. Through public relations work, fundamental improvement in relations with people with mental and physical disabilities should also be reached. This must, in particular, mean a change in the value structures of society; that people work toward living together and showing solidarity and support for those with disabilities. The goal is an integration based on equality that improves the perception of life for handicapped people, including changing the media.

5 Target group for the project

The primary target group is children and youth with severe mental and physical disabilities, some of whom attend the Mogilev Center for Development and Rehabilitation for Children with Handicaps. The Belorussian specialists will have the opportunity to acquire further education and expertise. A positive change for the parents of handicapped children, as well as a fundamental societal change in respect to handicapped people is also to be expected.

6 Cooperation with Belarussian partners

The direct partner in Mogilev is a local welfare society called "Blago," meaning "well-being" or "benefit." This NGO has been active for several years in humanitarian work, especially caring for handicapped people. Our cooperation with the private organization BelAPDI, caring for the interests of children and youth with disabilities since the beginning of the 1990s, is also of great importance. This organization has created a network of over 60 regional work groups. It is on the basis of these groups and through cooperation with organizations from Germany, Sweden, Holland and many other countries that a complex system of rehabilitation and training possibilities for young people with disabilities has been created in Belarus. These groups are working together for the rights and interests of people with disabilities and publicly representing them.

7 Cooperation with German partners and project financing

For the conceptual planning and implementation of the continuing education programs and internships in Germany, the support group has previously worked with the following institutions: Heilerziehungspflege-correspondence courses of the Hoffbauer Society in Potsdam-Hermannswerder, Association of Protestant Handicapped Workers Berlin-Brandenburg, Diakonie sheltered workshops of Berlin and the Christophorus sheltered workshops of the Samaritan in Fürstenwalde. In the future, two special education schools (the Burgdorf-Schule in Fürstenwalde and the Albatros-Schule in Berlin) will also be included in our activities. The project is financially supported in Belarus and in Germany through additional organizations as well as a small portion of our own funds. Additional financing has also come from the German Help for Handicapped People-Aktion Mensch, as well as the support program for Belarus 2003/2004 from the German governments program for economic cooperation and development. In Belarus, support has come from UNESCO and the Round Table for Help between the Churches and the Belarussian NGO BelAPDI.

8 Project realization and plans

1. Attendance of a two-month German course for day-care staff in preparation for the seminars and internships in Germany
2. Preparatory visit of German staff for situation analysis and preparation of the planned observation and continuing education courses
3. Organization of observation possibilities for Belorussian day-care staff in German institutions for people with disabilities (workshops and special education schools)
4. Implementation of a seminar for day-care staff through workers from BelAPDI
5. Furnishing of the day-care/workshop to enable ceramics, sewing, kitchen work/cooking, laundry/ironing and housekeeping training to be offered
6. Purchase of a van (9 seats and handicap accessible) for the transport of the children to and from the day-care.
7. Organization of day-care offerings for work orientation (work plans and assessment tools for the individual children and young adults)
8. Implementation of advice/counseling services for the parents of the children attending day-care
9. Implementation of a seminar from German specialists for Belorussian colleagues employed at the day-care
10. Organization and implementation of continuing education seminars similar to correspondence courses
11. Organization of an exhibition of articles and foods prepared by the children and young adults in the different workshop areas
12. Implementation of a continuing education seminar presented by skilled employees for colleagues working in Mogilev
13. Public relations work about the necessity of creating training possibilities and the right to education and training orientation
14. Creation of financial and content instruments as well as tools for evaluation analysis for the work in the day-care, evaluation of the steps and methods of the project implementation and analysis of the results

This document about the establishment of a day-care center for severely physically and mentally handicapped children and young people is a work in progress. All information presented here is subject to change. Further modifications will be introduced as necessary and available. (status 8 December 2003)