

STATUS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GENERAL AND ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN AND STUDENTS WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES FROM INSTITUTIONS

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***Abstract:** The problems of inclusive education have been dealt with by various specialists for many years. In the international community this idea has been rooted since the 90s of the twentieth century, while in Bulgaria only at the beginning of this century it gained more popularity. The topic, at the beginning, is mainly supported by international children's human rights organizations, which actively participate in the processes of improving the welfare of children in Bulgaria. Gradually, the ideas were adopted by non-governmental organizations in Bulgaria working with children and young people with disabilities, most of which in the beginning were organizations of parents of children with disabilities themselves.*

***Keywords:** inclusive education, severe disabilities, institutions*

INTRODUCTION

The problems of inclusive education have been dealt with by various specialists for many years. In the international community this idea has been rooted since the 90s of the twentieth century, while in Bulgaria only at the beginning of this century it gained more popularity. The topic, at the beginning, is mainly supported by international children's human rights organizations, which actively participate in the processes of improving the welfare of children in Bulgaria.

Gradually, the ideas were adopted by non-governmental organizations in Bulgaria working with children and young people with disabilities, most of which in the beginning were organizations of parents of children with disabilities themselves. Parents who face daily the lack of understanding of state institutions of the problems of people with disabilities and in particular of the need, they can be integrated into society and be able to lead a dignified life.

EXPOSITION

Today, 2021, we already have a valid, adopted in 2016, Preschool and School Education Act, which regulates the issues of personal development of children, the general and additional support that the child and the student receive.

In the context of the new Act are included all activities and forms of support that are offered to children and students so that they can be included, not interrupt and complete their education. These are activities and forms that are based on the values of personal development and inclusive education: support for personal development, building a positive organizational climate, establishing positive discipline and developing the school community. These activities ensure that the child is reached and supported in learning, learning, participation and developing his / her potential (Krasteva, L., Marinova, A. 2016).

But are the school and society ready to open up space and accept children with disabilities from institutions so that they can reach their potential, have the opportunity to communicate with people outside the family or the institution in which they live, to acquire knowledge and competencies, which will develop their strengths.

This article aims to present some of the challenges faced by professionals working with children with severe disabilities in new residential services in activities undertaken to ensure the right of all children to education. Our experience in this direction dates back to 2008 after taking the first steps to close the home for children and youth with disabilities in the village of Mogilino, which received negative reviews throughout Europe. After the broadcast of Kate Bluet's film, actions were taken to close the home and take the children to a new type of service – Family Accommodation Center. Many different experts took part in the process, 5 centers were built, where all children and young people were taken out. The assessments revealed that children are deprived of one fundamental right guaranteed to them by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Bulgaria, namely - the right of the “child to education and with a view to exercising this right in an increasing degree and with equal opportunities”/Article 28/.

In order to guarantee all the rights of children with severe disabilities by the institutions, they were enrolled in school.

But were the children, the teams working with them in the new services on the one hand, and the schools, the teachers, in a word, the system on the other, and the other children and their parents, on the other, ready to meet this challenge?

Prior to the adoption of the new law, the education of children with disabilities was mainly carried out in auxiliary schools. The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee published in 2002 - "Overview of the system of auxiliary schools". The study mentioned that “by their purpose and nature, auxiliary schools are special schools that provide education to children with milder degrees of mental retardation.

As about half of them are boarding schools, they resemble the orphanages of children deprived of parental care in many diagnosed with "mild mental retardation" and until September 2002 only they and some of the children with "moderate mental retardation" were treated by the legislator as trainees. Children with more severe mental disabilities were accommodated in another type of institution - homes for children and young people with mental retardation (HMRCJ), which are subordinated to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. In them the children did not receive and do not receive education.

(https://www.bghelsinki.org/media/uploads/books/pomoshchnite-uchilishcha-v-blgariia_uvod.pdf)

And it was these children and young people who lived for a long time in social isolation, mostly in small towns, who had to be included in the education system, which was unknown to them, but the system did not know them either. Because these are children with severe deprivation, in which it is difficult to determine where the "severe mental retardation" described in the diagnosis is due to disability or social neglect and lack of work with various specialists.

Until now, the practice of education professionals has been working with children with disabilities from families or with children from institutions, but they, like other professionals, have not been prepared to accept children with severe disabilities from institutions.

The inclusion of children with severe disabilities then brought to the fore several challenges for the education system:

- *Additional support and training for professionals working in kindergartens and schools so that I can meet the challenge of educating children and young people with severe disabilities from institutions;*
- *The provision and active use of assistive technologies and teaching materials - technologies for alternative communication and adapted teaching aids;*
- *Building accessible physical infrastructure - unfortunately in most schools there is no accessible infrastructure that would allow the active inclusion of children and young people with physical disabilities in the learning process;*

- *Overcoming the manifestations of discrimination and the established stereotypes in society regarding the children with severe disabilities from institutions and services of residential type.*

In the context of the new Act are included all activities and forms of support that are offered to children and students so that they can be included, not interrupt and complete their education. These are activities and forms that are based on the values of personal development and inclusive education: support for personal development, building a positive organizational climate, establishing positive discipline and developing the school community. These activities ensure that the child is reached and supported in learning, learning, participation and developing his / her potential. (Krasteva, L., Marinova, A. 2016).

How can this be achieved in children with severe disabilities from institutions?

The general and additional support provided attempts to meet the needs of children with severe disabilities.

What does general support for the education system mean?

The general support at the level of the system unites the existing types of educational environment in our country - educational institutions, centers for support for personal development, incl. centers for special educational support, regional centers for support of the process of inclusive education, dormitories, observatory and others, whose function is to support the internal structure for the development of differentiated approaches to meet the diversity of educational needs. At the level of kindergarten and school, general support connects all services that represent basic care for physical, mental and social well-being, motivating and developing interests. At the common (classroom) level, general support is addressed to those first manifestations of learning difficulties, learning and participation of children that can be overcome with a little help; or is aimed at early detection of gifts. In this field, learning relationships emerge and possible ways of teaching and learning are discovered so that every child can be accepted, progress and be able to participate.

What does additional support for the education system mean?

The additional support builds on the current practice of integrated education of children with special educational needs, including support for other specific needs of children. The purpose of additional support is to provide additional and different resources, and for children who can not meet the requirements of the curriculum - a way to have a decent experience of learning, learning and participation in their natural social environment, according to their optimal capabilities. In the WUA, the additional support is aimed at children with special educational needs, children at risk, children with gifts and talents and children with chronic diseases. (Krasteva, L., Marinova, A. 2016)

Additional support for personal development refers to individual and specialized assistance for children and students with complex needs. According to ZPUO it is realized through: work with a child and a student on a specific case; psycho-social rehabilitation, hearing and speech rehabilitation, visual rehabilitation, rehabilitation of communication disorders and physical disabilities; providing accessible architectural, general and specialized supporting environment, technical means, specialized equipment, didactic materials, methodologies and specialists; providing training in special subjects for students with sensory disabilities; resource support (Krasteva, L., Marinova, A. 2016).

This text addresses the main challenges facing the education system in order to adequately include children with severe disabilities from residential social services. Because, first of all, psycho-social rehabilitation is of an extremely important nature for them, as the deficits accumulated over the years of living in complete social isolation are difficult to overcome. The lack of specialized equipment and specially made didactic materials makes the work of the specialists who work with the children extremely difficult. And, of course, the almost lack of an accessible architectural environment hindered the inclusion of children and young people with disabilities.

CONCLUSION

The deinstitutionalization and inclusion of children with severe disabilities in the educational process has come a long and difficult way. Specialists from the social and educational systems worked together to meet the needs of children and young people and to provide them with an education. Amendments to the Preschool and School Education Act attempt to meet the requirements of the reality facing both systems.

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