

PROJECT:

INTEGRATION OF CHILDREN WITH DIASABILITIES IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL

“DIFFERENT, BUT EQUAL”

Venue: town of Pravets

Country: Bulgaria



The process of integration of children with disabilities in public schools in Bulgaria started in year 2002 when the government accepted a law, and afterwards a regulation for its implementation. As we all know, to legal part is only one step, but you have to put into practice that law, the situation is quite different-too many obstacles may prevent the realization of all good intentions, especially in a society that is not ready to change the negative attitude towards people with disabilities. It is easier to close your eyes and pretend that such people do not exist, and in your perfect life there is no place for such ugliness. But is it so?

“Vasil Levski” Elementary School, situated in the town of Pravets, Bulgaria, is one of the first schools included in the national strategy for people with disabilities. If we speak for success today, then we have to look at the beginning: the resistance on behalf of the teachers, that don’t have any specific skills to work with children with disabilities; the absolute rejection by the other kids in the school, that come from normal families where there is no tolerance toward any kind of difference ...it was so difficult to overcome all these, that at some point it seemed almost impossible!

The implementation of the project for Center for rehabilitation and social integration of children with disabilities, realized by the Bulgarian movement NALFAP, and one of the partner organization – Contemporary Society Foundation, changed the attitude towards the integration of these children. The total number of children with disabilities in the project was 21, and for all of them were established a multisense hall and a specific for their needs hall for physical rehabilitation. The facilities were open for every child, no matter his/her physical or mental health, and in an atmosphere of friendliness and cooperation, the handicapped children were able to make new and

useful contacts with other children. We organized activities such as art therapy and music therapy, which helped children to achieve better results in different fields, to find new abilities and skills. Many children from ordinary classes participated with pleasure in these activities besides their first reaction of rejection. The specialized work for group community training also contributed to the formation of new relationships, skills for communication and self-confidence.

The project team, as well as teachers from the elementary school, participated in series of training seminars and work meetings, which promoted their knowledge and skills to implement the strategy of work with children with disabilities, and destroyed many barriers and psychological limits.

The project team had a main goal-to personalize the methods for work to each child, and to use individual and non-standard methodology and solutions. The members of the team tried to find children's strong sides, to develop them, and were part of their transition into the public school, and into society in general. For example, some children from the target group took part in their first theatric play in front of public, an art exhibition, public presentation of the project through virtual presentation made by a handicapped child, etc.

This project is our good example. It is a result of personal engagement and desire for change. With its work, the project team tried to integrate these children, to help them realize themselves in the difficult life, and to begin the development of a future strategy for implementation of a realistic and successful integration in school even after the end of the project. We are aware that the process of integration of children with disabilities is a long and difficult way to go, but we hope that our work is a contribution to it, and is a prerequisite for discussion in the society about the future of such children. We are ready to share our experience and help everyone that wants to make efforts in this field, and we hope that presenting this project in France was the first step of sharing.

Maria Peeva, Bulgaria