

This programme was designed by Anna Dyrka-Brzozowska in 1991. Two years later the first Polish center run according to this programme has been founded.....

A PROGRAMME ENABLING MILDLY MENTALLY HANDICAPPED CHILDREN TO LIVE AND WORK IN OUR PRESENT SOCIETY

You don't need to convince anyone that the new Act of Government giving handicapped people, including mentally handicapped the right to rehabilitation through work will become wishful thinking if they not radically change the education system in special schools and institutions.

The isolation of mentally handicapped children in the present, primitive schools, with no foresight- sentences them to unfulfilled potential locked away in family homes or institutions. Occasionally some of them get specially reserved vacations , in special factories.

The type of work, monotonous and humdrum increases isolation from reality and is detrimental to their development. I would like to introduce a program for children from special schools in environments (described below) which would give children with mental disabilities the chance of maximum development, and in the future the possibility to get work according to their individual abilities and interests, also would make them socially acceptable and be of benefit to society.

- 1) The place
- 2) The setting up of the program
- 3) Staff
- 4) Health matters of rehabilitation and others
- 5) Suggestions and questions

Ad1.

Purchase of a 4 room flat on an estate and moving in 6 children aged 10-19, and carers living out, working on 3 shifts: two during the day and one during the night, in a rota 28 hours a week. The house would be a permanent home for children. Legally it would be owned by the sponsor as a private property, he would pay for the upkeep and the staff's salaries. It would be overseen by the Ministry of Education as an independent place of education realizing the copyrighted programme.

As soon as the children become 18 or get their own pension plus money which they could earn by themselves on the estate – the “home” could be self sufficient there would be only the salaries for the carers of them.

Ad.2

“Home on the estate” – should be similar to a real family home. All their members should also have their own place – space wise. They should also have responsibility in running the place. They have to do things for themselves and for others in the “family”. This includes – shopping, cleaning, cooking, washing etc.

Another important thing is “working outside”: get familiar with the estate, streets around, shops, playgrounds: to get in touch with neighbours, shop keepers. As well as to find out what kind of jobs they would be able to do on the estate. They could do community work, tidying playgrounds etc.

The home should have its own workshop – which would depend on abilities and interests of their members. They could make for example ornaments for their home as well as selling them.

But most important aim of the home is to make it open to the community on the estate. Everyone should know and care about it. The presence of two carers on the shift would allow to split the children into two groups working at home and on the estate – at the same time. Because of this in a few years time – when the children are grown up – they would have a place in the community doing things which they are good at. This would help them to get some extra money – additional to their pensions. This means the upkeep costs of the home would be reduced.

Ad. 3.

Staff. There would be 6 people carrying for the 6 children. It has to be a team of people understanding and accepting the full meaning of their work. It takes some imagination, sensitivity and initiative – to be able to care for children with special needs. A lot depends on the carers’ personalities and approach to people. It is up to them how the children will adapt to life on the estate – and how they will be accepted.

On the “team” has to be one psychologist – but there is no need for a director or accountant. Someone is needed to take care of the “workshop” (a cook, an artist, a dress-maker – depends what children will be interested in).

Apart from that – every carer should be able to teach children “something” – or you can look for “instructors” on the estate among pensioners – for example.

Ad.4

One carer per child means that the minder would give all his attention to specific child and take care of his health and rehabilitation. The carer would also take notes on his charge. Therefore in case of change of carers, the next one would be able to have an up-to date memo on the specific child’s care.

Ad5.

Benefits of such programme are obvious and various: children can start normal life, which is the best “school”, where they can develop their skills and independence to the maximum – depending on the needs and obstacles they meet and in consequence develop and use their characteristics – such as spontaneity, generosity and ability to make contacts with others.

Social benefits: attempt at breaking discrimination barriers, integration and keeping in touch and bringing help to those in need as well as creative work for the carers.

And lastly economical benefits: nursing homes for such children are proverbial bottomlesspits which can take millions. They are usually overcrowded and in consequence not effective. Their management is without any idea. They also are incapable of giving any future perspective to the children and so the work is without any motivation for the carers whose numbers are always too small in proportion to the number of administrative workers.

In this concept it is shown that the expences for each household are worked out to the bare essentials and it is cheaper by at least 1/3 per child that expences in the big nursing homes and in some instances could be met by childrens’ own pensions and social benefits. And so one question remains: where and how to get children to the proposed homes and how to organize carers.

The above programme has been worked out with specific children namely children from the School of Life in Lodz, Tkacka Street. Among 6 of them, 4 are from the same family, the other 2 boys are very friendly with them. Their future is rather bleak-nameless at the moment, nursing home for adults, separation of the family etc.

We have been running our home for 18 years according to this programme. It consists the main assumptions for every actions, which we are taking with our charges. Each year we describe every actions in details and we extend their range according to the needs and possibilities of the habitants of our hause. We observe our charges and together with them we accomplish the goals, which these mentally handicapped people outline for themselves.

We are very happy to be able to accompany them in their life.