SPECIAL-NEEDS FRIENDS





S P E C I A L - N E E D S F R I E N D S

Cultural Ecological Society Smetumet www.smetumet.com Slovenia, EU

S P E C I A L - N E E D S F R I E N D S

... are recycled old toys with a new mission. On their way to schools, kindergarten, hospitals, shops and homes they tell stories about consuming in excess of our needs and about needs that are both special and personal...

The project Special-Needs Friends aims to raise awareness and establish specific solutions in the field of waste toys and the equality of people without prejudice regarding their different needs and competences. At the core of the project lies the connection of care for the environment with empowering people with special needs. The accompanying activities are designed in an innovative, modern, inclusive way and released to the public and individuals, enhancing thoughts and activities, leading to a better and more responsible life for us all.

As we believe that all of us have different and simultaneously special needs, we aim to establish social conditions in which "special needs" would be satisfied to a degree where all needs of individuals would be equal and be "personal" only.

Satisfying special and personal needs of ALL should be of equal importance to all.

MAIN PROJECT ACTIVITIES:



- Actions of collecting old and redundant plush toys and waste recycling material,
- Designing and making of didactic toys with special needs -Special-Needs Friends,
- Performance of workshops and exhibitions in primary schools, kindergartens and other locations and design of learning materials,
- Community Carrotmob actions and activities in public places for enhancing general accessibility for all,
- Awareness-rising workshops, exhibitions, round tables and other events for the general public,
- The sociological case study of the project for good practice transfer into other enterprises.

The Cultural Ecological Society Smetumet manages the project in regard of contents, organising the activities and holistic design of the Special-Needs Friends. The society was jointly created by the following partners:

- University Rehabilitation Institute RS **Soča** contributed the professional support and a part of the capacities in the frame of occupational rehabilitation.
- The collected toys were processed under the mentorship of Smetumet by Mojca and Sabina, employees in the sheltered workshop **Želva**.
- **Humanitas**, The Society for human rights and supportive action arranged for the presentation of global influences of excessive consumption and modern life style.
- Institute for children friendly play **Zoopi** was displaying the situation on toy use in our environment and was organising the old toys collection.
- And last but not least, the counselling in the area of participatory praxis and the sociological case study of the project was conducted by a professor of the **University** in **Lillehammer** with her students



All activities from March 2014 to March 2016 were proceeding with the support of the **Norwegian Financial Mechanism** and later on autonomously.

Where could I screw up? Who could I affront and how? What could I do wrong? How should I address someone? What can I ask? Where can I look? Should I help or not? Can I make jokes?



People with locomotory, sensory or intellectual challenges, people with special needs... There are several different ways of considering specific groups of people who are different from the average due to a specific diagnosis or characteristic. There are a large number of expressions, each having its origin and more or less suitable context.

If we are not well-equipped for a relaxed and adequate approach, we are often embarrassed at the contact with this topic or such a person. It is about taboos, a sensitive area which presents a lot of challenges in communication and interaction. A child would point the finger at a "different« person without prejudice and shout out: "Look, this man has no leg!", then run to him, looking at him with curiosity and asking something "improper". The red faced adult would probably humbly apologise, try to silence the child and quickly take them far away, where they would

explain the situation in their own way. But they could also allow a respectful satisfaction of the child's curiosity, a chat of adequate length and thus an expansion of the child's horizon, a new personal experience, recognition of diversity and acceptance. Even help, if needed. Perhaps the man has a sense of humour and – not excluded at all – can also make jokes about his missing leg.

Concerning the official terminology: The most suitable is that which cites the person first and their condition second – person with blindness, hearing impairment, locomotory impairment... as this is the most appropriate attitude that needs to be internalised: we must not equate people with their condition, medical diagnosis, shortcoming or defect. We might just tolerate them, often we pity or patronise them, or strive for their rights in principle only. But we can really, in practice, treat them like equals.

All people are known by their character nature, we should focus on their abilities and affinities. Some people are simply better equipped than others. Many can accomplish less or even more and/or different things than the rest.

If we don't know how and what - we should ask. There is no common recipe for people who only share one or a handful of characteristics. We all are special in a sense. And we all need all available options to be as independent, accepted and integrated in society as possible.

CHILDREN HAVE FICTIVE BUT ADULTS HAVE VIRTUAL FRIENDS

Toys are a special thing. They have a strong, also symbolic meaning. They are not essential like food and clothing for example, but we need them nevertheless. Even as we grow up.

Oh no, adults have no toys. Okay, sometimes we play with Lego blocks, but only to socialise with children. And cards are played as a lark, when socialising. The computer and the prone are no toys if we play no games on them. And the car – is only a necessary transportation device!

It may be that we don't even recognise all the things in our daily lives which are a



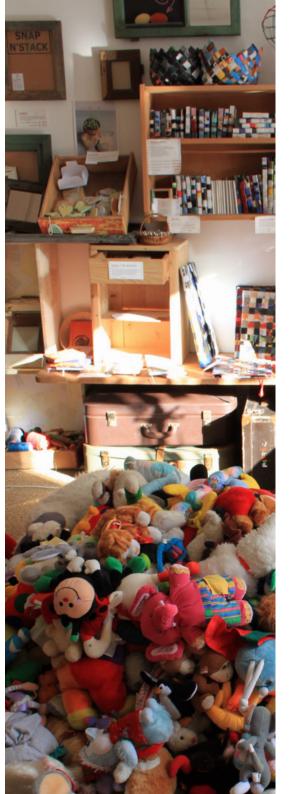
game or a toy. Do all these gadgets and habits we possess really only have a practical, educational, important, »adult« purpose? Aren't they also used in the same way that children use toys and games?

To entertain us, to pass our time? We show them to each other, compare, sometimes borrow or exchange them. We also exchange experiences. We learn how to use them from one another. Maybe we understand them as a status symbol. We compete with each other. We desire better, prettier, newer, larger, faster, louder, more efficient and more plentiful. By their use we socialise, practice communication, learn the rules of the world, the society, our narrower and broader environment in a specific way. We learn, explore, create. Through play and toys we build relationships and personality. We play roles. We watch others, learning about their way of thinking, working and reacting. We learn to foresee, pretend, accept failures, overcome emotions... Play is therefore a serious matter.

WHO OR WHAT IS HERE TO SCRAP?

Play and toys accompany us through our entire life. Consequently we have developed a special, nostalgic attitude to them. Some people never throw away their favourite childhood teddy bear, even if it is carelessly rolled up and doesn't resemble the nice teddy bears from the catalogue in the slightest. Emotions, memories, experiences are bonded to them. But in times, when teddy bears and other plush toys are far too many to bond with all of them, toys are thrown away in increasing numbers and with increasing ease.

Sometimes we also treat people this way, setting them aside. Not necessarily intentio-



nally. Often due to fear of the unknown. Or because of our own ignorance. Because we are not strong enough to face them, we don't find the courage to approach and accept them. Sometimes this is difficult and perhaps needs more time.

And where is this "aside"? For toys, these are waste disposal sites, recycling facilities and in the best case other users. For people with special need this is often the margin of society to which they are pushed, as they are provided equal possibilities on paper only.

We have decided to address two topics in the project, which at the first glance don't have much in common. Plush toys and handicap, recycling and special needs...?!

All things that we produce and design in our society are made of waste material. Because the ecologic viewpoint is important for us. As we feel that people are also an essential element of the ecology, we focus also on relations and ethics. As both

topics of special needs and environment protection are demanding and difficult, we would like to mediate them through something playful and well-known to us. We have decided to give surplus toys a second chance. Gathered from all corners, freshly cleaned, arranged and reworked in a way to express uniqueness, diversity and to personalise difference. With their personal and special stories they broaden our minds and open our hearts.

Thus waste and people have a chance to speak as they are, in their own name. We want the items to be no burden for the environment and no one to feel as a burden to society.

We change the world ourselves, although slowly and in our microenvironment. We can start with something small, like the toys our children are playing with. Ask yourself what you would like to teach them.

Maja Modrijan, for the Cultural Ecological Society Smetumet



HELLO!

We are the gang of Special-Needs Friends. To be as independent as possible, sometimes we have to try a little harder, use various accessories and spatial adjustments or tell others what we need. With the help of professionals we are going to present some different examples of impairments and their causes.

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LOCOMOTORY IMPAIRMENTS



INJURIES AND INHERENT GENETIC CONDITIONS

What is this? I badly hurt myself. When I ran for a ball across the street, a car hit me. My friend was also hurt; he fell hard from his bicycle. A third fell as the garage roof he was climbing on gave up under his feet. You know, bad luck never rests. All of us had at least a broken bone, blood was running and we were in great pain. In the hospital we were first thoroughly examined, some of us also needed surgery. Because the body doesn't heal quickly after such an injury, we were then sent to the University Rehabilitation Institute in Ljubljana. There we also met children in need of rehabilitation and aids due to genetic conditions. Those can cause missing limbs, adhered fingers or delayed growth.

What happens at such an injury? Often the skin with blood vessels, sometimes also muscle tissue, is torn apart. When the injury is bad, several bones can be broken. Sometimes a nerve is damaged as a result.

What issues do we have? The majority has problems with the movement of hands and feet. The bones heal slowly, then we need to relearn how to use the hand or the leg, to dress ourselves, comb our hair, clean our teeth, eat and drink something, draw a picture or do our homework. If a nerve was damaged at the injury, the function of the hand or feet is returning very slowly, it can take a whole year and sometimes it will not fully return at all.

How many issues we have depends largely on the severity of the injury and the number of damaged body parts. In the rehabilitation programme our capabilities gradually improve by learning, practicing our skills, therapeutic programmes (physiotherapy, work therapy, speech therapy, psychologi-

Which aids do we need? Those who are not yet able to walk need a wheelchair. Some of us also need braces to keep our ankles and knees and sometimes even hands in a suitable position. Some of us can walk on crutches, others can't. Some need a rollator for walking. Sometimes we use a specially adapted bicycle to overcome larger distances. Sometimes the injury is so bad that a part of the arm or leg is missing. This can be substituted with a prosthesis which we have to learn how to use. As we grow, such an aid has to be adapted every time, which is the work of orthopaedic engineers.

How you can help us? Ask and wait for us to tell you. We prefer doing things by ourselves, if we only can. Perhaps we need help holding a spoon, drinking from a glass, putting on our clothes or shoes...

Certainly we will find it hard to tie our shoelaces or similar.

Very similar difficulties are experienced by those who were already born without a part of the arm or leg. They are sent to the University Rehabilitation Institute in Ljubljana as babies where they are given a prosthesis very early and taught to walk and do other activities.



CEREBRAL PARALYSIS AND BRAIN DAMAGE

What is it? The expression cerebral paralysis describes a group of development disorders, which are the consequence of brain damage and occurring for a number of reasons. Many of us were born prematurely, so brain damage emerges due to immaturity of the lungs, liver, blood vessels. Some experience injuries due to lack of oxygen at birth, others due to infection by viruses or bacteria. People can experience similar troubles following head trauma.

How often do such things happen? In Slovenia each year some 40 babies are born this way, it is similar elsewhere in the world. Despite the advances in medicine, the number of children with cerebral paralysis has not declined in the last 30 years.

What are we like? Very, very different. Most experience difficulties moving, and also in other areas, such as sensing different stimuli (sight, hearing, tasting, body feeling), food intake, speech, behaviour and cognitive functions. Some have epilepsy too.

How severe the issues in these areas are depends foremost on the severity of the brain damage. Then, through the rehabilitation programme, our capabilities improve by learning, practicing kills, therapeutic programmes (physiotherapy, work therapy, speech therapy, psychological and special pedagogic treatment) and the support received in our family.

Which aids do we need? Those who are not able to walk, need a wheelchair. Some are able to push it by themselves, others need a wheelchair with an electric motor and still others can't even sit on their own and are transported by another person. Quite often we also need braces to bring our ankles, knees or hips and some-

How you can help us? Ask and wait for us to tell you. We prefer doing things by ourselves, if we only can. Perhaps we need help holding a spoon, drinking from a glass, putting on our clothes or shoes...

Certainly we will find it hard to tie our sho-

elaces or similar.

Very similar difficulties are experienced by those among us who have injured our head (and brain) in a severe car cash, after falling from a height or in similar accidents.



INJURIES OF THE SPINAL CORD

What has happened to me? Some of us are born with such an impairment. You have surely heard about "spina bifida" or mielomeningocelle. Very early in the development, as individual tissues are just forming, a flaw in the closing of the spinal tube happens. The vertebrae of the spinal column, most often in the lumbar sector do not close, their arcs remain open. The result of that is that soft tissues of the spinal cord and nerves pop out from the spinal column and get damaged even before we are born. But back injuries may emerge also later in the development, for example at a car crash or at falling from a height. In very rare occasions back injuries also are caused by damage of the veins supplying nourishment and oxygen or due to a severe viral or bacterial infection.

What troubles do we have? Where nerve cells are damaged in the spinal cord and those that transduce the nerve impulses to our muscles and other organs, there are not enough signals or none at all. Therefore our muscles fail to work in we cannot move.

How severe the issues are depends foremost on the severity of the trauma and where in the spinal marrow it occurred. Some can't move their arms, sit or walk on their own (if the injured part is somewhere in the neck), others can't stand and walk (if the injured part is located somewhere in the thoracic or lumbar spine). Usually we cannot sense or only somewhat sense the body parts that we can't move. This adds to our troubles. Sometimes our muscles, although they are not in our control, contract and cause pain. In case of spinal damage in the neck we can have also difficulties breathing.

Then, through the rehabilitation programme, our capabilities improve by

SPECIAL-NEEDS FRIENDS 2°

learning, practicing kills, therapeutic programmes (physiotherapy, work therapy, speech therapy, psychological and special pedagogic treatment) and the support received in our family. If a few months after the injury our abilities are not improving, that means that the damage to the spine is so severe that its function will likely never be restored again. In this case we also have a lot to learn, foremost how to ease the execution of daily activities with the use of aids.

Which aids do we need? Those who are not able to walk, need a wheelchair. If our arms are strong enough, we can propel the wheelchair by ourselves. If our arms are too weak, we need a wheelchair with an electric motor. Some of us also need braces to bring our ankles, knees or hips and sometimes even arms in a suitable position. Some of us can walk on crutches and others not.

As the nerves regulating the excretion of stools and urine are also damaged, we need help here too. If the urine remains in the bladder, this can be very dangerous, so we are taught to empty our bladder with a catheter. The excretion of stools can be aided by eating suitable foods and laxatives.

How you can help us? Ask and wait for us to tell you. We prefer doing things by ourselves, if we only can. Perhaps we need help holding a spoon, drinking from a glass, putting on our clothes or shoes... Certainly we will find it hard to tie our shoelaces or similar.

Mag. Katja GROLEGER-SRŠEN, dr. med., Department for children (re)habilitation, University rehabilitation Institute of the Republic of Slovenia SOČA



CHRONIC INTERNAL ORGAN DISEASES

CHRONIC LUNG DISEASES

What is this? When health problems last a really long time, we have a chronic disease. The causes for chronic lung diseases are very different, among others allergies, smoking, exposure to dust and chemicals (dust, irritants, smoke), polluted air and smoke from wood burning. The most common chronic lung diseases are bronchitis, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

What troubles do we have? We have difficulty breathing and breathe shallowly, we get tired quickly and we also often cough. Because ill lungs don't provide enough oxygen, our other organs can be effected, foremost the heart and vascular system. Because of lung disease we also tend to have other chronic lung disease, chronic rhinitis (chronic inflammation of

the nose mucous membrane) emerges in as much as 80 % of patients with asthma.

Which aids do we need? We regularly take medicine in the form of pills and use inhalators. When the bronchi (bronchial tubes for air supply to the lungs) are in a state of severe inflammation or damaged, a permanent blockage of respiratory organs can emerge. At advanced stages, when the respiratory organs are not able to provide enough oxygen for normal functioning of our body, we use a system for supplying liquid oxygen or an oxygen concentrator. The latter uses electric power to make air with a higher oxygen concentration than in normal air. It consists of an oxygen supplying unit and a nasal cannula or an oxygen mask which covers the nose and mouth.

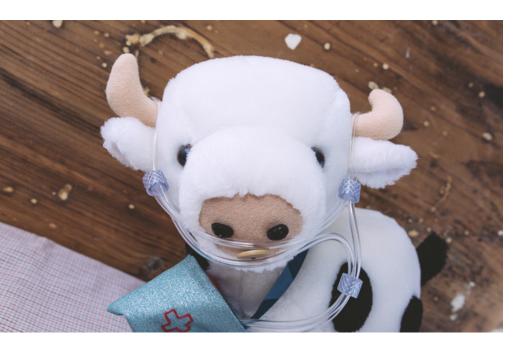
How severe are the issues? Greater physical efforts such as running or lifting of heavy objects are often too much for us.

24 SPECIAL-NEEDS FRIENDS SPECIAL-NEEDS FRIENDS 25

We have to take utmost care not to get infected with viruses or bacteria that could further worsen our situation. Therefore we have to take care about proper hygiene. Smokers have to abandon smoking, we have to avoid polluted air and we have to ensure a healthy way of life.

How you can help us? Ask and wait until we tell you. We prefer to do things by ourselves, if only we can.

Marija Špelič, dipl.m.s., Clinical Department for Lung Diseases and Allergies, UKCL



THERAPY WITH
TRANSPLANTATION
AND DONATION
OF ORGANS FOR
HEALING

What is this? Have you noticed a stitched wound on me and pills in my bag? My distinction is that I was healed by an organ transplantation. With this method, terminal failure of heart, liver, lung, pancreas and kidneys are healed (only at terminal failure of both kidneys there exists an alternative therapy with dialysis). In Slovenia, 170 persons on average are on the transplantation waiting list for kidneys, heart, liver or pancreas. Each year some 60 kidneys, 30 hearts, 21 liver and a few pancreases are transplanted. Those who need lung transplantation, go to a top hospital in Vienna, Austria, for the transplantation.

Why treatment through transplantation?

You know, I was very ill, my heart was giving up. In the hospital the doctors made every effort, trying different kinds of therapies. In spite of their efforts the heart was not functioning normally, but further worsened and failed. We were afraid I would die. The last chance was a heart transplantation.

Why treatment through transplantation? I

was put on the waiting list of all diseased, waiting for the transplantation. They also made a number of different medical examinations and tests to define my health situation and confirm that I am mentally and physically ready for the surgery. After finally getting a suitable, medicinally compatible organ for my organism, they called me instantly. From the call to the transplantation onwards, it all happened very fast. There is always a need for hurry, as after a few hours the organs are not suitable for transplantation any more.

26 SPECIAL-NEEDS FRIENDS SPECIAL-NEEDS FRIENDS 2

Very skilled professionals executed the demanding surgery of organ transplantation. The operation was successful. I was in recovery for a long time, now I am not very ill anymore. They healed me with organ transplantation.

How is the life after operation? I live much better now than before the operation, I can run, play with friends, romp around - but I have to pay attention and consider the instructions of my physicians and regularly take the pills that help my organism not to reject the transplanted organ. I also have regular medical examination.

Why is organ donation important? My operation was possible because relatives donated the organs of their loved one who died suddenly for transplantation. I am extremely thankful for this decision and act that enabled my survival and life.

After death it is possible to donate all the organs and tissues which the doctors know

how to transplant: heart, lung, liver, small intestines and pancreas, and tissues like: bone marrow, cornea, bones, joints, connective tissue, veins, cardiac valves and skin. With such actions donors help unknown fellow humans in trouble.

Everyone can decide to donate their organs after their death, but only over the age of 15 years. It is even better to make

such a decision later, after your 18th birthday, as you understand more and can decide to become a donor or not with greater responsibility. It is also desirable to discuss this topic extensively with your nearest in the family circle and question the experts of the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for the Transplantation of Organs and Tissues, which is the central organisation for this area of activity in our country. Visit their webpage www.slovenija-transplant.si , you will find many interesting information there. You can also visit the organisation Slovenia-transplant on Facebook.

Prim. Danica Avsec, dr. med. and Dr. Jana Šimenc, dipl. etnol. in kult. antrop., Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for the Transplantation of Organs and Tissues Slovenija-transplant



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SENSORY HANDICAPS



DEAF-BLINDNESS

What is this? Persons with deaf-blindness are people with simultaneous impairment of hearing and sight, meaning that we don't hear nor see or hear/see just a little. At the same time, in addition to the sensory handicap, such people can have also other handicaps and medical conditions. The group of people with deaf-blindness is extraordinarily diverse. For people with deaf-blindness we don't speak about total deafness and simultaneously total blindness, but about many combinations of impairments. This is called mass impairment.

How severe are the problems? That depends on the reason and onset of deaf-blindness. We talk of congenital, obtained and old-age deaf-blindness. Deafness-blindness is a condition, emerging for different reasons: hereditary impairment, illness, injury or old age.

What help do we need? There are considerable differences among us, the kind of help we need depends also on the chronological order of hearing and sight loss. Therefore each individual with deaf-blindness has to be treated entirely individually. People with deaf-blindness must receive adequate support, adapted to the individual's capabilities and capacities. Each person with deaf-blindness needs a companion and a translator/ interpreter for the deaf-blind to translate all sound and vision information from the surroundings into adapted means of communication. The proper understanding of information is most reliable through tactile ways of communication.

Which aids and kinds of communication on do we know? Communication with a person with deaf-blindness proceeds in different ways, namely: with Slovenian sign language, located sign language, tactile sign language, tactile two-hand

30 SPECIAL-NEEDS FRIENDS SPECIAL-NEEDS FRIENDS 3



alphabet, directed sign language, finger alphabet, laying of one-hand alphabet in the palm, tactile one-hand alphabet, Tadoma method, with enlarged writing, with pictograms etc.

We are talking about many ways of communication, among others also with the help of simple aids (for example writing with a large marker) and with the help of technical devices (writing on the computer, red-white cane, Braille pad).

The selection of a communication way for

each individual depends on the onset of impairment and its intensity, considering also the primary damage, especially the abilities and capacities of the individual (his existing experiences and acquired knowledge). Therefore we speak of individually adapted ways of communication with a person with deaf-blindness.

Dr. Simona Gerenčer Pegan, Secretary of the Society of the Deaf-Blind of Slovenia DLAN

PARTIAL AND TOTAL DEAFNESS

What is this? Partial and total deafness belong to the heaviest forms of disability or impairment. The consequences of deafness depend on impairment causes and on the outcome of the rehabilitation process for that person. Total and partial deafness generally causes loneliness, rejection of support from the environment, as deaf and very hard of hearing people don't feel others' presence around them and have the permanent feeling of being isolated and without real support of the world. Total and partial deafness can be the consequence of a congenital defect, injury, illness or old age.

Which aids and kinds of communication to use? Partially deaf are all people with the loss of hearing on both ears up to 95 % according to Fowler. They listen with

the help of technical aids such as hearing aids (behind the ear, in the ear, etc.), with lip reading, with an induction loop or portable FM System. Deaf people are those who have lost their hearing over 95% according to Fowler and who practically don't hear anything. A person with hearing impairment is a physically healthy person, so we often don't recognise them until they speak, only then do we become aware that they are completely or partially deaf. In communication they use the Slovenian sign language, read lips or use the one-hand or two-hands alphabet.

How can you communicate with us? We meet completely and partially deaf people in everyday situations, often not realising it as hearing impairment is not apparent n the outside. Therefore we detect the hearing impairment only after such a person begins to speak.

Deaf people communicate among themselves in the Slovenian sign language, which

When meeting a deaf or partially deaf person, we mustn't be afraid. Look into their face and speak clearly and slowly.

Don't cover your mouth when speaking.

Don't shout!

If the deaf person uses an interpreter, we take care that they are clearly visible; we provide for adequate lighting (the interpreter shall not stand in front of the window or intensely illuminated objects...).

Collected by: Simona Korez, rehabilitation adviser, Racio, the Society for Human Capital Development, Ltd.



TOTAL AND PARTIAL BLINDNESS

What is this? Total or partial blindness is a sensory disorder expressed as total or partial sight impairment. It could be the consequence of damage to parts of the eye, optic nerve or the brain centre for sight. How we see the world around us depends on the location of the impairment. The impairment can be congenital or it can develop later as consequence of infection, injury or old age. Among us are also deaf-blind people.

How often do such things happen? We don't have the exact data on the number of totally and partially blind people in Slovenia. Some 4000 members are affiliated in the Slovenian Association of Societies of the totally and partially blind, about 175 totally or partially blind

children attend schools and kindergartens regularly. In fact this number is much higher, as the official data is based on volunteer membership and on decisions about orientation.

What are we like? If you get to know us better, then you will find out that we touch a lot, listen carefully, taste with pleasure, watch from very close, sometimes bump into or trip over something and we like to talk. We have the most difficulties when moving outside, as the outer environment is generally not adapted to the totally and partially blind, and having a companion is very useful. Some of us wear dark glasses, use the white cane or are helped by a guide dog. When talking to us you can observe that some of us cannot control our eyeballs and our eyeballs move uncontrollably back and forth. Many of us keep our head bowed or our head is in a different position than in people with sight.

4 special-needs friends special-needs friends 35

How severe are the issues? Maybe you will be surprised by the fact that we collect as much as 80 % of information from our environment through sight. That means that after sight impairment is diagnosed, we shall immediately start with the exercises to develop the other senses and for the acquisition of skills that are crucial for our autonomous life, so we start immediately with: sight exercises, learning of the Braille alphabet, exercises for orientation and mobility, managing our daily routine, use of aids and computer technology. As we cannot learn with imitation, all this has to be learned with the help of a teacher for the totally and partially blind, in Slovenia called "tiflopedagog". The sooner we start with all these exercises, the lesser our issues will be.

Which aids do we use? As impairments of sight are very different, the use of aids is also very diverse. The basic aid we are recognisable by is the white cane. It helps

us to move safely and autonomously in the external environment. Some blind also have a guide dog. We also have many aids for doing housework, which are adapted to blind people (scales, clocks, light and fluid indicators, sugar meters, measuring instruments, torches, magnifying lenses...). The books we read are tactile (Braille alphabet and tactile pictures) or in digital form. For this we utilise the computer with a Braille pad and a programme for conversion of text into a sound recording.

How you can help us? If you notice us in traffic and want to help, first ask if we need help at all. We remember the way we walk along based on orientation points (a kerbstone, a step, a flower pot, a tree). If you lead us away from this route, we can become totally lost. In case you accompany us, we kindly ask you to not to push us in front of you, we will hold your arm. And a last request: For us it is

very important that you describe the place you have brought us to, so we can proceed on the way by ourselves. You shall not pat, address or feed the guide dog. When accompanying the blind on their way, the dog is at work.

Where can you meet us? The totally and partially blind are in kindergarten, schools, faculties, libraries, museums, shops,

at the airport, we are keen on sports and we visit the theatre, cinema and musical events. There are no hindrances for us, if we only get a chance. So there are no obstacles to becoming friends.

Katjuša Koprivnikar, prof. športne vzgoje, Headmistress of the Institute for Totally and Partially Blind Youth Ljubljana



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NEUROLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT DISORDERS



AUTISM

What is this? Autism is a neurologic development disorder that can be detected with children even before the 3rd year. Autism has influences the development of those brain parts which are involved in the establishment of social contacts, our communication skills and cognitive functions. Children with autism have deficiencies in the field of verbal and nonverbal communication and socialisation and play development. Often, autism is accompanied by the following disorders: allergies, asthma, eating and sleep disorders, sensory particularities and others. Four times more boys than girls are autistic. There is no cure for autism, but early treatment learning has an important influence on the development of autistic children. Almost 40 % of children with autism don't speak with words, they need alternative ways of communication (pictures, moves, etc.).

That way they can express their needs in by showing the picture of a glass when they want a drink.

Who are we? Children with autism don't stand out from the crowd, on the outside we look the same as healthy children with unusual behaviour. In some of us there are visible development deficiencies (in the area of speaking, communicating, autonomy, at play), while some areas can be on a higher development level (motor function, fine motor function, areas in connection with their special interests – i.e. puzzles, mechanical memory, especially visual memory).

How is autism expressed outwards? People with autism differ importantly from one another and those with adequate knowledge easily recognise similarities between different children with autism. We are alike in that we communicate differently, make social contacts different

tly, we have different interests and play. We can develop relations very quickly or keep completely to ourselves. When we approach another person, it seems sometimes that we are even less reserved than our peers, we at once wish to be cuddled and sit on the lap, on the other side we may not allow to be touched or caressed at all. Some of us approach strangers at once - we ask them questions, tell them stories -, others approach very rarely and only if we need something. We like order, we like to arrange objects into collections, and rather than to build a house from dices or play imaginative roles, we put them in a sequence. We love the regularity of everyday routine, we get upset by changes, especially unannounced. We express our feelings with outbreaks of anger, crying or shouting. Gradually we learn to control our anger and express our disagreement in a different way. That is an important part of our learning and we need plenty of time and energy for it.

What causes autism? We don't know of one single reason for autism emerging in a child. We know that autism is not caused by unsuitable upbringing or a traumatic event. Autism is not contagious. Contacts with children with autism are not harmful, even the opposite – in contacts with us healthy children learn patience, cooperation and different kinds of communication. All these are very useful qualities in life.

Dr. Branka D. Jurišić, Spec. educationalist, Educational centre PIKA; Janez Levec Centre, Liubliana.

A S P E R G E R S Y N D R O M E

What is this? Asperger syndrome (AS) is a development disorder which belongs to the group of autistic spectre disorders. For this group of disorders certain deficiencies in the area of social interaction. communication, play and imagination and a very narrow panel of behaviours or interests are characteristic. AS differs from autism in quite well-preserved speech and cognitive capabilities of children in the first 3 years of development. Often this disorder is described as autism without disturbance in psychic development or mild autism with high capacities. Experts are convinced that the AS is more common than classic autism and more and more individuals are diagnosed whom we would never have recognises as "persons with autism" earlier.

How is Asperger syndrome expressed outwards? Persons with AS can be motivated for socialising, want contact with others, but our communication is not usual. Sometimes we even speak too much, we rarely communicate with gestures and face expressions like other children; we can have real short lectures on the topic of our interest. The methodology and the style of narration in people with AS are excessively precise and so we remind of "little professors". Often we don't recognise that others get a little bored at that (we don't see that our discussion partner is already yawning and rolling their eyes), we just explain all the details that we know about the topic that is interesting to us only. It is difficult for us to change the topic of the debate as we are very occupied with our own interests and have troubles "listening« to the message of our partner and "reading" other people's feelings. So it happens that one of us with AS is telling about alarm devices, microprocessors, computer cables, bugs,

can be slow at things that demand manual

skills (writing in school, cutting with scissors,

buttoning up and similar).

What help do we need? Because of our many particularities in relation to others we more often find ourselves in dispute; our peers gibe and tease us frequently and mock us. Therefore we need a lot of support with the inclusion into the society of our peers and immense support at learning, so we can utilise the best of our potentials. This support is needed through our whole life, but some people with AS can even have a normal job and live autonomously.

Dr. Branka D. Jurišić, Spec. educationalist, Educational centre PIKA; Janez Levec Centre, Ljubljana.



DOWN SYNDROME

How often does the syndrome occur? From 1245 children born in Slovenia, one will have Down syndrome. The likelihood of a child being born with Down syndrome (DS) increases with the mother's age, although most children are born to young mothers (because these have more children).

What is the cause? A genetic disorder – most often trisomy of the 21. chromosome: instead of a pair of chromosomes a person with DS has three.

How is it discovered? With certain screenings even before birth, mostly however immediately at birth. What the child's achievements, respectively what the level of mental disabilities will be is impossible to predict at birth. People with DS can significantly differ one from another: in looks, capabilities, character.

What are we like? Although DS causes us quite a few problems, we are also gifted with a very open and friendly nature. We like to form contacts and show our feelings without reservation. We love to help others and we know how to accept help if we need it.

What are the characteristics? Some characteristics are purely physical: extreme flexibility of the joints, low muscle tone hypotonia -, there is an increased prevalence of health problems - heart disorders, disorders of the various glands, intestine, hearing and sight disorders are also more common. One characteristic of DS is also mental disability, most commonly people with DS have a moderate or severe mental disability, a few have slight mental disability and border intelligence is very rare. A weak working memory is more common, information that is seen is remembered better than that which is heard. Most people with DS are strong in communication and socialisation, and weak in speech and 42 special-needs friends 4

language abilities. They are often better at reading than mathematics or writing. Besides mental disability, they can also have other disorders which further complicate their development (autism, epilepsy ...).

Characteristic look - somewhat slanted eyes, shorter fingers, stocky figure ...

How pronounced the difficulties are, depends on the individual; most people with DS need special care – medical and therapeutical, as well as pedagogical, usually for life.

Preschool children: it is important to include them in treatment as early as possible, which should include a team of experts. As early as possible means literally as early as possible after the child is born. Early treatment is important for several reasons, but mostly because of the parents' contact with experts for developmental disabilities who know the needs of children with DS and instruct the parents on what their child needs while offering the parents support in their plight.

The child with DS is later included in kindergarten care the same as all other children with characteristic development (at the age of 12 months or later). Children with DS go into a preschool childcare program which is adapted to their needs. Many preschool children with DS achieve tremendous advances in their development – foremost as a consequence of the intensive engagement from people in their home environment and in kindergarten.

School age: Most children with DS need school programs which are less demanding than regular elementary school programs. Some are included in a program with lower education standards (usually this program is enacted in elementary schools with an adjusted program, sometimes already in regular elementary schools – in classes together with peers with characteristic development.

Prepared by Dr. Branka D. Jurišić, Sožitje – section for DS





TAILS OF HOPE AND PAWS WITH REASON

How assistant and guide dogs came into existence? Already in old Greece people knew dogs for guiding the blind, but in mass we started to use them after World War I, in Slovenia the first generation of guide dogs was trained in the year 1953. Soon after, these activities stopped and were revived again in 2006. From then on we have in Slovenia 28 guide dogs for the blind and 6 assistant dogs for people with locomotory impairment. The Slovenian Society of trainers and the Centre for Guide and Assistant Dog Training work according to international directives. Significant changes have occurred in the field of training standardisation and European legislation. We stimulate equal citizenship in all pores of social life for those people who are able to participate in that because of their guide or assistant dog. We cooperate with the

ADEu - Assistance Dog of Europe) and IGDF - International Guide Dog Federation and also with the EGDF - European Guide Dog Federation.

Which tasks fall to a guide dog and which to an assistant dog? Everyone among us wants to be an autonomous and active member of society. When people with special needs need additional help, this greater autonomy is ensured by guide and assistant dogs. Dogs can also take part of the burden from other family members, help in domestic activities, shopping, walking, on travels, etc.

Guide dogs are intended for totally and partially blind people and represent their "eyes«, indicating all obstacles on the way (pavements, steps, holes, pools, etc.) and find the safest way for the blind person.

Assistant dogs represent the "hands" of persons with locomotory impairment. They accompany a person in the wheelchair, pick different objects and things from diffe-

rent places and heights, help with opening the door, and they also have many other important duties.

For totally and partially deaf people the assistant dog represents their "ears" (the dog points to auditory signals: telephone ringing, alarm, sirens, bells, knock on the door, microwave signals, child's cry, calls of people, etc.).

A trained assistant dog warns people with epilepsy or diabetes of micro changes in their organism.

An assistant dog can also much improve the life of people with autism, therapeutic dogs help work therapists by supporting the main therapeutic methods.

What influence does the company of a dog have on people? It has been long known that dogs diminish stress, minimise nerve tension and comfort sad people, contacts also enhance health, especially with children as they are extra sensitive to impulses from their environment. Feelings

and relaxation have a positive influence on the heart, respiratory organs an on muscles and many psychophysical troubles. The emotional bond to an animal is expressed by actions and behaviour (which needs moving, talking, etc.). Laughter lowers the blood pressure and helps people relax and this happens more often in the presence of an animal then in the presence of a human.

How guide and assistant dogs are trained? Guide/assistant dogs go through a demanding training process. They are mostly chosen from the Labrador breed and have to fulfil special criteria. A guide/assistant dog is patient, peaceful, adaptable, other dogs, cats and birds don't excite them, at the same time they are guidable. When they judge a certain situation as dangerous to the person with special needs, they takes initiative and use their intelligence and inventiveness. Of course they have to be in extraordinary psychophysical condition and healthy. The training of a guide/assistant dog takes 16 - 18 months, in this time they are totally socialised, learn to obey and acquire special knowledge, and their user is also trained, since they have to be a good match with the selected dog so they can build a trusting and good relationship during the following years.

Have to behave in presence of guide and assistant dogs in public? A guide or assistant dog is wearing a special placed shoulder belt at work with inscriptions and signs denoting it as a working dog. A part of their equipment is also a special harness on the shoulder belt, a dog collar and a guide rope, being held by the blind person together with the harness. The blind person can also use a white cane for help in orientation and mobility. The white cane is also a warning sign for other road users about the presence of a blind person.

When we notice the pair "guide dog

- totally or partially blind person" or "assistant dog - person with locomotory impairment", we have to be considerate and not disturb the working dog at his work, not stopping them or patting them, not intruding and handing them treats. All we would achieve with that is that the dog would focus on us and not on the job they are doing. So we could also disturb the owner in doing their intended task. If we want to have contact with the dog, we need to ask the owner for advice first. It is of the utmost importance that we don't disturb a working dog with our own dogs and that we prevent their play, sniffing or a clash between them.

The President of SLO-CANIS mag. Darinka Lečnik-Urbancl and mentor Alenka Galun Alenka Kreč Bricelj, Cultural Ecologic Society Smetumet



I like cooking, lucky for my family I'm good at it. I used to draw a lot, now I deal much more with bureaucracy. I don't like that. I am glad when the effects of my work are quickly visible and concrete. I sew when I have the time. This does not happen very often. I really, really like to talk. I read stories to my children Voranc and Franja. I prefer folk tales. I try to be active in the local community. I iron only in the case of marriages or funerals. I prefer to build relationships rather than castles in the clouds. The worst black humour I share with my husband. I hate all songs of Phil Collins. I have beautiful co-workers and friends. Some of them are both at the same time. I value craziness. And responsibility. I am often late. I have problems with authority and hierarchic systems. All I know, I have learned out of pure pleasure or in the hardest possible way. I can't walk, so I use the wheelchair.

All these things (and a lot more) define me. I have no wish to trade nay of them with another person. Not even the wheelchair. I cannot imagine anymore what I would be like without these experiences. I like myself just as I am. No, it's not only about liking oneself (I know a few awfully conceited people). I believe that also because of my experience of disability I am a better mom, friend, citizen, wife, better for myself... well, sometimes I'm only more cranky and tired.

I have really great luck. I am a woman with special needs, living in the 21st century in the middle of Europe. I have parents, who supported and helped me after I got my spine damaged in a car crash. I had luck that we lived in Ljubljana and were financially well off. I have luck to have had enough power to stand up for myself. I have a brother who brought a dose of whipped cream to the intensive care and drew points in my face with a marker to mock the nurses

with it. I had a friend who did everything wrong because it was the only right thing for me. I have luck in that I could do things that give my life meaning and pleasure, despite my locomotory impairment. I was able to get an education. I have a wonderful husband who has already piggybacked me over all possible obstacles. Despite that, his expectations of me are fully equal. I have two beautiful children. Not to talk about all the possibilities offered by science and technology (modern medicine, the healthcare system, a good wheelchair, an adapted car, internet, etc.). These are extraordinary privileges. How different the things would have been here for me a 100 years ago or in a country outside the rich West. As a woman, tied to the use of a wheelchair, I would be complete excluded from ... oh, from life.

Nevertheless, many times things have been difficult for me. Here are clearly obvious obstacles such as stairs, narrow

When my spine was broken, I was certain that I therefore have a kind of immunity

zone waits around every corner.

and nothing worse can happen to me. Well, that was not the case. But if you concentrate on the things you can do and not on all the wrongs, you are in a good place to success, even more and better than you first expected. In such situations it is OK to take care of yourself first. You may be helpless like never before, but that doesn't mean that others can decide in your name. It is important to stand up for oneself. It is important to accept help. It is important to know and accept yourself. You are not your diagnosis, it is only a circumstance not of your own choice.

Oh, and one more thing: The main problem of an individual is that which seems the greatest to them - that is not something others can judge, but empathy can be felt for all.

AWAKED HEART

Petra Greiner Founder of the Institute 13 and special mom, www.zavod 13.org/blog



How many times do we talk about lumbar pain or feeling unpleasant pressure in our head? We have pains in this or that body part, but we seldom think of our heart and when it warns us with pain it is often too late. In my youth I put a nice barrier around my little heart. Although I had a peaceful and colourful childhood, I later protected my heart so that nothing could cause me pain. I didn't shed a single tear at romantic movies and babies were indeed entertaining, but I never experienced them as little balls of pure and only love. After many years my child was born and in my head an untameable storm went off. I stabilised my loins with all available muscles to remain standing upright at all and all this fixtures have shaken the stronghold around my heart. I started to think about this organ with more feeling only after I was told that my lovely second-born girl has two tiny holes between the atrium and the ventricular, and that this is of life importance for her. During my studies, throSPECIAL-NEEDS FRIENDS 53

ugh studying cadavers I was able to see the real heart and the physiology I had struggled with provided me with all the information about the important pressures. And I, helpless as I was those first few weeks, was sewing with a tiny golden thread her tiny holes. I substituted my domestic unskillfulness for motherly but clumsy love. I touched her heart with feeling but was still cautious. Cautious not to hurt and be in pain myself. I wrapped myself in the realistic story of my child's possible death and remained at a distance. So in my mind I developed a scenario how we are going to take gentle care of her when the time came and took care of her with supernatural emotionality. She did not speak, nor stamped nor tried to persuade me or with rebellious but positive force knocked on the remaining stones around my heart. She just slept in my arms. One could think that she was meditating, but her strong cry indicated that a real child is lying beside me. There was no saintliness on her, but

watchful she persisted for months and now even years. We went to ultrasound more often in the past, now more and more rarely. I have to set up an appointment for her in fact. Only for the sake of order and her basic heart medication that hasn't changed much since her birth. Since them the dose of diuretics was even reduced. It is nice to visit my favourite dr. Kanič. Zlatka (Goldie) has her name with a reason and only a woman who knows suffering can help a helpless and also suffering woman with a strong embrace. She sat me down in the first days after the ultrasound, already before the diagnosis. I know that I am repeating myself, but such words are never enough. She sat with me and talked about my child who had so many impairments that she shouldn't be alive at all. How? We all asked ourselves later. How great is the capacity for compensation in such a weak body? And dr. Burja, with whom we sat down for a coffee the other day and who is now enjoying her pension,

told me at our transfer to the capitol, when Sofia was 2 weeks old, that such a child needs only love. Yes. Love only. And each heart needs "love only". I don't remember when I got rid of the last rocks around my heart. I feel only the tears, which do not flow just when watching films but also at everyday heart-breaking events; and in the hug of my special little friends my heart begins to be glorious and has finally moved into the brain, that now also feels, not only thinks. Passion in now my spice, enabling my hands to work better for this or that project. I can get passionately mad or love with passion and I feel my pain without reserves, when it crosses my everyday stride.

My heart beats in my hands and has finally come alive. With minimal effort it was sleeping, waiting to awake, now it is pressing with all its muscle mass and pumping not only blood through my body, but offering people around me love which I never knew before. Kindness itself is not enough. Passi-

on is, which colours even the darkest greyish day-to-day and offers life where everyone else has already given up all hope.



A FAIR PLAY FOR ALL

In the last few years we have witnessed a flood of toys all over the world, filling the shelves in shops and the closets in children's rooms. The number of sold toys increases year after year due to several reasons, one of them the better material provision of parents and grandparents, and not least also the higher rate of divorce.

This growing demand is followed also by increased production. The states of the European Union are today the far greatest market for toys in the world – each year we buy around 16 billion Euros worth – most of them are not produced in the EU but in China. If we look on the EU as a unique market, then we can say that even 86 % all exported toys originate from China. The fact that toys are increasingly affordable (and of lower quality) has also changed our understanding of the role of

toys and consequently also our patterns of giving gifts.

The meaning of toys grew parallel with the growing belief about childhood being a special time, dedicated (foremost) to play. Even late in the 19th century giving presents to children was not a habit at all, and if, then the gifts normally weren't toys, but clothes, sweets and other dainties. Children often made their own toys, sometimes with the help of older children, rarely parents or grandparents.

Toys first acquired a ritual meaning and were more massively gifted at special occasions, like holidays, name days, birthdays etc. But giving gifts only on special days and events is today a thing of the past. Many toys are bought just like that, without a special reason, almost in passing. Not only do we present toys without a special reason, children also understand this as something ordinary and omnipresent.

An inevitable consequence of mass toys consumption is also their mass production and non-imaginable quantities of discarded toys that fill our waste disposal sites here or in other countries. Many toys – especial those produced from different materials – are almost not suitable for recycling, so they often land in the category of least wanted waste. Many toys are today no longer precious things, so their lifespan is also short.

As toys are becoming an increasingly mass phenomenon and as their production and consumption is adapted to the consumer society's functioning patterns, is important to also discuss the consequences of those patterns. The toy business is a serious, often bloody business and items that should charm a smile on the faces of our youngest can very quickly turn out to be totally ... unwanted.

Omnipresent plastics

A majority of toys today is made of plastic materials, produced through refining crude oil. Different kinds of plastics (polymers) are used for toy production. Although most of the plastic toys are safe, since polymers in their pure form are stable and non-toxic, producers often add to the plastic used in toy production (especially for different puppets and other soft objects) different softeners and other additives that are dangerous for the health and for the environment.

An astonishing quantity of plastic waste ends in the oceans. We produce about 300 million tons of plastic yearly and a good tenth ends up in the oceans. Sea currents form the so-called plastic islands that represent a serious threat to life in the sea. According to the most humble estimations, the largest plastic island is twice the size of Germany. Other researchers

Entertaining and disappointing electronic circuits

Technological development has also caused great changes in toy production. Numerous toys contain electronic circuits, not only gaming consoles and other items of entertainment electronics. Electronic circuits are part of many different toys from table games and cars to dolls and plush toys. The circuits contain some dozens different metals (gold, nickel, silver, platinum, copper, chrome, tin and others) and microchips, where extremely hard and highly conductive elements are used. Around the year 2000 the use of tantalum that is found together with niobium in the ore named Coltan rose extremely in the production of electronic devices. According to the most recent estimates, 80 % of world Coltan reserves are located in the Democratic Republic of Congo where between 1998 and 2003 the so-called "African World War" took place.

Every year there are more and more electronic devices in use. This causes an immense increase of waste containing dangerous toxic chemicals and heavy metals, so it is very difficult to deposit or recycle them safely. Many toys also belong to this group. At this moment, the quantity of electronic waste is rising steeply, as the lifespan of electronic devices is shorter and shorter.

In Europe, the quantity of electronic waste grows 3 - 5 % a year; this is three times faster than the total quantity of waste. European states forecast the triplication of the produced quantity of electronic waste in the next five years.

After electronic devices have served their purpose, they are often illegally expor-

ted from Europe, the USA and Japan into Asian (India, China) or African countries (Ghana, Nigeria, Egypt), where the costs of toxic waste recycling are a lot lower. Cheap recycling is enabled by lose legislation and low standards. But the problem of non-existing legislation is not only a problem of the countries where the waste is flowing together. The responsibility for the emerging situation is above all on the side of waste exporting states, with the USA and European states at the front.

Modern rag doll

Perhaps our grandmother still sewed rag dolls for their children and grandchildren, but today it is much easier to go buy a new doll in the nearest store. With a little effort it can also be found in the nearest grocery store. When we select toys and clothes for our children, we like those with cotton clothes, as we presume that cotton clothes are healthier, being made of a natural material. But

the truth is often very different. Cotton products can be healthy, of high quality, safe and durable, but today most cotton is produced in a way that rather provides for all other things instead of these.

Cotton balls are literary soaked trough with toxic chemicals even before they leave the field. Due to watering systems for cotton fields the whole once large Aral Lake that represented the fourth greatest reservoir of drinking water on the Earth has disappeared. Because of low prices of raw cotton it is often children who have to work on cotton fields, being the cheapest (non-paid) labour. The modern rag doll is not a doll sewn from used clothing by careful hands on winter evenings, but is a doll that on its way to us probably travelled through more countries than we ever will and went through more hands than we could shake in a day. On its way this doll has seen things which parents prefer not to tell their children, they rather avert their own eyes from them as well.

58 SPECIAL-NEEDS FRIENDS SPECIAL-NEEDS FRIENDS 59

Unlimited possibilities of choosing the same every time...

In the globalised world which is more and more controlled by the power of multinational companies, toys are also not immune to their influence. The mass toy production is thus creating a more and more homogenous and monotone socio-cultural landscape, in spite of the fact, paradoxically, that toy diversity is greater than at any other time in history. For example, only four largest companies control more than a third of the European toy market.

Through the development of toy producing technology, their broad accessibility, which almost forces us to buy them, children are confronted with the frustration of (too many) options that leads into anxiety, apathy and the emergence of a need for permanent new external stimuli. Since everything is accessible, the chance to create something oneself, even if only

in one's fantasy, has begun to vanish. And just with this closing off of different possibilities of interpretations this flood of toys takes from us the most valuable – the capacity to imagine the unimaginable. Without that we remain for ever caught only in the world of the already known ... Toy production, used materials and techniques and not least the problematic of discarded toys are complex topics that we have only touched upon briefly in the above text. You can read more about these topics on www.humanitas.si.

Rene Suša, Society for Human Rights and Supportive Action Humanitas



TOYS AS

Toys can be understood as a tool which helps children understand the grown-up world. They are like translators, helping children perceive in an understandable way not only what the world is like, but also what we want the world to be in the future. Due to our uncertainty in deciding, how many and which kind of toys we should present to our children, numerous parents and educators feel anxious. Most of us think that our children have too many toys, we also are worried about their quality. In their demand for larger profits, toy producers and sellers impose on us as "advisors" and force us into purchases that are not always aligned with our values.

When we wish to decide about choosing a toy according to our belief about what is good for our children and without the interfering "advices" of sellers, we can utilise a simple aid. Think about what you desire your child to attain on their path into the adult world and what you want to tell them through toys. Make a short list of family values which will be support your decisions about how many and what kind of toys your child should have. For example, do you wish for your child to believe that by crying all their wishes come true, even if they are unrealistic? Do you want for your child to be able to divert and amuse themself with something for a longer period? To be creative even when not having all the expected accessories? To know how to share with others? To be respectful to all people and open to other cultures? To support local production? To believe in non-violent communication? You can explain all this to a child with toys.

For the start remember that our children need fewer toys but of higher quality and at next toy store visit don't forget the reminder note for buying the messengers for a better world. If one of your values is the best possible care for children and the environment, you can utilise the following directives:

- "local" toys have priority before toys from far away,
- toys from natural and renewable materials are better,
- if possible, choose toys with environmental certificates or the fair trade sign,
- buy quality-produced durable toys, that can survive more generations and a lot of children,
- think about what kind of waste the toy will become; can it be disassembled and recycled/composted?

Nina Prešlenkova, founder of ZOOPI, Institute for Child- and Environment-Friendly Play

S P O R O Č I L A O S K R B I

Lillehammer University College in jaz kot kontaktna oseba smo veseli, da smo partnerji pOSEBNIH prijateljev. Uživala sem v svojih obiskih v Ljubljani in sodelovanju v številnih delavnicah, projektih Carrotmobs in dialogih znotraj tega projekta. Menim, da je projekt dober primer akcij, kakršne svet dandanes potrebuje in da se lahko marsikaj naučimo, če združimo skrb za naravo in skrb za ljudi.

Človeštvo se sooča z resnimi izzivi, povezanimi s podnebnimi spremembami in siromašenjem ter onesnaževanjem naravnih virov. Vplivne nacionalne in mednarodne ustanove predlagajo, da nadaljujemo s poslom kot običajno, s povečano proizvodnjo in potrošnjo, vendar v bolj zeleni preobleki. Zato so trenutno popularni izrazi, kot so zelena rast, zelene tehnologije, zelena potrošnja ipd. Vendar

pa obstaja veliko razlogov za prepričanje, da to ne bo rešilo težav in jih lahko še poglobi. UNESCO (Končno poročilo, Pariz 2014) zaključuje, da »ekonomske in tehnološke rešitve, politične regulacije in finančne iniciative niso dovolj. Potrebujemo temeljno spremembo v našem načinu razmišljanja in delovanja.«

»Grassroots« gibanja in državljani po vsem svetu zahtevajo spremembe. Podnebne spremembe razumejo kot del obsežnejših problemov v ekonomiji, družbi in politikah. Protestirajo ne le proti nezadostni učinkovitosti vlad pri podnebnih vprašanjih, temveč tudi proti uničevanju zemlje in virov ter proti izkoriščanju, neenakosti in revščini, ki sledijo iz favoriziranja ekonomske rasti. Zahtevajo družbo in ekonomijo, zgrajeno na drugih vrednotah, na vrednotah, kot so sodelovanje, svoboda odločanja, sonaravno življenje, enakost in vključenost vseh. Mnoge organizacije in državljani ne le protestirajo, temveč

tudi ustvarjajo nove načine življenja in delovanja v skladu s temi vrednotami. pO-SEBNI prijatelji so del tega velikega in še rastočega globalnega gibanja.

Smetumet iz odpadkov izdeluje nove uporabne stvari - s preprosto tehnologijo, večinoma lastnoročno. V bogatih državah se
moramo naučiti to početi velikopotezno.
Dandanes pretvarjamo vire v odpadke
v takšnem obsegu, da s tem uničujemo
biotsko raznolikost in predstavljamo grožnjo vsemu življenju na planetu. Če bi imel
vsak človek na svetu enak ekološki odtis
kot Evropejci, bi potrebovali več kot dva
planeta! Zato moramo mi v bogatih državah svoj odtis bistveno zmanjšati. Eden
pomembnih načinov, kako to doseči, je ponovna uporaba in zmanjšanje odpadkov.

Sporočila izdelkov pOSEBNIH prijateljev so pomembna: to so sporočila o naravi, ponovni uporabi in prekomerni potrošnji – in sporočila o skrbi. Skrbi za okolje in za ljudi. Ko se otroci igrajo z igračami s posebnimi potrebami, se učijo in razvijajo sočutje do sebe in drugih. Ko svoje poškodovane igrače prinesejo na delavnico, da bi jih popravili, se učijo skrbeti za svoje stvari tako, da jih popravijo, namesto da bi jih kar zavrali. S temi izkušnjami se v otrocih (in odraslih) razvijajo vrednote in znanja, ki so lahko navdih tudi za druge prakse v vsakdanjem življenju in družbi. Pogledi na svet se lahko razširijo in vključijo predanost delu za naravo, okolje in bolj vključujočo ter pravičnejšo družbo, tako lokalno kot globalno. To potencialno razširitev omogoča dejstvo, da se nekatere delavnice pOSEBNIH prijateljev osredotočajo na globalne teme, kot so begunci, prekomerna potrošnja ali proizvodnja in potrošnja igrač po svetu. S tem ta projekt gradi mostove med lokalnim in globalnim.

V projekt je vključenih veliko različnih partnerjev. Nekateri so tradicionalne ustanove: univerze, bolnišnice, vrtci in šole. 64 SPECIAL-NEEDS FRIENDS 63

Drugi so socialna podjetja in nevladne organizacije, ki delujejo na področju ekologije in človekovih pravic. Vsi v projekt vnašajo svoja znanja in izkušnje. Delo s tako različnimi partnerji je seveda zahtevno in terja veliko časa in potrpljenja. Vendar pa menim, da so pOSEBNI prijatelji dober primer, kako lahko sodelovanje različnih akterjev in različnih temeljnih principov projekt bogati in mu koristi.

Pri Smetumet so se odločili, da se bodo srečali z ljudmi v njihovem lokalnem okolju: v parkih, na ulicah, v kavarnah ter v šolah, vrtcih in bolnišnicah. Verjamem, da je to dobra odločitev, srečati ljudi tam, kjer so, namesto da bi jih skušali privabiti k sebi. Delovne metode so: povabiti otroke in odrasle k nadaljevanju izvajanja svojih dejavnosti, vendar na nekoliko drugačen način – ali k povsem novim načinom ravnanja. Kakorkoli, ljudi vabijo k zabavnim, igrivim in ustvarjalnim izkušnjam (namesto bolj ali manj dolgočasnih predavanj, ki jih

imam jaz!). Takšne izkušnje lahko izzovejo in vplivajo na znanje, razmišljanje in prakse ljudi.

Za konec: menim, da se lahko ljudje v Sloveniji, na Norveškem in v drugih državah od pOSEBNIH prijateljev veliko naučijo tako glede vsebine kot glede delovnih metod. Pri tem nas pOSEBNI prijatelji navdihujejo, da tudi sami ustvarjamo lokalne projekte, ki so lahko pomemben prispevek naši skupni viziji pravičnega, zdravega in smiselnega sveta za vsa živa bitja.

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THANK YOU.



S P E C I A L - N E E D S F R I E N D S