



## **Cooperation between Hospital/Special Educators and Home School Teachers Special Educators' Club**

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### **Introduction**

Direct Aid Association (DAA) is a public organization, registered in Armenia in 1997. DAA provides educational services for sick children through supporting the functioning of Hospital School in Arabkir Joint Medical Center & Institute of Child and Adolescent Health (JMC&ICAH) and pediatric department of Hematology Hospital. DAA supports the psycho-social services in Arabkir working in the frame of the holistic approach of pediatric care and runs the Patient Family House (PFH) providing accommodation and care for sick children and their families from far regions of Armenia. It's worth mentioning that DAA is the only organization that runs hospital school in Armenia, so this hospital school is unique for the country.

Arabkir JMC&ICAH is the Republican reference centre for children and adolescents with various diseases. Through numerous projects run by DAA and Arabkir in cooperation, today, a child admitted to the hospital finds himself in the hands of the medical staff, psychosocial team and hospital school teachers the cooperative work of which provides positive results both in medical care and general development of the child.

### **Lack of National Association**

When we speak about hospital education in Armenia we always have to look back into the educational heritage of the previous regime. Armenia was a part of the USSR for a long period and during that time the paediatric hospitals or pediatric departments lacked schooling services. Some hospitals offered play rooms. With the reference to short history of 20 years of hospital education we also have to mention that special education is as well recent in Armenia. In the past we had boarding school for children with 'problems', which was not exactly what special education services should provide to the children with disabilities. With all this in mind we have to add the lack of any association, national or local for the teachers working in special education, hospital education being part of it as well.

### **"Special Educators' Club"**

I think it is needless to mention that it is difficult to try to develop an area of education where there is no cooperation, information flow and experience exchange. After the organization of several training courses and workshops for the teachers and other staff working with children with special educational needs and seeing a need for experience exchange, a place where people could talk over and discuss professional issues, DAA initiated the Club. Since 2006 DAA has been running a Special Educator's Club, a project that strengthens the hospital and special education in Armenia and helps professionals to network for the benefit of the child with special needs. As there is no special education/hospital teachers' association in Armenia, this is a professional space for networking of the professionals working both in state schools and local NGO centers providing services to the children with needs. It's a professional.

The Club is run by DAA staff in cooperation with other needed professionals. We invite pediatricians, neurologists, psychologists, etc. for discussing different issues, clearing out difficult cases we come across during our work.

The regular meetings are scheduled once a month and additional meetings take place when there is a need: for preparing extra activities, creating material, discussing and planning work.



The purpose of the project is:

- to create a network where the child benefits both medically and educationally
- to strengthen and expand the network involving teachers from other schools and centers
- to further train and exchange experience with both international experts and local professionals

The club serves for:

- further in-service training, including visits to the working sites, observations, practical work, discussions with other professionals working with children with disabilities, e.g. psychologists, social workers, therapists, medical personal etc.
- special educators' further training in coaching and cooperating with general education teachers within integration program
- preparation and adaptation of teaching material and alternative means
- hospital teachers training in coaching
- as a link for cooperation between professionals working in state schools (special and integration) and local NGOs
- for the organization and implementation of professional conferences, e.g. cooperation with Kinderspital Zurich Hospital School

When a child from the hospital school in Yerevan returns to his home school (in the capital or some regions) he is met by a teacher who is aware of his condition, needs and educational progress while on treatment, since there is a constant contact among the teachers by the means of regular monthly meetings and connections through regional branches of the medical center. Being able to serve the child in his region, close to his home and family is much better psychologically and what is not less important financially.

During the existence of Club we had organized several common projects for the children with disabilities in special and integration and hospital schools. In 2007 we had a spring project with children from different schools and NGOs. During the festival the children performed, recited and finally planted flowers.

For the past two summers the some children with disabilities form schools in Yerevan and regions had opportunity to join the hospital summer camp.

For many of the children such activities are unique: an opportunity to be with peers, to have a rest during the summer. And for teachers it is a great opportunity to participate and learn how to organize leisure activities for their students.

As part of cooperative activity we can mention preparation and adaptation of teaching material and alternative means.

## **Result**

As a result of this four-year project we have established a growing network not only among the professionals working in the capital but also with those working in some regions of Armenia. The activities of the club have also been very important and fruitful in creating educational material, discussing difficult cases, organizing recreational activities for the children in need.

## **Conclusion**

As the experience shows the Club has an essential role for the professionals in the field of hospital/special education. It is the utmost possibility for the teachers to exchange ideas, create and compile useful didactical material, discuss cases and issues and in cooperation try to better serve the needs of the children.