

How to develop community-based rehabilitation services for people with disabilities at the local level?

Relevant articles of the CRPD: 7, 19, 20, 24, 25, 26

Country: Bulgaria

Region: South East Europe

Good practices available in: English (full report available in Albanian and Serbian)

Karin Dom Foundation – Day Care Centre Providing Rehabilitation Services in Bulgaria

Description of the practice and the process involved

Due to the lack of access to de-centralised (re)habilitation and educational services, a **parallel system of so called "Day Care centres"** has been developed during the last 10 years, often with the support of international humanitarian organisations wishing to promote a **deinstitutionalised and community-based service system**.

These Day Care centres were initially designed for **children or young adults** and were thought to be an **alternative to, and even replacement for social or medical residential institutions**. The main innovation with these types of centres was that they brought about the concept of **inter-disciplinary teamwork as well as a social approach to disability, combining** education with varying types of rehabilitation and social services. The various Day Care centres actually adapted themselves to suit **the needs identified** within the community where they were established.

One example of these Day Care centres is the Karin Dom Foundation. This NGO, based in Varna, Bulgaria, has been working in the field of **rehabilitation for children with disabilities** for 10 years. They provide **comprehensive multi disciplinary rehabilitation services**, and have continuously developed their activities and human resources towards the trends of **de-institutionalisation**. The main strength of Karin Dom as an organisation has been their **readiness to adapt to the changing environment**, both in regards to the **needs** of the Varna community, and according to the **overall development** in Bulgaria in terms of legislation and deinstitutionalisation. They also adapt to the **changing opportunities for the financial sustainability** of their activities.

The creation of the Karin Dom Foundation was based on the issue of **combating the old system of residential institutions** that existed (and still exists) in Bulgaria for children with disabilities. This NGO was registered in 1994, and from the outset, a **strong partnership** was developed with international experts, mainly from the UK.

In 2001, the Karin Dom Foundation decided to implement a project to "Develop Karin Dom as a **Training and Resource centre** for professionals". This was done in order to **address the need for training and support** to other Day Care centres, or professionals within children's homes (orphanages or social institutions).

The factors that made this practice possible

The process of development of the Day Care centre is presented below:

- Initial research into the **type of activities and centres** in the UK followed by various **study visits** throughout Bulgaria,
- Establishing **relationships with international experts** such as physiotherapists and psychologists,
- **Exploratory mission** to evaluate the site of the Day Care Centre (Varna municipality) and **identification of professionals** to be employed,
- Core team of professionals **chosen and trained** according to the approach of experts from the UK (teamwork, social approach, interdisciplinary assessment and individual action plans),
- **Definition of the mission, objectives and direction** of the Day Care centre was set by the Core team,
- **Contacts** made with families of children with disabilities in the surrounding area, and an **awareness and sensitisation campaign** was sponsored for these families,
- Activities commenced initially involving **5-6 families**,
- Creation of a **Parent Support group** that later on received **training in lobbying** and finally registered as a **Parent Association of children with disabilities**.

The development of the training and resource department followed the process below:

First, a **consultation process** with the families of the children in the centre was carried out, in order to have their full support for the implementation of this change as it was envisaged that the centre could only operate in the mornings.

Once agreement was reached **training programmes** tailored to the specific needs of each institution were designed and implemented. Training was conducted either in-situ or within the premises of Karin Dom.

The effects / impact of the practice

Slowly the centre became **more and more recognised** within the Varna community providing **daily care** for children with physical, mental and autistic

disabilities, and today the centre is functioning as a '**Therapy and Consultation centre**' and can show following results:

- **28 staff** employed in the centre,
- **Services provided** are physiotherapy, speech therapy, individual treatment, educational activities, support for inclusion into mainstream education, counselling for families, sensorial treatment etc,
- **140-160 children** attend the centre **per year** and **35-40 children** on **weekly** basis,
- **27 children** have been integrated in **mainstream education** since 1997,
- Each child has its **own action plan** that is **continuously** evaluated and adapted.

Some achievements of the development of the training and resource department were:

- **312 participants from 22 towns and villages** throughout the country,
- **123 students from universities** in Varna and surrounding cities,
- **5000 leaflets** were printed and distributed to parents regarding **10 different types** of disabilities,
- **Unemployed persons trained** as personal assistants to children with disabilities **integrated in mainstream** education.

Background and context

Full project report: [Beyond De-Institutionalisation: The Unsteady Transition towards an Enabling System in South East Europe \(DMI SEE, 2004\)](#)

Criteria for the good practices: see page 21 of the full report.

Recommendations from the good practices: see page 91 of the full report

Links to further resources:

[Full text on article 7 – Children with disabilities](#)

[Full text on article 19 – Living independently and being included in the community](#)

[Full text on article 20 – Personal mobility](#)

[Full text on article 24 – Education](#)

[Full text on article 25 - Health](#)

[Full text on article 26 – Habilitation and rehabilitation](#)

