

Parasolka: A future worth living for handicapped orphans in Ukraine



During the Soviet era people with a handicap were of low social status in Ukraine. Many were given into the state's care by their parents. They grew up in remote orphanages where they received no special education and little attention.

The Vilshany orphanage in Transcarpathia/Ukraine is home to 200 handicapped children and adolescents between the ages of 3 and 20. Since the fall of the iron curtain in 1991, the situation of these orphans living on the very margins of society has somewhat improved thanks to help from abroad. Once they are past the age of 20, the handicapped orphans have no prospects for the future, except for a life in a mental institution. This is why the Swiss association Parasolka, together with the local aid organization CAMZ, developed the project Parasolka. Thanks to donations from Switzerland a big house including land was bought and rebuilt to suit the needs. Since the fall of 2009, 25 young people with a mental and/or physical handicap from the Vilshany orphanage are individually accompanied and supported in an assisted living community at the Parasolka house.

It showed that these emotionally neglected and previously little supported people have a great potential for development. Since the government only pays for what is essential to survive, for the time being, the Parasolka association is funding an educator, music and dance teachers as well as the continuing education of the employees. For the residents, the setting up of a big vegetable garden and the moving in of goats, chickens, rabbits, a dog and two kittens, is associated with a meaningful activity and emotional attention. So far however, individual advancement and adapted work is possible only in limited ways. This is why small-scale agriculture is expanded and various workshops are being set up.

In addition, the Parasolka association supports the partner organization CAMZ in developing a legal basis for the acknowledgement of the Parasolka house as an independent institution by the Ukrainian state, on socio-pedagogical grounds.

Parasolka intends to show that people with a mental handicap are both capable of development and in their own way valuable for society. In this spirit the pioneer project aims to achieve a sociopolitical impact on all of Ukraine.

Parasolka moves handicapped orphans from the very margin of society to its center. These people are shown respect and appreciation which allows them human dignity and strengthens their self-confidence. Appreciation in contact with the handicapped orphans is what the voluntary commitment of the Parasolka team together with the partners on location stands for. This is an example of humanity which raises hope in a difficult environment.

