

Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

Czech Republic case study report 3 Ophthalmic Services for People with Visual Impairment

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The EPASI project is a programme of analysis of educational programmes in fourteen European countries, designed to address various forms of social inequality. The project analysis was conducted in the period 2007 – 2009. This report is part of the overall project, details of which are at <http://www.epasi.eu>.

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The submitted case study presents a project designed by Ophthalmo-Service centre Hradec Králové, which provides professional services for clients with visual impairments. This project was realised in the year 2006. It was launched on 1st January 2006 and finished on 31st December, in close relation to other projects which had been organised by Ophtalmo-Service centre since 1991¹. There were several funding partners – the Ministry of Health, the authorities of the Hradec Králové region, Pardubice region and the Magistrate of Hradec Králové. Already in the year 2006 there appeared to be necessary to plan and to manage this kind of services even in future. The project was realised by Mgr. Martina Šonská (the Head of the Ophtalmo-Service Centre in Hradec Králové). The project was targeted at persons with visual impairments over 15 years² of age from Hradec Králové and Pardubice regions.

The key project aim was to improve the quality in life and self-sufficiency of persons with visual impairments. Further aims are:

- to contribute to maintaining the high standard of free services offered by qualified social rehabilitation officers,
- to increase the intact society's awareness of the people with visual impairments and their specific needs,
- to cooperate with the Ophthalmology Department of the Teaching Hospital in Hradec Králové (especially with specialised ophthalmologists and regional ophthalmologists), with local healthcare authorities, with the Department of Special Pedagogy at the University of Hradec Králové and with other institutions providing services for the visually impaired,
- to provide a comprehensive system of social rehabilitation for people with visual impairments.

The social rehabilitation might be considered of fundamental importance. It enables individual clients to return back into the society and it represents one of essential principles of social integration.

The total annual cost was 1,336,642 CZK (the cost given here is partial; it is the cost on the side of the Hradec Králové centre. However, this centre is just one of the twelve Ophthalmo-Service centres on the territory of the Czech Republic).

The Hradec Králové centre working in the described area in the year 2006 served 231 clients in the form of personal intervention, made 220 written contacts with its clients and 461 phone contacts. In informational campaigns it addressed 735 people, especially students, doctors, office staff and other institution workers.

In fact, even nowadays Ophthalmo-Service is the only facility that on the professional basis provides basic social resocialisation services in the Hradec Králové and Pardubice regions for this kind of disability minority. Since the contemporary services continue the project 2006, this case study presents the project 2006 continuously with the contemporary centre's services.

The Ophthalmo-service centre provides these services:

1. **information and counselling service** (motivation of the clients and their nearest neighbourhood, mediation of other organisations services),

¹ The project has been organised by Tyfloservis (Ophtalmo-Service Centre) since 2001. Between the years 1996–2000 the project was run by the United Organisation of the Blind and Weak-Sighted (ie SONS ČR, *Sjednocená organizace nevidomých a slabozrakých ČR*) and between the years 1991–1996 by the Czech Union of the Blind and Weak-sighted. (*Výroční zpráva*, 2006) The terminological shift is also an indicator of the progress made in this field in the Czech Republic during the recent decades.

² This project focuses on clients older 15 years, as for the educational levels they are focused on the upper secondary, and tertiary education levels and life-long learning.

2. **selection, recommendation and training in the field of adequate rehabilitation and compensation aids usage and their acquisition,**
3. **courses:** Braille alphabet reading and writing, space orientation and self-sufficient motion training, typing, holographic signature, social skills training,
4. **public education and publicity campaign** among the expert and general public.

Satisfied clients participate in the centre's programme by spreading information about its services to other people often suffering from similar visual handicaps or even to their doctors. They also take part in educational activities organised by the centre for the general public (for example a radio discussion programme in the Czech Radio Hradec Králové station). Users create a natural demand for the services not previously offered on the market. If the demand is sufficiently high, Ophthamo-Service is able to reconsider the options and might offer another service included in the standard range (as for example was the case of sight re-education).

The offered services are mostly in the form of terrain intervention that take place in the client's temporary place of residence, but also in the form of outpatient interventions in the Ophthamo-Service in Hradec Králové itself. The intervention sessions are always adjusted to individual clients' needs.

The intervention counselling was provided in different ways, in particularly:

- in the written form,
- by telephone,
- in the form of single intervention sessions (approximately two hours long),
- in the form of course-like interventions with repeated sessions based on individual clients' needs.

The structure and content of the single counselling sessions or the so-called *first visits* include:

- an interview with the client,
- sometimes an interview even with the client's relatives (as a matter of fact, their presence at the interview was seen as very desirable and preferable),
- establishing the so-called *personal information sheet*,
- supplying the client with the basic sum of information about the centre's services,
- informing the client about other organisations providing services for the visually impaired,
- technical advice and support: recommendations as for both optical and non-optical medical aids, including the demonstration,
- explanation of the usual procedure for obtaining them.

If the client is interested in a special education course, the centre worker makes arrangements for regular visits – usually one lesson in one or two-week intervals. The lessons equip the client with specific skills and abilities. A standard regular course, as a rule, lasts for several months, but it can take up to one year (depending on the client's needs and abilities). Each client has a documentation file at the centre. The files list information about the attended courses and intervention sessions, and reports concerning the individual state and progress issued for medical purposes, eg for ophthalmologists, in particular.

The centre participated in the Self-Evaluation Process within the Hradec Králové framework of social welfare service quality standards implementation. The Annual Centre Report on the Czech Republic and The Annual Regional Activity Report are published to provide further information about the Ophthamo-Service's activities. It is also possible to obtain more information at a website www.tyfloservis.cz. Another form of centre's self-presentation is organising open-for-the-public days. The highly appreciated open-for-the-public days held on 7th and 8th March 2006 and on 5th December 2003 brought 260 visitors to the centre. The event programme included a specialised

ophthalmology seminar. Three Ophthalmo-Service clients worked as salespeople in a dark cafe and performed very professionally. The two live radio interviews of the Czech Radio Hradec Králové station undoubtedly helped in raising public awareness towards the possibilities open for the visually impaired too.

Of course, the project's rate of success is measured mainly by the clients' satisfaction, no matter whether by the 2006 first-time users or by regular clients dealing with visual impairment problems. The clients' feedback usually follows immediately after any kind of service was provided. There is a positive reaction to the cooperation with ophthalmologists, who recommend Ophthalmo-Service services to their patients and ask to be informed back about the used services. Also, the centre's contribution to the lecture '*Communicating with the Handicapped³ Citizens*' and held at the University of Hradec Králové especially for the staff of state institutions was positively evaluated. All of this proves that Ophthalmo-Service to be a useful and effective centre (with various activities and forms of further support for both the clients and staff).

The centre has participated in self-evaluation process within the social work during the standards implementation. The key methods: questionnaires, interviews. The results are non-public, for the centre's needs. However the results have not been revealed, the results serve only the centre's needs.

References:

Schindlerová, O. et al. *Chapters from Self-service of the Blind and Weak-sighted*. Tyfloservis, 2006
Výroční zpráva za rok 2006. Available at WWW: <http://www.tyfloservis.cz/vyrocnizpravy.php>.
[20/2/2008]

³ The term handicapped seems to have its roots in the contemporary stage of terminological development in the field of disability inequalities in the Czech Republic. The term handicapped in the Czech surroundings might be replaced by a term 'disabled' or 'disadvantaged', and sometimes by expression 'persons with disability inequalities'. Although this way of referring to inequalities by using a kind of "inequality attributes" (in cases of terms: disabled and handicapped) might be interpreted as attributing the inequality to the human being existence itself as a basis for viewing the "disabled persons" as basis for discrimination by purpose, it is not a truism at all. The terms disabled, handicapped etc. are used even by persons volunteering in this field of social work and education, often even by experts on special pedagogy etc. Even activities supporting inclusion of people with disabilities, such as a sports competition and consequent winner's prize uses the term handicapped/disabled. Another similar contradiction between the inclusive efforts and terminological usage might be observed in a book Schindlerová, O. et al. *Chapters from Self-service of the Blind and Weak-sighted (2006)*. The grounds for this usage and point of view seem to come from still little attention which is paid to linguistic sensitiveness to these issues. The term of this kind are used despite the fact that in the field of special pedagogy there is a more supportive and inclusive term "people with SEN". The still varying terminology might be interpreted as an indicator of the still outlasting view of the persons with these inequalities as of people who need help. The terminology in the CZ case study/ies and country report is applied with respect to the contemporary usage in the Czech Republic and in the documents concerning the described project.