

# THE BELL RINGS FOR EVERYONE!

## Programme Summary 2011



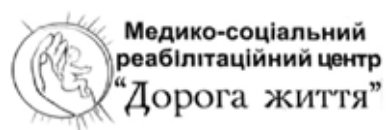
Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine  
ENPI Cross-border Cooperation Programme



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The Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI Cross-border Cooperation Programme is to be implemented in the period of 2007-2013 on the external border of the participating EU Member States with Ukraine. The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument supports cross-border co-operations on the external borders of the EU.

The overall objective of the Programme is to intensify and deepen cooperation in an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable way between Zakarpatska, Ivano-Frankivska and Chernivetska regions of Ukraine and eligible and adjacent areas of Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. The Joint Managing Authority of the Programme is the National Development Agency, Hungary.

The website of the Programme is [www.huskroua-cbc.net](http://www.huskroua-cbc.net).

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# INTRODUCTION

I am very glad that you have found our publication of interest and that you would like to know more about our programme.

The foremost thoughts when creating “The Bell Rings for Everyone” Programme were tolerance, equal opportunities and sustainability. We wanted to create a programme that would bring different social groups together and it would make social integration for handicapped people stronger.

Through the Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI Cross-border Cooperation Programme we had the chance to help cross-border social groups to cooperate. Apart from learning about the local handicapped situation, the staff and the volunteers of the participating member countries also got to know about each other’s culture.

During the one-year-long cooperation friendships were made and the organizations brought new information into each other’s work, which can also be considered as one of the programme’s results.

The success of the project inspires us to continue the cooperation and look for opportunities to work together.

Apart from the cooperation of the partners, the support of the local governments, the Hungarian Embassy of Ungvár, and the work of the partaking institutions and teachers also contributed to the programme’s success, for which I would like to thank them here. 2011 was “The European Year of Volunteering” and about 100 volunteers took part in our programme, whose work was exemplary.

*Károly Kisari*

# DOWN ASSOCIATION



The DOWN Association was created 13 years ago by parents who found it important to share their knowledge and experience with families who also have children with Down-syndrome.

- **Down Donation:** supports educational institutions that take part in the early development of the mentally challenged.
- Participation in the **Down Nanny programme**, showing a positive example at the birth of another Down-baby.
- **Down Shop:** sells jewellery, souvenirs made by the mentally challenged through a webshop.
- **Down Ambulance:** in cooperation with the Jósza András Hospital, where the necessary medical tests are carried out within a day, out of turn.

## Programmes of the Down Association

### „The Bell Rings for Everyone” educational programme in Central-Europe

Due to the success of “The Bell Rings for Everyone” programme in the 2009/2010 school year, the Association continued its actions in 2011 – in many Hungarian cities, as well as in Ukraine and Romania. The goal: helping the integration and acceptance of handicapped people.

### International World Down Syndrome Day in Vígszínházban (2009, 2010, 2011)

The Down Association was the first to organize an event in Hungary on World Down Syndrome Day on March 21, 2009 in Vígszínház, a famous Hungarian theatre, where 200 people with Down Syndrome and 400 able-bodied children had fun in various activities. In 2011 the third World Down Syndrome Day was organized, and it became an international event where more than 1000 people showed up. It is worth noting that every year the actors and actresses of Vígszínház take part in the children’s programmes as volunteers. Regular performers on World Down Syndrome Day include Slovakian and Polish groups and visitors come to play from many neighbouring countries every year.

### Wonder Castle (Csodavár) Early Development Centre in Nyíregyháza

Opened on August 30, 2011, the Wonder Castle Early Development Centre tries to help parents who find it important for their children to be able to become the most harmonious people possible, handicapped or otherwise, with advice on parenting and learning about and developing their children’s abilities.

## CARITAS SATU MARE



Caritas Satu Mare is a not-for-profit organization established in 1990, which later on became member of the Caritas Confederation, an organization including ten other similar organizations from Romania. In the very beginning, right after the revolution in December 1989, the main mission of the organization was to distribute humanitarian aid sent from abroad, but over the years, in its endeavor to answer the social needs of people in difficult situations, Caritas Satu Mare has developed and diversified its activities.

Currently, Caritas Satu Mare is carrying out complex social assistance programmes with 39 institutions from Satu Mare and Maramures counties. These programmes are separated into four groups: socio-educational programmes for children and youth, programmes for the handicapped, programmes for the elderly and social-charitable programmes. Through these programmes, Caritas Satu Mare has become an agent of social change at the local level. That is why Caritas Satu Mare promotes the most modern concepts and trends of social policy, provides professional services with the help of its 203 employees with an average age of 35, intervenes promptly and efficiently in cases of natural disasters, and encourages involvement of local communities in the development of the region.

In order to achieve its goals, Caritas Satu Mare has created solid partnerships, both with the local and county authorities and with other non-governmental organizations from the country and abroad.

## MEDICAL-SOCIAL REHABILITATION CENTRE - "THE PATH OF LIFE"

The Way of Life is a medical-social rehabilitation centre, charitable foundation, civic, non-government, non-profit organization that deals with the complex rehabilitation of the handicapped, gives them social protection, represents their interests until the age of 35. There are 5 age-based groups in the centre, with 56 visitors.

The children are looked after by trained teachers, psychologists, speech therapists, physiotherapists, physical rehabilitation and reflexotherapy experts, masseurs and nurses.

### Their goals

To provide a chance to physically and mentally handicapped children and youth to be able to be completely or partially integrated into social life.

Since love and the parents' love is absolutely necessary for their children's complete rehabilitation, The Way of Life centre helps parents to accept their children's problems and the centre's staff makes them an active part of the rehabilitation process. Early development is a complex family support programme for families where a child was born with disabilities or the suspicion of one. This programme helps to find the abnormalities early and allows complex treatment. It also assists parents with everyday life. The programme supports families from the birth of the child until they become 6 years old. One of their main goals is to completely prepare special needs children for the life ahead of them, make sure they will have a job and help them integrate into society.

Our centre runs several programmes that help the integration of handicapped children. We work together with The House of Children and Youth in Ungvár (PADUIN), the Victoria sport-coreography studio (lead by Dancsin- Brezsinszkaja V.) and the Transylvania-Carpathia School of Fine Arts.

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# REALIZING „THE BELL RINGS FOR EVERYONE” PROGRAMME

## Choosing the participants of „The Bell Rings for Everyone” programme

Author: Vékony Katalin, PR manager of the Down Association

Before starting „The Bell Rings for Everyone” educational programme, it was important to properly inform not only the directors and teachers of the participating institutions that look after handicapped children, but also the parents of the integrated child, the specialist school as well as the parents of the children attending majority schools.

Institutions participating in the Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI Cross-border Cooperation Programme put a big emphasis on this in all three countries, so the list of participants was created step by step.

### *a./ Choosing the participating handicapped children*

A parent meeting was organized at a friendly meeting by the Down Association in Nyíregyháza, Caritas Satu Mare and the Medical and Social Rehabilitation Center in Uzhhorod, where parents of the handicapped children could learn about “The Bell Rings for Everyone” programme while the children took part in playful activities. After the meeting the parents signed up at the organizations and their children became part of “The Bell Rings for Everyone” programme.

### *b./ Choosing the participating majority institutions*

Ungvár, Satu Mare and Nyíregyháza’s majority schools were briefly informed via email and phone about “The Bell Rings for Everyone” programme, then we invited said institutions’ directors for a meeting where they could learn about the programme started by the Down Association in greater detail, with PowerPoint presentations. They could also ask questions. The directors had a week to decide if they want to take part in the programme, then they selected the teachers in their kindergarten or school with whom the participating organizations could cooperate in “The Bell Rings for Everyone” project/

### *c./ Meeting the majority teachers*



The majority teachers of every country learned about the programme at a meeting held at each country. Their questions were answered by experts, then at another meeting they met the children who were chosen by each institution – based on age and interests – to be in their group or class.

*„With our programme we would like to achieve, apart from society's sympathy, for the handicapped children, using differentiated educational methods, to be able to take part in early development and integrated education in Hungary.”*

*Kisari Károly, Presiden, Down Association*

Press release, sociological research, the first TBRFE month



Each country's media was informed about the start of the Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI Cross-border Cooperation Programme by the project partners, so widespread publicity of the common goals and "The Bell Rings for Everyone" programme was given not only in Hungary but in Romania and Ukraine as well. Citizens could find out from the press that an initiative was started in their hometown, the point of which is that handicapped children could visit majority kindergartens and schools once a week as "classmates", then perform a project prepared throughout the months with able-bodied children.

Before the start of the programme, the participating insitutions handed out

questionnaires made with the assistance of a sociologist to the teachers and children of selected kindergartens and schools (whether the teachers took part in the programme or not). The parents of the handicapped children and teachers at specialist schools also took part in a similar survey.

After the survey, "The Bell Rings for Everyone" started with a one-month cycle in all three countries, during which handicapped children spent the month of May with their able-bodied peers. During this short period children could integrate and got to know their new peers, and participating teachers and special education teachers could experience "The Bell Rings for Everyone" programme in practice. This period was the warm-up for the three-month programme in autumn, where participants big and small were able to join a familiar environment.

*The primary goal of "The Bell Rings for Everyone" is to form social attitude on the one hand for children in public education, and on the other hand, for the families raising them.*

*Kisari Károly, President, Down Association*

## Teachers' visit to the House of Children in Hidegkút



On April 5, 2011 teachers of the partner organizations of the Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI Cross-border Cooperation Programme – “Organizatia Caritas Satu Mare” Association (Satu Mare) and the Medical and Social Rehabilitation Center “Path to Life” (Ungvár) – visited Hungary and spent two days in Budapest.

After some rest following their arrival and some sightseeing around Budapest, the partner cities' teachers

could observe an entire school day at the House of Children in Budapest-Hidegkút, starting in the morning. Here, teachers since the 1993/94 school year have been consciously practicing integrated education for special needs children. Everyone had the chance to observe any lesson and the integrated education in practice, as well as ask questions from the director of the institution during a free conversation.

Teachers from Ungvár and Satu Mare had a lot of positive experience during the visit and they could also see what is integrated education like in one of the outstanding schools in Hungary. Apart from the answers they got to their questions and the experience itself, teachers also realized that if integrated education can be done in such a form in Hungary, the same potential can be found in Romanian and Ukrainian institutions as well.

The Down Association had a press conference as part of the school visit, where Pokorni Zoltán, President of the National Educational, Scientific and Research Committee of the Hungarian Parliament, reassured the organizers – the Down Association – once more about his support and offered them the chance to present their ideas about creating equal opportunities in Hungarian education to the Committee.



*„I am very glad that this Hungarian initiative has found followers across the borders and I find it important to not only show them a good example but also help the foreign representatives to realize “The Bell Rings for Everyone” programme. Providing equal opportu-*

*nities is the base of every well-functioning society, so it is essential to create the conditions during childhood.”*

*Pokorni Zoltán, President, National Educational, Scientific and Research Committee of the Hungarian Parliament*

## Partner meetings every month



Cross-border partner institutions of the Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI Cross-border Cooperation Programme – “Organizatia Caritas Satu Mare” Association (Satu Mare) and the Medical and Social Rehabilitation Center “Path to Life” (Ungvár) – and the Down Association in Nyíregyháza had a meeting every month, in the country of a different organization every month. During

these meetings the three organizations prepared the schedules for the meetings with the participating teachers, directors of the organizations and parents and held brainstorming sessions to make the programme more colourful.

Apart from streamlining “The Bell Rings for Everyone” programme, the meetings were to help finishing the sociological study running in the background as well as brainstorming about and organizing the closing events in all three countries.

During the summer holidays, when kindergartens and schools were closed and this part of “The Bell Rings for Everyone” programme was on hold, organizing the closing events was started in Ungvár, Satu Mare and Nyíregyháza. Monthly meetings were still held: as well as sharing experiences and summarizing costs and results, the three organizations chose the venues for the three closing events and, based on the results of the one-month trial run of “The Bell Rings for Everyone”, thought of solutions to possible problems so that restarting the programme in September should be flawless.

## Short summary of the 3 months of TBRFE and the websites



After the start of “The Bell Rings for Everyone” in May, the three organizations contacted the participating institutions once again, so the programme could continue in September and handicapped children could visit majority schools once a week in all three countries.

With the help of the project coordinators, excellent relationships were formed between the chaperoning special education teachers and the teachers from the participating majority schools, so the integration of handicapped children into

an already known environment was problem-free. All the participating children had their pictures taken in Nyíregyháza, Ungvár and, of course, in Satu Mare. These were added continually to, and remained on, the websites for everyone to see.

Apart from the pictures taken on the lessons, visitors and participants can also find on the websites a list of institutions taking part in “The Bell Rings for Everyone” programme, as well as information about the programme itself. On the websites ([www.mbc.hu](http://www.mbc.hu), [www.clopotelulsunapentrutoti.org](http://www.clopotelulsunapentrutoti.org), [www.dzvinok.org](http://www.dzvinok.org)) contact information for the organizations can also be found, so interested parties can contact them, this way making a bridge between the majority society, the organizations taking care of the handicapped, special education teachers, kindergartens and schools. The websites are available for everyone in the countries respective languages.

### „The Bell Rings for Everyone” events in three countries

An important part of the Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI Cross-border Cooperation Programme is a special Children’s Day where students from the institutions participating in “The Bell Rings for Everyone” can stand up on stage with their handicapped peers and the parents can look at their performance and their craft creations. The closing events were the following:

#### a./ Special Children’s Day in Ungvár



The Ukrainian closing event was held on Saturday, November 19 in the Youth Centre of Ungvár (Padiun). Performers at the gala included the children groups participating in “The Bell Rings for Everyone”, various dance and singing groups from the city and one of Ungvár’s most famous coreographic dance studios, Victoria. Everybody could look at the creations done throughout the programme while clowns walked around the hall. There were facepainting, balloons and Saturday morning was spent wonderfully.

#### b./ Special Children’s Day in Satu Mare



Performers at the gala held in Satu Mare on November 26 included kindergarten students from the kindergartens participating in “The Bell Rings for Everyone” and the Northern Theatre, where the gala was held, prepared colourful activities for everyone. The king from the play called “Eternal Youth” guided the children and the parents throughout the day, and after the children’s performance drum virtuoso Cserey Csaba took the stage with a one of a kind, interactive drumming session where every children could take part. At the end of the gala, valuable

raffle prizes were handed out and there were facepainting, arts and crafts activities and clowns during the performances. The guests could also look at the creations the children did during the programme.



As part of the Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI Cross-border Cooperation Programme, Pregitzer Fruzsina's "I'm Doing Magic" performance opened the full-house "The Bell Rings for Everyone" gala organized by the Down Society and held at the Móricz Zsigmond Theatre in Nyíregyháza on December 3, World Disabled Day. Entering the Magic World was followed by performances from students from participating kindergartens and schools who took the stage with their handicapped peers. After the Hungar-

ian children, Ukrainian kindergarten students performed their productions that they created during "The Bell Rings for Everyone", then everyone could enjoy a concert by the music group Dió. After the raffles came a surprise from Móricz Zsigmond Theatre: they invited everyone on stage then spun the stage with everybody on it.

Apart from the fabulous stage productions, the hundreds of visitors could also enjoy making angels, facepainting, balloons and the children's creations.

The atmosphere at all three events proved that "The Bell Rings for Everyone" reached one of its goals, that is, it showed that handicapped and able-bodied children can work together in a productive way, and the teachers' experiences, results and enthusiasm (see below) also show that the programme had a positive effect in all three countries.

### The present and future of integration in our region

Pázmány Viktória training rapporteur, head of  
the „Csodavár” Early Intervention Centre

„In the light of the idea of equality it became evident that a separate way of social integration for handicapped people cannot be created. For handicapped people to be able to integrate into society institutions have to be established by the society where there is no difference between handicapped and able-bodied people.” Illyés Sándor's thoughts are proof of a new kind of understanding which does not stigmatize or excludes people because they are different but it realizes that living together and creating the chance of empathy is in everyone's interest

Separating handicapped people – if they suffer from birth defects – starts when they are infants. The handicapped baby is treated differently from its able-bodied peers, which starts an irreversible process and convinces the parents, the family and the child that something has changed forever and there is no way back. Segregation has a long-running history in our country and fixed social behaviours are hard to change.

On the other hand, the social, economic and legal environment seem to have changed in the last few decades throughout Europe and in Hungary. Processes aiming to strengthen integration were started in most nations within the European Union. Most of the southern states offer complete integration for handicapped youth already, which means they got rid of segregated institutions and their previous experiences are used in inclusive educational facilities. Most of Western-Europe runs two parallel models, which means that traditional segregated institutions can be found along with effective inclusive institutions following a modern approach. Exemplary examples can be found in the Scandinavian countries. Hungary, on the other hand, is still a third-line country and it still has a segregated school system and steps toward integration were only made in kindergartens.

Movements toward exercising human and civil rights and legal control could provide the appropriate framework. According to rule number 6 of „The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities” (United Nations, December 20, 1993, translated to Hungarian in 1995), “States should recognize the principle of equal primary, secondary and tertiary educational opportunities for children, youth and adults with disabilities, in integrated settings. They should ensure that the education of persons with disabilities is an integral part of the educational system.”<sup>1</sup> International norms are followed by Hungarian jurisdiction and it tries to develop the appropriate legislation. That is why certain laws and regulations were made that can prepare educational integration, for example law LXXIX from 1993 about public education, the law of equal opportunities from 1998 or regulation 29/2002. OM. about providing equal opportunities for handicapped students to continue their studies and the OM announcement from 2003 about developing handicapped students’ integrational skills and skill-developing.

Legal background on its own is not enough, though, and the planned integration takes a long time in practice. Unfortunately, without providing the prerequisites and neglecting the preparation of the affected or violating them through integration – in case of almost every minority – leads to opposition from the majority. The base of integration is mutual acceptance which has to be a part of education before the integration can start. One way of doing this is called inclusive education.

New approaches appeared that were adjusting to the legal framework or were running parallel with it. Such approaches include different kinds of alternative education that considers differentiation, individual personality development and unique treatment as its base as well as accepting the social spirit and each other and planting the seeds of tolerance in children. Also, more and more professional bodies criticize exclusive education and talk about the advantages of inclusive education. These are supported by new definitions in special education terminology, their goal being emphasizing the similarities and positive things as opposed to the differences and negatives.

Not only professionals but the parents of handicapped children also try to make sure their children reach adulthood after going through regular development, meaning they should not start their life separated, stigmatized, instead have the same opportunities as the other children both in education and other parts of life.

These efforts are supported by some changes that create opportunities which might not have been created with these goals in mind, yet fit perfectly in this system. For example, ending the state monopoly of education and developing a plural education system which gave way to alternative education.

Inclusive education in kindergarten and school leads to several questions and thoughts that are connected like a web and cannot be separated. Each question leads to the next, one thought gives birth to another and each sheds light on further connections. First, the participants have to be mentioned, because the success of integration is based on their training, preparedness and attitude. The school and its surroundings have to be prepared: teachers, children, parents. Special education teachers and other experts involved in the integration also have to be trained, since working in an inclusive school demands very different expectations than before.

Teaching special needs children inclusively is a serious burden on educational institutions, their integration cannot be a sudden decision or a result of reckless steps. Proper professional and

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1 [http://barczy.hu/letoltesek/tudomanyos\\_testuletek/dokumentumok/STDRULES-magyar.pdf](http://barczy.hu/letoltesek/tudomanyos_testuletek/dokumentumok/STDRULES-magyar.pdf) 2009-10-11



methodological preparation is required, the equipment and infrastructure have to be gathered. This means a financial and mental strain, from which the financial one is usually the bigger, even though gathering enough money should not pose a problem, according to the law.

It is expected from teachers to personalize every subsystem during the educational process (goal, method, evaluation, equipment), so it has to be different for SNI and other students. This contra-

dicts the school's need to be uniformed. This duality – the need to be unique and uniform – becomes an almost unresolvable paradox and creates serious difficulties for teachers. Creating a unique system of goals, evaluation, etc. is not easy because it already entails a certain segregation, separation. Teachers have to develop a differentiation system which is varied enough methodically. Using the appropriate teaching methods, teachers can make their class see and accept each other's differences and realize that the expectations and the goals are not the same for everyone. Each student has to develop compared to themselves and the goals have to be realistic.

It is undisputable that through inclusive education reaching the goals set by the teacher are more difficult than teaching less different children. It is also important to mention the excess that inclusive education holds and put them in the limelight. Living together, being different and learning about different things have a positive effect on every child's development. Getting to know and accepting each other conveys "normal" patterns of behaviour ; creates a realistic self-image and self-evaluation. For weaker students better performance is a pulling force, it becomes important to them to meet higher standards. On the other hand, children with better abilities profit both in knowledge and humanness when they help their peers understand and acquire the study material.

It is undeniable that for handicapped children it means more than this. Through integration children who have to stay at a student hostel from the age of 7 can avoid being put there. The feeling of segregation will cease which makes social integration easier, even natural for them. Teachers, though facing a more difficult task, can use more effective teaching materials, they can constantly refresh their knowledge and try new methods.

Inclusive education, as it has been stated before, has serious conditions. It is important to point out that not everyone has to be integrated by any means possible. The process has to be well thought-out and organized. The first, indispensable step of preparation is early development which requires an early diagnosis and diagnostic methods. Integration is not possible without assistance from special needs teachers, which would not only dismiss the segregation among children in the new system, but also among teachers, the two groups could work together, help each other and enjoy their common results. For this, both parties need to have a positive and accepting attitude. Apart from professional support, parental background is also necessary because families, as well as schools, are also part of the team. Ideally, the groups and classes should reproduce society, so when thinking about headcount and composition, we have to make sure that the number of SNI students does not make reaching the goals impossible. We are aware of the fact that this cannot be done in small settlements. Here differences are overrepresented and it shows in schools as well. Furthermore, it is a regulatory requirement for a founding document to include integration and the infrastructure, personal and physical conditions, the properties of the building and classroom have to be up to par with requirements and have to be tailored to the children's special needs.



„The Bell Rings for Everyone” programme tries to assist in several essential elements of this process. It creates conditions where majority and special needs teachers can experience the possibilities provided by inclusion. They get involved personally with a population unknown to them and they work together towards a common goal. The positive experiences gathered during the programme affect their attitude which later enables not only occasional integration but prepares them to accept difference, makes them

forget their fears about handling special needs children. The programme also provides deep experiences for the involved able-bodied and handicapped children and their families. Getting to know each other, the fun of working together and success achieved together brings the two camps together and shows the possibilities of various differences complementing each other and making their life more colourful.

In the times of great geographical discoveries maps used to be full of unknown areas. Today there are similar areas in Hungarian education. Such an unknown area on the map of education that provides a great challenge is inclusive schools. These schools are barrier-free not „only” physically but mentally; where difference is as natural as it is in society and nobody questions its reason for existence.

According to today’s EU – and because of this, Hungarian – laws, every child has the right to attend the school closest to their home. But this is only a law. Life, as in many other cases, does not comply with rules on a piece of paper and as common practice, mentally or physically handicapped children, when they reach the age compulsory schooling,, go to schools hundreds of kilometres away from their families and only come home at the weekends.

We could go on about differences between our children, and currently not many institutions try to lessen these differences, even though such institutions could show the way and the possibilities of development for the whole society.

What would such a school be like? The school itself is a polis, and as such, it resembles society. This school would actually resemble society and teach children the virtues that have become forgotten these days: patience, acceptance, love. This school could become a home and the people *living* in it would become families.

### Analysis of the effects of „The Bell Rings for Everyone” programme

Dr. Hüse Lajos sociologist, head of the Gyermekjóléti Központ

The most defining moment in a person’s life is undoubtedly when they are having a child. We could even go as far as saying that creating life and nurturing it, then setting it free is the foremost goal of our lives – not only in a biological, evolutionary sense, but both culturally and humanely.

This might be the reason for the lack of words when a couple has a handicapped child. Apart from taking such a burden on themselves, after the first pains are gone, they have to face the fact that this great goal might be damaged as well, since the person they should set free eventually might never learn how to fly.

There are no words for this feeling. No *right* words.

The problems already start with the name of the problem. Almost all of our words are hurtful,

offensive or it cuts like a knife. Other words babble or try to cautiously describe the point. And even if we found a suitable, non-offensive, yet not syrupy word for a handicapped child getting into the family, it would soon become offensive because it would fill up with the loss and sorrow of the affected and the uncomfortable embarrassment, gestures and intonation of everybody else.

The English call children born with mental, emotional, physical disabilities, having long-term medical problems or suffering from the consequences of a tragic accident an "exceptional child". As Kálmán Zsófia<sup>2</sup> writes, this expression illustrates that these children need special attention, care, education and love and their parents take on with exceptional humanity this extraordinary burden. How appropriate this expression would be in Hungarian!

We also do not have the appropriate words to describe those who carry this hard burden. As professionals, how should we disclose the diagnosis with the worrying mother? How should we tell the father, who is muted by self-accusation, about the future. How should we help the family as relatives, friends, acquaintances? How should we talk to them to overcome pain and grief, who to share with them the smaller joys of life and how to help them to discover such joys themselves? How should we marvel at values yet unseen? And how to be natural about all of these at all?

Societies, communities and school groups do not have enough experience to give a correct answer.

The Down Association was founded by a self-helping advocacy group of parents with special children. Working with them I experienced the inappropriateness of my words and struggled when I had to share my feelings. The impartiality of science only helped not to show it. It is my job, after all, to register the social and mental projections in a way that does not alter them. My job is to impartially observe the phenomena, analyze the data and interpret the results. If I let my feelings run free, I lose my impartiality and the objectivity needed to keep a cool head.

I also felt that I was fooling myself. I was never impartial to handicapped people, let alone children. And now I lost my impartiality towards the members of the Down Association – they became people from „notions”, some might have even become my friends. And, as it became evident while working, it does not feel good to talk matter-of-factly about what I have discovered through science as if it was only data. How should I say or describe the findings of impact assessment so that it is objective and humane at the same time, showcasing the people, handicapped or able-bodied, who the programme is about?

Once again, I turned to Kálmán Zsófia, who took down the words of a mother who was looking for diagnosis, help and advice after giving birth to her handicapped child.

*„Gently but truthfully.”*

I believe this is the answer to several “how”-questions. Even if the truth is not always clear – it would require further research. Even if the analyses are not always clear – further discussion and joint thinking would be required.

So, what would this research be about, I asked myself when I finally decided what I will write about and how I will write it, if not *to encourage joint thinking and call for further discussion?*

The bell rings for everyone...

2 [http://barczi.hu/letoltesek/tudomanyos\\_testuletek/dokumentumok/STDRULES-magyar.pdf](http://barczi.hu/letoltesek/tudomanyos_testuletek/dokumentumok/STDRULES-magyar.pdf) 2009-10-11

## Research background, material and method

The foremost goal of “The Bell Rings for Everyone” programme is to bring closer handicapped – more precisely, ones with mild to moderate mental disabilities – and able-bodied children. The creators of the programme assumed that working together and getting first-hand experience would make able-bodied children more accepting and tolerant. Another goal down the line is to change society’s approach, driven by mutual respect and the urge to help those in need. This change had to be made measureable during impact assessment and the expected amount of increase in tolerance had to be shown.

A significant feature of the research is that the results were basically reached by the *teachers of the accepting classes who did not have any special training*, as well as *the children themselves*, building on *their own strength, ingenuity and social skills*. We could say that nothing *extraordinary* happened, only something that anyone in any community could achieve: *the experience of being together*.

By carrying out the programme this way, The Association, naturally, did not want to declare that integrating handicapped children could be done without the need for special needs knowledge; it does not state that everything depends only on the attitude of the accepting environment. Changing attitudes in a positive way is, of course, in the focal point of the programme – and integration –, but lasting results can only be achieved in integrated schools where the *accepting teacher* is supported by and works closely together with a *special needs teacher* who overlooks and assists the development of the integrated children.

The first step of the programme’s impact assessment was a *questionnaire survey* carried out among the teachers and students of the participating kindergartens and schools, as well as the parents of the handicapped children. The survey, then concentrating on the changes, was repeated at the end of the programme as *impact assessment*. The data was supplemented with *parent interviews*, *family diaries* made during the event and an *interaction process analysis* (IPA) done on a subsample (N=8) of a random group of children.<sup>3</sup> The attitude of teachers in special schools was measured by a questionnaire on a smaller subsample.

We were aiming for a *full sample*, which means that we tried to involve every teacher in the participating institutions, regardless of the number of classes or groups who accepted handicapped children, and if the teachers took part in the programme or not – such as teachers of senior classes. The research did not include the administrative and technical staff of the institutions. A *“partial” full sample* was the goal in the case of the student population: we involved every student from the participating classes and did not include the classes not taking part in the programme – except for the control groups where we assumed “The Bell Rings for Everyone” did not change their attitude, or if it did, only minimally.

3 Bales, R. F. (1950). A set of categories for the analysis of small group interaction. American Sociological Review, 15: 257-263.

**Figure 1.** The number of elements (N) in the research subsamples during the questionnaire survey

|                                 | <b>Planned size of subsample</b> | <b>Realized preliminary survey</b> | <b>Realized impact assessment</b> |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Participating teachers          | 300                              | 601                                | 251                               |
| Participating students          | 600                              | 1006                               | 686                               |
| Parents of handicapped children | 50                               | 50                                 | 50                                |
| Special school teachers         | 50                               | 48                                 | not relevant                      |
| Control school teachers         | 20                               | 24                                 | 15                                |
| Control school students         | 50                               | 56                                 | 60                                |
| <b>Total</b>                    | <b>1070</b>                      | <b>1785</b>                        | <b>1062</b>                       |

The first questionnaire – about attitudes – was realized on a bigger sample of teachers and students than the planned number of subsample elements because the institutions were willing to make themselves available for us. We tried to carry out the impact assessment (second questionnaire) on a sample sized according to the original sample. Although after the random sampling but before the survey Nyíregyháza's education system was changed and it brought with it a change in the number of teaching staff and negatively influenced the attitude and motivation towards research in more than one case, so the second survey was carried out on a smaller teacher sample than planned.

## Research results

### Special children and parents taking on special tasks

Handicapped and able-bodied children working together in the big halls of the school – even if only for a short time – made the handicapped child's experience more varied. While concentrating on the tasks at hand, he experienced commonly experienced success, the love of the other children, the joys of being together. As the cognition of the physical and social medium deepened, the child's self-confidence and trust towards others grew.

Negative experiences could have come from two sources: performing in a way that was not deemed adequate, or the non-appropriate reactions from the accepting parties. There are many examples of the former in the research data – one could not dance, the other could not sing the way their peers could – but not even the sadness and anger coming from these failures could deter them from participating in these activities. What is more, they became more and more enthusiastic every week. It was very important for the teachers to notice these failures and, using their creativity, involve the children in activities where their success would make them forget their failures caused by their different abilities.

We did not find any evidence in the research data of the other negative source, i.e. the not appropriate reactions from the students of the accepting classes. Visiting children always arrived to a positive, accepting and supporting environment where they were looked after by their able-bodied peers. There was a class where only one of the students was perceptive of the little visitor's special needs and that student alone held the other child's hand throughout the events – it was just one student, but it was perfectly enough. In most places, though, groups of various sizes gathered around the handicapped children, friendships were formed that survived until after the programme.

The most intense experience, one I still remember vividly, during the discussion held with the parents – a focus group interview – was to see such a *deep faith and dedicated fight* that help parents who are trying to give everything to their children who were deprived of so many things by genetics or some mysterious force. The feeling of *deprivation* was a common feature of all of us, as was that special *will* with which we tried to compensate and correct deprivation itself. They all went through a deep sense of *grief* when they were faced with the fact that the longed-for child is not complete, and to this day they still feel the pain of segregation that comes from the lack of completeness. But most of them went through bereavement and reached *acceptance*. Acceptance, however, is not resignation, more like *acknowledging what is and trying to make everything better that can be made better*. This discovered (rediscovered?) force is what created „The Bell Rings for Everyone“ programme/

The parents were aware that the task is not small. They have to let their children out of their home and the safe walls of the special schools and send them, basically alone, to an often hurtful, sometimes ambivalent, sometimes excessive and wild world, to a group of able-bodied children who lack special training. These parents took a risk but they know what could be won. They trusted in a change for the better...

...while they hid their fears and worries from their children. They feared for their children and were scared of what reaction the able-bodied children's behaviour, not damped by professionals, would cause in their special needs children. How will they handle all the stimuli? Will they be well-behaved? Will they be ridiculed, hurt, and if so, how will they react? Unconcealed words of worry can be found in the parents' journals. But each and every entry was closed with the growing sense of confidence.

Every parent discussed partial inclusion with their children at home. And through the tight-lipped or long-winded accounts of the often tired, sometimes moody but mostly spry and happy children the parents' fears started to subside. The parents got a better view, a wider perspective about their children's future through their experiences. With the birth of their handicapped children, many families were torn from their natural environment, they were distanced from human relations and their lives were subordinated to the parenting of their special needs children and the increased burden of nurturing. Through „The Bell Rings for Everyone“ programme parents could see very simple experiences through their children, which made them more hopeful and open. Most of them – everyone – had bad experiences, emotional scars when their children were not accepted or looked upon differently – through „The Bell Rings for Everyone“ programme the healing of these scars could be well observed.

Segregation grows from the soil of a vision clouded by prejudice. However, this is not only true for the majority population but for the parents bringing up their handicapped children, but in a positive way. They considered the majority population to be too homogeneous, too similar: uncomprehending, negative, cold, hurtful. It was proven that the programme – the experience – made this situation better.

## The teachers

Teachers of the accepting schools – just like members of any other group in society – have colourful and varied characteristics. Their values and opinions about handicapped children have extremes (enthusiastic acceptance, strict rejection), middle grounds (that can be a golden mean or grey opportunism). Despite their diversity, with the appropriate statistical methods we can show some of their characteristics through which we can get to know their truest nature, the „average“ picture that can most likely be seen in every randomly chosen teacher.

During impact assessment the picture we got of the teacher was someone who sees beauty, challenge and sometimes fight and who shows mostly positive and special attention towards the handicapped child. To them the main difference in these children are their weaker concentration and comprehension of tasks and they attribute positive, rather than negative, personality traits to the children. Judging themselves realistically, participating teachers say that majority kindergartens and schools are not prepared for nurturing special needs children with others, and they do not think that the current school system is suitable for proper integration. So they mostly reached the conclusion that handicapped children's needs can most successfully be fulfilled in special kindergartens and schools.

Despite this, most teachers would undertake teaching differently handicapped children even under the current circumstances (Figure 2). Their opinion was only minimally changed by experiences during the programme – mostly those who did not take part and were not particularly interested in it, for example, they did not talk to their colleagues who accepted the visiting children. A significantly bigger number of teachers who had personal experiences, especially with disabilities the visiting children had, would be willing to undergo full integration than those who did not take part in the programme.

The opinion of special school teachers definitely has to be considered. Their much more cautious viewpoint warns us that we have to change the *present circumstances* for a more complete integration, for example by expanding the special needs support as a network.

**Figure 2.** Subsample percentages of teachers who would undertake full integration even with the present circumstances

|                                    | Situation analysis |                       | Impact analysis           |                       |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
|                                    | „average” teacher  | spec. school teacher* | non-participating teacher | participating teacher |
| mild intellectual disabilities     | 68,7               | 8,3                   | <b>60,4</b>               | <b>66,7</b>           |
| moderate intellectual disabilities | 26,6               | 0,0                   | <b>16,2</b>               | <b>27,9</b>           |
| autistic                           | 25,0               | 2,1                   | 22,8                      | 20,0                  |
| sensory disabilities               | 74,3               | 52,1                  | 71,2                      | 70,0                  |
| disabled                           | 82,6               | 70,8                  | 81,3                      | 83,6                  |
| emotional-volitional disabilities  | 27,2               | 20,8                  | 23,8                      | 25,4                  |
| speech disabilities                | 73,6               | 52,1                  | <b>60,7</b>               | <b>67,2</b>           |
| learning difficulties              | 83,9               | 47,9                  | <b>76,8</b>               | <b>88,5</b>           |

*\*The question was: „Under the present circumstances, would differently disabled children be able to be integrated into a normal school?” The table shows the percentages of „yes” answers.*

The results are not based on some preliminary presumption. Only 40% of the participating teachers thought before the programme that they would be able to cope with the situation – they were not deterred by their subsequent experiences. But most of them were uncertain. Most of the uncertain teachers were convinced after the programme that they could take on the same or similar role in a partial inclusion, and only every fifth – 9.6% of the full sample – felt that after such experiences they became even less certain.

Most of the teachers, stepping out of familiarity, were enriched with positive experiences and deep feelings. They learned how easy it is to reach the programme's goals with simple means, mutual experiences, mutual joy and the many results of partial inclusion. Positive examples and

good practices got stronger during the programme, so most participating teachers expanded their practical methods and their professional personality.

Based on the journals and the accounts of actometric observers an unsuccessful situation also occurred: the handicapped child was „inserted“ into a learning process that had started earlier, and it kept going on when the child was not taking part in the class's work. In such a group the child, who had coordination problems, was learning slower and performing modestly, experienced too big a contrast between their well-rehearsed performance and his own weaker one. The unsuspecting child, joining the group's practiced activities, filed the difference as a proof of him being less worthy, which did not decrease with the experience of working together because it (for example singing together) was made up of individual efforts (such as a song learned on their own). Although singing is a *joint experience*, but it is only a *social* experience if everyone can take an equal part in it, or if the „conductor“ finds everyone's role in creating *harmony*, based on individual abilities:

*All God's creatures got a place in the choir,  
Some sing low, some sing higher;  
Some sing loud on the telephone wire,  
Some just clap their hands, their paws or anything they got now!*

## The students

Based on the answers given to the assessing questionnaire, it can be said that the members of kindergarten groups and classes accepting handicapped children attributed mostly positive personal characteristics to the handicapped children. Most of them say that they would like it if the visitors stayed longer as their classmates.

The answers to the second questionnaire show the children's stronger opinion about the visitors being nice, loveable, etc. the accepting groups' members evidently had positive experiences, and so their attitudes became more accepting.

The overwhelming majority felt that during the activities both the visiting handicapped children and themselves had the best possible time. They said that „The Bell Rings for Everyone“ programme was good for the community and their teachers were well-prepared to coordinate the process.

The interviewed children felt that they helped the visiting children personally to make them feel good and to do their tasks. Personal assistance could take the form of kind words, supporting suggestions, loaded questions as well as actions. We can cross-examine this with the data collected through actometric observation, and according to this, the interactions towards the visitors were really positive and supportive. The interactions were mostly about solidarity, assistance and inquiry and there were no negative interactions – rejection, opposition, tension – to speak of. Even though the children treated the visitors very kindly, it is certain that their own role was significantly exaggerated, because the actometric observations showed much less interaction than it could be assumed from the self-declaration in the questionnaires.

## The objective and subjective side of „The Bell Rings for Everyone“

„The Bell Rings for Everyone“ programme gave handicapped and able-bodied children the chance to *experience things on their own*. This experience does not only refer to taking part and perceiving the events – it had an impact on their consciousness, and formed their consciousness and personality. The emotional reflections and deep manifestations of the meetings can be observed in the results of the impact assessment carried out by various psychological and sociological methods. It is not an exaggeration to say that their personality has changed due to these experiences.

„The Bell Rings for Everyone“ programme, as the *objective element* in the experience, was somewhat plannable and organizable, but *gaining the experiences*, people's reflections, their own – and unique – narratives were less controllable. The same event left different memories in everyone, they were told differently, with emphasis on different things and feelings, and they also perceived and interpreted theirs and other people's roles in the events. Differently, colourfully – yet the main current of changes can be easily measured:

*Down Association's special students were warmly welcomed by the teachers and students,  
regardless of country borders.  
The attitudes of reception and acceptance are still alive today.*



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