

Children with disabilities would like to change the attitude of the public

Prague – 27 December 2011 – **Research among children with disabilities, their families, and non-governmental organizations dealing with the issue has described the inadequate attitude of the public, as well as uncertainty about what to do in a particular situation as two of the most pressing problems people with disabilities encounter. Forms of behaviour that hurt people with disabilities most of all include compassion, fear, and excessive caution, as well as plain indifference.**

Last year, the Sirius Foundation, whose aim is to broadly contribute to improving and developing the quality of life of children, conducted (in co-operation with the Median agency) a study of the problems faced by children with disabilities in the Czech Republic¹, which showed that the negative attitude of the public is the second most serious problem viewed by parents of children with disabilities, and by representatives of non-profit making non-governmental organizations, following the lack of funds.

Almost 70% of parents consider the attitude of the public to the disabled a serious problem. Approximately 70% of respondents from the general public have answered that they are insufficiently informed about the situation of children with disabilities. Just under half of them have responded that their attention is sometimes captured by an interesting story, but they show no significant interest in the topic. The research has also shown that in a part of population the problem of the attitude to children with disabilities is connected with the uncertainty of what to do in specific situations, whether and how to offer help, and how to communicate with the disabled. Fear of the unknown and different thereby creates a communication barrier. When asked “How would you describe what you feel when you see a child with a disability?”, 13% of the respondents answered: “I have a strange feeling of something unfamiliar, uncomfortable.”

Further research, based on workshops with groups of children with disabilities (visual, auditory, and physical), has shown that children with disabilities have no special requirements concerning mainstream society. They mostly view their disabilities as part of their lives, they want to be as independent as possible, and they are usually able to handle common situations they experience in public spaces, otherwise they wouldn't face them. They believe that they can live normal lives, despite the limitations caused by their disabilities, and it hurts them most if people around them try to convince them of the opposite. They find the compassion of the people around as unpleasant or debilitating (leading to passivity), and, similarly, they don't like to be praised for what is normal (e.g. going to work), because they see it as a sign of being looked down on. They do their best trying to live normal lives like their peers do, and therefore they would also like people around them not to feel sorry for them, and to treat them normally, as equals.

“I find it awfully strange how many people are surprised that we want to live normally. They want us to study and work, but if we just go shopping and then return by metro or bus, people look at us thinking why we're

¹ The brochure summarizing the results of the monitoring can be downloaded at http://www.nadacesirius.cz/soubory/ke-stazeni/Brozura_Sirius_web.pdf.

going there at all, because it's not necessary. And if we have a drink in a pub, we look totally weird too. Why do we do it? Why don't we just relax or lie at home, because it's easier. Or there are a lot of people who try to make our life easier, so when we ask someone for directions, they try to discourage us, saying that it's difficult," said Míša, an 18-year-old student in a wheelchair, during a workshop, and her classmate Vlád'a added: "In my opinion, our goal should be to be seen as normal students. Sometimes it's not possible – for example, I can't spin around the high bar – but we should be viewed as normal people where possible. And if there's a problem, people shouldn't tell us that it's not possible, but help us overcome it. For example, at primary school I would have been happier if they had been more demanding, but they felt that I could do hardly anything. So I had an assistant who even wrote for me, which was totally unnecessary, because I can write everything I need."

At the workshops, the children also talked about the inadequate help that people with disabilities face, and that sometimes brings more harm than good. It especially happens to the blind in the street when passers-by "impose" their help on them, grasping them and pushing them along the way that they know well, perhaps because of the good feeling that they are doing a good deed. Eva, a student with a visual impairment, said: *"I'd feel more comfortable in the street if people just came to me, or gently touched me to show me that they are talking to me, and asked me if I need help. Depending on the situation, I'd either tell them that I do and specify what I need, or I'd say 'No, thank you'. That's what seems to be the best to me. That they ask me, and if I say that I don't need help, they respect that. Not that they come with me, despite the fact that I don't need the help."*

Using the findings, the Sirius Foundation decided to launch a campaign to change the attitude of the public and provide guidance on how to approach people with disabilities. The campaign, called chodicilide.cz ("walking people"), is based on the idea that in order to change the course of action it is necessary to change the point of view. To draw attention to the topic, the authors of the campaign decided to convey the feeling that breaks the target group away from everyday apathy, and helps it to look at the world through the eyes of people with disabilities. Therefore, a fictional world has been created in which it is normal to fly, and people who walk are actually handicapped. Will we like how the non-handicapped treat us? How they behave towards us? How they talk to us?

Are you concerned about the fate of people with reduced ability to fly or suffering complete loss of flying? Support them at www.chodicilide.cz and at facebook.com/chodicilide.cz.

For more information, please contact:

Denisa Lexová

Ewing Public Relations, s.r.o.

Phone: +420 224 800 521

Mobile phone: +420 737 848 095

Email: lexova@ewingpr.cz



Jana Muhič Vobořilová

Project Manager

Sirius Foundation

Phone: +420 257 211 445

Mobile phone: +420 602 390 605

Email: jana.muhic@nadacesirius.cz