



Disabled children wish for the public to change its attitude

Prague – December 27, 2011 – **Research among disabled children, their families and non-governmental organizations that deal with this issue has tagged the inappropriate attitude of the public and the uncertainty how to behave in a specific situation as one of the most burning problems that disabled people have to deal with. Pity, fear and excessive cautiousness, as well as plain indifference, are what hurts disabled people the most as far as the approach of people nearby is concerned.**

Last year, the Sirius Foundation -- whose purpose is to broadly contribute to improving and developing the quality of children's lives -- in partnership with the Median Monitoring agency performed research on the issue of disabled children in the Czech Republic¹, which showed that the children's parents and representatives of non-governmental non-profit organizations perceive the negative attitude of the public as the second most serious problem, right behind the lack of finances.

Almost 70 % of parents consider the public's attitude towards disabled people in general to be a serious problem. And roughly 70 % of those asked from among the public answered that they were badly informed about the situation regarding disabled children. Almost half of them would sometimes follow an interesting story but they do not have any greater interest in the subject. The research also revealed that for a part of the population the problem in their attitude to disabled children is rooted in the uncertainty how to behave in specific situations, whether and how to offer assistance and how to communicate with the disabled. Fear of the unknown and of something different causes a communications barrier. When answering the question "How would you describe what goes through your head when you see a disabled child?", 13 % of respondents said "I have a strange feeling of something unknown, something unpleasant".

Different research, which took place in the format of workshops with groups of children with a disability (seeing, hearing and physical), revealed that disabled children have no special requirements towards the majority population. They usually perceive their disability as a natural part of life, they want to be as self-sufficient as possible, and they are usually able to cope with the usual situations that they encounter in public areas, otherwise they would not get into them. They are convinced that they can live a full-fledged life even in spite of the restrictions they face due to the disability, and they are most hurt when people nearby convince them of the opposite. Pity of people nearby bothers them or even destroys them (leads them towards passivity), and they are also bothered by praise for something that is normal (e.g., going to work), because they perceive that as looking down on them. They do their best to live a normal life like their peers, and therefore they would like for the people nearby to not pity them and to treat them normally and as equals.

"I find it very strange that lots of people are surprised that we want to live absolutely normally. They want us to study and work, but then when we go somewhere and we simply want to do some shopping and then go back on the subway or bus, the people look at us strangely, like why are we going there because it's not really necessary. And when we sit down in a pub, we are also completely

¹ A brochure summarizing the results of the Monitoring is available for download at:

http://www.nadacesirius.cz/soubory/ke-stazeni/Brozura_Sirius_web.pdf

strange, like, why are we doing it. Why do we simply not rest or lie somewhere home, because that's easier. Or lots of people try to make our life easier, so when I ask someone how to get somewhere, they'll make a 'don't bother' gesture and say: you better not go there, it's difficult there", said Míša, an 18-year old student in a wheelchair, during the workshop, and her classmate Vláša added: "I would see the goal to be so that we are perceived as regular students. Sometimes it's not possible -- I can't, for example, do a giant swing on the horizontal bar -- but where it's possible, so that they treat us as normally as possible. And when a problem does appear, then not that it's impossible, but how can it be done. At elementary school, for example, I would have preferred if they would have had really big demands on me, but they had the feeling that I can't do much at all. So I had an assistant there, who even wrote my notes for me, which was absolutely unnecessary because I am able to write absolutely anything."

The children at the workshops also spoke of inappropriate assistance that disabled people come across and that sometimes does more harm than good. Especially blind people sometimes experience that a passer-by on the street forces his or her assistance on them, grabs them and pushes them along a route that they know well, perhaps for the good feeling that they did a compassionate deed. Eva, a visually impaired student, said on this topic: *"It would be more comfortable for me on the street if the person simply came to me, or touched me lightly, so that I knew that he or she is talking to me. And asked me if I need assistance, and then depending on the situation I would tell him or her whether yes, and what specifically, or no, thank you. This seems best to me. That he or she simply asks, and if I say that I do not need help, that he or she respects that and does not continue walking with me if I do not need the assistance."*

Based on the acquired findings, the Sirius Foundation has decided to launch a campaign that should change the public's perception and be a guide for how to treat disabled people. The campaign, which is called chodicilide.cz [*walking people*], is based on the idea that before we can change the way we act, we have to change our point of view. And so that the topic gets the attention it deserves, the campaign's authors decided to bring a feeling to the target group that will pull them out of the everyday apathy and help them look at the world through the eyes of disabled people. They therefore created a fictional world in which it is normal to fly and where those who walk are disabled. Will we like it how the healthy people treat us? How they act towards us? How they speak with us?

If you are not indifferent to the fate of people with a limited ability to fly or with a complete loss of flying, then support them at www.chodicilide.cz and at facebook.com/chodicilide.cz.

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