Information about the activities of the Society of German-Russia Relationship Münster/Münsterland e.V. 2011/2012 in the sector of Social issues and Civic Participation

Besides our events of Russian culture in Münster (especially the yearly festival of current Russian movies in March), we are organizing and realizing, the two-year pilot project **Therapeutic riding for disabled children in Ryazan**, with our partner, the Ryazan Gender Centre (RGC), since September 2011, which is accompanied by a social-inclusive program. The program was motivated e.g. by the fact that a significant number of clients of the Gender Centre, a counseling center for women in crisis situations, were women with disabled children. The situation of these women is especially hopeless: 80% are single mothers, because the fathers abandoned the family after the birth of a disabled child. The social significance of the project is determined, above all, by the very target group - families with disabled children are one of the most socially vulnerable population groups. In the city of Ryazan, there are currently more than three thousand disabled children with disorders of musculoskeletal and nervous system. State aid is minimal. Specialized medical and educational institutions are not enough, and those that are available are crowded, and often do not meet modern requirements in terms of the technologies of rehabilitation. At the same time in Ryazan we have a successful experience with therapeutic riding and hippotherapy in the rehabilitation of children with cerebral palsy and scoliosis. In Germany, these methods are used very widely. There they are very experienced and can boast of acknowledged and convincing results. One of the centers of therapeutic riding, the German Curatorship of Therapeutic Riding, is located next to Münster.

The project started with a workshop for the therapy team in Ryazan with experts from the German Curatorship of Therapeutic Riding. Until now the team successfully treated 30 children with various diseases, often infantile cerebral palsy and autism, which means they achieved impressive improvement in their quality of life. Many letters of the mothers express gratitude and astonishment about the visible improvements already after one treatment unit (6-8 weeks). Alongside the therapy of the children the parents receive an intensive psychological, medical and juridical counseling.

Also, the project manager, Dr. Lapitskaya, conducts an information campaign in order to initiate and promote discussion about the responsibility of society and policy makers for disabled children. For us as well as for our German employers, the foundation “Aktion Mensch”, it is important to connect all public and community organizations that are engaged with disabled children. Thus the RGC-team collaborates with physicians, hospitals, the Psychological Institute of the University of, the educational psychological counseling center,
On 24 May in Rayzan a symposium was held as the opening event of the project "Future Navigator - Establishment of a Regional Network for Media Participation". This is project of Bennohaus Münster, a non-profitable township centre. Objectives are bilateral meetings, in which German and Russian professionals working in self-help institutions for children, youth and disabled, participate in bilateral exchange to benefit the skills of each other in media self-presentation. The network includes 16 facilities in Ryazan. The RGC and DRG are part of this network and at the symposium they present their methods and objectives.

On 1 June, Children's Day, the riding therapy methods with disabled children will be presented in Ryazan under the title "Our Paralympic Reserve".

In July the RGC-team from Ryazan will be in Münster for a ten-day training and exchange of experts. This professional qualification includes both, the riding therapy as well as the organization of self-help groups, the care and integration of disabled children and financing models.

While the team of RGC is engaged with the actual implementation and execution of the project in Ryazan, the task of the DRG as an intercultural mediator is the transfer of expertise, the organization of exchange of expertise, of contacts and qualification. It is responsible for monitoring, for fundraising and last but not least together with RGC for the evaluation.

The project is sponsored by the German foundation Aktion Mensch, which is coming up for two-thirds of the biennial budget. The biggest problem at the moment is the funding of the necessary rest with Russian money. Maybe someone of the Russian members of the Working Group has ideas to whom, to which organization we could turn in Russia? Isn’t it a good omen that former President Medvedev as one of his last acts on 3 May signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of disabled people?