VOLUNTEERING AIMED AT SOCIALIZATION OF STUDENTS WITH SEVERE AND MULTIPLE DEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS UNDER THE CONDITIONS OF COOPERATION OF AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION AND A PUBLIC ORGANIZATION

N. Shumskaia, E. Gaidukevich
Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

Abstract

There have recently been an acute issue considering a possibility of expanding the educational space of a school through social partnership with public structures. Over the past six years, a cooperation agreement has been concluded between the charitable public organization «Perspektivy» and seven schools of St. Petersburg, which goes along the following areas:

1 Organization of informational and methodological support for school staff regarding socialization and education of students with severe and multiple developmental disorders (SMDD).
2 Capacity building of the school staff through various forms (seminars, trainings, supervision, etc.).
3 Carrying out open events at school with the involvement of specialists from «Perspektivy».
4 Renewal of the material and technical equipment.
5 Informational and consulting assistance for families with children with SMDD on the topics of development and education.
6 Providing volunteers to work in classes, which are attended by children with SMDD.

Personality of a volunteer often plays an ultimate role in working with children with SMDD. As Ushinsky K.D. wrote, everything must be based on the personality of the “educator,” only a person can affect the development of another person. In this regard, the presence of a volunteer in a fairly closed, limited space of school and class seems to us to be extremely important, since the volunteer here acts as a representative of the “big world”, as well as an unconditional “other”. Having perceived the “other”, the child gets to know himself better: his preferences, his desires, abilities, etc. The volunteer positively contributes to the socialization of the child with SMDD: the role of the volunteer is much more mobile and flexible than the role of the teacher or special educator, the volunteer can act as a friend, as an assistant, as an educator.

The data of the survey we conducted showed that future volunteers see their role in the school in much the same way. More than half of the volunteers surveyed noted that:

1 they want to be needed by children;
2 they want to get new experience;
3 they want to know how children with disabilities live, they want to learn how to understand them;
4 they want to learn how to interact with children with SMDD.

Data analysis revealed the basic needs of young people who do volunteer work in schools:

1 the need of a person to be needed by another person;
2 need for communication;
3 the need to gain experience (social, professional);
4 the need for self-actualization.

For the moment there are five volunteers working in three schools of St. Petersburg. Based on our positive experience, we believe that volunteering in schools can be one of the important areas of cooperation between a public organization and a public institution.

Keywords: volunteer, volunteer work, severe and multiple developmental disorders, education, public organization.
1 INTRODUCTION

Education, as a social subsystem, depends on the processes taking place in society: globalization, informatization, democratization. Over the past twenty years in Russia there has been a tendency to create conditions for the integration of people with disabilities into society, taking into account their needs and capabilities.

The most important condition for the successful socialization of children with severe and multiple developmental disorders (SMDD) is the provision of access to quality education for them.

Creation of comprehensive conditions for all children in this category getting education, taking into account their psychophysical features, should be considered as the main task in the realization of the right to a public education of children with disabilities [1].

Central to this integrational approach is the principle of “normalization” of life, which was first used in welfare of Scandinavian countries in the late 1940s [2]. According to this concept, the life of a person with developmental disabilities, no matter how heavy they are, should be as close as possible to the life of an ordinary person. In order to integrate such an individual, it is necessary to adapt the environment to his needs to the maximum possible extent. [3]

In the practical work of volunteers of a public organization, which we consider below, we can see the elements of this approach.

In the 1950s, upon the initiative of the parents of people with disabilities, the first organizations began to appear which focused on protecting the rights of persons with disabilities [2]. One of the successful Russian initiatives that helps accumulate the experience of education and social inclusion of children with SMDD is the charitable public organization «Perspektivy». Since 2000 this organization has been providing social support to families with children with severe disabilities in St. Petersburg in order to prevent social orphanhood. After ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities a legal basis arose for this.

At this point many experts are discussing the search for ways to help with the implementation of Disabilities Education Act for children with severe multiple developmental disabilities. Although the law is clear (every child in this country who has a disability — no matter the nature of the disability — has the right to a public education) these children remain least protected in both legal and social aspects. Until recently children with SMDD were considered to be learning-disabled, therefore the work on creating conditions for their education was practically not carried out. Many social and educational services are still unavailable for them, as they are developed without sufficient consideration of special educational needs of these children.

Currently in order to support families raising children with SMDD, «Perspektivy» has been fulfilling the Family Support Program, which includes various projects, two of them are: Day Care Center for Children with Severe Multiple Developmental Disabilities (since 2011), and project "School for everyone" (since 2013). Children with mental deficiency complicated by motor, sensory, and behavioral disorders attend this day center, where specialists step by step guide the child through a chain of developmental environments to gain experience in personal interaction and socialization.

2 METHODOLOGY

Having started to develop the project "School for everyone", we faced a lot of difficulties [4], the main ones are:

1 absence of an adequate barrier-free environment for children with disabilities in many schools, as a result of which the school administration can only provide individual home-based education for children with SMDD;

2 incomplete infrastructure, lack of modern equipment (special desks, lifts, adaptive equipment for children with cerebral palsy, voice recorders, keyboard to take notes, special writing supplies, etc.);

3 lack of competent specialists in the field of work with children with SMDD;

4 confusion in the titles of positions (tutor, assistant, teacher), as well as the unresolved question of the amount of support in the classroom;

5 lack of personnel: namely, in such positions as teacher, assistant teacher, assistant.
In order to solve these problems, cooperation agreements were signed between organization “Perspektivy” and several public schools of St. Petersburg, and internetworking programs were drawn up. Internetworking with charitable public organizations is a fairly new (and therefore unusual) mechanism for cooperation in Russia [4].

We believe that the idea of creating programs of cooperation between charitable public organizations and educational institutions could be a promising form of development of the school's educational system, since:

1. it allows you to create equal opportunities for students to receive an adequate education that meets their individual needs and takes into account the socio-economic trends in the development of modern society;
2. it allows you to develop the strengths of the two organizations without harming the interests of children and other educational institutions;
3. it is a real way to build a school as an open system, ready for interaction, cooperation and integration with other organizations.

Over the last 5 years the number of schools - partners has increased from two to seven. The cooperation goes in the following areas:

1. Organization of informational and methodological support of school staff regarding socialization and rehabilitation of students of the SMDD.
2. Improving professional competence of school staff through various forms (seminars, trainings, supervision, etc.).
3. Conducting open events at the school with the involvement of specialists from «Perspektivy» and other public schools.
4. Replenishment and improvement of the material and technical infrastructure of the school.
5. Informational and advisory support for families with children with SMDD regarding upbringing, development and provision of adaptive equipment.
6. Providing volunteers to work with children with SMDD.

For modern sociocultural space of Russia volunteer activity is a rather new phenomenon that is rapidly gaining popularity among various strata of the population and gradually acquiring a noticeable social significance [5].

One of the reasons for creating a project «School for everyone» is that many children with SMDD cannot be enrolled in intramural form of study (i.e. students attend classes in school), they are forced to stay at home and communicate only with their family members. They can only be provided with individual home-based education. They are still virtually excluded from the state education system, do not have the opportunity to communicate with their peers and, as a rule, receive no help other than medical.

We believe that a volunteer can positively contribute to the socialization of a child with SMDD. As you know, socialization is a complex and multivariated process that lasts throughout life of an individual and implies that individual's assimilating patterns of behavior, psychological attitudes, social norms and values, knowledge and skills that enable him to function successfully in society. As a rule, a disabled child, at best, only goes through primary socialization. However, even this process is limited for him, as we have already emphasized, for the reason that the set of social roles with which the child meets is extremely small. In the most typical version, this set looks like this: the parent (or closest relative), an employee of the institution, who comes to the house and conducts classes in the individual form.

Having in mind these conditions Perspektivy launched the first volunteer program called the Voluntary Social Year. Volunteers from Russia, Germany, Spain, Poland and other European countries take part in this program. This is an analogue of the German program FSJ (Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr), which has a history of more than 50 years. Every year from 30 to 40 young people go through their volunteer year in “Perspektivy”.

This program is expanding every year. Just so in 2016 volunteers worked only in one school in St. Petersburg, school Nr25 in the Petrogradsky district, and today volunteers work in 3 schools in St. Petersburg. Officially, the Voluntary Social Year starts in September, the volunteer is engaged in the program from Monday to Friday (35 hours a week). Usually for each volunteer is designated one class at school. Volunteer works in a team with teachers, educators, specialists of adaptive physical
education, coordinators and other volunteers. A volunteer spends time with children during lessons, intermissions, provides hygienic care, helps at breakfast and lunch. Sometimes he participates in walks, organizes leisure activities for children in the group of after-hours.

Why do schools need volunteers? In schools for people who hold positions of teachers, tutors, educator pedagogical activity is the main type of professional work. They are engaged only in it and do it professionally, having, as a rule, a degree in pedagogics. Our volunteers rarely have specialized education. Usually these are young people who have recently graduated from school, have not yet made a choice in their future profession, or older people who have decided to change their lives.

The role of a volunteer, as a rule, is not very typical for our country and, therefore, is not always clear for the school personnel [5]. In our experience often the introduction of a volunteer to the school staff begins with the necessary explanations, who the volunteer is, what is included in his work, etc. In our practice there were cases when, without understanding the meaning of the volunteer work, school employees wanted the volunteer to play the role of a "nurse": provide only hygienic care for children, help with moving and positioning children during intermissions or lunch. However, in our understanding it is impossible to interpret the work of a volunteer in this way.

Ultimately, the personality of a volunteer often plays a crucial role in working with children with SMDD. In this regard, the presence of a volunteer in a fairly closed, limited space of school and classroom seems to us to be extremely important, since the volunteer here acts as a representative of the "big world". In such conditions, the volunteer is the carrier of all the new, unfamiliar and interesting, the representative of everything "different." Telling the children about this "world" the volunteer thus introduces the child into this world.

Standard social roles in school look like this: teacher-student, educator-student, student-student. In our opinion, they are rather fragmentary and too official. In this situation, one more important role of the volunteer at school can be revealed: as the mental and social experience of the "Other". The significance of the phenomenon of the Other in the process of cognition and self-knowledge of the individual is one of the central philosophical and socio-cultural categories and was fully realized and proved by a wide range of social sciences of the twentieth century. Understanding the Other is a necessary step towards understanding oneself and the harmonious existence of a person (K. Jaspers, V. Frankl, L.S. Vygotsky). This understanding is best done through dialogue. The importance of a volunteer as an unconditional Other, in our opinion, is beyond doubt. For a child with disabilities, a volunteer (as an Other) is equally significant both in a social and psychological sense. The psychological component of development lies in the fact that, knowing another, the child better and more effectively learns and recognizes himself: his preferences, his desires, abilities, etc.

Interpersonal relations in school are often strictly fixed and limited. For example, the role of an institution employee (teacher, speech therapist, tutor, director) has an official character, and the carrier of this role rarely enters the personal space of the child, not becoming, for example, his friend and mentor. The role of a volunteer is much more mobile and flexible. A volunteer can act as a friend, as an assistant, as an educator.

3 RESULTS

Provisions of the article are also based on the analysis of materials of questionnaire and interviews conducted under the guidance and with the participation of authors with volunteers in 2016-2019. 15 people were interviewed (including 12 girls and 3 boys) in the age group from 18 to 28 years.

As the data of the survey we conducted show, future volunteers see their role in the school in much the same way. More than half of the volunteers surveyed noted that:

1. They want to be needed by children.
2. They want to get new experience.
3. They want to know how children with disabilities live, they want to learn how to understand them.
4. They want to learn how to interact with children with SMDD.

In addition, all the volunteers surveyed are worried about such possible situations as:

1. There will be no emotional contact with children.
2. They will not be able to find a way to communicate with children.
3 They will not manage to become a part of the team.

Some volunteers also identified their fears:
- can not cope with responsibilities,
- work will be difficult.

Data analysis revealed the basic needs of young people being about to work as volunteers in schools.
1 Need of a person to be needed by another person.
2 Need for communication.
3 Need to gain experience (social, professional).
4 Need for self-realization.

In the school year of 2018-2019 volunteers work in three different schools of St. Petersburg, supporting 27 children with SMDD in classes where an adapted general education program for students with moderate and severe forms of mental retardation is implemented. Every month we collect feedback from school volunteers, and at the end of the school year all participants write a general report.

In their feed-back reports volunteers often write not only about children and about their successes, changes in behavior, but also about the changes that have occurred in their own “world”. Whereas at the initial stage of volunteer activity the motives of the participants are rather individualistic, then subsequently they become, to a large extent, more social, directed at others, community-conscious.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Based on our positive experience, we believe that volunteering in schools of general education can be one of the important areas of cooperation between a charitable public organization and a public institution. Volunteer work has every reason to become an integral part of the psychological rehabilitation and socialization of children with disabilities, bringing much more tangible results than the use of exclusively traditional teaching methods in the classroom.

REFERENCES