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### **The Home for Deafblind Children in Zagorsk (Sergiev Posad)**

The Home for Deafblind Children in Zagorsk (at present Sergiev Posad - Russia) was established in 1963, owing to the initiative of a pedagogue: Prof. A.I. Meshcheryakov, a philosopher: Prof. E.V. Ilenkov and O.I. Skorokhodova – a deaf and blind person eminent in the history of world pedagogy for deafblind. It was the only centre worldwide intended solely to provide care and education for deaf and blind children. One of the first persons involved in trying to set up the home, as early as the 1950s, was Prof. I.A. Meshcheryakov. He is known as the founder of the School-Clinic for the Deafblind in Kharkov. That institution functioned from 1923 until 1936 when it was closed down by decree of the Ministry of Education of Ukraine. In 1938 I.A. Sokolyansky was released from jail for the second time (the first time he was arrested was in 1933). He left for Moscow and began to work in the Institute for the Deafblind. In 1944 his career at the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences started (A.V. Apraushev, 1982).

In 1950, via the decision of the Director of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, the Laboratory for Study and Training of the Deafblind was set up, headed by I.A. Sokolyansky. From 1955 the Laboratory offered specialist consultations for deaf and blind children who also began their special education there. That was the period when an idea to establish an institution specialising in providing care, education and rehabilitation for such children was being formed. It was actively advocated and disseminated by various representatives of science, parents of deaf and blind children and deafblind adults themselves, amongst others by the already mentioned O.I. Skorokhodova. The idea was unpopular and one which could not have been widely supported in a society which preferred and promoted power, ability, and health. It was a society which did not admit, both internally and externally, in an open, international forum, that disabled people (not to mention those with multiple, complex disabilities) actually existed in the country. It took ten years before it was possible to turn that idea into action and before it was possible to fight with the authorities for their permission to organise that institution. I.A. Sokolyansky died in 1961, but his work and attempts to set up

the home were continued by his successor as the Director of the Laboratory – A.I. Meshcheryakov (V.N. Czulkov, 1989).

The agreement to start the home was signed in 1963 by sheer coincidence. It was due to the fact that a close associate of N.S. Khrushchev, V. Lerner, who himself had a deaf and blind son, got involved in the described activities. At the occasion N.S. Khrushchev's leaving for an official visit abroad, when still at the airport, he was handed in a document for his approval. It was the one which initiated work towards creating the home. Since then the actual organisational activity began. A.I. Meshcheryakov formulated the principles for its functioning as an independent institution which preferred and implemented group education. Unfortunately, A.I. Meshcheryakov's concept assumed a limited number of admissions – 50 pupils at the maximum. It also introduced certain criteria specifying the level of functioning to be achieved by a candidate – those who were diagnosed with intellectual disabilities were not admitted. Only those having intellectual norms were allowed. This concept assumed also that the state would be responsible for financing the cost of the stay of a given individual until a coming of age, i.e., becoming 18 years old (A.V. Apraushev, 1982).

The Zagorsk home was created within the framework of the Ministry of Social Welfare, in whose structures it continues to function until now, as a public nursing home. Such a framing determined in the past (and it still does at present) its main focus on providing care and rehabilitation, although educational matters were not to be neglected. In order to perform the activities desired, 50 teachers and carers were employed, at the ratio of 1:1, as well as doctors, speech therapists, physical therapists, and service staff. The directors of the home were appointed by the authorities of the Ministry of Social Welfare.

### ***The activity of the Zagorsk home in the period 1963-1988***

In 1963 45 pupils of various age groups, even 17 years old, e.g., Yuri Lerner, were admitted to the home (during the conversation held with the author of the present article, A.V. Apraushev claimed there were in fact 38 pupils). Until then deaf and blind children were educated within the framework of individual schooling at home, on condition their parents succeeded in literally forcing the authorities responsible for education to provide several hours of specialist educational classes per week for their children. The level of development of pupils admitted to the home in 1963 was extremely varied – some of them could communicate with the external world, even by means of articulated speech. They could write,

read and look after themselves; but there were also pupils entirely dependent on assistance from carers (V.N. Czulkov, 1990).

A teacher, L.V. Tomachova, was appointed director of that newly established institution by the Ministry of Social Welfare; however, in fact, the Zagorsk home was run by A.I. Meshcheryakov in cooperation with E.V. Ilenkov. Pupils, accordingly to their level of development, acquired skills and age (pre-school, early school, school) were divided into 3-person groups. Special attention was paid to learning how to communicate with the surrounding environment – including alternative methods, generally tactual fingerspelling (dactylology). The educational programme included personal care activities, tidying up, learning to play, spatial orientation, performing socially useful tasks, learning (if possible) to write, read and count on the basis of educational and rehabilitation syllabuses devised for each individual, development of the residual hearing and visual skills, looking after plants, active rest.

The ex-head of prison, Zanchenko, was appointed to be the next director of this institution (the author of this article does not know his first name, and the informer, A.V. Apraushev, did not remember the name either). Not only did he introduce in the home a specific military-like discipline, but also the elements of ergotherapy (e.g., the pupils worked in greenhouses, cultivating cucumbers which were later sold), zootherapy – rabbit and hen breeding (which were also sold), taking care of dogs and active recreation – cycling, skiing, skating, hiking, camping; the latter activities being rather positive (A.V. Apraushev, 1982).

In 1969 the position of the Zagorsk home director was given to A.V. Apraushev, who had worked in it since 1965 – initially as tutor and teacher of literature, and later as deputy director. He held his position as director until 1988. Owing to his active cooperation with A.V. Meshcheryakov, (who, a few years later, became a supervisor of his PhD work defended in 1970) the infrastructure of the home was upgraded. For instance, an independent distribution centre of a central heating system was built. Its educational and rehabilitation activities were radically improved as well. The pupils were still divided into groups depending on their level of development and age. However, extra-curricular activities were introduced, i.e., vocational training system was implemented.

In 1967 an experimental group of 34 pupils was singled out from the rest of the charges. They, depending on their abilities, were trained for particular jobs or selected tasks involved in carrying out these jobs. They were trained to manufacture safety pins, to sew

sacks, towels and bedding as well as to learn locksmiths' trade. Each of the pupils was supposed to learn at least a few skills. The experiment was divided into three phases: the first one comprised pre-vocational training classes carried out on the premises of the home in the existing classrooms; the second one consisted of working for a specific number of hours per day in a cooperative for the disabled (in 1973, 12 pupils participated in this phase of the experiment) run by the All-Russia Association of the Blind; the third one meant getting employed at a particular position in a similar work-place. During the first two phases of the experiment the participants were supervised by the Zagorsk home. The third phase assumed that they would be fully independent and would live in a boarding house owned by the cooperative. During the first two phases of the aforementioned experiment, apart from vocational training, other educational and rehabilitative activities were carried out, for instance: general development and personal care activities, physical education, literature reading, games and plays (A.V. Apraushev, 1976).

In the period when A.V. Apraushev held the position as director, the Zagorsk home also carried out the so-called Zagorsk experiment. The crux of the experiment was to prepare 4 pupils whose level of functioning was the highest to study in higher educational institutions. Before this intention was put into practice, the selected people (Natalya Krylatova, Yuri Lerner, Alexander Suvorov and Sergey Sirotkin) were sent to school nr 65 for the deaf in Moscow in order to round out their education and obtain school certificates (the Zagorsk home is a care-providing institution, i.e., a nursing home, consequently it is not authorised to issue school certificates). In 1971 the aforementioned group began studies at Moscow State University at the Faculty of Psychology (except for Sergey Sirotkin, who initially studied at the Faculty of Philosophy, and later joined the group which studied psychology). Two fully able students were designated to look after the group of the deafblind: E.L. Goncharova and T.A. Basilova. The studies were successfully completed in 1977 (V.N. Czulkov, 1989). To emphasise the significance of this event, the state authorities presented the participants of the experiment with their own flats. Of this group, three people are still active professionally and academically, and participate in social activities: Natalya Krylatova works in the Academy of Pedagogic Sciences (with her husband Yuri, she co-authored the book entitled *The Alphabet of Sensitive Hands*), Alexander Suvorov works in the Moscow Municipal University of Psychology and Pedagogy, Sergey Sirotkin is employed in the Association of the Blind – he is Head of the Section for Social Rehabilitation of the Deafblind on the General Board of the Association of the Blind, Chairman of the Commission on Activities of Deafblind People run

by European Blind Union, Chairman of the Association for the Support of the Deafblind People “Elwira”. Two people obtained academic degrees – Alexander Suvorov is doctor habilitated of psychological sciences, whereas Sergey Sirotkin is a doctor of philosophical sciences. One of the participants of the experiment, Yuri Lerner, having graduated from the university, and additionally from the N. Krupska Academy of Fine Arts, got involved in sculpture. Unfortunately he died in 2003.

In the analysed period, and specifically in 1985, A.V. Apraushev made efforts to build new premises for the home. Obtaining financial support and proper permission for the location and building was bordering on the miraculous. Outstanding support was provided by E.V. Iljenkov. Thanks to his connections with the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, A.N. Kosygin, he managed to obtain the approval and was promised help in carrying out necessary procedures and in getting financial support to effect the construction work. However, the work on construction design and the following building activities went very slowly. Only in 1990 were they partly finished, i.e., the new premises were ready for the pupils to move in.

During A.V. Apraushev’s directorship, there were on average 50-60 residents in the home annually. Amongst them there was a small group of deaf and blind children who were additionally mentally retarded. Generally, deaf and blind children diagnosed as mentally retarded were directed to a branch which was situated in the town of Golovenka in the Tula region. A.V. Apraushev resigned from his position as director in 1988. The duties of the director were then appointed to his deputy – G.K. Epifanova – who works at this position now.

### *The Zagorsk Home from 1988 till now*

The new director accelerated construction work, initiated international cooperation of the home with other centres, which until then was relatively non-existent. She adapted educational and rehabilitation offerings to the needs of the modern world, modernised the existing technical and teaching aids as well as introduced new ones, and implemented novel organizational solutions. The director also proposed creating on the premises of the home a special department for its adult graduates. This initiative began to be materialised in the mid-1990s. Staff members started to benefit from trainings abroad, including several-months or even one-year long traineeships, mainly in Perkins School for the Blind in the USA, as well as

German and Dutch schools. Active cooperation with one of the greatest European authorities in the field of deafblindness, the Dutch Jan van Dijk was undertaken. Works focused on adapting the premises to the needs of these types of institutions were well under way, e.g., a greenhouse and production shops were being built. Not only deaf and blind children started to be admitted, but also those with the co-occurring intellectual disabilities and other types of co-occurring impairments: deaf and mute children, autistic children or those with genetically determined congenital syndromes, such as Rett syndrome. To exemplify: in 1999, there were 161 children in the home, including one 10 months old. 131 specialists were employed – pedagogues, psychologists, teachers, physical therapists, and doctors. Support staff was also employed, including the so-called nannies working with groups of the youngest children. The pupils were divided into 3-4 person groups, 32 in total, including 8 pre-school groups, 2 groups preparing for school education (“0” forms) and 22 school groups.

In the new building the pupils had access to the swimming pool and gym. They could participate in rhythmic classes, have massage, undergo physiotherapy or hippotherapy (the home owned its own horse). Additionally, the children could spend their time in the so-called “tea-room” (at a specified time they had tea in groups or drank herb tea made of herbs collected and prepared by them) in a mini-restaurant “Gold Circle”. They could also attend dance classes, as well as classes devoted to making Plasticide models, knitting and crocheting, sewing, theatrical performances, DIY and photography. The older pupils frequented pottery, painting, sewing, weaving and locksmiths’ trade workshops.

In pre-school groups one special education teacher and two tutors were employed per each group. Every day, except for Saturdays and Sundays, pre-school groups had 6 hours of educational classes. The teacher worked with children from 9 a.m. till 1 p.m., whereas later until 8 p.m., they were supervised by the tutor. At night children were looked after by nannies – one per two groups (thus one nanny supervised 8 children) and one tutor on duty in the entire home.

The situation in school groups looked similar. The syllabus for these groups envisaged from 6 to 8 hours of educational classes, including workshop classes, rest and additional activities. For instance, group 28 attended the following classes during a week (from Monday till Friday): speech development – 7 hours, mathematics – 5 hours, literature – 5 hours, weaving – 3 hours, biology – 3 hours, domestic skills – 5 hours, physical education – 2 hours, sewing – 3 hours, social orientation – 2 hours; whereas group 30 had the following ones:

hearing development – 10 hours, handicrafts – 5 hours, mathematics – 5 hours, speech development – 5 hours, object lessons – 3 hours, reading – 2 hours. The following classes were planned for both groups on Saturdays: physical education – 1 hour, rhythmic – 1 hour, arts – 1 hour, weaving – 1 hour, spatial orientation – 2 hours. An Orthodox chapel was opened on the premises of the home, where the children could satisfy their religious needs.

At present, as in the past, every pupil of this institution is placed under psychological, medical and pedagogic care from the moment of being admitted. The premises of the home cover 12 ha. It can accommodate about 200 residential pupils, both children (2-3 years old) and adults. In mid 2008 there were 230 pupils who were tended by 365 specialists – doctors (ophthalmologist, laryngologist, paediatrician), special education teachers, physical therapists and psychologists. Four divisions exist in this institution:

- educational and diagnostic (that is: pre-school) – for children with multiple disabilities at the pre-school age and younger;
- social and corrective – for children with multiple disabilities and conduct disorders;
- educational and rehabilitative – for children with multiple disabilities and learning difficulties;
- social and vocational rehabilitation – for adult graduates with multiple disabilities (*Sergiew - Posadskij Dzieckij Dom. Nam 40 let, 2003*).

The mission of the Zagorsk home involves:

- carrying out specialised rehabilitative, medical, curative, social and vocational activities focused on the development and maintenance of life activity for the pupils;
- providing care and support for the pupils in everyday life situations, organising their leisure and recreation times;
- organising and carrying out educational classes adapted to individual needs and abilities of every pupil;
- verifying the existing solutions and creating new ones concerning rehabilitation, education, and developmental support of people with multiple disabilities;

- optimising medical and social support (*Sergiew - Posadskij Dzieckij Dom. Nam 40 let, 2003*).

The mission concerning educational and rehabilitative activities at the pre-school and early school period involves: developing personal care and communicative skills, spatial orientation and mobility, as well as basic mathematical skills. This division houses (data from 2008) 40 children from 2 to 9-10 years old, divided into 10 groups of 4-children each. 1 special education teacher and 1 tutor work with each group. The division is headed by a coordinator (similarly to other divisions). It provides care for deaf and blind children, children with profound vision impairments, children with hearing impairments, mute children, children with vision and hearing impairments and/or mental disability and co-occurring cerebral palsy.

The school tasks involve: determining the optimal abilities of each pupil, devising and adapting educational and rehabilitative syllabuses to each particular individual's optimal abilities – particularly with reference to acquiring reading, writing and counting skills; supervising health conditions and providing necessary medical assistance; organising vocation training focused on simple tasks. Pupils who are of school age, depending on their abilities, are either put into social and corrective division or educational and rehabilitative one.

In the social and rehabilitative division there are at present (information as of 2008) 54 pupils divided into 15 groups (of 4 person each), including 1 group of girls with Rett syndrome. Children with severe physical and intellectual disabilities, as well as co-occurring conduct problems in the age group from 9-10 to 18 are placed in this division. Both individual and group work is carried out including: general development classes, activities developing the senses, spatial and social orientation, physical education classes and workshops. Total communication is preferred, aimed at using tactual fingerspelling, unambiguous symbols, individual box calendar method (daily) for each pupil and general calendars for the entire group (daily, weekly, seasonal). The pupils of a given division follow individual conduct correcting programmes devised by Jan van Dijk – as part of a cooperation with Dutch specialists.

The educational and rehabilitative division provides schooling for 59 pupils (data as of 2008) from 9-10 to 23 years old, including 55 residential pupils and 4 who learn at a school for the deaf in Moscow during the week and come to the home for the weekends. A division of pupils into groups of 3-4 persons, identical to those already discussed, is implemented. Children follow more complicated educational and rehabilitative programmes organised in a

class system (6-7 classes a day). Their lessons include, amongst others,: literature, grammar, mathematics, biology, history, speech and hearing development, articulation, spatial orientation, handiwork, rhythmic, physical education, and various workshops. For instance, during literature classes pupils create their own texts (written with regular non-raised alphabet or Braille alphabet) on provided topics. The texts are later read out and analysed in groups. On Saturdays there are 6 hours of classes: hippotherapy, swimming, horticultural activities and workshops. On Sunday pupils participate in hippotherapy.

The social and vocational rehabilitation division is devised for school age pupils and adult graduates. These pupils participate in a variety of occupational therapy workshops: weaving, art therapy, sewing, carpentry, pottery, mechanical (manufacturing ornamental nails), candle-making, arts (graphic art, painting, sculpture), laminating and binding written works, dropper, box and macramé making. Workshop groups vary from 6 to 8 people. Adults work in production shops for 30 hours a week. Part of the money from the sales of manufactured goods (having first deducted manufacturing costs) is given to pupils to spend according to their needs. To exemplify: the production shop manufacturing nails produces 2 kg of nails a day. Amongst the Zagorsk home's residents there are 70 adults from 18 to 54 years old (although its statute specifies maximum age as 23 years). Generally adults, divided into 10 groups, are the graduates of this institution. They are accommodated in a building of a hotel-like type, in 2-room units, one person in each room. There is a toilet and a bathroom in each unit. A given group works in the production shops until 1 p.m. At 2 p.m. a meeting of all the members of this division is held in order to discuss tasks to be carried out in the afternoon.

Under-age pupils get up at 7.30. They wash and get to breakfast. Specialist classes begin at 9.00 a.m. and they last until 1 p.m. Then dinner is served (one light meal is provided before dinner), after which the pupils can enjoy daily walks in the fresh air and participate in group activities with their tutors or attend other additional classes (children from the pre - school division have an afternoon nap). At 7 p.m. they eat supper. Quiet night hours begin at 8.30 p.m. For adults quiet hours start at 10 p.m. – provided there are no activities planned for the evening, e.g., meetings or discothèques.

The Zagorsk home also houses an Orthodox chapel which is overseen by two clergymen. Every day at 7.30 a.m. and 7 p.m. a mass is celebrated for those willing to attend it, during which Communion can be taken. Various ceremonies and religious celebrations are also held in it, such as church holidays and baptisms. The priests are also available to hear the

confessions. Both the staff and the pupils of the home strictly follow the principles of the Orthodox Church: they observe a 40-day lent before Easter and exhibit proper, traditionally rooted, conduct with respect to the clergyman. The Orthodox Church (due to the home location which is situated in the same town as the church authorities, including its Patriarchate) has supported this institution financially as well as by providing various goods almost from the beginning of its existence. However, during the communist regime period it was done unofficially. At present this support is of a more formalised nature. In 2008 the church reclaimed from the state authorities a holiday house (which can accommodate 50 people) in the vicinity of Sochi near the Black Sea. It was handed over to the home in order to organise summer holidays for the pupils.

At present, 3 graduates of the home study at the Academy of Fine Arts in Pavlovsk. Two study special pedagogy at the Pedagogical University. Also two graduates – having gained higher education are employed at the home – one as teacher, the other as tutor in the pre-school. Some graduates are employed as support staff responsible for cooking, cleaning and gardening.

The teaching staff is well qualified in special pedagogy, especially deaf education. Thus the home is actively involved in educational activities with respect to training specialists for working with people with multiple disabilities (generally for post-Soviet states). Additionally, it organises courses, trainings, workshops, traineeships, international and national conferences (amongst others in cooperation with Perkins Institute from the US), as well as student trainings for students of special pedagogy. It also provides diagnostic opportunities and consultations for children and parents who are not placed under the home's care. It owns some transportation means – cars, mini buses and a bus. The home is financed (apart from the money allocated by the Ministry of Social Welfare) by the Orthodox Church, institutional and individual sponsors, foreign financial support from Germany and Holland as well as from the American Hilton-Perkins Fund.

Unfortunately, only few graduates over 23 years old return to their family homes or gain such a level of independence which allows them to lead fairly independent lives. The majority continue to live in the division for adults as they have nowhere to return to. Their families no longer exist, parents have often re-married and simply forgotten about the child left in the home. Many graduates were admitted to the home when the Soviet Republic still existed and came from its various republics. After the collapse of that state these pupils have

no particular nationality and function as the so-called stateless persons. At present a large percentage of the children who come to the home were prematurely born, often with multiple developmental anomalies. As a result, only 10% of all residents are deaf and blind, 70% have hearing impairments and are mute, whereas 20% have other multiple dysfunctions.

In 2009 the home is planning to carry out the following experiment: two selected adults will be provided with a housing unit with single rooms, a bathroom, a toilet and a kitchen. They will have total independence as regards organising their lives, shopping, preparing meals, cleaning, personal care and other activities associated with everyday life.

### ***Conclusion***

The Zagorsk home (Sergiev Posad) from its beginning (1963) till more or less the beginning of the 1990s was the only specialist institution for deaf and blind children and youth in the world. In the mid 1990s the home started to admit children and youth with multiple disabilities, not necessarily only deaf and blind, as well as adults. However, considering the fact that the basic focus of this institution for caring for the deafblind has not been officially changed as yet, it is still a unique place internationally. At present there are four divisions in the home: educational and diagnostic, social and corrective, educational and rehabilitative and social and vocational rehabilitation. On the basis of these divisions, four programmes for supporting the development of the pupils are implemented: pre-school education – for children from 2 to 9 years old, educational and corrective – basic level (for children and adolescents from 9 to 18 years old), educational and corrective – intermediate level (for adolescents from 18 to 23 years old), social and vocational rehabilitation – basic level (for children and adolescents from 9 to 18 years old). Each of these programmes, apart from activities typical only to themselves, includes obligatory elements common to them all: religious education, art therapy, hippotherapy, social and psychological assistance, support of the family towards maintaining child-parent relationships (*FGU Sergiew-Posadskij Detskij Dom slepogłuchych Federalnogo Agenstwa po Zdrawochronieniu i Socjalnomu Razwitiu*, 2008). The quality and efficiency of the employed strategies concerning education and rehabilitation of people with multiple disabilities, mainly deaf and blind people, are confirmed by the pupils' achievements. Some of them have gained or are gaining higher education; some are satisfied with a chance to function independently or fairly independently in various everyday situations and professional capacities. All of them have been ripped out from “the

prison of the soul” – that was the term for deafblindness still in use in the 1920s (L. Arnold, 1926).

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