

**Rehabilitation of the House of culture of the “Union
of blind people of Armenia” after Sokrat
Shakhnazaryan into Cultural-sportive-information
center for blind and visually impaired people**

Project

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Rehabilitation of the cultural center of blind and visually impaired people

Preamble

There are about 10,000 blind and visually impaired people in Armenia. They do not have proper care and are not involved in the social life despite having their cultural center.

In years 60-70s of the last century the cultural life in this center was blossoming: more than 15 different educational classes were functioning: theatrical, dancing, national music, amateur groups of national music instruments, etc. Very good sportsmen and teams of checkmate, rolling ball, and athletics were having trainings in the center. Many festivals, musical, theatrical and sporting events had been organized for blind and visually impaired people. The values created in this cultural center were becoming the heritage of not only Armenian but also the Soviet Union republics.

Nowadays only faint echoes of the past active life remained. The cultural center that was generously funded by the activities of the Armenian Society for the Blind was transferred to the self-financing. Hence, nowadays the center is unable to perform its mission and the former designation.

A. History

The cultural center of blind people of Armenia was functioning at the address, Yerevan, N. Tigranyan Street 15, from 1959. After Armenia became independent it was renamed several times as “House of culture of the 2nd union of blind people of Armenia”, “House of culture of the union of blind people of Armenia”, and finally “House of culture after Sokrat Shakhnazaryan“ of the “Union of blind people of Armenia” LLC.

It is a 3 stores building with a nice architecture. The house has a convenient basement designated as a hiding place in case of emergencies.

On the first floor there is main entrance, dressing room, toilets, buffet, cafeteria with balcony and a sight to a beautiful garden. There are also 7 rooms, 25-30 sq. m each. каждая.

On the 2nd floor there is a hall for 300 sits with theater stage, hall, balcony and make-up rooms. There are 8 more rooms on the floor.

On the 3rd floor around the circumference of the hall and theater scene there are 7 more rooms 25-30 sq. m each and one 50 sq. m room.

The building was designed for cultural activity of blind people. The useful area reached 1,600 sq.m. Today only 1000 sq.m are used for blind people activity while the rest is given for rent to different businesses that has nothing to do with the culture and moreover the rehabilitation of blind and partially impaired people.

B. The attitude of the international community to the visually impaired

Humanistic ideals of a modern society suppose a system of rehabilitation for people with disabilities at all stages of age growth. That is why now all civilized countries make great efforts to support rehabilitation and integration of visually impaired people in order to make them competent members of society.

On December 2006 the General Assembly of UN has adopted a convention about the rights of disabled people aiming to encourage, protect and provide full and equal enforcement of all human rights and freedoms for disabled people, as well to encourage society to regard their dignity. The world community is taking considerable steps in this direction. Here are several examples demonstrating the general situation in the world concerning visually impaired people:

- The president of RF has approved a list of instructions following the meeting with disabled people and representatives of partially impaired people NGOs that took place on November 16, 2011
- American scientists together with the National Federation of blind people have developed the first car for blind people.
- A lot of gadgets were designed for blind people: electronic readers, talking mobile phones, mp3 players, tonometers, thermometers, photo cameras, GPS navigators, monitors, displaying the text in Braille font and even the Playboy magazine.

- The public transport stops in Saint-Petersburg will be equipped with devices helping the blind passengers. They will inform blind people about the number of the route and its direction.
- With the blessing of the Catholicos of all Armenians Garegin II a text book “The History of Armenian Church” for blind and visually impaired people was published in Braille font.
- In Denmark a “Dictus” program was distributed that provides transform of human voice into the text in a computer. As a result any person who had lost the vision can in a simple way – by using not a keyboard but a microphone – to dictate the text with the address, e.g. electronic message.

These are only few examples of what the mankind is doing for rehabilitation of visually impaired people.

A large number of well-known public figures are visually impaired, e.g.:

- David Blanket who lost his vision at the age of 3 years old was a member of the Cabinet of Ministers of Great Britain. Until 2010 he was Minister of Internal Affairs and after that Minister of Education and Employment.
- The American publisher, the father of yellow media, John Pulitzer was blind as well as
- Margolin, the famous developer of a sport pistol, an honored inventor in USSR.

A lot of visually impaired people were among science and art community.

Here is only a short list of them:

- Homeros, composers Johann Sebastian Bach, George Fridric Handel, Joaquin Rodrigo, Friedrich Ludwig Dulong, Nikoghayos Tigranyan, performers Fulton Blind Boy Fuller, singers Andrea Bocelli, Diana Gurtskaya, poets and writers John Milton, Nicolay Ostrovsky, Fanny Crosby, Jorge Luis Borges, jazz musicians Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder, Sergey Manukyan, scientist Leonhard Euler, Nicolay Lobachevski, prophetess Vanga and many others.

All these names are telling us that blind and visually impaired people if placed in a kind and supportive environment are capable of becoming a full member of the society and are able to live an active life and reach unusual heights.

C. Transformation of the house of culture into cultural-sportive-information rehabilitation center

The house of culture must turn into a center of practical, organizational and methodical work of comprehensive rehabilitation of visually impaired people. There should be assimilated and applied basically brand new, high-tech forms and methods of socio-cultural rehabilitation, favourable conditions created for the development of intellectual

and creative abilities of the visually impaired, introduced into modern practice, adapted to the needs of blinds recreation. Athletic and recreational activities and sports are also important and the most effective means of rehabilitation and integration of them into modern society. They create strong incentives for the return of disabled persons in an active, saturated life, expand the circle of friends, contribute to the emergence of new friends and new interests, and can best reveal the physical and spiritual capabilities of disabled people.

Information centers and special libraries in accordance with available resources, worked out forms and methods of servicing of blind and visually impaired readers, with the advent of new technological developments will play an important (and sometimes major) role in providing access to information for people with disabilities.

In order to fully accomplish its mission, all the spaces of the House of Culture with the adjacent territory should pass under one general submission. This will create a cultural, sports and information rehabilitation center of national importance, which will serve only, and only to people with disabilities and infinitely expand their opportunities.

It is expected to create the following rehabilitation components: sport, culture and information units, as well as a number of subsidiaries.

1. Sports unit

Sports unit will be located in the basement. The total area is approximately 180 sq.m. There can be located gym, rooms for armsport, power lifting, chess and checkers, table tennis and other sports. In addition there will also be support services such as massage, locker rooms.

Estimated cost of repair and preparation will make 40 thousand USD, including the repairs itself - 25 thousand USD, and the equipment - 15 thousand USD.

2. Internet availability center for blind and visually impaired people

In the room on the third floor (50 sq.m.) there will be located 15 special computers for visually impaired, of which 5 - for completely blind. The center will be renovated (repaired) and networked. At the first stage 5 computers will be installed. All computers will be equipped with JAWS and NVDA software. At the first stage 5 computers will be installed. At

the second stage additionally 10 computers will be installed after fundraising.

The estimated cost of the establishment of the center is:

1st stage: 12.5 thousands USD.

It includes the following works: installation of metal doors, replacement of power supply, renovation of the room, network setup, installation of the first 5 computers.

2nd stage: 25 thousands USD

It includes the installation of 10 more special computers.

3. Socio-cultural unit

Integration processes in the environment of persons with disabilities require unconditional respect for their civil rights in the cultural activity, creativity, cultural identity, privacy, access to cultural values, humanitarian and art education, cultural property and export of the results of their creativity and cultural creativity studies into foreign countries.

The problem of socio-cultural rehabilitation of disabled people in terms of economic transformation and stratification in the post-Soviet society at the same time can also be viewed as a problem of social justice, providing disabled children and adults equal opportunities with healthy people.

Socio-cultural block includes a hall with all auxiliary facilities for 300 people, such as a hall, balcony and make-up rooms, as well as several others. Among the support services it is assumed to have a medical station, printing and publishing, audio-video disc recording and copying, as well as others, including the areas of paid services provided by professionals who have vision problems.

Special rooms will be designed as a hostel to provide temporary housing for people with vision problems who will come for trainings from distant areas.

Total costs for repair of the hall with all surrounding facilities, including support, will make 35 thousand USD.

4. There is an extreme need of 2 minivans for blind people transportation to different social events.

The cost of 2 minivans is about 20 thousand USD.

D. Summary

This concept is designed to attract public attention to the needs of the Armenian people with vision problems in general, and, in fact, the creation of a rehabilitation center for them in particular. There is a need of broad support of all sectors of society, including the leadership of the Republic. There is also a need in corresponding changes in the legislation. Ultimately, this building should be completely freed from the alien organizations and given to the visually impaired. The work should start immediately on units and gradually bring to the full rehabilitation of the center to a full condition, gradually freeing the building from renting tenants. It will be a good and serious contribution of the general public of Armenia into the social support of the visually impaired.

Contacts:

Igor Mkrtumyan, 091415539

Armen Nazaryan, 093950600