

## **The history of Milicz Association of Friends of Children and People with Disabilities**

(Milickie Stowarzyszenie Przyjaciół Dzieci i Osób Niepełnosprawnych - MSPDiON)

**In 1991** a small group of parents of handicapped children established the Milicz Chapter of the Polish Society for Combating Disabilities. The beginnings were difficult because the rehabilitation in a wider sense was still in infancy in Poland and completely absent in small communities like Milicz. There were no trained therapists and equipment was scarce. Modern methods and approaches were practically unknown to the extent of a common disbelief in the efficacy of any therapy. In spite of these obstacles the group of determined enthusiasts prevailed.

**In 1993** the Chapter was transformed into the Milicz Association of Friends of Children and People with Disabilities (MSPDiON ) and the late Kazimierz Mroczkowski became its first director. The local government granted the building at Kopernik St. to the newly born Association. Although the facility was poorly suited for rehabilitation the gesture was crucial for the future success of the initiative.

After the completion of necessary adaptations **in January 1994** MSPDiON celebrated the opening of the Pre-School Rehabilitation Center with the Nursery Division. The center operated a nursery, kindergarten, and so-called integration special group. The facility served handicapped children from the gminas of Milicz, Cieszków, and Krośnice.

Many poor families from post-PGR villages near Milicz could not afford the transportation on their own. The problem was alleviated by the purchase of Nissan Vanette to transport children from and to their homes. At the same time the Association has expanded its activities by organizing revalidation and education groups for children and young people with profound multiple disabilities.

In the second half of the 90s MSPDiON enjoyed the time of rapid development. **In 1996** a new fully handicap-equipped 25-seat bus was put in service on four routes in the powiat of Milicz and thus many more people in need received help. **In 1997** MSPDiON established Private Health Care and the Center for Early Intervention. **In 1999** two more special need buses were added to carry **over 150** people to and from the Center's facilities.

The turn of millennium witnessed the further spectacular growth of activities and prestige of MSPDiON. The Association offered numerous courses for parents and staff, and organized support groups. In addition to their positive impact on the effectiveness of therapies and broadening of the professional skills of the staff, the courses helped to increase the public awareness and made life easier for those touched by disabilities. In 2000 the Association added sports to its program.

In 2001 the municipality of Milicz granted the Association another building at Polskiej Armii St. for the Occupational Therapy Workshop and District Support Center. The hippotherapy was made possible on a canopied arena thanks to the free land lease from the Milicz Forestry Commission and the donation of four Polish ponies by Mr. Aleksander Kowalski. Dance classes for people with disabilities began. The next handicap-equipped bus was purchased.

**In 2003** the dog therapy started with the purchase of two samoyed dogs. A day room with many therapeutic activities was opened for children and youth. A multi-sensory therapy was introduced through “Experience the World” hall.

After Poland became a member of the European Union **in 2004**, MSPDiON gained the access to numerous European projects and programs.

## **MSPDiON today**

The Association is a public benefit organization which is well known nationwide. It constantly expands its rehabilitation and revalidation mission. The Association serves **over 1000** handicapped from Milicz and neighboring powiats, and even reaches across the voivodeship border. Its staff of **over 130** employees includes highly skilled disability and rehabilitation therapists.

Sixteen years of work helped to modify the public perception of the handicapped. Nobody points fingers at a wheelchair on the street anymore. City streets and businesses allow more handicap access. The unpleasant and boring, even painful experience of therapy, has become more bearable. Even the Association’s philosophy has changed over these years. Due to this paradigm shift the goal has been redefined. A therapy does not end with a specialist’s treatment in a closed room but its mission has become to help a disabled person live a worthy and happy life.

The Association cooperates with the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (PFRON - Państwowy Fundusz Rehabilitacji Osób Niepełnosprawnych) to bring handicapped people to the workforce. For example, the PFRON-supported program “Trainer” facilitates the hiring of the disabled by local businesses. The Association is already engaged in launching a campaign for protected housing to give a chance to live independent lives. The program “*While others’ possessions are praised your own gifts go unnoticed*” brings handicapped close to the nature through kayaking on Barycz river , hikes and trips along the river valley on foot, on horseback, or in horse pulled carts.

The Association runs the following facilities, in particular:

***Day Center for Rehabilitation and Education,***

***Private Health Care***

***Center for Early Intervention,***

***Outpatient Rehabilitation Clinic,***

***Speech Therapy,***

***Occupational Therapy Workshop,***

***County Support Center.***

## **Day Center for Rehabilitation and Education**

It was the first facility set up by MSPDiON. Today, X holds the position of its director, and Y is the education deputy director. Both healthy and disabled children attend it.

In the Open Kindergarten there are four groups of children 3 to 6 years old, and there is a group of older children whose regular education was postponed due to health reasons.

An official diagnosis and referral is required to participate in the following programs:

The Special Nursery that is set up for children at least 3 years old with multiple disabilities;

The Revalidation-Education Team that helps young people, 3 to 25 old, with severe mental disability.;

Special education kindergarten, elementary and junior high school that accept students 6 to 24 old with moderate and deep intellectual disabilities.

## **Private Health Care Facility**

is supervised by Mr. A, DMD. Its divisions are described below.

***The Center for Early Intervention***, established **in 1997**, accepts any child, especially newborn, upon a referral from a health insurance physician. A team of specialists, including a pediatrician, physical therapist, physiotherapist, psychologist, educator, orthopedist, neurologist and speech therapist, examines a child. If necessary, an appropriate therapy is recommended or further examinations scheduled. The therapy is conducted within the facility or is supervised by the Center. For example, the physiotherapy, speech therapy, educational and psychological therapy, multi-sensory therapy, sensory integration, hippotherapy, dog therapy, or music therapy may be conducted.

*The Rehabilitation Clinic.* The admission is based on a referral from a general practitioner or an orthopedist. Upon an examination by an orthopedic surgeon either further tests are recommended if necessary or a treatment is prescribed such as physiotherapy, hydrotherapy, massages, or kinesiotherapy.

*The Outpatient Speech Therapy* serves children with speech impediments and disorders upon a referral from a general practitioner.

### **Leszek Szatkowski Occupational Therapy Workshop**

The late Leszek Szatkowski organized the Workshop **in 2000** and became its first director. His mission continues under the current directorship of Mr B. The mission is to empower disabled adults to become independent and accepted members of the society. Possible employment or self-employment is arranged with local businesses with the help of the nationwide program “Trainer”. At this moment there are 45 participants in various classes that begin by teaching simple skills and develop interests and hobbies. The facility has a computer lab and art studio, and specialty studios such as gardening, tailoring, carpentry, household maintenance, and ceramic shops. Participants have access to the psychological counseling, speech and physical therapy, or hippotherapy. Free transport is provided for fieldtrips or to the indoor swimming pool.

### **Powiat Support Center (POW)**

Day care facility, intended for mentally handicapped youth and ones with profound multiple disabilities, has functioned **since 2000**. The socialization and self-sufficiency of patients is the first goal. They are offered physiotherapy, speech therapy, psychological counseling, hippotherapy, dog therapy, and multi-sensory therapy in the “Experience the World” hall. They are bused to and from the swimming pool and participate in art projects and fieldtrips. The second goal is to relieve parents of disabled children from the burden of constant care and thus make their full time work possible, and to allow them to have some private life. POW is managed by G.

### **MSPDiON Board**

is elected every three years by the General Assembly of members of Association, currently Mrs Alicja Szatkowska has held the Chair position almost from the inception of the Association. Mrs Iwona Górnicka and Mr Janusz Dutkowiak are Deputy Chairpersons. Mrs Małgorzata Łaszkowicz is the Treasurer, Mrs Urszula Gaj is the Secretary, and Mrs Wanda Pietrzak and Renata Jach are members of the Board.

Besides the decisive function of the General Assembly, the Management and Audit Committee plays the executive role.

## **Contributors**

In 2003-2008 many tasks have been undertaken and completed. They have been financed or co-financed by the following institutions or organizations:

*Ministry of Health*

*State Fund for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities*

*Marshal Office of Lower Silesia*

*Voivode of Lower Silesia*

*Milicz City Office*

*Milicz Powiat Family Assistance Center*

*Polish Foundation for Children and Youth*

*Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (Civil Initiatives Fund)*

*Department of Education of Lower Silesia*

*Ministry of National Education and Sports*

*Stefan Batory Foundation*

*Robert Kyts Foundation*

*Jadwiga Rogulska-Kyts Md. Foundation*

*Office of the Committee for European Integration*

*Milicz Powiat Council*

*Milicz Gmina Council.*

Thanks to the cooperation with these institutions the mission MSPDiON has achieved a greater impact and scope. The funding has improved the facilities, brought new and attractive forms of therapy, and increased professional skills of the staff.

## **Proud Summary**

In sixteen years the Association has grown from a humble initiative helping a small group of needy to a great organization reaching beyond local boundaries. Several facilities now employ highly qualified staff of instructors, educators, physicians, psychologists, speech therapists, physiotherapists, hippotherapists, dog therapists, music therapies, nurses. The employees and volunteers participate in various forms of training and skill improvement endeavors. New attractive and more efficient forms of therapy are constantly introduced. The efficiency is enhanced by adding modern therapeutic equipment. The growth of the prestige and scope of the Association has helped to widen the number of beneficiaries.

We are so proud of our sixteen year quest.