

## **Deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind and people with cochlear implant among us**

Deaf and hard of hearing people of Slovenia are joint in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Clubs Association of Slovenia (acronym ZDGNS) - a non-governmental expert organization that endeavours for equal status and the rights of deaf and hard of hearing persons. It collaborates with competent governmental agencies and bodies, contributing with its motions, remarks, admonitions, and opinions to relevant discussions. Fundamental scope of the Association is to create conditions for full inclusion of deaf and hard of hearing persons in daily job, working environment, and social life.

ZDGNS is an ordinary member of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), the International Hard of Hearing Organization (IFHOH), the world association for the sports of the deaf (Deaflympics), and other international bodies. ZDGNS has founded also the Association of Slovene Sign Language Interpreters.

ZDGNS is an umbrella organization uniting 13 inter-communal member clubs. It is the executor of numerous special social programmes at the state level as well as several social programmes at the local level that are performed by the clubs of persons suffering from this particular category of disabilities.

In 1999, ZDGNS was recognized – after a previous approval of the Ministry of Education & Sports, and the Ministry of Culture - the status of association working for the public interest in the field of social care. In 2003, the Ministry of Labour, Family, and Social Affairs issued a decree on the disability status organization. Since 2004, ZDGNS has been registered as a representative disability organization.

First attempts of adult deaf people in Slovenia to establish their own organization originate from the far 1909. Their fundamental rights and interests have been identified already in that period. The first club was formally founded in 1931.

The deafness is ranged, according to the WHO classification, among the heaviest forms of disability. Because of their hearing impairment, deaf and hard of hearing people mostly suffer from troubles in communication with the hearing environment in which they live, are educated, work, perform artistic or leisure time activities. Communication obstacles, incapacity of interaction with other people due to partial or total loss of hearing are the reasons of various kinds of social exclusion.

Organizations of the deaf are therefore among those with the longest tradition. Based on solidarity, self-help, common experiences with the hearing world, and assistance of the normally hearing persons competent in the deaf people's mother tongue, i.e. the gestures, these organizations satisfy deaf people's special needs and foster the appurtenance to their social environment. The deaf and hard of hearing organizations enable their members to develop their positive identity, create the special deaf culture, and facilitate their integration in the society. No wonder that deaf and hard of hearing clubs throughout Slovenia represent their second home. Special social programmes performed in these clubs are developed for and by the users themselves, and reflect their hinderness. The basic goal of being associated is to

create conditions for full inclusion of the deaf and hard of hearing persons in their working environment and social life.

Deaf people of Slovenia are a 'grey spot' regarding the state regulations on the disability status and are still based on the provisions of the 'Federal self-managing agreement on classification of physical handicaps' adopted by the former Yugoslavia in 1983. According to this classification, deaf people are recognized only 70% physical handicap and are therefore not eligible to the right of the disability status, to get free technical aids, disability pension, and have other benefits. In other countries, deaf people are considered a group of persons with heavy disabilities.

Complementary to the care for this disability category are special social programmes developed to satisfy specific needs of adult deaf and hard of hearing people. These special social programmes are an important contribution to the social care activities that Slovenia provides on the public service basis.

The UN study completed at the end of the Disabled People's Decade includes guidelines for the strategic activities plan in the field of disability issues, and calls special attention to the most vulnerable disability groups among which are also deaf people.

### **Informative activities**

Magazine »From the World of Silence«

TV broadcast »Let's Listen to the Silence«

Own video production – »Video Journal«

ZDGNS website: [www.zveza-gns.si](http://www.zveza-gns.si)

Teletext at the national TV, page 723

Publishing

Persons with hearing impairment have the right of access to any informative sources by means of techniques and the ways adapted to their handicap. These rights are implemented through the previously listed informative activities. Depending on concept of the contents and the actual needs of the target public, the said means of information include reports about deaf people's life and work, their achievements as well as challenges and problems that are hindering their equal integration in the hearing, full-sensual environment. ZDGNS prepares yearly about 10 numbers of the magazine »From the World of Silence«, 20 TV broadcasts »Let's Listen to the Silence«, and 8 own production videos.

All actual news are available on the ZDGNS website, and our teletext page. Although several national TV broadcasts have already been captured this is not enough to satisfy the needs and wishes of deaf viewers striving for an equal access to information and awareness building.

### **The Centre of Possibilities**

I can hear but do not understand.

Usually it takes about seven years before a person, experiencing the impairment of hearing searches for help. The hard of hearing trouble which is often attributed to,

and equalized with the process of ageing is seen as a shame in the modern society whose idol is youthfulness. Stigma and negation, lack of information about consequences of the hearing loss and about possible ways of searching for help are the main reasons why people do not try to find an adequate solution for their hearing problem. A hearing aid is a precious appliance but not suitable for all kinds of hearing impairment and for any circumstances.

The Centre of Possibilities offers technical appliances to meet different needs of the hearing aid users, of persons with deteriorated hearing who do not use hearing aids, as well as of those with total hearing loss. There are several types of alarm clocks with the audio alarm function substituted by flash signals or vibrations, and a series of personalized versions of the basic model. Further on, the Centre demonstrates TV induction loops, phone sets with amplifiers, radio and infra red cordless headphones to listen the TV or radio programme, devices to enable participation in lectures, conferences, and other technical aids.

Within the Centre, these technical appliances are available for testing, training and adaptation to the use of a hearing aid. Experts offer advice on the most suitable hearing aids regarding to one's particular hearing trouble and his/her life style, and give information on the prices and the technical aids suppliers.

### **Advocacy, information, and awareness building**

Advocacy of hard of hearing people, giving information and awareness building are the scopes of the programme that provides hard of hearing people with the most recent data about the rights originating from the compulsory health insurance, explains the procedure of getting a hearing aid or access to the rehabilitation of hearing, offers legal advice regarding the rights upon the disability pension and other rights from the health and pensions disability insurance. Within this programme, information is available about the hearing aid suppliers and maintenance services, technical aids, noise and the consequences of excessive noise, about the self-help groups of hard of hearing people as well as many other data that hard of hearing persons and their families might need.

### **Education and professional qualification**

This programme is developed for adult deaf and hard of hearing persons who require - due to their communication hinderance - a permanent form of education and qualification. By adapted working methods, social isolation can be overcome and created conditions for one's personality growth and integration of deaf and hard of hearing people in their working and social environment as the final objective. In Slovenia there is also the programme of psycho-social assistance to individual aged adult persons and their families.

### **Sports**

Deaf sports have been practiced since 1924. In the world, sports of the deaf are considered as separate sporting activities guided by a separate world sports organization. The sport of the deaf is recognized as olympic sport and competitions

at the world level take place within the Olympic Games of the Deaf (Deaflympics). The Sports Association of the Deaf performs state championships in different branches of sport and a selected team of the best deaf athletes represents Slovenia at all official European and the world deaf championships.

## **Culture**

The culture of the deaf has got a special importance by recognition of the Sign Language according to the recently adopted Law on the use of Slovene Sign Language. In the Republic of Slovenia, deaf persons now have the right to use Sign Language as their mother tongue (i.e. first language). The culture of the deaf within the deaf community originates from the very beginning of organized activities of the deaf in Slovenia. Creativeness of deaf people has been successfully demonstrated in theatre, dance, film, and photography. Every year, one of the Association clubs organizes the International Day of the Deaf that is also a memorial of the World Day of the Deaf. This is the central deaf culture event in Slovenia at which our deaf members present their creative achievements in different arts. At the ZDGNS seat there is a permanent art exhibition.

## **Institute of Slovene Sign Language Interpreter's Association**

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Clubs Association (ZDGNS) actively collaborated in preparation of the Law on the use of Slovene Sign Language. ZDGNS is also the founder of the Slovene Sign Language Interpreters' Association which has got authorization for certain public services according to provisions of this Law.

The Law guarantees the right of deaf people to use Slovene Sign Language and to get information by means of accordingly adapted techniques. Further on, it determines the extent and modes of exercising the right upon the Sign Language interpreter in order to guarantee equal inclusion of deaf people in the living and working environment, and participation in all forms of social life on the basis of equal rights, conditions, and possibilities as those available to citizens without hearing impairment. Sign Language is the communication language of the deaf, i.e. a natural means of communication among deaf people. According to this Law, a deaf person is a person with total hearing loss or a person who uses Sign language as his/her natural language because of hindered communication capacities.

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