

# THE HOSPITAL SCHOOL AND THE PATIENT'S FAMILY HOUSE

## *Born in 1988*

To help the people who suffered from the Spitak earthquake of 1988, the couple of Ernst and Christina Leumanns from Switzerland hurried to Armenia bringing along medical equipment and dialysis machines. While prof. Ernst Leumann, the paediatric nephrologist was dealing with patients' health issues, Mrs. Christina, a special educator was thinking about how to provide education for the children on treatment.

It was decided to found a hospital school running at "Arabkir" Medical Center. The hospital school was also going to take on the social and psychological issues of the patients.

"These children are cut off from their family, environment, home, and the school is an indispensable link in the lives of everyone. All the children wake up in the morning and say, "I go to school". "Going to school" for a sick child, even if it is going from one building to another on the hospital grounds, still means leaving the hospital. The child leaves behind the psychological problem of being locked in a patient's room," says Hasmik Tadevosyan, the president of the Direct Aid Association (DAA) Charity NGO.

The organization was established in 1998, in the 10<sup>th</sup> year of the hospital school activity. At the beginning the students of the school were the children with kidney problems and then all the children receiving long-term treatment at "Arabkir" MC were involved.

The children are taught and taken care of by trained professionals who got acquainted with the international experience of the hospital schools. An individualized educational program/plan is made up for each child according to his abilities and needs. Depending on the student's health and treatment, the lessons are held either in the group or individually in the patient's room.

Narek and Mariam are of different ages, but they learn together in their room. While Mariam repeats the times table with the help of a game, Mary, the hospital school teacher, teaches mathematics to Narek.

"These lessons are very important; the children will not fall behind in the school program. No matter how much I work, what I can do differs from the teacher's work. They may not obey or listen to us, but they listen to the teacher", says Narek's mother, Gaby, who came to Yerevan with her son from Kapan.

Next to the textbooks are the educational games. Mary Abrahamyan, who teaches at the hospital school for eight years, says that playing techniques make the lessons interesting, the children don't get tired, and they are able to complete the gaps that make it easier for them to return to school after the treatment.

The founders of the hospital school, working with many children and their families faced a variety of issues and realized that the educational component was not sufficient. They decided to expand their activities. They began psychological and social work with the family of the sick child. A handicraft atelier was created for children and parents, which not only ensured their leisure but also solved the problem of profession and small income. An important part of the hospital school is the organization of summer camp in Aparan Rehabilitation Center.

"During the camp the children with health issues are away from the parents' overprotection and learn to live independently: they are able to take care of their medication, maintain the routine, if necessary, make an injection (children with diabetes), and communicate with their peers. They feel complete. We have young people who have participated in the camps and now are the leaders of youth clubs they have established. Even if they have a physical problem, they are spiritually ready to enter life as a full person," says Hasmik Tadevosyan.

The hospital school serves up to 1200 children annually. Many are from the regions. Mrs. Hasmik says that in the past there were times when the parents of the children on treatment had to overnight at the station, in the park. The families that are extremely financially underprivileged in the best case are able to bring their child to Yerevan for treatment, but have no opportunities to live in the capital, or to organize the child's care. In order to ease the problem, the Patient's Family House was established which can accommodate simultaneously eight mothers. Last year, 180 people have been temporarily accommodated there, 85% from the regions.

"It is for the 5<sup>th</sup> time we are at the Arabkir hospital. Since we come from far away from Sisian, we stay in Yerevan for months, it was impossible to live in a relative's house. I was offered to stay in the PFH. Here we prepare food, eat, do the washing," says Varsenik Margaryan.

Narek studies in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and acts at the Vardan Achemyan Drama Theater in Gyumri. For some time the playmates will replace him, and the public school will be replaced by the hospital school.

"I am very happy that I do not fall behind in school classes, I can complete the semester. If there is someone of my age in the hospital, we do the lessons together. During the individual classes the knowledge "reaches me" faster than in the classroom with 36-37 students."

Narek came to Yerevan with his mother, Anahit Sanosyan. During the last hospitalization he boy stayed in hospital for three months. Mrs. Anahit does not imagine where she would live, if she wasn't accommodated in the PFH.

"We do not have relatives in Yerevan, but here we are accepted as a family. The truth is the child has an illness but you feel like you have a support," says Mrs. Anahit.

Parents of the children on treatment in the paediatric department of Haematology Hospital named after prof. Yolyan also get services at the PFH. The hospital school, with all its components operates here as well.

For already 30 years the hospital school functions on grants and support from individuals.

"Every time I return to Yerevan I see the rising buildings, wealth and luxury, and the hospital school has a fundraising problem. Sometimes it hurts me very much," says the Swiss founder of the hospital school Christina Leumann.

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