

## **LET'S MAKE THINGS MORE VISIBLE**

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Each morning in Tetovo, at seven o'clock, Beni Sherifi and his 11-year old son Aldin, begin another long day of going to school.

"When I wake up every morning, I brush my teeth, dress, take my bag and go to school"- says Aldin.

On their way to school, they stop to pick up his school mate Lile. Aldin has had impaired vision since he was a little boy. He has to travel to Skopje, as there is no such school in Tetovo.

"I don't work. I dedicate my entire day to Aldin. My wife works in a private company. That's how we manage to go by", says Beni's dad.

"I get into the car and we travel to Skopje, but the trip is exhausting. It takes a long time to get to the school"- complains Aldin.

After an hour of travelling, they arrive on time in the only school in our country for rehabilitation of children and youth with impaired vision. There are a total of 50 students in the school. Some of them, even though they are still very young, live in the student's dormitory because they come from places far from Skopje, while others like Aldin chose to travel.

He had a Math test. This is his favourite thing to do, but it had to be done. He solves the assignments using special devices. He has been practicing a lot, so he quickly found the results.

"I like Art because the lessons are shorter than Maths. To know Maths you need to remember a lot of things and use your brain", says Aldin.

His father's description of Aldin is the following: "Aldin is a very intelligent kid. He has been learning languages, and that is very important for him, especially English. He is quite communicative. He can easily adapt to the people around him. He has friends, both in Skopje and Tetovo. They love him a lot. That's the way he is. "

Blind children from our country have been learning from the same Braille textbooks for 16 years now, although the program has been changed many times. Classrooms are very different from the ordinary ones. Everything is adapted to their needs, their movement, orientation, learning....

"Our new school building is something we are proud of. Trust me when I say that, it is a facility which meets all the needs of this category of students", said the Principal of the School "Dimitar Vlahov", Gorancho Jakimov.

Although this is the only state school for children and youth with impaired vision in our country, foreign donations are needed to improve the educational process. In fact, this is how the new building where Aldin studies was built and equipped.

Zharko Selkoski is the President of the National Association of the Blind. There are around 2500 members. He says that the number of blind people is much higher. There are no statistics with respect to the number of blind children. Officially, only fifty students who study in Skopje attend classes.

“The number of children who don’t go to school is probably quite significant. Those who can’t travel to Skopje should be included in ordinary schools, but the conditions there aren’t suitable for them. We appeal to the institutions to make the conditions, so that these children could go to school”, says Selkoski.

When the authorities do not get involved as much, then it is up to the individuals to fill the gap. One of them is Gazment Azemi. He is blind and he is currently at the final year of computer sciences. He created a computer quiz application with a sound option, thus helping blind students to practice for external testing. He needs the database of questions from the Ministry of Education and Science to prepare the programme.

“It was the lack of literature and access to the sources that made me think of this idea. It is actually a game so that I can ease the work of the students and help them learn more through questions and answers”, explains Gazment.

He receives support by the non-government sector, but he also seeks support from the institutions for his work. The accomplishment of such ideas can greatly facilitate the process of learning for primary school students like Aldin. As for Aldin, his school day has ended. He left Skopje with his father, and they are now going back to their home.

“When we prepare to go back to Tetovo, we get in the car, and try to get quickly out of everyone’s sight in Skopje”, Aldin says while riding in the car.

Aldin goes to a day-care centre for children with special needs three times a week. The non-governmental sector provided funds for opening four day-care centres, as part of the regular education in Bitola, Veles, Shtip and Tetovo.

“I have massages here, talk to my teacher Boletin, there is a magnifying glass, I can draw... There is a printer and I can print letters with Braille alphabet”, explains Aldin, happy with the school activities.

The other children were not there this time. He had the educator’s full attention for himself. After finishing his homework, it was time for his favourite activity. He lies on a mattress that makes vibrations helping him relax. Unlike him, many other blind children probably don’t have access to day-care centres like this one. In fact, most of them don’t have access to modern day conditions.

"It's nothing new when I say that many families have moved out of Macedonia in the last period, especially those with higher living standard, as they haven't been receiving the services they need for their children with special needs from schools and institutions"- said Shpetim Ljatifi, Manager of the USAID project .

The funding of these day-care centres will end in three years. They hope that the state will continue their work.

Finally, it is time for Aldin and his father to go back home. The exhausting day for them is over.

"I would like to be an artist when I grow up. I really like that" – says Aldin.

His father adds that there the state does not provide employment for the blind people in Macedonia and that Aldin will not stay there, but rather continue his education abroad.