

INCLUSION

Parachutists with special challenges

Persons with disabilities have the right to participate in sports, and the type of sport they choose should be adapted to their needs is stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the signatory of which is Macedonia

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Do people with any physical or psychological disability have special needs or challenges? Should the restrictions be demotivating or maybe they can overcome them with more effort? Can we remove the blockades created by this socio-social environment in the minds of all citizens?

If you asked me these or similar questions about three years ago, most likely, I would have answered with some generally accepted empty phrases on the topic, without really thinking about the problems in our society. And they are, to be honest, many. Especially for people who have to work hard every day to keep their normality.

The sky is open to everyone

Many things have changed in my life so that I can enter into the world of atypical people, both with my psychological maturation, but also with increasing my know-how in this subject.

I first spoke to Vangel on the phone. He told me he wanted to jump with a parachute. The phone does not show the challenges of this venture. He told me he jumped in France. I asked him if he had a permit. He told me that he was a quadriplegic, because he had paralysis. This is caused by an illness or an injury, which makes limbs and muscles partially or completely lose their function.

So how was this possible? A parachutist in a wheelchair! He sent me links from the competition in France. I got interested in this idea, which was simply named "The sky is open to everyone". That is how my learning started. A brand new world of parachutists with special challenges has opened up to me. It is not easy to participate in this sport when you cannot control your feet. But when there is a will, there is a way. The specially designed outfit that allows the free-fall together with the instructor to be stable and to reduce the shock on the ground.

We went to Belarus to compete. For the first time, a Macedonian team at this European Championship. Hundreds of contestants, all determined to represent their country. To be the best they can. To show what they learned and how much they learned. In their eyes there was focus and dedication. It hurts when you see the eyes of our people with disabilities. Sad, thoughtful and full of melancholy. You cannot but make a comparison and try to understand at what level we are in Macedonia. All praise to the exceptions, to people who despite their disability, want to live and

participate in atypical sports. They have a spark in their eyes that enchants others. We need these people as superheroes. To encourage everyone else to dream about their future.

Medical persons first see the disability, then the potential

"Do not tell me what I cannot do, tell me what I can, and not now, but the potential I have if I focus on fulfilling my desire for sports," is a thought that goes through my mind when considering this topic.

One part of the problem is that, more often than not, medical staff also see the disability before seeing the potential.

The most common problem is the lack of infrastructure for unobstructed movement throughout the city. But that is part of the problem that can be easily changed. Starting with the change of the name of the most important document for this process, which is called the National Strategy for Equalization of the Rights of Persons with Invalidity. Perhaps in the interest of awareness and acceptance of differences, the legislator should replace the word "invalidity" with "special needs", or, better still, with "special challenges".

This strategy nicely stipulates how to solve the easiest part of the problem. With money, with legal norms, with fines ...

But how to change citizens' attitudes? That is the hardest part. How to explain to them that they should not feel pity for them, and the desire to help atypical citizens should not be due to pity, but because of the potential they have.

In my opinion, the solution is to introduce new sports for people with disabilities. Educating medical staff how to look at the potential. Educating coaches on how to work and how to develop training programs that will result in athletes representing Macedonia in the world. Imagine if the next gold medal from the Olympics to be won by Macedonia in swimming or lifting weights by someone in a wheelchair. Sounds like an utopia?

I can imagine it because I see the potential in our athletes. I can imagine it because of my modest three-year experience with Vangel Trkaljanov.

Professionals ready for changes

The views and opinions of the public are changing very slowly. It is a whole process in which we all need to grow together. We are at a stage in which the awareness about the problems is so great that a certain group of people recognizes them and is ready to do something.

I base this claim on the experience I had in researching which sports are good for atypical people.

When I was thinking on swimming, I contacted our most famous trainer, Natasha Meshkovska. I immediately received all the help and analysis of the possibilities in Macedonia, what needs to be fixed, what to be built. And she already thought about the topic.

When I thought about diving, the instructor Igor Trajanoski gave me a detailed description of what can be done and what cannot be done with scuba diving. He gave his unconditional support.

We looked at the skiing with the Snow Sports Association, which is open to help and to cooperate.

When it comes to alpinism and sport climbing, Aleksandar Zarpchiev talked to us and offered help.

The conclusion is that professionals want to help. It is only necessary to get some structure and, definitely, support from the citizens and the state.

The final proof in support of this claim is the marking of April 2 - International Day for the Support of Autistic People. With only one week preparation, five events were held and a video was made that was broadcast on the very day. It is interesting how people mobilized to help in every way. Designers and printers, cameramen and directors, photographers and graffiti creators, scouts, skaters and parachutists, musicians and singers, all together - about 100 of them, have united to celebrate the day and raise citizens' awareness of this important question.

These are not people with special needs, but with special challenges. Every day they need to work harder to succeed, and in order to fulfill their potential they need understanding. Can we eliminate the blockades from our heads, only time will show.

Finally, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities stipulates that persons with disabilities have the right to participate in sports, and the type of sport they choose should be adapted to their needs. Macedonia is the signatory of this Convention.

(The author is parachute instructor)