

100 anniversary of the school for blind in Varna, Bulgaria

The history of education of visually impaired students in Bulgaria can be divided into 3 main periods:

1. The period of time between 1905 - 1944.
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2. After 1989.

The pioneer and initiator of education for the blind in Bulgaria was the famous and well known Bulgarian scholar Prof. Dr. Ivan Shishmanov, who was the minister of education from 1903 until 1907. During his university studies in Germany, Switzerland and France he was deeply impressed by the institutes for the blind in these countries and was determined to start education for the blind in his native country as well. Prof. Shishmanov appointed to this crucial task Dr. Donev, who had graduated from a university in Germany and had worked for some time as a high school teacher. In July 1904 Dr. Donev attended the congress of teachers of the blind in Halle, Germany and paid a visit to the institute for the blind in Vienna. There he admired the ideas of Zeune, Klein and Alexander Mell. In the winter of 1904 Dr. Donev visited the institutes for the blind in St. Petersburg, Riga, Warsaw and Prague. After his return to Bulgaria he adapted the Braille code to the Bulgarian language.

The first school for the blind in Bulgaria, which was called the State Institute for the Blind, was opened on 1 September 1905 in Sofia. There were 11 blind students admitted in the first class and Dr. Donev was appointed as the first director (principal) of the school. In chronological order the State institute for the blind in Sofia was the 189th institute of such type in Europe.

The educational structure of the institute was organized so that it offered six academic and two professional classes. The professional classes taught the traditional jobs for blind people at that time, for instance: music, tapestry, modelling etc. In 1907 the state institute in Sofia signed a contract with the institute for the blind in Bucharest, Romania, for an exchange of students. In the nineteen twenties a big step in musical education for blind people was made in the institute. The school had a philharmonic orchestra, which was the precursor of the Sofia philharmonic orchestra. In the nineteen thirties many Bulgarian teachers did their training in Germany and France. A lot of special literature was translated from foreign languages into Bulgarian. Very good relations were established with the institute for the blind in Zemun, Yugoslavia and in 1930 its director V. Ramadanovic visited Sofia. In the thirties, the State institute proudly celebrated its first blind students being admitted to the music academy in Sofia.

The second period was a very controversial one. Success and failure followed each other. In 1946 a second special school opened its doors in the city of Varna. In 1952 without any reason the school in Sofia was moved to Varna and this caused confusion and crisis. For eleven years there were two special schools for blind children in the city of Varna, which was absurd and showed a lack of any wisdom in educational planning. In 1963 one of the special schools for blind children was moved back to Sofia, but it turned out this was not the original State institute for blind, established in Sofia in 1905, but the other school, established in

1946. This is the reason why the school celebrating its 100th anniversary is located in Varna. In 1978 and 1979 education in Orientation and Mobility and in Daily living skills started in Varna. In 1980 Mr. Peter Petrov was appointed as director of the school and for the last 25 years he has successfully led the first established school for the blind in Bulgaria. In 1982 the school started a special program in low vision training and in 1984 the first resource service for integrated education of visually impaired was opened. In 1985 the school moved to a new building

After 1989 the third and last period began. Influenced by ICEVI, in 1992 the school opened an early intervention service. In 1998 the first visually impaired multidisabled students were admitted to the school

The students in the school have access to well-designed classrooms in all academic subjects, to a computer center and a resource center for materials. At the current moment a new gym and sports center are under construction.

The school for the blind in Varna participates in many international projects such as those with Overbrook school for the blind in Philadelphia, USA, Hilton/Perkins International in Boston, USA, SENSE International in the UK and CBM in Germany.

The school for the blind in Varna welcomes its 100th anniversary as a very modern school, open to the regular schools and to society.

Prof. Dr. Vladimir Radoulov
(Bulgaria)