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TURKAN SABANCI PRIMARY AND VOCATIONAL
SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

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partner up for the

PROJECT FOR BLIND CHILDREN WITH MULTIPLE
DISABILITIES



**Evaluation Report
December, 2011**

*Drawing upon the evaluation of programs and activities held between 2009 - 2011,
this report has been written by*

*Cemile Ozlem Can, teacher at the Turkan Sabanci Primary and Vocational School for the Blind;
Hilal Yoney, Manager of Finance and Administration of the Sabanci Foundation, and
Elif Alisoglu Cankaya, Education Programs and Facilities Specialist of the Sabanci Foundation.*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Turkan Sabanci Primary and Vocational School for the Blind (TSSB), which is involved in activities for the education of children who are **blind** as well as children who are **blind with multiple disabilities**, has been engaged in a partnership process with the Perkins School for the Blind since the 2004-2005 academic year. TSSB initiated the Project for Blind Children with Multiple Disabilities (BCMD) in the 2002-2003 academic year, and improved it in collaboration with specialists from the Perkins School for the Blind.

Established within this framework, the BCMD Nursery Unit comprises a BCMD Prep Class with a view to lay the infrastructure for the higher grades to come. Accordingly, once the BCMD complete their preschool education, it will be possible for them to take part in the individual education programs and the classroom settings to complete their eight-year basic education. Via the early intervention leg of the Project for BCMD, the goal is to reach out to the children who are blind as well as children who are blind with multiple disabilities at the youngest age possible, to offer guidance to both the child and the family, to follow up and support all aspects of the child's development, and to offer the required psychological and social support for the family within the framework of family education. Consequently, the target audience for the project is composed of blind children with multiple disabilities, educators, and families.

Subsequent to the successful outcomes of the 5-year cooperation of **TSSB and Perkins School for the Blind**, in **2009 the Sabanci Foundation and Vista Tourism and Travel Company have signed an agreement** marking a new collaboration, through which the goal is providing consultancy to the TSSB teachers, sharing experiences to reinforce capacity, and ensuring a higher quality education for students with multiple disabilities.

The activities covered by the project have been addressed in 3 steps:

- **Capacity Development Initiatives:** In order to equip the TSSB teachers with knowledge, skills and experience, **trainings** have been held and **communication methods** have been developed for children with multiple disabilities. Initiatives to craft a new program for **vocational education** have also been launched.
- **Teacher Exchange Program:** 2 teachers from TSSB visited the Perkins School for the Blind which has allowed them the opportunity for an on-site observation of the work carried out for children with multiple disabilities.
- **Family Counseling:** Specialists from the Perkins School for the Blind have offered support and counseling services for families of students enrolled in TSSB.

As part of the project, **specialists from the Perkins School for the Blind** have held periodic **trainings** with the **teachers, assistant teachers and interns** of the **Multiple Disabilities Department** of TSSB about various themes regarding blind children and youth with additional disabilities. Prior to the training sessions, the specialists have observed the classrooms and the students to render the training more effective, and the theoretical work has been buoyed through applied practices. Furthermore the specialists have observed the classrooms in the aftermath of which they provided feedback for the classroom teachers and the departmental physical therapist. In another leg of the project training meetings have been held for parents and for families of the infant group.

In the wake of the project which marked a first in Turkey in terms of addressing the population with multiple disabilities;

- **76 teachers have been trained** through 5 seminars held by the specialists of the Perkins School for the Blind.
- **2 teachers** from the TSSB have **attended an exchange program** so as to specialize in the field of "multiple disabilities".
- The families of **70 TSSB students** have been provided with **counseling services**.

The program is of utmost importance since it marks a first-time practice in Turkey for children with multiple disabilities, blind children with multiple disabilities, teachers and families; and takes a step towards the foundation of the education of blind children with multiple disabilities in our country.

DETAILS OF THE INITIATIVES WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT FOR BLIND CHILDREN WITH MULTIPLE DISABILITIES (BCMD)

- **Activities, Outcomes, Benefits, Areas for Further Improvement, Recommendations for the Future:**
 - **Capacity Development Initiatives**
 - **Teacher Exchange Program**
 - **Family Counseling**
- **Testimonials by Participants Regarding the Project for BCMD**
- **Quantitative Data**

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

Activities:

- A total of **76 TSSB teachers** have been trained through the 5 seminars held within the scope of the project.
- Specialists from the Perkins School for the Blind have devised **communication methods** for blind children with multiple disabilities.
- Since Turkey lacks programs or curricula for blind children with multiple disabilities, **program development for pre-service and in-service** vocational education has been kicked off under the guidance of specialists from the Perkins School for the Blind.

Outcomes:

- The seminars whereby 76 teachers have been trained have marked the commencement of initiatives for the population with multiple disabilities who endure major shortcomings in Turkey and in the curricular program.
- Communication skills, which play a major role in the education of blind children with multiple disabilities, have been conveyed through the analysis of exemplary practices, whilst educators have been informed on the development of alternative communication models.

Benefits:

- The project has **enhanced the specialization level of TSSB educators** with regards to the teaching of communication skills, development of alternative communication skills and development of programs targeting blind children with multiple disabilities.
- The education capacity of TSSB has been upgraded, making it a **reference school** for the education of blind children with multiple disabilities.
- TSSB has attained the image of a **specialist school that follows up on innovative practices and improves itself**, and it has upgraded its capacity to be designated as one of the limited number of schools in its respective field.

Areas for Further Improvement:

- To ensure that the trained **teachers stay with the school**, the teacher appointment system should be ameliorated and agreements should be signed with the Ministry of Education.
- The information from the trainings should be printed out, and **experiences should be shared with newly appointed teachers** alongside guidance support.

Recommendations for the Future:

- It is advisable to **carry on the cooperation with the Perkins School** that works in many countries with blind children with multiple disabilities and educators and leverage on their experience and specialization.
- A **trainers training** should be held in areas of need that require development.
- Our country faces challenges due to lack of teacher training for the education of blind children with multiple disabilities. Shortage of schools and classrooms of adequate capacity to cater to the education of students with disabilities is coupled with shortcomings in the current curriculum and program. It is indispensable to formulate programs for the education of **blind children with multiple disabilities**. It is necessary to set up schools and centers of adequate quantity and capacity to ensure that blind children with multiple disabilities may continue their education after elementary school and it is urgent to devise programs to equip teachers with pre-service and in-service vocational skills.
- To upsurge the productivity of training seminars, the planning process for the **seminars should commence at the outset of each academic year**.

TEACHER EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Activities:

- **2 teachers** from the Departments of Early Intervention and Blind Children with Multiple Disabilities at the TSSB have **attended a two-week special summer course** at the Perkins School for the Blind.

Outcomes:

- The summer course has enabled an **on-site observation of the education program at the Perkins School**.
- It has provided information about the **training methods in practice, and the programs and materials** in use.
- Throughout the course, the teachers have **exchanged information with colleagues** who work with blind children with multiple disabilities around the world.
- The teachers have conveyed their learning and observations to the department teachers, enabling **experience sharing and knowledge transfer**.

Benefits:

- The teachers who attended the summer course within the scope of the teacher exchange program have enjoyed the opportunity to **observe the Perkins School specialists in their classroom environment**.
- The program has increased the level of knowledge about the **examples of practices and education models** in the respective countries of the participants from around the world.
- The on-site observation of the education process of blind children multiple disabilities has **equipped the teachers with meaningful experience**.

Areas for Further Improvement:

- It is advisable to conduct **on-site observation** of the practices of **educators** who work with blind children with multiple disabilities.

Recommendations for the Future:

- **International seminars and conferences** should be held to provide more teachers the opportunity to exchange information with their colleagues from various countries with regard to practices in the education of blind children with multiple disabilities.

Activities:

- The **parents of the students** enrolled in the department for blind children with multiple disabilities as well as the infant group have received once-a-week trainings, which totaled up to **20** training sessions in 2009-2010 academic year, and **18** sessions in the 2010-2011 academic year.
- Specialists from the Perkins School for the Blind have offered **special education and counseling services for the families** as part of the project.

Outcomes:

- The services have been offered to a total of **70 families**.

Benefits:

- The training sessions have offered **social and psychological support for the families**, emphasizing the role and significance of family in the education of children.
- The sessions have raised the awareness of **families** with respect to the importance of **communication with their children**. The families were informed about the development of communication skills. Consequently, their perspective towards their children has shifted and they grew more willing to work with the department teachers.
- It has been observed that the **children of families who attended the trainings regularly** were more at ease in the use of alternative communication skills and adapted better as they started school, and they exhibited **fewer behavioral problems** thanks to their familiarity with the school.
- The teachers have regularly followed up on the development of the children whose families attended the training.

Areas for Further Improvement:

- For more effective and efficient **parent training**, the **scope** of the training should be **expanded** and the **duration** should be **extended**.
- Since families attended the trainings by their own means, those who lived further away and were of poor financial status were not able to show up on a regular basis.

Recommendations for the Future:

- Since it was mainly the mothers who attended the parent training sessions, it is necessary to **involve the fathers and siblings in the sessions as well**.
- Instead of parent trainings solely geared for the parents, it is advisable to practice modules that involve the blind children with multiple disabilities together with their parents.
- It is essential to support the participation of parents of poor financial status who reside further away.

TESTIMONIALS

“My son Erkut is 8-years-old. He is visually and physically impaired. When I first took him to the Turkan Sabanci Primary and Vocational School for the Blind he was unable to stand up straight, chew, or move independently. We could not even dream that our son could go to the same school as his peers. We attended the program on multiple disabilities; currently Erkut shares the same rows with his peers at the Turkan Sabanci Primary and Vocational School for the Blind... Words fail me in trying to express the impact of the program and what a major change it has brought to our lives.” Parent

“My daughter Aybike Gizem Kalfa born on 29.10.1993 has both visual and mental impairment. Prior to school, my daughter showed several behavioral disorders, yet owing to the high quality education at the school she has covered a long distance in a short while. She was a child who yelled for no reason, gave serious physical damage to herself and the people around since she could not verbalize her aggression and reactions, was unable to follow instructions, suffered sleep problems and had to use heavy tranquilizers to soothe these problems. Thanks to her education, first she stopped using medication. She began to express herself in brief sentences, which terminated her aggression and destructive behavior. My daughter now engages in self-help skills, is more self-confident, and most importantly, she exerts efforts to turn out as a happy individual. This makes me hopeful and happy about her future.” Ayşe Aydin, Parent

“My son Burak Ede born on 28.08.1995 has visual and mental impairments. Before starting school, he never went off the swing, never spoke, and had to be diapered. After school, he began to enjoy walking and he occasionally says ‘daddy’. He received toilet training. He used to be aggressive, now it is over. He loves crowds. We get on the bus easily, we can go out; he enjoys going to the park.” Fazli Ede, Parent

“Before starting school, my daughter Esra Torlak was a disabled child unable sit properly, unable to utter a single word. She had to be diapered and was unable to walk on her own. After starting school, her walking and toilet training started. She no longer has any toilet problems, and she began to utter a couple of words such as mommy, daddy, every... She adores her school.” Songul Torlak, Parent

“It was a first-time experience for us when our child was born. Since there was no such child in the family or around us, we had no knowledge or no idea on how to approach him. Through the support and guidance of our university professor we enrolled in the school. The Department of Blind Children with Multiple Disabilities was the only school we could apply to in the whole country. Our child has been attending this school for the last 6 years and it has contributed so much to us; he can now stay in unfamiliar settings and among people, he got accustomed to sounds and smells he was unfamiliar with; he got accustomed to multiple settings and sounds that he previously had no tolerance for. Then he learned to communicate his needs through sign language thanks to the tremendous efforts of his esteemed teachers. Even this development alone is enough to make us incredibly happy. We had to diaper our child until the 3rd grade, and thanks to toilet training today he can lead a diaper-free life. We can say so much more about how much the school has contributed to our lives. We are deeply grateful to the teachers who launched the program, offered their contributions, and shed light to our child’s life through their selfless dedication.” Yilmaz Durkaya, Parent

“We learned how to teach at the training sessions we attended. We learned to teach alternative communication skills. I can use sign language to communicate with my student who has no speech, no sight, and suffers severe mental disability. When I pose a question, he thinks that I see using my hands like he does, and he puts his hands beneath mine to answer me, and I affirm through words and signs that I have understood him, and he comes up with a big smile on his face out of his achievement and his ability to express himself. It is a great feeling for both of us.” Teacher

“Gizem is a student of mine who has both visual impairment and severe mental disability. When she first came to class she had violent tendencies and self-destructive habits. It was so hard to keep her in the classroom and communicate with her. I applied the special education techniques I learned at the trainings and we formulated a special education program for Gizem. Her progress within one year was unbelievable. She can come to school unaided by her mother, no longer inflicts harm on herself and she conforms to the class rules. I feel happy as I see the changes that the trainings bring to the lives of our students with disabilities.” Teacher

QUANTITATIVE DATA

Table 1 - Grade Level and Number of Students who Received Family Support

Grade Level	Number of Students
Infant Group	20
BCMD Nursery	12
BCMD Primary School	38
TOTAL	70

Table 2 - Teachers who Attended the Trainers Training

Branch / Grade Level	No. of Teachers	Teachers who attended the Trainers Training and continue teaching at the School in the 2011-2012 Academic Year
Nursery Teachers	7	3
Primary School Teachers	9	4
Assistant Teachers	28	7
Intern Teachers	32	-
TOTAL	76	14

Table 3 - Training Sessions and the Number of Participants

Date of Training	Scope of Training	No. of Participants
April 13-17, 2009	Trainers Training	35
November 21-28, 2009	Trainers Training and Parent Training	35
July 6-17, 2009	Teacher Exchange Program (Trainers Training)	2
May 11-14, 2010	Trainers Training and Parent Training	34
April 18-23, 2011	Trainers Training	24

One educator has attended more than one Trainers Training.