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Author: Cihan Yavuz
English Translation: Bahar Eriş
English Editor: Rana Zincir Celal
Designer: Çağlar Mertler
Design: Alaaddin Adworks
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GRANT PROGRAM
STORIES

SABANCI FOUNDATION CHAIRMAN GÜLER SABANCI

My grandfather Hacı Ömer Sabancı earned his bread working in the fields as a cotton worker. It was agriculture that laid the foundations of the industrial establishments that now comprise the Sabancı Group; the soil was our bread and butter. Working the soil is difficult; it takes effort. First the soil is cultivated; then seeds are sown, fertilized and irrigated. Even harvest has its time, where each step in the process makes a difference in the outcome. How deeply seeds are planted into the soil, the amount of water, the type of fertilizer are all important factors in the cycle of growth. Working the soil requires perseverance. It is not enough for the soil to be ready; you must consider the seasons as well. Harvesting the crop does not signal the end; sometimes the soil lies fallow for a year. Whatever that year’s harvest may have yielded, once September leads to October, excitement looms anew with a fresh start as new seeds are sown once again...

Over the course of our 90-year-relationship with soil in the Sabancı family, it has always been crucial for us to “share what we earned from this land with the people of this land”. When we established the Sabancı Foundation in 1974, we set out to contribute to social development and to make a difference in people’s lives.

In 2006 we underwent a restructuring process, diversifying our work in the Foundation. We examined new trends in philanthropy and best practices from around the world. We conducted public opinion polls to understand the needs of disadvantaged populations in Turkey. As a result of this process, we established a new set of programs which includes the Social Development Grant Program. This Program supports projects of NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) that ensure equal access to rights and services and foster social participation of women, youth and persons with disabilities.

Since 2009, 11 projects supported in this program touched the lives of nearly 60,000 women, youth, persons with disabilities and their families and communities in 71 provinces across Turkey. Some addressed the critical issue of child brides, others developed new models to support the national education system to effectively adopt mainstream education for children with disabilities, and others sought to ensure that young people have access to greater opportunities for employment. What all these projects have in common is a shared goal of social development. They all sowed new seeds and worked in pursuit of a better tomorrow.

Through this grant program, Sabancı Foundation sows a small seed with each project, to enable those who strive for social change. This book tells the story of 11 seeds that give us hope for a better future. Each project has come to life with a great deal of dedication and in the process, planted new seeds. While these seeds may take years to bear fruit, we must be patient, as farming is quite like social development, requiring perseverance. May we continue to see many more sowing seasons that cultivate in abundant harvests...
The Sabancı Foundation Social Development Grant Program aims to advance social development by promoting an equitable environment in which women, youth and persons with disabilities have access and equal opportunities to actively participate in society.

**WHY WOMEN, YOUTH AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES?**

In Turkey, there are approximately 37 million women, 12 million youth, and nearly 9 million persons with disabilities (of which nearly 2 million have an orthopedic, visual, hearing, speech and / or mental disability).

These three groups share many challenges when it comes to social development: For example, 12% of women and 36% of persons with disabilities at school age are illiterate. 70% of youth at university age are not attending school. These circumstances also bear a direct impact on economic participation: a majority of women (78%), youth (62%) and persons with disabilities (78%) are excluded from the workforce.

While 28% of men with disabilities are illiterate, this rate increases to 48% for women with disabilities.

Only 32% of men with disabilities are in the workforce, in comparison to a mere 7% of women with disabilities.

Among youth age 15-24, women (75%) are more likely to be excluded from the workforce as compared to men (48%).

The situation is even more challenging for those that face ‘double discrimination’.
Unfortunately, more specific data is very limited. Lack of research is in fact itself a significant indicator of the invisibility of these populations and the concealed nature of their challenges. However, statistics that are available clearly convey that women, youth and persons with disabilities are facing great injustices with regards to social and economic participation.

To help address these social injustices, the Sabancı Foundation Grant Program supports non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in developing and implementing programs to empower individuals and address the systemic root cause of these challenges, particularly in cases of “double discrimination”.

Projects funded through the grant program are monitored closely through reporting and site visits. Connections between projects are fostered through experience sharing meetings and seminars organized by the Sabancı Foundation on a regular basis.

1 Prime Ministry of the Republic of Turkey, Turkish Statistical Institute, Address-Based Population Registry System Research, 2010
Prime Ministry of the Republic of Turkey, Administration for Disabled People, Research on People with Disabilities, 2002
UNDP, Turkey Human Development Report, 2008

2 Prime Ministry of the Republic of Turkey, Administration for Disabled People, Research on People with Disabilities, 2002

3 UNDP, Turkey Human Development Report, 2008
Playing House is Fun, But Only as a Child’s Game!
Dear Diary,
My grandmother visited today. I kissed her hand. She stayed over for dinner. She told me she would take me to the village in the summer. I felt so happy.

Dear Diary,
Today at school the teacher asked what we would like to be when we grow up. I told her that I would like to be a teacher. She was very happy. We jumped rope with the girls after school. We barely even noticed how much we sweated! My mom told me that we will have guests coming to our house tomorrow, but I didn’t understand a thing.

Dear Diary,
They married me off today…

This is the last sentence of the diary of millions of girls in Turkey every year. Yesterday I jumped rope and today I was married off. The childhoods of millions of children are irreversibly altered with that last sentence. Their dreams are concealed under a veil, they step into womanhood and motherhood without even having had a chance to experience childhood. The heavy burden of womanhood is placed on the fragile shoulders of childhood.

A study conducted by Hacettepe University “Examples of Pressure Placed on Women in Turkey due to Gender Equality: Early Marriage, Bride Wealth and Male Child Preference” shows that the rate of girls married below the age of 18 in Turkey is 40%
Currently there are approximately more than 5 million women who were married before the age of 18. The number of women whose marriage decision is made by their family is approximately 7 million. And according to a study by the Turkish Grand National Assembly Gender Equality Commission, families of more than 2 million girls are paid bride wealth.

These striking figures confirm the enormity of the problem. In Anatolia, millions of children are forced into marriage and parenthood before they even become youngsters, leaving an effect that lasts for a lifetime.

A Woman Interviewed During a Meeting in Van (Eastern Turkey):
“I was married off at an early age. While everyone else was going to school, I was married to a 30 year old man when I was only 13. I had never met or seen him before. My father married me to him because he was his friend’s son. When I saw him, he seemed as old as my father! I could not approach him at all and I felt so scared when he was at home. I couldn’t even go to his room. I always viewed him like a father. That is why I condemn fathers who do this. And I still have not completely redeemed myself of that psychology.”

“Let’s End Child Marriage!” was the slogan used by the Flying Broom Association to reach public authorities, local leaders, NGOs, local media, universities and citizens in towns all across Turkey.

Supported by the 2010 Sabancı Foundation Social Development Grant Program, the Flying Broom Association project aimed to raise public awareness through a media campaign and by targeting schools and public institutions. The project also included research and field work about the prevalence and attitudes towards child marriage, which formed the basis of advocacy efforts.

Public meetings and film screenings were held in 54 of Turkey’s 81 major cities, reaching more than 20,000 people. Each film screening featured two short films about child marriage, and was followed by presentations and discussions about gender issues and early marriage. One on one meetings with nearly 300 NGOs and local government offices were also organized.

Women’s Assembly Representative from the Kars City Council (Northeastern Turkey):
“It is a major problem, but I don’t know how it can be addressed. We decided to hold a seminar with male participants. That is because no matter what women in the East may say, they can’t act without the approval of men. They even have to ask men whom to vote for. We wanted to hold the first seminar to explain to men how women should be treated. We have to educate everyone starting with public institutions.”
SHE WAS 15 AND THEY MARRIED HER OFF
A Girl Attending Meetings in Bingöl (Eastern Turkey):
“I had a friend. She was married earlier than us but it was upon her own will. She was 15.”

Sometimes just one sentence can capture an entire childhood. While most people have a vivid collection of memories with their childhood friends, in this geography, with its invisible and inaudible children, the most vibrant times of their young lives is collapsed into a single sentence: “She was 15 and they married her off.” However, the drama contained within this one statement finds no place in the media, is unknown to millions. Flying Broom carried out an extensive media campaign to elevate the silenced voices of child brides, raising and sustaining the issue within the public agenda. Visits to cities around the country were organized and thousands of signatures to increase the legal marriage age to 18 were collected. Through local and internet based outreach efforts, thousands expressed their support for the petition.

The project gained the political support of the Turkish Grand National Assembly Gender Equality Commission as well as the support of a famous singer, Burhan Şeşen, who composed a song for the campaign and performed it for the first time at a press conference together with his daughter Dilhan Şeşen.

A Young Woman Attending Meetings in Siirt (Southeastern Turkey):
“I was married off at 16. I grew up in poverty. I was married to a relative upon my own will. I have 6 children. I was a mother at 17. My husband is unemployed; we have serious economic difficulties. My biggest dream is that my husband finds a job and that our financial problems come to an end.”

A childhood of poverty, motherhood at 17, a life of ongoing poverty... Without taking steps to correct such injustices, the vicious cycle of fate will only continue. Child brides inherit the legacy of their mothers, making it part of their own lives.
**Broken Chains**

With the Child Brides project, Flying Broom tried to break the chain of that vicious cycle. In each city, meeting participants filled out surveys. Local government institutions in 10 cities were also surveyed. The outcomes of this research produced an analysis of early marriages in Turkey and were used as a basis for the advocacy efforts.

This is the story of a project that reached thousands in 54 cities. Another way of conveying the message, perhaps more profoundly, is through the poem, Ünzile, by Aysel Gürel who recently passed away, and that was immortalized in a song by Sezen Aksu.

For all child brides, for all those with pearly teeth, for all those who grow into adulthood before the age of 8, for all those who are too frightened to walk even as far as the last fence in their village, for all those who are both child and woman and mother at 12, for all silent women, for all Ünzile’s like a rose, red and tender, and like water, all serene and clear ...

Ünzile, a human offspring,
Five dead out of her ten siblings,
Grows up all crumbled
Until they come to make her a bride
Her teeth are pearls in a line
The visitors have a keen eye
Weeps my willow as she leaves
To become a woman child
An adult younger than eight
Ünzile,
A woman and a child
A mother at twelve
Like a rose, so red and tender,
Like water, all serene and clear,
A silent woman, Ünzile
Who pours down the rain?
How many sheep is she worth?
She has stopped questioning
Fed up with all the beating ...
Scared to leave, she stays,
She thinks the village border
Is that last fence,
Thinks that is where the world ends...
Ünzile, a human offspring,
Loaded her secrets of misery
In her belly pregnant with mystery,
An adult younger than eight,
Ünzile,
A child and a woman
A mother at twelve
Like a rose, so red and tender,
Like water, all serene and clear,
A silent woman, Ünzile...
AND WHAT ABOUT PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES?

These days, we live among a funfair of astounding images. We see fireworks ablaze, skyscrapers rising tall, concerts commencing, traffic flowing, cafes brimming with people, flamboyant invitations... This raving festival of our daily lives accommodates every detail, allows time for everything. Yet we should acknowledge that we do not spare ‘them’ a room in this lively funfair. ‘They’ are like those books always waiting to be read on the back shelf of our lives. We go blind and mute the moment we face this reality. We are unable to create a moment in the funfair of our lives. However, they are not part of the funfair; they are part of our lives. They do not represent our mercy; they represent our equality. They are not a problem someone should solve; they are a solution we should all be part of.

This is exactly why KAMER, an NGO that has been working with women in the Southeast for many years, decided it was time to include women with disabilities in their programs for the first time through the Removing Barriers project.

Supported within the scope of the 2009 Sabancı Foundation Social Development Grant Program, the project worked with NGOs in Diyarbakır, Hakkari, Şanlıurfa,
Tunceli and Van. With a team of volunteers, they visited homes one by one to understand the problems of women and children with disabilities.

The founder of KAMER, Nebahat Akkoç shares the inception of their idea to work in the field of disabilities as follows: “One day, during a panel about the problems of women in Erzurum, a woman in the audience stood up during the session and asked: ‘And what about the persons with disabilities? What are you going to do for them? For instance, how should persons with disabilities subject to violence apply to you?’ I was dumbstruck by the question. I realized how unfamiliar we were with the topic of disability in KAMER. The question had come from a mother with a disabled daughter. After talking to her I realized we had to start somewhere.”

During the first phase of the project, KAMER project coordinators began to visit homes to conduct a survey on a wide range of topics, such as the extent to which families could take advantage of the social services intended for persons with disabilities, the literacy rate of women, and the physical conditions of the houses and the neighborhoods.

They visited a total of 15,000 households in 5 provinces, identifying the number of children and women with disabilities residing in those homes. The household visits, which collected data on a population of nearly 90,000 people, revealed that the rate of disabilities in the 5 provinces was 7%.

44% of the women in the visited households were illiterate whereas 90% were unemployed. When women were asked the question “what is your main problem?”; the answer was that they primarily wanted a job, then a clean neighborhood and a park for their children.

KAMER defied the phrase “don’t let the cat out of the bag”, and went after the cat. They traveled from one home to the next, reaching out to the persons with disabilities that families were hesitant to disclose though they cared for them dearly.

They set out on a second round in order to assess and expand the data derived from the initial visits, focusing on households with children and women with disabilities in order to identify their distinct challenges. The analysis yielded figures that highlighted the magnitude of the problem for women with disabilities:

- 45% had never been to school
- 49% received no special social assistance
- 28% married before the age of 18
- 78% required home care

In households with persons with disabilities, women assumed all the responsibility for care. The age average of women was 41.
Nebahat Akkoç summarizes how the project transformed KAMER at the institutional level: “When we decided to develop a project for persons with disabilities as well as for their families, we realized that in KAMER we lacked the skill to communicate with persons with disabilities. We had our concerns. How does that person feel, what language should we use? We had no command of those issues. Later we held comprehensive meetings within our organization just to realize that we all came from a different perspective. We established consensus about gender equality but we had failed to develop a common language for disability. As we worked in the field we learned how to do that as well. The major benefit for us was raising our own awareness, our self-education. Together we attained a common point in terms of language and responsibilities.”

Once KAMER staff broadened their awareness about the issue of disability, they organized neighborhood meetings and children’s festivities during the third phase of the project with a view to sharing this message and understanding with communities.

While the household visits continued, neighborhood meetings were held so that KAMER could work more comfortably and discuss the problems of the neighborhood with the women. 2,000 women attended 33 neighborhood meetings in five provinces. The meetings allowed women to have their questions answered, share their expectations from KAMER and discuss gender issues.

Out of the 500 children attending the festivities, 200 had disabilities. The events helped to promote an atmosphere of understanding and awareness by bringing children together.

**BARRIER-FREE CHANGE IN KAMER**

As the neighborhood meetings took place, KAMER initiated activities to close their own gaps in the disability area.

**Nebahat Akkoç:**

“We realized during the project that none of us knew sign language. We were stupefied in front of a deaf and mute person. We contacted the Youth Federation of Turkey communicating our desire to learn sign language. Then we realized that we had built the KAMER offices on the second and third
floors. We had not assessed how a person with a physical disability could access our building. We moved 10 of our offices to ground floors. We built ramps for buildings with elevators. We are looking for space on the ground floor for our other offices as well.”

KAMER underwent this internal change on one hand, while generating a comprehensive report about the project on the other. KAMER presented its report to a range of decision-making bodies, mainly the Turkish Grand National Assembly. Moreover, report findings from the Mother Child Education Foundation’s “Inclusive Societies” seminar was shared with other institutions.

“Working with other NGOs, we witnessed the outrage in the field of disability. They were impatient and tense since promises had not been kept for years. It was tough to work with them initially but then we shared our work methodologies and achieved a collaborative relationship. We put together a booklet about addressing violence towards women. We realized that it lacked a provision about violence towards persons with disabilities. We revised and shared it with all NGOs as well as the persons with disabilities we had visited.”

As a result of the project, KAMER reoriented its work in the field of women: instead of women coming to KAMER, KAMER began to visit homes and neighborhoods and to serve women with disabilities for the first time.
Before we ask any questions, the mother describes the situation in a rush as if she is testifying. She sums up the life that she has lived, never having asked for any help, nor feeling any gratitude either. We inquire if anyone has visited her home about her children. She begins by thanking KAMER. “No one visited us until they came. They told us about our rights and left their phone number. They told us whom to call if anything happened to other children. Now we feel safe since there is someone backing us.”

We ask if we can take her photo with her children, and her answer indicates how far behind we stand in the area of disabilities: “Please don’t. I can’t take my children out because people will learn that they have disabilities; I don’t let them mingle with people. Don’t take their photos and show it to everyone.”

Her words come to an end. Her words pile up, forming a mountain to cross. KAMER’s Removing Barriers Project made the first attempt to cross that mountain. During the project, both the institution and the families of persons with disabilities have come a long way through initiatives to raise their awareness. Today, those narrow alleys are expanding step by step. The voices of the six deaf and mute siblings now reach up towards the summit of the mountain.
KAMER volunteer conducting a survey during a household visit
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL ISSUES ASSOCIATION (TOKAGEDER)

SERVICE FOR
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND
JOBS FOR WOMEN AND YOUTH

A New Job, A New Perspective
Many of us refer to persons with disabilities as ‘disabled’. We leave out their name, profession, dreams, and identity. That person is first a disabled friend to us before he or she is Ali, Ayşe, or Ahmet. Our sentiment of pity precedes our desire to know that person; we act based on feelings of mercy. We struggle with approaching them or communicating with them, and our ignorance hurts both sides.

Based in İzmit, the Research and Development of Social Issues Association (TOKAGEDER) developed a project to increase services and home care for persons with disabilities.

Supported within the scope of the 2009 Sabancı Foundation Social Development Grant Program, the project trained qualified staff in the field of home care.

The first leg of the project involved a comprehensive training program targeting those wishing to work in this sector and individuals who have relatives with disabilities. Applicants were interviewed and then selected for participation in the course.

**Institution:** Research and Development of Social Issues Association (TOKAGEDER)

**Founded in:** 2006

**Mission:** Research social issues using scientific methods, share findings with the public, organize activities to contribute to individual as well as social development.

**Contact Details:** +90 262 323 12 43
www.tokageder.org

**Project Title:** Service for Persons with Disabilities and Jobs for Women and Youth

**Project Goal:** Train and employ young women to provide home care services for persons with disabilities.

**Project Partners:** Kocaeli Municipality Association of Contemporary Women

**Period:** June 2009 - March 2010

**Activities:**
- Develop and design a 256-hour training program on home care for persons with disabilities
- Deliver training for 30 course participants wishing to work in disability care or who have children with disabilities
- Internship for course participants at local rehabilitation centers
- Online CV databank and job placement for course participants
- Training content certified by the Ministry of Education and ongoing courses implemented at Public Education Centers
A training program of 256 hours featuring five expert trainers was designed. 30 people wishing to work in the field of care for persons with disabilities and parents who have children with disabilities attended the training which covered seven subjects: Personal Development of Persons with Disabilities, Types of Disability, Handicaps and Challenges, Psycho-Social Education, Relations of Persons with Disabilities with their Families, Basic Health and Personal Care for Persons with Disabilities, Personal Development of People with Hearing and Visual Impairments. The training program was also certified by the Ministry of Education.

**Kamile Canbay, Project Coordinator:**
"Following the training program, our course participants changed their outlook towards life. They developed a heightened sense of social responsibility. From knowing nearly nothing about persons with disabilities, they now are knowledgeable on several different levels, including how to act towards and how to advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities. Although some participants ended up working in another professional area following this course, they started to volunteer in rehabilitation centers or centers for persons with disabilities. The relatives admitted their countless mistakes over the years in giving care to persons with disabilities, and are now more self-reflective and adapting their practices in all areas, from physical development to personal skills. They revealed that including their relatives with disabilities in their social lives, how to think in terms of sharing rather than simply looking after someone, or how to make the individual a part of the problem-solving process were unknown to them. As their approaches towards home care changed, so too did the lives of persons with disabilities."

**A Course Participant:**
"Coming from a family with a person with a disability, I am grateful to the organizers of this course. What I learned here cleared all the question marks in my mind that had been left unanswered for so many years. I have come to understand that my thirty year old spastic son could still learn something, that he has a very special place in our society and that I have to revisit our plans for his education, health and skills development. The internships throughout the course have been tremendously helpful. I was very happy to be in dialogue with them and I plan to visit them on my days off in the future."

Once the training was over, the process of placing the course participants in jobs began. The CVs of those who had successfully completed the course were collected into an online data bank and employment opportunities were identified. At the end of the process, 16 course participants were able to find employment, meeting the target that was set out at the beginning of the project.
Sometimes your home is your limit. Your neighborhood is your whole world. Everything ends with the next street whether you like it or not. Families draw lines with chalk, they paint over entire neighborhoods, and your financial situation becomes a chain. You can’t leave home. Your street turns into a haunted neighborhood. You stumble upon invisible obstacles. You may be living in an enormous city, yet all you have is a tiny corner of a town. Though it may sound distant to us, in this world, millions of young people dream of the one morning when they will be able leave the confines of their home …

Kamile Canbay:
“Most of our course participants were young women who were not allowed to leave their homes. They had dropped out of high school for a number of reasons. Most of their families did not want them to work. Together with the financial hardships they faced, it was difficult for them to leave home and socialize. Through our course, we had the opportunity to reach out to such individuals and convinced their families to enable them to attend the courses. They paid no fees; we had a shuttle service that picked them up from their homes and offered them lunch. And they saw that they were able to learn something. They believed in their ability to change their worlds and help others. Even the flourishing of that self-belief was enough to make the whole process worthwhile.”

Course Participant:
“At the beginning, what I wanted from the course was to get the certificate so that I could find work. However, as the course progressed, what I learned
began to pull me in other directions. Previously I knew very little about persons with disabilities; I used to ignore them like many people do. But I learned that barriers are there to be overcome. Over the course of our internship, I learned to respect their rights, and that they had the right to equal conditions. No one can ostracize them; they deserve to live a humane life.”

The project transformed not only the course participants and persons with disabilities, but also TOKAGEDER. Founded in 2006, the Association was seeking how, in the midst of hundreds of problems, it could specialize in and develop solutions in one area. Reminiscent of the search for a beacon in the ocean, it was looking for a goal in which to pour its energy and knowledge. The project steered TOKAGEDER to its respective course, inspiring other institutions along the way.

**Kamile Canbay:**

“This project helped us focus our efforts. We realized the importance of preventive rather than reactive actions in the field of disability. Everyone working for the organization enhanced their awareness and knowledge about disability issues. We began to think with greater awareness and in a solutions-oriented framework. Thanks to this project, we developed joint projects with the Prime Ministry Social Services and Child Protection Agency, the Public Education Center, the Municipality and special rehabilitation centers, experiencing firsthand how unity and joint action can yield success. For instance, the Public Education Center launched its own course, using all the training materials we developed in this project, which was certified by the Ministry of Education. 24 people attended that course. In this project we realized that families of persons with disabilities are deprived of various types of training, and we can now formulate our new projects solely concentrating on their training. The academicians who offered the training sessions were very impressed by our work and they ended up developing another project in the field of disability. In these ways, we think the project has had a strong multiplier effect.”

A drop falling into the sea... Just a small drop in an infinite body of water... Yet, the moment it makes contact, it ripples in circles, one after the other... The right project, just like that drop falling into the sea, can also have a transformative effect, like the Service for Persons with Disabilities and Jobs for Women and Youth project, which altered the perspective of course participants. It replaced pity with recognition.

Then it went on to change the lives of the course participants. It removed the invisible boundaries within homes. It offered new job opportunities to those who had lost any hope of progress. It taught families with relatives with disabilities to revisit their perspective. It opened the way for loving relationships while also bringing with it new knowledge.
ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST SPECIAL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (GÜNDER)

DISSEMINATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

Small Steps
Big Hopes
THE EYES OF THE GYPSY GIRL

The Gypsy Girl mosaic unearthed in the ancient city of Zeugma has become the symbol of Gaziantep’s Zeugma Museum. This is due to the extraordinary effect created through a special technique dating back to the second or third century AD that endows the mosaics with a special glow. Joy and sorrow coexist in the eyes of the Gypsy Girl, eyes which steadily follow you around regardless of the angle. Even if you shift in another direction, her gaze follows you.

The eyes of a mother of a child with a disability follows just like the eyes of the Gypsy Girl. Wherever the child goes, the mother’s eyes follow. Holding both joy and sorrow, those eyes keep looking at her child from all angles.

Unquestionably, underlying this condition is infinite love. When the unparalleled affection of mothers for their children is combined with education, major steps forward can also be taken for their development.

Developed by the Association of Southeast Special Education Institutions, the Project for Dissemination of Early Childhood Special Education Services was designed to meet this challenge. Supported within the scope of the 2010 Sabanci Foundation Social Development
Grant Program, the project was composed of three stages.

The first stage consisted of awareness raising of communities initiatives on special education; the second stage was training and employment for graduates of Girls’ Vocational High Schools; and the third included raising the awareness of families about early childhood special education.

In an effort to introduce the project and raise awareness about special education, early childhood special education seminars were held in Gaziantep, Mardin and Şanlıurfa. These were attended by over 600 participants, and included academicians from Ankara University’s Special Education Research and Application Center.

The project team visited Municipality, Provincial Administration, Governorships, Universities, Directorates of National Education, Public Education Centers, Guidance and Research Centers, Provincial Healthcare Directorates, Girls’ Vocational High Schools, Special Education Schools, NGOs, Chambers of Commerce, Mother and Child Health Centers and Hospitals to provide information about the significance of early childhood special education.

Hatice Erdoğan, Mother of a Child with Disability:
“We noticed the developmental delay of our baby when he was 18 months old. I didn’t know what kind of education I could offer to my child. Then I learned that I was the most important factor. Now I attend the classes at the rehabilitation center together with his teacher. What I learn, I apply at home. I had never played with him using toys before; now I use toys to support his mental development. We play with those. My child could only speak ten words in the beginning; last night he said, “Daddy, come”. This is a major development for us. In the beginning I thought I couldn’t do much, now I know that I am the person who can offer the most help for my child.”

Yener Doğruer, Project Coordinator:
“In Europe, mothers with children with disabilities are prepared psychologically from day one. Training offered by various institutions prevents them from experiencing trauma. However, in Turkey parents don’t confront the situation until it becomes pressing. We particularly wished to inform and raise the awareness of parents who have children with disabilities. We told them that they could participate in the education process, that their children with special conditions could develop through proper education, that they are not alone or helpless.”
An important facet of the project was the training and employment of young women who were graduates from relevant departments of vocational high schools. They were trained in the field of special education services through the Small Steps Early Intervention Program, thus helping to close the gap of intermediary staff in the sector while also creating jobs for young, unemployed women.

One of the first steps of the project was to reach out to graduates through schools and other venues. More than 400 Girls’ Vocational High School graduates in three provinces (Gaziantep, Mardin and Şanlıurfa) applied to attend the program.

120 young women were selected to participate in the training, and of those who successfully completed the course, 30% were recruited for internships and employed in special education programs and rehabilitation centers.

Özlem Döndü, Course Participant:
“I graduated from the child development department of a girls’ vocational high school. I worked at nurseries and kindergartens for a while upon graduation. Then the announcements for this seminar attracted my attention. During the seminar, we were informed about the “Small Steps” training program. Experts from Ankara University explained the program to us. At that point I realized how little I knew about the field of disability. For instance, we used to make generalizations about children with disabilities; we did not distinguish between children with autism or children with developmental delays… The course taught us that there are enormous differences between them. I saw that children with disabilities can improve through education. Participation in the course boosted my self-confidence and made me feel that I have a profession. I did well in the exam and found a job immediately.”

Aslı Sarıtiken, Course Participant:
“I am a graduate of the child development department of a girls’ vocational high school.

**WHAT IS THE SMALL STEPS EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAM?**

Small Steps is an early intervention program developed by the Macquarie University in Australia for children with developmental delay. The program is comprised of booklets covering eight different themes:

1. Introduction to Small Steps
2. Your Child’s Program
3. Communication Skills
4. Gross Motor Skills
5. Fine Motor Skills
6. Receptive Language Skills
7. Personal and Social Skills
8. Developmental Skills Inventory

Training was delivered by faculty members of the Ankara University Special Education Research and Application Center.
I worked at a kindergarten for one year upon graduating from school. Because I had certain shortcomings in the field of special education, I could not apply for positions in that field. The course attracted my attention, and I applied. First of all, the course taught me how to work on a systematic basis. I learned how to incorporate the family in the process and how important parents are for the development of the child. I discovered that you need to assign tasks to the family and include them in managing the education process. I changed jobs after the course and began to work in a special education institution.”

The final phase of the project aimed to reach families of children with disabilities and raise their awareness about early childhood special education. In Gaziantep, Mardin and Şanlıurfa, families with children who were diagnosed with disabilities yet deprived of education services were identified and informed about the significance of early childhood education and the services offered by the government. Finally, they were referred to early childhood special education services.

Based on official data from the Turkish Language Agency, there are 616,767 words in the Turkish language. Yet, there is no single word capable of describing the love and bond a parent feels towards their child. Search for a word to describe her eyes, the way she looks at her child; all you will find is silence. That is because language falls short in expressing that emotion; an emotion which transcends the boundaries of language and time. By facilitating access to the educational services, parents also learn how to help improve the lives of their children.
COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS FOUNDATION (TOG)

YOUTH SPACE

Fighting against Prejudice
YOUTH STEERED BY THE WIND

“I dropped out during my second year of high school. My grades were poor. I had no plans when I left school. I began to hang out at home. Sometimes I used to play football with friends who were also school dropouts. The borders of our life ended two buildings away. I had six, seven friends. I generally stayed home or hung out with them at internet cafés. I thought I would hang out this way until I enrolled for my military service. At home I played a computer game named Counter Strike. I had no dreams about life or about the future.”

He was 16, devoid of a future plan or dream, a member of the dreamless generation of children. He was in freefall like a leaf blown by the wind.

Ali Aksöz’s mother is a housewife. His father is a small merchant. Aksöz, who has been living in İstanbul, Kavacık since he was born, found a meaning in life through the Youth Space project run by the Community Volunteers Foundation (TOG) at Youth Centers.

Developed by TOG and funded by the 2009 Sabancı Foundation Social Development Grant Program, the Youth Space project aimed to generate a new model for youth centers by restructuring three centers affiliated with TOG in the provinces of Samsun and İstanbul.
Teams of volunteers set out to pursue three objectives: Increase access to information, combat discrimination and prejudice and advocacy.

“One day, while chatting with a friend from elementary school, he invited me to the “Pink House Youth Center” in Kavacık. First I refused to go. I said I had nothing to do there. I had seen what kind of place it was. My mom forced me to go there while I was in elementary school but I had stopped going. Upon my friend’s insistence I decided to visit the place one day. I was already hanging out and not doing very much; I thought it wouldn’t hurt to check the place out. The moment I stepped through the door I was moved by the environment. Everyone was chatting in the garden and seemed very relaxed. They told me that there was a workshop that day. I asked, ‘What is a workshop?’ I imagined a carpenter’s workshop. Then I joined in to see what it was about. I began to learn how to play table tennis at the sports workshop.”

The success that the Youth Center had in pulling Ali Aksöz away from the Counter Strike video game to table tennis was far from accidental.

In the second phase of the project, as part of their access to information efforts, a survey was conducted among 13-26 year olds to identify the areas in which they needed more knowledge.
The survey identified the most critical information and support needs for young people: Job opportunities upon graduation, how and where to develop hobbies, their rights as students, social and cultural activities, and help with the university entrance exam system were the areas inquired about the most. In response, relevant activities at Youth Centers were developed. Bulletin boards were set up to share up-to-date information and advisory services were offered free of charge. This enabled students to access the information they needed.

“I grew more and more active in the Youth Center. In the beginning I just joined the activities. Since everyone shared some type of information, I thought I could teach computer skills. I began to offer very basic computer classes. My circle of friends gradually underwent a change. My previous circle of friends questioned why I went to the center. They invited me to the internet café instead. They made fun of the name ‘Pink House. I couldn’t care less. I went to the place where I felt happy.”

The Youth Space project welcomed all types of youth; those from university and from high school, those with long hair, short, and also youth with disabilities. During the project, the Samsun ’Pinhole’ Youth Center started a program in ensuring equal opportunities for youth with disabilities. They began to work not from a distance, but from within themselves, the closest point.

BARRIER-FREE MOVEMENT

The Samsun Youth Center had to be physically renovated to allow access for youth with disabilities. They also embarked on a strategic planning process to understand how youth with disabilities could be included in the programs of the youth center. Discussions were held with local organizations of persons with disabilities in Samsun, during which the Youth Center introduced their programs and learned about the ideas and needs of persons with disabilities.

As a result of the feedback that was received, the volunteers came together to develop a ‘Barrier-Free Youth Center’. Through the joint “Barrier-Free Movement” initiative, the centers were completely renovated to allow access by persons with disabilities. Ramps were installed along staircases, bathrooms were revamped. The barriers at the youth center were removed. What was also learned during the “Barrier-Free Movement” experience was that physical disabilities
do not necessarily impede one’s capacity. Also contributing to the process was the 19 Mayis Municipality, the Samsun Branch of the Turkish Association for Persons with Disabilities, and the Amisos 55 Youth and Sports Club for Persons with Disabilities.

Held at a later stage, the Barrier-Free Dance “enteraction” (a combination of the words entertainment and action) workshop enabled persons with disabilities to actively participate in the activities of the Youth Center while also aiming to address discriminatory attitudes towards persons with disabilities. Once the Barrier-Free Youth Center began to host the meetings of the Samsun City Council’s Barrier-Free Life Working Group, it became clear how much had been achieved since the start of the project.

The young people who were active in the programs of the center were excited to share their accomplishments and experiences with others. Small newsletters named “fanzines” were printed and distributed to communicate the events at the Youth Center to the local community.

One major challenge that emerged in the course of implementing the project was the existence of discrimination between young people, so they held “Combating Discrimination Workshops” where youth trained their peers, enabling the Youth Center to reach new groups of young people.

Great interest in “fanzines” (fan-magazines prepared by youth)
Dance rehearsals at the Samsun Pinhole Youth Center
YOUTH AT THE HELM OF THEIR OWN FUTURE

The Youth Centers kept on improving through the activities of the Youth Space Project, which were leading youth like Ali Aksöz to undergo a process of self-transformation. Once a dreamless child, Ali Aksöz was now blossoming into young man who in turn inspired his peers.

“I was very passive and shy when I first visited the Youth Center. I used to do only what I was told. If no one told me to have a seat, I would stay standing by the door. Now I am the captain of my own life. Before the Youth Center, I had not stepped outside the Beykoz district. Thanks to the project I have seen all of İstanbul, even beyond. My next goal is to go abroad. My circle of friends has changed. I now have friends who are university students. I can also plan for the future now.”

Ali Aksöz constitutes but one example among his peers, among thousands of young people. He represents millions of others who cannot take action on their own, who stand on the edge of life, shy and tremulous, walking the fine line between good and bad decisions.

Advocacy activities were organized so that young people could make their own decisions about life, have a say in their future and be empowered to make choices for their lives.

The advocacy workshops taught them how to express their demands about their rights as well as the rights of their peers, and aimed to provide Youth Center participants with planning and implementation skills necessary to pursue local advocacy initiatives.

In all three Youth Centers, “Enteraction Workshops” were held, featuring activities such as photography, short films, street theater, rhythm, juggling and graffiti. In “Youth at Enteraction” events youth vocalized their rights and had fun at the same time, helping to share information about the needs and rights of young people.

The famous thinker Adorno once said, “A wrong life cannot be lived rightly”. Ali Aksöz’s life veered closer to the wrong rather than the right path. About one year ago, Ali Aksöz was a young man trying to kill people playing a computer game. As he killed them in the virtual world, he was also killing his own life and future. On the brink of deciding the course of his life, he veered towards the Youth Center. He took the right step.

The Youth Space Project came to life with the right ideas and the right methods. And with the right timing, young people were steered in the right direction.
SIX DOTS
FOUNDATION FOR
THE BLIND
ECONOMIC
INTEGRATION AND
EMPLOYMENT OF THE
VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Touch.
You may not be able to read, but touch.
Touch and feel, because that is what they are doing as well.
They may not see, yet they feel.
And they feel that you do not see them ...
**DREAMS IN THE DARK...**

Hülya Vural is 32. She has been visually impaired since birth.

She has been working as the officer in charge of running the copy machine at an elementary school in Istanbul for the past seven months. But do not assume that she was assigned to this post after a quick assessment of her capabilities. She made her dreams for her life a reality by latching on to them with a thick rope and holding on to that rope with all her might.

“When they first hired me they did not assign me any tasks at all... They hired me but they didn’t tell me what my job was. There was a room at the school, they gave me a chair and told me to sit in that small room. I told them ‘I can do something if you show me how’. They showed me nothing. Soon they started corresponding with the Ministry of Education to send me off to another school. The only thing in that small room was a copy machine. Nobody was in charge of it and everyone at the school struggled to make copies. So, I figured out how to work the machine by touching and tweaking with it. I learned how to make copies, how to minimize or enlarge the pages. To tell the front side from the back, I brought small tapes from home and stuck them on the machine. The taped side marked the front and the other side the back. And then I told the school administration ‘I can be in charge of the copy machine’.”

Hülya Vural carved out an occupation for herself in spite of her visual impairment. Now her willpower inspires others.
Six Dots Foundation for the Blind initiated the Economic Integration and Employment of the Visually Impaired project funded by the 2009 Sabancı Foundation Social Development Grant Program to motivate others by sharing the success stories of Hülya Varol and others like her. They aspired to show people with visual impairments - those seeking employment and those already employed - that they could thrive in various work settings, and that there were new areas of employment in the changing global landscape for people with visual impairments.

Implemented in Ankara, Bursa, Gaziantep and Istanbul, the Economic Integration and Employment of the Visually Impaired project began with a search conference during which public, private, NGO sector employees and academicians addressed the issue of discrimination towards persons with disabilities and shared their successes in the workplace.

A job inventory for people with visual impairment was developed. Included were occupations such as computer operator, dietician, accountant, cook, locksmith and hotel receptionist.

In order to foster the employment of people who are visually impaired, private sector employees were trained in four provinces; in total 145 private sector employees from more than 40 institutions along with 95 citizens with visual impairments attended these seminars.

Before any technical and statistical information was shared, Hülya Vural conveyed to participants how far their horizon should be:

“I used to work as a switchboard operator. This is the first job that they offer us. However I did not settle with that. I worked in a drill assembly workshop. I had to use an electric screwdriver to screw something in place. We used to assemble the drill by fixing the screws with an electric screwdriver. Everyone in the workshop did the same thing. Then I started to work at a soap factory. I was in charge of the final packaging of soap bars. When you begin a new job, the first thing to do before even learning the job is confront the discrimination. The first problem is alienation and the feeling of being an outsider in the eyes of others. They intervene even when you want to get up from your chair; they try to help as if you are
incapable of standing up on your own. They are prejudiced, perceiving you as ‘incapable of the job’; even when I throw away garbage they come and say ‘I can throw it away for you’. Yet, we can overcome these issues. We can challenge, be proactive and say ‘I can do it’ to show everyone what we can accomplish.”

The seminars had three overarching goals:

- Raise the awareness of employers about discriminatory practices and job design for people with visual impairments
- Improve the infrastructure for people with visual impairments, particularly in the areas of job identification and placement
- Research attitudes towards the employment of persons with disabilities and provide support to the private sector during the recruitment and hiring process

During the seminars, employees in human resources departments were informed about the range of professions for persons with disabilities, while people with visual impairments were trained on the diverse options available to them in the workforce, techniques for self-development, and interviewing skills. Co-workers of people with visual impairments were informed about how to relate to their colleagues.

Another aspect of the project was an awareness-raising public service announcement with the message “A blind person can work in whichever area they are trained.” The commercial was broadcast on various television channels nationwide and aired in 50 movie theaters in İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir. The objective was to create awareness about how people with visual impairments could accomplish any job they had been trained for.

**ENLIGHTENED DREAMS**

Hülya Vural’s story embodies those shared in the film.

“In the beginning nobody paid attention to how I was struggling with the copy machine. But as I persevered, I started to attract the attention of the teachers. They would watch me from a distance. Although I could not see them, I could feel that they were watching me. They would leave their books to be copied, pretend to leave, but then stay by the door to see if I could accomplish the task... How I fit the pages on the machine, how I distinguished the front of the page from the back... Then they started to congratulate me. Those who used to approach me with prejudice were now praising me. Then the students began to get used to it. The walls in their minds were starting to come down.”

The production and dissemination of a brochure and CDs marked the final phase of the Economic Integration and Employment of the Visually Impaired project.

The brochure collects and shares the project’s experience in working with people with visual impairments and private sector employees, providing information about workplace discrimination and offering pointers on how employers can recruit and hire qualified workers and how to motivate
and support them once they are hired. The CDs features stories of employees with visual impairments along with testimonies from human resources officers who had hired and were working with persons with disabilities. 1,000 copies were circulated to private and public sector institutions and NGOs.

An impact assessment showed that the project was successful in shifting perceptions among private sector executives and employees towards people with visual impairments. There is now a broad understanding that people with visual impairments did not have to be confined to operating switchboards; all that was needed was a minor modification to the keyboard for them to be able to use several office programs.

Hülya takes the final word once again on behalf of all people with visual impairments, melting hardened prejudice with the glow in her eyes, casting a rod of hope into a sea of impossibility, trading the words “what can we do” with “there is so much we can do”:

“Perhaps the only topic around which people in Turkey, from east to the west, can agree on is their prejudice towards us. There is a consensus in Turkey on what we cannot achieve. What could be impossible in a world where visually-impaired scientists exist? There is really no barrier in front of what a person with disability may accomplish. All that is needed is to set a clear goal. You must think in terms of ‘there is so much I can do’ instead of ‘what can I do anyway’.”

A working day at the call center
MOTHER CHILD EDUCATION FOUNDATION (AÇEV)

MULTIDIMENSIONAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Class: Literacy
Subject: Rights of Persons with Disabilities
**LIFE READERS**

The biographical novel Origines, in which Lebanese writer Amin Maalouf describes the origins of his family, begins with the author glancing at an old photograph of his mother:

“An unruly happiness, one that is incomprehensible to us, radiates from the photograph within the frame. They received much less from life compared to us, yet they expected so much less at the same time, and they did not try so hard to shape the future as we do. We are of that presumptuous generation who believes they were born into a promise of permanent happiness.”

We, too, will tell the story of those who continue to struggle despite getting much less from life than they deserve. We will tell the story of those who maintain their integrity intact even while being left behind, those who never lose the spark of happiness in their eyes. We will tell the story of the sun rising anew on women who never had the opportunity to go to school when they were meant to. These are women, who despite being illiterate, kept reading life through an alphabet of hope, and who have stored the whole world within the glimmer of their eyes.

Data from the Turkish Statistics Institute’s 2008 Household Labor Force Survey reports that of the 5.5 million people ages 15 and older who are illiterate in Turkey, 4.5 million are women. Furthermore, the same research

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**Institution:** Mother Child Education Foundation (ACEV)

**Founded in:** 1993

**Mission:** To contribute expertise on early childhood and adult education and establish a nationwide network.

**Contact Details:** +90 212 213 42 20
www.acev.org

**Project Title:** Multidimensional Empowerment of Women

**Project Goal:** Raise the awareness and knowledge level of women and equip them with literacy skills in order to promote social participation and knowledge and sensitivity with respect to rights of persons with disabilities.

**Period:** September 2008- October 2011

**Activities:**
- 579 literacy courses and trainings on rights of persons with disabilities in 7 provinces
- 10,650 women trained in reading and writing
- 362 new volunteer trainers
- 35 public awareness raising meetings and 38 elementary school seminars about disability for nearly 5,000 participants
- Visits to 310 village headmen to inform them of disability rights and local services
- Publishing and a guide on access to public services for persons with disabilities and distributed to 6,400 people
shows that the nearly 800,000 people who are illiterate, unemployed and not seeking employment are either people with chronic illnesses or disabilities.

In Turkey, having a disability creates a host of challenges.

An illiterate woman can only stand on the edge of life. Life flows around her, yet she cannot take one step into it without help. It takes an extraordinary effort for her to cling to this life, where sounds do not add up to a language, where signs and texts and announcements do not mean a thing.

AÇEV (Mother Child Education Foundation) set out to support such extraordinary efforts by raising awareness of disabilities through literacy courses.

Initiated in 2009 with support from the Sabancı Foundation Grant Programs, the Multidimensional Empowerment of Women Project provided illiterate women with literacy training. As women attended literacy courses, they were also informed about how realizing their individual and social rights can improve their lives.

Another innovative aspect to the training came through a new module designed by experts to inform participants about the rights of persons with disabilities. The primary goal of the module was to raise the awareness of course participants about their own rights, the rights of their relatives with disabilities, and inform them about what they could do, and from where they could obtain support.

Moreover, for those without any disabilities, the trainings raised their awareness on how to approach and treat persons with disabilities. Therefore, for those women who were participating in an educational setting for the first time in their lives, learning about disability also meant taking the first step towards social inclusion.

This project targeted illiterate women aged 15 and above, with and without orthopedic disabilities.

During the first stage of the project, volunteer trainers were recruited in the cities of Ankara, Adana, Bursa, İzmir, Nevşehir, Trabzon and Van. Over 350 volunteers came forward to teach the courses and carry out local-level outreach to introduce the project to school principals, guidance teachers, neighborhood headmen, NGO representatives and Public Education Centers.
FROM SOUNDS TO LETTERS

Volunteer Trainer from Adana (Southern Turkey):
“It was my first course experience. It was so exciting. I learned a great deal from the participants. We had great experiences and shared a lot. It made me so happy to encourage people, show them how to live independently and see their self-confidence flourish. I still remember the first day of class: The fear, shyness, and concern in their eyes was replaced with self-confidence and self-expression at the end of the course…”

After they were identified, the volunteer trainers were given an initial two-week training together with AÇEV education experts and field workers on the rights of persons with disabilities and teaching literacy skills.

Volunteer Trainer from Trabzon (Northern Turkey):
“It was a very intense training with experienced educators; it was tough. First we learned about psychology. Although I thought I knew about it, there was still so much I did not know. Adult education seemed more difficult since we had initially envisioned regular literacy training. We questioned whether we could succeed. However, once we dove in and gave it some effort, we were able to do it.”

Following the preparatory phase, the training delivery started. This training was a process of change and development for illiterate women. For more than 10,000 women, sounds first turned into letters, then letters into words, and finally words into meaningful sentences. The barrage of letters that once surrounded them was transformed into a world of expression. The veil on the face of life lifted, painting what used to be black into an array of colors.

I CAN READ AND WRITE ON MY OWN

Course Participant from İzmir (Western Turkey):
“I never knew which bus to take when I went to Diyarbakır. I didn’t know how to go to the supermarket. When I visited a hospital, I needed help. Thank God, I have learned it now. I got sick the other day. I went to the hospital on my own. I took a number and knew when it was my turn. I didn’t feel inadequate. My life before this was empty. The last time I went to the market, the staff joked, “Sister, now you can take care of it all on your own; finally we are freed from helping you all the time!” I used to ask others what the number on the screen was when I went to the hospital. Now I can read and write on my own. I have two daughters and a son. We moved here so that they could go to school. My daughter studies public administration in Eskişehir. My other daughter graduated from high school and is preparing for the university entrance exam. I moved here for the sake of my daughters, because we were not allowed to go to school when we were young. They don’t send girls to school in the East. My husband and I decided that we would send our daughters to school. I hope for their success with all my heart. I can endure any hardship for the sake of my children.”
Course Participant from İzmir:
“Nobody around me knew I was illiterate. Then I heard about the course, in fact, my neighbor told me. I decided to try it out; I could always drop out if it didn’t make sense. But that’s not how it turned out. I loved our teacher; I loved the atmosphere. And I was concerned that I would not be able to grasp things, I thought it would be hard at this age, but it turned out to be so enjoyable. Coming home and doing the homework… It was really fun. Three and a half months flew by so fast. We learned reading, writing, and math. There were classes on health as well, such as first aid. We learned phone numbers and addresses. I was unable to read before, now I can read with ease. I can write down and exchange phone numbers; this is very important. I can write a list at home, read books and newspapers. This is very important to me. A lot has changed in my life. Words fail me.”

Words may have failed her yet the shine in her eyes, the joy in her voice pierced through the walls of the class and beyond. As much as literacy education, education about the rights of persons with disabilities and how to approach them helped participants evolve into both literate and aware individuals.

While literacy courses were taking place, an expert reviewed the AÇEV Literacy Program textbooks to make necessary modifications and add content related to the rights of persons with disabilities. The trainer and participant modules on rights of persons with disabilities were developed with the support of Dr. İ. İsıl Gül, an academician from Bilgi University. After the modules were used for

Women studying math's in literacy courses
the first time, they were revised based on feedback from the field. All the work was shared first with the volunteer trainers, who then passed it on to the course participants.

**Volunteer Trainer from Trabzon (Northern Turkey):**

“The training has completely changed my perspective towards disability. Like any other person, my first, natural reaction to a person with disability was pity. I wanted to help them. This training showed me that what really hampers persons with disabilities is the inability to obtain the support they truly need. Well, I have learned how to lift those barriers. Thanks to you, I learned what I could do and I apply it at home as well.

We were very attentive during classes about disabilities. A few of my students had relatives with disabilities. They had pushed them into a corner; all they knew to do in the name of social integration was to pity them. The family members kept them at home or did not even let them out thinking that it would be too difficult. They all faced the same problems. Their perspective changed with this training.”

Parallel to the training, a “Guide on Access to Public Services for Persons with Disabilities” was prepared in cooperation with the Prime Ministry Administration for Disabled People. In addition, a “Disability Awareness” test was developed and implemented, and technical assessment (to determine physical obstacles for persons with disabilities) was conducted for the buildings in which the literacy and awareness course classrooms were located.
the rights of persons with disabilities were published and circulated. 6,400 “Guides for Access to Public Services for Persons with Disabilities” were published in print and in the Braille alphabet.

As women learned how to read and write, their lives also changed. They were further integrated into life and empowered through reading and writing skills. They learned about the rights of persons with disabilities who faced challenges in social participation not only due to illiteracy but because of their disability. The sentiment of pity was replaced by respect for and awareness of rights. They stepped into the courses as illiterate women; they stepped out as women who understood life and imposed their own meaning onto it. They went into the course not knowing how to read or write, and emerged as individuals with a better understanding of life, who can give meaning to life. They started out feeling pity before, but I realized that this isn’t the right way. When you want to help a person with disability to walk, you have to approach them with care, not jump to say, ‘Can I help you?’. Not ‘Let me help you cross the street’- that is insulting.”

It may be a minor point to express the impact of this project only through numbers, but it is important to record them for the sake of history. Through the Multidimensional Empowerment of Women Project, 362 new volunteer trainers were trained, 10,650 women gained literacy skills, 579 courses provided literacy training and informed thousands of women about the rights of persons with disabilities, 35 awareness raising meetings, hosting public officers, teachers, neighborhood headmen and local citizens reached 1,755 people, 38 seminars held in elementary schools offered training to 3,242 children. Course participants and volunteers visited 310 neighborhood headmen to inform them about locally available services. 11,000 textbooks and books about
NO BARRIERS FOR PARTICIPATION

YOUTH FEDERATION OF TURKEY

N Brrrs Fr Prtcptn!
Removing vowels from our lives would make reading quite difficult. Your eyes search for a vowel to insert between the consonants, to complete the whole. But what if sound was missing from life altogether?

In daily life, we may fail to notice that language is in fact a grand empire. In every moment of our lives we freely explore this empire’s vast terrain, enjoying its uncharted geographies. Some of us revolve around a small patch of fifty words while some of us stitch words together and even jump rope with language. We know to search for a sign or guide if we were to ever lose our path; from those signs we could create a language and a direction.

Through the No Barriers for Participation Project, the Youth Federation of Turkey (YFT) believed that youth with hearing impairments, provided the appropriate support, could pursue their own rights and become responsible for developing their own solutions.

This project aimed to enhance their understanding of their rights and how to attain them. This represented a new approach in Turkey, one that empowers persons with disabilities rather than viewing them as objects of pity and in need of protection.

**THE GRAND EMPIRE OF LANGUAGE**

Institution: Youth Federation of Turkey
Founded in: 2004

**Mission:** Bring together associations operating in the field of youth; focus on the inclusion of youth to facilitate their social participation and empower them.

**Contact Details:** +90 312 418 02 76
www.turkiyegenfed.org.tr

**Project Title:** No Barriers for Participation

**Project Goal:** Support the social participation of youth with hearing impairments by empowering them to develop rights-based projects.

**Project Partners:** Turkish National Federation of the Hearing Impaired

**Period:** April 2010 - July 2011

**Activities:**
- Design and development of a 48-hour training of trainers and 100-hour **Turkish sign language course**
- Training for 30 youth workers who **gained the skills necessary to work with youth with hearing impairments**
- Training for 360 youth with hearing impairments in 13 provinces **to learn about NGOs volunteerism, rights and project development**
- 34 **rights-based project ideas** developed by youth with hearing impairments
- Raising awareness through events and meetings with 62 public and 35 NGO representatives
- Creating and publishing of a sign language training kit and interactive **sign language DVD** and a book outlining the training and project methodology
YFT implemented this project with support from the 2010 Sabancı Foundation Social Development Grant Program. They brought together youth with and without hearing impairments in order to gradually spread the practice of sign language, and increase the capacity of youth with hearing impairments to develop projects to pursue their rights.

The first phase of the project concentrated on improving the skills of youth to work with youth that have hearing impairments.

Through a major initiative carried out in cooperation with the Turkish National Federation of the Hearing Impaired, members of professional associations and NGOs who work with youth were trained on how to work with youth with hearing impairments.

Trainer trainings were held in two stages, lasting a total of 48 hours. The first stage addressed team-building, motivation techniques, training methods, meeting facilitation, civil society, and volunteerism; the second stage covered human rights, project development, training material development and module design. These sessions were followed by entry-level Turkish Sign Language courses lasting 100 hours. The content of the two-stage training was integrated into the sign language course so as to enhance the trainers’ capacities while learning sign language.

As a result, youth workers from NGOs such as the Community Volunteers Foundation, the Educational Volunteers Foundation of Turkey, Young Leaders, Red Crescent, and the Government Department of Youth Services gained the skills required to communicate effectively using sign language.

THE LEGAL STATUS OF SIGN LANGUAGE

While sign language has been ratified as an official language and incorporated into the constitution in several countries, such as South Africa, New Zealand, Austria and Portugal, its status and areas of practice in Turkey remain undefined.

Turkey officially recognized sign language in 2005 for the first time, announcing that sign language could be taught at schools for people with hearing impairments. Currently, the Turkish Language Agency is spearheading the process of building the Turkish Sign Language system and its tools.

The 2002 report by the Administration for People with Disabilities states that 22% of people with disabilities in Turkey have hearing impairments. According to the Turkish National Federation of the Hearing Impaired, there are only 60 schools serving people with hearing impairment. 45 of these are elementary schools while 15 are high schools.
The second phase of the project aimed to touch the lives of youth with hearing impairments, who were pushed to the periphery of society. They applied their experience working with youth to work with youth with hearing impairments. After youth volunteers were trained by professionals in sign language and how to approach towards people with hearing impairments, they visited 13 provinces across Turkey including Adana, Trabzon, Eskişehir and Diyarbakır to deliver workshops that empowers youth with hearing impairments to pursue their rights.

Dilek Kumcu, Project Coordinator:
“In the beginning we noticed that we had been ignoring young people with hearing impairments even though we walked on the same street and lived the same life. As we spent more time in the field and continued working, the gaps became more apparent to us. The first is the problem of communication. The second is social integration. This was not confined to the problems encountered only in public and private institutions; it was a problem about integration in social life from birth. It was a problem of access to services. The same communication problem exists in education, justice, social welfare and other service areas as well. During lawsuits and court trials, legal statements and the testimony of people with hearing impairments were being recorded inaccurately.”

WE DO NOT NEED SPEECH TO COOPERATE; SIGNS WILL SUFFICE

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Yet as the problems emerged, so did their solutions.

Through workshops, 360 young people with hearing impairments received training on how to develop projects and pursue their rights. One group went a step further by attending a training of trainers.

Of the many project ideas formulated by the youth with disabilities during the workshops, 13 were included in a ‘Project Ideas Competition’ and evaluated by a jury of experts. The three projects scoring the top points in the evaluation were awarded prizes (see box).

THE TOP 3 PROJECTS

The winner of the project competition was “Silent Actors” from Trabzon. The project aimed to bring together young people with and without hearing impairments to create joint works of art.

The first runner up of the competition was “Work-Language One-Language” from Kayseri. The project aimed to develop sign language training that could be taught and disseminated in a short period of time.

The second runner up of the competition was “I am Learning Turkish” from İzmir. The project aimed to teach Turkish literacy to high school students with hearing impairments in İzmir.

What they had in hand was a language of signs, and what they had in mind was a common project to work together with youth with disabilities to pursue their rights. Thus the project would integrate yet another mission by enabling collaboration among youth with and without hearing impairments.

As part of the project, trained youth workers worked closely with youth with hearing impairments in the cities they visited. At the local level, they contacted public institutions as well as NGOs that have an impact on the lives of people with hearing impairments to discuss the challenges of youth with hearing impairments.

This phase of the project unveiled new and unexpected problems. It became clear that youth organizations face challenges accessing youth with disabilities, and were mostly unaware and not in touch with this target group.

In terms of schools, the absence of teachers with sign language training meant that youth with hearing impairments were unable to receive a proper education.
The most vibrant part of the workshops was when youth with disabilities discussed their dreams. As the workshop kicked off with the statement “I have a dream”, youth painted the far-reaching borders of a land without challenges, revealing at the same time the problems they experience.

In the activity, participants drew the horizon line as far out as possible, dreaming of imaginary countries, immersed in the philosophy that ‘everything I can think of can come true’.

The game “Imaginary Land” started with the question “If you discovered a new land and if you were to come up with your own rights and rules there, what would they be?”. Expressing the rights they needed, they formulated their dreamland as follows:

**In “Poyrazistan Land”, we want:**
1. Dedicated public transportation cards for people with hearing impairments
2. All girls attending school
3. TV series with sign language
4. Clean environment
5. Entertainment
6. Lights instead of whistling in sports games
7. Physicians with hearing impairments
8. Traveling and learning new things
9. Policeman trained in sign language

The activities of the No Barriers for Participation project shaped the lives and the dreams of youth with hearing impairments. Once locked within their own silence, they now learned their rights to equal opportunities and self-expression through sign language.

**In “Winderos Land”, we want:**
1. Civil servants with disabilities
2. Videophones for people with hearing impairments and discounted phone bills
3. Communication through sign language
4. Computerized education at school
5. Teaching sign language to people in public squares
6. Sign language education at universities
7. Jobs based on one’s education
8. Teachers working to help students
9. Education and job opportunities abroad

**Neslihan Yilmaz, Participant with Hearing Impairment:**

“My Name is Neslihan Yilmaz. My biggest challenge was attending university as a student with a hearing impairment. When I sought help from my classmates, they couldn’t support me, so I dropped out of school. Doing nothing at home was not my thing either; I was really bored. Later I decided to take an active role in the Trabzon Association of People with Hearing Impairments. About two years ago, a large group including both women and men formed within the association. I got involved in several activities...
such as theater and ‘kolbastı’ dancing. We went to İstanbul and performed in a festival; that was even better. However the real change occurred after the arrival of No Barriers for Participation Project in Trabzon. We first learned the concept of volunteerism. We thought about how to shift our perspective. Following the training, I plan to design projects and communicate the concept of volunteerism to others in the Association.”

An important goal of the project was for the activities to be sustainable. In addition to the other project activities, joint initiatives were held with local governments, NGOs and the media with a view to enhancing and sustaining awareness about disability. The project also advocated for the dissemination of Turkish Sign Language.

Elif Serbest, Project Coordinator:
“When we first set out with this project, our aim was bringing together youth with and without hearing impairments. First, youth workers learned sign language. This enabled training of hearing-impaired youth in their own language, and was a first step to share the culture of hearing impairment in every platform and setting. One of our overarching goals in the project was to show people with hearing impairments that they could advocate for their rights. We wanted to show them that they could stand up for their rights in any platform without help from others.”

2 words.

First one.
Turkish

If only all problems were as simple as a silent film... If only the children of this land could use sign language to play in this film. If only this silent film was not merely a film; if only sign language was known to all so that everyone could easily communicate with people with hearing impairments.

The challenges of people with hearing impairments are not as simple as in a silent film. In an empire stripped off its sound, the Youth Federation of Turkey lined the road with signs for those left without them. They provided a gift of a language of signs for those with and without hearing impairments. This helped to enable the hearing-impaired to communicate, but also to ensure those without hearing impairments can contribute to this pursuit. The No Barriers for Participation project changed the lives of people both with and without hearing impairments. They worked to find the pieces of the puzzle and bring the vowels back.

PARTICIPATION HAS NO BARRIERS...
TOHUM AUTISM FOUNDATION (TOHUM) 

POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION PROPOSALS FOR ENHANCING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MAINSTREAM EDUCATION

Teacher: Is everyone here? 
Class: WE ARE HERE!
THREE WRONGS DO NOT MAKE A RIGHT

Even though you may have the most sincere intentions when you hold a visually impaired person by the arm while crossing the street, unless he has asked for your help, your actions may actually disturb him.

Even though you may go out of your way to help your colleague with a disability at work, what she really wants is to be treated just like everyone else.

Most of us miss those nuances. This is because most of us get to know persons with disabilities when we are teenagers or adults; very few of us share our school classrooms with them. Education is a right to which everyone is entitled equal access. Theoretically we may all believe in equality of opportunity in education, yet very few of us have actually seen how this contributes to the life of a person with a disability.

We are not the only ones who neglect them. Each year, as millions enter university exams as if preparing for a race, the education system fails to recognize persons with disabilities - and we in turn, fail to live with and respect differences.

Institution: Tohum Autism Foundation (TOHUM)
Founded in: 2003
Mission: Ensure the social integration of children with Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorder through special education, early diagnosis and the application of these practices throughout the country.
Contact Details: +90 212 248 94 30
www.tohumotizm.org.tr
Project Title: Policy and Implementation Proposals for Enhancing the Effectiveness of Mainstream Education
Project Goal: Foster the implementation of mainstream education at the level of decision-makers by raising awareness of the measures that need to be adopted and creating a best practice model.
Project Partners: Education Reform Initiative (ERI)
Period: April 2010- October 2011
Activities:
• Training for 140 teachers on mainstream education
• Awareness raising seminars for nearly 3,000 parents, teachers and students
• Hands-on training for 30 teachers at TOHUM schools
• Monitoring, consultancy and supervision services for teachers at schools
• Empathy services for students at schools
• Create model guidelines for teachers on mainstreaming education
• Publishing policy papers on Mainstream Education
• Meetings to inform policy makers

THREE WRONGS DO NOT MAKE A RIGHT
While all questions find an answer, the educational rights of those with disabilities are always left blank. And so, three wrong answers can sweep away thousands of right answers, as well as their dreams, hopes and future plans. While we move forward, enrolling in good schools, prejudice follows us like a dark storm cloud.

Today, mainstream education has helped to ensure that children with disabilities can rightfully access their most fundamental rights, that all children can attend to school, and make sure that children learn to share their desks with their peers.

However, mainstream education does not end with placing children in regular classes. The success of mainstream education depends on both children with disabilities and their teacher being provided with the necessary preparation in special education.

Research studies show that there are a number of shortcomings in mainstream education in Turkey. In one survey of over 900 classroom teachers, 86% of teachers admitted that they lacked sufficient knowledge about mainstream education; 77% reported that they did not prepare individualized education programs for students with disabilities in their classroom, and 71% reported that they implement a standard curriculum for all children- with and without disabilities.

The Policy and Implementation Proposals for Enhancing the Effectiveness of Mainstream Education Project implemented by TOHUM Autism Foundation took a step forward in closing the gaps for the effective implementation of mainstream education.

Supported by the 2010 Sabancı Foundation Social Development Grant Program and delivered in partnership with the Sabancı University’s Education Reform Initiative, the project first focused on raising knowledge and awareness about mainstream education.

Collaborating with three elementary schools in İstanbul, one of the main activities of the project was piloting a mainstream education model compatible within the existing educational infrastructure.

What is Mainstream Education?

It is more beneficial for students with disabilities to attend school in the general classroom setting, rather than be separated into specialized classes. Through this practice, students with special needs are able to share a classroom with their peers.

This has two benefits. It enhances the academic performance of the student and enables relationships with other students in the classroom. Students who have a friend with special needs early in life are more likely to have an unprejudiced approach towards people with disabilities in later years.
Training seminars and workshops were held in three schools for 140 teachers while nearly 3,000 parents, teachers and students attended awareness raising seminars.

Gülay Gürdal is one of the teachers in the project. She teaches English at Zehra Ülker Elementary School in the Ümraniye district of Istanbul.

Gülay Gürdal, Teacher:
“For many years, I taught classes in which students with disabilities were present. I knew they were different, but I never paid any special attention to them. I ignored them the way I ignored children who tried to attract attention. I applied the methods of reinforcement and punishment, but I applied the wrong methods at the wrong time. I was acting on the basis of what I had been taught in university years ago. The two day training in this project taught us that persons with disabilities are not a homogeneous group; different disability conditions require different reactions. Later on we also learned how to behave based on the type of disability and how to apply reinforcement and punishment methods.”

DIVERSITY IS RICHNESS
Consultancy services were delivered during the second phase of the project. Out of the 150 trained teachers, 30 were selected to attend a two day hands-on training at TOHUM schools. The teachers had the chance to learn from educators who worked directly with autistic children, understand what methods they employed, observe their interactions with the children and raise any questions they had.

Following the teachers’ visit to TOHUM, educators from TOHUM visited the same teachers in their own classrooms on a monthly basis. They observed the teachers and offered guidance as they implemented mainstream education practices in the classroom.

Gülay Gürdal:
“Educators from TOHUM visited my classroom every month. They listened carefully and took notes. That stage was so important for me. Talking to them, I learned how I could better integrate my students with disabilities in the lesson. For example, I was not designing a special curriculum for my students before. I have two such students in my class. One has mild mental retardation and the other has severe attention deficit disorder. Thanks to the training, I designed a special curriculum for these students. If the whole class was assigned the task of memorizing 70 words, I prepared 10 words for them to memorize. This enabled them to participate at their own skill level. The major contribution of the educators from TOHUM was teaching us how to include the whole class in the lesson. In the past, I used to apply reinforcement for the student independently. Now all their classmates are included in this process. We achieve it together. Their classmates help them and congratulate them when they succeed. The trainings have transformed our classroom into a genuinely mainstreamed educational space. The
conscientious contributions of TOHUM educators Ali Kaymak and Nergiz Koçarslan are particularly unforgettable for me.”

**Nergiz Koçarslan, Teacher from TOHUM Autism Foundation:**
“The first thing we noticed after visiting schools was that teachers had a very well-intentioned yet inadequate approach towards their students. They generally believed that everything was fine as long as the student caused no trouble and was occupied with something. When no special curriculum was developed for the students with disabilities, they could not participate in the classroom and so they stopped following the class. First and foremost we helped them create special curricula appropriate for the level of the students. Then we included the whole class in the education process. For instance, one student had to learn how to say ‘thank you’. We helped them accomplish this together as a class. When the student learned, the whole class applauded to reinforce the behavior. Tailoring the class for students with special needs and enhancing the education process for the whole class changed everything.”

**Gülay Gürdal:**
“It is hard for me to explain how the project changed my personal story. I was appointed to another school this year. As I was leaving, I realized how much I loved my students with disabilities in one year. It was painful to leave them. I realized that I did not only see them as students, but as special people whose transformation I had contributed to. Now I am going to a new school. I will apply all my learning at my new school as well.”

As the consultancy for special education services continued, the next stage of the project was initiated. Aiming for the widespread application of mainstream education, project partner Education Reform Initiative, prepared a series of reports. First, a Situation Analysis Report on mainstream education assessed the current conditions in Turkey. Second, a report on best practices from around the world was published. These reports were followed by a report that presented proposals for mainstream education and ‘Mainstream Education Support Model Guidelines’ explaining the nature of the training and its effectiveness. The reports were shared with relevant people and organizations, and visits and informative meetings were held with policy makers.

As TOHUM Autism Foundation embarked on this journey, the goal was to support teachers and raise their awareness of mainstream education. The teachers grasped the importance of mainstream education and the perspectives of the students towards their peers with disabilities shifted. TOHUM Autism Foundation sowed a tiny seed. That seed sprouted in the classroom, was watered by the students, and grew into a tree with strong roots for mainstream education to flourish further.
MICRONET:
MICRO ENTREPRENEUR
WOMEN’S WORK PORTAL

Ask Someone Who Knows
A STARTING POINT FOR A DIFFERENT LIFE

Some people weave the fabric of their lives stitch by stitch. Some craft lacework, fastening problems to each other, with solutions inserted in between. They always keep the next step in mind. They have to act with caution. They piece together their lives with eye-straining effort. If they are skillful and diligent enough, their life measures up to a work of art. Or if they are unfortunate, they end up with a handful of problems all tangled up …

Gülten Bingöl is one such woman who carefully weaves her life one stitch at a time. The light of her efforts brightens up our faces as soon we step through the door of the First Step Women’s Cooperative in İstanbul’s Nurtepe neighborhood.

Nurtepe is a neighborhood on the hills of the Kağıthane district in Istanbul which was built in the last 20 years. Kağıthane used to be an area where the dwellers of the Ottoman court would escape to for recreation. During the Republican era, it became a space for İstanbul’s new citizens, those who migrated from Anatolia with an appetite to be part of the center.

The First Step Women’s Cooperative in Nurtepe is an independent women’s cooperative established with the support of the Foundation for the Support of Women’s
Work (KEDV). The Cooperative serves as a starting point for women in Nurtepe with hopes for a different life. Most of the women in Nurtepe are like Gülten Bingöl, they migrated here, leaving behind their hometown for a new land:

“We came to İstanbul in 1991 after my husband, who is a teacher, was appointed here from the Varto district of Muş. And we never went back. When we arrived here, it was a very lonely life. I was stuck at home with my four kids. In Varto, there were big families. We used to stroll the streets and visit relatives. We lived in solidarity. Here, for so long I didn’t even leave the house. In 2001, I met KEDV. I took part in the establishment of the First Step Women’s Cooperative in Nurtepe in 2004. Getting together with friends here, I realized that this too can be an environment of trust and solidarity. And sharing. It all started anew for me. In fact, I have not visited my hometown for the last two years. I managed to build a brand new life here.”

Gülten Bingöl is a woman who could thrive on her own, despite her circumstances and without guidance from others. She is her own pathfinder, finding her own light in the women’s cooperative.

In Turkey, not all women are necessarily born entrepreneurs; however, often they are pushed in that direction. Though many are encouraged to remain housewives, they look for work when their families enter periods of economic hardship. However, the necessity of looking after their children keeps them at home, and so the work they do from home becomes part of the informal sector. Vocational training courses generally are ineffective since women fail to receive support once the training is over. KEDV enables the dreams of Gülten Bingöl and other “micro-entrepreneur” women by supporting the activities of more than 70 women’s cooperatives across Turkey.
As the number of women’s cooperatives soars with each passing day, so too does the need for a platform to facilitate coordination and the sharing of experiences and information.

The Micro Entrepreneur Women’s Work Portal project funded by the Sabancı Foundation Social Development Grant Program in 2009 helped women start and improve their businesses by sharing information on a variety of issues, from marketing techniques to accounting, and providing them with support from experts. The first leg of the project started with the very basics: Computer training.

After the project commenced in 2009, KEDV launched computer courses in 24 provinces including Adapazarı, Batman, Düzce, Kayseri, İstanbul, and Trabzon. Young volunteers from the Youth for Habitat Association, trained over 1,200 women in computer literacy.

FOUNDATIONS OF A NEW LIFE

As part of the project, a computer class was established in the Nurtepe cooperative building. Although the five computers in the small computer class were slightly outdated, their users brimmed with new ideas.

Gülten Bingöl was among those who were introduced to computers through this project:

“The first time I attended the computer training I thought it was hilarious. We were almost illiterate and they brought in the computers. I thought it would be a waste. I thought I was too old to learn. I said that there was one at home for my child to use and that I hardly ever got a turn. In fact we even discussed donating them to women with children. Then the training started. The youngsters came in to teach us everything from A to Z, from switching on the computer to word processing. I have caught on so much that now I do the children’s work on the computer at home.”

Introducing computers to micro entrepreneur women was the first step of the project. The second step was training mentors who would offer consultancy. 54 private sector
employees from 15 companies attended training sessions to offer online consultancy to entrepreneur women using this portal. Members of the Private Sector Volunteers Association and Sabancı Holding attended these sessions.

Gülten Bingöl describes:
“We didn’t know what to do when we wanted to do something. We could find no one to ask questions to. For instance, we wanted to set up a store but we had no clue about how to take care of insurance or banking transactions. The people around us whom we consulted had limited knowledge.”

While women were learning computers, the project team was designing the Micro Entrepreneur Women’s Work Portal website—www.girisimcikadin.com. When it was ready, entrepreneur women would use this platform to reach professional volunteers and receive consultancy from these mentors to build sustainable businesses.

I ENTERED A WEB SITE AND MY LIFE CHANGED

One of the first users of the web site was Gülten Bingöl and her friends.

“In our cooperative we decided to set up a kitchen to have a go at catering for nearby businesses. If it were up to us, we would immediately launch the place, cook all the food and then sweat to sell it. After the launch of the www.girisimcikadin.com website we clicked on the “ask someone who knows” link and asked if we should set up a home cooking business. They first questioned if we had any space for the business and whether we had calculated our expenses. They suggested we conduct market research. They told us to go talk to the businesses around to see if they were interested in buying from us, if they have such a need. We did as they suggested, and realized that the businesses cooked in their small, in-house kitchens. We determined that there was no such need.”

In fact www.girisimcikadin.com operates on very simple logic. When entrepreneur women have a question about their work, they click on the “Ask Someone who Knows” button and pick the relevant heading (“banking and financial services”, “legal matters”, “developing a business idea”, “accounting”, “marketing and sales”, “advertising and communication”, “product design/purchasing and product/business development”) and type in their questions. The questions are submitted to mentors in that particular field. The mentors respond within two days.
The mentors recruited for the portal with the guidance of the Private Sector Volunteers Association were inspired by the stories of the entrepreneur women and found a platform to share their own experiences. One of the project mentors sums up what the project means to her:

“I learned about the Micro Entrepreneur Women’s Work Portal Project through an e-mail my company sent me. I attended the introduction and consultancy training meeting and was impressed by the scope and goals of the project as well as the energy of the project team. I registered on the portal to offer my own small contribution to micro-entrepreneur women who are striving to support their family. Although we weren’t interacting face-to-face, we shared a joint platform with many women that had diverse business ideas ranging from craftwork to soap and olive oil. Thanks to this platform, we had the chance to learn the ideas of entrepreneurs and shared our experience to the best of our ability. We shared their enthusiasm. I hope I was able to make a minor contribution at least…”


As of October 2011, the website has over 1,433 active members, with the numbers growing on a daily basis. Consultancy services have been offered 500 times through the website; there have been 320,000 page displays, and the information notes have been used by over 2,400 users.
“A cooperative member ran a stationery store, yet business was weak. She received consultancy from the www.girisimcikadin.com web site. They told her where to find cheaper suppliers and supplied her with a range of sales techniques. They guided her step by step on every issue. Now her business has recovered. Thanks to this web site we learned that we cannot randomly build businesses. It takes certain costs, accounting, transactions… We learned that there are steps to follow on the path to success. We learned that we have to ask everything to everyone, that commerce is a matter of supply and demand and that we have to go to the right places to sell our product.”

Orhan Pamuk’s novel New Life opens with the sentence, “I read a book and my whole life changed.” Sometimes it takes a book, a sentence or a question to change our life. We lay the foundation of our new life upon that question.

Gülten Bingöl is one woman who rebuilt her life at a women’s cooperative. Now, there is a platform for thousands of women like her. For women entrepreneurs, there is now a sea of information available to bring truth to the sentence “I entered a website and my whole life changed.”
Sorumlu Valandan
Sorumlu Valandan
7

Konsey düşünün
Neclis Çalışın

Kız öğrenciler için kiralık daha düşük olsun lütfen

D. konu / kim
Sözün verea
Bu farete dair
Konseyde söyle
Fert yarow

Eğitim
PARTİ

Haydi Usaçalar
meclise...

Sem flairını
Söylenceye
Olmaz mı reden
Ne zaman?
Hariç ne zaman?
LOCAL DEMOCRACY ACADEMIES

Present Company Included!
WHO WILL LISTEN TO ME?

Inspired by real events, the film “Swing Vote” with actor Kevin Costner presents an interesting story about democracy. When a citizen’s vote is mistakenly annulled in the U.S. Presidential elections, he is given another full day to vote again. When all the ballot boxes are opened, the two parties end up with the same number of votes, and so the fate of the United States winds up in the hands of one person. All heads turn to Kevin Costner, just for that single vote. The pervasive claim in Turkey, “What would my single vote change anyway?” is thus given an answer. When a single vote supersedes all others, the importance of democracy is re-established.

In fact the film tells us a great deal. It reveals how flawed it is to not go to the ballot box, thinking “What can I change, my one vote is worth nothing”; or to not take an active part in democratic processes, thinking “How can I possibly make a difference?”

While democracy is considered important in Turkey, participation in democracy often fails to measure up. Not only at the level of central government policies but also at the local level there are mechanisms to include the views and voice of citizens; yet, citizens are not aware of their rights and do not participate to the extent they should. A person with a disability may be stuck in his or her home since the roads of the city are full

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While democracy is considered important in Turkey, participation in democracy often fails to measure up. Not only at the level of central government policies but also at the local level there are mechanisms to include the views and voice of citizens; yet, citizens are not aware of their rights and do not participate to the extent they should. A person with a disability may be stuck in his or her home since the roads of the city are full
of obstacles; a youngster may fail to socialize because of scarcity of parks; a women may not walk the streets at night because of lack of street lamps; and yet, none of them vocalize their opinions, thinking “Who would listen to me?” However, solutions to these problems are steadily increasing as a result of a number of noteworthy projects that have been implemented in recent years.

Developed by the Youth for Habitat Association, the Local Democracy Academies project is one of these initiatives which aimed to disseminate democratic principles and practices among the general public, starting with democracy education for youth, women and persons with disabilities.

Funded by the 2010 Sabancı Foundation Social Development Grant Program, during the first stage of the project, Local Democracy Academies were set up in cities in eight cities (Adana, Ankara, Denizli, Diyarbakır, İzmir, Kocaeli, Ordu, and Van) and at later stage, in two additional cities (Ordu and Giresun.)

City Councils are consultative bodies established in 1998 through a circular issued by the Ministry of Interior, and constitute a decision-making mechanism comprised of NGOs, the Governorship, the Municipality and political party representatives. City Councils are a democratic platform to present problems, discuss solutions, and submit suggestions to relevant institutions. Decision-makers get feedback from citizens through City Councils, which contributes to the formulation of participatory local policies. Receiving volunteer consultancy services from Youth for Habitat over the years, City Councils have 3 sub-committees: Women’s Council, Youth Council and the Council for Persons with Disabilities. These sub-councils were crucial to realizing the Local Democracy Academies project.

Once the Academies were officially established (as separate rooms in each City Council building), a training curriculum was developed for council representatives. 40 council representatives from eight project provinces gathered in İstanbul and attended a training of trainers on the rights of women, youth and persons with disabilities.

Aysun Aydın was one of the project participants from the Ordu City Council.

**Aysun Aydın, Ordu City Council, Member of Youth Council:**

“Prior to the Local Democracy Academies, we used to implement a range of projects in the City Council. For instance, we held computer literacy courses. I attended the trainers training after the Local Democracy Academies project was launched. The training informed us of a number of issues we lacked knowledge about, such as rights of persons with disabilities in local governments, the role of youth in administration, legal rights of women and so on. As we learned more, we
realized how much information we were missing. We subsequently returned to our own cities to share our learning and train others.”

Following the training of trainers, the second phase of the project began.

With a view to improving the capacity of Women, Youth and People with Disability Councils, the trained representatives began to train other council representatives in their respective cities. In addition, the sub-councils held seminars and awareness raising meetings on the rights of women, youth and persons with disabilities, reaching over 7,800 people.

To address the problems shared by women, youth and persons with disabilities and to enhance their participation in addressing these problems, joint project meetings were held on a monthly basis in each province.

CITY ANALYSIS SURVEYS

The surveys in which respondents presented their views on the extent to which they are able to access their rights in their neighborhoods is comprised of four sub-headings:

- **The Home Setting** allowed respondents to evaluate their neighborhood in terms of quality, access and safety. Under this heading, participants mainly focused on factors that prevent access to buildings for people with disabilities, leading to their inability to leave the house, and thus forming a barrier to their integration in urban life.

- **Healthcare and Social Services** allowed participants to reflect on healthcare and social services with respect to their quality, access and participation. The overriding theme, voiced by women in particular, was the inadequacy of facilities for childcare and elderly care.

- Under the subheading of **Safety and Protection** participants evaluated institutions offering services as well as their perception of safety. With respect to safety, women especially reported feeling unsafe when they go out on their own.

- **Work and Social Life** allowed participants to evaluate work, play and leisure time, as well as the social networks, friendships and private lives in their setting. Women voiced a lack of places where they can drop their children off at work whereas youth shared their need for vocational training and requested information about municipality programs. Another theme among youth was the problems they experience in terms of an open discussion of their physical and sexual development with their families. People with disabilities voiced their frustration about companies’ lack of adherence to legal employment quotas.
Aysun Aydın:
“We visited almost all the NGOs and institutions in our cities in person in order to spread the word about Local Democracy Academies and promote their participation. During our visits, we informed participants about the rights of women, youth and persons with disabilities. We requested universities and youth groups to send representatives to our Local Democracy Academy trainings and followed up our request with official correspondence. During seminars with NGOs and other institutions, we trained participants about issues affecting women, youth and persons with disabilities. In the full-day training program, we shared information about disabilities, rights-based education, social inclusion, civic rights, women’s rights, the role of women in society, and gender.”

The third phase of the project aimed to develop policies in collaboration with women, youth and persons with disabilities.

After broadening their awareness about the rights of women, youth and persons with disabilities, reaching out to the community through seminars and awareness raising meetings, and gaining the skills to manage coordinated work, the councils started to reach out to decision-makers in the cities with their policy recommendations.

The first step of the process required consensus on the policies to be proposed. With the support of UNICEF, international conventions concerning women, youth and disability were examined and “City Analysis” surveys were conducted to understand the perspectives of these three target groups. With the mobilization of the sub-councils, the final reports were prepared including detailed findings from over 5,000 survey respondents from the eight project cities.

Priorities were identified on the basis of the findings of the “City Analysis” surveys (see box), and debated within the Women’s Council, Youth Council and Persons with Disabilities Council. Policy recommendations were then formulated and shared with decision-making bodies.
SOLUTIONS ON A COMMON GROUND

A meeting with other organizations was held to share the experiences of those who took part in the journey of the Local Democracy Academies.

Aysun Aydın;
“One of the most important stages of the project was the “City Analysis” survey. UNICEF adapted this tool which was previously used in other countries, to this project. The survey functions with a different structure. First of all, you have to have groups of at least 5 individuals. It is required to discuss the questions as a group while responding to the survey. For example, is your neighborhood convenient for persons with disabilities to live in? In answering the question, there should be a discussion of what a convenient neighborhood for persons with disabilities involves. The discussion process is informative for everyone, and sows the seeds of joint decision-making, which constitutes the foundations of democracy.

We scattered all around the city to conduct these surveys. We attended women’s days, went to neighborhood coffeehouses, dorms, school cafeterias and talked to all sorts of people. We sought responses for all the city’s problems. We put the findings in reports. We ended up with tangible data pertaining to the problems of women, youth and persons with disabilities. We shared the data with our sub-councils. Each sub-council mapped out policies and prepared recommendations regarding their respective problems and submitted them to the relevant institutions. We are now following up on the implementation of the recommendations.”

What Local Democracy Academies have focused on is the establishment of a democratic infrastructure in Turkey. It allowed young people to participate more broadly to seek solutions and implement them through democratic means. It enabled youth to engage in the democratic processes as they ascended to various decision-making levels. By educating so many citizens about women, youth and persons with disabilities, the Local Democracy Academies led each participant to recreate his or her own story from scratch.

Aysun Aydın;
“When we began the Local Democracy Academies we first noticed that we could not spread the word about the work of the City Council sufficiently. We hadn’t effectively communicated to people that there was such an opportunity for social participation. That is something we achieved through the Local Democracy Academies. As we proceeded we realized that we were acting on our own in the councils. For example, the Women’s Council was only aware of its own problems and trying to figure out a solution on its own. Through the Local Democracy Academies, women, youth and persons with disabilities sub-councils started
to collaborate. It dawned on us that we could not generate solutions for our own problems unless we were aware of each other’s problems. This joint work has been so fruitful for us. We enhanced our communication with the other NGOs in our city. We began to share problems, solutions and experiences during the course of this whole process. We saw that what one of us didn’t know was known by another, and was already solved by another NGO. We learned to collect our experiences in a common pool.

This broader perspective expanded our boundaries. For instance, I live in Ordu; Giresun is both too close and too far. After this project, we got in touch with Giresun and realized that we shared the same problems and efforts. We grew closer and saw if we could design projects together. That is how Giresun was included among the project provinces. Today, we are in touch with all Local Democracy Academy provinces, including Giresun. We share information with a much wider pool.

As for my own story… I am 24. While I interned as an accountant, I was also a member of the City Council. After I joined the Local Democracy Academies, my whole perspective on life changed. I forgot all about accounting and decided to be an NGO volunteer. Upon seeing how entrenched women’s problems were in our city, a friend of mine and I founded the ‘Ordu Association for the Empowerment of Women’. There I apply what I learned in the Local Democracy Academies. For example whenever we apply for project funds, we use tangible data gained from the analysis of cities. It has supplied us with a vast data bank.”