

Program Script for Mine Narin (Aired on 17 January 2010)

Category: Education
Location: İstanbul

A scene from the movie “Rain Man”

Doctor: Ray, can we try some?

Ray: Yeah,

Doctor: Do you know how much 312 times 123 is?

Ray: 38,376

Doctor: He is right.

Ray’s Brother: What?

Doctor: He is right.

When **the movie Rain Man** starring Tom Cruise and Dustin Hoffman **was released in 1988**, autism, via the movie screen, entered everyone’s minds and hearts.

In the movie Rain Man, Tom Cruise, after his father’s death, met his autistic brother. While trying to live with him, he showed millions of people what autism really was.

Even though Rain Man may have brought autism to the forefront by winning Oscar awards, the “Rain Men” of Turkey are still lost underneath dark clouds.

We don’t hear their voices and thus we do not know what goes on in their lives or anything about their condition.

Quotes from a letter:

I am a child who has autism. I am not autistic. Autism is just a part of my character.

It is not a concept that can describe me on its own. Are you someone who has feelings, thoughts, character or are you someone who is just fat, wears glasses or is clumsy?

I have trouble comprehending and expressing feelings. Shopping at the local supermarket could turn into a nightmare for me.

I think concretely. I can only decipher the language according to words.

Don’t let only autism shape your thoughts about me. Help me socialize.

Please love me unconditionally. I can’t succeed if I don’t have you as my pillar.

Be my friend, my teacher, my lawyer. You’ll see how far I can come.

When trying to connect with me, please take all of this into consideration.

With love.

Interview with Professor Gönül Kırcaali:

Autism is a neurological disorder of social interaction, language development and behavior.

By social interaction we mean not communicating and interacting with others, and preferring to be alone as the showing signs.

When we talk about language problems, some do not talk or have irregular speech, or some do not have the capability of speaking or, do not use the language functionally.

With situations where they stand out with their behavior; some have obsessions. These obsessions could be showing particular attention or behaving in certain ways.

They can spend most of the day bouncing a ball or by spinning the wheel of a car.

Or they can get stuck on things. For example, they can concentrate deeply on something quite out of the ordinary.

Among other socially disadvantaged groups, children with autism are at a great loss for attention.

Every one in 150 children has the risk of being autistic. In the total population of 450 thousand in the 0-14 age group, there are 125 thousand children with autism in Turkey.

Interview with Aylin Sezgin:

Aylin Sezgin: In 1997 I had my twins. In 1998 we noticed problems that were slowly starting to appear in one of them.

It was easy to differentiate because they were twins.

Interviewer: What kind of problems?

Aylin Sezgin: There was a delay in his speech but there were other problems before that; he wouldn’t look directly in our eyes, he was not a child that smiled a lot.

He hardly slept and he had eating problems.

When it came to socializing, for example he had problems in communicating or looking in the eyes when approaching someone or being able to point at someone.

These are issues we confronted but we had no idea what was happening.

In 1998 we started talking with doctors. Some said that this happens with twins, one is sometimes slower.

Some said that boys develop slower. Time was slowly passing by.

Towards the end of 1998 a psychologist confirmed our suspicions.

She said there was the possibility of autism. That was when we first started to learn about autism.

In 1999 we went abroad and came across a totally different reality. First of all, we can have our children fully tested.

They could evaluate exactly where the autism is and if it was low, medium or high functioning autism.

In addition, they told us that only one hour training a week would definitely not be enough, and that **an intense training of 30-40 hours a week would be needed.**

This of course was very saddening and frustrating for us. We felt we had lost a lot of time...

They told us that this period is really important, if the symptoms are diagnosed early and intense education is given, the child could be saved from autism.

Two very important factors of autism are: early diagnosis and education.

Compared to Europe, Turkey is unfortunately one step behind in putting an early diagnosis as well as educating people with autism.

But in recent years, with changemakers, Turkey’s “rain men” are also seeing more success rates in early diagnosis and special education.

Mine Narin, the daughter of a famous businessman Halit Narin, still actively works in the private sector.

But what she does for children with autism puts her in a different field than the thousands of other businesswomen.

Mine Narin saw her university friend Aylin Sezgin struggle with the problems of having a child with autism. She started to think of ways she could help.

The Tohum Autism Foundation started on the path with this intention of aiding children with autism and having them be a part of a normal social life.

Interview with Mine Narin:

If autism is diagnosed early, it is possible to lead a normal life with the proper education.

We need to spread this awareness throughout Turkey and put an emphasis on early diagnosis.

After Mine Narin investigated into autism studies being done in Israel, England and America, she aimed to apply these model studies in Turkey. With the aim to help her friend Aylin Sezgin and other children with autism in Turkey,

she believed that she could make a difference by establishing **the Tohum Autism Foundation in 2003.**

Their objective is to help the unclaimed and non publicized autism in Turkey and raise awareness as well as helping these children with proper education.

However, it was not easy to bring this dream to life.

She came across many difficulties when establishing the foundation and also when developing the training programs.

A teacher: "Look how well you said that letter"

Interview with Mine Narin:

Establishing a foundation has very important responsibilities. As you know, in Turkey, foundations are very old organizations.

A foundation statute has to be prepared and that took us about one year.

We actually became established so that we can put an early diagnosis and put the children with autism through the education system to integrate them into society.

What I mean is this. **If we could give special education to kids in the 3-5 age group, 50% of these children can go on to normal schools.**

A teacher: scissors, scissors. You said scissors, super.

Interview with Aylin Sezgin:

We first started our program with 10 children. We currently have 24 children in the schooling program and approximately 100 children attend the course programs.

We are currently serving 130 children. Of course we came across many difficulties.

From translating the program to Turkish, to finding people to work, to convince people to work on a different project, to finding the families; these are things that take up time.

But we are at a much better place now.

The government gives children with autism 8 hours training a month.

Meaning you can take your child to a rehabilitation centre and **get 8 hours of special education every month for free.**

But a child with autism needs about 40 hours of special education a month. **We are talking about 160 hours in comparison to 8 hours.**

It is not possible to get far with 8 hours of special education, so we decided to develop a different program.

We are giving our children program service with not just 8 hours but not 160 hours either.

About half of the 100 children receive a scholarship to attend our school.

Because on top of the aid that the government has given, the families need to pay an extra fee for special education and we provide scholarships to those family who can’t afford it.

At the Tohum Autism Foundation Special Education School, the day starts at 9:00 with a bell, like any normal school.

Every student has a special teacher appointed to them. Till 3:00 pm they develop speech, eating properly and developing oneself in social surroundings.

Later on they work on main studies such as Turkish grammar, math and geography.

This way, children with autism are educated when they are still ‘a seed’ (young) and are trained in a healthy way to be a part of society at an early age.

Interview with a teacher (Hayal Esler):

We have group sessions. Other than the one-on-one education, the numbers of students in a class change. According to the child’s capabilities, the class and training models change.

We also have group training activities.

Here the important point is to prepare them for inclusive education. We aim for these children to be integrated in mainstream schools in the future.

We have a motivational system here. We aim for students to meet their targets- such as; looking at their teacher in group training, answering questions, and

following directions like “everyone raise their hands” and they follow this direction.

Or if we are singing a song, they may not sing all the words but they can move along with us. Our objective is to have each child be able to reach their highest capability.

Educating a child with autism in Turkey is very expensive and also demands a lot of patience.

Out of the 450 thousand children with autism in Turkey, only 2 thousand can receive an education. Only a small proportion of those are lucky enough to have special education here.

Interview with the mother of a child with autism (Hülya Kurt):

(Hülya Kurt sings a folk song)

“I see the day, I see the days...”

I have three sons. Two are autistic. When they were babies I took them to checkups every month. Everything was going well,

but when they were about 2 and a half, we noticed that they still hadn’t started talking.

For example, he has a tooth ache but cannot tell you this. You can’t possibly notice everything. So what happens then?

He becomes aggressive because he is in pain. He is trying to explain his problem and there is nothing you can do.

This is one of the biggest problems we face. Here at first they learn to sit quietly at the table, they learn to speak, to communicate or do anything that a person would require in his or her daily life.

I want to first talk about my little son. My little son, when he first started here,

his fingers were so weak that he couldn’t even push a metal door handle to open. Now he draws beautiful pictures all on his own.

He is currently taking reading and writing classes. He studies math. Miracles really do happen.

We came here with a full scholarship. I want to take this opportunity to thank them very much those who give scholarships, and those who find the scholarships.

I mean, without the scholarships it would have been impossible for us to continue.

(A child with autism is singing):

Say what comes from within, otherwise it’s a shame. If you give up on life, sadness will find you.

If I could do something for your sparkling eyes, tell me what is going on, it will be a story for me.

Just come, the streets will give back. Just come.

Interview with the father of a child with autism (Mustafa Öztürk):

It is important to give a child with autism education in the best way possible.

There are very few organizations in Turkey who do this and one of these associations is the school of Tohum Autism Foundation where my son is attending.

Only four years ago a music teacher came saying “how can I help with these children”.

Deniz discovered a talent in Süleyman, my son, here at the foundation. And after that she said “I will educate this child without asking for any fee.”

We brought him every week. Now he works more often.

He takes one hour lessons each week from teachers from Istanbul Technical University in a building that the municipality has provided.

There was one incident. My son was listening to our neighbor’s daughter practice on her piano, then without any notes in front of him, he started playing something from Mozart.

The teacher, who was quite surprised, said “but I didn’t teach him this”.

“he probably listened from our neighbor’s daughter” we said. Like that, the method of work changed for example.

We think that he plays what he listens, but that is not important. We don’t think he has an extraordinary talent but he does play well and that is amazing.

The Tohum Autism Foundations’ projects are not limited only to schools. They want to make Turkey aware of autism and to make a difference for children with autism.

They aim to inform the public about autism through distribution of brochures and through commercials.

Interview with Mine Narin:

For the first time in Turkey, along with the Ministry of Health, we screened 46 thousand children.

Approximately 1,200 medical officials went through training and learned about autism.

They were given the necessary education to recognize autism at an early stage which they now continue with.

We have projects with the Ministry of Health to take this practice to all over Turkey.

Along with the Ministry of Education we gave training about autism to the special education teachers working at RAM’s (rehabilitation centers) or inclusive schools.

We have these in different intervals; **some lasted for weeks and some for 30 days.**

Our last education program was 160 hours of training. They were given trainings at different levels until they became specialists.

I think we have about 1800 teachers working at public schools, they received this training with the partnership of the Tohum Autism Foundation.

(Children with Autism Are Singing)

While Mine Narin is known to be one of Turkey’s most successful businesswomen, she wanted to dedicate her energy not only on her professional career but also on children with autism.

She searched for happiness in these children’s laughter, not in her professional career.

Without any advantage, she touches the lives of people she’s never known.

The Tohum Foundation has planted happiness seeds in the hearts of many children. She made a tremendous difference with what she has done for children, and for hundreds of hearts in Turkey.

Dear viewers, we have done so many programs with Mine Narin. We touched on the different topics related to autism,

We can say that we have been following Mine Narin for years as she has showed how much effort she has put into this.

What Mine Narin has done is very important. Mine Narin is someone who should be looked up to in her own social circle.

Mine Narin is an important figure to show no matter who you are how you can make a difference in other persons’ lives that you have never known.

After a short break, I will explain how you to nominate people like Mine Narin to be Turkey’s Changemaker.

We have come to the end of another Turkey’s Changemaker program. If you know a Changemaker close by please call us at 212 249 23 14.

Or go to our website (www.farkyaratanlar.org) and fill out our form.

We are at the SEED Conference Center of Sabancı University Sakıp Sabancı Museum in Istanbul.

Until the next episode of “Turkey’s Changemakers”, I’m Cüneyt Özdemir, wishing you a good evening.