

Basic facilities

Possibilities to improve and extend the assistance

All the people involved with the Liliane Foundation know that its assistance is focused on children with disabilities in development countries and that it is direct, person-centred and small-scaled. Those are the basic principles respected and implemented by all mediators in Africa, Asia and Latin America.



Basic facility Zimbabwe

Apart from the medical rehabilitation of children with physical and/or mental disabilities, much attention is given to social rehabilitation like education or vocational training. So in theory a whole range of options is available to effectively help children with disabilities.

In practice it often remains frustrating that not all the help desired can be offered. Many mediators indicate that they themselves have a clear picture of the form of assistance the children need, but that there are as yet no appropriate facilities in their country or region. Especially for children with a severe degree of mental and/or

physical disability, facilities often turn out to be inadequate or even not available at all. For instance day-care centres and short-stay homes, i.e. after an operation, are badly needed. We call the building, the infrastructure required for that purpose, a '*basic facility*'.

From intensive contacts with mediators it further appears that there is among themselves, their co-workers and parents a need for training in the field of rehabilitation and follow-up of people with disabilities. Setting up a course or a training in this field is also regarded by us as a *basic facility*. Thanks to a subsidy provided by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also the Liliane Foundation offers since 1996 the possibility of financial support to basic facilities. Basic facilities enable mediators to extend and improve assistance to the children.

We can divide the basic facilities in two main categories: Small-scaled basic facilities and Training/Workshops.

1. Small-scaled basic facility

This concerns a small facility with or without the possibility of accommodation. For this purpose either a small building may be constructed or an existing building may be rented and, if necessary, adapted. In this building one of the following objectives may be realized:

- Day-care for groups of 10 to 20 children with among other things training in Activities of Daily Life (ADL);
- Temporary relief to allow paramedical care, for instance after surgery;
- Furtherance of social contacts among children and youngsters with disabilities and among parents/caretakers of the children;
- Skills training, regular training and development of parents/caretakers of children with disabilities;
- Small orthopaedic workshop for the manufacture and repair of appliances such as callipers and crutches or adapted furniture.

2. Training/Workshop

- Furtherance of skills of the mediators and of their co-workers.
- Awareness-raising of parents/caretakers regarding taking care of their child with a disability.

When setting up a basic facility there are some aspects that we always want to take into consideration. The demand must also come from the basis and so should preferably also be signalled by the parents of children with disabilities or by youngsters with disabilities themselves. It is not sufficient if a mediator appreciates there is a need somewhere and looks for a solution. There is hardly any point in building a room meant for the organisation of parent meetings when those parents have not signalled that need themselves. This might entail the risk that the building will hardly ever be used.

The location of the building is of key importance. We highly appreciate it if local authorities, for instance the municipality, concretize their cooperation to a project by donating a piece of land - provided it has easy access. If it is remote, without any surfaced roads leading to it, especially people with disabilities will not be able to get there.

The projects are small-scale, which goes for the target group as well as for the costs. We absolutely do not want to construct ambitious and prestigious projects, but to respond to small-scale needs.

Using local building material may result in far less expenses. Apart from that, if buildings are made of local material they will also better fit the environment. If all the houses in a village are made of clay and have a thatched roof, it would not be wise to build a day-centre for children with disabilities of bricks and covered with corrugated iron. The quality of a building does not only depend on the material that is used. Designing it requires expertise.

From a well-intending mediator we received an application for a building, outlined on a piece of paper. In order to save room on the ground floor, the toilets had been planned on the first floor. That is not exactly practical for wheelchair users. The aspects of fire security and the possibility of fast evacuation in case of fire also have to be taken into consideration. Access for wheelchairs is absolutely required. A reliable architect as well as a trustworthy and experienced contractor should be looked for. It is important to ascertain that the building contractor and the architect are independent and do not share a mutual interest. If possible, different quotations should be asked for.

Apart from the expenses that are necessary to set up a facility (investment costs) there are also the costs that are required to run the facility: the operation costs or running costs. These are recurring costs, such as costs of water, electricity, salaries for the staff, material etc. As to those costs the Liliane Foundation's policy requires that they should be *reasonable*, compared to similar projects in the country as well as to the number of children that will be using the facility. The total operation costs, calculated per child, should be such as to enable a family with a more than average income to give at least a reasonable financial contribution. If the operation costs are too high, then the plan is perhaps not realistic and therefore not feasible.

Applying for a basic facility is of course slightly more complicated than applying for a calliper or a hearing aid. The question as to whether an application will be approved or not depends on the one hand on the funds available and on the other hand on the contents of the applications. The funds are limited and may vary from one year to another.

Mediators should take care not to raise any false hopes with the target group. A wonderful project may perhaps not (at once) be realized when the funds have been spent already.

Finally we are getting more and more aware of the importance of cultural and/or sport activities, especially for children or youngsters with severe multiple disabilities. Also for the organisation thereof you may appeal to basic facilities.

Good communication with the correspondent is essential for the mediator to submit and handle basic facilities.

We invite mediators who are considering to improve or extend the assistance to the children through a Basic facility to send us a proposal.

Miel Claes

Regional correspondent Latin America