

The Upgrade of Multi-Sensory Room for Blind and Visually Impaired Children

According to official data of the Ministry of Social Policy and Labor of the Udmurt Republic, about 10,000 visually impaired citizens currently live in the Udmurt Republic. In 2018, about 1,500 of them used the services of the National Library of the Udmurt Republic. It should be noted that in recent years the number of children with serious visual impairments has increased, resulting in higher barriers to information access and poorer educational opportunities. The aim of the proposed project is to reduce the inequality in information accessibility and to expand educational opportunities for blind and visually impaired children.

The main objective of the project is to upgrade the Multi-Sensory Room based at the National Library of the Udmurt Republic to offer individual and group rehabilitation, remedial and developmental activities for children with visual impairments of preschool and primary school age (including teaching reading and writing Braille).

Within the framework of the Multi-Sensory Room upgrade project, it was planned to re-equip the site with new modern tools and equipment. At the preliminary stage of the project, special rehabilitation and developmental equipment for training tactile and motor skills, vision restoration as well as special educational materials were acquired.

The library specialists developed a program of individual and group remedial and developmental sessions for blind and visually impaired children. The program consists of the following parts: an explanatory note, the program contents, training methods and means, thematic lesson plans. The program includes a total of 90 hours of individual training, each session is 30-35 minutes in length, held once or twice a week. The program of group remedial and developmental sessions for blind and deaf-blind children includes 24 topics, each session lasts 30-35 minutes.

In December 2018 the newly upgraded Multi-Sensory Room hosted 7 pilot sessions (3 group and 4 individual sessions) based on the new program and using new functionality of the site.

Group sessions:

- theatricalized game-session “A Journey to the Land of Tales” (based on works by Korney Chukovsky) for pupils of the visually impaired class (1st grade, school № 53, Izhevsk);
- session with master class “We Study and Create” for pupils of the visually impaired class (2nd grade, school №53, Izhevsk);

– interactive therapeutic session “Hocus Focus” for special education pupils (3rd grade, school № 53, Izhevsk).

Individual sessions:

- session with a pupil having both vision and hearing impairment from the Developmental Center “Chudo” for children with disabilities (Chaykovsky, Perm Krai);
- session with pupils of the 1st grade of Izhevsk “School № 4 for children with disabilities” having both vision and hearing impairment;
- session with pupils of the 2nd grade of Izhevsk school № 53 for children with visual impairments;
- session with an 8 years old child with cerebral palsy, totally blind, not attending educational institutions (Votkinsk, Udmurtia).

On 17 December 2018, the National Library of the Udmurt Republic held the opening of the newly upgraded Multi-Sensory Room with an interactive seminar program attended by librarians, special education professionals, parents of children with disabilities, students of the Udmurt State University.

The first theoretical part of the seminar focused on implementation of the project “The Multi-Sensory Room Upgrade for Children with Visual Impairments” supported by the grant from the Goethe-Institut, received as part of the Summer School for young library professionals in Stuttgart; and on 17 Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations in 2015.

The theoretical part of the seminar was followed by an interactive presentation of the Multi-Sensory Room featuring a group rehabilitation and training session for pupils of the visually impaired class (school № 53, Izhevsk) demonstrating functionality of the sensory room, its methods and forms of work.

The Multi-Sensory Room opening attracted great mass media attention, which included coverage in news by 4 local TV channels.

The news report on “My Udmurtia” TV channel dated 12/17/2018

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujcFszawQVI&feature=youtu.be>

The news report on “TNT-Noviy Region” TV channel dated 12/17/2018

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1aCAIZG-b2Y>

The following is an excerpt from an interview with Natalia Shapmorova, the head of the social initiative “Osobyje Mamy” (“Special Moms”): “Unfortunately, my daughter doesn’t see at all. She is 9 years old. The Room's facilities contribute substantially to the development of cognitive, emotional and volitional functions.

For such children it is very necessary, very important when they touch, when they learn the world. We can see everything that is around us, and they can only touch it”.

The news report on “STS-Izhevsk” TV channel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4ztHrjao6s>

The news about the Multi-Sensory Room opening was placed on various Internet sites and portals, including the official websites of the National Library of the Udmurt Republic (<http://unatlib.ru/news/archive-of-events/4673-prezentatsiya-multisensornoj-komnaty-dlya-slepykh-i-slabovidyashchikh-detej>), the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Udmurt Republic and the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation.

The Multi-Sensory Room is expected to host over 200 individual and group sessions every year, providing services to at least 250 blind and visually impaired children. Our specialists will also offer free consultations for parents of children with visual impairments.

We sincerely thank Goethe-Institut for supporting the upgrade of the Multi-Sensory Room for blind and visually impaired children, based at the National Library of the Udmurt Republic. We wish all of you good health, good luck and every success in your important mission!

*Anna Semenova,
National Library of the Udmurt Republic,
Izhevsk, Russia*