

## **Ability Park, Student Service Association**

### **General goals and key aspects of the project**

Ability Park is a thematic amusement park with national and international awards and recognition that gets people acquainted with the life of people with all kinds of disabilities in an interactive and entertaining fashion that facilitates social inclusion. The objective of our enterprise is to shift social attitude and offer a meaningful and pleasant experience through games led by people with disabilities to visitors of all age groups who wish to play, have a good time and test their abilities.

Ability Park was conceived in 2002 and operated in various locations at that time. The idea behind the Park was to connect the increasing interest in thematic parks and the human affection for games with the requirement of shifting social attitude towards people with disabilities in an interactive fashion. The Park is to facilitate such shift in views required for the social integration and inclusion of people with disabilities. It also endeavours to change indifference, aversion and pity displayed towards people with disabilities into compassion and recognition by presenting their abilities, opportunities and demands in a comprehensible way visitors can experience themselves.

Ability Park is a complex equal opportunities project running permanently from 2007: on the one hand, its education and training program translates the problems of people with disabilities into the language of various professions (architecture, education, media, IT) and illustrates that disability is rather a technical than a social issue. On the other hand, it is an employment program playing a significant role in the workplace rehabilitation of people with disabilities through the employment of blind, deaf, physically and mentally/intellectually disabled persons. Last, but not least it is a tourism attraction offering a meaningful and pleasant experience through its permanent games (blind labyrinth, wheelchair labyrinth, sign-post, Wonder Town) and other games of logic and dexterity, workshops and information services to all the visitors who wish to play, have a good time and test their abilities.

### **Duration**

- 2002-2007: Ability Park was first installed in 2002 and has attended several events since then (Sziget Festival, Sport Island, Children's Island). It was installed in Millenáris Park for six weeks in 2004 and has participated at several hundreds of events around Hungary (e. g. REHA Hungary, Hídünnep, various school events) during these years.

- February 2007 - March 2008: The Park has moved to Jövő Háza Központ (House of Future Centre) in Millenáris Park, Budapest.

- April 2008: In April 2008 AP's moving to a new building independent from any other exhibitions.

### **Results of the project**

*Awards and recognitions:* Hungarian Design Award – Special Award of the Ministry of Education, design category; World Young Business Achiever Award Hungary 2003; WYBA 2003 – Award of Excellence in Social Corporate Responsibility; Knight Cross of the Hungarian Republic 2007; Award of the Pannon Hero Foundation 2007

*Number of visitors:* 260.000

*Venues and events:* Sziget Festival, Millenáris Park, Sport Island, Children's Island, REHA Hungary, Hídünnep, various school events.

*Number of employees (February 2008):* 102

### **Project implementation**

Ability Park is a permanently running project. Our main activity - the operation of an interactive exhibition - is functioning more like an enterprise by now. All the other activities in connection with our methodology, games and employees (e. g. the trainings, outdoor programs, festivals, etc.) are functioning like projects.

### *Games of AP:*

- Dark Cases – blind labyrinth
- Paralympic dress-room – blind labyrinth
- Wonder Town – games in connection with the logic of mentally disabled persons
- Sign Post – sign language games
- Game store – sensory games
- Wheelchair labyrinth
- Lisa living room – presentation of medical aids
- Chamber of doors – disability-related quiz

### *Organisational aspects:*

Ability Park has a unique employment system with more than 80 blind, deaf, physically and mentally/intellectually disabled employees, the so-called animators, who present and conduct the various games of the Park. Since the interactive exhibition is open 6 days a week, we need to employ a great amount of people with all kinds of disabilities, who are able to show the details of the games as well as talk with the guests about their disabilities. There's a big fluctuation amongst the employees as most of them eventually get the opportunity to practise their professions in the open labour market after gaining a significant work experience in the Park.

Since AP is a rehabilitation workplace, it was necessary to develop a well functioning personal helper (mentoring) system as well. Mentors of the Park help the animators solve their problems, write their rehabilitation plan and they provide them with a lot of advice in connection with their daily work. The mentors have a meeting once a week, where they exchange their experiences facilitated by the training managers of AP.

AP is divided into zones in connection with one kind of disability. Every zone has a leader responsible for the activity of a specific day in the respective zone. He/she decides about the working-time of the animators, the reception and coordination of the visitors in the zone, etc. AP has 3 shift-leaders as well - non-disabled persons who coordinate the work of the animators, mentors and zone-leaders. Together with the Park manager they are responsible for all the important decisions concerning the daily operations of AP. They keep contact with everyone the Park has to work with. The Park manager is also responsible for the enrolment and dismissal of the employees, the restructuring and development of games, etc.

Since it became quite a big enterprise, AP has a management of 12 persons including the executive chairman, his representative, Park manager, financial manager, the communication manager (responsible for PR, marketing, sales, fund-raising and tenders), the training manager (responsible for the training of animators, mentors and the management as well as trainings provided to firms, companies and professionals), the program manager (responsible for the outdoor programs), the HR director and their crew.

### *External activities:*

Besides operating the Park as a full-time exhibition, AP has many outdoor programs and external activities as well. Most important of them are the trainings for companies and professionals as well as participation at various festivals. These activities provide AP with extra income, numerous important opportunities and professional experience.

External trainings of the Park are based on non-formal educational elements, the interactive games of AP, dramatic situation-modelling, our specialized knowledge in all kinds of disabilities, the treatment of and attitude towards people with disabilities. Our training program translates the problems of people with disabilities into the language of various professions (architecture, education, media, IT, customer relations, health-care, social workers, municipality and administration) and illustrates that disability is more a technical than a social issue.

## **Financial structure of Ability Park**

*General:*

Financial structure of AP is a mixture of non-profit and profit-orientated financing. In the first 5 years incomes from non-profit activities (tenders and donations) were dominating over profit-orientated financing (profit from tickets, trainings, outdoor programs, etc.) Since February 2007, the beginning of the permanent exhibition our financial structure has changed a lot, which means that profit-orientated financing has gained far bigger importance. From April 2008, the beginning of the fully independent exhibition this structure is undergoing another relevant change: we're becoming absolutely self-sustaining and much more dependant on our own profit.

*Main changes in the financial structure:*

From February 2007 AP has undergone a relevant change in its financial structure, namely an approximately fivefold growth in its budget. Unlike in the 5 years of outdoor programs, the first year of constant opening and permanent employment has brought a big change. In 2007 our main incomes were the following: the normative subvention after employments with disabilities (between 36.000 and 44.000 EUR per month), rental contract with the House of Future (we're receiving a fix amount of 8.000 EUR every month and a small percent from the ticket profit), incomings from trainings and outdoor events, tenders and donations. Our main expenses were the following: wages and taxes, investments, rents and current expenses, etc. The normative subvention is functioning in a post-financing structure, meaning that it must be paid by us in advance. For the first month of employment we didn't get the subvention, so we took out a bank loan (44.000 EUR).

Our financial year ends in March, meaning that we don't have our formal account for 2007. Therefore, we must note that all the data included are only referential, not entire and incommensurable!

*Yearly budgets (2006, 2007):*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total income</b>	<b>Total expenditure</b>
2005	93.572 EUR	80.400 EUR
2006	93.820 EUR	71.624 EUR
2007 (February – December)	approx. 560.000 EUR <b>Only referential and not entire!</b>	approx. 600.000 EUR <b>Only referential and not entire!</b>

*From 2008:*

In April 2008 AP's moving to a new building independent from any other exhibitions. We're going to receive all the profit after the tickets meaning that we're going to be more dependent on our profit as before, and at the same time we'll become absolutely self-sustaining.