

## **From the Specialised Institute to the Resource Centre**

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Concerning the education of visually impaired children, France is just in the middle of two systems.

### **Slide 2**

- The integration of children with visual impairment in regular education classrooms is the promoted model and is increasing a lot.

Actually, French legislation requires the integration of any child with disabilities in schools of their community area. Today, it's the most common situation for children with visual impairment.

- There are still quite a lot of specialised Institutes in which visually impaired children used to be boarders and educated in adapted classrooms. This kind of education is dismissed nowadays and we think that institutes have to consider how to adapt their services in collaboration with the inclusive system.

### **Slide 3**

How an Institute like Montclair should adapt to the new education system?

We were convinced that there were probably some specific situations difficult to handle in regular education for which specialised Institutes would be able to offer a solution providing a new organisation and management in cooperation with the support services available.

2 questions were the main subject of our analyse:

- How could we give some help to pupils or young people when total integration fails to give a proper answer to a difficult situation during their schooling?
- What do families and students think afterward, about their experience of specialised Institute and boarding?

To give further thoughts to these questions, we have conducted a survey with the young and their families issued from Montclair Institute. What did they expected, why, what did they find?

#### **Slide 4**

We have used 2 types of questionnaires:

- To the young: for 4 years now, we have been sending a questionnaire to them, one year after their departure from the Institute, as to collect their feedback on their experience in Montclair.
- To the families: we have sent one questionnaire to the family of boarder students for the last 4 years

We got 30 replies in total.

#### **Slide 5**

As to know why did these young people choose a specialised insitute (but was it truly a choice?), we have investigated about their initial situation.

- 14 were previously in specialised institute. Some of them have made the choice of changing from one institute to another during their schooling. But most of them would have planned integration if it would have been possible. The lack of support services and competencies lead them to go on with specialised Institute.
- 6 of them were in normal schools close to their families with the help of support services. But, this assistance was not enough anymore regarding the needs and the difficulties. The parents had to choose between going on with integration or leaving for a specialised Institute.
- 9 were in regular classrooms without any specific support. 4 of them would have been able to benefit from a support service but it didn't exist in the area and they had no choice than to go to specialised institute. For 5 of them, going on with integration was to tough because of the increasing of the visual disease and the important supportive needs necessary.
- One young had dropped out of the school system and had big needs in rehabilitation.

#### **Slide 6**

For 15 out of the 30 situations, it was too difficult for support services to handle all their needs. The main problems were:

- Important and urgent needs in rehabilitation, technical aids, adapted support.

- Need of specific and adapted schooling: it means less children in a class, individual support, adapted pedagogical means.
- Relational problems, which impede the integration and put the young in a situation of suffering or moral distress.
- After several years of integration, some families and child can't get over the effort and energy requested.

### **Slide 7**

From the family side, here are the explanations for the choice of specialised institute (range from the most important to the least one):

- For 10 families out of 14, it was impossible to go on anymore with individual integration in ordinary school (first quotation for 7 families)
- For 10 families out of 14, they wanted opportunities of rehabilitation and technical aids.
- For 10 families out of 14, they were missing specific support services in their community area.
- For 9 families out of 14, there was a need of independence between the young and his parents.

### **Slide 8**

The most important expectations from the families when they arrive at the Institute are related to the competencies of professionals specialised in visual impairment and ask for a safe and secure environment.

- To learn how to use technical devices and palliatives process (6 quotations)
- To get autonomy in mobility and daily living skills (5 quotations)
- To make the most of adapted schooling and secure environment (4 quotations)
- To get self - confidence or to come back to self - confidence (2 quotations)

### **Slide 9**

Thanks to this analyse of needs and demands from the clients, we can evaluate the limits of integration and identify some specific needs, which could be handle in specialised institutes, if not in the mainstream.

Specialised Institutes provide the competencies of trained professionals who have acquired experiences thanks to the diversity of the population they have worked with. It gives also to the student the opportunity to meet other visually impaired people and to get some useful independance from the family.

Here are the limits we have pointed out:

- When the visual disease suddenly appears or increases: it asks for important support in rehabilitation and palliatives aids which are difficult to handle with the regular education system

- When some young are suffering, become isolated, withdraw from people, have relationships problems... They need psychological and educational support. Moreover, to meet some peers with visual impairment can give sense to what they are living.
- When some families and child are exhausted by the involvement and the energy that integration asks for. They are looking for a break, a bit of time of a rest.
- When some young are performing badly at school and are going towards school failure, lack of vocational prospects. They sometimes need to work on a new project of life, to build a vocational project more adapted to their skills and limits.

### **Slide 10**

This analyse of the initial needs lead us to look at the feeling of the young and their families after their experiences in the institute.

To the question “which kind of aids and supports seemed to have been the most important during your stay in the Institute?” here are the answers for the young:

- The technical aids (10)
- The schooling assistance (10)
- The personal support (9)
- The rehabilitation process (9)

### **Slide 11**

The following quotations illustrate the support the young have found in Montclair Institute

*“I have never made as many activities as when I was in Montclair. Beforehand, my parents didn’t dare because they were afraid for me.”*

*“To be boarder for some times in Montclair, gave me the opportunity to explain more easily my visual disease and my limits.”*

### **Slide 12**

As for the parents, the answers to the question “which kind of aids and supports seemed to have been the most important during the stay in the Institute?” are quite similar to those of their children:

- The technical aids (12)
- The schooling assistance (11)
- The exchanges with care staff (11)
- The rehabilitation process (8)

**Slide 13**

The following quotations illustrate the support the parents have found in Montclair Institute

*“Being able to deal with a laptop has completely change her way of working... for a true saving of time... we weren’t anymore alone to help her with school, to encourage her, to deal with her moral distress.”*

*“It’s difficult to say what was the most important for N. To learn Braille was essential. Mobility gave him independence. The relationships with care staff, the other students and the leisure activities gave him the opportunity to be more open minded.*

**Slide 14**

An advantage of the specialised institute is also to provide a global personal monitoring, in a community environment. This is a truly and effective support to:

Enable people to set up personal compensation strategy as to get self -confidence and to trust their abilities.

*“I saw that others were able to manage with and it gave me some encouragement, but I wasn’t ready for independence.”*

*“J. is more independant, more openminded, has gain in self – confidence”.*

**Slide 15**

Get aware of their own capacities and limits and to be able to speak and explain their visual disability and its consequences

*“Beforehand, I didn’t dare telling I was visually impaired, but now, it’s less taboo. I have understood that I can live with and be as successful as any other people.”*

**Slide 16**

Allow them to meet their peers, to exchange, to know themselves thanks to the others (life in community, speaking group...).

*“At the beginning in the Institute, the psychological support and the discussions with the care staff help him a lot to deal with his handicap”*

**Slide 17**

Provide leisure activities adapted to their specific needs as to get positive and constructive experiences.

*“Montclair gave me something that my parents would have been afraid of allowing: autonomy. Without you, I would still be afraid of many things.*

### **Slide 18**

This survey and our daily experience lead us to pinpoint some assets from the specialised Institute, which could be complementary to the individual integration in mainstream:

- Intensive and comprehensive support
- Providing of psychological, social and educational assistance by a team of professionals.
- Opportunities to meet other people with visual impairment, value of the exchanges and the benefit for self - development.
- Support to families.

### **Slide 19**

In conclusion, we would like to express firmly our commitment to the current orientation of handicap directives:

- Necessity to develop the inclusion in regular education system
- Necessity to provide technical and human resources specialised in visual impairment

But also:

Necessity to allow the opportunity of a time of breathing, a place of resource in case of difficult situations

### **Slide 20**

From the specialised Institute, we would like to develop the idea of a Resource Centre. The main purposes would be:

- To be an identified partner for the support services, when they can't meet some specific needs in the community area.
- To provide some specific and specialised services, adapted to each situation and not bound by the rules of regular education.
- To be identified as a possible and secure place for breathing, taking a rest, building another project.