
VivaCell, UNICEF Joint Project Improves Education Environment For Children With Special Needs

armradio.am - 5//2008

UNICEF and VivaCell, a subsidiary of Mobile TeleSystems OJSC (NYSE: MBT) announced today that thanks to their joint initiative, access to quality education for more than 200 Armenian children with special needs will become much easier.

Over 36 million drams donated by VivaCell to UNICEF in 2007 were spent on establishing and furnishing resource rooms in eight inclusive schools in Yerevan and Tavoush province as well as on the purchase and outfitting of three specially equipped minibuses that will be provided to three community centers offering transportation services to children with special needs in Tavoush.

"The partnership between VivaCell and UNICEF vividly demonstrates how public and private sectors can work hand in hand for the benefit of children. I welcome this joint initiative that creates opportunities for children with special needs to exercise their right to education," Bagrat Yesayan, Deputy Minister of Education and Science said during the ceremony of handover of minibuses and resource rooms held today at the inclusive school No.180 in Avan community of Yerevan.

"This joint initiative will help ensure that children with special needs have full access to quality education in eight inclusive schools, and will enable community centres to provide outreach services to other children with special needs," UNICEF Representative in Armenia Sheldon Yett said.

"Too many children with disabilities are unnecessarily prevented from going to school, while others are consigned to environments that discourage real learning - environments that are unhealthy, unsafe, ineffective, and unfriendly," the UNICEF Representative added.

"We have often been considered as doing philanthropy. However, what VivaCell is doing is a clear responsibility toward the country in which our Company operates and toward the children of Armenia. By this act of social responsibility, VivaCell will help children with special needs to get quality education. With special vehicles and resource rooms it will be much easier for them to achieve this. VivaCell recruits individuals with disabilities and invites other enterprises operatin in Armenia to do the same," said Ralph Yirikian, the General Manager of VivaCell.

Under the project each of the eight selected inclusive schools was equipped with a resource room where children, with the support from specially trained teachers, will engage in various developmental activities. Resource rooms will also serve as a place of convergence for parents of children with special needs where they will be able to receive information and guidance from professionals.

Through the project, over 100 teachers from the eight schools were also provided training to improve their knowledge and skills on methodologies of working with children with special needs.

According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Issues, there are approximately 8,500 children with disabilities living in the Republic of Armenia. Although the country has 14 inclusive schools and 5 UNICEF-supported community centres that cater for the needs of 1,500 children with

disabilities, many of these children remain isolated from the society and deprived from basic education.

Inclusive education ensures the right to education for children with special needs and provides them with opportunities to develop their social skills and become productive and full-fledged members of their community and the society now and in the future.

Since 2001 UNICEF has been supporting projects on inclusive education which demonstrate that most children with special needs can, with motivation and effort from teachers, school administrators and students themselves, thrive in a mainstream environment.
