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THE HISTORY OF REHABILITATION HOLIDAYS AND CAMPS OF THE SPORTS ASSOCIATION OF THE DISABLED "START" IN POZNAŃ, 1963-2007

Key words: history, "START", rehabilitation holiday, rehabilitation camps, the disabled.

ABSTRACT

The article discusses the history of rehabilitation holidays and camps of the Sports Association of the Disabled "START" in Poznań, between 1963 and 2007. First, the beginnings of the idea of rehabilitation holidays are discussed followed by selected events from the period between 1963 (when the first holidays were organized) to 2007 (when the holidays took place for the 45th time). The report discusses the most important dates, numbers of events, their locations, numbers of participants, information about organizers, programmes and special initiatives. The paper also presents basic facts about the Association, especially changes in its structure, name and objectives.

*For years I have been convinced that the rehabilitation holidays
should play a role of a factor
which positively affects the stereotype of disability*

(Edward Niemczyk) [17]

The Sports Association of the Disabled "START" (Sportowe Stowarzyszenie Inwalidów SSI) is the oldest non-governmental organization in Poland, whose aim is "to utilize physical culture, sport and tourism and social and educational activities for physical, mental and social education of the physically and intellectually disabled, as well as of people affected by addictions, violence, poverty and other adversities". The "START" organises rehabilitation holidays and integration camps, propagates competitive and popular sports, tourism and recreation as well as training of specialist coaches, instructors and volunteers, exchange of information and co-operation with other organisations and institutions in Poland and abroad in the area of its statutory activities [18].

The beginnings of sport for the disabled in Poznań are connected with the introduction of regular physical exercises in the early 1950s to the program of the Sports Association "START" (Zrzeszenie Sportowe (ZS) „START”), which had been operating since 1952, originally among the able-bodied members of the Co-operative Labor Movement (Spółdzielczość Pracy). Jan Dziejdzic from the High School of Physical Education in Poznań was the initiator of this project. As his associates he invited disabled workers from the cooperatives "Broommaker" ("Szczołtkarz") and "A Blind Man" ("Niewidomy") as well as a few other Poznań companies. Initially, the propagated sports for the disabled included swimming, rowing, running, throwing and horse-riding. Some time later walking

trips and kayak trips were added and, finally, sports camps were organized. The latter had been already held by the Polish Association of the Blind (Polski Związek Niewidomych [17].

The introduction of sports among the disabled in Poznań was also the activity of Professor Wiktor Dega from the Orthopedic Clinic of the Medical Academy in Poznań as well as the establishment of the Polish School of Rehabilitation. For the first time, sport and tourism in the form of skiing activities became part of physical and social rehabilitation of the disabled at the winter sports rehabilitation holidays for amputees organized in 1956 in the Clinical Sanatorium and Rehabilitation Centre (Kliniczny Ośrodek Sanatoryjno-Rehabilitacyjny) in Cieplice Śląskie by Doctor Janina Tomaszewska from the above mentioned Orthopedic Clinic. A year later similar holidays were organized again in Cieplice, and in 1958 in Bukowina Tatrzańska in the Holiday Resort of the Union of Disabled Co-operatives (Związek Spółdzielni Inwalidów ZSI). Both holidays were run by the then assistant at the Orthopedic Clinic, Doctor Aleksander Kabsch [16]. The participants were amputees from co-operatives for the disabled from all over Poland. In the following years, apart from the winter holidays, the Clinic also organized summer sports rehabilitation and therapeutic holidays in the "START" centre in Wisła.

A landmark in the organisation of sports rehabilitation holidays was a meeting held in March 1961 during the holidays run by Doctor Kabsch in Bukowina Tatrzańska, which was attended by ZSI Vice-Chairman Jan Kochanowski, Chairman of the Poznań Province Council (Rada Wojewódzka), Chairman of the Poznań Province Council (Rada Wojewódzka) of ZS "START" Franciszek Karłowski, District Head of the Rehabilitation Department of ZSI (Dział Rehabilitacji Okręgowego ZSI) in Poznań Andrzej Skrzydlewski, (a proxy of the ZSI Chairman, Witold Sokolnicki) and Doctor Aleksander Kabsch from the Orthopaedic Clinic in Poznań. The meeting led to an agreement on close cooperation between the District ZSI and ZS "START" in the area of development of sport and tourism among the disabled (in particular, of programmes of professional rehabilitation of co-operative movement of the disabled), and in the area of organisation of sport and rehabilitation holidays. In order to make their work more efficient a Committee for Physical Education and Sport of the Disabled (Komisja Wychowania Fizycznego i Sportu Inwalidów) by the "START" Province Sport

Committee (Wojewódzka Komisja Sportowa WKS) "START" was established. Its prominent members included Jan Dzedzic (chairman), Franciszek Karłowski (secretary of WKS "START"), Doctor Franciszek Laurentowski, Doctor Aleksander Kabsch and Antoni Molenda. The Committee also included Andrzej Skrzydlewski, Edward Niemczyk (manager of the Vocational Guidance Service of Rehabilitation of the Disabled at the District ZSI (Poradnia Rehabilitacji Zawodowej Inwalidów Okręgowego ZSI)), Irena Kołodziej and Urszula Bober [17, 20].

In 1961 the ZSI Board from Warsaw and the ZS "START" from Poznań signed an agreement concerning the organisation of nationwide sport activities for the disabled by the "START" [17].

In 1963 Doctor Aleksander Kabsch began his cooperation with Edward Niemczyk, the pioneer in kayaking of the disabled, and the same year the Vocational Guidance Services of Rehabilitation of the Disabled at the District ZSI and the Sports Association "START" organized, for the first time in Poland, summer rehabilitation holidays for the cooperative employees with motor disabilities. The program of the holidays included mainly kayaking rehabilitation. Its main initiator, organiser and manager, like in all subsequent holidays of "START", was Edward Niemczyk (a social assistant at the Clinic and later the Association Chairman). The holidays took place in late August and early September at Lake Sarcz in Trzcianka Lubuska and lasted 21 days. Despite simple accommodation and food, the participants were happy with a large number of canoes that were at their disposal and the weather which made sport rehabilitation possible. This first canoeing holiday determined the organisational and programme framework of subsequent holidays, and it definitely met the needs of people with lower limb dysfunctions. It allowed them to get rid of the wheelchair or crutches, at least for some time, and according to Edward Niemczyk, "It made each physically disabled person in a canoe feel free". By introducing sport rehabilitation holidays the organisers assumed that each sports and scouting camp should also encompass rich cultural activities. As for the participants of holidays, they were the disabled selected by their co-operatives who were qualified to take part in the holidays by a rehabilitation doctor [15, 20].

The second "START" holidays in 1964 took place at a lake in Drawno. The holidays lasted three weeks and the participants stayed in two-bed holiday chalets of the Polish Tourist and Sight-

seeing Society (PTTK). When asked by the journalists, who visited the site, about their aim to participate in this new form of rehabilitation, they answered: "To do sports for our own pleasure – and first of all – for health. To regain, at least partially, our physical fitness" [13].

In February 1966, thanks to the initiative of Jacek Malejka, Franciszek Karłowski, Edward Niemczyk, Przemysław Głowacki and Andrzej Skrzydlewski, the Inter-co-operative Centre of Physical Culture of the Disabled "START" in Poznań was founded. Its main points of interest included gymnastics for the disabled at work, sport and recreation activities, rehabilitation and sports holidays and camps, therapeutic gymnastics, tourism, sports events and competitions [17].

Ten years after the first "START" holidays, those events were well-propagated and became known all over Poland. In 1973 the holidays were held in Nowy Zyzdrój in the Mazurian Lakes region, in the Centre of Family Holiday of ZSI together with holidays for able-bodied people from the Silesia region. However, it was not the first time holidays integrating the disabled and the able-bodied took place. The "START" activists came from all over the Wielkopolska region: Jarocin, Opalenica, Leszno, Wolsztyn, Poznań, Kalisz, etc. The morning routine of the day was rather strict and included the following elements: a wake-up call at 6.45, morning exercise at 7.00, tidying up the site and assembly at 7.45. After breakfast, from 9.30 to 12.30 and after lunch from 3.30 pm to 5.00 pm the participants attended group activities including bowling, swimming, canoeing, shot put, javelin throw, volleyball, general rehabilitation gymnastics, tourism and camping. In the evening the participants played parlor games, organized rec hall activities, set camp fires, watched performances of bands, etc. After the holidays were over Edward Niemczyk said about its participants: "They have to go back, although they did not want it so much. They made friends, they enjoyed sunshine, rest and carelessness. These holidays became their second world. A better world" [19].

In 1974 the framework plan of the holidays, which took place in Trzcianka and lasted 20 days, included in total 272 hours of rehabilitation activities. They included eight different rehabilitation forms: canoeing (learning, exercises, trips – 80 hours), field activities – including trekking (48 hours), compensatory gymnastics, swimming, bowling, badminton, team games and camping activities [5].

Until the passing of Act 51 of the Management of the Union of Disabled Co-operatives on 4th October 1974, on the principles of organisation and financing of rehabilitation and therapeutic holidays, the finances for the "START" holidays had come from the central rehabilitation fund, which was a part of rehabilitation funds raised by the disabled co-operatives. In Poznań it was managed by the District ZSI. After 1974, when the rehabilitation holidays were recognized as one of the basic forms of fitness improvement for the disabled, the "START" received funds from individual co-operatives. All participants in the holidays were employees of the disabled co-operatives and they took part in the holidays during their annual leave. The "START" could also recruit individual disabled persons who paid for their holidays and were members of other social organisations for the disabled or physical culture centres run by the "START". Since then the holidays took from 14 to 21 days. The participants included people with various disabilities. The programme encompassed individual fitness improvement activities, general motor rehabilitation exercises, active recreation forms (e.g. tourist trips), sports activities and cultural and educational activities. The programmes developed directly by the "START" were approved by the Rehabilitation Vocational Guidance Services [25]. The holidays still took place in rented recreation centres all over Poland, and it was strictly observed that they should be far away from the place of residence of the participants and in regions of great natural and cultural qualities, as rehabilitation holidays were often the only forms of rehabilitation the disabled could participate in [15].

In 1975 the Inter-co-operative Centre of Physical Culture of the Disabled "START" in Poznań began to organize winter holidays as well as spring and autumn holidays. In total, 21 holidays took place in 1975, which were attended by 903 people, mainly from the Wielkopolska region. The number of participants ranged from 22 to 60. Nineteen of the holidays were co-educational and two were holidays for disabled men. The holidays were held for people with the following disabilities or diseases: motor organ disorders (5), hearing impairment (3), including one for young people), mental disabilities (5), various diseases (4), epilepsy (2), schizophrenia (1), circulatory system (1), and rheumatoid diseases (1). There were also four holidays for pensioners. The organisers of the holidays were the "START" (5 holidays), RZSI (4), a co-operative association from Poznań (3), the

Rehabilitation Vocational Guidance Services for the Disabled (1), and the following disabled co-operatives (1 or 2): “General Świerczewski” Poznań, “Union” (“Zjednoczenie”) Poznań, “Metalworker” (“Metalowiec”) Poznań, “Purse and bag maker” (“Kaletnik”) Poznań, “Copernicus” (“Kopernik”) Leszno, as well as a unit of “START” in Kalisz and Sport and Tourist Association “Development” (“Rozwój”) in Rawicz. The holidays were organised in the following places in Poland: Niwka (5 holidays), Bukowina Tatrzańska (2), Mierzyn (2), Wągrowiec (2), Szczyrk (2), Gościm (1), Drawno (1), Skoki (1), Karpicko (1), Nowy Zyzdrój (1), Gdynia (1), Brenno (1), Ustronie Morskie (1), Boszkowo (1) [6, 17].

In 1976, the Inter-co-operative Centre of Physical Culture of the Disabled “START” in Poznań was reorganised into the Inter-co-operative Centre of Sport, Rehabilitation, Tourism and Recreation “START”. The holidays organised by the Centre were meant mainly for people with motor organ disorders, and their commissioner was the Regional – previously District – ZSI (RZSI) in Poznań. The RZSI was at the same time the organiser of rehabilitation holidays for people with all other disabilities, similarly to individual disabled co-operatives. In 1976 the “START” Centre organised and coordinated 25 holidays for 967 participants with seven types of disabilities, and was in charge of nine of the holidays. The holidays took place in ten various locations – mainly in the mountains, at the seaside and in Wągrowiec (6 holidays). Out of the above, 34 people (in particular, elderly and single people) took part in a 10-day “Christmas holiday” held in Wągrowiec. Eighteen people (with various diseases) took part in the “START” two-week canoeing camp on the Brda River [7, 17].

In January 1977 the “START” Centre took over the organisation and supervision of all rehabilitation holidays in the Wielkopolska region. The costs of accommodation, food and transport were charged to individual co-operatives from which the participants of the holidays were selected. However, because the Centre could not provide enough of qualified staff for all holidays, the RZSI Management selected co-operatives which had organised the holidays previously, to be co-organisers of their projects. The co-operatives received information about the dates, plans and programmes of individual holidays from the cooperating sport and tourism associations. In 1977 the organisational matters of the holidays were

managed on behalf of the Centre by Wiesława Wszelak – a qualified recreation instructor [1]. Twenty-six rehabilitation and therapeutic holidays, five sports camps and canoeing holidays were then organised for the total number of 1,054 people. The number of events significantly exceeded the plans made by the Centre for 1977. It is interesting to note that more than half of the participants (approx. 50-60%) were residents of Poznań: in the first five holidays, which took place twice in Bukowina Tatrzańska, twice in Niwka and in Wągrowiec, 181 people from the Wielkopolska region took part, out of whom 109 were from Poznań. They represented the following disabled co-operatives from Poznań: “Equality” (“Równość”), “Unity” (“Jedność”), “Inplast”, “Metalworker” (“Metalowiec”), “Sinpo”, “Union” (“Zjednoczenie”), “Purse and bag maker” (“Kaletnik”) “20 years of the Polish People’s Republic” (“XX-lecie PRL”), and “Doctor F. Witaszek”. The subsequent holidays in 1977 took place in Wągrowiec (4 times), Karpicko (3), Ostrowieczno (3), Zajączkowo (2), Gościm (2), Mierzyn, Niwka, Brenno, Lubniewice, Buszewo, Sokolec and Obrzycko. The sports camps were held twice in Wisła for the blind, and in Margonin, Błazejewko and Karpicko for disabled field and track athletes and table tennis players. The canoeing holidays took place on the Brda River, for two weeks and were attended by the disabled with motor and eyesight disabilities. It is interesting to note that the holidays for the disabled with various diseases (34 participants) which took place in July in Sokolec were of tourist character. The staff were 21 instructors-trainers including Edward Niemczyk, Wiesława Wszelak, Jacek Malejka (Head of Department of Disabled Sport in “START”). The reflections of the “START” leaders after the 1977 holidays were unfortunately rather critical. There was a number of issues to be changed in the future: the number of specialist staff and cultural and educational instructors was insufficient, clear and appropriate rules for paying the staff were not in place, the financial resources for the cultural and educational activities and trips during holidays were insufficient. Moreover, there were difficulties with selection of appropriate holiday centers (properly adapted and equipped) and with the rental of busses [2]. Fortunately, in terms of programmes the holidays were organized on a very high level. The Centre tried to solve the transportation problems in 1978 by using the services of the “Almatur” Travel and Tourism Agency (Biuro Podróży i Turystyki) the Wielkopolska Tourism

Company (Wielkopolskie Przedsiębiorstwo Turystyczne) "Przemysław" and the Province Transportation Company (Wojewódzkie Przedsiębiorstwo Komunikacji) in Poznań [4].

In 1979 the ZS START was reorganised into the Province Council of the Sports Association of Labor Co-operative Movement "START" (Zrzeszenie Sportowe Spółdzielczości Pracy ZSSP "START") whose chairman became (until 1987) Franciszek Karłowski. Despite this reorganization the "START" Department of Sport for the Disabled, led by Jacek Malejka, has not been reformed [17].

In the 1980s the development of rehabilitation and therapeutic holidays was significantly affected by the activities and initiatives of the Wielkopolska Union of Patients With Motor Organ Disabilities (Wielkopolski Związek Inwalidów Narządu Ruchu WZINR), created in December 1983 by decree of the Poznań Province Governor. The idea to establish the Union – according to its long-standing chairman Edward Niemczyk – had two origins. The first one was rehabilitation holidays in which the disabled with motor organ disorders had been held continuously since 1963; the second included the initiatives of the disabled practising sports with the "START". As a consequence, the aim of WZINR was to create conditions for even more comprehensive rehabilitation of the disabled and development of a partnership between the able-bodied and the disabled with motor organ disorders [21].

Six months later, in the summer of 1984, the WZINR Management, together with the RZSI and the Province Council of ZSSP "START", organised the first "Integra" rehabilitation holidays in Wągrowiec [27]. The aim of "Integra" was motor, mental and social rehabilitation of the disabled. The holidays were to become one of the factors developing the attitudes of the disabled towards their own disabilities and the society. As Wągrowiec became a permanent base for the holidays and Edward Niemczyk its standing manager, in later years the holidays were called by its participants "The Edward Niemczyk Wągrowiec Holidays". The adaptation of the recreation centre of the Wielkopolska disabled co-operative movement in Wągrowiec, situated on Lake Durowskie to the needs of the disabled was not easy. However, within a few years a wheelchair ramp to the lake, a special pier, terraces, ramps to the main building with the dining room and chalets, concrete paths and an appropriate rehabilitation base were built. In

the late 1980s "Integra" in Wągrowiec attracted approx. 100 participants a year, of whom one third (1989) and sometimes even one half (1990) were in wheelchairs. An article about "Integra" from 1989 mentioned that "In general, [Edward Niemczyk] organises the rehabilitation holidays of the Wielkopolska Union of the Motor Organs Disabled for 'his' people, but on the other hand, with obsessive persistence, and without regard for regionalisation, he looks for people stuck inside for years and invites them to Wągrowiec", because "people who are not associated with the co-operative movement (...), those with no 'appointment' other than beds are craving for contacts the most". Unfortunately, the number of people willing to participate in "Integra" was growing each year and the impossibility to invite all of them became a source of concern for the organisers. Sometimes the management of the Rehabilitation and Recreation Centre in Wągrowiec caught some unregistered tenants, whom Edward Niemczyk did not have the heart not to take on holidays, even though they did not have the referrals from their physicians. The "Integra" staff consisted of people connected with Edward Niemczyk for 20 years, e.g. Doctor Hildebrandt, nurse Korejwo, Mrs Korcz – Deputy Head of "Integra", and an elderly lady from Sweden named Ebba, who supported "Integra" financially and "materially". Direct assistance for the disabled was provided by third-year students of the University School of Physical Education in Poznań as part of their in-service training or on a voluntary basis. Like the rehabilitation holidays in previous decades, the "Integra" programme included, apart from rehabilitation treatments, also recreation and sports activities (in particular, canoeing), sight-seeing trips and artistic performances and meetings with guests. The main principle of the holidays was: "Everybody is co-responsible, and everybody is a co-creator" [26, 27].

1990 was the most difficult year for the "START" and WZINR, when due to the commencement of economic transformations in Poland accompanied by a dramatic increase in prices of goods and services, many groups withdrew from organising and running rehabilitation holidays. Edward Niemczyk, however, did not give up. First, he found people in Poznań hospitals willing to take part in the "Integra" holidays, then he sought sponsors and possibilities of transporting the participants to the Rehabilitation and Recreation Centre in Wągrowiec; finally, he turned to the

Ministry of Health for assistance and support. As a result, the holidays did take place: they were subsidised by the National Health Service and Social Care. Some participants were transported in ambulances, and on the first day of the holidays 115 people from Poznań and other Polish towns arrived in Wągrowiec (most of them took part in such holidays for the first time, as they were starting their “new lives” after accidents or illness) [27].

In order to be able to act freely in conditions of the developing free market economy, and secure their earlier achievements in organization of rehabilitation holidays, the “START” authorities decided to separate from the Centre. On January 15, 1991 it was transformed into an independent, self-governing association with the status of a legal entity, called the Sports Association of the Disabled (Sportowe Stowarzyszenie Inwalidów SSI) “START” based in Poznań and promoting a range of activities all over Poland. This entity became voluntarily associated with the Polish Union of Disabled Sport “START”. In the statute of the Association one of the priority objectives was to develop and implement original and commissioned programmes related to rehabilitation holidays (known in Poland for years) and integration camps (introduced to the activities of the Association for the first time). Edward Niemczyk became the SSI Chairman [15, 18].

The development of active rehabilitation within the framework of the Association was greatly enhanced by the Act of 9 May 1991 concerning the employment and professional rehabilitation of the disabled. It was an important step towards the equality of opportunities of the disabled in society – both in terms of active rehabilitation and social rehabilitation. Thanks to the formation of the State Fund of Rehabilitation of the Disabled (Państwowy Fundusz Rehabilitacji Osób Niepełnosprawnych, PFRON) it became possible to subsidise holidays for all the disabled. Since 1990 “START” has also co-operated with the Wielkopolska Rehabilitation and Technological Resource Base of the Disabled Co-operative (Wielkopolskie Zaplecze Rehabilitacyjno-Techniczne Spółdzielni Inwalidów) WIELSPIN in Poznań, which had been formed on the basis of the former Regional ZSI. The WIELSPIN took over from the Union its assets and rehabilitation and recreation centres in Wągrowiec and Puszczykowo, and the disabled co-operatives of the Poznań region became its shareholders [11, 14].

The significance of tourism in the lives and rehabilitation of the disabled in the Poznań community was confirmed and emphasised in a letter of Edward Niemczyk – the then Chairman of the Sports Disabled Association “START” – sent in June 1992 to Elżbieta Seferowicz, the Deputy Chair of the Parliamentary Health Committee of the Parliament of the Republic of Poland. The letter was an appeal to include in the meeting of the Committee devoted to the matters of the disabled, the issues of physical culture, sport and tourism as factors of physical and mental rehabilitation, social integration and creation of equal opportunities for the disabled: adults, teenagers and children. At the same time, it was pointed out that the Association ran integrative rehabilitation holidays in Wągrowiec as an unconventional way of rehabilitating the disabled [8].

The significance of the holidays in the lives of the disabled was emphasised in the letters of participants to Edward Niemczyk, in which they asked for extra referrals, for example, in a letter from January 1992, written by a 1st degree invalid Stanisław Furman from the area of Tarnów, who had taken part in holidays four times: “The “Integra” holidays in Wągrowiec are not only necessary for me to improve my physical health (because I know that in my case there is no return to health), but also for the improvement of my psyche (...). The stay at “Integra” has given me a lot. After holidays like these a disabled person develops a totally different attitude to life; these few days allow us to forget about the pain, suffering and many other problems we have to deal with in our lives” [8].

In 1992 the Wągrowiec “Integra” – which so far had been the flagship holidays of the “START” – was given a new form, i.e. that of international holidays, and welcomed also Poles living abroad and foreigners. The project became known as “Euro-Integra”. One hundred and fifty representatives from Poland and other European countries (post-communist countries, in particular: Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, the Czech Republic, Belarus, as well as the Netherlands and Sweden) were invited to participate in such holidays in June 1992. Their holidays were free of charge, as they were financed by the “START” with funds from the Polish state authorities and government organizations as well as from individual sponsors. The participants covered only their costs of transport to Poland. The aim of the holidays was to create a “common Europe” by way of solidarity, parti-

icipation of the disabled in social life and organisation of peer assistance during the holidays. The Association received a great support of the Department of Physical Culture and Tourism of the Province Office in Poznań and its director Wiesław Deptuła. During the holidays its participants could take part in sightseeing trips to Poznań, Biskupin, Gniezno, Żnin and Wągrowiec, as well as in mini car races, hikes and wheelchair hikes in the area [8].

On the basis of questionnaires, interviews and observations carried out during the "Euro-Integra" rehabilitation holidays in the early 1990s it was found, for example, that the participants recognised the socialising values of physical culture, paying special attention to tourism as one of its forms. In the opinion of the respondents tourism ranked first because it made it possible to meet new people and make friends. Moreover, the effort related to undertaking tourism, i.e. going for a trip, going camping, going for a rally or pilgrimage allowed them to overcome their own weaknesses, test their capabilities and learn to overcome architectural, communication, social and psychological barriers. Going for rehabilitation holidays allowed the participants to see new places, get in direct contact with history, tradition and nature; and introduced them to the world of spiritual and material culture [12].

The idea of "START" holidays developed in the subsequent years. To continue the tradition physiotherapy students from the University School of Physical Education in Poznań have taken part in many of them. They were selected by Professor Bożena Biniakiewicz who co-operated with Edward Niemczyk. Since 1995 also Jolanta Idzi – a therapist and nurse from the Orthopedic Clinic in Poznań – has become involved in the "START" holidays. In 1999, on the basis of a gentlemen's agreement, the chairman of "START" Edward Niemczyk swapped functions with deputy chairman Romuald Schmidt (Romuald Schmidt had been connected with "START" since the 1980s). Edward Niemczyk kept, however, the function of the head of "Integra" holidays and received the title of the Honorary Chairman of the SSI [15, 17].

Many years of achievements of the "START" has been appreciated by the international community in various forms, e.g. an invitation from a British foundation "Motivation" to co-run from 1994 to 1996 a system of rehabilitation camps in Albania, Romania and Malaysia. Then the Knights Hospitallers of the Sovereign Order of Saint John –

Knights of Malta – entrusted the Association with the organisation of the 13th Integration Camp for Disabled Youth in Wągrowiec. Over 300 young disabled people from all over Europe took part in the one-week camp [18].

As far as other holidays of "START" are concerned the second half of the 1990s brought their greater specialisation and an increase in quantity. In the reporting period of 1996-1999 the Poznań "START" offered the following types of holidays to the disabled: holidays for the most disabled children requiring permanent care; holidays for children and teenagers with "survival" activities, i.e. military survival school and elements of sport organised in camping conditions; holidays of advanced active rehabilitation with a programme of modern sports for young people in wheelchairs; holidays for adults with rehabilitation and recreation activities, and holidays for the elderly. In organisation of holidays an emphasis was put on filling the gap left after the stage of basic rehabilitation carried out at rehabilitation-focused holidays, by way of social and mental rehabilitation, satisfying the need for active leisure, good fun, self-fulfillment and boosting confidence of the disabled. Therefore, the programmes of all holidays contained, apart from conventional physical therapy, also the following sports activities: swimming, canoeing, table tennis, team games (basketball in wheelchairs, quad-rugby), diving, climbing, water-skiing, soft tennis and boccia. Moreover, the programme included relaxation training, power training, wheelchair training and self-sufficiency training, i.e. teaching all basic life activities. Each day started with morning exercises (the rule unchanged since 1963). Traditionally, the holidays abounded with cultural and educational activities and using the tourist and natural qualities to a maximum – hence walking and coach trips. In 1996 the "START" organised nine rehabilitation holidays for 487 children, teenagers, adults and the elderly – mainly with motor organ diseases. In 1997 eleven holidays took place with 632 participants; in 1998 eleven holidays with 650 participants; and in 1999 twelve holidays with 640 participants. In 1998 the holidays took place in May in Mielno (in the "Syrena" Rehabilitation and Recreation Centre), in May/June and June/July in Wągrowiec, in July in Krag, in August in Brenno, twice in Wągrowiec, in Sieraków and Mielno-Unieście, in September in Międzywodzie and in October again in Wągrowiec. Six holidays were organised under the banner of "Euro-Integra", three holidays under the banner of

“Integra”, one holiday had a survival theme and one focused on sport and recreation. Each was attended from a few to twenty people. As far as funding of the above holidays is concerned, apart from the assistance from the PFRON the “START” received support from the Office of Physical Culture and Sport via the Polish Association of Disabled Sports (Urząd Kultury Fizycznej i Sportu via Polski Związek Sportu Niepełnosprawnych), the Department of Physical Culture and Tourism of the Province Office (Wydział Kultury Fizycznej i Turystyki Urzędu Wojewódzkiego) in Poznań, the Board of Poznań City via the Department of Health and Social Issues (Zarząd Miasta Poznania via Wydział Zdrowia i Spraw Społecznych), Province Group of Social Care (Wojewódzki Zespół Opieki Społecznej), “Caritas” of the Poznań Archdiocese (here the co-operation with Father Mateusz Żarnowiecki was invaluable) and Swedish organisation “Individuell Manniskohjälp”. The plans of the Association for the following years included, among other things, extension in terms of quality and quantity of the offer of holidays for children and teenagers, introduction of inexpensive holidays for adults (still organised in attractive locations), and new forms of rehabilitation through sport [9, 23].

It is worth noticing that the first “survival” holidays for teenagers were run by “START” in 1997 in the Mazury region. This experimental project was then attended by about 30 people, although not without initial concerns. The event was run by officers of the special forces of the Polish Army. The programme called “Survival School” taught children coping in extreme situations, introduced the participants to the basics of military reconnaissance, moving in an unfamiliar terrain in day and at night, climbing and elements of self-defence. Moreover, it included classes in various sports. In the subsequent years the event was completed with more attractions, thanks to which in 2001 the list of offered water sports included jet-skis, water-skiing, surfing on an inflatable wheel and kneeboard behind a motor boat, canoeing and catamaran sailing. The camp had educational and integration qualities as able-bodied children participated in it together with disabled children and children from families with alcohol problems [22].

The period of intense work of the Association between 2000 and 2003 was the time which was summed up by the management of SSI “START” at the Delegates Convention in 2004 in

the following way: “There is a lot of interest in this form of rehabilitation. (...) we have earned a good name for ourselves, so that participants come to us from all over the country.” This statement was a reflection of pride and satisfaction, even more that 2002 was the 40th anniversary of the first rehabilitation holidays organised by the “START” [24].

In the first years after the Polish administrative reform the Association kept receiving financial support from the same administrative units as before, however reorganised, e.g. the Ministry of National Education and Sport via the Polish Association of Disabled Sport (Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej i Sportu via Polski Związek Sportu Niepełnosprawnych) and the Department of Sport and Tourism of the Province Marshal’s Office (Departament Sportu i Turystyki Urzędu Marszałkowskiego) in Poznań, as well as many organisations and companies. Between 2000 and 2003 similar numbers of rehabilitation holidays and integration and sports camps were organized each year. In 2000 there were nine such events: six holidays and three camps, for 536 people in total. One year later there were ten events: seven holidays and three camps for 429 participants. In 2002 eight events were held: five holidays and three camps for 445 participants; and in 2003 there were nine events: six holidays and three camps for 444 participants. All of these integration and sport camps were intended for children and teenagers and had a “survival” character combined with water sports. They were so popular that each year the “START” had to organise them three times during summer holidays – each of them was attended by approx. 70 children. They always took place in the Recreation Centre in Wola near Żnin. Holidays were located in the following places (some of them a few times): “Grażyna” Rehabilitation Centre in Mielno, “Perełka” Rehabilitation Centre in Kołobrzeg, “Posejdon” Rehabilitation and Recreation Centre in Kołobrzeg, Rehabilitation and Recreation Centre in Brenno, “Wielspin” Rehabilitation and Recreation Centre in Wągrowiec, “Jantar” Rehabilitation and Recreation Centre, “Energetyk” Rehabilitation and Recreation Centre in Sarbinowo, “Neptun” Rehabilitation and Recreation Centre in Jantar, “Wistom” Holiday Centre in Kołobrzeg, “Gliwiczanka” Spa Sanatorium in Kołobrzeg and “Ledan” Rehabilitation and Recreation Centre in Chłopy [24].

As far as the future plans of the “START” are concerned the declaration of the “START”

activists stated that: "We intend to maintain a good – over 40-years old – brand of organisers of rehabilitation holidays" [24].

The Association kept its promise: in 2004 and 2005 the number of organised rehabilitation holidays and camps and the number of people participating in them was on the same level as in previous years. In 2004 (from July to August) six holidays were organised for 248 participants, as well as three sport and rehabilitation camps for 201 children and youths. All together, 449 people went on nine holidays and camps with the "START". In 2005, the number of participants in eight holidays and camps was almost the same – 447. Among the holidays the most noteworthy was a two-week event organized by the "START" in Wągrowiec under the motto of "Active Rehabilitation" offered to people aged from 18 to 45. 76 children and adolescents participated in those holidays. In 2005 children and youth went to two sport and rehabilitation camps, traditionally near Żnin and other holidays took place in Kołobrzeg (4 holidays) and Wągrowiec (1). In 2006 the number of holidays and camps run by the "START" was still the same: eight of them were organized (6 and 2) in the same locations; however, the number of participants decreased to 300 people [10].

The plans and offers of rehabilitation holidays and camps of the "START" Association for 2007 were as follows (data from May 2007): two rehabilitation holidays in Wągrowiec – one of them organized as "Active Rehabilitation"; two holidays in Kołobrzeg and, traditionally, two sport and rehabilitation camps for children and youth in Wola. The planned number of participants was about 280 people [2].

The incredible activity of organizing rehabilitation holidays and camps taken by the "START" activists in 1963 (initiated by workers from the Orthopedic Clinic in Poznań) and remaining immensely popular until today is an unquestionable proof that Edward Niemczyk's words quoted at the beginning of the article have been staying true for the last 45 years and had a great positive impact on the disabled and the able-bodied alike in Poland. Thanks to "START" rehabilitation holidays and camps the stereotype of disability in Poland has been most definitely challenged.

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