



Overview of the SPA

By Dr. Thomas Troger, Director

The Swiss Paraplegics Association (SPA) is the national self-help organization for people with spinal cord injuries. The association facilitates addresses, represents and coordinates concerns and needs of all its members and their families throughout Switzerland. It stands up for its members and champions all aspects of community, including sports, legal matters, social aspects, culture, building, vocational, political and personal affairs and facilitates the betterment of life quality, including re-integration into society. As the umbrella association it promotes and supports the growth and build-up of regional wheelchair clubs throughout Switzerland.

FORMATION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

After the Swiss Paraplegic Foundation (SPF) had already been formed in 1975, a quarter of a century ago, the Swiss Paraplegics-Association (SPA) was founded on the 27th of April 1980 by the past head physician of the Swiss Paraplegic Center Basel, Guido Zäch, together with the already existing wheelchair clubs in Basel, Kriens, Uster, St. Gallen, Wetzikon and Zurich. Today, 27 wheelchair clubs throughout Switzerland and over 4000 active and 7000 passive members belong to the Swiss Paraplegics Association. The Swiss Paraplegics Association supports the 27 wheelchair clubs, which are voluntarily managed, financially as well as administratively, to a great extent. The 54 delegates (two delegates per club) also make up the top level, namely the delegate's conference.

Carriers of the Swiss Paraplegics Association's vision are currently the 27 Swiss wheelchair clubs. As regional representatives they carry the concept of solidarity into the community. They offer their members an ideal platform to find a way out of isolation. Offers provide an array of activities customized to the region and its members. While participating in sports, outings, hobbies, cultural and social events, friendships and contacts are formed spontaneously between wheelchair users and pedestrians.

HOLISTIC ONSET

In Switzerland annually, approximately 200 people suffer a spinal cord injury due to some form of accident. It remains a permanent task to be able to give them a level of purpose and meaning in their lives, despite their serious disability. The holistic rehabilitation begins at the scene of the accident and continues throughout their lifetime. According to this philosophy, first assistance and help is mobilized in close collaboration with the Swiss Paraplegic Foundation, the Swiss Paraplegics Association and the Swiss Paraplegic Centre in Nottwil, from the first minute onwards and is continued after discharge from the clinic.

The Swiss Paraplegics Association Nottwil in the Canton of Luzerne plays a significant role within this framework. The SPA is active throughout entire Switzerland and offers an array of services and supports to all wheelchair users to better manage and cope with their daily living after discharge from the clinic and set them on a path of continual betterment.

The efforts and actions of about 65 employees in the service of the Swiss Paraplegics Association are part of an exemplary worldwide concept on the holistic rehabilitation of Para and tetraplegics. It's grounded in the thought of availing of life-long support, way beyond just pure medical and therapeutic concerns and needs.

MODERN MANAGEMENT & SELF HELP ARE NOT CONTRADICTIONARY

The Swiss Paraplegics Association is a federation. The delegate's conference, being the highest legislative organ, chooses the board of directors, which usually comprises three active club presidents as well as including one doctor and member representation. They serve in office on a voluntary basis. The leadership of business operations on the contrary, is under the business management and guidance of a director. The Swiss Paraplegics Association is lead on the basis of the most modern management methods. From our vision statement, a clear business profile, business sectors, mutually aligned strategies, strategical maps with core strategies, leadership directives and internal quality management are also part of it, as well as the newest strategy of implementation, including resources such as the balanced score card. Of course target agreements, objectives, continual employee meetings and an electronical personnel management (HR) are as much a component as are suggestions and complaints in written form, as well as members, clients and yearly staff surveys.

This is a necessity in order to be able to keep up with increasing member demands. Quality and humanity are desired and in demand. The Swiss Paraplegics Association is able to do both through clear leadership and careful consideration when selecting employees (viewing character and professional competence), while determining duties at an early stage including professional competence and responsibility to meet obligations.

The Swiss Paraplegics Association is fortunate enough to be able to count on several hundred volunteers, who are continuously available for vacation assignments or as assistants at sports events and/or courses. Innumerable volunteers can be added from the 27 wheelchair clubs, which collectively amount to about 1800 volunteers ready for engagement.

CUSTOMISED OFFERS

A new life begins for a person with SCI when they leave the hospital after five to nine months of successful first rehabilitation. Being in a wheelchair is connected to a multitude of challenges, be it purely administrative, transportation, building, health related, social or community.

At this point the Swiss Paraplegics Association comes to the fore, providing assistance with continuously growing and broad-based support services within its five specialty departments:

- **Institute for Legal Advice:** Professional consultations provided by lawyers for legal queries, with reference and consideration to spinal cord injuries.
- **Life Guidance:** in 2009 the Swiss Paraplegics Association (SPA) founded the life guidance sector, where the former external service is newly incorporated. Mainly SCI sufferers themselves and living in the Swiss-German, French and Italian-speaking areas, these external service employees guarantee uncomplicated direct contact to members, and they get straight to the point when someone needs help.

The SPA built up the first occupational contact centre, when someone becomes unemployed and leaves the work process, so offering initial help to SCI sufferers through introduction to recognised specialised and intermediary services.

- **Culture and Leisure:** The range Culture and Leisure includes, inter alia, a travel agency, which organizes group holidays and tetraplegic relief weeks and initial consultations for individual travellers and offers a large travel Information Desk. Furthermore, a variety of events and activities are offered, which allow shared experiences. Besides, the section organises training courses for paraplegics and volunteers, awareness courses for the general public as well as training for teachers on the theme of «Education and disability».

The Department is also committed to the mobility of paraplegics. It maintains two platforms: «Rolli Hotel», the website with wheelchair accessible hotels and ParaMap, the mobile Web application on the go, which summarises localities under different categories.

The SPV also has adapted coaches, which are operated by two transport companies.

- **Wheelchair Sport Switzerland:** As a national sports body for wheelchair sports we are committed to the sustained promotion of wheelchair sport at all levels. We take care of the execution of all related tasks, starting with general sports, supporting the 27 wheelchair clubs, promotion of young talent, training of officials and competitive sports. The Swiss Paraplegics Association is affiliated to the Swiss Olympic Association and is the founder of Swiss Paralympic.

In contrast to a standard sports association, the Swiss Paraplegics Association with its Wheelchair Sport Switzerland section offers over ten different types of sport at competitive level. These are supervised by the technical commission (volunteers). As well as this there are also about fifteen more sports of general sport character.

Paramount is pursuit of the following objectives for all wheelchair athletes:

- provision of joy and fun of exercise and sport
- Improving quality of life by increasing the self-confidence and independence
- achieving the optimum performance through support to different stakeholders (sports leaders, coaches, club, association)
- encounters in sports with pedestrians (integration / inclusion)
- prevention of secondary illnesses through regular training
- improve the perception of one's body and its functions

- **Centre for Obstacle-free Building:** Supports people with physical disabilities, builders and experts in regards to questions, organization, projection, planning and construction through professional architects. The existence and creation of a living space in which the wheelchair user can comfortably get around without obstruction, is as much an important premise for speedy and effortless reintegration. In the specialised discipline of architecture, this department fills a void in Switzerland. About 250 reconstructions or new developments take place annually, and these are supervised through the Department of Obstacle-free Building.

Countless other services are directly provided through our central services. Especially belonging to this category is the entire supervision and counsel of all wheelchair clubs and their members, as well as the taking over of services for the clubs (memberships, address administration, mail orders etc.) Members have special discount rates available to them, an internet hotel guide is operated and leaflets about interesting subjects are also published. Public Relations are en-

hanced through the association's own periodical Paracontact. Besides the representation of interests, this is also where any other work for the association takes place. Anyone in need of help can also contact one of our four field agents directly. All are themselves para or tetraplegic and there are no language barriers.

SENSITISING THE PUBLIC/COMMUNITY

- The Swiss Paraplegics Association engages in public relations. An important informational tool is our own publication Paracontact, which is published in German as well as in French. Furthermore it is Paracontact that represents the interests of its members to a large degree, (for example the carrier of the successful referendums against the abolishment of the ¼ rent), and is also very active in lobbying.
- It also supports and champions the general sensitization of the public in regards to the concerns and needs of all spinal cord injured individuals. In this respect for example, experts on the instruction of the Swiss Paraplegics Association have developed a guiding new concept for holistic education on the subject of «Schooling and Disablement». It is called Paradidact and it addresses all the basic requirements from teachers to students, which are necessary for careful introduction and diversified education for the sixth form (senior level).

FINANCING

The Swiss Paraplegics Association has received various service contracts from the Federal Social Insurance Office and this generates about 25% of its total revenue. Another widely diversified contract has been issued by the Swiss Paraplegic Foundation. These collective mandates amount to 70–75% of the SPA's income. The remaining 25–30% is generated through their other extant services.