



"HARA" CENTRE FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

90, Marathonos Av., Pallini

153 51 Attica

Greece

[info@kea-hara.gr](mailto:info@kea-hara.gr)

[www.kea-hara.gr](http://www.kea-hara.gr)

The Hara Centre for Individuals with Special Needs is one of very few institutions of its kind in Greece. For 25 years now it has been providing its services to people with special needs who cannot look after themselves, and is currently caring for 52 children and adults.

Looking after people with serious mental or physical handicaps can be a heavy burden on their families, especially when these people are too disabled to take care of themselves. There are cases in which the type and severity of the handicap will mean the individuals affected are dependent on the help of professional specialists. And parents often have the added anxiety of what will happen to their disabled children when they are no longer there to look after them.

Greece has only a few institutions which can accommodate and assist people with special needs unable to take care of themselves. In 1983 a group of parents decided to set up a facility for children and adults with serious mental and physical disabilities. Their conviction that their children, too, were entitled to a decent quality of life helped them to overcome serious obstacles and establish the Hara Centre for Individuals with Special Needs.

In 1986 the society was given a building in Pallini, Attica, but after the 1999 earthquakes it was decided to demolish the old hostel and replace it with a modern, attractive and efficient new building. A friend of the society drew up the architectural plans, free of charge, while the funds required for the reconstruction were secured from the public investment programme. The new building - a state-of-the-art hostel designed to the highest specifications and covering a surface area of 2,800 square metres - was completed in March 2005.

The children who are accommodated at the centre are severely mentally challenged, which makes it necessary to provide them with special living conditions. They present challenges which any family would find it impossible to meet without help, not having the necessary training or resources to support the children at home. Hara offers these individuals accommodation and specialist care throughout their lives, while the parents, assisted in this way, can offer their own care and support, freed from the burden of the massive difficulties they would otherwise face on a daily basis. The Hara Centre offers its charges accommodation and the care they need in a friendly and healthy environment. The children's everyday routine features creative activities organized as part of a programme of psycho-kinetic

education, designed to help them develop their abilities to the full and intended to expose them continuously to new experiences. They are cared for by a team of experienced specialists – including doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and nurses.

The children regularly visit local sports facilities and take part in a number of activities. Apart from the simple pleasure of engaging in sporting activities, a number of the children have had the additional satisfaction of winning a prize for their participation in the Special Olympics, organized for disabled children from all over Greece and Cyprus.

The society is administered by an Administrative Board, elected every second year, consisting of seven parents and volunteers. A number of doctors and nurses volunteer their services to the centre, while many parents and friend of the centre help in organizing special events. Hara's future plans include the establishment of a hostel exclusively for adults, designed to meet the different needs of older disabled persons.

Most of the costs of running the hostel are covered by fees paid by the children's parents or insurance funds. The centre also receives substantial support from the Together for Children organization. To meet the cost of the new building efforts are under way to recruit new members – both individuals and companies – who will pay an annual subscription.

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