

SYNOPSIS:

OUT OF SIGHT

The situation of mentally disabled children in Russia

Pictures by

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In February 2010, in an article entitled “Kill them so they don’t suffer”, a Russian journalist supported euthanasia for new-borns suffering from severe mental disabilities, whom he labeled as “unfinished”, “defective” and “worthless”. Far from being an isolated pamphlet, this article was well received by many in the general public, who concurred with this vision of the mentally disabled.

Today, despite some clear improvements in the conditions of state care homes for disabled children and a decrease in the number of children suffering from severe disabilities who are given up by their parents, the situation is still dire. Disabled children’s rights are still under-protected in a variety of ways. Current legislation states that all children have the right to education. However all too often this legal framework does not translate into practical support. Parents talk of the tremendous challenges they face in providing education to mentally disabled children, and how the state turns a blind eye to their struggle.

During 80 years, the soviet regime was concerned about giving the image of a strong, harmonious and productive society. It did not want these “imperfect” human beings or “monsters” to be too visible. For a long time, families were forced to give up their children to the State, allegedly better suited to take care of them. Far from the eyes of the society, hundreds of thousands of children were then placed in state care homes, which turned out to be places where they were left to die. Slowly, the idea that the life of these children was not worth living permeated through the Russian society.

Fortunately, some hopes remain amid this bleak picture. Countless parents have decided to keep and raise their disabled children, to believe in them and to fight for offering them a better future.

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