

Educational opportunities in Switzerland

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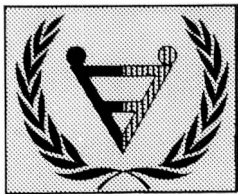
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THE International Year of Disabled People is over – for everyone except the handicapped people themselves and people like Jacques Martin, 48 year old president of the world winter sports for the disabled championships, which next month will be held for the second time in the Vaudois Alps.

"Our society," he says, "is not concerned enough with the handicapped, not even at the basic level. We could make life easier for those who have difficulty in moving about."

"There certainly are a lot of organisations dedicated to these matters, but their activities are still a trifle disorganised."

The championships take place from March 8 to 18. The event has a budget of Sfr. 1,800,000, most of which will be used to take care of more than 500 athletes who will be taking part in the trials and their immediate relatives or companions.

There have been setbacks. A promotion directed at large industries and Swiss banks did not bring in the results which the organisers had hoped for, but a sponsorship campaign among smaller companies and individuals brought good results.

Public authorities have also responded well and approaches to local communes, large Swiss cities, cantons and the Confederation have been well received, bringing in around Sfr. 600,000.

A great deal of voluntary work has also helped the fund raising effort. Tombolas have been organised all over the country and on February 27 there will be a Sports Night in Lausanne.

The principle is simple. Most of Lausanne's sporting clubs have agreed to open a bar in the Palace of Beaulieu, and each will decorate its room for the occasion. There will be dancing to several well known orchestras, singing and a range of sports demonstrations.

The whole event is scheduled to last until 4am the following morning, allowing members of the public plenty of time to enjoy themselves at this unusual event and to swell the funds.

Jacques Martin is certainly

Helping hands in the Alps

making great efforts to pull together all the goodwill. The postal services have offered him 50 postal cars and the army will place a transport column at his disposal, since transport can be a major problem for disabled people.

Ski clubs are lending a hand with the organisation of courses and the army will also assist with communications and public health.

When the championships begin, the athletes will be accommodated in groups, according to their nationalities, and ferried to the various centres.

Alpine ski trials will take place at Gryon, Villars and Les Mosses; the Nordic ski trials at Les Diablerets and the ice sports and toboggan events at Leysin.

Financial problems still exist, but as the event grows closer Jaques Martin says that he is quietly confident.

"We knew that the task would not be easy . . . but the event deserved to be organised," he said.

"When Aigle Rotary Club undertook the organisation of Swiss winter sports championships for the handicapped a few years ago we realised that these sportsmen gave tremendous encouragement to other disabled people. Indeed, they offer a remarkable lesson in courage and perseverance to the able-bodied."

He also hopes that events of this kind will attract employers' attention to the capabilities of handicapped people and adds: "Employers should realise that handicapped people should not be disregarded. They are as capable of doing work as anyone else."

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EDUCATION in Switzerland is administered principally by the cantons (of which there are 25, each with its own Department of Education) and local authorities. As in England the Federal or Central Government has no power to determine the curriculum of public or private schools.

The Federal Authorities only intervene in order to establish certain standards below which education must not fall, as well as the requirements of the "Federal Maturity Examination", the school-leaving certificate which enables the entrance to universities.

Each canton enacts its own laws for the maintenance, support and administration of its public school system.

The principle of free, compulsory education is maintained throughout the country but within this framework, account is taken of regional differences and traditions, particularly at the primary school level.

Thus the school systems within the Swiss Confederation vary from canton to canton but, as in England, it is possible to detect general characteristics, particularly at secondary school and university levels.

In general, the pattern of primary education is that all children go to a common school between the ages of six or seven and 10 or 11.

Then, as in England, pupils either continue at primary

school or enter a cantonal secondary school establishment, comparable to the English grammar school.

At 16, after passing final examinations, education may be continued at the gymnasia (senior high school) which the student leaves two or three years later after obtaining his "baccalaureat" or "Swiss Maturity Certificate".

At the secondary school and gymnasium young people already tend to specialise, in classical (Latin-Greek or Latin-modern languages), scientific (mathematics-sciences), or commercial.

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