

## Düşler Akademisi

Ercan Tatal, Founder

After growing up in Istanbul, Ercan left the country to study languages, a pursuit that took him first to Tübingen, Germany, and then to Milan. These experiences not only gave him opportunities to study culture, language, and literature, but also resulted—quite unexpectedly—in exposing him to societies where the disabled enjoy greater freedom of movement and opportunity than in Turkey. For the first time, he saw disabled people in public places—restaurants, schools, work places, dance clubs. He describes this time as pivotal to him in suggesting the possibility of greater understanding and acceptance of disability in his home country.

Seeing that scuba diving might allow the kind of positive exposure disability needed in Turkey, Ercan first took a course in handicapped diving in Switzerland. He later contacted the Handicapped Scuba Association (HSA), a California-based organization that certifies instructors to dive with the disabled. Eventually becoming one of 17 "co-stars" at HSA (from among the 1,000 certified instructors in the world), he returned home, initially accepting a job as a dive instructor at an established school on Turkey's Mediterranean coast. He took the job conditionally, though, and the condition he set was that he would offer lessons to private clients, as long as the school understood that he would bring disabled people along on dive trips. In this way, he began taking a few disabled people out with non-disabled paying clients and arranged free accommodations for the disabled at area hotels.

He saw that setting up a pilot camp was the next step, and in 2002, after scanning the country, he found the perfect spot. He completely renovated the rented building in one and one-half months. The facility now has 40 beds, arranged in brightly-painted rooms, with basketball courts, a swimming pool, and seaside access. As the water temperature is warm in Bodrum, he can hold camps nine months out of the year. The Bodrum camp is a testament to how quickly Ercan can move with an idea, and how quickly he can get others to move with him. A Board Member for the Turkish Foundation of the Disabled, Foreign Advisor for the Disabled Union (a citizen group with 120,000 members in 70 branches throughout the country), and founder of a new venture, "Alternative Life Association," which provides better services for the disabled, Ercan has developed the connections and stature he needs to pursue an aggressive expansion plan for his camps.

An experienced scuba diver and sought-after instructor, Ercan approaches his work with the same vigor and determination that he applies to diving or any other of the many athletic endeavors he undertakes: develop clear strategies, select the few most likely to lead to an understood goal, and pursue those with energy, tenacity, and an optimism grounded in an understanding of your own ability and limitation. Currently, he represents Turkey in the Camel Trophy and Landrover Challenge, a multisport challenge that takes him, along with contestants from 16 countries, all over the world. Ercan deliberately uses these experiences, and the exposure and publicity they grant, to promote his work with the disabled.

**Dreams Academy** (Düşler Akademisi) is a Turkish alternative academy of arts, offering cultural and artistic education and recreation free of charge for disabled and socially disadvantaged people. In particular for those with a disability or a chronic disease. It's located in Istanbul.

Turkey, a country that signed the UN Disability Agreement, needs to be producing urgent solutions for the disabled people who constitute approximately 15 % of our population. The gap between the place where should the disabled be and where they actually are is very huge. The hugeness of this gap has gradually been increasing not just for the disabled, but also for the other layers of the society. It is necessary to produce serious and permanent solutions and clear the way for the usage of the most basic constitutional and humanitarian legislative rights equally and freely in order to fill this gap. THE DREAMS ACADEMY is a project produced in line with this approach. With the financial support from the AYDER (Alternative Life Association), UNDP (United Nations Development Program), Ministry of Development and Turkey Vodafone Foundation; tens of thousands of social life solutions and opportunities have been actualized on 15 November, 2008 by

“Diving is Freedom”, “Alternative Camp” and “Reha İstanbul” projects. The representatives of the contemporary municipalism intellect, the Municipality of Beşiktaş, Ataşehir and Kadıköy are the strategic – corporative partners and implementation collaborators of the academy. The Dreams Academy is a social responsibility project. The Dreams Academy, where cultural and artistic training is provided free of charge for the disabled and socially disadvantaged young people, has turned into a permanent alternative academy of arts which prepares you to life and provides basic training. It is composed of art studios such as Vocal – Rhythm – Dance – Photography – DJ – Instrument – Painting – Design. Different workshops like personality development and motivation can be built from time to time. Following the workshop trainings for the disabled and socially disadvantaged participants, getting jobs on the respective branches is given a special importance. The workshop trainers and corporative partners who are the best in their branches and have high level of sensibility for social responsibility are the cornerstones of the Dreams Academy in terms of reaching the project aims, program quality and sustainability. The Dreams Academy is a pioneer and model project providing equal participation opportunities with an “art for everyone” approach. Providing training opportunities in different branches of art for the disabled and socially disadvantaged individuals, an alternative pioneering point of view is created in the society. Social Inclusion Brand: This is a project in which sensitive artists from all around the world and DA rhythm workshop students come together and arrange a series of workshops and concerts. By taking the stage in giant organizations such as IKSJ Jazz, Efes One Love, Rock’n Coke and Akbank Jazz, it has proved the power of arts and music, having no obstacles. Dreams Academy Society of the Spectacle: This is an internal project where the Dreams Academy Drama Workshop students meet in order to exhibit a play full of theatre and dance. The volunteer director of the first play was Mehmet Ergen and it was written by Gökçe Sezer who is a stage actor and has been contributing to the works in person. Dreams Academy Production Studios: This is a project built as the continuation of the Dreams Academy. The aim of this project is to help students, who become artists following the artistic training they complete, carry out their freelance jobs. The Dreams Academy is the first complete model implementation of the “universal design for everyone” period in our country. The most important factor about the projects which are models of social entrepreneurship is that they are carried out by the native and foreign volunteers who make the projects sustainable, spread the participation at highest levels and build up identities for these projects. The Dreams Academy presently carries out the workshop activities in the Dilek Sabancı Park and Ataşehir Lodge which are allocated for the project by the Municipality of Beşiktaş.