

HOW YANIK BECAME A PARTNER

Story



VOLUNTEER VERA

– You know, my neighbor has been helping special children for many years in retirement. She says it helps her feel needed and not go crazy with loneliness.

Vera listened attentively to her friend. A couple of minutes ago, she shared that she couldn't stay at home anymore. Only a week has passed since her retirement, and she has already managed to get tired of being in her four walls.

She worked in a library for many years. A calm woman in love with books connected her life with literature a long time ago and never regretted it. When the time came to retire, she was seen off with great regret, because she was exactly the person to whom everyone went for help and who could help in any situation. She could patiently pick up books at the request of a person, regardless of how long the work took. Her willingness to help and endless patience were well known to visitors of the city library. Adults and especially children lined up for her, knowing that she would certainly find what they needed. So after so many years of working together, colleagues were very upset about her retirement.

Vera was a typical introvert. She inherited her boundless love for books from her parents. Thick tomes replaced her company of peers, to whom she never had much attraction; they had too different characters and interests. The only

exceptions were a couple of friends and a husband whom they met in the reading room. He was a scientist and, like her, spent a lot of time reading books. They never had children, so after the death of her parents and husband, Vera was left all alone.

NEW LIFE

The long-awaited retirement nevertheless came as a surprise to her. At first she was happy to rest, but after a week she firmly decided that staying at home was not for her. She needed to be needed, and besides, she really lacked communication - the team, which over the years of work became important to her, including readers whom she assisted. She remembered her friend's words about helping special needs children in retirement.

In the square in front of her library, at lunchtime, she sometimes saw these children with their parents or teachers trying to read children's books to them. These children seemed to be aliens to her, because they seemed to see the world through a different prism, being in their own world as a baby is. In the age of digital technology and waning interest in reading, they were immersed in her beloved world of rustling pages. Vera suddenly felt a strong desire to convey to these children her undivided love for books.

So she registered as a volunteer in the program for helping children with special needs and began to wait for her first student.

OFFER

-Hello, Vera. Please tell me, would you like to work with a child? But the situation is different there. There is a boy who has severe autism. He does not speak and practically does not perform any actions; - the employee of the volunteer organization was silent for a while, leafing through the pages of documents. – If you are interested, I can send you more detailed information.

- Yes, Inna, send it, please. I'll look and think it over, - Vera answered.

She hung up the phone and thought. Almost six months have passed since she joined the volunteer organization that helps special children. During this time, she managed to successfully work with several children. Vera tried using photography and was surprised how successful this experience turned out to be. She also became more interested.

“But here it’s a completely different matter ... The child cannot speak, he is not capable of any actions. What will I do with him? - Vera thought, reading the information about the eight-year-old boy Yanik. “I won’t know for sure until I try,” she finally decided and accepted the offer ...

BOSS’S CHAIR

On the day they met, Vera was worried. She thought for a long time about whether she could help the boy, who was unable to speak or do anything.

-Hello, my name is Vera. The volunteer organization sent me to help Jan,” she said smiling when she first came to the place

–We call him Yanik, - the boy's mother smiled. – Please, come in, he is in his room.

Entering the room, Vera saw an office chair on wheels, where the boy was sitting near the window. He did not turn his head, did not look away, and did not react in any way to the fact that adults entered his room. He just sat and stared at one point, as if immersed in his own world, and was not at all interested in what was happening around

“Like an important boss in an office,” Vera thought.

From time to time the boy made some movements with his hands and sometimes turned in his chair.

Vera went to the library that evening and borrowed some books on autism. Kanner, Asperger, Appé - all these authors have written a lot on the definition and diagnosis of autism. Vera learned that the disease had been known for a long time, but unexplored much during that time. As for the lack of speech regarding Yanik, this was common in children with an autism spectrum disorder.

“But this does not mean at all that the children do not understand what they are being told,” thought Vera and decided on occasions to check this out.

The next day she had a long talk with Yanik's mother, who was expecting her fifth child. She made no secret of how much she and her husband loved their children.

- You see, they are everything to us. My husband and I have always dreamed of a big loud family, with many children who could play together ... We would very much like Yanik to make some progress, but ... Our ABA specialist said that we should not expect miracles, -mother smiled sadly

– How long has your ABA specialist been working with Yanik?- Vera asked.

-She had just started. A very diligent girl and loves her job and children. You will get to know her soon.

- I'll be glad to meet her,- Vera replied

FIRST CONTACT with YANIK

Vera spent the first few days just talking to the boy. Seeing that he remained indifferent to this, she began to look for a way to get through to him. She

remembered her successful experience with photography and came up with an idea. On one of her visits, Vera brought a camera. She took a couple of pictures of Yanik, snapping her camera close to him. She loudly discussed the objects she photographed. And a couple of times Vera noticed that the boy furtively glanced in her direction at what she was doing. This made her unspeakably glad, even a fleeting glance of this child meant a lot.

- Stella, can I take some of your family photos? I would like to try to work with Yanik with their help.

- Yes, of course, Vera, - Stella was a little surprised, but with pleasure she brought Vera a plump family album.

In the evening, Vera started making a photobook. She named it "*Yanik and his family*." She took white sheets of paper and attached with tape photographs of the boy's mother and father, his siblings and Yanik himself. She wrote a simple, uncomplicated story about the boy Yanik, who lives with his family in a cozy apartment. She told a little about mom, dad and siblings, and, of course, most of all about Yanik himself - what he liked to do and to eat. She decorated the book with stickers and placed each sheet in a transparent cover to protect them. The book turned out to be nice and convenient; its pages could be easily turned over, remaining clean and not being torn

– Look, Yanik, this is your mother feeding you your favourite chicken soup. And here is your little sister playing with her bears and dolls. And here you are again, looking out the window. What did you see there? Maybe birds? Or a kitten? - Vera reasoned the next day, sitting next to her student

She suddenly realized that something had changed. She looked up and froze - the boy was looking directly at her with interest. Then he glanced at the photobook.

– Can you see well, Yanik? Let me put the photobook closer, - Vera spoke carefully, afraid to destroy that fragile bond that had just appeared between her and the boy.

“Ba,” Yanik said.

Vera knew that “ba” and “pa” were the only sounds the boy could make. From books, Vera knew that autistic children often used inner speech, but in reality, alas, it is transformed into inarticulate sounds. The woman was sincerely sure that her constant stated monologues to Yanik would help him replenish his own vocabulary and, perhaps, learn to build words and sentences on his own

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Soon the day of Yanik's birthday happened. The house was filled with joyful children and smiling adults, friends of the family. There was also an ABA

specialist who worked with Yanik. Vera, of course, was also among those invited. She brought her camera with her and took pictures of the boy, his guests, gifts, and other attributes of a good celebration.

-Vera, can I have a minute?,- Stella waved her hand from the other side of the room. – This is our ABA specialist, Laura. She devotes a lot of time and effort to us.

- Well, Stella. This is my job.”, -the serious young woman smiled.

“I am pleased to meet you,” Vera said.

From the words of Yanik's parents, she already knew that Laura always defends only the traditional methods described in textbooks. The women started talking about how Vera uses photobooks.

-Vera, please, understand me correctly. I don't trust this... hmm... unprofessional method a bit, you understand? There are methods and textbooks. Many prominent experts developed them with scientific research”, -explained Laura her point.

Vera did not argue, however, she did not intend to convince Laura. She returned to photograph Yanik's birthday. At some point, she suddenly noticed that Yanick was looking straight into the camera and smiling slightly.

“Yes, he's posing,”- Vera thought dumbfounded. Her hope of one day getting Yanik out of his chair was immediately strengthened.

The photos from Yanik's birthday made an excellent photobook. Vera decided to include Yanik in the work, and he helped with decoration, sticking the stickers. Everyone in the family loved the book. Laura also liked it and even was using it to work with Yanik.

TRIP to BOTANICAL GARDEN

One day they went to the Botanical Garden, and Laura went with them. Vera, as always, took her camera. It was spring, and everywhere they were greeted by the scents of lilacs and other flowers. The world around was full of bright colors, which after winter were pleasing to the eye. Vera turned to Yanik:

- What beautiful flowers! Yanik, touch them, and I'll take a picture of you, - she exclaimed.

The boy immediately reached out and touched the flower. Laura sighed softly. Yanik willingly did what Vera asked him to do. During ABA classes, Laura always used some kind of food or his chewing tube to get him to complete tasks.

- Well done, Yanik, now smell the flowers. They have a wonderful smell.

Yanik bent down to the flower, and Vera quickly took a picture.

- Vera! This is a real miracle! – whispered Laura.

Vera nodded, smiling. She sincerely believed that the boy's situation was not at all hopeless.

The next day, she showed the pictures to the parents of her client. Father could not let go of the photo for a long time. He was impressed.

- “Vera, you have no idea how much this means to me,” he said quietly, “Stella, she...” he sighed, collecting his thoughts, “she accepts Yanik the way he is. She resigned herself to the fact that he was forever chained to his chair and closed in his world. But I can't just give up! It always seems to me that I should somehow help my son, show him the real world, tell him how good it is, and help Yanik find his place in it. Do you understand?”

- Yes, sure, I understand you very well. Believe me, I will do my best to help with this.

WORK with PHOTOBOOKS

Work on photobooks was getting more and more active every day. Vera began to make a book about Yanik's daily life: eating, walking, and communicating with relatives. Yanik was no longer as indifferent as before. He posed for photos and even looked with interest, when Vera showed him the camera screen with a good shot. He took an active part in the creation photobooks themselves and, with the help of Vera, pasted stickers on the pages, passing her the tools she needed for work.

Vera asked Laura to teach Yanik cutting paper, and she agreed so now there is hope that soon he will be able to take a more active part in creating photobooks. And while reading, Yanik always turned the pages.

COMMUNICATION

During one of the times in the yard, Vera accompanied Yanik. She was pushing a little old bicycle on which the boy was sitting with his legs up, and they were having fun. Then Vera's phone rang, and she answered the call by stopping pushing the bike.

- Ba, ba!,- she heard Yanik's demanding voice.

-What is it, Yanik? Do you want me to ride you some more?

--Ba,- the boy said affirmatively.

-Wow, we can really communicate!,- Vera wondered.

That same evening, she excitedly spoke to Laura:

“Can we teach him how to nod his head for “yes” and swing negatively for “no” This will be a step towards establishing communication with him!

Laura thought.

– You know, Vera, it seems to me that this is quite possible. But only with a positive response. On the downside, I'm not sure it's a good idea.

“Thank you, Laura,” Vera thanked her from the bottom of her heart.

After some time, Yanik was already able to answer questions, nodding his head. If he did not nod, Vera understood that it was "no."

Also they started to use “pa” for park, so it came out that they had a simple dialogue

ABA vs REAL LIFE

Sometimes Vera watched how Laura and Yanik's classes were going. One day she suggested using more photos in that work.

- You know, Vera ... - Laura drawled doubtfully, - I'm not at all sure that this can be useful. I already did ABA tests and they confirmed that Yanik doesn't recognize pictures; it's too hard for him. But, of course, you can take more photos, and I will try to teach him to recognize them.

Vera continued to operate in her own way. If Laura, followed the methodology, usually acted only with gestures, then Vera constantly talked with the boy. Day after day, she told him stories, showed him photographs, and tried to get his elusive attention. One day, Vera came to Yanik from the store, having bought, among other products, his favourite chocolate milk. Putting food in the refrigerator, she pinned photos of the food she brought to the cabinet door.

“Look what I bought,” Vera said cheerfully, leading him to the cabinet photos.

The boy stared blankly at the pictures. Suddenly, he took a photo of his favorite chocolate milk and hurried to the refrigerator. Vera just smiled happily.

-Don't worry, Yanik, we'll show them that you can recognize the photos,- she thought. “You and I will act according to our own methodology.”

Milk was poured for the boy:

- Yanik, well done! You found a photograph, and got the milk.

A satisfied expression appeared on the boy's face. Vera thought with satisfaction that Yanik enjoyed spending time with her. His mother once told Vera that when she was gone, the boy carried her slippers everywhere with him. Vera was very moved then, and she tried her best to make the boy's life more interesting and pleasant.

HARMFUL CARE

An unexpected problem for Vera was that Yanik's mother surrounded him with an iron ring of care. She loved her son so much that she did not give him any space for independence. A child who could well perform some simple actions was most often spoon-fed, dressed and undressed and Vera was incredibly upset. She tried carefully talking to Stella, but ran into a wall of misunderstanding. Then she turned to Laura.

- After all, Yanik can be much more independent, "- she said hotly.

"Vera," the girl sighed, "I understand. But this is his mother, and it is up to her to decide what care to surround her son with, even if it's detrimental for him. Of course, we can try to convince her, but I'm afraid that in this case we may simply lose our job. I'm not ready for this.

Vera decided to make another attempt and turned to the volunteer organization, but even there she did not meet with understanding. She was told that the main thing is that the parents were satisfied with the help that Vera provided.

"Well, I'll do what I can," Vera decided and continued to do her job.

PUZZLES and OTHER ENTERTAINMENTS

Despite Laura's skeptical attitude, Vera believed that it would be useful for Yanik if she and Laura taught him the same things, albeit in different ways. Vera saw that Laura often used puzzles in her work, and decided to follow a similar path. Only Vera's puzzles were homemade. She would take a photograph of something and cut it into pieces. Then they, together with Yanik, assembled this photo in a special photo frame, which served as the basis. Assembling the picture from the pieces, Yanik memorized what the things were there and how they looked. First, Vera cut the photo into two parts, then, when Yanik memorized their locations, she made four pieces, then six, and so on. The subjects of the photographs were taken from Yanik's everyday life.

One day, Vera noticed a rotating stand for spices or utensils in the kitchen and asked Stella to borrow it. Together with Yanik and his sister, they made a real "Wheel of Fortune" by attaching photos of various goodies to the wheel. The three of them played it for a long time and ate delicious prizes with pleasure.

FOOD

One of Vera's ideas was to create a photo book dedicated to food.

"You know, Vera, it's a little strange," Stella once told her, "but Yanik chooses very healthy food for himself. Since childhood, he ate only what he liked. And it's funny that he liked healthy food. Fruits, vegetables, white meat, and various lean foods. Here we are very lucky to have him.

“But...” Vera began to speak and fell silent.

An unpleasant thought occurred to her.

“After all, Laura uses junk food to encourage him. There are chips and sweets. A boy could easily become addicted to them,” -she thought frustrated.

But she did not begin to touch an uncomfortable topic with Stella, knowing that she idolized Laura and her methods. ABA methodology is used all over the world, how could Vera convince the mother?

Instead, Vera decided to spur his interest in healthy food. Together with Yanik, they prepared his favorite fruit salad. Vera photographed every step of preparation. Laura helped Yanik with some actions. Then Vera came up with short rhymes for each step. They helped the boy better remember their order.

Yanik always listened to the book about banana-apple salad with pleasure. He also willingly helped in the preparation of the salad - bringing fruits, peeling and cutting bananas, washing apples.

When Vera found out that he knew how to put beads on a thread, she immediately used this skill. They made a lot of bracelets and beads for Yanik's mother, sister, aunt and even for Laura. A separate page was devoted to each step of producing a piece of jewelry in the photobook "Jewellery Workshop "Yanik and Co"". "Co" - because Vera was also fond of this occupation, and sometimes Yanik's sister also joined them.

TAKE a PHOTO of ME

Over time, Yanik became very attached to Vera, and she became a regular participant in their family trips. One weekend, the whole family went to the Zoo. Vera, as always, took her camera along and kept clicking it, taking pictures of animals, the boy's parents, sister and Yanik himself. Suddenly she saw that the boy was trying to climb a rather high fence. Finally he succeeded.

“Well done,” Vera praised him.

But the boy looked at her strangely and expectantly. It was clear that he wanted something. And suddenly he pointed his hand at his chest. Finally, it dawned on Vera.

- Yanik! Do you want me to take a picture of you? - she exclaimed.

A satisfied smile spread across the boy's face. Vera laughed and snapped her camera. When she finished, she looked up at Yanik's parents. They were amazed and excited.

“It's just incredible,” Stella whispered happily.

“Looks like Yanik is turning from an assistant into my partner,” Vera thought happily. She could not put into words how important this moment was for her, when she saw with her own eyes the transformation of a child from a passive observer into a real participant in their common cause.