
I KEEP RUNNING

A runner is not somebody who runs fast. It's somebody who keeps fighting, says Marc Buhl. Twenty-year-old Adrian Ojdana, a patient of the Institute and a member of the Polish Team of the Deaf in Athletics, understands perfectly what this German writer means. With a serious hearing disorder, he fought to win sporting trophies, his dream job of a computer scientist and a place among normally-hearing people. Both in sport and in life Adrian adheres to the principle: it takes work to achieve successes.

He has been into sport since he can remember. In primary school, he played basketball, volleyball and football. Next, he started to practise swimming. - I tried various disciplines to find the one that suited me best - says Adrian. In Staszów, his home town, not all teachers supported his sports passion. - When my son received a cochlea implant at the age of 9, some suggested that we should arrange for him to be exempted from PE lessons - says Robert Ojdana, Adrian's father. - We didn't agree. We signed statements saying that under our responsibility he can participate in sports classes. We even bought him a special head guard. We wanted Adrian to be able to do what he loved - adds Adrian's mother, Monika.

Living in a small town with no sports clubs, the only way Adrian could pursue his sports passions was by attending classes at the school sports club. Then, in the middle school, which he completed at the Institute for the Deaf and Dumb in Warsaw (Instytut Głuchoniemych w Warszawie) a chance appeared for him to train at a sports club. His PE teacher spotted his talent. It was he who encouraged him to take up running. - First I ran 3000 and 1500 meters, and when my pace improved - 800 and 400 meters - says Adrian. - I had a great trainer who knew how to motivate me properly. In sport, it is very important to have not only physical but also mental stamina - he explains. Successes came after a few years. He was noticed and invited to be on the Polish team. Currently, he represents Warsaw Sports Club for Deaf Youth under the Institute for Deaf and Dumb.

Gate to the world

Adrian was diagnosed with hearing disorder very early. His screening test result shortly after his birth was abnormal. The boy received hearing aids, and an intensive rehabilitation began. Thanks to the efforts of his parents and specialists, he learned the Polish language and speech well enough to start education in a mainstream school in his home town Staszów. - With time his hearing got worse and the hearing aids didn't help. We started to seek new possibilities - says Robert Ojdana. - We opted for implantation. It was a very good decision that changes a lot in Adrian's life. - After receiving an implant, my son became a self-confident and sociable boy. Previously, he had been a quiet, withdrawn kid and had kept himself to himself - says Monika Ojdana. - We were very happy to see Adrian opening up, expressing himself. This was incredible. As though we opened a gate to the world for him - she adds. Adrian is grateful to his parents for making this decision, although the implant did not solve all his problems with communication.

- I can hear much more sounds in the implant than in hearing aids, and they are clearer. I can also understand speech better, which makes it easier for me to communicate with others - says

Adrian. - However, I still struggle with communicating in difficult acoustic conditions. That's why during classes in Polish-Japanese Academy of Information Technology in Warsaw, where I'm currently studying, I sometimes rely on a sign language translator. I need this help especially during lectures in a large hall, where there is a significant reverberation - he explains. - During practical classes in small groups, I rely on myself. Fortunately, the lecturers are understanding, remembering about my deafness.

Adrian has not always met with such an attitude on the part of his teachers. He remembers that in primary school in Staszów the teachers did not know how to treat a pupil with an implant. - They probably thought that the implant solved all the hearing problems of our son and he didn't need an individual approach any more - says Adrian's mum. - Our interventions brought short-term effects - she adds. Adrian got lower grades because he didn't do homework or was not prepared for classes. And all that because he didn't hear something well. - Our son was very troubled by these failures. That's why we decided to have him transferred to a school where the teachers are prepared for working with children with hearing disorder - explains Robert Ojdana. In third grade of the middle school Adrian began attending the Institute for Deaf and Dumb.

Using a word and a sign

The decision to change school was not easy. - It was a boarding school. We worried how Adrian would cope in a completely new setting, far away from home - says his mum. - Thanks to the kindness of the director of the Institute for Deaf and Dumb, I was allowed to stay with my son in the institute for a few days of a "trial period" so that we could see what it was like to function at a place like that - she adds. Adrian liked the new school very much. He was glad that classes were conducted in small groups of several students. Even the fact that he did not know sign language, which was used by most of the students, did not make him less enthusiastic. When presenting the material, the teachers were speaking clearly and using a sign language at the same time, so the boy was convinced that he would be OK. - I saw how education looked like here and knew that at this school it would be easier for me to acquire knowledge - says Adrian. - In the Institute, I felt more free than in the mainstream school. If there was something I didn't understand I could signal it any time, and it made nobody puzzled or impatient - he recalls. He passed the middle school exam in the Institute with the second best result and the secondary school exit exam (matura) - with the highest score.

Before arriving at the Institute, Adrian didn't know any deaf people communicating through a sign language. So, at first he wrote notes to his school mates. - I observed all the time how they talked to one another during breaks or in the hall of residence, and that's how I learned a sign language - he recalls. - I started with the alphabet, then I learned signs signifying the basic words and ultimately I managed to master it. What motivated me was the desire to communicate with my school mates - he says smiling.

Adrian's parents feared that by being around people who use sign language every day he would give up speaking. - We were relieved when we saw that during classes the teachers spoke and used sign language at the same time. This meant that Adrian could have a regular contact with the Polish language - says Adrian's mum. - We didn't mind him starting to use sign language, but we also wanted him to use the language in which we raised him - she explains. According to his father, Adrian learned sign language in no time. - I envy the ease with which he did it - he says. - Even the director of the Institute for Deaf and Dumb was full of admiration for our son. He tried

to persuade him to become a sign language interpreter - he adds. Adrian is considering this idea. He thinks that it would allow him to help many deaf people who unlike him didn't learn the Polish language well enough to function freely among normally-hearing people.

Today, Adrian gets along fine both among the deaf and normally-hearing people. Depending on whom he is talking to he uses Polish or sign language - either of them allows him to communicate effectively. His friends are normally-hearing and hard-hearing. He can find a common ground with everybody. Adrian's parents think that he benefited more than they expected from changing school. Staying at the boarding school, far from home, Adrian became independent more quickly, got mature and learned to take responsibility for his life.

Always moving on

Adrian is seriously thinking about the future. After graduating from the secondary school he chose demanding IT studies, because he is passionate about computers. He thinks that a computer scientist is a profession with a future. Currently, he is a first-year student and is working hard to prepare for this year's World Championship of the Deaf in Athletics, which will be held at the end of July and at the beginning of August in Bulgaria, and for the European Championship of the Deaf in Athletics in Germany. In 2017, he plans to take part in the 23rd Summer Olympic Games of the Deaf in Samsun, Turkey. Like every sportsman, he would like to win medals, but they are not an end in itself. Sport gives him above all a lot of fun and satisfaction. While running - he says - he airs his head, leaving behind stress and overwhelming thoughts. Sport also motivates him to take up new challenges. He is considering a future career of a trainer. He would like to encourage children through his passion to take up physical activity. According to him, practising sport not only benefits your body, but it also forms your character. It teaches you self-discipline and perseverance in pursuing your objectives. It pays off in your day-to-day life. Sport offers other benefits as well. When I'm away for competitions, I can see the world, get to know competitors from other countries, broaden my horizons.

His sports idol is Usain Bolt, a distinguished athlete from Jamaica. He is also a fan of Robert Lewandowski. He's aware that it takes many years of hard work to achieve successes. He devotes a lot of time to his sports passion. When he prepares for competitions, he trains five times a week. Training is not only about running, it also involves many hours of hard work at the gym. - Of course, I go to parties as well - he adds smiling. - Like most young people I like having fun, living it up, but I always know when to call it a day at a party so that I can be in a good form during training. This self-discipline allows him to reconcile learning and leisure (he likes listening to music, especially electronic one, and dancing) with sport. And although it sometimes takes effort, Adrian keeps running forward.