

Géza Dely didn't launch a foundation to help disabled people. He wants to enable them to give something to the world.



TIBOR KRAUSZ

AT THE FOUNDATION'S CAFE: Géza Dely (2nd from l.) enjoys a moment with some of his organization's employees who have disabilities.

By **Tibor Krausz** / Correspondent

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Zoltán Kollár has a movement disorder that has made him unable to walk, talk, or eat unaided. He's used a lumbering electric wheelchair since childhood. But none of that has slowed him down.

Zozó, as his friends fondly call him, loves to go to parties, watch plays in theaters, and head outdoors for trips. He also enjoys lecturing on special-needs education at a teachers training college in Budapest, Hungary, where he works part time.

"Even in my condition, you can have a happy and rewarding life," says Mr. Kollár, a cordial man who communicates with his left pinkie finger, which he uses to touch letters and common words printed on a portable communication board. "I won't give up," he stresses. "We show everyone they must never give up."

By "we," he means the scores of other people with various forms of mental and physical disability who have come together to help each other and others like them through the Nem Adom Fel Foundation.

The nonprofit, whose name means "I won't give up," is the brainchild of Géza Dely, a Hungarian humanitarian who seeks to inculcate a simple yet potentially life-changing idea in people with special needs. That idea is this: Your disabilities do not define you; your abilities do.

'Our approach is that no matter how disadvantaged you are, you're able enough to do something for someone else.'

— **Géza Dely**, founder of the Nem Adom Fel Foundation

"When you have a disability and face difficulties, you can turn inward and feel sorry for yourself," says Mr. Dely, a bearish man with a trim beard and the upbeat demeanor of a self-help guru. "Or you can

use your abilities, whatever they may be, to help others.

"We didn't set up Nem Adom Fel to help people with disabilities," he elucidates. "We set it up to enable them to give something to the world."

That "something" can even be a smile or a song.

In fact, it was with songs that the nonprofit got started. In 2005 Dely, who plays the guitar, and some of his special-needs friends began busking on the streets of Budapest, the Hungarian capital.

By then Dely had been helping people with disabilities for more than a decade as a social worker. Their indomitable spirit captivated him, he says, but they lacked an avenue where they could join forces and express their creative energies. So with the equivalent of \$2,000 that he and his friends had raised by playing music on the streets, Dely launched Nem Adom Fel.

The foundation, which is sustained partly by grants from the European Union and the Hungarian government, has gone from strength to strength. Its band is still going strong, too, and has given several

▶ NEXT PAGE

charity concerts at smaller stadiums, alongside trained backup musicians. It has also performed in Germany, Switzerland, China, and elsewhere.

Nem Adom Fel has not only provided outlets for disabled people, but has also undertaken activities that benefit other needy individuals. “We don’t just want to help ourselves,” Dely notes. “We want to help others, too.”

The foundation has used some of its funds from performances to renovate a dormitory for disadvantaged youths in neighboring Romania. It has also created several day-care centers for ethnic Roma children in economically deprived rural communities in Hungary. At the centers, special-needs volunteers teach underprivileged youngsters origami, play games and music with them, and help them with homework.

The nonprofit is now raising funds to build a home for two kinds of residents – people with disabilities and seniors without homes or companions. “The idea is that they will all live independently [in separate rooms], but will also support each other,” Dely explains. “Our approach is that no matter how disadvantaged you are, you’re able enough to do something for someone else.”

The approach has gained recognition. “Nem Adom Fel helps disadvantaged people become independent and interdependent by fostering companionships and friendships among them,” attests Maria Keys, a Hungarian-American who is president of the Cosmopolitan Lions Club in Budapest, which has helped raise funds for Nem Adom Fel. “No one does it like them.”

In addition to its outreach activities, Nem Adom Fel runs projects for those with various disabilities. It helps them find suitable jobs, and the nonprofit itself employs some 90 people with special needs. It also offers training programs, counseling, and specialized services.

Moreover, the foundation organizes social and cultural events for disabled people. And it runs fun-filled, weeklong integrated summer camps for disabled and disadvantaged youths.

A year ago, the nonprofit launched Nem Adom Fel Cafe & Bar, a stylish coffeehouse in a downtrodden part of Budapest. The cafe

is staffed almost entirely by disabled people. An autistic barista mixes drinks, while visually impaired and mentally challenged individuals help out behind the counter. Several hearing-impaired men and women busy themselves in the kitchen. People in wheelchairs work as servers.

“Everyone can fit in and find their place,” Dely says. “They’re all amazingly enthusiastic and task-oriented.”

Indeed, a can-do spirit is on full display at the cafe. Its buoyant ambience contrasts with the sullen indifference that prevails at some other coffeehouses around town.

“We’ve wanted to have a meeting place we can call our own,” says Szabolcs Papp, who lost the use of his legs as a newborn because of a medical error. He now works for Nem Adom Fel as its spokesman. “We also want to support ourselves financially.”

The establishment serves as a social experiment as well. “[Able-bodied] people can meet us here and get to know us better,” explains Dávid Gulyás, a college-educated man who has autism. Károly Tóth, who has cerebral palsy, concurs. “We can break down barriers over tea and coffee,” he says.

Mr. Tóth performs creatively choreographed dances with his wheelchair in small theaters. He also performs at the cafe.

Several evenings a week, the cafe hosts such artistic performances, as well as live music, open-mike events, and poetry readings.

Another popular performer is Imre Tunyogi, a cognitively impaired man who works as a waiter and has mastered slam poetry. “I wake up like you, but each morning I clothe myself in my slow speech and slow movements,” he rapped at one of his recent recitals. “But

this,” he went on, fist-pumping for emphasis, “prepares me to face my problems.”

A recurrent theme in Mr. Tunyogi’s poetry is a stance against prejudice. Attitudes about disabled people are improving in this Central European nation, but some misconceptions about them persist.

“There are still palpable reservations about people with disabilities in society,” Dely says. “Many people feel pity for them, but pity isn’t what they need,” he adds. “It’s self-motivation and opportunity. Once they have those, they can solve their own

How to take action

UniversalGiving (www.universalgiving.org) helps people give to and volunteer for top-performing charitable organizations around the world. All the projects are vetted by UniversalGiving; 100 percent of each donation goes directly to the listed cause. Below are links to three groups that support children:

■ **Christian Care Foundation for Children With Disabilities** (<http://bit.ly/ChristianCare>) helps disabled orphans and disabled poor children in Thailand reach their full potential. Take action: Make a donation for these children to attend 2017 Rainbow Camp (<http://bit.ly/RainbowCamp>).

■ **World Food Program USA** (<http://bit.ly/WFPamerica>) builds support and resources for the United Nations World Food Program, the globe’s largest hunger relief organization. Take action: Help fund this group’s art project for at-risk urban youths in El Salvador (<http://bit.ly/SalvadorArt>).

■ **Foundation for International Medical Relief of Children** (<http://bit.ly/MedReliefIntl>) aims to improve pediatric and maternal health in the developing world. Take action: Volunteer for this organization in Peru (<http://bit.ly/PeruHealth>).

problems.”

Still, Nem Adom Fel’s message of inclusivity has come to resonate with more and more Hungarians. Local pop stars have performed with the musicians of the foundation’s band. And the cafe has been the scene of notable events: Olympic athletes have held press conferences there, companies have conducted workshops there, and people have thrown birthday parties there.

To break down barriers even more, Nem Adom Fel offers sensitivity training sessions, during which people with disabilities tell their able-bodied peers about their daily challenges. “People can learn patience and perseverance from us,” says Kollár, the sociable man who lectures part time.

Dely says he himself now understands more about those qualities. “I’ve learned a lot from special-needs people,” he notes. “I’ve had a charmed life, compared to them. I’ve never had to face the kind of difficulties they’ve had to overcome.”

He insists he deserves little credit for Nem Adom Fel’s successes with disabled people. “This foundation is what people with disabilities do. It’s not what we do for them,” he says. “It’s their achievement.” ■

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