

Disabled youngsters in a German care institute stars of the new catalogue and international campaign: BENETTON SUNFLOWERS BLOOM IN AUTUMN

UNITED COLORS
OF BENETTON.

Ponzano, 11th September 1998. Little Hildegard wearing a polo neck that proclaims love, a group of children ice skating, young cooks preparing and tasting what they've made with their own hands, Manuela posing with her mother and brothers, little Hansi smiling in the country sunshine with his grandparents, parents and a gentle speckled calf, a team of skiers ready to launch themselves on the snow and fourteen year old Stefan imitating Elvis with his guitar. These are some of the stars of the pictures in the new Benetton catalogue for the 1998/99 Fall/Winter collection, taken by Oliviero Toscani at the St. Valentin Institute that specialises in the education of youngsters with disabilities and is located in Ruhpolding, in the Bavarian Alps. The catalogue will also be the subject of the press and billboard campaigns, which will come out in Italy in collaboration with TIM (in Italy) and with Procter & Gamble's Lenor Care brand in Great Britain and Ireland, an important sign from two companies who, choosing to share in this approach to social communication, have decided to place their own brands next to the Benetton brand.

The new catalogue is called **The sunflowers** because, in her introduction, the writer Susanna Tamaro tells of how these flowers can be seen from a window of her home and of how she associates *"their stubborn joy and ... the docility with which they follow the sun"* with the smiles of the children of the Ruhpolding institute. The catalogue pages show children and youngsters with disabilities, happy and sad like all young people, their families, teachers and specialist Institute staff: all together in a sort of extended family, in a peaceful community where the usual measure of "normality" is superseded by a deeper feeling of solidarity between human beings. *"We're all delighted that Benetton decided to do its catalogue in our centre"*, said sister Michaela, one of the teachers *"there was a wonderful atmosphere here: it was really an enjoyable encounter, and a sign of friendship"*.

The photos give an impression of unstrained genuineness, innocence and hope. They are pictures that, as Tamaro emphasises, *"speak of a world with no defences, no limits, no preconceptions. A world that presents itself by offering the immediacy of its love"*. Because of this, the Benetton catalogue, for the first time, will also become a world-wide communication campaign, presenting some of these pictures in the press and on billboards, in order to help to break down the wall that surrounds disability as an extreme form of "difference" and therefore marginalized because it is incomprehensible, frightening and, even more serious in our image-orientated society, unrepresentable.

In his explanation as to why he chose to take these pictures at the St. Valentin Institute, Oliviero Toscani quotes a famous dadaist motto: *"Stupid people see beauty only in beautiful things"*, in order to emphasise how, today, beauty conforms almost exclusively to the aesthetic model put forward by advertising and television. *"That's why"* he adds *"it's necessary to look for something deeper than superficial"*

beauty. I've chosen these children, these young people, these families, because they are beautiful in the purest sense of the word".

The St. Valentin Institute for the disabled at Ruhpolding, in Germany, with state support, takes care of the education of 110 children and young people, from three to twenty-two years of age, of which 30 are full-time residents. Once they reach the age of twenty-two, in accordance with their capabilities, they are assigned an external job or are integrated into structures for adults with disabilities. The Institute, that can count on the services of a team of about one hundred between teachers and specialist personnel, is organised to offer specific treatment according to the type of disability, and allows the youngsters to live in contact with a natural, uncontaminated environment. With its two gymnasiums, one devoted to physiotherapy, indoor swimming pool, relaxation room, riding centre, ski runs and skating rink, the Institute is also equipped for recreational activities that range from excursions to cookery, painting to the theatre, to music.

High-resolution images are available in the section:

Image Gallery – Benetton Institutional Campaigns – The Sunflowers