

## ICEVI European Newsletter

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Coordinated by      Andrea Hathazi      [ahathazi@yahoo.com](mailto:ahathazi@yahoo.com)  
Edited by            Mary Lee            [maryblee2000@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:maryblee2000@yahoo.co.uk) and  
                             Betty Leotsakou      [bleotsakou@gmail.com](mailto:bleotsakou@gmail.com)  
Designed by        Peter Teplický      [webmaster@icevi-europe.org](mailto:webmaster@icevi-europe.org)

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## President's Message

Dear Members of ICEVI-Europe,

For those of you who have already celebrated Easter, I hope that you have had a blessed and wonderful holiday with your families and loved ones.

Various interesting and exciting events, conferences and seminars will be taking place within the next couple of months. As previously mentioned in our December 2015 Newsletter Issue, we at ICEVI-Europe are very much looking forward to the upcoming VBS Congress, August 1-8 2016 in Graz, Austria. We hope to see all of you there, contributing with your knowledge and experiences, making this conference on the topic of Inclusion of the Blind and visually handicapped a great success. Further information can be found under the calendar of events section on the ICEVI-Europe website, as well as, on the [VBS congress website](#). Furthermore, The International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment and the World Blind Union will be jointly holding their General Assemblies at the Rosen Centre Hotel in Orlando, Florida, USA, from 18th to 25th August 2016. The joint Assemblies will include an ICEVI Day on Monday 22nd August 2016 that will be dedicated to conference-style papers and workshops. For additional information on the World Conference, including a schedule of events, event pricing, venue and travel details, an agenda, registration etc. please visit the [WBU-ICEVI 2016 conference website](#). The International Tactile Reading Conference organized by the Swedish Agency for Accessible Media (MTM) and National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (SPSM) will take place 5-7 April 2017 in Stockholm at the Clarion Hotel. A Call for Abstracts and Posters was sent out to the ICEVI-Europe Newsletter mailing list and can be found in this issue of the Newsletter. Please visit the ICEVI-Europe website and [Tactile Reading conference website](#) for additional information and details. Unfortunately, we regret to inform you that the Host Committee of the 7th ICEVI East European Conference in Belarus has decided to cancel the conference due to difficult circumstances. We will keep you informed about the details regarding the organization of the next East European Conference.

ICEVI-Europe has also enhanced its ongoing cooperation with the European Blind Union, by collaborating with the EBU and jointly producing a state of the art report entitled, "Erasmus+ Mobility of Students with Disability: A State-of-the-art report on the accessibility of exchange programs for students with visual impairments" regarding blind and partially sighted students' access to Exchange programmes. The aim of this state-of-the-art report is to obtain a clear picture of the possibilities and barriers of exchange programs for university students with visual impairments. You may also find this report on the [Access to Education webpage of the EBU](#), as well as, on the [website of ICEVI-Europe](#).

ICEVI-Europe is continuing to grow its cooperation with the European Coalition for Vision (ECV). We have endorsed the second edition of the Your Eyes Manual, a publication by the European Forum Against Blindness (EFAB) and member of the European Coalition for Vision (ECV), a manual which aims to encourage early diagnosis in blindness prevention and highlight the issues of vision loss. Within the framework of our cooperation, ICEVI-Europe will be more actively participating in the work stream of ECV focusing on Parliamentary Business, Legislation and MEPs, including supporting and advocating for the European Accessibility Act and will be present at an ECV Planning Meeting on April

20, 2016 in Brussels. A special article on the European Accessibility Act can be found within this issue of the newsletter, as well as, on the welcome page of the ICEVI-Europe website. Furthermore, ICEVI-Europe was cordially invited to attend a networking dinner event, in support of early diagnosis, better preventative management and better vision on April 20, 2016 at The European Parliament in Brussels.

ICEVI-Europe was invited to participate and speak at the Zero Project Conference 2016's Policymaker Forum on Inclusive Education and ICTs which was held on February 10-12 2016 at the United Nation's Office in Vienna, Austria and brought together inspiring and engaging policymakers, educational stakeholders, UN Staff, opinion leaders, representatives of DPOs, NGOs, foundations and social entrepreneurs from around the world. The purpose of the Zero Project is to recognize Innovative Practices and Policies that are effective in overcoming the barriers faced by persons with disabilities, along with promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, in accordance to the principles and Articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). The Global Campaign on Education for All Children with Visual Impairment, EFA-VI, implemented by ICEVI International in partnership with the World Blind Union, had been selected by the Zero Project as an Innovative Practice on Inclusive Education in 2016. Dr. Lawrence Campbell, President Emeritus of ICEVI and Lord Colin Low of Dalston CBE, President of ICEVI received personalized invitations to attend the Zero Project Conference as experts and speakers, in support of the EFA-VI Campaign Initiative. We at ICEVI-Europe would like to extend our sincerest congratulatory wishes to ICEVI for this exceptional accolade and I was very honored to be present and participate at this significant moment. The EFA-VI Campaign was chosen amongst hundreds of submissions from over 98 countries and underwent an extensive research and selection process. We could not be more proud of the fact that the EFA-VI Campaign was recognized on a global level and received the attention that it rightfully deserved.

In this edition of the newsletter you will find significant information regarding various interesting activities that have taken place or are ongoing throughout Europe. You will read a very interesting article on the overview of Early Intervention for children with disabilities in modern Russia, an observation-based study on a thesis written within the field of special needs education regarding children and adolescents with congenital blindness and varying degrees of additional difficulties such as autism spectrum disorders (ASD), as well as, information about ATOMOL: the Hungarian innovation for teaching chemistry to blind children. You will also become familiar with the developments and conclusions from the ICEVI-Europe Nordic and Baltic sub-region meeting which was held on October 26-27 2015 at Tartu Emajoe School, in Estonia and the organizational changes in Finland regarding the former Onerva, Center for Learning and Consulting into the The National Valteri Centre for Learning and Consulting, along with its purpose/roles and the new Innovative Learning and Working Environment. Moreover, in light of International Women's Day, a Press Release written by the World Blind Union highlights the importance of gender equality and the access to information and education for women who are blind.

We would like to encourage all National Representatives (National Contact Persons) and ICEVI-Europe Members **to contribute to the development of Newsletter Issues** by giving content and shape to them, informing all readers of any recent developments in the field of visual impairment ongoing in their respective countries.

Wishing you and your families a beautiful spring season and continued success with your initiatives for people with a visual impairment.

On behalf of the Board of ICEVI-Europe,  
Panagiota (Betty) Leotsakou, President



## The overview of early intervention for children with disabilities in modern Russia

**Ruchin Vladimir**, PhD, Associate Professor of Department of sociology, social anthropology and social work SSTU (Saratov, Russia)

**Myasnikova Ludmila**, PhD, Associate Professor of Department of Psycho-Pedagogical and Special Education, NRSSU (Saratov, Russia)

The transitional state of Russian society is reflected in various sectors of the socio-medical sphere, including the imperfection of the system of early detection and correction of deviations in development of children. Institutionalization of key components of such a system and its expanding into a broader range of needy children of early age, requires the establishment of a new type of social relations which is possible to achieve through the efforts of the whole society. Obviously, the variation of organizational forms and special education programs, focused on the interaction of experts in the process of complex care for children of early age are in demand today. However, another important moment of creating the above mentioned system is the transformation of social consciousness from the point of view of the free expansion of parental choice of agencies that can provide the specialized assistance. Thus, we are talking about improving early detection and correction of deviations in the development of children, and of the active inclusion of society in the solution of health problems through the efforts of the entire civil society, including the efforts of NGOs. This review will consider the domestic experience of organization of early intervention for children with disabilities.

An important step in the creation of early intervention is the idea of creating a system of early care for children with disabilities advanced by the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation in the mid 90's of the last century. This idea included both the quality improvement of early help functioning, and providing each family with available medical and psycho-pedagogical diagnostics in the early stages of child development, defining special psychological and educational needs that would create the conditions for

effectively overcoming the deviations in a child's development, starting with the first days of life<sup>1</sup>.

The leading staff of the Institute of correctional pedagogy of RSA developed the state concept of early care for children with developmental disabilities. The key tasks of implementing this system were defined as follows<sup>2</sup>:

1. The earliest possible identification of special educational needs of children (special educational needs).
2. The maximum reduction of the gap between the moment of definition of primary violations and the beginning of targeted training of the child, including both nonspecific and specific components.
3. The mandatory inclusion of parents in the learning process, starting from the first years of a child's life.
4. Extension of time limits for special education: lower boundary – the first few months of a child's life.
5. The existence of a specialized standard of education, which defines academic achievement together with the level of child's competence.
6. More differentiated, step-by-step training, which in most cases is not required in the education of a standard developing child.
7. Much more profound than in mass education, the differentiation and individualization of the learning process and special organization of the educational environment.

For the implementation of the objectives it would be necessary not only to create a new structural element in the system of special education - **services of early intervention** for children with various developmental disabilities, but also to make a fundamental change in the selection of students. In addition, the achievement of objectives should include the search for additional resources and improving the organization of the education of broad segments of the population, especially parents, including them in different types of public organizations focused on joint activities with services of early intervention.

Services of early intervention<sup>3</sup> can be opened as **a structural unit** in:

- preschool educational institutions of compensating or combined type;
- special (correctional) schools;
- pre-school educational institutions;

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<sup>1</sup> Razenkova Y.A. Regional politics in the sphere of early intervention: problems and perspectives /Defectology - № 4. – 2003. – P. 72-77.

<sup>2</sup> Malofeev N.N. Rehabilitation with education should start from the first months of a child life /Anthology ICP RAE scientific-methodological journal, electronic edition <http://almanah.ikprao.ru>.

<sup>3</sup> Prepared with the help of methodological materials of Y. A. Razenkova, PhD, chairman of laboratory early intervention for children with diagnosed visual impairments of RAE establishment «Institute of correctional Pedagogy»

- institutions of further education;
- various centers of education: of diagnostics and consulting; psychological, medical and social support; psychological-pedagogical rehabilitation and correction; curative Pedagogy and others.

Depending on the created conditions of service, early intervention can function as a narrow profile service, providing assistance only to certain categories of children and their families, as well as multi profile.

The aim of early help services is to provide complex psycho-pedagogical and medico-social support to families with babies and toddlers with developmental problems.

The customers of early intervention services are families raising children with disabilities of three or four years old.

Categories that may be directed to the service of early intervention:

1. Children with diagnosed developmental disabilities – with visual and hearing impairments, locomotor disorders, genetic syndromes, organic lesions of the Central nervous system, suspected Autism Spectrum Disorders and other neuro-psychiatric disorders.
2. Children of biological risk group – premature children, post-term, children whose mothers had infectious and viral diseases during pregnancy (rubella, influenza, cytomegalovirus, herpes, toxoplasmosis, etc.), children whose mothers suffered from morning sickness during pregnancy, children born with asphyxia and birth trauma; infants with hemolytic disease of the newborn; kids who suffered childhood infections (influenza, pertussis, scarlet fever, measles, etc.), children with CPR during birth or in the period of stay in a children's hospital or intensive care unit; babies who were born with low scores on the Apgar score; children from families with a high risk of visual impairment, hearing impairment, locomotor disturbances, impaired speech and intelligence.
3. Children of social risk groups – children from social risk families; children of parents with mental illness, suffering from alcohol, drug addiction; children of young parents; children of families sent by social services; children from families of refugees and displaced persons; children from bilingual families and others.

Institute of RAE correctional pedagogy of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation created the project of Program, a unified state system of the early (from the first months of life) identification and special assistance to children with developmental disabilities. The project entered into the Program "Development of practical Psychology in education" (2003-2010) of the Ministry of education of the Russian Federation. The high level of interest of specialists and state structures in the organization of such assistance was proved by the feedback received and expert assessment of the Program during its discussion in the regions of the country.

Domestic experience of the organization of early assistance to children with disabilities is based on data from years of research and practical activity of specialists of the ICP RAE (Institute of correctional pedagogy) in Moscow (Y. A. Razenkova, N. D. Shmatko, O. E. Gromova, N. A. Uryadnitskaya, E. R. Baenskaya). These data prove that competently organized early intervention can prevent the emergence of secondary deviations in

development, ensure the maximum realization of rehabilitation potential, and, for a considerable number of the children, open the possibility of involving them in the General educational stream and eliminate the need for costly special education. Early (from the first months of life) correction of deviations in the development of children worldwide is one of the priority directions of special Pedagogy and Psychology (N. N. Malofeev<sup>4</sup>, Y. A. Razenkova<sup>5</sup>).

The most famous model of early help for young children with developmental disabilities in the St. Petersburg social program "habilitation of toddlers". In the Samara region the interagency regional target program "Rehabilitation" was developed (approved by the Law of the Samara region 44-DG of June 15, 2001), where the section on early intervention with problem children became one of the most important.

Today a variety of support services are actively created for families with children of early age with disorders in development in our country. So, the model of early intervention service was created in Great Novgorod, where there is great experience in consulting families in Moscow (Consultative-diagnostic center of the Institute of RAE Correctional Pedagogy, state scientific institution "Center for early diagnostics and special assistance" of the Ministry of education of Russia, psychological-medical-social Centre North district, the Center for curative Pedagogy, Center of early intervention "downside up", etc.), in St. Petersburg (non-state educational institution "Saint-Petersburg early intervention Institute", the rehabilitation center of children with visual impairments, etc.). Samara, Rostov region adopted the regional program of early diagnosis and early special assistance, and these programs are financed from regional budgets. Perm region, Kostroma, small cities of the Moscow region are implementing their own models of early rehabilitative assistance to children with disabilities.

Professionals working at public organizations try to solve the problem of help for children with developmental disorders and their families, so in Nizhny Novgorod and Saratov Centers of early intervention for children with visual impairments were created.

In Nizhny Novgorod a group of short-term stay for Visually Impaired Children operates on the basis of the early intervention Centre, created by members of the Nizhny Novgorod public organization of parents of visually impaired children called "Perspective" (NARDIS "Perspective"). Educational activities for children are held by speech pathologists, physical education instructor, musical director. Work is conducted in close contact with the parents.

In Saratov the early rehabilitative assistance to children with visual impairments began in 2004 on the basis of the Saratov regional public organization "Center for rehabilitation and assistance to children with visual impairments". In contrast to Nizhny Novgorod's colleagues the Saratov experts have developed and tested innovative technology for early intervention via home visits for children with severe visual impairment and their families. In

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<sup>4</sup> Malofeev N.N. Early intervention – the priority of modern correctional Pedagogy / Defectology. – 2003.- № 4. – P. 7-10.

<sup>5</sup> Razenkova Y. A. Suggestions on effective use of organizational mechanisms for perfection and development of early intervention system in different regions of the country / Defectology. –2009. - № 4. – P. 61-64

2012-2013 the developed technology was applied in the practice of the Resource center, operating under a Federal pilot group on the basis of GBSO "Special (correctional) comprehensive boarding school of III-IV type of Saratov". Since 2014 work in early intervention for children with visual impairment is carried out in two directions: consulting at home (children up to 3 years) and a short-stay group (children 2-3 years). 3 years old children are enrolled in a pre-school group which is a subdivision of a boarding school. Thus, there is continuity in the education of children with vision impairments. Students of the faculty of psychological, pedagogical and special education of Chernyshevsky Saratov State University are involved into work at home with young children with severe visual impairment, as volunteers. Future special education teachers and psychologists learn to develop individual educational routes, conduct studies of cognitive activity and the emotionally-volitional sphere of children, develop synopses of lessons with preschool children, acquire practical skills of work with the blind and visually impaired children, including children with multiple disabilities.

At the present stage of development of special education, early intervention is considered as an important component of the educational and social integration of children with developmental disorders in the environment with normally developing peers, which creates prerequisites for getting by many of them general education. A new step in this direction is the Concept of development of early intervention for children till 2020, developed by the joint efforts of experts from the Ministry of labor and social protection. This concept refers to the implementation of a range of services for early intervention through interagency cooperation of public authorities of subjects of the Russian Federation, bodies of local self-government, medical, educational organizations, social service organizations, and private commercial organizations. It is particularly important that it takes the origins of the Concept from a non-profit organization.

## **Language and activity among children and adolescents with congenital blindness. An observation-based study by Gro Aasen**

Gro Aasen finished her doctoral thesis in August 2015. She works at Statped and is a qualified special education teacher and music therapist. The motivation behind her doctoral thesis came from her experiences in the practical field and from supporting individuals with blindness and autism spectrum disorders.

### **Summary in English**

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This thesis is written within the field of special needs education regarding children and adolescents with congenital blindness and varying degrees of additional difficulties such as autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Focusing particularly on echolalia, the thesis is concerned with how unconventional utterances expressed by children and adolescents with congenital blindness and ASD can be understood, and the effect augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) – using tactile symbols and schedules – can have for children with blindness in a heterogeneous sample.

The thesis is article-based and consists of two subprojects with a total of four articles. For both subprojects data collection is longitudinal and has been undertaken in pedagogically organized activities and situations. Data consists of transcriptions of observation of natural language use and occurring behavior in the sample. Article I is a theoretical description and discussion of echolalic language in children who are blind. The function and development of echolalia are discussed and incorporated in a discussion of language development in individuals with blindness and individuals with ASD. Article II describes and discusses the immediate repetition of something a conversation partner has said – the occurrence of echolalic and unconventional utterances expressed by a child with congenital blindness and ASD. The study substantiates that echolalia is not a set of meaningless imitations of sound, but is probably personally meaningful from early language development. In Article III, the effect the use of tactile symbols has on six children and adolescents with congenital blindness and ASD difficulties is examined. All the children followed requests to act more often when tactile symbols were used than when they were only verbally encouraged to take action. In Article IV, the use of tactile schedules among seven children and adolescents who are blind is described and evaluated. The results show that all the children were active and used several strategies when reading the tactile schedules, both reading strategies they had been taught and their own strategies. The children showed interest in the schedules. This was most likely due to their interest in the events that the schedules provided information about. It was possible to find examples of achievement relating to child behavior or developing forms of behavior, which indicated that the children had achieved a generalized use of tactile schedules and that the schedules could cover functions such as increasing predictability, promoting a sense of agency and being used as an aid to promote communication.

The characteristics of children and adolescents who are blind that are observed in the thesis, point to the need for a thorough understanding of each individual and the use of AAC aids to compensate for sensory loss so as to promote activity and mutually beneficial interaction and communication between pupils and teachers.

Studies were conducted by The Department of Visual Impairment, Statped Southeast, Norway, in collaboration with the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Department of Special Needs Education, University of Oslo, Norway and The National Autism Unit, Oslo University Hospital, Norway.

### **Articles included in the thesis are:**

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Martinsen, H., Piros, A.S.H., Rime, I., & Aasen, G. (2008). Ekkolali belyst med eksempler fra en blind gutt med autisme. *Skolepsykologi*, 6, 3-26.

Aasen, G., Martinsen, H., Piros, A.S.H., & Rime, I. (2011). Umiddelbar gjentakelse, ekkotale og påfallende ytringer hos en blind gutt med autisme. *Psykologi i kommunen*, 6, 49-59.

Aasen, G., & Nærland, T. (2014). Enhancing activity by means of tactile symbols. A study of a heterogeneous group of pupils with congenital blindness, intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*, 18(1), 61-75.  
doi:10.1177/1744629514522142

Aasen, G., & Nærland, T. (2014). Observing the use of tactile schedules. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*, 18(4), 315-336. doi:10.1177/1744629514544073

## The proposal for a European Accessibility Act: a new, accessible Europe for blind and partially sighted people?



The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe

### Access denied

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Back in November 2014, in our “Access denied” report, EBU gave examples of inaccessible products and services which would likely remain inaccessible without comprehensive EU legislation.

These included important everyday devices such as ATM machines, televisions and computers.

[A Digital Single Market for ALL citizens: our agenda for change](#)

### Access designed?

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The technology and knowledge exists to remove these barriers. The fact that some ATMs, phones, computers etc. are already accessible proves that point. Most of these devices are still not accessible, however. Unless the law requires their inclusive design, mostly these products will continue to be beyond bounds for blind and partially sighted people.

### The EAA to the rescue?

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One key piece of legislation we have been calling for to remove these barriers was the so-called “European Accessibility Act” (henceforth EAA in this article) that the Commission had promised back in 2011.

So, in early December 2015, EBU was delighted that the Commission finally tabled the proposed EAA.

The newly-proposed Directive seeks to require that a wide range of goods and services be accessible to disabled people and others with a “functional limitation”.

### Improving the internal market, improving accessibility... or both?

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The EAA proposal only seeks to harmonise laws in areas where the Commission feels legislation would improve the functioning of the EU’s internal market, rather than to rectify discrimination in all areas where there is an inaccessible product or service.

In a sense, this approach fits with the EU’s Digital Single Market or “DSM” initiative, which also focuses much effort on improving the EU’s market, and is not therefore called something broader, such as “Digital EU for All” or “Single Digital Society”.

This distinction – “market, not society”- matters. Why? Because there are some areas of discrimination that we need “fixed” via EU regulation, but for which there appears to be no case that such legislation would harmonise and therefore improve the functioning of the EU’s “market”. In those areas, we have been told, the relevant EU legislation is likely to be the EU’s proposed “Equal Treatment Directive” (ETD), and not the EAA. However, the bad news here is that the ETD has been stalled for years due to the opposition of some Member States.

These are tough times to achieve socially-focused legislation in Europe, with austerity being a commonplace, and more “jobs and growth” the EU’s overriding objective.

Despite this political context, in the EAA proposal, we do have a great opportunity to make real progress in the right direction.

[Commission proposes to make products and services more accessible to the disabled persons](#)

## **The EAA proposal**

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The EAA proposal covers computer hardware and operating systems, ATMs, ticketing machines, check-in machines, phones and smartphones, tablets, TVs, online shopping, banking services, e-books and websites of transport companies, and we welcome all of that.

Despite being pleased that the proposal has been tabled, and welcoming much of its content, we do have some concerns, which we expressed in our [initial response to the Commission on the proposal](#).

### **The scope**

There are many products and services which this proposal does not cover and which we feel it could and should include. For just one example, though “ATM” or cash machines are covered, payment terminals that are used by customers with credit cards in shops appear not to be in the scope. We do not understand the logic of that exclusion.

### **Exceptions to the new rules**

The European Commission’s proposal foresees exceptions to compliance for companies that believe it is too complicated or too expensive for them to make their product or service accessible. We have asked for clarification of these exceptions and for strong safeguards to be in place to avoid abuse. We do not want a law which ends up being optional for those upon whom it is supposed to make requirements!

We are also keen to better understand some of the wording of the proposed new law. To be fair to the Commission, it is tough to word the EAA so that it requires sufficient accessibility, is “future-proof”, and explains clearly which functions an accessible product or service should achieve. We hope to work with the Commission and other interested parties to strengthen and clarify the wording where necessary.

### **What now?**

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We have already met key people from the Commission, Council and Parliament to discuss the EAA draft. We are working on the matter with our friends in the European Disability Forum and ANEC.

We will of course be following and providing comments to the legislative process as this happens, urging a really strong, effective EAA.

We have a lot of work to do, but if we achieve a good EAA, Europe really will have taken a big step towards finally being accessible to blind, partially sighted and other people with disabilities. That is surely a goal worth fighting for.

Contact EBU: [ebu@euroblind.org](mailto:ebu@euroblind.org)

### **Estonia: ICEVI Nordic and Baltic sub-region meeting at Tartu, Estonia**

Mrs Monica Lovi, Tartu Emajoe School, ICEVI Contact Person, Estonia

The ICEVI Nordic and Baltic sub-region meeting was held on 26th and 27th October 2015 at Tartu Emajoe School, Estonia. The new head of our sub-region Tarja Hännikäinen (Finland), and contact persons Elfa Hermansdóttir (Iceland), Ligita Geida (Latvia), Astrid Kristin Vik (Norway), Anders Rönnbäck (Sweden) and Monica Lovi (Estonia) took part in it. The representatives gave their country reviews concerning the situation in the field of education and rehabilitation for persons with visual impairment. In addition to that main topic, the work of Nordic-Baltic sub-region was discussed.

Even though, the situations are different in the Nordic and Baltic countries, our main goals and concerns are similar. The participants highlighted that in addition to working for equal educational opportunities for blind and visually impaired, it is more and more important to ensure the high quality of that education.

Certainly, it is a very challenging and resource-demanding task. In the Nordic countries, there are competence centres and they provide special services for blind and visually impaired people. In the Baltic States, the special schools for blind and visually impaired have this specialist knowledge and competence. Therefore, those schools support also BVI children who attend mainstream schools.

Our Nordic-Baltic team expressed a common concern about the lack of trained professionals for persons with visual impairment, especially for those in mainstream schools. In many countries, there is no possibility to specialised training in visual impairment at university level. A question about the qualification of teachers and rehabilitation staff for visual impairment was raised.

The other topics discussed were employment/unemployment among BVI; the situation with services for persons with MDVI and the need to develop specialisation for staff and also services for clients with multiple disabilities.

We found that cooperation within the framework of ICEVI is necessary for professional development. Our group agreed to share our ideas, materials and good practice between our countries. As a result, there is now a web-based folder to use for the Nordic-Baltic team as an interactive tool for that purpose.

## Organisational changes, Finland

In Finland the organisation supporting pre-school and basic education of pupils and students with visual impairment has been on the path of change. During the last years the name and the structure of our organisation supporting pupils with visual impairment has changed from 'Jyväskylä School for the Visually Impaired' to 'Onerva' and now finally to 'Valteri Center of Learning and Counselling'.

Jyväskylä School for the pupils with visual impairments (JNK) used to act as a national special education school and was under the provision of Finnish National Board of Education. The other organisation provided by the National Board of Education at Jyväskylä was the Haukkaranta School for pupils with hearing impairments and language disorders. At the beginning of 2013 JNK and Haukkaranta School merged and the new name was Onerva, Center for Learning and Consulting.

The provider for Onerva has altogether six state special schools and centers for consulting. All these centers have had a long cooperation known as the Valteri-network offering municipality educational officers, educational professionals and families a wide range of specialised services, when support was needed. They offered knowledge related to autism spectrum disorders, language and communication, hearing, mobility and motor coordination, neurological or chronic illnesses, challenges with vision and pupils with multiple needs.

On 1 August 2015, the Valteri network became as one organisation, **The National Valteri Centre for Learning and Consulting**, with six units in different parts of Finland. Onerva is one of them. All these units offer support for learning and school attendance, and each of them also has a Valteri special education school. After the merger, all Valteri services will remain and even become more diverse than before. The main philosophy is still to supplement municipal and regional support services in learning and school attendance. These services can target the needs of individual children and young people, or the needs of an entire working community, municipality or region.

**So from now on, Onerva is one unit in Valteri.** Also our contact information has changed, e.g. new e-mail is [mfirstname.lastname@valteri.fi](mailto:mfirstname.lastname@valteri.fi). Please see more information: [Valteri - Center for Learning and Consulting](#). You can also find more information of [Onerva - unit \(specialization on visual impairment\)](#).

## The New Onerva Building January 2016 - Innovative Learning and Working Environment at Jyväskylä, Finland

Onerva - unit by Valteri Center for Learning and Consulting - got a new Innovative Learning and Working Environment in January 2016, at Jyväskylä, the central part of Finland. One of the aims of the building process was to create a new kind of learning and working environment that enables functionality, active learning and the application of new technology. New space arrangements have been created so that all premises and furniture can be adapted for different purposes. Both staff and pupils can work together with others

in the open working area, in the intensive working area or in the silent working area. These different working areas are called the park, fountain and den, adapting Julianna Nevari's learning space concept. In compliance with the space concept, the project is called 'Oivallus' (Finnish for 'insight').

We hope that the building will be a model for a new way to construct the learning and working environment. Accessibility and the multi-sensory impact on the environment refers to the suitability of the premises for everyone, irrespective of the nature of the support needed. The spaces and routes are barrier-free and safe, and the perception of space is facilitated by limiting and outlining different spaces with contrasts. Good acoustics are an important factor that promotes learning. The spaces can also be lit in various ways, which is important from the viewpoint of vision as well as of concentration.

Welcome to visit!

Further information on the project: Valteri Centre for Learning and Consulting, Onerva Unit. Tuulia Kuntsi, Head of Learning, tel. +358 295 33 2811, [tuulia.kuntsi@valteri.fi](mailto:tuulia.kuntsi@valteri.fi)

## **ATOMOL: the Hungarian innovation for teaching chemistry to blind children**

Krisztina Kovács, ELTE University

The ATOMOL teaching and learning material can help pupils with vision as well as pupils with visual impairment to learn the properties of atoms and how to model them. Moreover, it gives the opportunity to realise "learning on one item" in the classroom.

Author: PANNI SZOMBATI, teacher of the VI

E-mail: [atomol2015@gmail.com](mailto:atomol2015@gmail.com)

Year: 2015

Place: Budapest

### **Short description**

The set contains a holder with pockets where the atom models are packed to match the periodical system. The pockets have labels naming the atom models in print as well as in Braille. In the classroom the pocket holder can either hang on the wall or be packed in the sack that belongs to the set. The set contains 81 atoms which are: 10 Hydrogen; 10 oxygen; 5 natrium; 5 kalium; 3 magnesium, 4 calcium; 3 iron; 3 aluminium; 10 carbon; 3 nitrogen; 4 sulphur; 4 chlorine; 2 fluor; 3 phosphor; 2 copper; 2 zinc; 2 silicon; Noble gas: 1 helium; 1 neon, 1 argon, 1 krypton, 1 xenon, 1 radon. A molecule can be produced through combining the atomcircles, i.e. the buttons and button holes of the outer atom shell.

[More information with pictures of the ATOMOL.](#)

## World Blind Union Press Release: International Women's Day 2016



**Toronto, March 8th, 2016:** International Women's Day encourages us all to reflect on the importance of gender equality, to celebrate the successes of women, and to acknowledge the work that is still left to be done. "With women making up more than 50% of the world's population and often being the main link for the family and connection to the community, there remains a great deal of work to be done to ensure equal rights in all aspects of life," says WBU Immediate Past President and Chair of the International Disability Alliance, Maryanne Diamond.

For women who are blind, access to information, health, and reproductive rights, education, employment and participation in all aspects of the community must be supported to achieve equality with other women and with men. For example, blind women's access to information is a serious issue, especially health and reproductive information. Just as sighted women want access to the latest health and parenting information, so do blind women. However, unlike sighted women, most blind women do not have access to the array of materials available due to the inaccessibility of printed materials, especially reference materials. Less than 10% of printed materials are made into accessible formats and in developing countries it's often less than 1%. With the appropriate support and information, blind women are as effective and competent as sighted women are at raising children and caring for their families.

One way we can improve blind women's access to information is by advocating for the universal ratification and implementation of the **Marrakesh Treaty**. This treaty will allow for more books and printed materials to be published in accessible formats, and for blindness organizations to share books across borders providing access to a wider variety of printed materials for blind and partially sighted women all over the world.

Blind and partially sighted girls also suffer from a lack of access to information, especially in developing countries, where less than 1% of blind girls receive a full education. Most developing countries' inclusive educational systems do not have the resources or specialized teachers required to effectively educate blind children, which often means the best option available is a specialized school. Families are often hesitant to send their blind girl child to these schools, even more than a blind boy child. This hesitancy is often grounded in both the fear of sending their blind daughter to a school in the city, especially when she is from a rural area, and also from the perceived low value of a girl's education. Many families are not aware of opportunities that are available to blind girls and women to become gainfully employed and to be fully active and productive members of their communities. Access to information and education are keys to unlocking these opportunities, so we must work to overcome the multiple barriers to information and education that exist for blind women and girls.

You can learn [more about the Marrakesh Treaty on our campaign page](#).

The World Blind Union (WBU) is the global organization representing the estimated 285 million people worldwide who are blind or partially sighted. Members consist of organizations run by blind people advocating on their own behalf and organizations that serve the blind, in over 190 countries, as well as international organizations working in the field of vision impairment. Visit our [World Blind Union website](#).

For further information contact:

World Blind Union

Caitlin Reid

Communications Coordinator

[Caitlin.Reid@wbu.ngo](mailto:Caitlin.Reid@wbu.ngo)

## Call for abstracts and posters for the Tactile Reading conference 2017

The logo for "TACTILE READING" features the word "TACTILE" in a large, bold, black, sans-serif font. Below it, the word "READING" is written in a smaller, bold, black, sans-serif font. The letter "I" in "READING" is replaced by a stylized graphic of a person's head and shoulders, composed of small black dots.The logo for "MYNDIGHETEN FÖR TILLGÄNGLIGA MEDIER" features a stylized graphic of a person's head and shoulders, composed of small black dots. Below the graphic, the text "MYNDIGHETEN FÖR TILLGÄNGLIGA MEDIER" is written in a black, sans-serif font.The logo for "Specialpedagogiska skolmyndigheten" features a stylized graphic of a person's head and shoulders, composed of small black dots. To the right of the graphic is a red circular emblem containing a white star-like shape. Below the graphic, the text "Specialpedagogiska skolmyndigheten" is written in a black, sans-serif font.

**Tactile Reading** will take place in Stockholm **April 5–7 2017**, bringing together people working with children and youth with visual impairments and blindness, from all over the world. Academics in various research areas, teachers, specialists, commercial companies, developers and innovators in the field of tactile reading are invited.

The conference is arranged by Swedish Agency for Accessible Media (MTM) and National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (SPSM).

This will be a chance to share experiences and research in the field of tactile reading. The conference will promote best practices and inspire to new ideas for research, and will bring people together for future collaboration. This is the first time this conference is arranged, with the ambition to create a recurrent international event.

### **Call for Abstracts**

We are seeking practitioners and academics to give presentations on the following topics:

- Development of tactual understanding
- Tactile reading and the brain
- Braille and literacy
- Tactile graphics
- Universal design and tactile reading

The time for a presentation is either 20 or 40 minutes.  
All presentations should be in English.

Send your contribution to: [tactilereading2017@mtm.se](mailto:tactilereading2017@mtm.se)

## **Present a poster**

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If you prefer to present a poster at the conference please submit your proposal and contact us.

**We are looking forward to meet you!**

[More information and details about Tactile Reading conference 2017](#)