

# European Newsletter 2 • 2003

## Message from your content editor

Thank you to all our contributors who make the Newsletter so varied – from Early Intervention to Lifelong Learning via inclusion, special school and resource centre provision! The only thing we don't have enough of in this edition is photographs. It's so nice to see the faces behind the stories. May I encourage those of you who have not yet sent anything but have something to share about your work, to, please, contribute to the next newsletter. 400 words, or less, and if you have a nice photograph...? Send by email or post to my addresses above. Good writing!

Marianna Bultjens



ICEVI EUROPE

### International Newsletter

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### Editors

Marianna Bultjens  
(Content)  
tel ++44 131 651 6204  
e-mail:  
marianna.bultjens@ed.ac.uk

### address for correspondence

Scottish Sensory Centre  
The Moray House School of  
Education  
University of Edinburgh  
Holyrood road  
Edinburgh EH8 8AQ  
United Kingdom

Marika Carlborg  
(Layout)  
tel ++358 9 511081  
e-mail:  
marika.carlborg@arlainst.fi

Grazyna Walczak  
(Printing and Distribution)  
tel ++48 22 6432289  
e-mail:  
abaw@polbox.com

Printed at The Center for  
Blind Children in Laski,  
Poland.

website:  
www.icevi-europe.org

### Tactual Profile

Tactual Profile was initiated by Visio, an organisation for blind and visually impaired children and adults in the Netherlands. It is an observation instrument for charting the tactual functioning of children with a severe visual impairment from birth to sixteen years old. The instrument concentrates on the tactual requirements that the everyday environment places on perception.

For more information send an e-mail to [tactielprofiel@visio.nu](mailto:tactielprofiel@visio.nu) or contact:

Visio  
Mrs. Ans Withagen  
Amersfoortsestraatweg 180  
1272 RR Huizen  
The Netherlands  
Telephone +31(0)356985815  
Fax +31(0)356936414

## The condition of the education of the visually impaired in Denmark.

The Nordic countries have for several years been viewed as examples of good practice in the education of the visually impaired. In the last couple of years I have begun to express my concern whether this should still be the case! One of my responsibilities is to receive foreign visitors at the Institute for the Blind and Partially Sighted in Denmark. Outlining the state of the education of the visually impaired is often troublesome for me. This note is not a letter of complaint, but merely a summary of the complexity of problems that could appear in many countries on the road towards inclusion.

Both countrywide and locally we are faced with political decisions that have a great impact on the situation for the visually impaired. The consequences are not always in the interest of the users. Lately we have seen that the Refsnæs School (now Visioncentre Refsnæs) has been divided into four different institutions without any professional co-ordination. That has left the staff facing big challenges!

The situation for the integrated visually impaired students is in several aspects difficult. While the material situation works quite well, the social side can be a burden. The school authorities often talk of "a school for all", but still up 25% of all Danish students is some time during their school life referred to special education. The authorities do not realise that making school inclusive requires special training of staff. The worst example I have heard of is from a quite large municipality, where the town council by vote decided "that now the schools are for all" they therefore could withdraw all extra support. Expertise, also on visual impairment, is essential in the inclusive school.



The training of the teachers of the visually impaired is in a chaotic situation. The ministry of education made a "reform", where they first closed down the national special teacher education and then afterwards realised that something must replace it. The creation of a replacement was then put in the hands of newly established local educational centres without any coordination. Denmark is now facing a gap without education of new special teachers for at least 2 years. An extra result of the "reform" meant that the classroom hours for the future special teachers have been reduced by more than 60%.

The same goes for the teachers working directly with the visually impaired students in the classrooms. The local school authorities have reduced the time spent on national courses, but at the same time a lot of local teacher training takes place, conducted by the vision consultants. But the situation varies much from county to county. This is especially worrying when all special educational issues at the same time have been excluded from basic Danish teacher training.

It sounds, as if everything is falling apart, that is not true. I have just outlined some of the more difficult issues we are facing in Denmark at the moment. And no, things were not better in the old days when we had the schools for the blind. What we have come upon is an unfavourable mixture of an irresponsible decentralisation and a missing political will to set quality standards in the education of the visually impaired.

A great responsibility has been placed on the Danish professional system. We have to point out and make way for alternative solutions. We need to set the quality standards; no one will do it for us.

As I have stated, we are on the road towards inclusion. We are facing difficulties that nobody could have foreseen, but we are getting better in accepting the imperfections of the system and are beginning to show how to improve it. Two important areas have already been identified for development: "Blindness and autism" and "Social competence". The latter has been set up as a national research and development project, where already 6 individual projects have been initiated. I look forward to informing you about our findings.

Peter Rodney, MA (Applied Psychology)  
Educational consultant at the Institute for the Blind and Partially Sighted.  
Lecturer of Psychology at the Danish University of Education, Dept. of Special Education.

## MDVI Euronet News

## From School to Resource Centre - A Comenius 1 School Development Project Year One Report 2002-2003

MDVI Euronet Coordinators held their annual planning meeting in May this year in Prague with members attending from the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Scotland and Sweden with contributions received from England and Portugal.

This report is the summary of the first year of a three year European School Development Project funded through the Comenius 1 Action. Comenius is part of Socrates, the EU's programme for education, offering financial support to schools wishing to participate in transnational education projects.

The meeting provided the opportunity for members to be updated on progress on the Network's two Comenius projects as well as the chance to preview the new Web site. Of particular interest was the new online discussion room where professionals, whether or not they are members of the Network, are invited to discuss or raise issues of interest related to MDVI.

The aim of the project is to investigate the potential for special schools for the visually impaired to develop a resource centre role to support all pupils with a visual impairment, regardless of their educational placement. The partners for the project are the Royal Blind School, St Joseph's School for the Visually Impaired in Dublin, The High School for Visually Impaired Students in Prague and Ekeskolan/Resourcentre Vision from Orebro, Sweden.

Future work plans agreed at the meeting included continuing the programme of MDVI workshops started last year with a second session focusing once again on assessment issues. Other workshops which will be developed will address vocational training, active learning, leisure activities as well as MDVI and computer technology. In addition, the Network has committed itself to examining the practicality of establishing a lecture circuit where professional speakers will be invited to speak to staff working with children and young people with MDVI in order to motivate, teach and challenge. The themes of the lectures will fall under the Network's four priority areas.

The whole report can be read at: [www.ssc.mhie.ac.uk/pubs/comenius/comen.html](http://www.ssc.mhie.ac.uk/pubs/comenius/comen.html)

*Rob Jones*  
June 2003

More information on all the of the above activities is available at [www.mdvi-uronet.org](http://www.mdvi-uronet.org)

### MDVI Euronet team



## The FLUSS Project – Materials to Support the Professional Development of Teachers

Within the context of the Sokrates program a European collaboration has developed materials for „Further educational courses for teachers in joint instruction settings teaching pupils with visual impairment“. The working group consisted of teachers for the visually impaired from various educational institutions: special schools teaching children and youth with visual impairment in their institution; special schools for the visually impaired teaching pupils with visual impairment in their institution but at the same time providing consulting services for pupils taught in joint instruction in regular schools; one institution providing consulting and supporting services to children and youth from early intervention to academic performance in their local neighbourhood; and finally, one university which covers the first phase of teacher training. The partners of the FLUSS-Project (FLUSS stand for the German title of ‚Fortbildung von Lehrkräften für den gemeinsamen Unterricht mit sehgeschädigten Schülern‘ = further educational courses for the instruction with visually impaired pupils) came from Germany, Estonia, the Netherlands, Austria and Hungary.

The concept of further education courses has been planned for specialists in the field of special education for visually impaired who, themselves, run further education courses for teachers in primary schools who already have or will have a child with blindness or low vision included in their classroom. This publication is intended as a contribution

to adult education, facilitating joint instruction in primary schools with individual children with visual impairment.

A prerequisite for the users of this publication is that they have in depth knowledge of special education of the visually impaired as well as relevant experience in this field at their disposal. This publication is divided into Modules which:

- Deal with selected topics that are important for joint instruction
- Choose exemplary situations (case studies)
- Offer structured topics to promote ‘active learning’
- Facilitate the work of a person conducting further educational courses by providing references to media, worksheets, presentations for copying, and useful bibliographies.

The authors’ aim was to:

- familiarize primary school teachers with characteristic consequences of visual impairment.
- create an understanding for special needs of children resulting from their visual impairment and
- show through first hand experience what didactical approaches and media support are necessary in order for these children to learn together with other children.

It is taken for granted that primary school teachers will be in constant contact with the special teacher from the special educational resource centre responsible for included school settings in order to manage the various school tasks. These special teachers develop, in cooperation with their primary school teacher, individual educational plans; ideas for teaching approaches, as well as other school activities. Further more they are responsible for finding suitable learning media as well as introducing their application.

The whole unit is intended to be a range of offers. Specialists from the field of special education for the visually impaired conducting a further educational course for primary teachers can pick and choose parts, and modify them according to their circumstances. Easy access for those interested in this matter is made possible by the presentation in different languages in print in German, English, Dutch, Hungarian and Estonian and the possibility of downloading this publication from the Internet under [www.sfs-schleswig.de](http://www.sfs-schleswig.de) .

Topics, such as legislation have to be adapted and updated for each country. The publication is divided into Modules, subdivided into units. As follows:

- Module A: Suggestion for preparing and organizing further educational courses
- Module B: Special educational consulting and support systems
- Module C: Social and legal foundations for joint instruction (integration/inclusion)

- Module D: Visual impairment
- Module E: Social competence
- Module F: Adaptations
- Module G: Methods and didactics of teaching
- Module H: Mobility and movement

Differing structures and methods in each module are the result of the varied backgrounds of the participating special teachers for the visually impaired, their various institutions and the different philosophical roots in the countries with whom they have been working on the Modules. A forced standardization would have spoiled or even ruined the unique and specific form of the modules, which were created in a certain context.

The german as well as the English version can be obtained as print media for • 24,50 by: edition bentheim, Ohmstr. 7, D-97076 Würzburg, phone \*49-931-23009-2391, fax: \*49-931-23009-2390. E-Mail: [info@edition-bentheim.de](mailto:info@edition-bentheim.de)

Dr. Peter Appelhans  
(translation: Karin Edigkauffer, M.A.)

## 150 Jubilee of the Blindenistitutsstiftung Würzburg (Excerpt from Message of Greeting given on behalf of ICEVI by Herman Gresnigt)

I was very pleased to receive the invitation from Dr Hans Neugebauer to bring greetings from ICEVI to you today. There are many reasons why I am so glad to be here today. It was in Würzburg in 1987 that I first came into contact with ICEVI at the World Conference organised by the Blindenistitutsstiftung. Since then I have often been a guest at the Blindenistitutsstiftung where I have got to know the high standard of care and education provided there for blind, visually impaired and multiply disabled visually impaired children, young people and adults - as well as the outstanding hospitality on offer! Finally, because my successor as ICEVI European Chairperson is Eberhard Fuchs, the Director of the Centre here in Würzburg.

I congratulate all at the Blindenistitutsstiftung. A celebration of your 150<sup>th</sup> Jubilee means that you are among the oldest European organisations providing services to blind people. An occasion like today offers the opportunity to reflect on past, present and future. I hope this reflection inspires you to continue innovation and developments in your work of education and care; the further development of knowledge and approaches in all aspects of education such as: Early Intervention, teaching in special schools, especially for children with MDVI, integration. In accordance with the aims of ICEVI I

wish you continued success in setting up and supporting collaboration and partnerships with colleagues and institutions at home and abroad. Since the 'velvet revolution' ICEVI has devoted a lot of time to improving education and training in eastern and central Europe. This has been achieved through partnerships, exchanges, conferences and seminars. The Blindenistitutsstiftung has played an outstanding role in this through its contacts in Poland, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary and other lands. I have been told that during your 'week of the senses' pupils and staff from 7 different countries took part.

From the bottom of my heart I thank the Blindenistitutsstiftung for all it has done to help educational developments in Europe. Although the economic climate across Europe is not too healthy at the moment I hope you will still be able to keep up this work. It would be a great joy to me if you would continue to collaborate with ICEVI, in future improvements to services for people with visual impairment. I wish you all the best in your Jubilee Year and the due recognition which the Blindenistitutsstiftung has earned.

Herman Gresnigt

### Dear Friends,

Blind since earliest childhood, educated in the School for the Blind in Soest/Westfalia and meantime 81 years old, I regard it one of the most important tasks of my remaining years to sensitize organisations of and for v.i. people, teachers and trainers, gerontologists, managers of senior citizen homes and other caring services for the special needs of blind and low vision seniors. I have written, therefore, two handbooks for this group, the first, entitled "Don't despair, but dare", published in 1999, and the 2<sup>nd</sup>, "How to meet and help v.i. seniors professionally" for people who are not working for them as teachers and trainers regularly, but occasionally in homes and at home, presently in publication. In 2000, I organised with the German Centre for Research on Ageing at the University of Heidelberg and the German Assn. of Blind and Partially Sighted Students and Professionals an International Conference on Special Needs of Blind and Low Vision Seniors, the proceedings of which being edited by Wahl and Schulze and published by IOS Press Amsterdam and Berlin in 2001, ISSN 1383.813 X.

Being the advisor of the CBM for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind, I am closely connected with ICEVI since CBM began to support its work. I

feel encouraged, therefore, to ask all of you to have an open eye and ear for the special needs of v.i. seniors in your respective country and then to offer them the same training as we are used to do in Germany, meantime. You can find the Heidelberg papers on the homepage of the German Assn. [www.dvbs-online.de](http://www.dvbs-online.de)

- Access and use of ict for disabled and elderly by Joh.-Jürgen Meister
- Memory training with blind seniors by Sonja Bernard,
- About the necessity of memory training for blind and low Vision seniors and their training opportunities in Germany,
- Senior citizen homes and vision loss,
- publications of and for v.i. seniors in Germany,
- A guide for people with age-related total blindness ("Don't despair, but dare"), and
- v.i. seniors caring for themselves and others, the work of the senior group of the German Assn., H.E. Schulze

Thank you!

H.E. Schulze  
76189 Karlsruhe

# EARLY INTERVENTION FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED CHILDREN IN ROMANIA

The **Early Intervention Project for Visually Impaired Children aged between 0 and 6** years was founded in 1998, as a result of collaboration between Theofaan International, The Netherlands through Mr. Herman Gresnigt, now Sensis International, "Babes-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca through Professor Dr. Vasile Preda and the schools for visually impaired children in the west part of Romania. The project "MATRA I" was followed up by the *Early Intervention Conference* held in Timisoara in 2000. As a result of concluding the Protocol signed in October 2000 between Sensis International, The Netherlands and Ministry of Education in Romania, the **Early Intervention Project** was continued for another two years ("MATRA II"). This new project included a new center in Oradea, the Kindergarten for Visually Impaired Children and West University of Timisoara as well.

In June 2001, Sensis International, The Netherlands organized a theoretical and practical course for early intervention workers in all centers in West part of Romania, Arad, Cluj-Napoca, Oradea and Timisoara and also for West University of Timisoara.

## **General objectives:**

- Embedding of early intervention as a regular form of care for young visually impaired children and their parents;
- Involvement of the families in the activities with their children;
- Create the proper environment to develop early intervention as an integral part of Romanian nomenclature;
- Develop collaboration among different institutions: Local Authorities, Local Inspectorate, Union of the Blind, Foundations and Schools for Visually Impaired Children from different regions of Romania;
- Assessment of children for making intervention programs for each child;

Each center develops early intervention activities with visually impaired children aged between 1 and 6 years, blind and partially sighted. Some of them have additional disorders: mental handicap, deaf impairments, motor disorders, hydrocephalic disorders, epilepsy, autism, speech problems, affective and behavioral disorders etc.

The children have the following visual impairments: hyperopia, myopia, astigmatism, converge and diverge strabismus, congenital cataract, nystagmus, mycrophthalmia, glaucoma, rethynopathy of prematurity, aniridia, visual cortical impairments.

Early Intervention takes place in the children's own home and also in the Early Intervention Room, which belongs to the school. This is equipped with specific materials and toys for blind and partially sighted children, including a Dark Room for visual stimulation.

Obviously the parents are involved in the development of their child. They are also informed about the implication of visual impairment to the child's development, how to establish the relation with their child, what kind of materials is specific for each child. Good contact between early intervention workers and parents is considered very important.

The parents are involved in activities, which have the following aims:

- Information about how to co-operate and communicate with children with visual impairment;
- Discussions about the importance of children's participation to the early intervention program;
- Exchange experience among parents;
- Telling stories about "special days" in children's life;
- Discussions about some co-operation problems between parents and visually impaired children;

The children are assessed by the eye-specialists who offer the information about the eye-diagnosis and its implications.

Between 2000 and 2002, each center organized an early intervention meeting with all the early intervention workers.

The project ended with a conference, which took place in October 2002 in Cluj-Napoca.

The representative members and specialists from Sensis International, The Netherlands, gave us a lot of support in our project and we would like to thank them very much for all these efforts: Mrs. Corrie de Hass – Project Manager; Mrs. Helen Verbunt – Low Vision Therapist; Mrs. Esther den Hartog – Pedagogue; Mr. Jan Ottevanger – Manager.

Professor Vasile PREDA, Ph.D.

Roxana CZIKER Early Intervention Worker

Aurora JARDA Early Intervention Worker

## The Sokrates Grundtvig Project lilebp - life long learning for blind people

Blind and visually impaired people in Europe still suffer from disadvantages and have to face major discrimination as far as their access to the life long learning process is concerned. Up to now, personality structure, wishes, aptitudes, and specific skills of blind and visually impaired people have been considered too little or not at all when job or educational decisions were taken.

This real situation was the motivation to look for solutions. As no validated models are available throughout Europe, the LILEBP concept has been developed as part of the Sokrates EU programme; it will be realised by the end of September 2003. The LILEBP project meets the major needs, of the blind and visually impaired people, to participate in educational measures. It will thus achieve their participation in society by increasing the individual demand for life long learning.

In this project, a holistic educational guidance model, especially designed for visually impaired and blind people, is being developed on a European scale. Building on the participating organisations' experiences in the guidance of blind and visually impaired people, a new guidance model, which specifically suits this target group, is being developed. The special skills of the people to be counselled or their aptitudes and interests for certain lines of education and certain jobs will be determined by aptitude tests which are being adapted to the needs of the target group as part of the project. The major Austrian test publishing company

Schuhfried has shown interest in the wide field of "aptitude diagnosis". As part of the LILEBP project, cooperation has been set up to adapt existing tests and develop new tests.

It has already been possible to start the process of opening up new opportunities for blind and visually impaired people. Target group members actively participate and cooperate in all steps of the project. The project has been welcomed by people working in this area as well as blind and visually impaired people.

Partner organisations in the LILEBP project, coordinated by bfi Steiermark:  
ANS, Via Clericetti 22, 20133 Milano, Italy  
IBS, Rymarksvej 1, 2900 Hellerup, Denmark  
NCBI, Whitworth Road, Drumcondra, Dublin 9, Ireland

Further Information:  
bfi Steiermark  
EDV Schulungszentrum  
Mag. Susanne Reiber  
Keplerstrasse 69, A-8020 Graz  
e-mail: [info.edvsz@bfi-stmk.at](mailto:info.edvsz@bfi-stmk.at), WEB: [www.bfi-stmk.at](http://www.bfi-stmk.at)



Call for Papers: International Conference on Computers Helping People with Special Needs (ICCHP): [www.icchp.org](http://www.icchp.org)  
International Computer Camps for Blind and Partially Sighted Students (ICC) [www.icc-camp.info/](http://www.icc-camp.info/)