

ICEVI European Newsletter

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The President's Message

Dear Members and Non-members of ICEVI-Europe

I hope you all are keeping well and can look back on 2017 with a feeling of satisfaction and achievement.

We recently held our first meeting of our new Board in Helsinki, Finland. This followed on from the election of the Board Members during the General Assembly in our European Conference in Bruges, Belgium. The minutes of the Assembly can be found on the website of ICEVI-Europe.

In this first meeting we confirmed positions on the board. The compilation of the new board for the years 2017-2021 is: Vice-President: Dr. Andrea Hathazi, Treasurer: Dr. Steve McCall & Secretary: Mrs. Kathleen Vandermaelen.

As a matter of course, one of the issues was the evaluation of the 9th ICEVI-European Conference in Bruges. The Board, along with the Belgian host committee look back with satisfaction at the conference. The presentations of the Keynote Speakers were really interesting and there was a great commitment in the workshops. The social program was animated. There were many useful meetings and discussions. The conference captured what ICEVI-Europe is all about, sharing knowledge and information, as well as exchanging best practices and expertise regarding the education and rehabilitation of people with visual impairment. Many participants went home with wonderful memories and useful know-how based on the framework of the Quality of Life, Empowered by Dialogue, the theme of the conference.

What was really unfortunate was the number of participants. As a consequence of international conferences occurring in the same time period, the number of participants was below the expectation. This means there was a financial deficit.

As in the 2013 European Conference in Istanbul, the program committee in Bruges organised meetings of professional interest groups. The board will strongly stimulate the structural network of these professional interest groups. We will try to organise in the coming year a meeting/conference of professional interest groups in preparation for the tenth ICEVI-European Conference in 2021 in Israel. The European network for psychologists and related professions working in the field of Visual Impairment (ENPVI) provides us with a model of what a successful professional interest group can achieve.

The Professional Interest Groups under the umbrella of ICEVI-Europe, along with the Managerial Responsible Persons serving as the Contact Person between the Board of ICEVI-Europe and the particular Professional Interest group are the following:

Early Intervention: Managerial Responsible Persons: Mrs. Ana Isabel Ruiz López (AIRL@once.es) & Mrs. Elena Gastón López (EGL@once.es)

Teaching and Teacher Training: Managerial Responsible Persons: Dr. Nathalie-Lewi Dumont (nathalielewi@gmail.com) & drs. Hans Welling (Wellingja@yahoo.com)

Rehabilitation: Managerial Responsible Persons: Dr. Beata Pronay (pronaybea@gmail.com) & and drs. Hans Welling (Wellingja@yahoo.com)

ENPVI: Managerial Responsible Person: Dr. Beata Pronay (pronaybea@gmail.com)

Vocational Training and Employment Rehabilitation: Managerial Responsible Person: Mrs. Anne Kristine Grosbøll (akg@ibos.kk.dk)

ICT: Managerial Responsible Person: Dr. Steve McCall (s.mccall@bham.ac.uk)

Parents Interest Group: Managerial Responsible Person: Dr. Andrea Hathazi (ahathazi@yahoo.com)

We encourage you to join a Professional Interest Group of your choice and engage in the exchange of knowledge and sharing of best practices with fellow professionals and practitioners in your same field of interest. To do so, please contact directly the Managerial Responsible Person(s) of an ICEVI-Europe Professional Interest Group of your choice, in order to register yourself as a member of that Professional Interest Group.

In the coming years, ICEVI-Europe plans, amongst other activities, to organise regional conferences as well. We have plans for conferences for East-European countries, German and French speaking countries, and a Balkan conference.

Empowerment by dialogue will go on. That is the challenge for ICEVI-Europe and we hope also the challenge for all the members and non-members of ICEVI-Europe in their professional life supporting people with visual impairment, and as colleagues working together in schools, institutes, rehabilitation centres, universities, anywhere.

It is the last newsletter of this year. Also, a good opportunity to thank everyone for their input, efforts, and support. I hope all of you will have festive holidays and an inspiring start in 2018 in your personal and professional life.

On behalf of the Board of ICEVI-Europe,

Hans Welling
President



Report on the ICEVI Europe Board Meeting in Finland, November 2017

Martha Gyftakos

The ICEVI Europe Board Meeting took place for first time in Finland on 16th and 17th of November 2017. The Board meeting was attended by Mr J.A.Welling, President, Ms M. Gyftakos, Executive Assistant to the Presidency, Dr S. McCall, Treasurer and representative of the English speaking countries, Mrs K. Vandermaelen, representing German and Dutch speaking countries; Mrs A-K Grosbøll, representing Baltic and Nordic countries, Mrs B. Pronay, representing Central European countries, Dr A. Hathazi, representing Balkan countries and Mr V. Ruchin, representing East European countries.

The meeting was organized in Helsinki in close co-operation with the [Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired](#) and Valteri Center for Learning and Consulting Onerva Finland. It took place at the Iris Centre - the Service and Activity Centre for the Visually Impaired, which is specifically designed for blind, partially sighted and deaf-blind visitors. The Iris Center houses various disability organisations including The Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired (FFVI). FFVI provides support services for visually impaired persons and acts as an advocacy organization for their rights. The Federation is the umbrella organization for the various associations of the visually impaired in Finland and offers services to 80,000 visually impaired persons. Our stay in Finland was hosted and organised by Timo Kuoppala, Head of the International Affairs, FFVI and Tarja Hännikäinen, Consulting Teacher, Valteri Onerva, Jyväskylä Finland. The Board is very grateful to our hosts for enabling such a productive meeting.

Goalball European Championships in Finland, September 2017

VAU, the Finnish Sports Association of Persons with Disabilities, arranged the 2017 IBSA (International Blind Sports Federation) Goalball A-Division European Championships on 15th –23rd of September in the Pajulahti Sports Institute, Lahti, Finland. The ten best teams from the continent, both men and women, played in the tournament.

The 2017 IBSA Goalball European Championships have been chosen as part of the Programme on 'Finland 100 years, the centenary of Finland's independence'. The organisers of the European Championships want to highlight the work of the persons with visual impairment in Finland and it will be shown in various parts of the event. For example a band playing in the opening ceremony consisting of visually impaired Finnish musicians. Also young visually impaired persons organized a Café in the Dark (Pimé Café) event during the games. Goalball was originally created for the rehabilitation of

blinded war veterans, and it is one of the most traditional and most successful disability sports in Finland.

Supporting students with a visual impairment at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (KUL)

Bogusław Marek, Ph.D. OBE

KUL CAN = YOU CAN: this short slogan is probably the best introduction to the mission of the 'Centrum Aktywizacji Osób Niepełnosprawnych' (Centre for promoting activeness of persons with disabilities) at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. As the largest university centre in Poland for the adaptation of educational materials, KUL CAN offers a wide range of services for students with a visual impairment, strongly believing that persons with disabilities need not be 'disabled' as students. All they need is a chance to show what they can achieve if they receive appropriate support and the full access to the course books and other materials which sighted students take for granted.

In addition to Braille, large print and texts in digital format (support which is becoming standard at Polish universities), KUL CAN develops and provides students with innovative educational materials and resources. It offers a range of services including a computer room with specialist equipment and software, a borrowing service for laptops or electronic Braille notebooks, high quality thermographically printed tactile graphics and audiographics, 3-D printing and specialist software designed to meet specific needs of individual students with a visual impairment.

Cooperation with local museums, art galleries and schools of art has resulted in joint projects aimed at making works of art accessible to persons who are blind or have low vision. Poland's success in the Typhlo & Tactus 2017 tactile books competition (third place!) will hopefully strengthen KUL CAN's links with artists and art educators and will raise interest and belief in the importance of encouraging Braille literacy by providing young totally blind learners with beautiful, interesting, high quality tactile books.

Equally important to KUL CAN as providing access to education for students with a visual impairment is the education of sighted children and students. A permanent exhibition and workshops acquaint students from local schools with the challenges caused by blindness and with the solutions available. Demonstration lessons in schools promote the benefits for both blind and sighted students of well-organized inclusive education.

With the experience gained from raising blind students' confidence with tactile diagrams and in teaching English to totally blind learners, KUL CAN has been able to expand its services to regions where tactile graphics are unknown or neglected and where teachers of English have no qualifications in special

needs. Free workshops for blind students and their teachers and parents have been offered by the director of KUL CAN in places as remote as India, Nepal, Palau and Samoa. Enthusiastic, highly positive feedback from participants and requests from other Asian countries and from Africa confirm the huge level of need in the area of support for teachers of learners with a visual impairment (all subjects!) in various parts of the world.

The example of KUL CAN suggests that no matter how limited financial resources of an organization (or of an individual) are, where there is a will there is a way and I sincerely hope that KUL CAN will soon find followers who will engage in similar international projects.

It's a technical matter, or how to evaluate an accessible environment

Gendeleva Maria, Head of the department RPODP "Perspective",
[gendeleva2012\(at\)yandex.ru](mailto:gendeleva2012(at)yandex.ru)

Assessments of the accessibility of buildings and urban infrastructure to persons with disability in Russia are conducted by "Perspective" - the universal design department of RPODP. As the head of department, I will provide a short account of the work we do to make people with disabilities feel comfortable in an urban environment.

Universal design is the starting point for accessibility and is the focus for our unique team of employees who have a range of different disabilities. We began our work in 2013 when experts from the Boston Institute of Design came to us and held the first seminar on universal design for our team at Perspective. The seminar encouraged us to consider how we might encourage this approach in Russia and we came up with a range of different ideas and plans.

Boston architect Joshua Safdie encouraged one of our members, Mary, to take the lead on this work and thus a fragile girl in a wheelchair became a possessor of the knowledge about how the architecture and design of buildings can be changed, and how infrastructure can be improved, so that people with disabilities are no longer forced to live locked up in their apartments and can be enabled move freely in the streets. The next challenge was to transfer this knowledge to the many officials and managers at various levels.

The first audit of accessibility made by the "Perspective" team was at the hotel "Izmailovo", where the first seminar was held. By examining the "Alpha" building, the residents of Moscow and regional partners of "Perspective" learned to assess the accessibility of different rooms, entrances and exits, parkin areas, toilets etc. Since then, the hotel has repeatedly hosted various activities of public organizations, and the hotel staff evidence in practice the

importance of providing facilities accessible for all visitors including those with disabilities.

Accessibility audits were then carried out in several Moscow schools where children with disabilities are taught. The next targets were public places like Gorky Cultural Park, the Tretyakov Gallery, Domodedovo airport, the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the streets and bus stops, VDNKh, etc.

The uniqueness of the audit methodology of RPODP "Perspective" is that the team of experts is made up of people with different types of disability. This helps to provide assessments that evaluate all the potential shortcomings and possibilities of the various environments.

RPODP "Perspective" provides reports with data, measurements and photographs to support its recommendations on the elimination of barriers, and includes information from the manufacturers of rehabilitation equipment. We guarantee consulting support to clients during the restructuring /conversion process.

"Perspective" focuses on the promotion of universal design principles to achieve a barrier-free environment for all. In addition to environmental audits it offers training seminars for architects, designers and representatives of public organizations involved in the creation of an accessible environment. We have experience of working throughout Russia and CIS countries. Such seminars are a perfect platform for increasing public awareness, and the understanding of experts and government officials about the range of barriers facing people with disabilities and means to overcome them.

In 2015 we held the first all-Russian competition for the best project in the field of architectural accessibility, urban infrastructure and industrial design, which was attended by young architects and designers from 22 cities of Russia. Analysis of the entries showed that the topic of an accessible environment is one of great interest for the specialists. The best projects of the competition were recommended by the Ministry of Education and Science of Russia as modern solutions. The contest has since been being held annually.

Using game technology to promote intellectual and creative development in children with visual impairment

E. Hudoshina, I. Shestakova, O. Belova, kindergarden teacher, speech therapist, instructor of physical training of MBPEE "Kindergarden of combined type # 45, Engels, Russia

Summary. This paper presents the results of a joint project by speech pathologists and an instructor of physical education using the game 'Fantastic Mazes' by V.Voskobovich to promote spatial orientation in the classroom. The

project involved visually impaired children of 5-7 years. This paper is recommended for preschool teachers and parents interested in developing outdoor games with their children.

Physical education for children with visual impairment requires great attention, care and understanding. Loss of vision can lead to difficulties in spatial understanding and orientation and motor coordination. Many of these difficulties can be reduced by educational activities that promote physical development such as active outdoor games and physical exercises.

The specialists of our kindergarten work together, and the speech pathologists and instructor of physical training plan joint activities and devise exercises to promote physical skills in pupils. The activities contribute to the development of children's psychomotor skills, general physical development, health education and orientation. The lessons aim to motivate children to perform motor tasks through the use of technologies developed by V. Voskobovich.

The project aims to enable the successful inclusion of disabled children in educational establishments, ensuring their full participation in social life, and promote their self confidence in various kinds of professional and social activities.

Organising and planning field visits for sporting activities - an essential guide

Gašper Tanšek, Physical Education Teacher – Center IRIS Ljubljana (Slovenia)

When you are organising a sporting activity for a group of blind and visually impaired pupils/students that involves travelling to an outside venue, be it for one day or longer you need to ask yourself a lot of questions. You have to carefully prepare and plan the visit in advance and make lots of enquiries beforehand. The organizer has to consider:

WHO will attend the activities? How many students will attend - how many of the students are blind, how many are visually impaired, how many have physical impairments or other disabilities? How many assistants do we need to provide sufficient support for the number of students? Can we show that we can meet all the relevant standards and official norms and regulations, especially safety regulations? In the case of students who are blind we have to consider whether the blind student will need an individual assistant at all times – and plan alternative support if the assistant is unavailable (even for a short period of time).

WHERE is the group going? Each venue (seaside, countryside, mountains, ski resort) makes different demands. The organisers need to seek in advance as

much information as possible through the internet, by telephone, through acquaintances who have visited the location previously. Information will be needed about the hotel, the apartments or rooms, the toilet facilities (are there toilets in each room/apartment or are they shared)? Are rooms available on the ground floor? Is there an elevator? What is the dining room like?

Information is needed about food/meals, additional services in the hotel and the surroundings and recreational opportunities. Are there possible substitute activities for students with special needs who are not able to join the group such as a gym, a fitness centre, a wellness centre, a swimming pool or outdoor recreational areas accessible in summer/winter?. Can we borrow some of the equipment we need at the location? Can we lock our equipment somewhere secure in order to avoid theft? What health care is available and how close is the venue to the nearest hospital?

WHEN is the group going? Planners need to take account of the likely weather conditions at the time of the visit and plan for heat, cold, sun, snow, rain, mud etc. They will need to adjust the list of equipment that is sent to the parents of the students accordingly. What kind of clothes, supplies, and personal hygiene items will they need? Will they need their own bedding?

HOW will the group get to the location – by bus, train, van, or plane? Organizers should check in advance the relevant public transport timetables. It is also important to consider where the transport arrives – will we be delivered close to our destination, or do we need to look for additional transport or even walk part of the way? We need to enquire about transport costs to find the best carrier and the best value and to enquire whether there are discounts available for blind and visual impaired travellers. Blind and visual impaired pupils/students who can produce a certified card are usually given a discount for entrance fees or even free entrance for many attractions as do their teachers and assistants. This often applies to museums, galleries, cinema, sports events, ski passes and public transportation.

We should establish whether the transport is modern and offers easy access/entry. Can we find a train or bus that has a low floor for easy wheelchair access and no steps to climb? Some public carriers have applications on the internet, so that disabled people can order a suitably adapted bus at a specific time at a particular stop. You need to make the driver aware that your students will need help getting on and off the bus and that they will need more time to get to their seats.

WHY is your group going on the trip? Is the focus of the fieldwork going to be on swimming, skiing, getting to know nature, hiking etc.? When going swimming and skiing, it is necessary to determine the number of swimmers/non-swimmers or skiers/students who don't know how to ski before departure, so that the composition of each group and teachers required can be properly planned.

Three practical examples of planning requirements for outdoor activities

Swimming/water activities

For swimming activities, make sure you have each individual pupil or student under supervision at all times. Pay attention to each student when they are on the beach, in the water, taking part in games.

When the group goes on board a boat or ship, tell the skipper to pay particular attention when students are getting on and off.

If some of students cannot participate in a group activity, arrange some alternative activities for them - such as studying the beach, collecting shellfish, pebbles, making sculptures using stones, sand etc. or plan a visit to the Aquarium. During planning explore the facilities in the location - the access to water, beaches, the distance from hotel to the beach. Is it possible to reserve a part of the beach or swimming pool for your group only?

Winter activities

Blind and visually impaired skiers and their accompanying skiers are given discounts of 100% in some ski resorts, and you will need to check which ski resorts make these offers. It is always a good idea to call the ski resort in advance to tell them that you are coming with blind and visual impaired skiers. Also we recommend that you talk with the ski manager for advice about the different ski slopes so that they can alert the manager of each ski track to help you. Find out if they can reserve a part of a ski track for your party of skiers. You should aim for a ski track that is flatter and where there are no big crowds - a more calming and quiet environment! Cross-country skiing is great for the blind and visual impaired students and is an important part of winter activities for many skiers with visual impairment.

Hiking activities

If you are considering a hiking trip for a group of blind and visual impaired students, try to choose a lightweight low difficulty route and shorten the route if necessary. A circular path, from the base to the endpoint is ideal. Students should be accompanied by their teacher, an assistant and most important of all do not forget safety equipment (helmet, hiking shoes, climbing belts etc)! Always make sure that people at the venue know about the route you plan to take and when you are due back.

International Running for Runners with and without Disabilities

Judit Gombas

Insufficient physical activity and the tendency towards a sedentary lifestyle are worldwide phenomena. A physically inactive lifestyle is among the leading factors of death and is one of the [key risk factors of noncommunicable diseases, such as cardiovascular disorders, cancer and diabetes, worldwide](#). The International Platform on Sport and Development (2009) highlights the fact that in developing countries sports are almost completely unavailable for individuals with disabilities, and that even in Western countries there is a [need for increasing the number of accessible sport facilities \(pdf format, 163kB\)](#).

Achilles International is a New York City based NGO, promoting running among runners with and without disabilities. It is a worldwide network, with active European chapters in France, Germany, Norway and Poland, among others. Achilles Hungary Foundation was established in 2016. Our mission, like that of Achilles in general, is to promote the participation of our inclusive teams of runners in mainstream running events. We believe that sport has the potential to bridge gaps in the society, promotes personal achievement and is a powerful tool for building strong communities. Since in many European countries there is no Achilles chapter yet, the Hungarian team is always multinational, consisting of VI runners and their guides from various European countries. Eighteen blind and low vision runners and their sighted guides, arriving from Slovakia, Great Britain, Denmark, Germany and Hungary completed this year's Budapest Marathon (October 15, 2017). Last April an even bigger team of our runners took part in the Vienna City Marathon, and every November our marathon runners get the opportunity to participate in one of the world's greatest running events, the New York City Marathon. Participation in international running events is always a weekend programme, during which our runners from different countries can make new friends and exchange information, including important information on visual impairment (the latest technological inventions, useful services etc.) VI runners and their guides, even for shorter distances than a full marathon, are always welcome.

[Up-to-date information on events.](#)

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News from Poland: Important anniversary

Bogusław Marek, Ph.D. OBE

Not many special schools in Europe can boast a history as long as the oldest school for children with a visual impairment in Poland. The school in Bydgoszcz celebrates its 145th anniversary this year. A conference entitled "**From a white cane to audio description**" was organized on November 23rd. To mark the occasion teachers, parents and professionals gathered from all over Poland, enabling a discussion about achievements in the area of education for students with a visual impairment, current needs and plans for the future.

Congratulations and best wishes to all students and teachers from the school bearing the proud and well deserved name of Louis Braille!

News from English Speaking Countries

Wales

Welsh education is currently in the process of becoming more distinct from that of other UK countries and is set to change further with the introduction of the [Additional Learning Needs \(ALN\) transformation programme](#). The introduction of the ALN and Education Tribunal Bill 2015 over the coming years will reform the way the education and health sectors provide for children and young people (CYP) with ALN and support them in achieving their full potential. Other current relevant legislation in Wales relates to the Social Services and [Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#). The Act places great importance on [person centred practice](#) allowing all parties involved with the CYP and the CYP themselves to have a voice in the support that they require to reach their well-being outcomes. The Act also calls for greater co-production between services to deliver support in a more collaborative way.

As is the case elsewhere in the UK the number of Qualified Teachers of Visually Impaired (QTVIs) and Habilitation Specialists continue to be a cause for concern. We have chosen to adopt the [NatSIP Eligibility Framework](#) in order to calculate the level of support required from VI support services for each CYP with VI. This tool has allowed us to consider whether the number of QTVIs relative to caseloads is reasonable. However, as we have only recently adopted this framework there are still differences in the scoring across services. Therefore we have introduced regular moderation meetings to discuss its use.

The Welsh Association of Vision Impairment Educators (WAVIE) group continues to gather momentum and is working hard to keep VI educators across the country informed and in touch with current national matters.

England

VIEW stands for Vision Impairment Education Workforce and it is the name of the professional association for people working with people with Visual impairment in the UK. VIEW currently has two online courses that are of particular interest to teachers of children with visual impairment.

The UK Learning Media Assessment (UKLMA) resource, hosted by VIEW, is designed to help teachers of children with vision impairment and the team around the child to make informed, transparent and data-driven decisions about the learning and literacy media that will maximise individual children's educational attainment.

You can access a taster of [UK Learning Media Assessment resource by visiting this site and logging in as a guest.](#)

[The full version is available as part of VIEW membership benefits.](#)

VIEW members can now also access taster material from our Braille literacy course for Teachers of Children with Vision Impairment.

Designed to provide specialist training to increase knowledge, skills and confidence in teaching braille to children, and developed in partnership with the UK Department for Education and the National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NatSIP), the course has been written by UK nationally recognised practitioners in braille and created as an online course by an experienced instructional designer.

[Find out more on effective teaching of literacy through braille topic.](#)

Educare

Gail Lawther, senior teacher at Jordanstown School, Northern Ireland, contact person of EDUCARE for Northern Ireland

Marija Jeraša, teacher at the Centre IRIS, Slovenia, contact person of EDUCARE for Slovenia

EDUCARE was a two-year European staff exchange programme within Erasmus+ Key action 1 which started in autumn 2015. Visual impairment is a low incidence disability. Specialist organisations working in the field tend to be unique within their country and need to reach out beyond national boundaries to work with others who are dealing with the same issues and challenges. Fortunately, through our previous cooperation in EU projects and networks like MDVI-Euronet and ENVITER, the partners had already established good contacts and the group believed, when applying for the project, we would all be able to benefit from each other's knowledge, good practices and strategies.

Partner organisations had been enquiring for some time how to approach the issue of behavioural problems in connection with visual impairment. The number of young people with VI (Visual Impairment) and MDVI (Multi Disabled Visually Impaired) who develop challenging behavioural difficulties has been growing and the professionals working in the field of visual impairment are facing challenging situations for which they have not been adequately trained or prepared to cope with. Lack of competences generates new problems and causes stressful situations for both staff and young people. Consequently, the teachers and other professionals had recognised there was a great need to increase the quality of professional knowledge and understanding of the target group.

Five partners out of ten, who had applied for the grant, were approved financial resources:

- Royal Dutch Visio (Koninklijke Visio), the Netherlands,
- Budapest School for the Blind (Vakok Ovodaja, Altalanos Iskolaja, Specialais szakiskolaja, EGYMI, Kollegiuma es Gyermekeotthonaaiskolaja), Hungary,
- Southern Bavarian accommodation and sheltered workshops for blind and visually impaired people (Südbayerische Wohn- und Werkstätten für Blinde und Sehbehinderte gemeinnützige GmbH), Germany,
- Jordanstown School - Regional School and Centre of Excellence for children who are deaf or visually impaired, Northern Ireland,
- Centre IRIS – Centre for Education, Rehabilitation, Inclusion and Counselling for the Blind and Partially Sighted (Center IRIS – Center za izobraževanje, rehabilitacijo, inkluzijo in svetovanje za slepe in slabovidne), Slovenia.

Two others were involved in the project, namely Vinko Bek from Zagreb who participated in two training events and Lega del filo d'Oro Onlus, Osimu, Italy as a host of the third training event. In this way we followed the plan of training events set out in the application form. Each partner sent 2 to 7 professionals to each training event. The profile the participants had to fit was that of a professional with a background in VI/MDVI, some work experience, working with children/young people with behavioural problems, speaking and reading English and highly motivated to learn, share and implement the lessons learned.

However, the start was not easy this time. The theme of the project is extremely vast, besides that the background and expectations of partners varied considerably. The group struggled through the first year. The evaluation at the end of the second training event showed that in spite of all differences our problems and goals are alike, furthermore, case studies made us realise

that we can help each other bringing new perspectives to the issues. From that revealing point on the cooperation was extremely good and fruitful.

From the very beginning the partner organisations agreed upon the following objectives:

- Better understanding of the needs of the target group
- Sharing recent literature available
- Discovering models/approaches for professionals/staff to deal with the issues
- Sharing and exchanging the challenges and good practice
- Adoption of the shared strategies
- Improving the staff competences regarding the treatment of behavioural problems of pupils and students with VI/MDVI
- Implementing new knowledge, skills
- Reducing the stress level of the professionals
- Better achievements of pupils and students with VI/MDVI and additional behavioural problems.

There were four staff training events, each preceded and followed up by a range of activities and every training event was focused on one specific behavioural issue. We were able to tackle the problem from different points of view to identify various manifestations of behavioural problems regarding different education systems, cultural surroundings, the complexity of the impairment and other factors that can influence the behaviour. During the exchange training events, experts trained the participants in the three different models from the Netherlands, good practices were shared, new methodologies, case studies, and current research in focused areas of interest were presented and taught. This led to a coordinated overview of specific behavioural disorders in relation to children with VI/MDVI in order to give the professionals new tools to work with the target group. In between the exchange training events a number of activities were carried out by the participants like reading recommended literature, working on questionnaires, discussing, evaluating and analysing case studies, writing reports and giving presentations in their own language for colleagues in their organisation and country.

Topics of the four trainings events were:

1. Introduction to three methodologies developed in the Netherlands.
2. Aggression/Self-inflicted injuries
3. Behavioural problems related to autism
4. Challenging behaviour related to transition processes

This project enabled professionals working in the field of visual impairment to understand and address complex and severe individual needs. Through case studies, which were the most valuable part of our training, we have become aware of the importance of gathering information about the case, analysing it and of planning small, SMART steps and achievable goals in our interventions. We have realised that support our colleagues might provide is invaluable. Furthermore, we have found out that transition in and out of schools/services is a huge challenge for VI/MDVI children, young persons or clients and the family. This occurs when a child or young person goes through the process of a change which may have a major effect on their emotional state, for example from nursery school to primary school, and we established that young persons with SEN may experience more transitions than their peers. For example sometimes a change of class or activity might have negative effects on their behaviour. Consequently, it is of the greatest importance to prepare the process with care and attention to avoid the negative effects manifesting as challenging behaviour. The guidelines about the steps in this process, which were produced during one of the training events, might be very helpful.

To summarize, the results of the project are evident on three different levels. Firstly, the knowledge that the professionals have gained about specific models, methods, practices and techniques, with the objective of earlier recognition and better understanding of the problem is invaluable. The materials and different forms for observation we have shared will help us to deal with new cases. Secondly, the skills and competences of the professionals have improved; they have learnt how to use/adopt these techniques in order to integrate them into daily activities, in order to create more appropriate interventions. The staff have been prepared/trained to address the problems of pupils and students with VI/MDVI and behavioural problems. This will ultimately decrease stress levels, give confidence and improve the learning experience of VI/MDVI persons. Finally, long-term benefits of improved staff competences will also result in better prevention techniques and strategies to avoid and/or de-escalate severe behavioural situations and problems. In addition, we expect the target group will have better opportunities to set out on the road to full integration in society.

These are some of the statements of the professionals involved in the project at the end of it:

- Tangible results to be disseminated within our own institutions.
- Practice orientated exchange projects are very valuable for the development of our own organisation.
- Such projects are very useful as they offer an opportunity to reflect on our work. Besides that, they develop an attitude and awareness of having so many things in common.

- Good to know with all the vast knowledge and experience within the project group that we are all puzzled by the same problems and can acknowledge that it is okay to ask for help.
- Research has also proved that there is social and emotional deficit within young VI/MDVI children.

Strategic Partnerships Program "Erasmus 4 VIP"

Duration: October 2016 to September 2017
Katerina Ahmad, Volos, Greece

Introduction

This project aimed to identify new ways in which youngsters with disabilities, especially with visual impairments, can become more involved in social and educational activities. In order to achieve this objective, the project consortium, consisting of five partners from Romania, Greece, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Cyprus considered that first of all it was important to explore the real-life context of the inclusion of visually impaired youngsters in order to later design powerful resources that youth workers and youth organizations could use to integrate visually impaired youngsters in non-formal education activities and international mobility.

This first phase of activity ran from November 2015 to June 2016 and allowed partners opportunities to carry out study, research and surveys relating to the levels of participation of young people with visual impairments in the different countries, and to compile the findings into five national reports.

This research was oriented towards offering:

- Young people with visual impairments the chance to participate in a structured dialogue activity in which they could express their needs, interests and experiences, especially in terms of personal development through various youth activities.
- Consultation with different NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations), public institutions and people with no disabilities in order to gain a wider perspective on the issues discussed.

While the total number of participating people and organisations was not enough to consider this research a true survey, it did provide partners with relevant input on the needs and realities that surround young people with visual impairments.

The research focused mainly on the following:

- The actual level of inclusion and participation of visually impaired young people in learning environments
- The participation of visually impaired young people in the community
- The participation of visually impaired young people in the NGO environment
- The support offered for integrating visually impaired young people
- The level of sharing of information about European learning opportunities through NGO's, schools, information outlets to visually impaired young people

Qualitative and quantitative information was collected using a tool consisting of four different Questionnaires and two Focus Group discussions.

Data was collected from:

- Education institutions responsible for including visually impaired young people
- NGOs for the young
- Schools that are working with the visually impaired
- Local authorities liable for assuring accessibility for the visually impaired in urban regions
- Young people with visual impairments
- Young people with no disabilities

Partners responsible for implementing the activities in the five partner countries were:

- Ofensiva Tinerilor, Romania
- Magnites Tyfli, Greece
- Center for Youth Activism CYA KRIK, Macedonia
- National Association of Resource Teachers /NART/, Bulgaria
- Pancyprian Organization of the Blind, Cyprus

Overall, mapping of the existing situation as it was revealed from the analysis of the study results, suggests that there are a lot of measures that need to be taken to ensure that the full inclusion and participation of young people with visual impairment in services and programs can be applied in practice. Through the questionnaires and the focus group discussions, the five partners attempted to collect a number of recommendations on what actions and measures need to be taken, in order to promote and improve the access of young people with visual impairment to various programs and services.

The recommendations address the issues of how public institutions can improve their services in order to make them accessible to people with visual impairments and included advice about:

1. The ways NGOs can improve the participation of young people with visual impairment by providing more volunteering/learning/leisure opportunities.
2. What NGOs can do to promote better opportunities for young people with VI to access opportunities for in international mobility by creating more supportive environments in volunteering or learning projects.
3. The most appropriate channels NGOs can use in order to communicate learning opportunities to young people with visual impairment.
4. The skills that young people with visual impairment consider relevant and would like NGOs to address through formal and informal learning opportunities.
5. The support measures that can be taken so that NGOs can involve young people with visual impairment in their programs.
6. The need for awareness raising workshops within NGOs.

One of the main findings of the study was the fact that public institutions are not aware of the true needs of people with visual impairment and the challenges they face in attempting to access various public services and programs. A number of recommendations on how these services can improve their offer, common to all partner countries, were made. They included recommendations such as:

- Ensuring that all staff are supportive by taking measures/initiatives to combat negative attitudes and perceptions, stereotyping and prejudice related to people with disability.
- Having trained employees that are aware of the needs of people with disabilities
- Improving indoor and outdoor accessibility to enhance independent mobility (e.g. by providing tactile markings, audio traffic lights, acoustic signs, Braille signs, audio materials, colour contrast, etc.)
- Raising awareness of the fact that issues of disability and accessibility are about more than physical access to the environment and cannot be overcome just by creating a ramp. Institutions usually grossly overestimate their own accessibility and need to be aware that accessibility means a lot more than one partial adjustment.
- Taking into consideration the whole range of challenges facing people with disability who want to benefit from training and services, including moving from their place to the venue, access to venue, access to the

necessary communication tools or training documents, opportunities to offer feedback, etc. For example, if a service offers support for the visually impaired but there are no Braille signs or large print signs with good color contrast leading to the venue, then the clients may not even be able to find the venue.

Announcement of Publications

De Verdier, K., Fernell, E., & Ek, U. (2017) "**Challenges and Successful Pedagogical Strategies: Experiences from Six Swedish Students with Blindness and Autism in Different School Settings**" in Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders.

Note: [this article is available as open access, through this link.](#)

De Verdier, K., Ek, U., Löfgren, S., & Fernell, E. (2017) "**Children with blindness - major causes, developmental outcomes and implications for habilitation and educational support: a two decade, Swedish population-based study**" in Acta Ophthalmologica.

This article is not open access, but can be found on for example Wiley Online Library, by using the DOI 10.1111/aos.13631.

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A Presentation on the IBOS MusicXML Reader, instant access to music scores for blind users

Bo Alstrup, Daniel Gartmann and Kenneth Hartmann

Danish name of the software: IBOS Nodelæser.

Field: Education

Topics: Blind/Low Vision, Higher Education, Software.

Summary of the Paper

The IBOS MusicXML Reader enables blind and visually impaired students and musicians to easily access music scores on the same terms as the sighted.

IBOS MusicXML Reader is free of charge and has been developed by The Danish Institute for Blind and Visually Impaired (IBOS) to provide:

- Instant access to music scores
- Full accessibility and ability to work independent of sighted assistance
- Simple installation and intuitive use.
- A product with no cost for the end user

In short, the IBOS MusicXML Reader is a program that works with a screen reader on a Windows PC. Notes from a digital musical piece, can be read aloud, shown as Braille notes and text on a Braille display and the computer screen. The music piece can be played back too.

By taking advantage of the file-format supported by all major music notation programs, MusicXML is capable of rendering the contents of a music score to a user who cannot see. The user doesn't even have to know Music Braille.

[Download the IBOS MusicXML Reader](#)

The IBOS MusicXML Reader

The IBOS MusicXML Reader makes it possible for a screen reader user to read the contents of a music score, just like their sighted fellow students or colleagues. It is also possible for the user to choose which voices or instruments to read and which to skip.

You can select specific bars from the score, as well as have parts of the score played and repeated as many times as you need. You also have the option of playing a score back at different speeds.

The score can be read using speech and music Braille notation via a refreshable Braille display as well. The Braille output is handled by the screen reader's standard mechanism for sending information to a Braille display. Information about the notes is also provided as regular text for those not familiar with Music Braille notation.

The software is currently available for Windows. It has primarily been tested with the JAWS screen reader version 17 and later. However, we have done some testing with the NVDA screen reader, all tests showing promising results.

You just download and install the software as you would with any other Windows application.

Design of the IBOS MusicXML Reader User Interface and User Experience

The user interface (UI) has been optimized for use with a screen reader, which means all actions are accessible from the keyboard. Most functions are directly accessible via standard Windows hotkeys or key combinations known from

Office programs. All functions can be accessed through a classic menu structure as well. The structure of the menus and settings are known from the Windows Explorer and JAWS settings environments.

Much attention has also been given to create a user experience that, from what we have learned through years of helping and teaching persons with vision impairments, gives the most pleasant and efficient workflow.

In order for the musician to be able to free both hands for playing the instrument, foot switches can be used for stepping through the score. This enables the musician to rehearse the piece or even to "sight-read".

The software is designed to be simple to use in the sense that it is based on the essential keyboard navigation found in e.g. Microsoft Word and the JAWS Settings Center.

The default language of the UI is English, but the software is easily localizable to different languages. It identifies the language of the system on which it is being executed and switches its UI to this language, if available.

Target Audience

The target audience is musicians with vision impairments. This group includes pupils in primary school and college as well as professional and amateur musicians wishing to access a music score.

As the information is visible on the computer screen, the cooperation between blind and sighted musicians is easy.

We have aimed to accommodate the needs of users not familiar with Music Braille by providing the output in clear text. This also makes it suitable to speech-only users and is therefore in line with our goal, which is to provide an affordable solution to reading music scores for as many blind and visually impaired users as possible.

Purpose and Background

Development of the IBOS MusicXML Reader has been inspired by the necessity for blind students and professional musicians to be able to access written music in digital form in a way that is easily accessible, readily available, and affordable.

Sighted musicians and students of music can use software packages e.g. Sibelius, MuseScore, and PriMus. However, these applications are not accessible enough to screen reader users, when it comes to reading the actual music score.

What all the aforementioned packages have in common is the ability to export a music score to the MusicXML format, which our software can import and immediately make accessible to a blind student via a screen reader. This feature also facilitates cooperation between blind and sighted musicians.

The software project has been developed and managed by two blind ICT consultants from IBOS. During the development, the ICT consultants have been in a continuous dialogue with several blind musicians representing the following very different user cases:

- A professional organist needing to study the score for his/her church choir
- A college student studying rhythmical music
- A blind pupil in primary school
- Amateur musicians playing in a band

Based on this dialogue, the program has gone through several internal and beta-iterations prior to the release of the first official versions.

Future Opportunities for Development

The program is already in use, we see many opportunities for further promoting the use and enhancing the IBOS MusicXML Reader.

At IBOS, we expect to implement the feature of navigating in the music score directly from a Braille Display. We look forward to presenting the IBOS MusicXML Reader at the CSun AT Conference in USA, March the 19-23rd 2018, where we will be available for meetings with people, who are interested in this project.

In order to distribute and increase development resources for implementation of future functions in the IBOS MusicXML reader, we are interested in working together with others in the following areas:

- Localizing and supporting the program locally
- Writing music notation directly from a Braille device supporting Braille input.
- Making the software available on other platforms, including Android, iOS, and MAC OS, while maintaining the simple user interface and accessibility.
- Compatibility with the free NVDA screen reader to maximize the number of blind users worldwide.
- Exporting the Braille score to a Braille note-taker.
- Embossing the score, or parts of the score, to a Braille printer.

An Open Source development model might be the most efficient way to implement these features.

The Danish Ministry of Social Affairs and the Johan Otto Wroblewski Foundation has provided the initial funding for the development of the IBOS MusicXML Reader.

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A framework for managing requests for the involvement of ICEVI Europe in international research or programme partnerships

ICEVI Europe Board

Purpose of the Paper:

- to define the key questions that the Board of ICEVI Europe will consider when processing requests for its involvement in future research or programme partnerships
- to provide guidance to potential partners about ICEVI's criteria for partnership development

STAGE 1 Evaluating the proposal - should we do it?

1. Does the proposed partnership align with the ICEVI Europe mission statement and ICEVI's areas of interest and priorities?
2. Is the proposal original and important?
3. Does the proposal add value to the lives of children/people with visual impairment?
4. Can we be confident that the organisation making the proposal is sufficiently experienced and qualified to carry out the work successfully?
5. Can we be confident that any other partners are sufficiently experienced and qualified to carry out their contribution successfully?
6. Does the proposal make it sufficiently clear what the role of ICEVI Europe will be in the project and what the expected outputs of ICEVI Europe will be?
7. What will be the benefits for ICEVI Europe of being involved in the project? How will the project strengthen ICEVI?
8. Does ICEVI Europe have the necessary expertise and capacity to carry out the project?

9. How will the role of ICEVI Europe be acknowledged in the outcomes of the project?
10. What will be the reputational consequences for ICEVI Europe if the proposal fails?

STAGE 2 Managing the proposal – can we do it?

1. Does ICEVI Europe have the necessary resources needed to carry out its role in the proposal? How will the proposal help meet any additional resources that are required?
2. Will the project cover its costs? Are ICEVI Europe's management and administration costs realistically quantified and covered?
3. Which member of the board will be the named person for managing ICEVI's input?
4. Which member of the lead partner organisation will be the named person for managing ICEVI's input?
5. Are ICEVI's management responsibilities made sufficiently clear in the proposal?
6. How will the Board of ICEVI Europe be kept informed of the project's progress?
7. What monitoring systems are required to manage ICEVI's contribution the project? Who will put them in place?
8. What operational reports will need to be submitted by ICEVI Europe to the partner /funding body? How often will they be submitted and who will write them?
9. What are the financial monitoring and reporting requirements of the partner /funding body? Do we have the capacity to meet them?
10. Will there be a designated ICEVI Europe bank account for the project?
11. Will the project require ICEVI Europe to issue employment contracts to individuals for pieces of work? What will be the terms of employment? What will be the payment arrangements?
12. What records will ICEVI Europe need to keep? How long for?
13. How will the project be externally audited? What evidence from ICEVI Europe will external auditors need to see?
14. What will be the financial consequences for ICEVI Europe if the project fails?

For further information on research/programme partnerships please contact the ICEVI Europe Administrator Martha Gyftakos, mgyftakos@yahoo.com.

The role of ICEVI Europe in Erasmus+ European Projects

Assoc.Prof. **Andrea Hathazi**, Romania
Assoc.Prof. **Vassilis Argyropoulos**, Greece

ICEVI Europe had the opportunity to be one of the members of the European project entitled "Bridging the Gap between Museums and Individuals with Visual Impairments – BaGMIVI". This project (No: 2014-1-EL01-KA200-001631) has been funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union, Key Action2 – Strategic Partnerships. The project consortium consisted of universities, museums and art galleries, schools and association for and of people with visual impairments from Greece, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania and also included the European Blind Union. The project was coordinated by the University in Thessaly, Volos, Greece. The central aim of the project was to develop networkings between universities, museums, schools for the blind and associations for and of people with visual impairments. The objectives of the project referred to:

- Enabling museum members to become more aware and update their knowledge regarding the disabling barriers that impede the access of visitors with visual impairments to museums
- Creating learning, cultural and social opportunities for individuals with visual impairments
- Promoting the collaboration between museums, schools and associations of individuals with visual impairments.
- Identifying and distinguishing the best practices and guidelines for the development of an accessible and inclusive museum for visitors with visual impairments.

The project in total involved twelve formal partners, including four universities, three non-profit non-governmental organisations, four museums and one IT Company. The BaGMIVI project was conducted through a cluster of activities and the products were considered intellectual outputs (IO). Some of the activities referred to design (scoping/IO1

<http://www.bagmivi.eu/index.php/intellectual-outputs/62-intellectual-output-1-needs-assessment-study>, training events/IO4, multiplier events, frameworks of videos/IO4 & IO5, action research framework/IO6

<http://www.bagmivi.eu/index.php/intellectual-outputs/66-intellectual-output-6-reflective-logs-and-questionnaires>), others to development (training material/IO4, museum educational material and programmes/IO5), others to implementation (training, visits, events at national, regional and international level) and others to policy and educational frameworks ([best practices guide/IO7](#) and [Policy Recommendations and Guidelines Report/IO9](#)). Finally, it is important to underline, that the innovation of the BaGMIVI Project can be

justified by the production of outputs that may be used as Open Educational Resources, namely the syllabus, videos from museum staff training events, the development of differentiated museum content/programmes and the best practices guide.

ICEVI Europe participated almost in all intellectual outputs and had the leading role in designing and structuring the videos regarding the project training events (IO4 - <http://www.bagmivi.eu/index.php/intellectual-outputs/64-intellectual-output-4-videos-from-museum-staff-training>) and the development and implementation of differentiated and accessible programs of the museums for visitors with visual impairment (IO5 - <http://www.bagmivi.eu/index.php/intellectual-outputs/65-intellectual-output-5-videos-from-the-development-of-differentiated-and-accessible-museum-programmes>). The videos focused on best practices that can be used in similar contexts.

ICEVI Europe also participated in the dissemination of the findings through its website, newsletters and the ICEVI European Conference. It was also able to promote the work of Bagmivi through its network of individual members and institutional members within ICEVI Europe and through the partnerships that ICEVI Europe is involved in with other leading national and international organizations and agencies for the visually impaired. The project was completed in 2017.

[Further information can be accessed at BAGVIMI project website.](#)