

## ICEVI European Newsletter Issue 39, Volume 15 number 1, May 2009

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## From the Board

Our 7th conference in Dublin, Ireland will be held soon.

During our last board meeting we have discussed comprehensively the final preparations.

It promises to be an interesting conference with excellent keynote speakers, more than 100 oral presentations, workshops and posters. We even have participants from outside Europe.

It is up to the host committee to finish the final details. This may sound easy, but everyone knows that organising a conference asks for a lot of effort, especially at the end.

Fortunately St. Joseph's has an excellent committee and can count on many volunteers, even during the conference.

Parts of the conference will be:

- The regional meetings, which will be held on Monday July 6 at 16.00 and
- The General Assembly of ICEVI-Europe, which will be held Thursday July 9 at 16.00

These meetings are very important because a new board and also country representatives have to be elected. In this newsletter you will find more information about this.

You also can find more information at [www.icevidublin2009.org](http://www.icevidublin2009.org)

I hope to meet many members and non-members of ICEVI-Europe in Dublin.

*Hans Welling, Chairman*

## Reports from the sub regions

### News from the Nordic and Baltic Countries 2009

*by Peter Rodney*

#### From Denmark

#### **Institute for the Blind and Partially Sighted**

#### ***Curriculums are ready to be tested***

Throughout the summer the curriculums for the courses developed in KnowProVip EU project have been finished and are now ready to be tested. The aim of the courses is to give a brief but highly informative introduction for professionals who are going to work in a new area within the field of visually impaired people. The content is

Refugees/immigrants

Ages 60 and over

Acquired deaf blindness

#### **ABOUT KnowProVIP**

Building on previous research done under ProVipTrain. ProVipTrain was an EU project, part funded under Leonardo da Vinci pilot projects programme, which included seven partners from five countries (France as promoter, Germany,

Netherlands, Denmark and Poland). Over two years (2004-2006), ProVipTrain developed and implemented training courses on vision impairment, for professionals working in the field, to allow them acquire basic knowledge on vision impairment, to ensure better support and advice.

### ***Seminar on Echolocation***

IBOS was in the spring host of a seminar on Echolocation. The speaker was Daniel Kish, a blind O&M instructor from USA. An other seminar was held on accessibility in the public domain.

### ***Participation in the Braille-conference 5.- 8. jan. 2009***

4 braille teachers was part the international conference "Writing with 6 dots and its future" in connection with Louis Brailles 200 years birthday in Paris

### ***European network for psychologists***

In March Peter Rodney and Peter Verstraten from Sensis joined a meeting in Vilnius to prepare the 3rd conference for the European network for psychologists and related professions working in the field of Visual Impairment. The conference will be held on the 30 and 31 of March 2010.

### ***NOVIR***

In September the Institute in Copenhagen was host for the annual meeting for R&D staff members of NOVIR (Nordic Visual Impairment Research – Group). In 2009 the meeting will be held in Norway.

### ***NORDLYS***

Nordic conference on lighting and low vision was held the 6.-7. November 2008 in Copenhagen.

In May the 6th conference for vision consultants will take place in Sweden

### ***News from synscenter Refsnæs - National centre for blind and partially sighted children and youth of Denmark***

In 2008 we formed a development department to enable us to focus more on international collaboration. In doing so we are currently looking for strategic partners and interesting projects to participate in that will help us optimize our efforts in providing the best possible care and education for our children and youth.

In 2009-11 we are participating in a MDVI Comenius project called Sound and Picture together with Sweden, Norway, Finland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Italy, Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The Project has two aims: to empower educators in MDVI by developing modes of communication for these children through the use of non-commercialised, sound and picture based educational resources which can be used right across the curriculum; to empower and enable children to play a more active role in their own learning by developing a means of communication through which they can express their thoughts, wants and needs thus fostering a sense of self-esteem, motivation and control. Resources will contain freeware, MP3 audio recordings, digital pictures and movies. They will be trialled, evaluated and modified as required by each partner. These individual resources will consequently enable children with MDVI to develop awareness that communication is reciprocal, thus enhancing skills of choice making, independence and thereby fostering inclusion. Each partner will work

collaboratively to produce a DVD containing freeware instructions and exemplars of produced resources with a view to develop good practice at national, European and international levels.

The RoboBraille-service is an ongoing success and continues to win prizes. To check out the latest news and features of the service go to [www.robobraille.org](http://www.robobraille.org) and try it out. It is free of charge to all non-commercial users.

We are also busy preparing for the ICEVI conference in Dublin as we have a delegation of 12 people attending who will be presenting papers on MDVI, early intervention, Battens disease, RoboBraille and the importance of international collaboration Europe concerning VI.

*Tanja Stevens, International Coordinator*

## **From Finland**

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### **NÄÄKKÖNÄÄ (a.k.a. NAEAEKKOENAEAE or you see) in Finland**

The central federation for the blind together with central hospitals have arranged two-day education packages to help understand cortical/cerebral/cognitive visual impairment especially in children from birth to school starting age (7 yrs. in Finland). CVI is often linked to other impairments, but lately one group has emerged with often almost normal visual acuity and visual fields, but great problems with processing visual information. These people have what is called periventricular leucomalasia, which actually means that the white matter in the brain next to the ventricles is damaged – often when the child is born very much prematurely but can be saved to have a good life. The damage takes place in the dorsal and/or ventral stream, so in the part of the brain after the visual areas V1, etc. and results in very strange outcomes: the child does not understand facial expressions, doesn't recognize people by looking at their faces, have difficulties in finding their way from one place to another, get lost in places that seem quite straightforward to most of us. If there is a slight alteration in the route they have lost they will immediately lose their way. They may see a very small crumb on an empty table but cannot find scissors on a table where they are accompanied with other objects. They will learn letters easily but not to read, because the letters are too close to one another.

These children are not stupid; quite the opposite: they have taught us to understand how their brains work. We thought we had the answers, but they have often learned to cope and we can learn from them. The two-day happening began with a lecture about cerebral visual impairment by Markku Leinonen, a doctor who specializes in this field. His was followed by another medical lecture, Leena Haataja who is a neurologist. She told us about children's neurological illnesses causing cerebral visual impairment. It was time for lunch and after that we listened to Dr. Lea Hyvärinen speak about examining functional vision. She brought with her a student who actually had cerebral visual impairment, but had managed to find his way to university and had progressed to a high level of knowledge and will shortly probably be a very highly respected scientist in behavioural sciences. The first day ended with what translated from Finnish into English would be called anecdotal or story theatre. The first lecturer on the second day told us about how lacking eye contact brings challenge into the development of the child's communication skills. Then we had time to visit the

exhibitions by various companies and institutions. We then heard about the Åboan model of neurological rehabilitation for children and proceeded to have lunch. In the afternoon I gave a lecture on how difficulties in processing visual information affects a school child (it was not a good idea to have my lecture on the second day after lunch, as from where I stood, I could observe a few respectable heads slowly nodding off). After I had ended my speech we only had one lecture left. That concerned the child, the family and everyday life. The series of lectures has been carried out in Oulu (Uleåborg) in 2007, in Tampere in 2008, Åbo was this years effort and next year it will take place in Joensuu. We hope that in time it will have been performed in many more venues in Finland and especially that we will learn to understand more the problems with visual information that these children face and how their brains are equipped to deal with them and what we can do to help this process.

### **Valteri - National Service Network for special needs education**

Valteri ([www.valteri.fi](http://www.valteri.fi)) - programme consist of service network by six Finnish speaking state-subsided special schools and resource centres and a Swedish speaking resource centre. According to the Law of Education these Valteri-centres have the mission to administer development, consultation and support related to inclusive education and also to arrange special needs education alongside rehabilitation.

Valteri-programme has the main act to support inclusive education by offering the centralized web-services for clients in inclusive education and support with knowledge related to autism spectrum disorders, language and communication, hearing, mobility and motor coordination, multiple handicaps, neurological or chronic illnesses, problems with vision. Valteri-network is utilized in long-lasting training for staff working in inclusive education, like staff at school administration and co-ordinators for special needs. Also web-consulting services for educational and rehabilitation staffs are available.

Common services by all Valteri-centres are in-service-training for teachers and class-assistants, counselling and consulting services to schools, temporary education and rehabilitation for children and material production.

Valteri-network acts as part of the web-services of Finnish National Board of Education, [www.edu.fi](http://www.edu.fi).

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Jyväskylä School for Visually Impaired Finland [www.jynok.fi](http://www.jynok.fi)

### **From Sweden**

The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools was established on 1 July 2008 for the purpose of coordinating the government's support for special needs education.

The agency takes over the former functions of the National Agency for Special Educational Support, the Swedish Institute for Special Needs Education and the National Agency for Special Schools for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

Resource Centre Vision, located in Stockholm and Örebro, continues to be a part of the new national agency and the services offered will remain the same as earlier. The profile of the two centres will also be the same, i.e. Stockholm will be specialized on visual impairment and Örebro on MDVI.

Ekeskolan, the national school for children and young people with MDVI, was re-opened at the same time. However, the administration of the special school and Resource Centre Vision in Örebro has been separated from each other, but the two units will share the same campus as before as well as other resources.

As before, there are also regional adviser employed by the new agency. Some of them are specialized in visual impairment. The new agency will also continue to be responsible for producing textbooks for students with visual impairment.

Although the ship is sailing under the flag of a new "shipping company", Resource Centre Vision and Ekeskolan, will continue to be active on international waters. A good example is that we had the pleasure to have three teachers from the special school in Riga, Latvia, staying in Örebro for one month. We have also had the opportunity to welcome a great number of visitors for near and far during 2008. Among new countries in our guest book are Cambodia and Egypt.

The cooperation with the other Nordic countries has in 2008 been as intensive as usual. We have a school system with many similarities which means we have common needs concerning in-service training and exchange of good practice.

From 1 July all e-mail address and telephone numbers has changed. If you think you have lost contact with a colleague in Sweden, please use <firstname.surname@spsm.se>.

For more information see [www.spsm.se](http://www.spsm.se)

***Harry Svensson***

## **From Lithuania**

In February, 2008, Mrs. C. van Gendt, Child psychologist of Visio (the Netherlands) and Mr. H. Welling, Chairman of the ICEVI Europe in the Ministry of Education of Lithuania presented the report about Early Intervention and Inclusive Education in Lithuania "FREEDOM TO CHOOSE".

The motivation for this project was a contact between Mr. Numgaudis, State secretary of the Ministry of Education of Lithuania, Mr. Rodney – Jensen from the Institute for the Blind and Partially Sighted in Denmark and member of the ICEVI, and Mr. Welling, chairman of the ICEVI Europe.

This project was financed by the Ministry of Education of Lithuania, coordinated by Mrs. A. Daujotiene, director of the Lithuanian Training Centre for Blind and Visually Impaired in Vilnius and executed by Visio Rehabilitation Centre for the Blind by Mr. H. Welling, chairman of the ICEVI Europe, and Mrs. C. van Gendt, consultant for the project.

The basic objectives of the project were:

- to collect information about the current situation of Early Intervention and Inclusive Education for visually impaired children in Lithuania;
- to identify the possibilities and problems for the integration of visually impaired children in mainstream schools;
- to give recommendations to improve inclusive education for the visually impaired children in Lithuania.

Mrs. A. Daujotiene, director of the Lithuanian Training Centre for Blind and Visually Impaired in Vilnius, and Mrs. J. Stuopeliene, director of the Kaunas District Training Centre for Blind and Visually Impaired, gave the information

about the working areas in Early Intervention and Inclusive Education in Lithuania and ensured the possibility to talk with teachers, parents and pupils.

Mr. H. Welling and Mrs. C. van Gendt collected information about the current situation of the institutes, including current activities for parents, parents' and teachers' opinions about Inclusive Education and Early Intervention, and the demand for courses, the financial situation and current policies. They interviewed and discussed with parents, children and teachers in the Institutes and in the mainstream schools with integrated visually impaired pupils, to get a good image of the situation of the visually impaired children in Lithuania, to understand their deep wishes and other problems and possibilities for Inclusive Education and Early Intervention for the visually impaired in Lithuania.

27th of February, 1928, is the date of the beginning of education for blind in Lithuania. In this occasion on 29th of February, 2008, the international conference "For education of blind in Lithuania – 80 years. Problems and perspectives" took place in Kaunas district training centre for blind and visually impaired. The conference was rich in reports and relevant information from various areas of the education and social life of blind and visually impaired people in Lithuania and Europe.

Mrs. A. Gelzinis, the ophthalmologist from the Hospital of Kaunas University of Medicine, presented, for example, the project for the prevention of avoidable children' blindness in Lithuania as a part of an international program VISION 2020 in Lithuania. Among the guests of the conference were Mr. Hans Welling, the president of ICEVI Europe, and Mrs. C. van Gendt, Child psychologist of Visio.

20th - 29th July, 2008, 3 teachers and 3 students from Kaunas District Training Centre for Blind and Visually Impaired participated in the 5. International Tandem Camp for blind and visually impaired young people organized by Tandem-Help's project (Germany).

16th – 17th October, 2008, the international conference "*Quality education – accepted right of blind and visually impaired people*" took place in Vilnius.

The conference was organized by the Lithuanian Union of Blind and Visually Impaired (LUBVI) in association with the Lithuanian Ministry of Education. Over 100 peoples took part in this conference - there were the speakers from Lithuania and abroad, the members of LUBVI and Ministry of Education, educators of blind and visually impaired persons.

In this conference there were a lot of the guests from abroad: Harry Swensson, the Vice-President of ICEVI, Hans Welling, the president of ICEVI Europe, Sir Colin Low, the president of European Blind Union, Mr. Simon Butt, the ambassador of UK in Lithuania.

Talking points were the possibilities for pupils and parents to choose one of two ways of education: inclusion in the mainstream school or special school.

### **From Estonia**

The Estonian Ministry of Education has launched a three-year project on creating a system of educational counselling of children with special needs. There will be counselling centres established in every county and in addition two special centres – one for hearing disability and the other for visual impairment created in Estonia.

The Estonian State School for the Blind – Tartu Emajoe School has been involved in this project since 1st January 2009 as a centre specialized in the field of visual impairment. Counselling sessions are available for the children with blindness and low vision all over Estonia, for their parents, teachers, educators and other specialists. Tartu Emajoe School has provided this kind of services for many years already but now it is a part of national system of educational support system for the children with special needs.

Tartu Emajoe School has been very active in different kind of project work. In the framework of European Youth programme, summer camps for the children with blindness and low vision have been organized, the next camp is coming this summer. These camps are very popular among children from our special school but also from mainstream schools.

We are very pleased that our pupils are interested in activities at European level. It is empowering for our pupils that two of them have received fine work rewards at the Euro-pean Braille Essay Contest.

On 4th January, the Louis Braille bicentenary was celebrated in Estonia with major events in Tallinn and Tartu where writing in Braille was introduced also to sighted people to arise awareness about blindness and literacy.

## **From Norway**

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### **Project: ADL performance in society and social perspective for children and youth with visual impairment.**

The project “ADL performance in society and social perspective for children and youth with visual impairment” is a joint venture project between Assistanse and Tambartun National Recourse Centre for the Visually Impaired. Assistanse is a Non-Government organisation (NGO) for parents of children and youth with visual impairment in Norway. The project is supported by the foundation “Health and Rehabilitation” and the project duration is between January 1st, 2007 and December 31st, 2008.

### **Background**

“Society expects our children to master requisite ADL skills in order to live and act independently. We, the parents of these children and youth, are responsible for ensuring that these goals are achieved. But how? We need something, or somebody, to teach us the methods, show us the tricks, and somebody to give us requisite support along the way. We can’t handle it all - not just by ourselves!”

This is a voice of concern and expresses frustration, from a mother of a 13 year old daughter with visual impairment. The daughter is meeting challenges every day, from early morning to late evening. The daughter has to master many skills within the area of ADL in order to ensure participation in the youth society and within community activities. Equal participation in most everyday activities requires mastering an innumerable number of skills within the field of ADL.

Most people learn ADL skills automatically. We simply know how to do it by watching others. We take such development and performance skills for granted. Children and youth with severe visual impairment don’t have this opportunity of learning by watching. They have to be given alternative options of learning based on different methodologies. In addition, such learning is often based on



individually-based formulation of goals and adapted teaching. This applies, in particular, to the field of ADL. Lack of such skills can often be considered as barriers for social interaction and participation on equal terms.

ADL is a collective term for a number of practical skills performed in daily-based activities. It applies to self care, domestic economy, cooking, the use of public transportation and so on. The list is long, and most of the things we do in the course of a day includes ADL components. Independent performance of ADL skills enables a person to master everyday activities.

### **Project objectives**

*Primary objective:* Develop and mediate ADL knowledge

*Secondary objective:* Develop and improve the content of Tambartun's service provision regarding:

- local counselling
- courses for pupils with visual impairment
- courses for personnel working with pupils with visual impairment
- courses for parents/guardians of children/youth with visual impairment

*Primary target group:* Children and youth with visual impairment.

*Secondary target groups:*

- Parents and guardians of children and youth with visual impairment
- Professionals at Tambartun and Huseby National Resource Centres for Visual Impairment working within the field of ADL
- Staff responsible for ADL teaching in local preschools, schools etc.
- Local counselors

### **Method**

The innovative five-step model is a method that is strongly focused on quality of life through participation in activities. This project's framework is based on this five-step model. The method implies that:

- training must be experienced as meaningful for the target person
- training/actions are based on conclusions made from an individually-based holistic plan.
- training objectives and chosen activities must be relevant within the target person's local community.

The use of the innovative five-step model requires a description of the target person's current life situation. This is done by mapping the activities the target person participates in every day. This overview will be compared to a desired future situation where future activities are identified. The difference between these two scenarios or descriptions is used as the basis for individually based initiatives.

### **Results**

The project has proposed and developed the following:

1. The website [www.blindhverdag.no](http://www.blindhverdag.no). This web site can be used as a tool to facilitate the need for "how-to-do-it" knowledge. The website is first and foremost targeted at parents/guardians and professionals working with ADL. The website is also for children, youth and adults with visual impairments who are in need of finding solutions for practical daily-based problems. The web site contains step-by-step instructions for everyday activities, and tips on how to prepare learning environments.

2. Individually tailored ADL-courses/camps for children and youth with visual impairment in need of improving their ADL skills. It is also suggested that already existing courses at Tambartun, for preschool and primary school children, should include new and selected ADL components. The chosen components are considered to be of special importance for the target groups in mind.
3. There is no formal education within the field of ADL and vision impairment in Norway today. Knowledge within the field has, so far, only been offered as a small component in general 3-5 day-long courses at Tambartun and Huseby. The project group has proposed to establish an independent university module in ADL. This module will, if desired, be approved as a directed study component within a future masters program at the University of Trondheim. This module will be open for teachers, preschool teachers and others professionals that are meeting required educational standards.
4. ADL-courses for parents and guardians. Tambartun National Resource Centre is at present, not giving any ADL courses for parents/guardians. This has partly to do with the parent's limited rights for education. The parental organisation, "Assistanse" is working on this issue. They demand the same rights as professionals to attend pedagogical courses related to the area of visual impairment. Parents of children with hearing impairments have obtained such rights.
5. ADL book. The final result of the project is to develop a specialized book within the field of ADL. The book is aimed towards university students, parents or professionals working with individuals with visual impairments. The authors are senior advisors Magnar Storliløkken and Bengt Elmerskog; Tambartun; as well as Harald Martinsen and John Magne Tellvik, Professors at the Department of Special Education, University of Oslo. It is estimated that the book will be completed by early 2010.

*Jan Erik Enge, Occupational therapist  
Tambartun National Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired*

## **Report from the English Speaking Regions for ICEVI board meeting, Prague, Czech Republic, April 2009**

*by Mary Lee*

Representatives for the English speaking regions have been busy preparing for the conference in Dublin this July. A meeting of the programme committee was held in Dublin in February 2009 and preparations are well under way. The abstract choices were finalised and a draft programme drawn up. The venue is in the beautiful setting of Trinity College Dublin, close to the city centre. The programme promises to be interesting and stimulating and very relevant across a diverse range of interests.

### **Contact persons**

Audrey Farrelly has returned from maternity leave and has resumed her post as contact person for Ireland. Paul Lynch has taken over from Mike McLinden as contact person for England. Mary Lee continues to fill the gap for Scotland, created by the departure of John Ravenscroft for a post in Sydney, Australia.

## Wales

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The 'Vision for Work' modified workbooks for blind and partially sighted young people to support them through their work experience placements, will be featured on the Careers Wales website for free download by September 2009. The materials consist of three workbooks to support the work experience process - preparing for work experience, a work experience journal and planning for the future - that are in accessible formats. [www.careerswales.com](http://www.careerswales.com)

The UK's first performance festival for visually impaired young people! This two day festival will celebrate the successful culmination of the three year project DEW (Developing Emotional Wellbeing through the Arts) a partnership between RNIB Cymru [www.rnib.org.uk/Cymru](http://www.rnib.org.uk/Cymru) and UCAN Productions [www.ucanproductions.org](http://www.ucanproductions.org) and funded by the BIG Lottery. The ethos of all our activities is 'have fun, learn new skills, and make new friends'. Workshops include Drama, Body Percussion, Storytelling, Radio Plays, Sound Recording, Activities for under 7's, UCAN Sing Choir, Dance and Movement.

## Israel - "What You Hear Over Here"

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A CD release party and benefit concert for "Ofek Liyladenu"- the Israel National Association of Parents of Visually Impaired Children, took place on February 24.

Proceeds from the event will go towards the creation of a foundation called "Musical Dreams", which will provide musical education for visually impaired children and will help their families purchase instruments. It will also provide information on all matters related to the needs of blind or visually impaired children in musical education.

"What You Hear Over Here" is the product of seven young visually impaired and blind musicians, who donated their time and talent for the benefit of "Musical Dreams". Their CD features both original music and covers of popular songs, and is a unique combination of creative expression and community service. Although two of our presentations were accepted for the July ICEVI 7th European Conference, we shall not be able to attend due to lack of financing. We regret that there is no sponsoring for Parents associations participation at such important conferences.

## Scotland

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The Scottish Sensory Centre is dedicated to the needs of pupils throughout Scotland who are deaf, visually impaired or multi sensory impaired. As part of its activities, the centre runs a series of popular courses on many topics relating to deaf and visually impaired pupils at all levels. The programme for those interested in multiple disability, for example, has included:

- Play and Communication for Children with Visual Impairment and Additional Support Needs
- Impairment of vision due to damage to the brain in children
- The Early Years: Strategies and Resources for working with very young visually impaired children
- Creative and multi-sensory approaches to teaching music for pupils with additional support needs & MDVI
- Working with Pupils with a Dual Sensory Impairment or Deaf Pupils with Complex Needs

Materials from these and many other excellent courses can be found on the website: [www.ssc.education.ed.ac.uk](http://www.ssc.education.ed.ac.uk)

## **200th Anniversary of Louis Braille (Extract from the Sunday Herald 2009)**

### ***Dotting the eyes By Alan Taylor***

“The number of books in Braille has risen healthily over the years. The RNIB's National Library Service, for example, has over 25,000 available for loan, making it the largest collection in Europe. These include 14,000 music scores. Nearly 5000 readers borrow books and around 500 borrow music. It also sells 4000 books a year, the most popular being a guide to the season's football fixtures. Because they are so expensive to produce, all RNIB Braille products are heavily subsidised. It costs £1500 to produce a novel of 350 pages in Braille, which is one reason why under 5% of books published in the UK are printed in Braille, something which the RNIB will be campaigning to improve over the coming year.”

## **Ireland**

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### **November 08**

Braille Reading Competition – To encourage the use of Braille.

### **January 09**

14th: Roddy Doyle – Writing Club. A writing club for all students with visual impairments, with readings from the Irish author Roddy Doyle.

24th: Parent's Brunch – A Saturday brunch where parents of children with a visual impairment or a visual impairment and additional disabilities aged 0-10 can meet together for support and a chat, while their children are engaged in activities with staff from St. Joseph's pre-school.

### **February 09**

3rd/4th/10th/11th & 24th: Equestrian and Stable Care. Students with a visual impairment can learn to care and tend to horses within the Sense and Grow Garden.

11th: Cerebral Palsy Awareness: Training in the awareness of students with C.P. and a visual impairment.

11th: Roddy Doyle – Writing Club. A writing club for all students with visual impairments, with readings from the Irish author Roddy Doyle.

25th: Horse Riding – All students with a visual impairment welcome to try out this activity.

### **March 09**

3rd: Pre-school swimming sessions begin. To be held once a week with qualified instructor.

4th/11th/18th & 25th: Halliwich Swimming Therapy – A four week course in this therapeutic approach to swimming for children with a visual impairment and multiple disabilities.

6th – 8th: Under the Stars Camping Weekend – Students aged 8+ years can experience the outdoors. This will include local wildlife, cooking skills, orienteering and camping outdoors.

21st: Parent's Brunch – A Saturday brunch where parents of children with a visual impairment or a visual impairment and additional disabilities aged 0-10 can meet together for support and a chat, while their children are engaged in activities with staff from St. Joseph's pre-school.

26th: Horse Riding – All students with a visual impairment welcome to try out this activity.

### **Additional News**

St. Joseph's Centre for the Visually Impaired have extended their children's library. It now includes large print books, junior fiction books, tactile books, Braille Grade 1 & 2 books available to all children throughout Ireland. An extensive range of books on visual impairment and related topics are available to parents, professional and students.

St. Joseph's Sense and Grow Garden, welcomed some new additions to its Animal Therapy section. Lambs, a snake and a terrapin are now very popular with all the children and adults visiting the garden. The planting of flowers by the children over the past few months are now producing some beautiful arrangements within the garden.

### **Report from French speaking countries, March 2009**

*by Catherine THIBAUT*

In France, during the year, many conferences have been or will be organised to commemorate the bicentenary of the birth of Louis Braille.

- in January, from 5th to 8th, an international conference at UNESCO : "l'écriture à 6 points et son avenir", was organized by INJA (National Institute for Young Blind children) and AVH (Valentin Haüy Association)
- from March to December, a travelling exhibition ("Au doigt et à Louis. Le Braille: la preuve par 6") will travel in different cities of France and Europe. It is composed of 4 themes : braille, the story of Louis Braille, development of techniques for production, daily living without seeing.
- From 18th to 20th of June, an international conference will be held in Disneyland Resort, near Paris, by CINAL (a special committee for the bicentenary) and UNESCO, with many contributions from specialists from all over the world (Larry Campbell will be present). More information on [congres.cinal-dv2009.com](http://congres.cinal-dv2009.com)

In other conferences or meetings, homage will be paid to Louis Braille. The title of the 45th meeting of GPEAA will be: "communication and visual impairment: from Louis Braille to nowadays", from 15th to 19th October. Nathalie Levy Dumont, from INSHEA (Institut National Supérieur de Formation et de Recherche pour l'Éducation des jeunes Handicapés et les Enseignements Adaptés) is involved in an international research project concerning disabled secondary school pupils and students. The OCDE is in charge of this research and ten countries are taking part in it. It consists of identification, with quantitative and qualitative items, of the factors which make schooling in higher education and access to employment, easier or not.

To date, a number of people from France are registered for the conference in Dublin: teachers, contact persons from GPEAA and psychologists from ALFPHV.

In Belgium, at the beginning of the year 2009, the ministry of education (French community) promulgated a decree which allowed disabled children

access to support by a specialist teacher in a mainstream school without being in the special schools.

In Switzerland, the CPHV in Lausanne is organising with other partners, an exhibition from 27th of April to 14th of May, to commemorate the bicentenary of the birth of Louis Braille. Isabelle Mathis will continue to be the contact person for Switzerland. Her colleague (Mrs Mira Goldschmidt) will be present in Dublin.

In Luxembourg, Frank Groben continues to work on his project OPTIC with his European partners. He will present it in Dublin (optimising the inclusive classroom).

## South European region

*by Ana Isabel Ruiz Lopez*

During 2008 ONCE has published two educational multimedia games for blind and visually impaired children between ages of 4 and 7, useful also for sighted children - the reason why they are having a lot of success in ordinary schools: "Leocadia the flea" and "The magic word tree". These two games are available on our web in English and in all the Spanish languages.

<http://educacion.once.es/home.cfm?id=176&nivel=2&orden=2>

Italy has led a European project, Lambda, an innovative system to ease access to Maths for blind students. Spain has also participated in this project, together with some other European countries.

[www.lambdaproject.org/default.asp?sec=115](http://www.lambdaproject.org/default.asp?sec=115)

The Spanish ACCEDO Group from ONCE, devoted to accessibility of educational content on the computer, for visually impaired children, has been awarded the Handinnov Prize that recognizes organisations that have introduced exemplary practices in Europe in favor of young disabled people.

<http://www.onisep.fr/handinno/>

Spain has celebrated the International exhibition of Assistive Technology for People with Visual Disabilities (Tifloinnova, 21-23 November 2008), organised by ONCE, with a large participation of national and international manufacturers and an attendance of more than 3.000 visitors.

ONCE celebrated, under the auspices of the World Blind Union, from 16th to 20th June 2008 the First International Congress for Blind and Partially Sighted Children. Under the theme "Listening to the Children", the conference gathered together more than 20 blind and partially sighted young boys and girls from 18 different countries from 14 to 16 years old. They discussed education and visual disabilities.

As usual, we have offered some places for children from Italy and, Portugal to come to our summer camps, though this year it has not been possible for them to find any students to come.

As every year, we have offered a scholarship for blind students to study in ONCE's Physiotherapy College

Our contact person in Portugal is working together with Hans Welling, trying to organise a European Masters on Education for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

ONCE is in touch with ACAPO (Portugal) trying to organize a training seminar for Portuguese teachers who work with blind and partially sighted children.

ONCE has also organized several activities with schools and resource centres from Bulgaria, exchanges with students from France and the United Kingdom...

Unfortunately we do not have any more information about the countries in our sub region. We haven't been able to have any meeting with our contact persons this year, though we have been in touch with them through e-mail. It's very difficult for us to find any contact person in Malta, Andorra, and San Marino.

ONCE will continue promoting activities in its sub region and will try to improve contacts with Malta, Andorra and San Marino.

## **The Report of the German and Dutch speaking region**

*by Karsten Hohler*

I will not be running for a further legislative period. Therefore I will leave the board in the summer. Over the last year I have been thinking about improvements in the work of the region.

I have analysed the situation together with Hans Welling and Eberhard Fuchs. We asserted that work in the field of education for the blind in our region is very strongly connected with the work of the VBS (Verband der Blinden- und Sehbehindertenpädagogen). For this reason, we agreed that the future board-member of ICEVI Europe should also be a board-member of VBS.

Dieter Feser, the new chairman of the VBS and successor to Eberhard Fuchs, has agreed to run for the board. Following that, I have sent an enquiry to the contact persons of the region in agreement with Hans Welling, asking whether they would support the candidacy of Dieter Feser. The contact persons of the Netherlands and Austria have spoken positively; no message has come from the others.

Dieter Feser will run for the board of the German and Dutch speaking region in Dublin.

In July 2008 the VBS-Kongress meeting of nearly 700 people working with blind and visually impaired took place in Hannover. Inclusion was one of the main discussion points at the conference. A very important input on inclusion came from the people of ICEVI-Europe.

## **Central Europe region**

*by Terezie Hradilková*

### **Czech Republic**

The new coordinator for ICEVI-Europe (IE) activities of the Czech Republic was established – Mgr. Ema Gallová, Bc. from the institution Jan Deyl Conservatory and Secondary School for Visually Impaired in Prague. The group of institutions and individuals from the special education and social field of visual impairment was informed of ICEVI - Europe organization, The Dublin conference and other IE future plans. The translation of IE bulletin gave the possibility for all to become members of IE. There was the National meeting of Education and

Rehabilitation of Visually Impaired in November 4th 2008, where the proposal of cooperation in the Czech Republic in name of IE aims was declared. The question of visually impaired adult's education can be ICEVI interest too according to the opinion of the national conference participants. The ICEVI material to integration was distributed in Czech Republic, it's translation was part of materials to the conference on integration during the "Week for inclusion" in September.

Czech Republic ratified the OSN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Ministry of Education declares it's conception of inclusive education, edits a conceptual material about the education in the Czech Republic, so called "White Book", and Ministry of Social Affaires declares a single valued target – social inclusion and equalizing of opportunities.

**Early Intervention:** Terezie Hradilkova , vice chairman of ICEVI- Europe, cooperated on organization and realization of European Early Intervention conference „Theory meeting practice“, in Budapest, Hungary, August 2008. Six early interventionists from Czech Republic took active part on the conference. There was established the network of early intervention interest group of ICEVI - Europe.

*Emá Gallova, January 2009*

## **Hungary**

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### **1.) Early Intervention**

In August, 2008 we hold a European meeting of early interventionists. There is a new regulation concerning early intervention in Hungary there has to be 2 time 2 hours direct service to the child with special needs to get financial source from the state. This is too rigid and does not support the needs of the family.

### **2.) School aged children**

The Kettesy School for Low Vision Children in Debrecen has less and less children even if they accept blind and multiply impaired children as well. The municipality withdrew the permission of serving integrated children at local schools in the county. There is a danger that the school will be closed. Inclusion is the leading form of education of children with blindness and low vision in Hungary but itinerant services are not sufficient (low number of services, low number of itinerant teachers, missing regional services, low financing, etc.)

### **3.) Rehabilitation**

Good news: the first 26 trained rehabilitation teachers of persons with visual impairment had finished their training and got their diplomas. I supervised 10 persons in the East part of Hungary. They do a good job. Now we have 8 different regional rehabilitation services in Hungary. The training will be continued from September 2009.

*Krisztina Kovács, January 2009*



## Slovak Republic

### Legislation

In Slovakia the new Educational Act has been voted through. It is valid since September 2008 (Act No 245/2008). Institutes of itinerant teacher and resource centre have been included for the first time and can be implemented in education of pupils with disabilities with support of the government.

### Most important activities in education of visually impaired and people/staff working in this field

Activity in education of visually impaired pupils and students and people working in this field increased. There are more active institutions and organizations providing education, training and meeting of experts.

### *Department of special education, Comenius University, Faculty of Education*

- offers an enlarging study program of special education focused on visual impairment;
- organized national and international scientific meetings
  - conference (Via Lucis "Integration – chance for all", June 2008)
  - workshop ("Early intervention of visually impaired children in Slovakia", November 2008)
  - 1st International special - educational conference (2008)

### *Special primary school for pupils with visual impairment in Levoca*

- organized special trainings for teachers and parents focused on guidance for children with VI;
- supports development of staff relations organizing team-building meeting;
- with the help of Association of friends of the school (its non-profit organization) tries to improve conditions for education - there was reconstruction of special and technical schoolrooms

### *Special primary school for pupils with visual impairment in Bratislava*

The number of multi-disabled pupils with visual impairment raised. The school tried to develop staff qualification and competence. Pupils are traditionally very successful in several national and international sport, skills, scientific and atheneum competitions.

### *Slovak society for special and therapeutic pedagogy*

- organized national workshops and events for experts, special teachers and children with visual impairment
- International conference on Angelman syndrome (June 2008, Lucenec)
- National workshop on re-education of vision (June 2008, Ziar nad Hronom)
- International exposition - work of VI children (November 2008, Banovce nad Bebravou)

### *Support Centre for Visually Impaired Students at Comenius University*

Except of one vocational school there is no any special secondary school for visually impaired preparing them for the study at university. Blind and partially sighted students in the age 15 - 19 years are educated in mainstream secondary schools with no adequate technical and human support. That was a reason, why the Support Centre continued in co-operation with secondary school pupils and

their teachers. Traditionally activities were oriented on teaching and doing mathematics with the help of IT and AT.

- Two trainings for the blind secondary school pupils and two special workshops for mainstream teachers of scientific subjects (mathematics, physics, informatics) were organized. Experiences of using mathematical editor for the blind LAMBDA were presented in several national and international events (Bratislava, SR; Linz, AT; Milan, IT).
- New lecture about the accessible programs for students of applied informatics was developed and as a pilot course was introduced at Faculty of Mathematics, Physics and Informatics in 2008.

### **Most important projects**

#### ***Department of special education, Comenius University, Faculty of Education***

Project Via Lucis finished: focused on

- disability studies for people working with persons with disabilities in different institutions and organizations (secondary schools, universities, counseling)
- preparation of secondary school students for university.

#### ***Special primary school for pupils with visual impairment in Levoca***

The project Training for teachers of visually impaired finished in 2008. It offers participants knowledge and trained skills in reading and writing Braille, mobility and orientation, special educational aids provision, IT and AT in education, language and music education.

#### ***Non-profit organization for visually impaired in Levoca***

To provide continuity of Matra project the organization employed itinerant teachers for pupils with visual impairment with the financial support of Ministry of Education SR. 13 itinerant teachers supported education of 475 children and pupils in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools in different Slovak regions. Three workshops for itinerant teachers had been organized (May 2008, Levoca; November 2008, Bratislava; December 2008, Banska Bystrica).

#### ***Support Centre for Visually Impaired Students at Comenius University***

- Within the TEMPUS project Access\_VIP (Access to university for visually impaired people : 2007 - 2008; [http://cezap.sk/access\\_vip](http://cezap.sk/access_vip)) have been built a support centre "Without barriers" at Moldova State University in Chisinau, MD according to the similar centers at Technical University in Karlsruhe, DE and at Comenius University in Bratislava, SR.
- Within the @science project (<http://www.ascience-thematic.net/en>) an international scientific workshop Access to Scientific Sources for the Blind was organized (October 2008).

### **Most important changes / results**

- New Educational Act
- Opening the Centre of supporting students with special needs at Faculty of education of Comenius University in Bratislava.

### **Future plans**

#### ***Department of special education, Comenius University, Faculty of Education***

Changes in the system of life-long learning

### **National Institute for Education**

- Plan to provide training program for itinerant teachers.
- Prepared the Educational program for children and pupils with visual impairment and try to put it in practice.

### **Special primary school for pupils with visual impairment in Levoca**

There is an intention to improve international co-operation with French colleagues in the field of development of education of blind pupils. The Special school works on transformation of the school in an resource centre that will methodically supervise special educators and mainstream schools where are educated pupils with visual impairment.

### **Non-profit organization for visually impaired in Levoca**

- Within the new Educational Act itinerant teachers should be financed by the government and regional school councils since 2009.
- There is an intention of improve practice in early intervention and training staff in this area.

### **Slovak society for special and therapeutic pedagogy**

The Society will celebrate the 40th anniversary and will organize an international conference Perspectives in special and therapeutic pedagogy.

**Elena Mendelova**, ICEVI national contact person in Slovak Rep.,  
[mendelova@fmph.uniba.sk](mailto:mendelova@fmph.uniba.sk), February 2009

## **East-European Region**

by **Liliya Plastunova**

The list of countries of the East-European region consists of: Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine. This list can be filled up with five further countries: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. As you will remember at our previous meeting, we are increasing the work with Tajikistan. Since geographically Tajikistan is in the Asian region, Mr. Bhushan - ICEVI-Asian president was involved in this process as well. In August a business meeting took place in Tajikistan. As a result of this meeting some projects have developed. Active work with Tajikistan begins

The annual International Festival of Arts for children with health problems took place in March in St.-Petersburg - this project also was held under the umbrella of ICEVI. More than 200 children from 6 countries participated. The purpose of the project was:

1. socialisation of children with health issues;
2. development of tolerance in society.

Teamwork between ICEVI and the school for v.i. children in Tolyatti City (Central Russia) took place in May, 2008. The Fund of Tolyatti has organised a trip for children to France. Under the support of ICEVI, children have visited the Rehabilitation Center in Anjou. Parents and teachers thank colleagues of the Rehabilitation Center and especially Kethrin for their organisation of a warm meeting for the Russian children. It was a good experience of work for teachers and children. The Russian children have invited the French children to visit Tolyatti City.

For a long time, together with ICEVI, we have been preparing a project on the organisation of coursework between the Universities of the East-European Region. In July we have started the project " XXI century - a century of open society for all". The purpose of the project:

**the creation of a network of services for v.i. children and students in the East-European and Asian regions.**

The first conference has taken place in November in Saratov State University (Central Russia). Themes of the conference:

1. International Classification of Functioning, Disabilities and Health (ICF), the base for the education and rehabilitation of children with visual impairment.
2. Inclusive Education of Children with Visual Impairment, responding to student diversity.

There were more than 150 participants from 6 countries. The 2nd conference will take place in Moldova in May, 2009. The themes:

1. Socialisation of v.i. children.
2. Low vision.

In July, 2008 In The Crimea, Alupka City, a Ukrainian project was organised with the international participation of experts from Poland and Russia and the support of ICEVI. The purpose of the project: **development of an innovative model of social services - organisation and carrying out of courses for parents at "Mama school"**.

One more project: the paper-bag for the International project «TEMPUS» has been prepared. The consortium consists of 10 universities and ICEVI is the coordinator of this project.

In August experts from Armenia, Russia and Ukraine participated in the International Conference on "Early intervention" in Budapest, Hungary.

We have more than 20 new ICEVI members from the East-European Region and 1 from Tajikistan.

We actively cooperate with the ICEVI Newsletter. In 2008-2009 3 articles were published. We have a Russian version of the Newsletter and Brochure.

### **Wishes:**

1. In ICEVI there are many people from the East-European region, especially Russia. Therefore the members of ICEVI kindly ask the Board to consider this when granting supported places for the conferences.
2. Colleagues from Belarus who make the Russian version of the Newsletter, kindly ask that the newspaper have a Russian translation; and again kindly ask to the board to consider an opportunity to receive payment for the translation.
3. Concerning the website - there is an offer to expand the Home Page, to make it more informative and to translate it into Russian.

## Preannouncement of an International Conference within Eastern Europe

In November 2008 a conference for the Eastern European countries took place in Saratov, Russia.

The central theme was **Inclusive Education: Experience and Prospects and the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)**.

It was decided to continue the conference.

The next conference will take place on October 2nd, 3rd and 4th in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova.

The State Pedagogical University "Ion Creanga", Moldova Blind Union and ICEVI-Europe are preparing the conference.

The central theme will be People with Low Vision, Education, Rehabilitation and Social Participation.

Please note down the dates. The website of ICEVI-Europe will inform you further. [www.icevi-europe.org](http://www.icevi-europe.org)

## Summary of the book "tastend door de tijd"

2008 has been an important year for Royal Visio, The Netherlands. Last year it was the 200th anniversary of the opening of the first school for blind children in Amsterdam. In these 200 years, Visio has extended into an organisation that offers education, rehabilitation and care for people with a visual impairment.

In order to improve the accessibility of its services, Visio now has rehabilitation centres in several locations in the Netherlands and two schools, with an important role in the support of children who attend mainstream schools.

Visio's birthday was a good reason to compose a **historical book under the title "tastend door de tijd"**. *The author is Dr. J.L.M. (Jozef) Vos, University of Utrecht*

Underneath you will find a summary (pages 308-316).

### Summary

'Willingly or unwillingly, a blind person is a being that personifies the image of blindness as created by the sighted, and who is treated according to that representation.'

*Pierre Henri, director of the Institution nationale des jeunes aveugles, Paris, 1958.*

'The popular image of visual handicap is usually of a totally blind young person. He or less often she is equipped with a guide dog, has acute intelligence and enhanced hearing and is able to use sight replacement techniques such as Braille.

The reality is very different. The visually handicapped person is likely to be female, elderly, adventitiously "blind", has other disabilities and is unknown to any of the professions concerned with visual disability'.

*Janet Silver, Moorfields Eye Hospital, London, 1983.*

'I am fully aware that my blindness in itself has in many ways determined my life, but when trying to survey my life, asking myself which events and which emotions have [either in joy or in sorrow] most deeply affected me, I would have to say they were decidedly not the ones immediately connected to my blindness.'

*Frits Tingen, director of the foundation Het Nederlands Blindenwezen  
[Dutch Blind Welfare], 1959*

In cultural history blind people and blindness have evoked particular fascination, more so than, for instance, deaf people and deafness. This is undoubtedly due to the dominant significance of sight in the human existence. More than half of the sensory perceptions handled by our brain enters through our visual system.[\[1\]](#) A visual disorder may lead to serious problems in the contact with the surrounding world and in interpersonal relations. Cultural historiography observes blindness usually in two contrary manifestations: on the one hand positively, as being a gift from God, where superficial sight is exchanged for deeper insight. This manifestation is associated with the image of the blind seer, and is often linked to the classical tradition. On the other hand there is the negative interpretation of blindness being a punishment from God, associated with the character of the blind beggar, and often linked to the Christian tradition. Linking these manifestations either to the classical or the Christian tradition is mostly a matter of accentuation, and has many variations.[\[2\]](#)

Referring to its ambivalent representation does not explain the fascination for blindness. And although the theme itself is outside the range of this book, its presence in history is emphasized too often to wholly disregard it. Many attempts at clarification are one-track, involving 'the magic, all seeing eye'.[\[3\]](#) Blindness, however, is precisely about the absence of eyesight, which is, from a cultural historical point of view, associated with the quizzical and the enigmatic, with uneasiness and uncertainty, and which may for that reason actually have helped create the ambivalent representation.[\[4\]](#) In *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) Charles Darwin has already indicated the essentiality of especially facial expressions to human survival. Later the American psychologist Paul Ekman and other researchers have further analyzed the immense subtlety of the human facial expression and the key position of the eyes in it[\[5\]](#), focusing not only on relatively superficial forms of visual communication such as winking or frowning, but also on the exchange of signals of which the interpretation can under certain circumstances be a matter of life and death (fight or flight response).

Facial expressions offer essential information about the emotions and intentions of a person. It is highly imaginable how the lack of a recognizable expression in people creates uncertainty in their communication partners, deprived as they are of essential, vital information as to their intentions – are they good or bad? Is there danger to be expected or may one be easy? In this sense, blindness presents a problem to the sighted, a problem of which a person born blind would be unaware. This fundamental uncertainty, evoked when meeting with a blind person – and which possibly has its roots in our genetic system rather than in our cognitive system – may explain both the fascination for blindness and its ambiguous representation, which in turn allays, historical-anthropologically speaking, the uncertainty as much as it reflects it.

## Segregation and integration

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Historically the education of and care for the visually impaired and blind in The Netherlands, tested against two centuries of Visio and its predecessors, show remarkable continuity in their aim. In 1810 blind children were given an education to make them 'useful and proper members of society'; a century later to 'better their chances of earning a living in society'; and these days 'blind and visually impaired people are supported in realizing their wish for self-reliant living, learning and working'.

Of course the phraseology mirrors the times. The initially articulated objective was an independent and useful existence, to which fashionable terms as emancipation, socialization, assimilation, participation and inclusion were later added, all qualifiers of the aim towards a full functioning of visually impaired and blind people in society. All the more notable is the fact that during the nineteenth and the larger part of the twentieth centuries an extensive apparatus was built that resulted in the institutional segregation of most of the target group.

From 1960 onwards the institutional segregation of certain groups in society was severely criticized from historical sociological quarters. The Frenchman Michel Foucault mentioned the 'the great confinement' of the ill, the insane, the physically impaired and the poor in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[\[6\]](#)

The American Erving Goffman viewed the nineteenth and twentieth century 'total institutions', to which the homes for the blind or for those otherwise in need of care also belonged, as disciplinary measures for social minorities in a hierarchically set society.[\[7\]](#) Later historical research has qualified this perspective, at least with regard to the blind.[\[8\]](#) Of them, only a relatively small number was admitted as in patients, and admittance usually happened voluntarily and temporarily. The disciplinary nature itself was no stricter than that of other, 'regular' institutions for educational, medical or social care. Even though the institutionalizing was not as 'total' as depicted, the criticism of it did help bring about a turn in the way people thought about residential education.

Recent historiography shows a certain rehabilitation of the private initiatives which, occasionally with governmental cooperation, organized education of and care for the blind and the visually impaired.[\[9\]](#) This critical reevaluation is closely linked to the idea of a retreating government and a renewed interest in the historical meaning of the civil society. It involves reassessing charitable institutions, the motives of initiators, the effects of their actions on society and the relation with the government (subsidiarity, democracy and welfare state).

An underlying theme in this field of research is the confrontation of the belief in progress, dating from the Age of Reason, with the mostly disappointing results of the charities engrafted onto it. It is this area of tension that offers the keynote to this study.

## Patronage of the blind

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The apparent chasm between objective and means forms the thread of this book. Central to it is the history of the Institute for the Education of the Blind [Instituut tot Onderwijs van Blinden], established in Amsterdam in 1808 as the first educational institution for blind children in The Netherlands. The Institute evolved in direct reciprocity with the changing societal context to a conglomerate of specialized institutions that eventually, in 1988, was to converge in Visio. The

initiators of the Institute for the Education of the Blind maintained the range of thought adhering to the socially stratified society of that time, which allowed the petty bourgeoisie to reason from a sense of moral superiority and political dominance over the commonalty, a power relationship that was viewed as a natural phenomenon. Elevating the blind in their eyes thus meant offering support in finding their social destination: 'the decent station of a worker'.

In this context 'integration' and the education accommodating it were limited. The initiators of the Institute illustrated the self-image of the enlightened bourgeoisie as society's vanguard leading the lower classes to civilization, naturally within the limits of their presupposed (in)capabilities and the existing social structure. In this line of thought the initiators claimed exclusive expertise in the upbringing of blind children, a claim that resulted in a self-appointed patronage over the blind, an attitude that has for decades dominated the education and organized assistance of the blind and the visually impaired.

Disappointing results soon superseded the high hopes placed on the education of the blind. Administrators responded by further differentiating education and extending care to specific subgroups. The Institute for the Education of the Blind initially educated only 'totally' blind children in the age group of six to twelve years – children who had been born blind or who had become so at a very young age. Soon this group was expanded to accommodate children till the age of eighteen. In 1843 a separate institution was called into being for ex-students aged eighteen to thirty. In actual practice the age limit was continuously expanded, until the Institute also functioned as a home for older blind people. In 1880 the Prins Alexander Stichting [the Prince Alexander Foundation] was established for blind pre-school children. In the second half of the nineteenth century the realization dawned that there was also a large number of visually impaired people. After a shortlived attempt in 1892-1894, the education of visually impaired children finally took hold in 1936. Some years before, the care for children with multiple impairments had already been initialized through the Van Heukelomstichting [Van Heukelom Foundation], from which in 1963 the Elizabeth Kalishuis [Elizabeth Kalis Home] was established for multiple impaired adults.

During the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries and partly due to initiatives outside the Institute, an increasingly intricate network of institutions for the education of and care for blind and visually impaired people came into being. Both professionalization and publicity made this network into an ever more compelling safety net, that designated the blind and the visually impaired as a separate social category. Institutionalization and professionalization resulted in the creation of a separate 'world of the blind' in which administrators, educators, attendants, social workers, parents, pupils, and (organizations of) blind adults all participated. This world of the blind was built on the original ideal of integration, but its distinctive, categorical nature acted as an impediment rather than otherwise, creating a paradox of blind welfare.

### **Private initiatives and the government**

The central objective of the Institute for the Education of the blind was preparing children for a self-reliant existence. The ideal of self-reliance is closely linked to that of modern day charity and its transition from relief to elevation.



Founding the Institute is an early illustration of how the traditional, 'demotivating' relief was dismissed and exchanged for providing the poor and the impaired with prerequisites for their active social participation. This turn of thought was rooted in the belief in progress of the Enlightenment, and the firm belief in the manipulability of men and society through education and breeding. Considering the donations that richly poured into the Institute, this belief was broadly based in society.

The Institute for the Education of the Blind epitomized the combination of education and poor relief, two spearheads in nineteenth century domestic policy. After the realization of the Dutch unity in 1795 education was, by the laws passed in 1801, 1803 and 1806, made into a matter of the central government, which meant that the government, though acting as guarantor for proper primary education, would only interfere if lower official bodies and private institutions failed. This amounted to the provision of primary education to the poorest of the poor. 'Special' education of for instance the deaf or the blind depended solely on private initiative. Even poor relief remained, after a few failed attempts at state regulation, for the most part a matter of private organizations. These private initiatives, whether or not on a denominational basis, successfully maintained their independence from the central government, thus retaining the power of the elite in the hierarchy of class society.

Until well in the twentieth century education and assistance of the blind and the visually impaired depended on private funds. Only a few large cities had employment institutions, in which local governments participated since 1920.

Attempts at a structural solution of the unemployment among the blind and the visually impaired hardly availed. In 1923 the central government however did, for the first time and by Royal Decree for the regulation of Special Primary Education, make a small contribution to the education of the blind. After World War II the public funding of education and social services was increasingly handled by the central government, changing the status of social services from favour to right, but the substance of duties, as well as their execution, was mostly left to the traditional, private institutions. An immediate consequence of the transition to public financing was that these private institutions tightly joined forces within the foundation of Dutch Blind Welfare, Het Nederlandse Blindenwezen (1947), a federative cooperation that seemed to ossify the separation of the world of the blind, rather than mellow it.

### **New ways**

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During the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century the traditional world of the blind collapsed under a complex of developments. Because of increased public funding, the interweaving with the welfare state, the matter-of-courseness of professional social services regulated by law and the bureaucratic context in which they happened, the institutions for the education of and care for the blind and the visually impaired reached the stage of settled charities. Demographic changes (ageing population), medical (preventive and diagnostical) as well as technical (aids and appliances) developments caused the emphasis within the target group to shift from the blind to the visually impaired, and from children to adults and the elderly.

Social developments as democratization and emancipation raised doubts as to the sustainability of the historical patronage over the blind. Changing views on minorities, integration and participation also took root in the world of the blind.

The 1980 bill New Ways drew radical conclusions from the thinking on social services to the blind and the visually impaired as they had so many years ago been established. The administration, staff and parents of the now Royal Institute for the Education of the Blind collectively produced the bill, which was characterized by a breach with the traditional, institutional, supply-focused policy, and the adoption of a pluriform, functional, demand-focused approach instead. Through New Ways society distanced itself from the way blind and visually impaired children had been torn away from their 'natural' environment during more than 150 years of residential education, emphasizing their distinction from the sighted. According to the drafters of the bill, the changed social circumstances necessitated a reorganization of education and social services that would take the wishes and needs of the blind and the visually impaired as its vantage point, which called for approaching the clients, literally and figuratively.

The regionalization of care and education from 1980 onwards meant a clean break with the centralized, mostly intramural care services. Staff and organization had to switch to a system of ambulant care and rehabilitation services. The improved geographical distribution of care services entailed a vast extension of the clientele, which called for both reassessment and retuning of tasks and needs. In order to gauge the needs a multidisciplinary diagnostic system was developed, the visual profile, which charts individual needs and serves as a base for individually geared care.

### **Integration again**

To what extent have the education of and care for the blind and the visually impaired in their two centuries of existence contributed to the social integration and participation of the target group?

Undoubtedly a great many blind people have been taken from unsound social environments and given an upbringing and a (vocational) education they would in all probability never have had otherwise. For them the chances of a dignified existence increased importantly. The dark side of it was that they received long years of paternalistic upbringing, even though that particular sector hardly differed from other parts of the educational and poor relief system. Self-reliant social functioning was not an option, it was an obligation.

For a long time this self-reliance was interpreted as receiving a sufficient income from personal labour. If evaluated exclusively on the basis of this criterion, the project must be considered to have failed.

Until 1950, up to 65 percent of the blind working population was without livelihood.

Recent statistics show that 45 percent of the visually limited labour force do not participate in labour, figures that are noticeably higher than the average of the total labour force. As long as there is a free labour market, however, visually limited people will find it difficult to compete.

Special unemployment relief projects in the past have only resulted in increased dependency, and have always been regarded, at least by the Institute for the Education of the Blind, as temporary, stop-gap measures.

The flow towards work was stunted by the free labour market, a variable that was uncontrollable. What was controllable was the way pupils were equipped by means of (vocational) education, a matter in which the Institute compared highly favourable to regular educational institutions. Its general educational programme was more extensive than that of a regular school. The combination of general courses and vocational education up to the age of eighteen was rarely granted to sighted boys and girls. The vocational education focused on fields that were considered to be within the range of self-reliant practice by the blind.

There was a continuous search for new suitable subjects, though the traditional trades were long held on to, until an overhaul in modernization started in 1930.

One of the important merits of the Institute was that it vastly improved literacy among blind children, a laborious process initially, but after the breakthrough of Braille in 1890 a great social leeway was made up.

To the blind and the sighted alike, literacy has been of momentous importance to intellectual education, maturity and social emancipation. By battling illiteracy the education of the blind actually facilitated its own opposition. Former students of the Institute played prominent parts in the Nederlandse Blindenbond [the Dutch union of the blind], which, after a period of cooperation with denominational unions, aimed at altering the charitable favour of education and care to a social right. In the interest of both, unions and institutions formed a coalition, named Het Nederlandse Blindenwezen [Dutch Blind Welfare]. In so doing the institutions received state support while the unions achieved judicial regulations with regard to social security, which cut through the one-track linkage between integration and labour.

The recognition of the unions by the institutions as worthy interlocutors illustrated the turn the image of the blind had taken since 1950. The indigent wretches of before proved to be rational, mature citizens. This turnabout in everyday practice was ideologically supported by actual, phenomenological concepts of personal dignity. Where for a long time the blindness had been the central issue, now it was the human individual, hampered in his development by a visual impairment.

The shift from distinctive disablement to general humanity challenged the sustainability of the separate, categorial care system, and in particular the isolated position of the boarding schools that still made up the heart of the world of the blind.

Even though the contrast between this isolation and the aim for integration was recognized since 1950, leaving the students to the care of parents and regular education was not considered advisable. Attempts at compromise included a change from mass housing to a system of surrogate family units, as well as a more active involvement of the parents and a (careful) admittance of day students, the latter proving to be of crucial importance to the education of the visually impaired.

During the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century concentrated housing and boarding schools came to be seen as an obstruction to social participation, parents playing an essential role as they more and more chose to raise their blind or visually impaired children by themselves.

Comparable views on residential education caught on in other parts of the welfare sector. The similarities between the developments in the blind welfare and the mental health care are especially striking. In close deliberation with the parents the Institute for the Education of the Blind in 1980 decided, as the first in its own sector, to make a clean break from the past and start searching for truly new ways.

Since the early eighties the education of and the care for the blind and the visually impaired have transformed completely. The education is left as much as possible to regular schools, with ambulant educational support available. Special education is only offered when the visual impairment is complicated by other, mental or physical, impairments. Social support, if not offered by regular institutions, is ambulant. Only the most vulnerable among the target group are admitted in part time or full time residency. The emphasis in the total package of services has shifted largely to diagnostics and rehabilitation.

Despite all changes, the aim for social integration and participation has remained unaltered. The target group, however, is of a completely different size and composition than it was in 1808. The substance of the assistance offered is no longer imposed upon the community, but assessed individually. Both education and support are, as much as possible, offered in an 'inclusive' environment. As such, they are in keeping with the internationally laid down rights of the disabled in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of May 2008. In a world that seems increasingly set upon visual communication, these rights are of particular meaning to those with a visual impairment.

by Dr. J.L.M. (Jozef) Vos

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## 7th European Conference of ICEVI in Dublin

Before long you will find information about the regional meeting and the General Assembly, which will take place during the conference. To anticipate matters I herewith inform you of the following.



### Regional meeting

Monday July 6 the regional meetings will be held. These meetings offer the opportunity to further meet with colleagues, to exchange regional information, to meet with the country representatives, and also to discuss developments in the field of education and rehabilitation and the role which ICEVI has to fulfil in these matters during the coming years.

### General Assembly

On Thursday July 9 the General Assembly will take place. The agenda so far is:

1. Approval of the annual report 2008 and the budget for 2009
2. Elections of the chairman, members of the board and the country representatives
3. Presentation of the conference in 2013

Concerning the elections the situation is as follows:

#### Chairman

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No new candidates have presented themselves. It is possible to do so up until June 10. The present chairman is eligible for re-election.

#### Members of the board

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Except for one board member all members are eligible for re-election. New candidates can present themselves up until June 10.

#### Country representatives

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All country representatives have been asked if they are willing to be put up for re-election. The chairman has not received answers from all representatives.

In the newsletter of April 2008, all information about the procedure for these elections was published.

Those who are interested are advised to look at the newsletter once more.

As part of the preparations for the General Assembly nominations should be sent to the chairman, [hanswelling@visio.org](mailto:hanswelling@visio.org)  
After June 10 the final agenda will be made for the General Assembly.

Soon the temporary list of candidates for board membership and country representatives will be published. In this list you will see which vacancies are to be filled.

## Conference 2013

During the conference in Dublin it will be decided where the next conference will take place.

Representatives of countries can give a presentation during the Dublin conference.

*Criteria* to be the host are:

- Having a strong national host committee
- Having a good venue with many rooms
- Having hotels with several price levels (mention prices in high and low season)
- Having the fee cost not more than €500
- Having a social programme
- Having the ability to fundraise
- Having international accessibility

The preparations for the conference will take place in cooperation with the board of ICEVI. The board will also take the final decision about the place of the conference in 2013. Hopefully many countries will present themselves before June 10. Updated information about the conference can be found at [www.icevidublin2009.org](http://www.icevidublin2009.org)

For questions about the General Assembly you can contact your board member.

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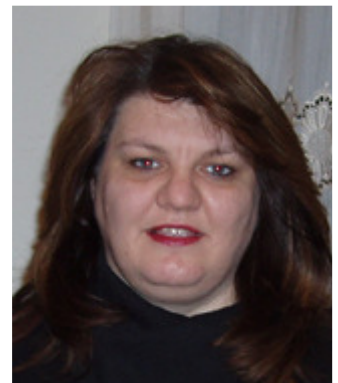
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