

**ICEVI European Newsletter
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Preface: Report of the Board meeting

On March 13th and 14th 2008 the board had a meeting in Huizen, the Netherlands.

Visio was the host. It is not always easy to find days when every member of the board is able to attend, but this time the full board was present, which was important for the meeting.

Figure 1: Board members met in Huizen, the Netherlands (March 13th-14th 2008).



As usual the meeting began with reports and relevant information from the various sub regions. It is always interesting to be informed about what is happening throughout Europe. After the meeting the suggestion was made to place this information on the website in future.

In the newsletter of December 2007 all members were informed about the statement of the board on Inclusive Education. This document has been finalised as a formal document from the board. The intention is to discuss this subject during the Conference in 2009.

The board approved the annual report of 2007. According to the articles of association (art 17.4) the annual report will be presented to the general meeting in digital form. The general meeting consists of the contact persons, who are required to approve the report.

The board was pleased to be informed about the successful Conference on Psychology and Visual Impairment, which was also held at Visio from March 10th – 13th. The next conference will be held in 2010. The board would like to encourage other occupational groups to come to such initiatives.

The board was informed about the preparations for the Conference on Early Intervention, which is planned for August 27th – 29th in Budapest, Hungary and the Balkan Conference planned for October 22nd – 26th in Istanbul, Turkey. The ICEVI-conference 2009 in Dublin was also discussed. During the meeting

a poster was sent to all members. Soon the website will be accessible with all the necessary information icevidublin2009.org It promises to be a conference with exciting topics for discussion.

During the meeting the General Assembly of ICEVI-Europe was discussed; this will take place during the Conference. You will find important information about this in the newsletter.

After the meeting, some board members witnessed the 24-hour reading marathon that Visio was holding. This was one of the many festivities taking place as part of their bicentennial celebrations.

The next ICEVI board meeting will be held in April 2009 in Prague, Czech Republic.

Hans Welling
Chairman

Upcoming events in 2008

week of 23 April 2008

3rd International Smiling Child Festival, Istanbul (Turkey)
- for the disabled children who are 7-15 years old from all over the world.

website: www.smilingchild.com

7-11 July 2008

9th International Conference on Low Vision,
Montreal (Canada)
Theme: Research-Rehabilitation Partnerships
website: www.vision2008.ca



9-11 July 2008

11th International Conference on Computers Helping People with Special Needs (ICCHP), Linz (Austria)
"eQuality: A Global Challenge" - Equal Access to the Information Society as a Global Challenge. website: www.icchp.org

27-29 August 2008

"Theory Meeting Practice" - The European Conference on Early Intervention for families with children with Visual Impairment, Budapest (Hungary)

e-mail: tradeshow@mail.externet.hu (Gini Prónay)

website: www.ei4vi.eu

22-26 October 2008

[4th ICEVI Balkan Conference](http://www.icevi.org), Istanbul (Turkiye)

e-mail: ayyildizemine@yahoo.com website:

www.sabancigormeengelliler.org

ICEVI poster Dublin Conference 2009

7th European Conference of the International Council for the Education of the Visually Impaired

'Living in a Changing Europe'

In Association with St Joseph's School for the Visually Impaired



5th - 10th July 2009 Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

For further information please contact:

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Website: www.icevidublin2009.org

Preparations for the General Assembly in Dublin 2009

As you know ICEVI-Europe has, since the beginning of 2007, had legal status as an association. This had been decided during the General Assembly in Kuala Lumpur.

Because of this, ICEVI-Europe has a better, more concrete structure both now and in the future.

According to the articles of association, The General Assembly, which will be held during the conference, is the most important organ of ICEVI-Europe. In the two intervening years, matters will be handled in the general meeting, which consists of the contact persons of the various countries. During the General Assembly the annual report of 2007 will be discussed, and also elections will take place.

Contact persons for each sub region

According to the articles of association, retirement by rotation will take place.

Since the association was only founded at the beginning of 2007, the board assumes that each contact person may be re-elected. Each contact person will receive a letter in which they will be asked if they are willing to be re-elected. In addition to this, other people may present

themselves as a possible contact person. The board wishes to invite people to come forward since there are also vacancies.

You will find enclosed a job description for the contact person and the number of contact persons required for each country.

Current contact persons and new candidates should inform the chairperson before March 15th 2009 hanswelling@visio.org

On the basis of the information received, the board will make a proposal for the General Assembly.

Job description of contact persons in Europe

Tasks

1. The contact person is a member of the general meeting of ICEVI-Europe, conform article 16.2 of the articles of association.
2. The contact person takes part of the meeting in the sub region, which is led by the member of the board.
3. The contact person observes and points out special events and activities that could be important for the European Board, European chairperson and for the European Newsletter, such as conferences, workshops, anniversaries.
4. The contact person communicates with the sub regional member of the board and/or European chairperson about needs and demands in his or her country and about possible twinning contacts.
5. From time to time, the contact person supplies copy for the European Newsletter about what is happening in his or her country.
6. The contact person supplies agenda items for the meeting of the European board.
7. The contact person improves and updates information for the member of the Board and for the website.

From the contact person is expected:

1. He or she has to be employed in the field of education and rehabilitation of the visually impaired.
2. He or she should have a good network of contacts in his or her country in the field of the education and rehabilitation of the visually impaired.
3. He or she has time to fulfil the function and is able to attend the meetings.
4. He or she is able to communicate in English (or by means of someone else).

Appointment

1. Membership of ICEVI-Europe
2. The nomination has to be done with a written letter of support from the representative organisation in the country or sub region.
3. The appointment takes place by the General Assembly and the duration is 4 years. Reappointment is possible.
4. Before the official appointment the board can decide to appoint under the condition of approval of the General Assembly.

5. The appointment will be confirmed in writing.

Contact persons per country	
Number of inhabitants	Number of contact persons
>20 milj	1 contact person
>20 milj <50 milj	2 contact persons
>50 milj	3 contact persons

This means that all countries have 1 contact person, except:

Country	Number of contact persons
Belgium	2 contact persons
France	3 contact persons
Germany	3 contact persons
Italy	3 contact persons
Ukraine	2 contact persons
Poland	2 contact persons
Romania	2 contact persons
Russia	3 contact persons
Spain	2 contact persons
Turkey	3 contact persons
United Kingdom	3 contact persons

Board members

For the board members matters are the same

- According to the rotation by retirement (start 2007) all board members can be re-elected (art 13.2)
- The appointment takes place at the nomination of the sub region (art 11.4)

Also new candidate board members have to take care of nominations to the chairperson before March 15th 2009 hanswelling@visio.org

With more candidates, even so as for contact persons, elections will take place during the General Assembly.

Chairperson of the board

For the function of chairperson another procedure counts.

The Board of ICEVI-Europe shall have a Chairperson elected and appointed by the General Assembly (art 11.2) and sometimes can be re-elected for a period of 4 years.

Profile of the chairperson:

- International experience concerning rehabilitation and education of people with visual impairment
- Managerial experience
- Availability at least one day a week
- Ability to travel
- Availability of a secretariat
- Working knowledge of English
- Availability of financial support to do his/her work

Candidates also have to contact the present chairperson before 15th March 2009.

European Conference 2013!!

Many persons probably will remember the ICEVI-conference in Chemnitz. During the question where the next conference was going to take place, suddenly we had two candidates. This is good for an association. The board would like to invite each organisation or country to think about organizing the conference 2013.

It concerns the following matters:

- composing an organising committee
- having suitable conference and hotel accommodations, the number of participants varies per conference, but is above 500 persons
- Taking care of a healthy budget, taking in consideration the supported places. Having sponsors is always necessary
- Taking past to the programme committee of ICEVI, which is responsible for the contents of the conference

The possibility exists that during the General Assembly several organisations, countries will present themselves and the General Assembly will take the final decision.

Interested organisations are asked to send a request before March 15th 2009 to the chairperson, when they are willing to do a bit during the General Assembly.

*For further information please contact the chairperson as well,
e-mail: hanswelling@visio.org.*

**Special Interest Group "Batten Disease",
ICEVI Europe Conference (Dublin, Ireland 2009)**

At the ICEVI conference in Dublin, July 2009, one track will focus on a neglected or almost unknown area of special education, namely education for children and young adults with Battens disease. There are two main reasons behind the neglect of this condition. Firstly, the target group has a very low incidence. For instance, there are approximately only 80 individuals with

Battens disease in Sweden and Norway together. Secondly, the nature of the disease. These children and young adults have a significantly shortened estimated lifespan; they will over time require more and more assistance or support and more and more special education. This challenge within education requires knowledge and an alternative educational platform. It must be remembered that a substantial part of these children's and youth's life content is closely associated with their lives in educational and school environments.

The limited research into Batten disease covers the implications for the family of providing care for children and young adults particularly in relation to stress (Labbe 1996; 2003) and the wider implications of the experiences of families living with Batten disease on our understanding of disability within society (Scambler 2005). There is ongoing research looking at the support needs of families with Batten disease funded by the Batten Disease Family Association (Scambler & Williams 2005). There are a number of studies looking at use of medications and therapies in the treatment of young adults with Batten disease, but these focus very much on medical treatments and symptom control rather than the psychosocial support of this group of young people with families. Many authors stress a need for a supplementary focus on rehabilitation for children and youth with Batten disease.

Public support is required if we are aiming at participation for the target group. Families to children and youth with Batten disease are part of one of the most vulnerable groups one may find in our society. The State and local areas and communities have, according to UN Convention on the Rights of the child, special obligations. Article 23, §3 say that the State should ensure *assistance and financial resources... to ensure that the disabled child has effective access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities*. Article 31, §2 say that the State parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

Not much has (so far) been recorded and documented regarding education for children and youth with Battens disease despite the very special needs of these children and young adults. The aim of organising special themes/streams, focusing on education for these children and youth within existing conferences such as ICEVI, is to highlight the special challenges teachers for these children meet in everyday classroom situations, to ensure that inclusion and participation requirements are met, and to ensure that these children's special educational needs are met. Conferences, such as ICEVI Europe 2009 in Dublin, might be a starting point for development, where educational knowledge and experiences are shared among professionals and practitioners within education.

The First International Batten Education Conference in Örebro 2006 was the first important step to highlight education for children and young people with Batten's disease. The ICEVI conference in Dublin 2009 will continue this development. How well this can be achieved through expanding our knowledge and sharing experience is very much dependent upon your participation. We therefore kindly ask teachers and pedagogues, with experience and knowledge within the field, to address their knowledge and interest by submitting an abstract on an educational or related topic to the conference organisers on an aspect of Batten disease) Such dissemination of knowledge will help us to promote professional networking, education development and pedagogical research in the field of Batten disease and most importantly help support the young people with Batten disease and their families.. Details regarding how and when to submit an abstract will be made available on the ICEVI-Europe web site. www.icevi-europe.org. If you would like any advice or suggestions before submitting an abstract please do contact us via email to Peter Rodney, pr@ibos.dk. member of the scientific committee.

Bengt Elmerskog, Assistant Director,
Tambartun kompetansesenter, Melhus Norway
E-mail: bengt.elmerskog@statped.no

Second European Conference on Psychology and Visual Impairment a great success

From 10 to 12 March 2008 the second *European Conference on Psychology and Visual Impairment* took place in Huizen, the Netherlands. This conference, under the umbrella of ICEVI, is one of the building activities of the European network of psychologists and related professions working in the field of visual impairment. The first meeting in October 2006 in Copenhagen was visited by 52 participants. Now, in Huizen, there were 71 participants from 17 different European countries. This conference was the first collective international activity of the merging organisations Visio, Sensis and De Brink and could be called a very successful event already.

Aims of this conference were a continuation of the exchange of expertise that was started in Copenhagen, further acquaintance and making international cooperation more concrete. To reach these aims many different methods for knowledge exchange were deployed in this conference. Next to some plenary sessions, there were many interactive workshops with a mixture of oral presentations, poster presentations and knowledge markets. The goal of the knowledge markets was to facilitate exchange of knowledge and experience between participants. Every participant got a large sheet and wrote down what knowledge and experience he/she had to offer to other participants with regard to the specific topic of that workshop and what knowledge and

experience he/she would like to get from other participants. Armed with a 'shopping list' the participants walked around and got into a lot of 'selling and buying' of knowledge.

There were workshops with regard to visually impaired people of all ages on quality of life, the role of the psychologist, assessment, psychogenic blindness, social participation, vocational training, psychotherapy, visual restitution therapy, acquired brain injury and other neuropsychological aspects. Also there were some 'open spaces' in the programme (one even during a walk outside) in which one could further exchange on themes that were not explicitly included in the programme.

Many participants, who are accustomed to listening to presentations during conferences, had to get used to the amount of active involvement of all participants in a conference that even started with speed dating! But in the end all were very satisfied with the chosen set-up of the conference and the many opportunities to exchange and share knowledge and experience.

The full programme, pictures and evaluation information can be found on the website of the European psychology network: www.synsraad.dk.

Figure 2: Participants of the second ECPVI conference



Also thanks to a great ambiance, very good catering and fine music during the dinners, the second *European Conference on Psychology and Visual Impairment* proved to be a very successful one. Negotiations are still going on about which country will be organising the next conference, but it is already suggested that the third conference will take place in April 2010.

Peter Verstraten, project leader,
Sensis, sector Innovation & Expertise, dept. Development & Implementation,
Grave, the Netherlands
E-mail: pverstraten@sensis.nl

24-hour Dutch reading marathon a great success

As part of their jubilee activities, Royal Visio organised a 24-hour reading marathon in March. The Dutch organisation celebrates its 200th anniversary this year. The aim of the reading marathon was to draw attention to the different possibilities for blind and visually impaired people to read. Over 200 people read out loud: their texts varied from children's books to short stories and abstracts from well-known novels. Five Visio-locations in different parts of The Netherlands were temporarily equipped with radio studios so that all the stories could be heard live via the Visio-website.

The reading was done by clients of Visio, relations, members of staff and celebrities such as radio and television presenters, actors and politicians. Princess Laurentien, daughter in law of Queen Beatrix, read the marathon to its finish. Participants made use of enlarged texts, Braille in print, and via the computer with speech, text enlargement and Braille lines.

Figure 3: Visio 24-hour reading marathon



Many newspapers, radio and television programmes reported on the marathon and the ways in which people with a visual impairment can access reading material.

More information: regiendeboer@visio.org

Early Intervention and Inclusive Education in Lithuania

March 27th, 2007, 10 a.m., Ministry of Education and Science of Lithuania, C.J. van Gendt – Van Evert, Child psychologist Visio, The Netherlands and J.A. Welling, Chairman of the ICEVI, Europe presented report about the project "Early Intervention and Inclusive Education in Lithuania" to the leaders of the Ministry. The project was inspired by the letter of Mr. D.Numgaudis, State

secretary of the Ministry of Education of Lithuania, where he expressed interest in Inclusive Education and the wish to create more facilities for visually impaired persons to be successfully mainstreamed. Further more Mr. D. Numgaudis asked for assistance to train specialists in Early Intervention.

The second step was made by C.J. van Gendt – Van Evert, Child psychologist Visio, The Netherlands and J.A. Welling, Chairman of the ICEVI, Europe, who came with a study visit to Lithuania, September, 2007

The process of the visit included:

1. Review of information about history, culture, education and the situation of disabled and visually impaired persons in Lithuania obtained from reports, documents, internet sources, and an interview at the Embassy of Lithuania in The Netherlands.
2. Collection of information about the current situation of the institutes, including current activities for parents, parents' and teachers' opinions about Inclusive Education and Early Intervention, the demand for courses, the financial situation and current policies, by means of a Questionnaire. This Questionnaire was sent to the directors of both institutes for Blind and Visually Impaired in Lithuania, sent to the chairmen of two parent organisations for the visually impaired, to the Vision development centre in Klaipeda and sent to the Ministry of Education.
3. Interviews and dialogues with parents, children and teachers, at the Institutes and at 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.

A field visit to the Institutes for the Blind and Visually Impaired and mainstream schools that integrate visually impaired children in order to get an impression of the strength and possibilities of the institutes and the schools.

The presentation of the study in the Ministry was met with great positive interest. The most surprising moments for the audience were about the number of visually impaired in Lithuania. Lithuanian association for the blind and visually impaired keeps data about 8000 visually impaired persons. Mr. J.A.Welling suggested it should be about 60. 000 visually impaired living in Lithuania. This number is including elderly people, multiple disabled and persons with visual perception problems.

The presentation of the study ended with conclusion that the best way to help situation with visually impaired in Lithuania is by the natural way to transform Lithuanian Training Centre for the Blind and Visually impaired in Vilnius to a centre of expertise. The centre of Expertise must contain: training and rehabilitation for the visually impaired and their family, early intervention, education, individual assessment and individual plans, information.

27th March, 2p.m. The hall of Lithuanian training centre for the Blind and Visually impaired is overcrowded with the parents, teachers, educators and administrators of visually impaired. One more time C.J. van Gendt – Van Evert, and J.A. Welling presented report about the project Early Intervention and Inclusive Education in Lithuania. Audience was very interested. It was felt that “the time of changes” had come. One mother of partially sighted boy has chosen the mainstream education. She was very happy: it is for the first time we got so many attentions concerning the inclusion problems. Let’s hope that it will be a good start of a way to full participation of the visually impaired in the open society. A very long way made of small steps. Let’s hope that Lithuanian decision makers will have enough will to start it.

Dalia Tauriene,
Lithuania

The road to an inclusive society in Lithuania

Motivation for the project

The motivation for the project was a contact between the State secretary of the ministry of Education of Lithuania, Mr. Numgaudis, and Mr. Welling and Mr. Rodney at a meeting that took place in Vilnius at one of the Institutes of Lithuania for the visually impaired.

Mr. Numgaudis expressed the interest of the ministry in Inclusive Education, the wish to create more facilities for visually impaired persons to be mainstreamed and assistance to train specialists in Early Intervention. The result was this project, financed by the ministry of Education in Lithuania, coordinated by the director of the Institute for the visually impaired in Lithuania, Mrs. Daujotiene and executed by Mrs C. van Gendt, consultant for the project, Visio, the Netherlands and by Mr. J.A.Welling, chairman of ICEVI-Europe.

Inclusive education

According to The Convention of the Rights of Persons with disabilities unanimously adopted by the United Nations in 2006 which ensures persons with disabilities full and equal human rights, fundamental freedom and non discrimination, equal rights to take part in education for disabled persons is a European goal. In article 24 on education is stated: 'Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability. Inclusive education is more than physical integration; being part of the social group and paving the road to full membership of society are essential in it.

Methodology of the project

The project included a review of information about history, culture, education and the situation of the disabled and visually impaired persons in Lithuania, collection of information about the current situation of the education of the visually impaired in Lithuania in the Institutes and in the mainstream, the situation of early intervention and opinions and wishes about it by questionnaires, interviews with teachers, parents and pupils and a field visit held during our visit in Lithuania in September 2007.

Afterwards in February 2008 the results were presented at a conference on the Ministry and the Institute for the visually impaired in Vilnius.

The current situation in Lithuania

Lithuania is an interesting country with beautiful nature and impressive historical buildings. It is a meeting place for cultures and religions from east and west.

The Russian occupation and recent liberation did leave their trail. People are proud of their own nation and working hard to modernise policy on different topics.

For special needs education this means that the policy of segregating 'the different' undergoes serious changes towards the general principles of humanity, democracy and renewal.

This results in a consistent and coherent policy towards management, structure of education, education assessment, school network, the learning load, training of teachers, pedagogical and psychological teams and services, education funding, transport, school buildings, materials and computer usage.

A lifeline intervention from birth to six years is founded to monitor every child.

There are two Institutes for education the visually impaired: The Lithuanian Centre for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Vilnius and the Kaunas training Centre for Blind and Visually Impaired in Kaunas. Both institutes show a tremendous amount of professionalism and creativity in supporting their pupils and making materials.

Results of the study

All teachers, at the Institutes and in mainstream, showed a very good motivation for their job and are highly concerned about the well being of their pupils. The parents are interested in new possibilities for their child in special education and in education in general and were tremendously open in their answers. The children were open and motivated too, and showed us a new, intelligent and creative way to approach their own situation demonstrating vividness and wit of a booming new generation.

Upon the consent of the parents, a child with special educational needs can be taught in a mainstream class with a normal, modified, alternative or individual curriculum, at a special group or class, partly in a mainstream class and in a special group, or at a school for special education. In principle there

are extensive possibilities and parents have the choice. Current trends are that more and more SEN pupils attend mainstream educational settings and the number of SEN pupils attending special (boarding) schools is decreasing.

All respondents agree that it is desirable to have a free choice for parents and pupils for integration in the mainstream or attending a special school. They all see good possibilities to integrate partially sighted of all ages and young children.

In the case of partially sighted children with slight other problems parents are concerned about the attention their child gets, the number of pupils in the class, acceptance by other children and the learning pace.

Concerning the issue of integrating a blind child many problems are mentioned: teachers have to learn Braille, which would take time and against which some teachers show resistance, Braille books are not always available or in the wrong text, tactile and 3 dimensional development can be underestimated, there is a lack of tactile materials, there is a lack of extra training, blind children might get underestimated, other children don't understand their blind peer, social isolation, being humiliated, and lack of leisure activities. Many parents and teachers are doing a lot of extra work. Teachers with positive experience of integrating a blind child, mention that it is more difficult to integrate children with behavioural problems or a mental retardation. Blind children can be very motivated and serious and an example for the other children. All children belong to the community even when they are disabled. The school has to take care of them. Integrated blind children are very happy to be at home and with their family.

Blind children suggest that to be accepted depends in a large way on your own attitude.

When deciding on the best place for their child, parents experience a lack of support. The pedagogical and psychological teams and services shall have to play a role in this, but lack professionalism on the visual impairment.

Diagnoses and indications for special education are based on a medical system; which doesn't allow making medical information available to professionals and parents, which they experience as a big lack of information and as an obstacle to giving the right support or advice. It will be very difficult to change this system.

Transportation is an overall problem; it is hard to reach the rural areas and for both the mainstream schools and the institutes it is an issue to get the disabled children to school.

Before it reaches the school age early intervention is possible for every child with special needs. Before the age of two this is provided at the hospital and at home and after that in Kindergarten or special groups. Professionals from the pedagogical psychological team play an essential role there. However, their knowledge on visual impairments is insufficient and in the end teachers

specialized on working with the blind are doing the intervention. The faculty of Special Education of Siauliai University organizes courses in Early Intervention, but does not specifically focus on the visually impaired child. All respondents emphasize the importance of Early Intervention. Challenges lie in the coordination between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, a transformation from a deficit model to more focus on family needs and a training system for professionals.

Parents need good advice about their child's capabilities and the best fitted education, teachers in the mainstream school need information, materials and support, visual impaired children in the mainstream need training, to learn Braille and get mobility training and ambulatory teachers need payment for travelling and more time to support the child, teacher and parents.

Some mainstream schools have a certain number of visually impaired children being successfully integrated. Very nice examples of inclusive and individual education were observed.

Both Institutes for Visually Impaired children show a tremendous amount of professionalism and creativity in supporting these children and making materials. The Institute in Vilnius shows a broad variety in support for the children at the institute as well as the integrated ones. The activities and facilities at the institute range from courses, camps, a department for social care working on early intervention and inclusive education, an ICT department, a music school, division for deaf blind, to a library.

Most of the respondents experience a big lack between the policy and the practice. The challenge for the future therefore is to connect a coherent and consistent policy to the extended professionalism of the Institutes to create a practical and successful system for Inclusive Education.

Recommendations

All respondents agree that it is desirable to have a free choice for parents and pupils for integration in the mainstream or attending a special school. This corresponds with the mission of the United Nations in the Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities. Most of the respondents are however concerned about the possibilities to integrate blind pupils and partially sighted pupils with slight other problems.

For a really free choice it is important to find possibilities for most of the problems of these pupils and if that is not sufficient to remain special schools.

To raise the quality of the support for the children with a visually impairment and their parents (later of all may be) also for the adults, there is a need for a centre of expertise.

Of the two institutes the institute in Vilnius is the one that supports the most children in mainstream and realizes a broadest variety of activities for these pupils.

The natural way is to transform this institute to a centre of expertise, a

resource centre. Afterwards the institute in Kaunas can follow this development.

Such a centre of expertise must contain the functions of early intervention, education, assessment visual functions and development, information and training and rehabilitation.

Further on courses to enhance inclusive education on topics as braille, signals of a visual impairment to train the pedagogical and psychological teams, development of blind children, support for teachers in mainstream, ICT, day to day skills, orientation and mobility, visual stimulation and training, interdisciplinary work and courses to enhance early intervention on topics as assessment, stimulation and training, supporting a blind child and his family and courses for parents are needed.

Courses can be organized by The University of Kaunas, The faculty of Special Education of Sialiai University and the centre of expertise.

The last recommendation is about the costs. In cooperation with the Ministry of Education a good solution must be found for the costs for transportation of teachers to support the mainstream, for pupils to reach their school and for the amount of children for a full time itinerant teacher.

Epilogue

To realize the recommendations a working group of professionals is suggested and perhaps an international board for support.

We enjoyed our visits to Lithuania very much. The inspiration and motivation of the teachers and pupils were impressive. We got a very warm welcome and a lot of good information to do our job. At the presentation of the report we experienced an open attitude towards renewal.

After our visit in February some initiatives are taken to realize a working group and to gather information. The report will be translated in Lithuanian language.

We hope this project will show the professionals in Lithuania ways to start the process of transformation Institutes to resource centres to realize a more inclusive society.

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FREEDOM TO CHOOSE

Early Intervention and Inclusive Education in Lithuania

The road to full membership of society for the Visually Impaired

C.J. van Gendt-Van Evert,

J.A. Welling

Website Tactual Profile - Now in English! (Visio)

Tactual Profile is an instrument for assessing the tactual functioning of children from birth to 16 years with a severe visual impairment. The instrument is based on practical experience tested against recent literature and developments in the field of touch.

The Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development, ZonMw, has given Visio's Tactual Profile observation instrument its Pearl award. The organisation selected the instrument for its above-average results and its obvious potential for innovation and improvement in practice. This award made it possible for Royal Visio, the National Foundation for Blind and Visually Impaired to translate the content of the website in English.

The Dutch version has been expanded by adding an interactive forum section and a monitoring system for users. Collecting data in the system will help to clarify the children's development. These data will be available for follow-up research later.

Visit us at www.tactualprofile.org

Conference in the French speaking countries

A conference was held in Angers, over two days (November 30th and December 1st 2007), gathering together the French-speaking European Countries. The main objectives of this meeting were to enhance communication between the contact persons of the French-speaking countries (Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland and France), to inform each other about our services in supporting visually impaired children, and to make ICEVI known to the maximum number of people in our respective countries. The chosen topic of the conference was to think about the evolution of and changes in the organization of support in our countries.

The programme was organised as follows:

- 1st day: introduction by Hans Welling, a presentation from the organisation in each country, the point of view of various participants as regards the changes (associations of professionals, association of parents, institution)
- 2nd day: a presentation of new professional practices or European projects from each country

The information about this conference had been dispatched to most of the French organizations working in our field and to the services in the northwest part of France and Paris area. The contact persons were given the task of disseminating the information in their own country. Approximately 40 people took part in this meeting. In addition to the participants from Belgium, Luxembourg and Switzerland, professionals from French institutes (Nantes, Nancy, Yseure, Toulouse, Illzach, Villeurbanne, Ambarès, Plénée Jugond) were

present in Angers. The main professional organizations in France: GPEAA (Group of teachers and educators), ALFPHV (Association of psychologists), FISAF (Federation of services and establishments) were involved in the organisation and supported the project.

These two days were rich in information and exchange. The presentations were of great quality, very well prepared and always fulfilling the formulated request. They were the source of many discussions. We also had moments of laughter (special thanks to the good mood of Isabelle Mathis and her colleagues) and we were sometimes touched by some subjects (thanks to Violaine Van Cutsem for the presentation of her team's work with MDVI children and their family). We learned a lot from each other and shared our knowledge and experiences. Each one could share his/her views and questions and put forward a message in their presentation (Frank Groben, from Luxembourg, is trying to find a French-speaking partner to take part in his Comenius project).

This time of exchange was a way to rekindle an interest in the ICEVI and to make it better known. The GPEAA carries on spreading information about ICEVI. The ALFPHV (Association of French speaking specialized Psychologists) takes part in European exchanges. The FISAF contributes to the dissemination of information about ICEVI by means of its network. Most of the participants expressed an interest in future meetings that have been announced: Budapest, Dublin. We hope that this conference will encourage French-speaking professionals to participate in these future meetings and push forward our thinking in the field of visual impairment.

Preliminary announcement Theory Meeting Practice

The European Conference on Early Intervention for families with children with Visual Impairment will be held in Budapest, Hungary 27-29 of August 2008.

The idea for this conference came about at the ICEVI congress in Chemnitz 2005 from people involved in the practice of early intervention. There is a big need for exchange of opinions, ideas and new developments in this field. The aim of the conference is to share good practice, theoretical sources, to exchange approaches and philosophies and to establish a European network for early intervention for families of children with visual impairment. Another intention is to share the methods and outcomes of a five year series of international workshops between five European countries: Hungary, the Czech Republic, Austria, Poland and the Netherlands.

The interactive 2.5 days meeting will have a few plenary sessions and many workshops in small groups either on the topic of the plenary session or analysing case studies on video that are brought by the participants.

The themes are:

1. Being a companion of the family
2. Methodology of early intervention for supporting the development of the young child

We would appreciate if each participating service prepared a poster on its situation in early intervention.

100 participants who are working with families and their children in the field of early intervention are welcome. The official language of this conference will be English and there will be no interpretation.

The website is under construction.

The first announcement and application form will be available on the website from January 2008.

The fee will be 200 Euro. ICEVI members will pay 180 euro. A limited number of supported places will be available.

Organizing Committee	
Country and Organisation	Committee member
<i>The Netherlands, Sensis</i>	Carina Poels and Esther den Hartog
<i>Czech Republic, Ass. for Early Intervention</i>	Terezie Hradilková
<i>Hungary, ELTEUniversity, Barczy Faculty</i>	Krisztina Kovács
<i>Belgium, Accent-Spermalie</i>	Eliane Bonamie

December 2007

*For additional information please contact:
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4th ICEVI Balkan Conference Istanbul – Turkiye, 22nd – 26th October 2008

Dear Colleagues,

We are pleased to announce the 4th ICEVI Balkan Conference, which will take place in Istanbul, Turkiye on October 22 - 26, 2008, under the auspices of Ms. Dilek Sabanci and organized by the Turkan Sabanci School for the Blind. The school has been founded in Istanbul, Uskudar. Istanbul is [Europe's](#) most famous and populous city and it is also the most important cultural and

financial center of the country. The city covers 25 districts of the [Istanbul province](#) and has also been nicknamed "[The City on Seven Hills](#)" because the historic [peninsula](#), the oldest part of the city, was built on seven hills. It is located on the [Bosphorus Strait](#), and encompasses the natural [harbor](#) known as the [Golden Horn](#), in the northwest of the country. It extends both on the [European](#) ([Thrace](#)) and on the [Asian](#) ([Anatolia](#)) side of the Bosphorus, and is thereby the only [metropolis](#) in the world which is situated on two [continents](#). Istanbul was also chosen as joint [European Capital of Culture](#) for [2010](#).

The conference *theme* is **Recent Approaches & Future Challenges** and the *topic* will be **The Programs & Projects regarding the Visually Impaired and Visually Impaired with Additional Disabilities**. The aim of the conference is to stimulate a critical discussion about what kind of educational opportunities or difficulties **the visually impaired and multi disabled children with visual impairment** in Balkan Countries have. We also would like to address how important the inclusive education and pre-vocational and vocational training for VI and MDVI children. As same as we discussed at the past Balkan Conference's, in Athens, Varna and Belgrade; we would like to note the importance of collaboration among the teachers, academics, specialists and the therapists who work with those children and also discuss the future perspectives and challenges.

The main goal of the conference is to explore; the basic concepts in the education of children with visual impairment and additional disabilities, how they are stated in national curriculums and what the frameworks and educational approaches are across Balkan Countries. Through keynote lectures, parallel sessions, workshops, paper and poster presentations, we hope to address basic questions about the blind and MDVI's education in Balkan Region of Europe.

We supply limited supported place for the participants with the presentation and 4 people per one country could benefit from that. All participants, including the ones who will have the supported place, will pay 60 €. We will be very happy to receive your proposals by **April 29th, 2008**. You will get the application and abstract form from the [conference website](#). If you need to ask any questions regarding to the conference, please do not hesitate to contact me via e-mail: ayyildizemine@yahoo.com.

Detailed information about the program and the other details will take place in the next announcement soon.

Sincerely,
For the organizing committee

*Ms. **Emine AYYILDIZ**, Conference Vice Chair
Betty LEOTSAKOU, BALKAN COUNTRIES REPR.*

The Education of the blind in Lithuania – 80 years. Problems and perspectives

27th of February, 1928. This date is the beginning of education for the blind in Lithuania. On this occasion, the 29th of February, 2008, the international conference "The education of the blind in Lithuania – 80 years. Problems and perspectives" took place in Kaunas district training centre for the blind and visually impaired.

The first part of this conference was **literary – musical composition The young old school**. This composition was prepared by pupils and teachers of our training centre. They told us about the beginning of education for the blind.

One of the characters in this composition was Pranas Daunys, a volunteer of the Lithuanian army, an officer; he lost his sight in the battles for independence in Lithuania. After returning home he decided to found the school for the blind in Kaunas. He analyzed a few Braille alphabets and made his own – Lithuanian - which is almost unchanged nowadays. P. Daunys said: If we have a script – we will have the pupils.

The pupils in the composition showed us that the beginning was hard but there was a lot of enthusiasm, a will to work and to teach blind children. There was a lot of music and songs, too.

During the years in the school for the blind in Kaunas, music was the relief when the only color you can see is – black. It still is now and will be the relief. So the guests of the conference had a great chance to hear how the pupils of the training centre played piano, clarinet and saxophone; how they sang the songs and recited the poems.

Figure 4.1, 4.2 Concert



After the artistic party the director of the training centre Janina Stuopeliene welcome the guests of the conference and introduced Mr. Hans Welling, the president of ICEVI – Europe.

Mr. Welling congratulated the training centre on such a great occasion and wished them a lot of success in the future education of the blind.

Arvydas Gelzinis, the ophthalmologist from the Hospital of Kaunas University of Medicine, talked about the project for the prevention of avoidable children's blindness in Lithuania. He presented this project as a part of an international program **VISION 2020** in Lithuania. The purposes of this project of prevention are: to ascertain the main diseases which are the cause of avoidable blindness in children, and to reduce the number of cases of children's avoidable blindness in Lithuania.

Ingrida Gabrielaviciūte, the psychologist from the Lithuanian Training Centre for the Blind and Visually Impaired and doctoral student in Vilnius University, department of General Psychology, presented ITVIC – Intelligence test for visually impaired children – as an alternative for WISC-III for the assessment of intellectual abilities of Lithuanian visually impaired children.

Dr. Vilma Juodzbaliene from the Lithuanian Academy of Physical Education, Department of Physiotherapy, in the report Vision. Social environment. Physical activity. presented a study the purpose of which was to evaluate the dependence of physical activity on vision impairment, social environment and health conditions. This study showed that the visual impairment level is not directly connected to physical activity but has influence on the kind of physical activity; and that blind and partially-sighted pupils who live at the education center are less physically active than their peers who return home after classes every day.

Dr. Lora Tamosiuniene and Vida Cesnuityte from Mykolas Romeris University presented the needs of blind and visually impaired people for the integration into the information (IT) society in the Baltic States. They told that as a part of a Socrates/Gruntvig 1 project, sociological interviews with blind and visually impaired people were accomplished. The purpose was to identify the needs and opportunities for eLearning for VIPs in the Baltic States. Despite several existing obstacles the Baltic eLearning market for VIPs is rapidly growing.

Dalia Zamuskaitė from Vytautas Magnus University, Centre of Foreign Languages, Lina Vitkuvienė and Artūras Lenkšas, IT teachers in Kaunas District Training Centre for the Blind and Visually Impaired, presented the report Technologies and their use for language acquisition by the blind and visually impaired. They told that the scarce existing literature concerning second language acquisition in blind students allows us to conclude that blindness itself does not obstruct the learning process of a foreign language. Quite to the contrary, their aural sensitivity and memory training seem to place them in an advantageous position with respect to their sighted counterparts provided there are adequate pedagogical and methodological conditions. Intelligent and

skilful exploitation of EFL teaching and learning materials might prove to be a very useful tool to boost students' motivation and satisfaction level.

Dr. Asta Lapėnienė from Vytautas Magnus University, teacher of fine art and technology in the Kaunas District Training Centre for Blind and Visually Impaired, and Janė Čiepienaitė, primary teacher in the Kaunas District Training Centre for the Blind and Visually Impaired, presented their research The creation of the education's process by using the interaction of view and word. The purpose of this activity was to transfer the model of the integral process of learning to practice and to check its efficacy in the situation of visual impairment.

Prof. Vytautas Gudonis from Šiauliai University, habilitated doctor, academician of the Academy of Education and Social Sciences of Russia, academician of New York Academy of Sciences, presented the report "Images of sightlessness in pictorial art as an expression of society's attitude towards the blind". He showed some pictures from his own collection of reproductions. The conclusions of his research were that realistic pieces of art reflect the blind person objectively, but that the pieces of art with idealisation of blind people could encourage in society a negative opinion about the blind and their possibilities, and that the image of the sightless person in pictorial art could help us to understand correctly the opinion of society about the blind in different times.

***Janina Stuopeliene, director,
Giedre Petkuvieni, teacher***

Figure 5.1 Prof. Vytautas Gudonis - about the image of blind in the pictorial art, Figure 5.2 The guests are listening to the reports

