

ICEVI European Newsletter

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Message from the Board

Dear members of ICEVI-Europe,

The year 2014 is quickly coming to an end. A year which was devoted to fundamental discussion and planning in regards to improving the functioning of ICEVI-Europe as well as, developing a strategic plan of action for the future. There have been quite a few activities and developments within ICEVI-Europe that have taken place since our last board meeting in Madrid, Spain.

First, we would like to inform you that the 5th European Conference on Psychology and Visual Impairment (ECPVI 2014) that was held in Bratislava – Slovakia on the 20th – 21st November 2014 has taken place with great success. More information regarding the outcome of the conference will be included in the following issue of the newsletter.

ICEVI-Europe was invited to participate at the Board Meeting of the European Coalition of Vision (ECV) on October 8-9, 2014 in Brussels in light of The World Sight Days Events. On behalf of the board of ICEVI-Europe, I would like to extend my sincerest congratulatory wishes to the ECV for agreeing to develop and promote a European vision and eye health indicator. Members of the ECV presented in the European Parliament with an information stand on preventable blindness, raising awareness of vision and eye health by screening MEP's.

In this edition of the newsletter you will also find significant information regarding the noteworthy achievements and activities of the Israeli Organization, Ofek Liyladenu, a self-assessment tool for schools and services supporting young learners with a visual impairment, the project BaGMIVI (Bridging the Gap Between Museums and Individuals with Visual Impairments), the work of the Romanian Rehabilitation Foundation "Speranta," the initiatives of ECV, as well as, an announcement of a meeting for the German and Dutch speaking contact persons of ICEVI-Europe.

Preparations are well under way for the first International Conference on Enabling Access for Persons with Visual Impairment (ICEAPVI-2015) which will be held in Athens, Greece, February 12-14, 2015 at the Eugenides Foundation. We strongly encourage all practitioners, specialists, educators and professionals in the field of visual impairment to participate at this conference giving them the opportunity to network with fellow colleagues throughout Europe and exchange knowledge and best practices and share experiences. Please make a note of these dates in your calendar and join us for this important scientific conference.

For further information regarding registration procedures and important dates, you are welcomed to visit the ICEAPVI-2015 website at <http://access.uoa.gr/ICEAPVI-2015/>.

ICEVI Europe continues its good work along with you and on your behalf. Your contribution of ideas and suggestions are welcomed and play an important role in our success.

At this point, we would like to strongly encourage all National Representatives (National Contact Persons) to submit any news, events, projects, publications, scientific work or good practices that have been undertaken in their country in the field of visual impairment to the Coordinator of the Newsletter, Mrs. Andrea Hathazi, so that it may be included in future issues of the ICEVI-Europe Newsletter, informing all members of ICEVI-Europe of any recent developments in the field of visual impairment.

Wishing you and your loved ones a very Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year filled with health, happiness and prosperity.

*On behalf of the Board of ICEVI-Europe,
Betty Leotsakou, President*



Major achievements and activities of Ofek Liyladenu Report for ICEVI Europe's Newsletter, October 2014

Advocacy: After decades of neglect Israel's Supreme Court of Justice (SCJ) ruled in favour of parents' appeal against the Ministry of Education (MoE) about the lack of accessible text books, teaching materials and matriculation examination required for thousands of blind and visually impaired pupils. On 20th December 2013 the court published a landmark ruling for children with blindness and visual impairments.



One of the immediate results of the appeal was a first time funding guaranteed in the MoE **budget** to produce school books in one of four formats accessible to the children: Braille, audio recording, digital format and enlarged print. The ruling of the SCJ instructs that the MoE is **responsible to provide accessible text books, teaching materials and matriculation examination** to children with visual impairments. Following the ruling, the MoE also published **revised regulations** on obligations of the school towards the pupil. To conclude, the SCJ noted that "*this petition raised a crucial public issue and the petitioners have a significant role in advancing the solution to the problem.*"

On another front, the Knesset – the Israeli Parliament - passed an amendment to the "Copyrights Law 2007" which allows use of published material for use by people with disabilities. This amendment opens the route for use of digital school books by children with visual impairments.

In May 2014 *Ofek Liyladenu* published a **Policy Paper on Assistive Technologies for Children with Visual Impairments**. The paper was widely distributed, and subsequently a special session of the **Knesset Education Committee** took place to discuss the issue and to instruct following steps. So did the Commission for **Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities** which is also actively involved in the matter.



In the pictures, left to right: (1) Guila Seidel, Chair of Ofek Liyladenu, MK Amram Mitzna, Chair of the Knesset Education Committee, Yael Weisz-Rind, Executive Director of Ofek Liyladenu. (2) MK Amram Mitzna, Chair of the Knesset Education Committee leads the discussion at the Knesset.

Minister of Education, Rabbi Shai Piron MK, met a group of Ofek Liyladenu's children, to hear first hand about their experiences, difficulties and successes in attending mainstream schools (see picture below).



Special Activities for Children and Families

As part of Ofek Liyladenu's on-going programs a special visit was organized for teens in the operational part of **Ben Gurion International Airport**. The visitors were thrilled to learn how such a complex system operates and had the opportunity to feel aircrafts, helicopters and enjoyed a ride on a fire-engine.

This year's **summer retreat for our families** took place in the desert resort town of Eilat on the shores of the Red Sea. The families enjoyed 4 days of adventures but most importantly each other's company, where they could share their feelings and experiences in a relaxed manner and see that they are not the only ones coping with children with blindness and visual impairments.



Work on the Horizon, our summer work program for teenagers celebrated its 13th anniversary!! This year 70 youth participated in the program which included pre-employment training and two weeks of summer employment, in cooperation with partners from the business, banking and NGOs sectors. The **successful program** receives positive feedback from youngsters, parents and employers. From the teens and their parents the overall feeling is of a **great achievement**, building of self-confidence in their abilities and development of their skills and capabilities. The work experience is perceived as a crucial experience for future employment, and even for future self-sufficiency as adults. From the employers' point of view, both on a systematic level and on the level of the specific staff working with the youngster, the experience was seen as a formative experience in employing people with disabilities and supporting a youngster with visual impairments in their journey to independence.



Ofek Liyladenu's facilitator on the training day. Two teens at work.

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BaGMIVI - Bridging the Gap Between Museums and Individuals with Visual Impairments

The proposed project BaGMIVI (Bridging the Gap Between Museums and Individuals with Visual Impairments) was approved by the Erasmus+ Programme in relation to Key Action 2. Specifically, 12 formal and 4 silent partners constitute the consortium of this project. Four of the 12 formal partners are universities (University of Thessaly-UTH, Sofia University-SU, University Babes Bolyai-UBB, and Eotvos Lorand University-ELTE), three are non-profit non-governmental organisations (i.e the International Council for Education and Rehabilitation of people with Visual Impairment-ICEVI-Europe, the Bulgarian Association for Education of Visually Impaired Children- BAOZZD, and the European Blind Union-EBU), four are museums [one archaeological (Greece), two galleries (Hungary & Bulgaria) and one ethnographic (Romania)], and one is an IT Company. The silent partners are special schools for the blind and the contact persons of the Universities are all experts in the education and rehabilitation of the blind and visually impaired.

The need for collaboration and interagency partnerships is the basis of the present project, which aims to bridge the gap between museums and individuals with visual impairments. Hence, the proposed project aims to address the following objectives:

- To enable museum members to become aware and update their knowledge regarding the disabling barriers that impede the access of visitors with visual impairments to museums and the techniques that can enhance the access and inclusion of individuals with visual impairments to the museums.

- To create learning, cultural and social opportunities for individuals with visual impairments and enable them to acquire self-advocacy skills regarding their rights as museum visitors and the requirements of an inclusive museum.
- To promote the collaboration between museums, schools and associations of individuals with visual impairments.
- To point out the best practices and guidelines for the development of an accessible and inclusive museum for visitors with visual impairments.

The main activities included in BaGMIVI concern the management, assurance and evaluation activities, the development of a needs assessment study, of a syllabus and of the BaGMVI portal, the holding of Joint Staff Training Events for museum members and the development of accessible museum content/programmes, the organization of the museums visits and vice versa and the development of a best practice guide and policy guidelines and recommendations and the dissemination activities.

The expected tangible results of the BaGMIVI include the needs assessment study, the syllabus, the videos from the training and videos from the development of differentiated museum content, the best practice guide and policy guidelines and recommendations.

*Vassilis Argyropoulos, Ph.D.
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The Rehabilitation Foundation "Speranța" – a chance for children with special needs

Since the beginning of our activity, all of our initiatives represented pioneering approaches for inclusive education. The community services we established for the children with disabilities and their families are unique initiatives that became models of good practice and are triggering attitude changes at school and community level.

Introduction



The Rehabilitation Foundation "Speranta" is a Romanian NGO aiming to provide direct support for children with disabilities and their families.

Ever since our founding in 1992, we are offering free of charge, multidisciplinary therapies for children with **autism, Down syndrome, Asperger, neuromotor deficiency, cochlear implant, mental retardation** and so on. Since 2007, we are elaborating and promoting inclusive education

guidelines, both on a local and national level. The Foundation was internationally acknowledged in the following two monitoring reports presented at Brussels:

- 2002 country report - "*Human Rights for People with Intellectual Disabilities*", document of Inclusion Europe;
- 2005 monitoring report - raport de monitorizare 2005, "*Rights to Education and Employment of People with Intellectual Disabilities*" published by Open Society Institute.

Psychologist:

- psychological evaluation and diagnosis services for children and teenagers, using standard cases and tests, validated and calibrated on the Romanian population – WISC IV, Nepsy, KID SCID, BASC 2, ASEBA and so on;
- specific intervention for developing cognitive, emotional and social competences, personal autonomy, personality and the detection and correction of behavioral issues;
- information and parent counseling;
- information and counseling for teachers.



Speech Therapist:

- detection and correction of speech disorders (pronouncing, voice, writing and reading, developmental disorders);
- speech intervention for children with: hypoacusis, prosthesis and cochlear implant.

Physiotherapist:

- prevention, diagnosis and treatment for the locomotor apparatus diseases and disorders.



Art-therapy and occupational therapy:

- the use of the art process for improving emotional conditions and communication and relational skills, enhance self-esteem and overcome traumatic events for children with uncharacteristic developmental delay and so on.
- occupational therapy, to foster and enhance fine motor skills.

The activities are run by a multidisciplinary team consisting of 3 therapists: speech therapist, psychologist, social worker – a team specialized in the rehabilitation and recovery of children, in order to achieve their maximum development potential, with the final goal of social and educational inclusion. All the activities are held in a one-to-one setting (therapist – child) or in small group settings.

In 2014, we have been strengthening our efforts on two major action lines, aiming:

1. to develop replicable models of good practice in the field of inclusive education and early intervention
2. to concentrate our efforts on promoting systemic change in the provision of early intervention and inclusive education, both locally and nationally.

Together with our partners, the Public Policies Institute (IPP) and "Save the Children" organization, two of the strongest Romanian organizations in the field, we have been working to put these efforts into practice, by means of implementing the following new projects:

1. "Inclusive education - a right of the disabled child",

run in partnership with the Public Policies Institute in Bucharest and financed through the 2009 – 2014 EEA grants and the NGO Fund in Romania.

Statistics show that 43.94% of children with disabilities in Romania are not included in mainstream education. The project "Inclusive education - a right of the disabled child" aims to evaluate the current level of inclusion of children with disabilities in the educational system; to identify the barriers concerning the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 24; to set up and to operate inclusive models of good practice through the Diversity Class and to generate changes in attitudes and perception towards children with disabilities, by means of capitalizing on the expertise of the Rehabilitation Foundation "Speranta" and the Public Policies Institute.

Based on the directions given by the 24th Article of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, concerning equal access to education, the Rehabilitation Foundation "Speranta", together with its partner, the Public Policies Institute, are targeting the following goals, through this project:

- to assess the current stage of educational inclusion of children with disabilities into the education system (both special education and mainstream education) and to identify the barriers concerning the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 24, concerning equal access to education;
- to get involved in developing an inclusive educational system for disabled children, through setting up and piloting 10 "Diversity Class" services in public schools in 4 regions of Romania;
- to raise awareness on the current barriers restricting access to inclusive education for disabled children in Romania

Beneficiaries:

Direct beneficiaries:

- children with disabilities in 10 Romanian counties, who are currently enrolled in mainstream education or not enrolled at all (at least 150 children);
- the teachers, who will benefit from special training in the educational inclusion of disabled children (30 teachers);
- representatives of the relevant authorities and public institutions (such as the Ministry of Education and the County School Inspectorates), who will benefit from a complex diagnosis on the current state of educational inclusion of disabled children in Romania, as well as from practical solutions to improve disabled children and youth's access to education.

Indirect beneficiaries:

- all the children with disabilities in Romania who are attending, or not, a form of education; their parents/families who will be better trained and supported to improve the quality of life of their children; the teachers'

community, who will become more tolerant and open to accepting disabled children.

We shall expect the following results:

- a monitoring report to include barriers and legal gaps restricting the implementation of the 24th Article of the Convention, mirrored to the results of models of good practice
- setting up and piloting 10 "Diversity Class" services in public schools in 4 regions of Romania;
- lobbying decision making agents to accord with legal aspects in this field, as well as putting into effect the 24th Article of the Convention.

2. "A good start"

– a project run in partnership with "Save the Children" organization and financed through the 2009 – 2014 EEA grants and the NGO Fund in Romania.

Considering the current reality regarding early intervention in Romania, that is characterized by almost a total lack of any programs that address the infant at risk, this project is proposing to offer a complex early intervention program for infants and small children age 0 – 4, with disabilities or who are at risk of developmental delay or disability, and their families, having as the final goal their social and educational inclusion.

It is well known and generally accepted that all children are growing up and developing very fast in their first years of life. The timeframe of maximum plasticity of the central nervous system is between 0 and 3 years old. Even if every child is unique, having his own developmental pace, it is necessary to place an important focus on the role of early intervention in the critical developmental stages, given the case that the child is already presenting a risk of developmental delay in cognitive, emotional, motor, social or other areas. That is exactly why some children need an extra help through this kind of complex service called early intervention.

Early intervention stands for a support system that helps children with disabilities or who are at risk of developmental delay or disability, and their families. The program includes developing a model of family interaction to promote a better health condition for the child, optimizing the competences, preventing functional disorders, minimizing developmental delays and promoting positive adjustment for parents and families (Shonkoff, Meisels 2010; Guralnick, 2001).

Considering the above, the Rehabilitation Foundation "Speranta", together with its partner, intend to set up a new innovative Early Intervention Center in Timișoara, to prevent and reduce the risk of social and educational exclusion for children with disabilities or who are at risk of developmental delay or disability, and their families. Together with "Save the Children" organization, we intend to extend and replicate our model of early intervention, so that it will become replicable by any organization in Romania.

The goal of the project:

to prevent and reduce the risk of social and educational exclusion for children with disabilities or who are at risk of developmental delay or disability, and their families, through setting up an innovative early intervention program in Timișoara.

Objectives

O1:

To increase the access to multidisciplinary screening, intervention and monitoring services for 150 children, age 0 – 4, with disabilities or who are at risk of developmental delay or disability, through setting up an innovative early intervention program in Timișoara

O2:

To increase the parental competences of 200 parents of children who are included in the project, through providing individual counselling and thematic workshops

O3:

To promote the early intervention multidisciplinary services within the community, as a fundamental support system for children at risk and their families.

Beneficiaries

- 150 children age 0 to 4, from Timisoara and rural area, known as having a disability or an increased risk of a developmental delay or disability
- 200 parents / legal representatives of these children

Results

- 1 accredited early intervention center
- 150 children benefitting from early intervention
- 200 parents who benefitted from information and counseling services
- 4 collaboration protocols with relevant public authorities and decision makers
- 4000 hours of volunteering activity

Conclusions

The Rehabilitation Foundation "Speranta" is an organization with over 22 years of experience in the social field, supporting the rights of children with special needs.

Through its work, the Foundation brought public attention onto a very sensitive and little known issue which, if overlooked, can significantly affect the quality of life for these children and their families. Over time, we became involved locally in offering support services directly addressed to children with special needs, their parents and teachers.

In the last few years, we have extended nationwide through developing proper educational policies, such as the *Methodology for setting up, organizing and running rehabilitation and education support centers for children and youths (CASE)*, run in partnership with the Romanian Ministry of Education and the representatives of 24 County School Inspectorates.

Through all our work, we have succeeded in positioning our organization at the top of the list, among the major Romanian NGOs aiming to support disabled persons and in being renowned as a support organization and a valuable resource in effectively putting into practice the social and education inclusion of disabled children.



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Pharos Visual Impairment: A self-assessment tool for schools and services supporting young learners with a visual impairment.

Building upon a Comenius funded pan-European research project and based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and the World Health Organisation's Classification of Functioning (ICF), Robert Jones and Iain Prain have created a self-evaluation model for those working in services for young learners with a visual impairment. The model was originally aimed exclusively at schools for young learners with a visual impairment, but following requests from colleagues in Europe and Scandinavia, a version has now been produced for services providing support for learners with a visual impairment in a wide range of non-specialist educational placements.

A major part of the initial concept in the development of Pharos Visual Impairment, had been to develop partnerships and cooperation between schools servicing the needs of young learners with a visual impairment. This may now be a lesser goal and the self-evaluation tools produced for the project, can be used as a stand-alone service development tool. However they are used, the resources are freely available on the Pharos Visual Impairment website.

For details, visit <http://www.pharos-schools.org/>

Press release: European coalition for vision 09/10/2014

On the occasion of World Sight Day, the European Coalition for Vision (ECV) set an ambitious objective to leverage vision and eye health at European level. World Sight Day is a global event that focuses on bringing attention on blindness and vision impairment. It is observed worldwide on the second Thursday of October each year.



Meeting on 8 th October 2014 in Brussels, members of the European Coalition for Vision agreed to develop and promote a European vision and eye health indicator. Today, more than 80 European Core Health Indicators exist, but none of the current health indicators fully addresses the eye health issue. Health indicators are sets of data (tables, graphs, maps) on health status, determinants and care in EU Member States and play an important role in supporting policy development.

Mr Peter Ackland, Chair of the ECV stated: 'ECV's role is to alert European public authorities on the issue of vision and eye health. ECV is therefore asking for the creation and implementation of an EU-wide recognized eye health

indicator – in order to collect detailed and harmonized data and consequently better shape European public policy in that respect’.

In parallel, EFAB (European Forum Against Blindness), EGS (European Glaucoma Society), EGDF (European Guide Dog Federation) and ECV presented in the European Parliament with an information stand on preventable blindness. Numerous Members of European Parliament had the opportunity to have a digital retina photograph taken by members of ECOO (European Council of Optometry and Optics) and to learn more about vision and eye health. On 7th October, Honorable Members of European Parliament Marian Harkin, Robert Howitt and Pilar Ayuso also hosted a dinner-debate on “Vision for Europe: addressing the challenge of avoidable blindness” at the European Parliament.

Representing professional bodies, patient groups, European and national health, and disability NGOs as well as trade associations, the ECV aims at raising the profile of eye health and vision, to prevent avoidable visual impairment and secure an equal and inclusive society for those with low vision and irreversible blindness in Europe.

More information on ECV can be found: www.ecvision.eu

Manifesto: www.ecvision.eu/manifesto/

*For further information on the European Coalition for Vision, please contact:
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Press release: European coalition for vision 04/12/2014

European Coalition for Vision (ECV) regrets the lack of data on vision impairment in Europe and calls for more harmonized data collected at EU level to provide better policy advice to decision-makers. Vision is a vital part of the health dimension that is too often neglected. ECV’s objective is promote a EU eye health indicator that would address this issue.



European Coalition for Vision welcomes the report “Health at a glance: Europe 2014” presented on 3rd December 2014 by Commissioner for Health and Food Safety Vytenis Andriukaitis. The report, based mainly on the European Core Health Indicators (ECHI), highlights key trends in health, providing a state of play of Europe’s health.

Chair of ECV, Mr. Peter Ackland, stated: “This report is essential as it provides a good overview of the state of health in the member states. We call on the Commission and Member States to develop and promote a EU eye health indicator, that would complement the data on health to include the field of vision – that would help stimulate further public policy actions in the eye health domain”.

Representing professional bodies, patient groups, European and national health, and disability NGOs as well as trade associations representing suppliers, the ECV aims at raising the profile of eye health and vision to reduce the unacceptably high levels of avoidable vision impairment and blindness, and to secure an equal and inclusive society for those with low vision and irreversible blindness in Europe.

*More information on ECV can be found: www.ecvision.eu
Manifesto: www.ecvision.eu/manifesto/*

*For further information on the European Coalition for Vision, please contact:
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Announcement: Planned meeting of German and Dutch speaking contact persons

The German and Dutch speaking contact persons of ICEVI are planning another meeting in Amsterdam from Dec. 3rd till 4th.

It will give us the chance to exchange information and discuss collaboration within our countries.

The attendants invited to this meeting are: Dieter Feser and Dr. Elke Wagner from Germany, Frank Groben from Luxemburg, Carolin Poels from The Netherlands, Elisabeth Gitzl from South Tirol (Italy), Gerti Jaritz from Austria, Christian Niederhauser from Switzerland, and Eliane Bonamie from Belgium

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