

**ICEVI European Newsletter**

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**Content:**

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- The President's Message
- A note from the Host Committee of the ICEVI Europe Conference 2021 in Jerusalem
- Announcement: 10th European Conference and Elections
- COVID 19 REPORT: IMPACT AND RESPONSES IN ICEVI EUROPE – UPDATE
- PLoCC-VI: Prospective Longitudinal Cohort Study Children with Vision impairments
- The Development of Tactile Images for Blind Individuals
- Let's explore new adventures with animals in the new app called the EDA PLAY TOM!
- Announcement: Notice of Spam/Scam Emails

## The President's Message

Dear Members and Non-members of ICEVI-Europe,

Sometimes it looks like the world is standing still. Almost every individual and every organization is experiencing the consequences of the pandemic we are living through on a daily basis. Remote contacts, non-essential shops & businesses closed, cultural and sporting activities postponed, no face-to-face meetings or conferences, working from home and being prohibited from leaving the house in the evening, due to nationwide curfews and lockdowns being imposed by governments across Europe. In addition, some also face loss of work or even illness or loss of loved ones.

The impacts of Covid-19 are profound, especially for people with a visual impairment, including those with an additional disability and for the service providers that strive to support them.

We too, at ICEVI-Europe, have not escaped it. Conferences of Professional Interest Groups were cancelled. We were looking forward to the festive celebration of our 10th European Conference which has also been postponed.

Nevertheless, I have always been struck by the resilience of people, organisations and society as a whole.

It doesn't take significant effort to create a personalised day's development program by following virtual conferences or webinars that are currently being held across a wide range of areas relevant to our area of focus including:

- The Global Campaign for Education
- Education, Girl, Disability – an equation to solve, Handicap International
- Sustainable Developments Goals
- The Climate Change Education initiative of ICEVI-World
- Yarn Bombing 2021. Deafblind International
- Diversity and Education of the National Federation
- The Inclusive Education Task group of IDDC

This is just a random selection of what is on offer.

As the pandemic gradually decreases, all the energy and creativity that is visible everywhere can focus on adapting to the 'new normal'. For the ICEVI-Europe Board this means exploring the possibility of reorganising the 10th European Conference and engaging in initial discussions with regards to planning the conference as soon as possible.

It is always important to meet colleagues from various European countries and to share knowledge and expertise. Equally important are the conferences of Professional Interest Groups and Regional Conferences.

These will be the most important items on the board's agenda in the upcoming time.

But as I have said before, ICEVI-Europe can only do something in cooperation with its members and member organisations. The board is counting on your support and contribution too, in order to revitalize its program of events and successfully organize workshops and conferences aimed at professional exchange of the latest developments in the education and rehabilitation of the visually impaired and networking opportunities.

The board wishes you all a good time with new energy and creativity.

On behalf of the Board of ICEVI-Europe,

**Hans Welling**  
**President**



## **A note from the Host Committee of the ICEVI Europe Conference 2021 in Jerusalem**

About two years ago we at Aleh – the Israeli Association for the advancement of blind and dyslexic students – were honored to receive an offer by ICEVI European Board to hold the quadrennial conference of ICEVI Europe in Jerusalem in August 2021. We seized this offer with welcoming hands because we thought it would be a onetime opportunity to gather here in Israel the leading professionals dealing with blind and partially sighted persons in Europe, to share knowledge and experience, to promote engagement of ICEVI members and interaction among all participants of the events, and to meet each other under the hospices of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

We started to work intensively on the conference, hand in hand with the Board of ICEVI Europe, and as the conference date was decided on, we prepared, among many other things, a draft of detailed schedule and keynote speakers to be invited to the conference. We dedicated lots of time and resources (including substantial expenses) with great anticipation that the conference will be realized successfully.

Our third meeting with the board of ICVI Europe was held in Paris on February 2020, when we all started to learn about a new virus that was starting to spread all over the world. All our preparation work was halted thereafter.

2020 was a challenging year as the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically altered many facets of our lives. We faced countless unforeseen obstacles along the way. One of the great challenges we faced concerned the ability to continue serving our customers and those in need of help and we had to adjust our mode of operation dramatically. Another new challenge we faced and still are facing to this day is how to fund our activities at the same level that is expected from us, because our sources of income have been substantially reduced. The unstable political situation in Israel made it almost impossible to rely on Governmental contribution, and the financial crises due to the Pandemic made it more difficult to recruit donors from the private sector.

Moreover, there is still great uncertainty about the regulations to be applied in the future due to the pandemic, especially with regard to the possibilities of holding international conferences in the country and allowing non-citizens to attend it.

In those circumstances, and after deep thoughts, we reached the conclusion that we cannot hold the much-anticipated conference in Jerusalem. This decision was concluded with great sorrow and was not easy to make, because, as said above, we saw the conference as a pivotal event in the coming year and the fact that it will not be held in Israel is very sad for us.

However, we cannot turn back the clock. We need to prepare for a new, post-pandemic world, prepare to rebuild better and stronger, prepare for the next challenge as we continue to work together to adapt and move forward.

The conference would have afforded us the opportunity for dialogue concerning how we can work together to address the new and emerging challenges facing blind and partially sighted people. We are sure that we all will find other ways to share our experiences, our expertise, and our resources to make a difference in the lives of blind and partially sighted women, men and children everywhere to ensure no one is left behind.

We hope that the Board of ICEVI Europe will find an alternative venue for the conference and we will do our best to help it to organize the conference in due course. Needless to say, we will be more than happy to share our preparation work towards the conference with the new organizer of the conference.

Thank you for your understanding, and I wish you all a happy and healthy 2021!

Tomer Rossner

Chair of the Host Committee

## **Announcement: 10th European Conference and Elections**

The delay to our 10<sup>th</sup> ICEVI-Europe Conference has consequences for the General Assembly of our association. The general Assembly is normally an integral part of our quadrennial European Conferences.

Among the key agenda items at the General Assembly is the elections of the board members. During recent preparatory discussions, the current board members indicated that they would be available for re-election.

However, this does not apply to the President of the Board. He has expressed a desire to resign as President by the end of 2021, in line with the regular schedule. Nevertheless, he will, in accordance with the articles of association governing ICEVI-Europe, remain a board member as an Immediate Past President.

There is therefore a vacancy for the position of President and ICEVI-Europe is looking for suitable candidates to undertake this interesting position for a term of four years, beginning on January 1, 2022.

### **Who can be the new President?**

The President is ideally someone who has:

- International experience concerning rehabilitation and education of people with visual impairment
- Managerial experience
- Availability to work on ICEVI matters for at least one day a week
- Ability and willingness to travel
- A working knowledge of English
- Access to financial support to do his/her work
- Skills for driving and implementing the mission of ICEVI-Europe

ICEVI - Europe has a good secretariat who has served many years as the Executive Assistant to the President of ICEVI-Europe.

The current President is happy to provide further information to interested persons. A candidate interested to become considered for the function of the position of President, should contact Hans Welling using the following contact details.

Hans Welling

Email: [Wellingja@yahoo.com](mailto:Wellingja@yahoo.com)

Mobile: 0031652679821

Skype: J.A.Welling

## **COVID 19 REPORT: IMPACT AND RESPONSES IN ICEVI EUROPE – UPDATE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

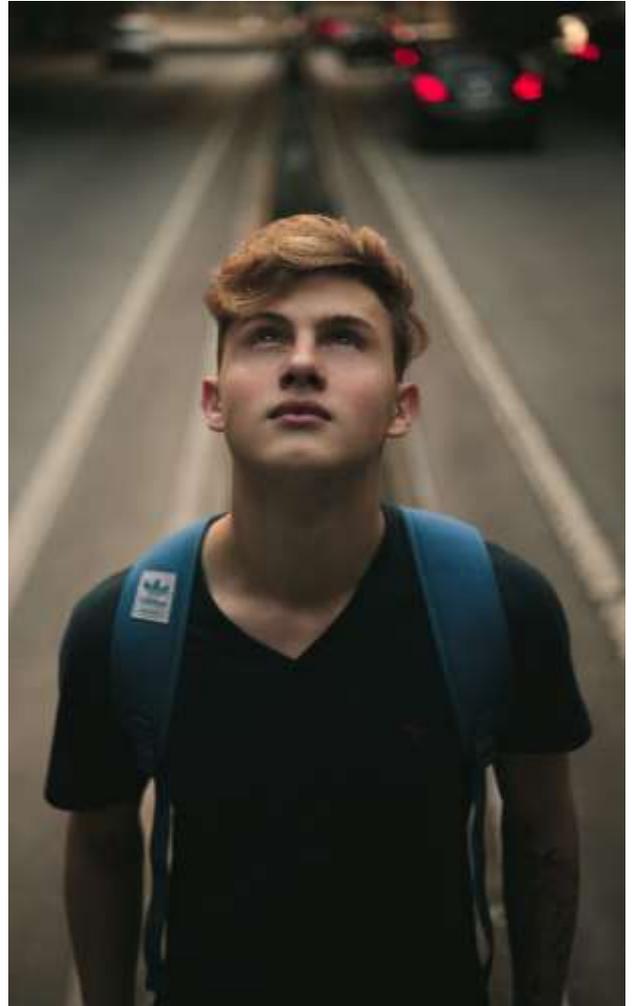
The pandemic has had impacted severely on people with visual impairment across Europe and on the services that seek to support them. The region has been particularly hard hit over the past year and many countries are facing a second or third lockdown as their governments struggle to contain the virus and its new variants.

Despite the success of the immunisation programmes, services concerned with the education, welfare and inclusion of the people with visual impairment continue to face unprecedented challenges that will continue into the months ahead. In our last newsletter we explored the responses to the first wave of the pandemic through a case study focussed on Israel. In this newsletter we will explore the measures taken in ICEVI regions across Europe to combat the effects of the virus on services for people with visual impairment. Our report documents these measures in order to identify best practices in the field. Our thanks to all the contributors for their valuable inputs.

## **PLoCC-VI: Prospective Longitudinal Cohort Study Children with Vision impairments**

### **International consultation**

Several studies showed that children with vision impairments (VI) show difficulties in their development compared to sighted children. For example, children with may have difficulties with language or motor skills compared to sighted children. However, the group of children with VI is highly heterogeneous. Various factors like nature and severity of the vision impairment, the degree of support from the environment and possibilities for compensation may ensure that one child develops better than another. These individual differences get lost with comparative studies because they focus on group averages instead of individual differences within the group. Therefore, we want to set up a new study: Prospective Longitudinal Cohort Study Children with Vision Impairments. In order to formulate relevant research questions we performed an international consultation among professionals working with children with VI.



### **What did we do?**

We set up a questionnaire that is based the framework the family of Participation Related Constructs (fPRC, Imms et al., 2017). This framework assumes that various factors influence and are influenced by participation. We chose for this framework because participation is an important goal in rehabilitation. We asked professionals working with children with vision impairments to fill in the questionnaire. These answers were compared to the fPRC.

### **Who participated?**

25 participants filled in the full questionnaire. All these participants are professionals, working with children and adults with VI. The participants had various backgrounds, like in research, teaching, pedagogics or a medical

background. In addition, participants worked all over the world: Germany, USA, UK, Netherlands, Spain, Australia, New Zealand, and Belgium.

### **What are the results?**

All the answers of the participants were coded. Through several rounds of coding, we came to 37 different topics regarding the development of children with VI. Most topics that the participants mentioned were related to the environment (60,67%) and activity competences (37,47%). This means that participants think that the environment of children with VI, for example what parents do, and skills and competences, for example social skills, are important in the development of children with vision impairments. To a lesser extent topics were related to sense of self (4,12%) and preferences (0,75%). Besides, professionals mentioned some topics that were not related to the fPRC, like 'good support for parents'. A great part of the topics that did not fit with the fPRC concerned topics related to a certain disorder or subgroup of children with visual impairment. A graphical representation of the results can be found on the last page.

### **Family of Participation Related Constructs (fPRC)**

According to the framework fPRC, several factors are related to participation. In the current study, we focus on the following factors within and outside the individual with vision impairments:

*Participation:* Consisting of Attendance and Involvement

*Activity competences:* Ability and capacity to perform a certain task. For example, cognitive or motor skills.

*Sense of self:* Refers to how the person perceives and values himself. For example, self-esteem.

*Preferences:* The interests or activities that are meaningful for or valued by the individual. For example, making choices.

*Environment:* the external, broader social and physical structures in which one lives. For example, the family.

*Context:* the personal perspective of the individual. For example: how someone experiences, perceives and values something.

### **What can we use?**

The international consultation pointed us several topics somewhat neglected until now but interesting to explore in future research on participation. First, the role of parents. How do parents support their children with VI and how they can they be supported. Second, study social skills and interactions of children with VI. Third, investigate how professionals can promote social interaction, and true involvement next to enhance attendance of children and youngsters with VI.

### **What is important for practice?**

In line with fPRC, the answers of professionals emphasized the focus in rehabilitation should not only be on competences and improving skills, but also

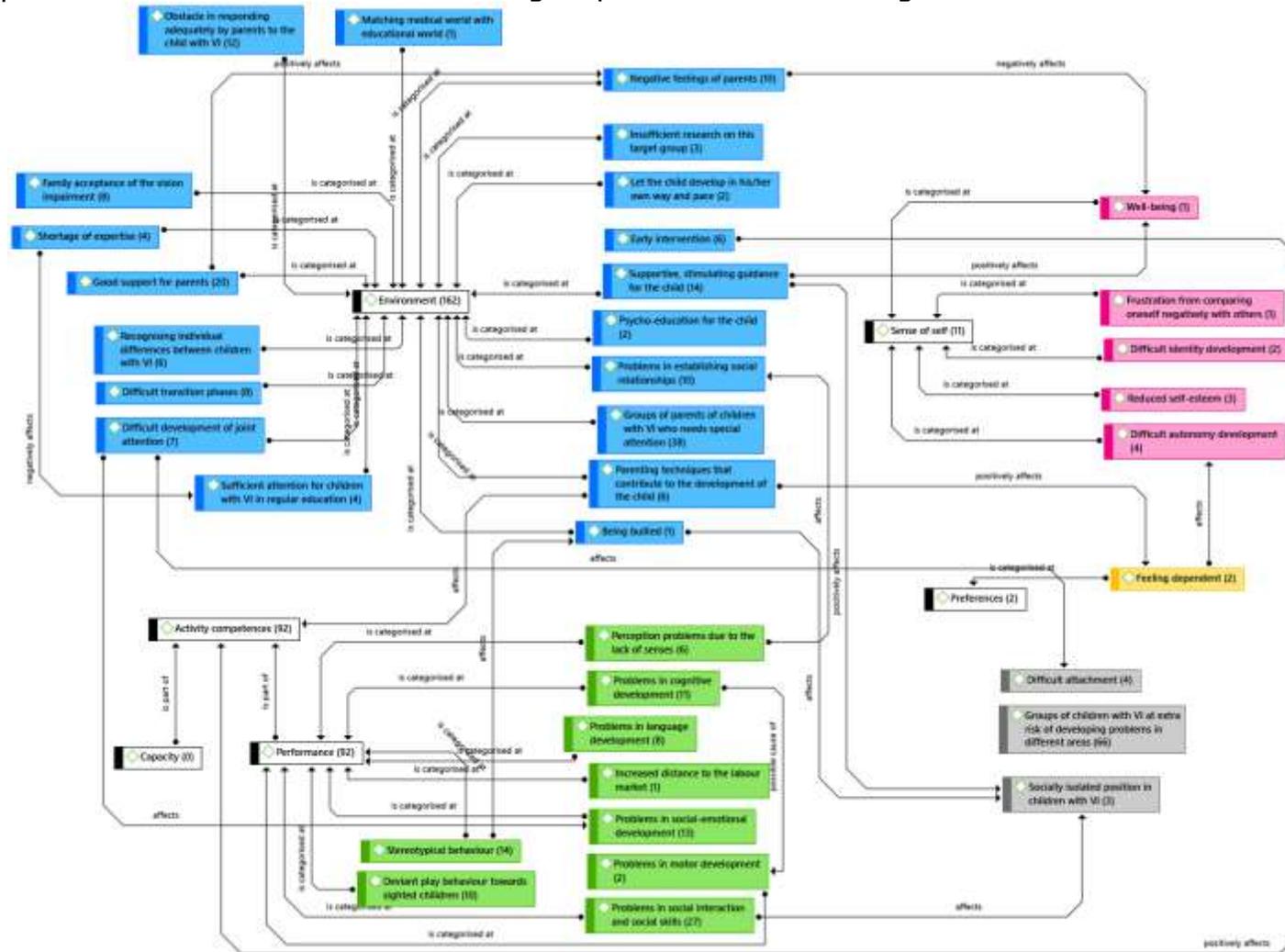
on actors in the environment of children with VI, such as parents. It is valuable to give parents adequate support in parenting their children with vision impairments. Besides, it is also important for professionals to focus on teaching social skills.

**Researchers:** Carlijn Veldhorst MSc,  
Nadine Peters-Rit BSc, Dr. Mathijs  
Vervloed

**Contact:** [carlijn.veldhorst@ru.nl](mailto:carlijn.veldhorst@ru.nl)



**Network:** Topics that deserve attention according to professionals working with children with VI



## **The Development of Tactile Images for Blind Individuals**

**by Dan Patzelt**

Can a smartphone become a pedagogical tool, the teacher's helper in a class that includes blind or visually impaired students?

Theoretically people should have equal access to a full education; but in reality, things are far from equal and accessible for all. Education has been and will always be the key to achieve equality and a real perspective on history, life and one's environment. When talking about young children's education, the primary focus must be the development of their imagination. To be able to use their imagination, which will help their self-development, they need to understand the world around them.

For this purpose, from an early age, children are told different stories with pictures and illustrations. This not only helps their self-development through imagination but also develops their senses and their spatial orientation.

For many people, the ability to assimilate and process illustrated information is a given. For the blind or the visually impaired, it's quite the opposite. Blind or visually impaired people require tactile drawings or 3D objects that are simultaneously audio described.

Let's imagine a class of only blind or visually impaired children. They are given tactile drawings, but for them to correctly represent it in their minds, the teacher would have to go from student to student and repeat the description and exploration process over again. This is time-consuming and unproductive for all the parties involved. Even if there is just one blind or visually impaired student in a class, the teacher must describe the image separately to this student. These disparities create many obstacles for the inclusion of blind people in everyday life and lead to marginalization.

Many blind or visually impaired children stay in boarding schools for their education. In most cases, this may result in an emotionally traumatizing experience which does not benefit them in the long run. A special school may mean 12 years at a boarding school, away from the family's warmth, following institutional rules, and where independence is not a priority. The existing educational methods consume considerable resources in both in financial and

human terms. The lack of resources can make children unable to adapt to society's requirements and expectations.

Nowadays, artificial intelligence (AI) is used more and more in the learning process across the world. Taking this into consideration, and researching the needs of blind and visually impaired people by interviewing teachers, experts, and authorities, the Association for Urban Development, a Romanian NGO, created in 2013 the concept of individual study with the help of a smartphone. The project aims to redesign the traditional methods of teaching blind and visually impaired children using modern software solutions (integrating AI). The new way of the independent study involves a virtual mobile assistant that will generate shapes, proportions, spatial concepts in the minds of blind people by delivering tactile drawings which are also audio self-described.

TactileImages.org is an e-learning platform (MVP stage), with more than 800 tactile drawings available.

The innovation implemented by this concept of learning through audio self-described tactile drawings is called 'Hand Gesture Recognition for Human-Computer Interaction'. It enables the adaptation of any existing raised learning materials i.e. tables with tactile maps, bas-reliefs and tactile graphics sheets.

Special education is an area that has faced close to zero innovation and a severe lack of funding - but not anymore. The Tactile Images e-learning platform brings you an innovative mobile virtual assistant which will be continuously improved using Artificial Intelligence. The app will analyze and report to the teacher the child's learning progress. It's a solution that brings innovation and efficiency to special education, whether it's through face to face learning (eg in public/private schools) or remote learning (in special situations like pandemic, homeschooling).

The virtual assistant will significantly improve learning efficiency for blind children. A consequence of this will be a more inclusive society where people blind and visually impaired can contribute their skills and abilities using this innovative technique - audio self-described drawings.

Tactile Images' long-term aim is to make the e-learning platform and mobile virtual assistant available to all European learning institutions as a pedagogical tool. It works in 8 languages: English, Spanish, French, German, Italian, Finnish, Turkish, and Romanian.

With the Romanian Orange Foundation's support, we have added a drawing module that allows even non-professional designers to create graphics. The drag and drop function enables users to create scaled drawings to which they can add descriptions adapted to the child's level of understanding. Moreover, we are currently developing our proprietary hardware, improving the embossing techniques with an innovative PVA glue printer, Tactile Printer One, which reduces printing costs 20 times.

Our vision would be that Tactile Images became a real game-changer in the field of social inclusion and a tool for self-improvement for children and even adults who are blind or visually impaired.

**Dan Patzelt**

The Urban Development Association

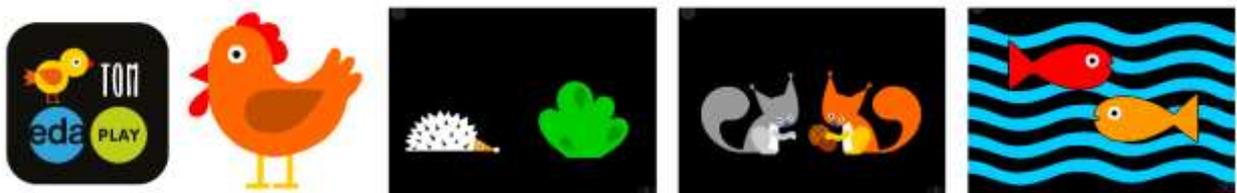
Bucharest Romania

[www.procivic.ro/en/home/](http://www.procivic.ro/en/home/)

## Let's explore new adventures with animals in the new app called the EDA PLAY TOM!

By Markéta Skalická, Ivana Bajgarová, EDA cz, z. ú.

Low vision specialists and experts in the field of early intervention from the EDA cz, z. ú., early intervention center in Prague (in the Czech Republic) have developed a new interactive game for children with CVI, a game called EDA PLAY TOM. In this new app, children explore adventures with the animals on the farm and in the forest. Touch-responsive tasks, bold colours, black background, all the features of the game are tailor-made for children with visual and fine motor skills impairments.

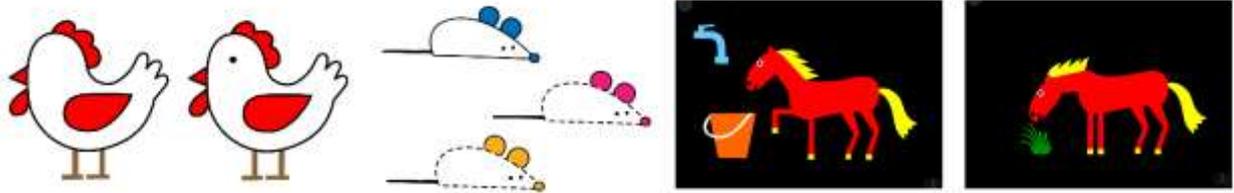


The eye has to be provoked and challenged. Children are motivated to touch the screen and something interesting happens. They can feed a sheep, groom a horse, play with a cat or they discover a hedgehog in the forest, meet a bird and other animals. The app also includes animals that children may know from another game called the EDA PLAY TOBY. Both of the games, the EDA PLAY TOBY and the EDA PLAY TOM are available for free and are designed for both iPad devices and Android tablets.

All images in the EDA PLAY TOM are spaced far enough apart so that the child with CVI is able to perceive both individual pictures and also perceive the whole scene of the task. The EDA PLAY TOM app is focused on the development of visual perception and visual attention. Interesting sounds together with attractive on-screen animation captures the attention of the child. The child is motivated to observe the movements of the animals and how the animals change and interact with the child's touch on the display. In the EDA PLAY TOM app children practise the processing, saving, and recall of visual perception experiences. In a playful way, we help children with CVI develop their visual skills and challenge their eye-hand coordination.

Our non-profit organization EDA provides early intervention services to families of children with visual and multiple impairments in the Czech Republic. Our team has over 30 years of experience in the field of early intervention, visual stimulation, and finding ways to motivate children with multiple impairments. In the new game, we are trying to bring joy and adventures with simple-

shaped but attractive animals worldwide. Visit [www.edaplay.com/eda-play-tom](http://www.edaplay.com/eda-play-tom) and find out more about the EDA PLAY TOM app.



The EDA PLAY TO app is suitable both for children with visual impairment and also for children with severe fine and gross motor skills impairments. Children can touch, tap or just slap on the display of an iPad or Android tablet and they are rewarded with an interesting sound and animation of an animal.

You can support the child's skills development both with new technologies and iPad and Android tablet devices and with paper worksheets. The worksheets are available on [www.edaplay.com/activities](http://www.edaplay.com/activities) for free download.

## **Announcement: Notice of Spam/Scam Emails**

It has been brought to the attention of the ICEVI-Europe President, Hans Welling, that for an extended period of time, Spam/Scam emails are continuing to be sent out to certain ICEVI-Europe board members, national representatives and possibly also members/non-members, despite the measures taken to resolve the situation. At first glance, it may appear as if they are from Hans Welling (see examples below), however, they are sent from various, false email addresses that do not belong to Hans Welling.

The spam/scam emails are sent with the intention of requesting the recipient to send payment information and funds as urgent support to the ICEVI-Europe President & board in relation to non-existent ICEVI-Europe events. Please take note of these scam emails and delete them. Do not answer to these emails, give your bank account information, or transfer the funds requested.

Some person(s) with bad intentions and absolutely no connection with ICEVI-Europe has purposefully written & disseminated emails to ICEVI-Europe colleagues with the goal of obtaining bank account information and money.

If you are in doubt about the validity of the email that you may have received, please contact Hans Welling for confirmation at his official email address, [wellingja@yahoo.com](mailto:wellingja@yahoo.com)

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Hans Welling <[hanswelling@visio.org](mailto:hanswelling@visio.org)>

To: <email recipient>

Mon, Mar 8, 2020 at 10:01 AM

Hi,

Hope you are safe and in good health?

I need your support with an urgent transfer payment matter.

Look forward to your reply for more details.

Best wishes,

Hans

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Hans Welling <[presidentinbox107@gmail.com](mailto:presidentinbox107@gmail.com)>

To: <email recipient>

Wed, Jan 8, 2020 at 11:37 AM

Dear,

How are you today,Is there any possibility to help the board get a task done today,let me know in other to explain further..

Best Regards

Hans

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24 dec. 2019 kl. 09:26 skrev Hans Welling <[Largelife101@mail.com](mailto:Largelife101@mail.com)>:

Hello,

How are you? Season's Greetings. are you available? I need your help with the ICEVI-EUROPE regarding logistic support for the upcoming ICEVI international "SATTE Conference 08-10 January 2020"

Its very important and I'll be waiting for your reply email soon.

Best regards

Hans Welling

ICEVI-EUROPE President

Diependaalsedrift 32

1213cr Hilversum

The Netherlands

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Hans Welling <[presidentop527@gmail.com](mailto:presidentop527@gmail.com)>

To: <email recipient>

Mon, Sep 9, 2019 at 2:28 PM

Good Day,

How are you today? is there any possibility that you could help the board initiate a wire transfer in the bank to our vendor and you would be reimbursed as soon as possible before this week runs out. Thank you

Hans Welling