

ICEVI European Newsletter

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From the Board

Dear ICEVI-Europe members,

On October 26-30, 2014 the Board of ICEVI-Europe gathered as formal board members for the first time under new leadership in Budapest, Hungary. The Eötvös Loránd University, Bárczi Gusztáv Faculty of Special Education generously offered to serve as the meeting venue and Kristina Kovacs was a hospitable host. At this point, I would like to introduce the newly elected officers. Mr. Klaus Hoem is our Vice-President, Dr. Steve McCall is our Treasurer and Mrs. Krisztina Kovacs is our Secretary. We would like to sincerely thank Mrs. Mary Lee, a former member of the board, for her generous offer to stand as an Editor of our Newsletter.

During the meeting, board members discussed the status of ICEVI-Europe. As you probably are aware the organization has had formal status as an Association since the beginning of 2007. At the General Assembly, which was held this past July, during our conference in Istanbul, there were two major changes for ICEVI Europe that took place. The logo remained the same, but we added the word Rehabilitation to our title. In addition, the leader of the Organization will be referred to as President, not Chairman.

The Target Group of ICEVI – Europe was also a subject for discussion. As we know, ICEVI- Europe was initially concerned with the education of people with visual impairment. However, many developments since inception called for further reflection. Discussion within the board led to the conclusion that ICEVI should stand for International Council for the Education and Rehabilitation of People with Visual Impairment. This means having an association of professionals and professional organizations in the field of education and rehabilitation of people with visual impairments. In this framework, ICEVI-Europe will serve as an organization which also aims to work for adults and elderly people who need professional support.

Before the end of the year ICEVI-Europe will have a new flyer and its first Brochure.

The need of continuing the existence of interest groups was brought into discussion. It was decided and agreed by all that there is a vital need for continuing the existence of interest groups. Specifically, the following seven Interest Groups, will be maintained and overseen by the respective person(s) in charge: a.) ICT Specialists – Klaus Hoem, b) Early Intervention Specialists – Ana Isabel Ruiz Lopez & Elena Gaston, c.) Teachers – Andrea Hathazi, d.) Low-Vision Specialists- Betty Leotsakou or Steve McCall & Mira Goldschmidt, e.) Psychologists – Liliya Plastunova, Peter Rodney, and Peter Verstraten f.) Rehabilitation Specialists – which include Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Orientation & Mobility Instructors, and Daily Living Skills – Krisztina Kovacs , and g.) Administrators and Managers – Dieter Feser.

This year marks a turning point for the organization. ICEVI-Europe is striving to form research teams of experts with the main goal of participating actively in various vital European projects that further the education and rehabilitation opportunities available to professionals who work with people with visual impairments. On a separate note, we value the received support from our existing members and strongly urge prospective corporate Institutions/Organizations to become new members and partake in our work and growth. It is our hope that with incoming monetary resources, possibly coming from new membership contributions, we will be able to return to a printed version of our newsletter.

ICEVI-Europe would like to extend its warmest congratulatory wishes to “Ofek Liyladenu” - Israel National Association of Parents of Children with Visual Impairments, and to the disabled rights organization, Bizchut, for Israel's Supreme Court of Justice ruling in favor of their appeal against the Ministry of Education.

Pushing for action by the Ministry of Education to provide blind or visually impaired children who study in mainstream schools with the necessary, specially adaptive textbooks and teaching materials in braille, large text, or audio format is an extraordinary achievement. Thanks to their compelling efforts, Ofek Liyladenu enabled parents of thousands of visually impaired children to obtain access to learning materials in a suitable format in accordance with their children’s needs, at no extra cost. Equally noteworthy was the decision by the Ministry of Education to allow blind and visually impaired students to take their matriculation examinations along with their peers. More information on this achievement can be found in this newsletter.

ICEVI-Europe would also like to sincerely congratulate the newly formed European Coalition of Vision (ECV) on the successful official launch of their organization and the elections of their Manifesto. The ECV Launch Event and Elections Manifesto took place in Strasbourg, on February 4, 2014 at the European Parliament. ECV is an alliance comprised of professional bodies, European NGO’s, disabled people’s organizations and trade organizations, that aims to raise awareness of vision and eye health, promoting an inclusive society that supports the rights and independence of blind and partially sighted people.

More information on the aims and call to action of the organization can be found in the Manifesto included in this newsletter.

In this edition of the newsletter you will also find significant information regarding the adoption of the Historic World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) treaty in Marrakesh, Morocco. This treaty made available published works in accessible formats such as Braille, large print text and audio books to hundreds of millions of people who are blind, visually impaired and print-disabled, worldwide.

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

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



Report of ICEVI-European Board meeting

The first meeting of the newly elected Board of ICEVI Europe was held on October 28-30, 2013 in Budapest, Hungary at ELTE University Bárczi Faculty of Special Education, hosted by Krisztina Kovács. Most of the board members could attend the meeting - Betty Leotsakou (President), Martha Gyftakos (minutes), Hans Welling, Klaus Hoem, Krisztina Kovacs, Dieter Feser, Francis Boë, Andrea Hathazi, Ana Isabel Ruiz Lopez, Elena Gastón Lopez (interpreter), Liliya Plastunova, Mira Goldschmidt (via Skype), Darija Udovicic (representing Perkins International), Aniko Nagy (blind special education student at Eötvös Loránd University, Bárczi Gusztáv Faculty of Special Education). Apologies: were made by Steve McCall who replaces Mary Lee, John Harris (ENVITER) and Dennis Lolli (Perkins International).

There were 17 items in the agenda, including the profile of ICEVI Europe (Constitution and the brochure); division of roles in the Board; plan of action 2013-2017 (EU projects; SenseAge; special interest groups); financial situation; future of the Newsletter and website; ICEVI-Europe Awards; cooperation with relevant international stake-holder and professional organizations (GPEAA; ENVITER; EASPD; Perkins International; WBU); regional and sub-regional reports and news; reports from two interest groups (Early Intervention and ICT);

evaluation of the Conference in Istanbul; information on the next Conference in 2017. Because of space limitations, I can only mention the key facts by common consent.

Profile of ICEVI Europe

The profile of ICEVI-Europe was discussed. Changes made to the Constitution and placed to the Notary by Hans Welling, after the General Assembly in Istanbul, were announced. These changes are as follows: a.) The name of Chairman of the Board now is changed to President of the Board, b.) The name (subtitle) of ICEVI-Europe is changed to International Council for Education and **Rehabilitation** of People with Visual Impairment, Europe, but the Logo stays the same, as agreed by ICEVI International. New functions within the Board were also elected.

Brochure of ICEVI-Europe

Because of some changes in name and composition of the Board and to save financial resources, there will be no new brochures printed, but the changes will be displayed with stickers. Proposals were also made to have the brochures, with relevant information, available in a format accessible to visually impaired people, as well as available on the website as online flyers.

Plan of Action for 2013-2017

Everyone agreed that before discussing how ICEVI-Europe should be seen in the next coming years, a clear strategy must be developed and outlined, which at this moment, doesn't exist. Betty Leotsakou and Hans Welling have suggested that during the next meeting in Bordeaux, France, there will be a 2-Day consultation, with Lawrence F. Campbell as facilitator, regarding how ICEVI-Europe can grow and create motivation for people, both individuals and institutions, to become ICEVI Europe members. The possibility of involvement with European Projects, as an opportunity to build ICEVI Europe's network of people, was discussed. Andrea Hatházi gave some tips on this topic, emphasising the need for cooperation with joint workshops and seminars, joint training for teachers, research projects, or even the development of studies. Examples of EU projects that fulfil this task could be Lifelong Learning, Erasmus or Horizon 2020. A brief outcome/evaluation of the SensAge Conference was presented by Liliya Plastunova, which can be found on the SensAge website. A proposal was made to place SensAge presentations on the ICEVI-Europe website.

Everyone agreed that each board member be in charge of an Interest Group. Specifically, everyone agreed to maintain the following seven Interest Groups, along with the person(s) in charge: a.) ICT Specialists – Klaus Hoem, b.) Early Intervention Specialists – Ana Ruiz & Elena Gastón, c.) Teacher Training - Andrea Hatházi, d.) Low-Vision Specialists- Betty Leotsakou or Steve McCall & Mira Goldschmidt, e.) Psychologists – Liliya Plastunova, Peter Rodney, and Peter Verstraaten f.) Rehabilitation Specialists – which include Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Orientation & Mobility Instructors, and Daily Living Skills - Krisztina Kovács, and g.) Administrators and Managers – Dieter Feser.

Other matters agreed upon

- The current situation shows that there is more expenditure than income. The President proposed that the board focus on finding ways of collecting funds.
- With regard to the membership list, it was noted that it has not been updated since the European Conference in Istanbul and that this will be done by Hans Welling.
- With regard to the membership fee, it was decided that if someone has not paid, they would have to pay for all the years they owe, in order to remain a member. It was agreed to compose and send out a letter of interest for the purpose of promoting awareness and acquiring new institutional members. It was also agreed to send out another letter to existing members, both individuals and institutions, regarding their membership payment.
- A letter to the Contact Persons should be sent out with regard to updating their National Pages on the website, adding the new organisations that are members.
- Further discussion was had regarding the possibility of increasing the membership fee for individuals. However, since the majority of European countries are facing a financial crisis, and given the fact that organisations have already set their budget for the upcoming years, it was decided that the membership fee should remain the same for now. Individual members from Eastern Europe and the Balkans - 10 Euro per year. Individual members from the rest of Europe - 25 Euro per year.
- The newsletter was discussed with respect to the individuals overseeing it, as well as content. A digital copy is sent out 4 times a year, with no printed copy sent out due to the high printing cost. Mary Lee has accepted Betty's proposal of becoming the Editor of the newsletter. Andrea Hathazi has agreed to take on the role of Coordinator of the newsletter. As the Coordinator, Andrea will be responsible for seeking out all articles, sending the National Contact Persons reminders regarding set deadlines for article submissions, as well as working together with Mary, who will edit the articles.

- Questions arose as to what extent the contact persons are working. There is a lack of feedback to board members from the contact persons. Similarly, Board members do not send their sub-region reports because they do not receive information from the contact persons.
- An Awards Committee was newly formed with agreement for a Certificate of Recognition to be given not only to individuals but also to institutions that have performed work of particular importance in the field of Visual Impairment.
- All board members presented regional information and updates.
- The RoboBraille project was introduced by Krisztina Kovács; Person Centred Technology and the Eastern European Conference (October 10-13, 2013 in Chernigov, Ukraine) was presented by Liliya Plastunova; Francis Boé gave a brief presentation on WIPO (The World Intellectual Property Organization); Reports from the following Interest Groups were discussed: Early Intervention - Ana Ruiz & Elena Gaston, ICT- Betty Leotsakou, Psychologists - Peter Rodney
- The next 2017 Conference was briefly discussed. It will take place in the Dutch part of Belgium in the city of Bruges. The University of Applied Science will be used as the venue.

Krisztina Kovács and Martha Gyftakos

Report on the ICEVI Conference in Istanbul

Istanbul, the wonderful city of 14.1 million people, warmly welcomed the participants of the 8th ICEVI European Conference, which took place from June 30th to July 5th 2013, in Turkey. The programme committee, the scientific committee and the host committee have worked intensively and with a lot of enthusiasm to prepare this conference. The conference aimed to be a meeting place for all, who are involved in education, rehabilitation and care for people with a visual impairment or multiple disabilities. The conference theme was „A Changing Future with ICF”. The invited key speakers approached the theme of the conference for each age category, from a multidisciplinary perspective, within the general framework of the ICF (International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health). Participants were invited to submit papers within the specific areas of e.g. The Visual system, Activities and participation, Environmental factors, Personal factors. The Conference was attended by about 200 participants from the whole of Europe. The conference was a great opportunity to exchange ideas, share good practice, disseminate the results of projects and studies and develop new partnerships.

During the conference the General Assembly of ICEVI Europe took place. Hans Welling stepped down as President of ICEVI Europe, and Betty Leotsakou, former representative of the Balkan region, was elected as the next President of

ICEVI Europe. ICEVI Europe offers gratitude to Hans Welling for his major contributions to strengthening and developing ICEVI Europe during his period in office and welcomes Betty Leotsakou, wishing her all the best for the next period. Regional meetings took place and the new Board of ICEVI Europe was also elected.

Andrea Hathazi

New Models to Teach, New Models to Learn

After thirty years working for inclusion, we need to reconsider how things are working and which changes do we have to make.

The ICF and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities have brought new ideas based on new social models and changes that have taken place in the understanding of disability in general and visual impairment in particular.

One pupil's story

To introduce my reflection, let me tell you the story of one of my pupils. When I first came to her, she was 14 years old. She is partially sighted, but has very low vision. Her visual conditions had change in the last five years, decreasing her sight a lot. She was integrated in the same school since she was 5. She was a Braille reader. She was being trained in orientation and mobility and had very good daily living skills, but felt very frightened about using the white cane.

Seeing that situation from a traditional perspective, it seemed to be very normal, but with the help of some colleagues, we discovered the real situation:

- Her parents didn't accept the visual impairment. They had never learnt Braille, they didn't support her in her mobility training and they had hardly any contact with ONCE.
- She used Braille, but she didn't like to use it. Her parents had bought an enormous screen, of about 48 inches for the computer.
- She was feeling obliged to learn how to use the white cane, but she didn't want to use it.
- She never spoke about her feelings about blindness or her needs, maybe because even she didn't know them.
- At school she was "labelled" as the "blind girl" and her relationship with her sighted peers was less than was supposed, after being in the same school for many years.

The situation was complex. We had two choices: to continue giving her things she didn't even know she needed or to create the need in her and in her parents. We opted for the second one. Even if it was going to be slower, we thought it

would help her to be “a person” and not “an object of what professionals and parents want for her”.

So, we thought about the **objectives** we had in our action plan:

As the ICF says, disability has to do with the possibility of participation of the individual in a real life context. The impairment is not in the person but in the situation. At the same time, participation has to do with the quality of life, with the chance to choose, with the things we like and we dream of. All those things have then to be combined with our real possibilities.

So, what we wanted for her was to give her the opportunity to participate, to feel ownership of her life and to have the chance to fulfil her wishes whenever it was possible.

But we had to consider another important factor: she was a teenager, and she didn't want to feel more impositions, she had a strong need to fight for her own thoughts and wishes, so any idea that came from an adult, was rejected.

We decided to be patient, not to try to convince her about things she couldn't understand at that point and to try to create in her new needs and wishes.

And we **started**:

In our first sessions I tried to use the enormous screen, even it was impossible for her to see anything on it. But it was she who needed to have that evidence.

The second or third day, I installed a screen reader “as a help”; at the beginning she rejected it, so I waited.

Continuously she made visual references to everything, she showed me her drawings, which, I have to say, were very nice. So I listened to her, watched her pictures and praised her initiatives.

Soon she began to trust in me, but I continued in an observing position.

In a few weeks she asked me to show her the screen reader, just as a help, and soon she told me she wanted it definitively. Two months later, the enormous screen was out of her room and of her life.

She really enjoyed learning new things on the computer with the screen reader.

Of course, she was more motivated by social networks than her homework, so we agreed together that at the end of each session we could spend a little time learning about them.

She finally only wanted to use the computer, but she didn't have a Braille display, so she did everything with the screen reader, only with voice.

At school things were still the same.

One day when I arrived at school, she was crying, telling me she felt inferior to her classmates, she didn't have more than two friends and both of them were also inferior to the others. I knew that school was not good for her, as they

treated her as a little girl, never considering her opinion, and with a social attitude of charity, not of inclusion, but it was she who had to realise it. Even though she was crying, I was glad, because it was her first step to understanding the situation. The only thing I told her then was that she wasn't inferior, that it might be that she was in a context that made her feel inferior.

I referred this to our psychologist and we agreed that we had to consider if it was just a teenage feeling or if she was beginning to be conscious of her real situation. So, again, we had to be patient. In the following months she the idea grew in her and she came to the feeling she needed a change.

We didn't know if it was going to work. A change to a new school could be very positive or not. It was true that the label she had in the current one was very negative, but we didn't know what situation she would find in a new one.

Finally her parents helped her in the decision and she changed to a new school for the next school year.

The change wasn't easy but from the first moment she felt one more in her class. Her classmates and teachers understood she was a normal teenager with the difference that she had nearly no vision. At the same time, the computer was a big help for her studies and her inclusion. For the first time she felt she had real friends and colleagues.

But there was a new problem. With the use of the screen reader, she set Braille aside. Her spelling was terrible, and the learning of English and maths was nearly impossible. But again, we had to create the need and be patient.

One day, we had to study something very difficult to be done only with voice, so I suggested to her to make a tactual graphic herself with her good drawing skills. And she accepted the idea. She began to make such nice and helpful graphics that she once told me she would like to share them with other visually impaired children. For the first time she felt proud of what she was doing and for the first time she talked about being in contact with other blind students. She was feeling accepted in her school so she didn't mind being in contact with other visually impaired people. She could have more than one group of friends.

After that, one day she showed me a very interesting map concept she had made with the Perkins Braille. And she told me: I like the computer, but touching things makes me learn better. That was another conclusion I wanted her to reach. So, I felt we were on the right path.

Today she is 19 years old. It has been a very long journey, but we are at a very interesting point: when she started making those interesting map concepts she began to love Braille and she passed all her notes with the Perkins Braille. It was a loss of time, as she took her notes on the computer and then she rewrote them with the Braille writer. I tried to convince her how useful it would be to have a Braille printer and a Braille display. It took her more than one year to convince herself. Now she uses them and her improvement has increased a lot. She achieves much more in much less time.

Now she uses the white cane. And when she forgets it, her friends remind her of it. She is still frightened, but she is doing her best to use it in more situations.

She is still having to advance in autonomy and self-esteem, but her last thought is she wants to study physiotherapy in the ONCE Physiotherapy college. Now, being blind is not threatening for her.

The family hasn't change that much, but at least, technology helps them in their relationship. They have the same accessible mobile phone, so they share contacts, conversations and applications. They are beginning to listen to what she says she needs and wishes. We are still being patient with them.

Working with the ICF spirit

I have shared this story with you, because I have felt the spirit of the ICF in all its stages.

So now, the reflection comes:

Up to now, professionals thought we knew children's needs and we were the ones who had the key to help them. But many times we have seen the optical aids we recommended kept in a drawer, Braille was replaced by voice and inclusion was a chimera, as many children felt alone at school, feeling different and inferior.

The ICF changes completely this feeling, as now we are conscious that the wishes and motivation of the person are what determines their needs.

There is a need to evolve in our models of support.

Successful inclusion empowers the individual and dissolves barriers, whilst if it is badly understood, it damages the individual in his process of becoming a full person. Restrictions in participation will affect their personal development and thus, their personal well-being.

New models to teach

So from now, when we face a new case in our work, before giving professional advice to parents, teachers and the own child, we have to stop, observe, consider their contexts and personalities and question ourselves:

- We have to consider the child as a whole. Adults are no more those persons who have the knowledge and the key to helping children.
- Families' attitudes are essential for blind children, but once they find their way, they can even overcome them.
- Imposed learning is not significant, so we must first seek strategies to make the child feel the need to learn something, and once they do, support them.
- We need to assess the context with a wide perspective and consider that our role is to accompany the child and the family in their life process, in order to make the child become a full person, living his own life.

- We have to keep an observational and patient attitude in order to let the child and family think about their situation and be the principal leaders in their own process.
- The most important objective of our work is not to teach Braille or mobility. It is to make the child feel like a normal person with abilities and limitations, facilitating a balanced sense of self-esteem. We should prepare them to live, choose and desire.
- We need to listen to the child's wishes, even if they seem absurd. They tell us a lot of things about the real situation they live in and what they really need.

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Paper presented in the 8th European Conference, Istanbul 2013

European Parliament Elections Manifesto 2014



EUROPEAN COALITION FOR VISION
Better Eye Health For Europe

European Coalition for Vision Better Eye Health in Europe

Europe is Facing an invisible epidemic. 20.4m Europeans are suffering from serious vision impairment, including 2.3m people who are blind. Two-thirds of these cases could be treated or prevented. The cost to individuals, their families,

Member states and the EU as a whole, undermines European goals of social cohesion and participation, and hinders economic growth and development.

The solutions – proven, simple and cost-effective – are available but overlooked in the same way as the crisis: regular eye care for all, easy access to care and rapid intervention when necessary will tackle most of this burden. People living in Europe would benefit greatly from improved eye health; and for Member States healthcare savings and productivity gains would be considerable. Therefore we urge the European Parliament to address this challenge under its next mandate.

People living with sight loss have the same right as those without a disability but often these rights are not fulfilled. Europe must do better in providing rehabilitation programmes, assistive devices and removal of barriers to access health, education, social support and employment. We call on European Parliament to use its significant powers to improve the lives of people affected by sight loss.

Call to action for MEP candidates

- Encourage the European Commission and EU Member States to prioritise vision and eye health as part of their public health strategies.
- Adopt an EP resolution to encourage Member States to ensure fair and equitable access to eye care, including free sight tests and treatment, for the most at risk and vulnerable groups (including those on low incomes).
- Ensure all relevant legislation and regulations improve access to and use of eye care services and promote an inclusive society that supports the rights and independence of blind and partially sighted people.
- Improve the consistency and standard of EU and Member State data collection on the status of vision and eye health and the inclusion of people with sight loss.

The European Coalition for Vision is an alliance made up of professional bodies, patient groups, European NGOs, disabled people's organisations and trade associations representing suppliers. The coalition exists to raise the profile of eye health and vision, help prevent avoidable visual impairment and secure an equal and inclusive society for those with irreversible blindness or low vision in Europe.

Please visit www.ecvision.eu for more information.

The 2010 Global Burden of Disease Vision Loss Group has recently published estimates of the causes of visual impairment in three European sub/regions of the world . There are 20.4m Europeans that are either blind or have a serious vision problem which impedes their ability to work, learn and participate in normal life. The main causes were found to be cataract and uncorrected refractive error (which together account for more than half of the disease burden), plus glaucoma, macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy. These can affect people from childhood to old age, and the numbers at risk are expected to

increase dramatically over the forthcoming years, mainly due to the ageing European population.

In May 2013 the World Health Assembly adopted Resolution 66.4 which included the global Action Plan "Universal Eye Health – a global Action Plan 2014-2019". It is now of paramount importance that the 28 Member States of the EU each develop country specific plans to achieve implementation of the Plan. Universal health coverage, including social protection measures to ensure free access to eye care and rehabilitation services for the most vulnerable and at risk groups including pensioners, children and the unemployed, is a necessity.

Although the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities clearly articulates the entitlement of persons with disabilities to have the same rights as others, it is a reality that people with sight loss are disadvantaged and denied the support required to enable them to participate in society. Data that is collected across Europe to measure the inclusion of people with sight loss is inadequate and there is a lack of consistency in the standards used to measure and record data. This needs to be addressed in consultation with disabled people's organisations.

The European Coalition for Vision has come together to call on the European Union institutions to use their power and influence to support our work in addressing these challenges.

For further information visit www.ecvision.eu
or email Zoe Gray at zgray@iapb.org

European Project JOBS MDVI



Fourteen organisations from eleven countries started a European project in 2011 that has led to a very successful cooperation between us. These organisations are: Child Vision, Lega del Filo d'Oro Onlus, Keskuspuiston ammattopisto, Budapest School for the Blind, Royal Dutch Visio, Südbayerische Wohn- und Werkstätten für Blinde, Berufsförderungswerk Halle, LICEUL PENTRU DEFICIENTI DE VEDERE, Positive Eye, CRDV, Ibos, Vision Europe Limited, Blindravinnustofan and the National Institute for Blind, Visually Impaired and Deafblind Individuals in Iceland that lead the project.

The overall aim of the project was that, through transnational collaboration, the participants would explore and identify issues for the training of professionals to develop methodologies addressing lifelong learning and work related issues in the development of people with multiple disabilities and visual impairment during their transition towards work. People who have difficulties in accessing the formal vocational training system and the traditional employment market in their member states.

The partnership and its work groups included a range of expertise - such as adult educators, vocational trainers, special education teachers, university lecturers, researchers, private consultants, together with users' organisations- and it looked at the issues involved in enabling professionals to support the project beneficiaries to develop their citizenship, including routes to and from work, continuing education, personal and social development, and the methodologies, materials and staff training required to achieve this. For a disabled person, and especially for those with multiple disabilities, reaching the labour market is a major challenge, as it implies overcoming overwhelming barriers in school, when going to university, taking the local bus or even surfing on the Internet. Therefore, the partnership addressed ways to overcome those barriers and aimed to help with implementing the UN Declaration of Rights for People with Disabilities.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY

These were to train staff to develop their skills and competencies in the following areas:

- **Job mediation** (job coaching): give people with MDVI mentors / job coaches in the work place, work with employers, to help their approach and attitude, find suitable jobs, and establish an appropriate support mechanism.
- **Valued activities:** Individuals with MDVI have identified the need for meaningful activities on an holistic basis, not just for work, but for all areas. Therefore professionals need to be trained and enabled to offer valued activities which will lead the individuals with MDVI to seek work.
- **Social and personal skills:** Because of the wide range of individuals with MDVI and the increasing spectrum of need, more training is needed for professionals. The partnership identified, as a fundamental need for individuals with MDVI, to have training in this field. The professionals working with individuals with MDVI therefore need the tools to increase or support self-esteem of the MDVI individuals and thus increase their active citizenship.
- **Assistive technology:** There is a large increase in assistive technology, an increase in the development of technology and therefore the training of staff in this area. The ability to use and implement this is crucial to enable the appropriate support to be offered to the individual with MDVI. The development of technology empowers the client but due to fast progress in this area, staff need to be better trained, and to be able to evaluate, and recognise what assistive technology is available throughout Europe.
- The approach that was taken to meet these objectives was done by holding seminars, working meetings, and collecting good practice.

The outcomes of the project included a joint film made by the organisations of service providers, working with individuals with MDVI, finding the appropriate

solutions. A course developed by one of the organisations and an extensive gathering of best practice through the website. The website includes ideas or support that professionals may find useful in their own work development. Contact persons for each part can be found in best practice on the website: www.jobsmdvi.org

On behalf of the JOBS MDVI team
Elfa Hermannsdottir



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The Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled



WIPO adopted in June 2013 (in Marrakesh) during a Diplomatic Conference, a treaty on exceptions and limitations to copyright for facilitating access of visually impaired people and all people who have difficulty reading print and published works. (WIPO: World Intellectual Property Organization UN Geneva)

During more than 4 years, the World Blind Union (WBU) has been creating the content of a much needed future treaty (essential and desirable) on exceptions and limitations to copyright, for the blind and extended to all persons with a disability, concerning the reading of printed texts. This will facilitate much greater and faster access to books and printed materials. However NGOs cannot file a formal treaty at the UN, it must be an acceding country. Ecuador and Uruguay have taken the opportunity and it was therefore submitted to the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), a UN committee in Geneva.

The CRCS Committee (WIPO) met about 2 times a year for work (content, writing etc ...), with informal meetings in between times for preparation. 187 countries, represented by their diplomats, attended assiduously to these meetings and discussions of work. Sixty NGOs and representative organisations have been invited to contribute to this work as experts.

After 4 years of discussions, often quite difficult, with hope and sometimes despair, the WIPO SCCR met in Marrakesh, Morocco, during the second half of June in a Diplomatic Conference, to consider the possibility of finding agreements for the official signing of the treaty.

The first week was very difficult, it seemed to be always two steps forward and immediately one back. Then the discussions became less demanding and more peaceful. Little by little we began to see some accord, some even that at

times had seemed inaccessible, and then finally the much desired treaty, eagerly awaited by the blind associations, was adopted and signed with great joy and satisfaction on June 27, 2013, because it meets the objectives and requirements from the AMU .

What will change:

"Recognized authorized entities (and contractual) ," that is to say approved transcribers' bodies, may, after adaptation (Braille, audio, digital ...) send the adapted structures abroad or receive them. To be brief, the approved organisations can create " cross-border shipments" and thus exchange between associations or organisations, structures adapted to "compatible formats." In some special cases users may receive the books directly if there is not an authorised body in their country (those sending will not be required to control the use in the recipient country.) This will be possible of course when the countries concerned have ratified the treaty.

This will enable faster and much wider access to printed books and published works in adapted formats. Cross-border trade will promote mutual exchange. This is a revolution, and an historic moment for existing users and future generations

But still to come are the publication of the treaty, its ratification by country and then the details of its implementation (20 countries must ratify the treaty before it enters into force, and exchanges may only be made between countries that have ratified the treaty.)

The World Blind Union (WBU) will lead an initiative to encourage the rapid and effective ratification of this treaty.

I refer you to the WIPO website to read the full text (11 pages) in which you will find the different definitions and methods of operation. UMA have prepared a text to disseminate a comprehensive summary of this treaty (legal and complex enough anyway).

Site: www.wipo.int

Contact me for more information: francis.boe@free.fr

Francis BOE

Representative CFPSAA to WIPO-(ONU) Genève June 2013



Report from Greece

Project: Accessible Educational Resources in Greek Universities

Following the principles of "Design for All" and "Universal Design for Learning" this Greek three year national project (started in 2013) aims to promote the development of accessible educational resources in the higher tertiary level (targeting the 24 public Universities and the 16 public Technological Educational Institutes) to benefit students with disabilities (including those with blindness and low vision).

The project's main activities include:

- Development of templates and guidelines for accessible educational resources.
- Training of the academic and administration staff in Universities and Technological Educational Institutes on how to develop accessible educational resources.
- Operation of a help desk on Accessible Educational Resources.

Templates and guidelines for accessible educational resources will be developed for the following types of document: MS-Word (2007, 2010 & 2013) MS-PowerPoint (2007, 2010 & 2013), LibreOffice 4.0, LaTeX and PDF.

This project has been co-financed by the European Union (European Social Fund – ESF) and Greek national funds through the Operational Program "Education and Lifelong Learning" of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) under the Research Funding Project: "Open Courses".

ATHENA Free AT Software Inventory

The ATHENA Free AT Software Inventory aims to inform and provide persons with disabilities, their facilitators as well the professionals of the domain, with the available costless Assistive Technology (AT) solutions (Open Source or Freeware).

The AT software applications provided in ATHENA are presented in an organized and systematic way after they have been installed and tested in the Speech and Accessibility Laboratory, University of Athens. For each free AT software, the following information is given: application name, developer, version, AT category(ies), related disability(ies), description, operating system(s), installation procedure, settings and hints, download links, and a screenshot.

There are three ways to browse the ATHENA online free AT software inventory:

- Browse by Disability: lists the related applications based on the chosen disability (Speech, Hearing, Motor, Blindness and Low Vision).
- Browse by Category: lists the applications by type of AT software category (Voice Recognition, Screen Daisy Reader, Calculator, Mouse Cursor, Click

Helper, Virtual Keyboard, Camera Mouse, Alternative Communication, Text To Speech, Screen Magnifier, Braille Translator, Web Browser, Mouse Emulator, Contrast Adjustment, Keyboard Shortcuts, Voice Mail, Clock, Video Call).

- Show All Applications: simply lists the whole inventory's applications in an alphabetical order.

The ATHENA inventory has been developed under the collaboration of the Accessibility Unit for Students with Disabilities (<http://access.uoa.gr>) and the Speech and Accessibility Laboratory (<http://speech.di.uoa.gr>) of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece.

You can access ATHENA inventory in <http://access.uoa.gr/ATHENA/>

PROJECT: Handedness and Braille Literacy in Individuals with Severe Visual Impairments (HaBLISVI) (started in 2013-three year project)

This project aims to investigate the physical and cognitive processes that underlie the processes of reading and writing Braille and correlate them with patterns of handedness and working memory. In addition, the project combines the study of the functions of hands, fingers and haptic patterns that Individuals with Severe Visual Impairments (ISVI) produce when they explore tactile figures and small three-dimensional objects and correlate the results with laterality.

The main research objectives of the present project are:

1. to relate visual impairments and blindness with handedness,
2. to relate type of presentation of stimuli (mechanically or electronically) with the reading and writing ability of ISVI,
3. to evaluate the relationship between tactile movements (types of active touch) and performance,
4. to investigate qualities of working memory and relate them to components of Braille literacy, and
5. to assess the neurophysiological mechanisms that refer to laterality and relate them to handedness.

The proposed research project deals with a set of many elements, such as pedagogical, cognitive and neurophysiological, and as such it occupies an intensive multi- and inter-disciplinary character. It is expected that the outcomes will provide new ideas and perhaps may have a strong impact on the way researchers think about learning models of active touch. A better understanding of how ISVI read and write Braille, can motivate innovative pedagogy in special education, guide developments in assistive technology, and suggests any potential changes to the Braille Code itself.

The HaBLISVI project is developed by the University of Thessaly and it is implemented under the "ARISTEIA" Action of the "OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING" and is co-funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and National Resources

**Project Title: Audio and Tactile Access to Knowledge for Individuals with Visual Impairments
(started in 2012-three year project)**

The main objectives of this project compose a study on how and in which ways people with visual impairments (PVI) use their touch and hearing in order to have access to knowledge. More specifically, the present research deals with a set of main research questions which are the following:

1. How do individuals with visual impairments elaborate and conceptualize audio-haptic information in order to shape a cognitive map to orientate themselves in a new environment?
2. What is the contribution of audio-haptic information in the blind persons' orientation and mobility?
3. What are the parameters which have impact on individuals with visual impairments when they listen to auditory renderings of the visual structures of documents (so-called meta-information or prosody)?
4. How do blind individuals have access to mathematical content when the input is based on a combination of audio and tactile information?
5. Are there any correlations between different types of active touch and levels of understanding? and,
6. What type of links take place between psychological and physiological states when individuals with visual impairment receive acoustic and/or tactile information?

The findings of the research project may have implications for:

1. the production of audiotactile aids for orientation and mobility of the visually impaired,
2. the production of accessible educational material in math and sciences,
3. the computer based assistive technology used in the education of students with visual impairments,
4. the development of a new generation of Text-to-Speech systems that will support the sonification of the visual attributes of documents and the auditory access to mathematical expressions, and
5. the development of appropriate learning environment through a better multimodal curriculum for students with visual impairments. The results of the project is expected to have a great impact on psychologists', special education teachers', orientation and mobility instructors' and rehabilitation specialists' perspectives and instructional methods.

The proposed project is expected to upgrade the university education. This might be the case since many undergraduate and postgraduate students will participate in this project and contribute to the improvement of relative courses with new and original products stemmed from the study and research process of the present project. During the implementation of the project, a research collaborative environment will be formed including a substantial number of external and experienced researchers (27 Greek researchers and 5 researchers from abroad). Moreover, by the end of the project a more promising future

cooperation will be established among the research groups. The diffusion of the results in society both at a national and at an international level is also very important and will take place through the various publications and conference presentations.

This project has been co-financed by the European Union (European Social Fund – ESF) and Greek national funds through the Operational Program "Education and Lifelong Learning" of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) under the Research Funding Project. University of Macedonia is the leading partner and the other two partners are: University of Athens and University of Thessaly

Vassilios S. Argyropoulos,
University of Thessaly, Volos, Greece

Association "Ofek Liyladenu": Accessible school materials for children with Visual Impairments

"Ofek Liyladenu" (Israel National Association of Parents of Children with Visual Impairments) has been concerned for years by the very limited availability of accessible school books and materials for our children. At the end of 2011, we appealed to the High Court of Justice against the Ministry of Education (MoE) for not taking responsibility to provide the materials to students with visual impairments.

The appeal was very successful and the MoE accepted its responsibility. As a result, for the first time, the MoE has ensured funding and designed a new process through which the children receive accessible school materials for the new academic year like their sighted peers. The books are provided in a format preferred by the student: digital file, Braille, enlarged print and audio recording.

In spite of our great achievement and the new attitude of the MoE, major difficulties came up during this transition period, which required our on-going follow up and involvement. These include weak planning of the process; lack of expertise and tools; lack of communication with the parents on the process and timeline; and delays in publishing the Ministry regulations and their communication to schools.

On-going feedback from the parents was crucial for us in our discussion and work with the MoE. The feedback was useful for modifying and changing the process: from the first steps of compiling reading lists through the production of the books and finally the timely distribution to the students. The Supreme Court Appeal is still pending and allows us to maintain the pressure on the MoE. We expect that for the next academic year we will see a considerable improvement and an efficient system for providing accessible school materials.

Guila Seidel,
Chairperson "Ofek Liyladenu"

RoboBraille in Romania

Readily available educational material in alternate formats is critical for the blind, partially sighted, dyslexic and others with special needs. RoboBraille is a web- and email-based service that automates the conversion of educational material and other texts into alternate media such as digital Braille, audio books and e books. RoboBraille also converts otherwise inaccessible documents such as scanned documents, image-only pdf files and PowerPoint presentations into formats that are more accessible for those with special needs. The service is free for individual, non-commercial use. RoboBraille already supports all major European languages, many of the smaller European languages as well as American English, Latin American Spanish and Arabic. A wide range of partners in Romania is currently in the process of localising the service to Romanian and promoting the use of RoboBraille and other inclusion technologies in educational practice. Coordinated by Synscenter Refsnæs, the National Danish Centre for Visually Impaired Children and Youth and funded by the VELUX Foundations, a private foundation, the project will also establish a digital library of educational material in alternate formats as a shared resource amongst the special schools for the blind in Romania.

In the spring of 2012, Synscenter Refsnæs approached key organisations working with and for the visually impaired in Romania in order to form partnerships with the intent of implementing the RoboBraille service and one or more digital libraries across the country. Several organisations expressed their interest in the project and were invited to join. The Ministry of Education in Romania was also involved and is actively endorsing the project. The original partners included the National Library Service for the Blind, the Association of the Blind in Romania, the School Centre No 1 for Visually Handicapped Children in Bucharest, the School for Partially Sighted in Bucharest, the department of special education at the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, the Speranta Centre for VI and MDVI in Timisoara, the Faculty of Education at the West University in Timisoara, the High School for the Blind in Timisoara, the School for the Blind in Arad with the High School for the Blind in Cluj-Napoca as the coordinating Romanian partner. Later, the special schools in Tirgu Frumos and Buzau were also invited and joined.

The project is a three-year implementation project that is expected to come to a conclusion in the spring of 2015. The project has sister-projects in Hungary and Bulgaria that are conducted in parallel. During the project, Synscenter Refsnæs and its Romanian partners will localise RoboBraille to support the Romanian language, test the service amongst potential users and gather feedback, disseminate information about the service and how it can be used to support inclusion in education, on the labour market and socially, establish one or more digital libraries or library integrations, and explore how the educational practice of those with special needs can be impacted by technology. In a series of train-the-trainer workshops, Synscenter Refsnæs expects to teach a large number of instructors on alternate media production with RoboBraille in order for

these instructors to be able to teach others. Romanian partners will also explore how e books as well as audio material in mp3 format can be used to support the learning process.

The first results of the project are beginning to show. Support for the Romanian Braille code has been added through a software component developed by the High School for the Blind in Cluj-Napoca. A license to Carmen, a high-quality synthetic Romanian voice from Ivona, has been acquired and integrated into RoboBraille. The main RoboBraille website (www.robobraille.org) has been localised to Romanian as has all supporting information material. And an integration between the Pontes library for the blind and RoboBraille has been created, resulting in large quantities of books being converted into mp3 format. During the first half of 2014, local partners will trial a new digital library of alternate media as a shared repository amongst all special schools for the blind and partially sighted in Romania.

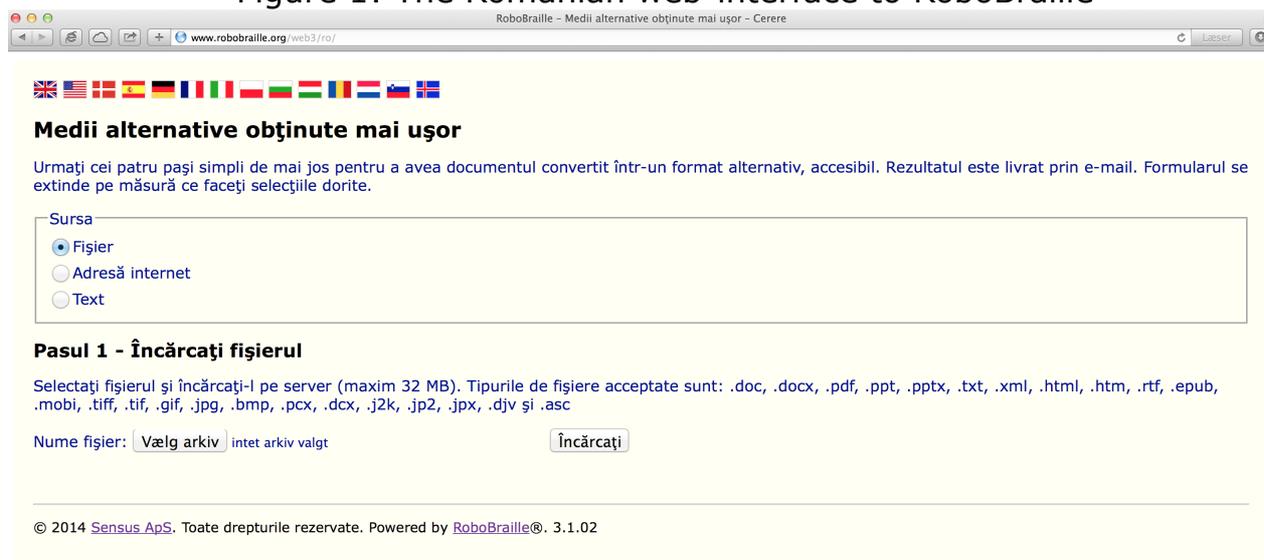
Once ready, the Romanian RoboBraille partnership will launch the service officially. The launch event is expected to take place in several locations in Romania during the spring of 2014.

If you are interested in knowing more about RoboBraille in Romania or any of the other international RoboBraille projects, please visit www.robobraille.org or contact the authors tanja@robobraille.org or lars@robobraille.org

Editorial note:

The illustrations below may be used to illustrate the article above. All illustrations should be credited to Sysncenter Refsnæs/Sensus.

Figure 1: The Romanian web-interface to RoboBraille



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL www.robobraille.org/web3/ro/. The page title is "RoboBraille - Medii alternative obținute mai ușor - Cerere". At the top, there are flags for various countries including the UK, USA, Denmark, Spain, Germany, France, Italy, Romania, and Norway. Below the flags is the heading "Medii alternative obținute mai ușor". A paragraph of text explains the process: "Urmați cei patru pași simpli de mai jos pentru a avea documentul convertit într-un format alternativ, accesibil. Rezultatul este livrat prin e-mail. Formularul se extinde pe măsură ce faceți selecțiile dorite." Below this is a form titled "Sursa" with three radio button options: "Fișier" (selected), "Adresă internet", and "Text". Underneath is the heading "Pasul 1 - Încărcați fișierul". A paragraph lists accepted file types: ".doc, .docx, .pdf, .ppt, .pptx, .txt, .xml, .html, .htm, .rtf, .epub, .mobi, .tiff, .tif, .gif, .jpg, .bmp, .pcx, .dcx, .j2k, .jp2, .jpx, .djv și .asc". Below this is a text input field for "Nume fișier:" with a dropdown menu showing "Vælg arkiv" and "intet arkiv valgt", and a button labeled "Încărcați". At the bottom, there is a footer: "© 2014 Sensus ApS. Toate drepturile rezervate. Powered by RoboBraille®. 3.1.02".

Figure 2: Presenting RoboBraille and Inclusion Technology to students and faculty at West University, Timisoara, Romania, October 2013



Figure 3: Train-the-trainer workshops for teachers at the High school for the Blind, Timisoara, Romania, October 2013



Lars Ballieu Christensen and Tanja Stevns

Promoting Higher Education and Assistance for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Israel: The "Aleh"* Society Model

The Aleh Society was established in 1990 as an association affiliated with the Hebrew University run by blind academics and students, predominantly to support their peers promoting the academic education of blind young people in Israel. Its operation began with five students and accommodates over 450 at present spread around all universities and colleges in Israel. The result of the founders' efforts was an unprecedented innovation: people with disabilities empowering their own benefit, relying on education as the most significant rehabilitative component in altering their social status and inclusion in Israeli society.

Aleh developed a model allowing the blind student to overcome the challenges of accessing information independently. The model has several components: a human facet, a technological aspect, a joint technological-human facet, and a rehabilitation aspect, all of which facilitate the blind students' independence.

The Human Aspect: As soon as a blind student has enrolled in a university, orientation and mobility is given prime emphasis. Teaching the students to reach places of importance for him, such as classrooms, library, faculty offices, in addition to teaching him to become familiar with technology equipment, internal and external sources of assistance and managing his account with the university's administration. Alongside this, students begin learning how to search for academic sources. A sighted student and/or an experienced blind student guides the newly admitted blind student, coaching him on practical ways of searching for information. As the academic year begins, the model transitions to addressing the reading element. During this stage, the human aspect is important as well, for reading class material to the student, and for getting the student acquainted with his specific course materials. While the blind student progresses in his degree, he learns to use reading technologies which are at his disposal.

The Technological Aspect: The more the blind person masters the digital technology and the Aleh's state-of-the-art technology at his disposal, the less dependent he is on mediated readings, and the more he can make use of the technology required for progressing in his studies. However, the human aspect does remain relevant because fast-paced technological advancements require tutorials for almost every newly born innovation.

The Rehabilitative Aspect: A significant component supporting the student throughout the stages of the model is the rehabilitative aspect. The various types of assistance given to the student as they arrive at the university include care for personal issues such as test anxiety and personal crisis during the academic year; providing grants and offering financial support; preparing the student for life post-graduation. The social worker's contribution to the well-being of the

student is crucial when it comes to caring for and upholding the student's progress throughout the stages of the model.

In using this model, Aleh made services available to all visually impaired students at its support centers which were built by Aleh (learning centers for the blind), at all universities and colleges in Israel. In most of them multi-purpose facilities are available with the specialised equipment for blind students as well as allocated classrooms and libraries. Aleh provides computer equipment to the students, making it possible to use it throughout the years they study, both at the center and at home. The variety of equipment available include: CCTV models with various magnification powers, laptops with large print software; voice-over screens, Braille display; portable CCTVs; software for converting PDF files into sound files; and MP3 players, among other devices. In addition, the student may use human assistance for personal readings and tutorials as well as assistance in operating the equipment; a digital talking books library with over 2,000 titles; Braille library and large-print books. All these technological resources constitute a model of accessibility to a variety of forms of assistance, both human and technological, allowing the blind student an equal opportunity to be compatible with other students.

Expanding the model

Pre academic programs

Promoting higher education among visually impaired young people, potential candidates for academic studies, forced Aleh to reach them at a much younger age and communicate with their families. Five main programs channel the idea to cross-sections of young people in the community.

1. *National Mentoring Project for Blind Children and Parents of Blind Children*
This program is led by visually impaired students who become mentors to school age pupils with low vision. The mentorship is ongoing throughout the academic year. The mentors receive a scholarship for their involvement. The children are aged 5-18 integrated in the regular education system. 500 children attended this project.
The child is mentored four hours weekly, either at his home, at a place of his choice, or both. Activities include assistance with schoolwork/tutoring and recreational activities. Another aspect of the program is providing assistance to parents of blind children — for example, self-help workshops for parents of blind children offering support in coping with a child with disability. By involving blind students as mentors, the project fulfills two main goals: providing a role model in a young adult who is a blind student, and providing a fieldwork framework for the mentors. This serves as an initial introduction to the workforce.
2. *Post-High School Preparatory Classes for the Blind and Visually Impaired Students*
Aleh, run a post-high-school, pre-academic preparatory class for visually

impaired candidates at the Hebrew University campus. This is an on campus segregated program. By doing that, Aleh succeeded to create special schooling within a mainstream environment. The preparatory classes aim to improve skills for those who completed high school matriculation exams or who wish to improve their matriculation scores. The students are tutored in small classes, using state-of-the-art technological equipment with accessories for blind and visually impaired students. Each student has a support curriculum tailored to his specific needs and abilities, based on their high school achievements. The majority of students in the preparatory program stay in the university dorms. Additional housing includes rehabilitation apartments where the students live under the supervision of Aleh's social worker. Activities at the rehabilitation apartments aim to increase independence and improve ADL. By the end of the process, over 90% of the students in the preparatory class are eligible for matriculation, with scores that enable admission to university.

3. *Preparatory Courses for the Psychometric Exam*

As part of its efforts in promoting higher education among blind and visually impaired high school graduates, Aleh operates preliminary courses for the Psychometric Exams as an entrance exam to Universities in Israel. The teaching format is by frontal instruction and students are also given individual tutoring. In addition course materials are provided in large-print or audio to suit the student's visual ability. The number of hours each student devotes to the tutoring varies according to the individual's ability. Students who are totally blind are assigned a personal mentor for assistance.

4. *"Aluma" – A National Service Program for the Blind and Visually Impaired*

The "Aluma" program allows visually impaired individuals, who have been excused from obligatory military service on the basis of their visual disability, to become involved in national service, an alternative to the military service. Becoming active in the national service program, gets the youngster ready to leave the safe shelter of their families and face life on their own, helping them experience a responsible activity, no less important than the obligatory military service, as a way of contributing their share to the community. This program is for youngsters aged 18-21 who completed high school. The voluntary national service takes 30 hours per week and lasts one or two years in various organizations. In addition, they are obliged to attend, for 10 hours per week, a functional rehabilitation training program. Participants of the program are becoming ambassadors, helping to change the general public's attitude towards blind people. Most of the "Aluma" graduates become students at universities in Israel.

5. *Academic Preparation Workshops*

These workshops are geared to assist the newly admitted students in orientation and mobility on campus and to further train them in activities of daily living at the university dorm, living with roommates, shopping for groceries, handling a budget, etc., in addition to acquainting them with the university, coaching them in how to make study plans, introducing them to

the variety of services offered by the university and by Aleh, connecting them with a number of institutions in the community.

Post graduate programs

Aleh has developed programs to promote the gradual integration of students into the community as they come close to graduation. The programs are in two parts: 1) a job seeking workshop that covers writing a resume, job-hunting techniques, how to introduce oneself to potential employers, etc.; and 2) programs for allowing internship and experiencing work environments before hitting the open market. This may include mentoring young blind children, coordinating programs at Aleh, volunteering at different workplaces, editing and anchoring on campus radio programs, taking part as actors with the blind theater group, and operating a Rehabilitation Information Station at Eye Clinics where they provide guidance to newly blind people regarding rehabilitative programs and services for visually impaired people in the country. This program is most fitting for students of social work, psychology, education and special education. The information station is an early intervention project which narrows the gap between the knowledge of the person that he has lost his sight and the beginning of the rehabilitation process.

Conclusion

A longitudinal survey of blind university and college graduates was conducted in 2004 by an independent research institution in Israel, covering 10 years (1991- 2001). It revealed that the majority of graduates (80%) had completed their bachelor's degree in three to four years. This is a significant change from the numerous years spent at university by blind students before 1990, when Aleh was established. About 70% of the visually impaired graduates supported by Aleh programs are working in the open market, while among the general blind population, only 26% are employed. 80% of the graduates are taking part in the work force and over 55% of graduates are employed full time. Another study, held in 2012 by one of the universities in Israel, confirmed the above-noted results. The findings suggest that 70% of graduates supported by Aleh programs are employed. The study emphasises that 60% of those surveyed are employed part time to full time.

Adv. Zohar Ginio
Chairperson, The Aleh Society

On the importance of cooperation between parents and professionals

As a parent of a child with visual impairment, I am very pleased to write something about the experience of a parent, so you may read my parent story. I am a Mom of a beautiful lady. My daughter is now 24 years old and I always say: she is beautiful outside and also inside.

Laura is her name and she is a student of management, economics and law. I have been involved in ICEVI since 2002. Laura was born healthy; after vaccinations when she was a baby, she developed rheumatics and because of that she got uveitis and that is an infection in her eyes. It cost me very many emotional moments, I had to find my own way into this other world.

I survived by trying to cooperate with the professionals in this world. This was going up and down. At this moment I am allowed to negotiate with my government, not that they offer me a magic stick but they listen to me.

About my great and also beautiful daughter, at this moment she only can see with one eye light and dark and the other one just 0.5. She is doing reasonably well. She likes to study and to work but it costs her very much energy. She is now recovering from a burnout. She has to learn to say this is ok for today, no more, stop now!!

These are her lessons to learn and together we can do it. She had very good amiable teachers and they can convince her to do what she can do.

She likes to live on her own, with support from us, her mom and dad, and some help from others to clean her house.

Every country has its own culture, but I think that every parent will recognise my story I would like to share with you to reach empowerment and cooperation. Together we can reach more.

Most people can't imagine what it means to have a child that is disabled. To understand which emotion is involved, please, try to think about all the things that do change in your life when you enter into this other world you don't know yet.

Lots of things are changing, there are lessons to be learned, you have to build yourself on this road and you have to get information. You must now learn a language that differs from the one you originally intended. On this road you meet other people than you had planned; people you never met before. It's actually a totally different world.

Everything is a little bit slower and differs from the life without disability. But this also makes your world bigger and more glamorous than you could ever have expected. After a while you are there: you begin to look around you and you suddenly notice that it is possible for you to live in this world. There are so many interesting things you come into contact with and can be involved in and so many interesting people you can cooperate with.

Never ever forget you don't have to do this alone. Try to involve your family, your friends. You can talk about the problems and the successes you have.

There are wonderful things to share! Never suppose that `they' know, tell them! It can be a tremendous pitfall if you don't! The pain that you feel will never, never leave you; these things will be with you for the rest of your life. It is the loss of your entire dream.

But, please, don't spend the rest of your life grieving over the fact that you don't have a healthy child! Try to find people who are willing to reach out a helping hand and to cooperate with you. If you don't, you will never be free and you will never be able to open yourself up for the special and beautiful things that you will find on the way. Inclusion means to cooperate, to try to find out: what, why? The others (the helpers, the organisations) do things the way they have to do them.

Try to be deeply involved in this world - your world, their world; do not attack the people you find on the way, try to work together with them so that in the end you will never ever have to say: if only...

In the end you will be stronger and can be proud of yourself and your child. You enter a world you have never dreamt of. Believe in your strength as a parent; do always follow your instincts, above all do always believe in the possibilities of your child, it's amazing.

Let us share: our knowledge our skills, and cooperate together, we as parents with the professionals and the governments.

It's not only money, it's empathy, time and interest, that's what we achieve when we share our experience and empower the parent on behalf of the child and you as professionals will have done a great job.

I would like to share with you my experience from the ICF conference in Austria. For me as a parent, ICF means cooperating with different professionals from the visual impairment field, like: psychologists, ophthalmologists, regional coordinators, different types of rehabilitation workers, low vision therapists, early intervention advisers, experts for VI and CVI, independent researchers/educators, low vision trainers, special education teachers, and parents, so the group is a variety of people involved in the field of ICF.

I visited the conference to know more about cooperating with each other, professionals with professionals and also with parents. I would like to let you know more about this conference.

You can find many presentations and information about ICF / visual impairment from Paul Looyensteijn, he presented the knowledge based network visual profile www.visualprofile.info. Also Karin van Hemelrijk and Joke Luyten of Ganspoel from Belgium (www.ganspoel.be). They work with children and youngsters with CVI and presented their working methods. There was in Austria a presentation I liked very much from Roxanna Elena's (Romania) she tells us about multidisciplinary research concerning cerebral visual impairment in children with brain damage and another presentation of Dorthe Marie Degn's (Danmark,

www.ibos.dk), this presentation was about the dilemmas in implementing ICF for VIP. Both stressed the importance of knowing what is necessary to realise interdisciplinary cooperation between the various disciplines in support of clients with visual impairments and their family.

The information showed us that the ICF-model is like a puzzle and that it is not simple to use in the support of people with visual impairment and their families.

When everybody cooperates and asks their colleagues from other disciplines for information it could work. But this requires time, the expertise of each other's disciplines and sometimes brings to light gaps in communication or cooperation or even expertise. A worse problem is that only too often people assume they know all about the other colleague's discipline and don't ask. The parents or family of the visually impaired were affirmed to be important, yet often not (enough) consulted as sources of information about the environment. COOPERATION and TRUST can be the magic words.

We had different workshops with practical cases from the field. These brought to light how everybody approached the case from different viewpoints and said different things. For example: concerning health condition, body functions and structures most of us were in one line. Concerning activities, participation, and above all personal and environmental factors however, points of view differed widely. Also we can see that legislation differs in the different European countries on many points. So the puzzle is not (even) the same in every country.

Negotiations with others in the field are essential: find out together what is best for this particular client. What are his/her wishes or dreams, analysed by the professional, in cooperation with the parents or family. This means the active involvement of the client, the child and/or his parents. Their dreams and wishes must be taken into account. They are the ones who have to - be empowered to - realise the plans, with important but in terms of time, relatively very little support from professionals in rehabilitation, education and care.

Be aware of what you as a professional are doing. Dare to look at all elements, also outside your own discipline. Notice that every person is different and there cannot be one approach or solution for every blind or low vision client.

Always remember that it is the client who can reach the set goals, and the professional who may help set conditions and who may coach, but only with the magic words cooperation and trust.

There is no handbook that will give you the right solution. For each individual client a tailor made solution must be found. The ICF-model offers a guide to take into account all the important factors, depending on his components of ICF.

Never forget that the client (/child and/or parent) sees you as the knowledgeable expert and wants to put their trust in you and the support system. If the client feels he can trust you, he will be very motivated to follow your advice, use aids and cooperate. Keep in mind that it only works if the client totally agrees with the set goals and if different professionals give well

coordinated advice; that will settle and deepen the client's faith both in your expertise and in the system.

Let's hope that this conference will work like a snowball; the more we talk about it, the more it can help all of us to do even better for the visually impaired child or client.

I end my short review by stating that the involvement of clients and/or parents is of utter importance. For the ICEVI worldwide this cooperation is growing; we already are cooperating with parents from USA, Malaysia, New Zealand, Israel, etc. Elke Wagner states that the partnership of professionals with parents in ICEVI should increase.

I have offered the Foundation Mita stimabo (www.mitastimabo.nl) to help realise this. Please pass on to me at mitastimabo@planet.nl, names, websites and e-mail addresses of parents' organisations you know. I will then contact them. Dr. Elke Wagner and I will see what we can do to support parents who want to be involved in ICEVI. Dr. Wagner is the contact person for parent's organisations in Germany.

Thank you for your interest and let's do it together. It is a challenge to go for the solid participation of parents in the whole of Europe and the world.

We also have our parents' organisation IPAVI

You can e-mail to:

Susan LaVenture, LaVentureS@GuildHealth.org or
Ofek Liyladenu ofek@ofek-liyladenu.org.il

Warm regards *Angelette Akkermans*
mitastimabo@planet.nl

Information from the UK

Online courses on Visual impairment and Special Education Needs

The British Council is launching a series of online courses in the field of Special Education Needs (SEN). The courses have been designed for Teachers of English as a subject or teachers teaching through the medium of English, working in mainstream learning contexts who are not SEN specialists. They positively promote the social model, assuming differences are a normal part of diversity and that teaching must be adapted to the needs of the learner. The content covers how to identify learning difficulties that result from SEN; what procedures to follow once the difficulty has been identified; how to implement effective teaching and learning strategies and how to create an inclusive learning environment. To launch the course a free webinar was held on Visual Impairment by Maha Khochen.

For further information about this course and other SEN online courses, contact *Phil Dexter*, Adviser for Teacher Development, Global English Teacher Development Department, British Council, English and Examinations, UK
phil.dexter@britishcouncil.org

Visually impaired achievers

As an Armenian student with multiple impairments (including a visual impairment), Armineh Soorenian moved from Iran to the UK in 1996. Since this time Armineh studied for a BA, MA and a PhD in Disability Studies. Completed in November 2011 at the Centre for Disability Studies, University of Leeds, her doctoral thesis was concerned with disabled international students' experiences in British universities. She analysed the challenges participants experienced because of being 'disabled', 'international' and sometimes 'mature' and 'postgraduate' students. Armineh concentrated on how some of the difficulties were intensified because of the combination of students' multiple identities and, as a consequence, how the participants felt further isolated during their university experience. The key barriers were in the four areas of: access and information; disability services; learning and teaching; social life and accommodation.

Her book 'Disabled International Students in British Higher Education: Experiences and Expectations' is under contract by Sense Publishers, and is due to be published soon. Armineh has also campaigned and written extensively on disabled people's other human rights issues such as access to cultural and social life, as well as income and benefits.

For further information on any of the above, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Maha Khochen, Institute of Education, University of London
School of Psychology and Human Development
mahakhechen@hotmail.com

News from Wales, UK

RNIB Cymru has just been awarded £1million to run a project around transitions.

Future In-Sight is an opportunity to make a difference to the employability of 14-25 year olds who are experiencing sight loss, through working with a range of partners who contribute their specialist skills. It is funded by a £1 million grant from the Bright New Futures funding stream of the Big Lottery Fund and will run for 5 years from 1st August 2013. It will reach young people across Wales.

Talking to young people with sight loss in Wales, we have tailored a programme of activities to respond to their needs. These include:

1. Developing personal confidence

Young people tell us that they want the opportunity to develop self-advocacy skills and personal confidence. They want to learn from older young people with sight loss who have overcome the same challenges and to have help in preparing for the future. Future In-Sight will comprise:

- **Confidence building through drama and the arts.** Led by our partner, UCAN Productions, 12 confidence building courses per year will be held across Wales encouraging team working, self-advocacy, use of body language and development of social skills.
- **A peer-support / buddying scheme.** Designed to provide support and guidance by older young people with sight loss to younger ones. This will be monitored through UCAN and other partners.
- **Development of a modular 'finding your feet' style course.** This will be written in consultation with young people to address the things they want to know about. RNIB Cymru will co-ordinate the writing, piloting and roll-out of this course which can be delivered by other partners such as local societies and specialist teachers / social workers.

2. Gaining practical skills and experiencing work

We know that it is difficult for young people to gain worthwhile experiences of work and we want to address this and help them plan for the future. Future In-Sight will address this by providing a minimum of 8 supported work placements per year for those doing work experience through school and for those working with RNIB Cymru Employment and Transitions staff. These placements will encompass:

- **Visual awareness training for employers.** This is a way of both preparing them for the arrival of a young person with sight loss as well as an incentive - free training for their employees - if they accept someone on placement.
- **Equipment loan.** The grant includes £20,000 to buy a bank of accessible equipment, to be stored and maintained by Neath Port Talbot College as part of the Beyond Vision partnership. This will be available for young people who need specialist technology to enable them to fully engage with the work placement.
- **Orientation and mobility around the workplace.** Provided by Guidedogs and Vision Support (in North Wales), this short term (1-3 days intervention) will enable young people to develop independent travel skills to enable them to maximise the work placement and give additional skills to those looking for work.
- **Technology support.** This support will be available to ensure that the young person's equipment is compatible with that of the employer and to give any training that is required. RNIB Cymru technology staff will also support work clubs and work with individuals as required.

3. Planning for the Future

Key to the success of the Future In-Sight programme is the ability to refer young people between organisations to enable them to develop the skills and get the experiences and guidance they need to plan for the future.

Future In-Sight will build on the successful transitions and employment work established by RNIB Cymru, ensuring that young people access both specialist services and mainstream statutory support and the information they need to plan their journey from school to employment. Our team of transitions and employment staff has been enhanced by the addition of a full-time transitions officer with responsibility for co-ordinating work placements and establishing relationships with employers in a range of sectors who are able to work with young people with sight loss. With our partners we aim to make a lasting difference to the prospects of young people in Wales.

For more information contact: *Nicola J. Crews*
Head of Education and Employment Services, RNIB Cymru
Nicola.crews@rnib.org.uk

Information on The Doran Review, Scotland

The Doran Review Report (2012) sets out the strategic vision for provision for children and young people with complex additional support needs in Scotland. The review report sets out the findings and recommendations for provision across four themed areas; Culture, Complex Additional Support Needs and Expertise, Policy Choice and Learning Experiences, Interagency Working, Planning and Review, and National and Local Provision and the Role of the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government responded in a document 'Meeting the needs of Scotland's children and young people with complex additional support needs' which sets out its response to the Doran Review of provision for children and young people with complex additional support needs. The review makes 21 recommendations across four themed areas and this report sets out the response to each of these. In summary, the grant aided schools including The Royal Blind School and National Centres, including The SSC are considering these reports as they move towards a strategic commissioning process.

The Doran Review (ISBN: 9781780459684)
www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2012/11/7084

Meeting the needs of Scotland's children and young people with complex additional support needs (ISBN: 9781780459660)
www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2012/11/6244



Present

Positive Approaches-Practical Outcomes Conference

On: July 10th-11th 2014

At: St. Vincent's School for Children and Young People with Sensory Impairment and Additional Needs - Liverpool

A conference with a practical 'what to do' 'how to do it' and 'what to do with it' approach offering front line practitioners an opportunity to:

- Develop their knowledge base
- Refresh their thoughts and practices
- Broaden skills and competence

Keynote speakers

Day one: *Dr Roxana Cziker* presents

'The role of the brain in the development of the visual system in children with cerebral visual impairment'

Including the importance of assessment in premature children

Day two: *Dr Gail Bailey* presents

'The Emotional Well Being of Children and Young People with Visual Impairments and their Strengths'

Conference Programme

Day 1

9.00 – 9.30am

Arrival, registration and refreshments

9.30 – 10.30am

Dr Roxana Cziker presents:

The role of the brain in the development of the visual system in children with cerebral visual impairment

10.30 – 10.45am

Break

10.45 – 12.45pm

Workshop Carousel

12.45pm – 1.45pm

Lunch

1.45pm – 4.00 pm
Workshop Carousel
(Break approx 2.45pm)

Day 2

9.00 – 9.30am
Arrival, registration and refreshments

9.30 – 10.30am

Dr *Gail Bailey* presents:

The Emotional Well Being of Children and Young People with Visual Impairments and their Strengths

10.30 – 10.45am

Break

10.45am – 12.45pm

Workshop Carousel

12.45pm – 1.45pm

Lunch

1.45pm – 4.00 pm

Workshop Carousel

(Break approx 2.45pm)

4.00pm – 4.15pm

Plenary

The conference has been planned to enable all practitioners to participate in each workshop outlined below. Delegates will be assigned to one of four groups for the two day conference and participate in each workshop on a carousel basis.

Workshops

Workshop One:

Cerebral Visual Impairment – the role of functional vision assessment and visual stimulation and training.

Presented by: *Dr Roxana Cziker*



About the presenter

From May 2012 I have been the director of the High School for the Visually Impaired Students in Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

In 1996 I graduated from the Special Education Department at the Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania and since then I have been employed in the High School for the Visually Impaired Students in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, both as a teacher at a primary school for blind children and also for ten years as an early intervention worker for students with MDVI age 6 months to 8 years. In 2009 I introduced for the first time within my institution, the low vision assessment and therapy as visual stimulation and training for both vision impaired and children with MDVI.

I have two PhDs, one in psychology (2007) related to visual behaviour training for children with visual impairment, a multidisciplinary approach and the second PhD is in medical studies (2010) and is about the relation between cerebral injuries and motor, sensorial and neuro-cognitive and visual-perceptive functions related to paediatric pathology.

One of my passions related to my profession is to discover the visual potential of each child and to give them the chance to feel free to use their residual vision.

Workshop One Programme

- Short introduction about the visual system and brain dysfunction related to the visual system – cerebral visual impairment and neurological disorders
- Classification of visual functions – oculomotor, sensorial, visual-cognitive and visual-perceptive functions
- Presentation of tools and instruments to assess visual functions
- Assessment of visual functions and transfer of data into the practical issues/ information
- Practical assessment of visual functions
- Multisensory assessment in children with cerebral visual impairment/observation
- Presentation of a model report: visual functions assessment
- Presentation of materials for visual training

Workshop Two:

The Emotional Well Being of Children and Young People with Visual Impairments and their Strengths.

Presented by: *Dr Gail Bailey*



About the presenter

I am an experienced teacher as well as a fully qualified and experienced educational psychologist who has applied psychology to optimise learning experiences in a range of settings. I have led projects at regional and National level since being diagnosed with RP myself as well as presenting papers at National and International level.

I consider myself a positive psychologist whose mission is to improve learning and life experiences for vulnerable children and young people by utilising their strengths. My specialism since conducting research at University College London is in the Emotional Wellbeing of Children and Young People with Visual Impairment, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. My main aim at the moment is to pro-actively support Emotional Well-being in these groups through delivering high quality applied learning courses and texts for front-line practitioners.

I am currently honorary lecturer on the DEdPsy Professional Training Course for Educational Psychologists at UCL and on the MQTCVI at Birmingham University as well as being a practising educational psychologist.

Workshop Two Programme: The Recognition and Development of Strengths

Through my casework and research it became evident that even though young people may self report positive emotional well-being, they may still have difficulty recognising their character strengths and focus on weaknesses. In my daily work I recognise the importance of building resilience to combat adversity and the recognition and development of character strengths is a useful approach to help a child self-advocate about their capabilities. This is important if a child or young person is to optimise their potential and can be applied to all sorts of learning and life situations

This workshop will introduce you to:

- The assessment of strengths

- Strengths spotting- The recognition of how strengths are already used in daily life
- How to apply strengths when the going gets tough
- The Positive Steps toolkit (Positive Eye) and games to encourage the recognition of strengths in self and others will be available.

References:

BAILEY, G. (2009) What Can You See? A Guide to the Social and Emotional Development of Children and Young People with Visual Impairments. London: RNIB Cymru

BAILEY, G. (2011) A Positive Exploration of the Emotional Well-being of Children and Young People With Visual Impairments. Unpublished doctoral thesis UCL 2011

BAILEY, G. (2012) Emotional Well-being For Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. London: Sage/ Lucky Duck

Workshop Three:

A practical framework for building positive social skills

Presented by: *Gwyneth McCormack*



About the presenter

Gwyn is an enthusiastic, passionate and committed professional with a wealth of experience and knowledge in the field of education and visual impairment, which includes:

- Six years as a mainstream secondary school teacher
- Eleven years as a Teacher of Visual Impairments in a Peripatetic Support Service supporting children and young people, 0 –18 years old
- Five years managing a Local Authority, Peripatetic Support Service for Children with Visual Impairments

Gwyn has a clear understanding of inclusion from the School, Service, Child and Family perspectives. Five years ago, Gwyn established Positive Eye, providing

practical courses, consultancy and a bespoke product range written and published in-house to offer practically based, strategies and approaches to professionals working with children and young people with visual impairment. Positive Eye is known nationally and also has developed regular clients within several European countries. Gwyn's aim is to deliver imaginative and creative approaches, within easy to use frameworks, equipping the front line practitioner with the practical skills they require to support children and schools. Gwyn has also recently taken the lead role in delivering the two year QTVI course at the University of South Wales.

Workshop Three Programme: A practical framework for building positive social skills

Social skill development is often something that is missed and put to one side due to time limitations and the demands of the busy curriculum, yet supporting the development of positive social experiences are a crucial aspect of the child's emotional well being. The workshop offers the practitioner a practical framework for supporting the development of social skills as an integral part of the child's everyday school life. The framework offers a strategy which enables the child and the professional to measure progress and success. It involves:

- Assessment of social skills by professional
- The child's thoughts on social situations they find easy and those they would like to find easier
- Identifying targets for intervention
- Planning goals and measuring progress by child and professional
- Practical strategies - teacher directed social skills training, peer mediated interventions and role play
- Planning social skills programmes

Workshop Four

Mobility and Orientation skills

Presented by: *Sue Cook*



About the presenter

Sue has worked in education for over thirty years, firstly in mainstream secondary school and then as a qualified teacher of visual impairment and she is a former Ofsted inspector of Special Needs. Sue is a tutor for the Birmingham University distance learning course for teachers working towards the QTVI qualification. Sue's guiding principle is that all pupils, regardless of disability, are entitled to access education and achieve their potential, and as manager of a sensory inclusion service she developed a broad-spectrum team with expertise in sensory and other educational needs. In May 2013 she started her own specialist consultancy, Visible Outcomes. Sue has a thorough knowledge of current legislation and guidance relevant to sensory impairment, other disability issues and education in general. She has a practical approach and flexibility in working towards realistic outcomes and is particularly interested in the development of Orientation and Mobility.

Workshop Four Programme

Orientation and mobility is an area often left to the O & M specialist and rarely included as part of the child's daily life until there is a need for specific training. This workshop will offer the practitioner ways of developing good movement skills from the outset in a collaborative manner with parents and colleagues by providing a framework which will include:

- Assessment of mobility and orientation skills at the different phases
- Identifying what skills require tuition
- Advice & Practice on those skills
- Planning intervention
- Inclusion of others in any programme for reinforcement
- Intervention by O&M specialists

Cost to attend: £115.00

To book your place:

Complete the online booking form at www.positiveeye.co.uk/conference/

1. *Priority booking* for Services for VI in the North West
Booking deadline: **Friday 10th January 2014**
2. Bookings for *other professionals*: **10th January - Friday 28th February 2014**
3. *Final* booking deadline – **Friday 28th February 2014**

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Support the child to recognise the things they find easy and those they would like to find easier with this simple effective posting box. Tickets are posted by the child, either in the "easy" or "easier" slot. Those posted in the "easier" slot form the child's targets for development and intervention. The child can then re-post the tickets in the "easy" slot when they think their access to a task or activity has improved, supporting the child to be in the "driving seat." Goal planning sheets and measuring progress graphs enable progress to be charted and recorded at three review times across the year. Support the child to recognise the things they find easy and those they would like to find easier with this simple effective posting box. Tickets are posted by the child, either in the "easy" or "easier" slot. Those posted in the "easier" slot form the child's targets for development and intervention. The child can then re-post the tickets in the "easy" slot when they think their access to a task or activity has improved, supporting the child to be in the "driving seat." Goal planning sheets and measuring progress graphs enable progress to be charted and recorded at three review times across the year.



Pack includes: Easy-Easier Posting Box, Set of laminated tickets Pack includes: Easy-Easier Posting Box, Set of laminated tickets with typical classroom tasks, CD with list of tickets, review and recording sheet, goal planning sheets for child, measuring progress graphs, skill level descriptions and copy of graphics (to enable tactile representation should it be required) with typical classroom tasks, CD with list of tickets, review and recording sheet, goal planning sheets for child, measuring progress graphs, skill level descriptions and copy of graphics (to enable tactile representation should it be required)

Cost = £20.00 + £5.50 P&P Extra boxes £8.00 each (+P&P)

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