



A Comenius Project



## **MOBILITY IS FUN FOR EVERYONE**

Simple steps to empower parents, families and professionals.

Safe travel and movement **T**hrough the **E**nvironment  
for young learners with visual impairment,  
**P**romoted by all!  
Understanding and **P**articipation.

## **STEP UP!**

# **NEWSLETTER 3**

September 2013

[www.step-up-comenius.eu](http://www.step-up-comenius.eu)



## Hosting a Comenius meeting

By Paul Taylor, Habilitation Specialist, The Royal Blind School, Edinburgh.

At the beginning of June, The Royal Blind School in Edinburgh was proud to host the latest meeting of the Step Up project. We had attended the Luxembourg project meeting and we were very impressed by the organisation that went into hosting the event, so when it was our turn, we knew that we had to start planning early to make it a good experience for all of our European colleagues. We spent time thinking about the experiences that had made the trip to Luxembourg memorable. We decided to include the following on the list: Accommodation, hospitality, local knowledge, venue for project, equipment to be used during meetings, tours of our school and welcome packs.



A good starting point was to get the number of people attending, as this figure would be important when arranging the venue, facilities, teas, coffees and lunches. Now that the process was underway, I began researching local accommodation for our colleagues and a list of hotels was e-mailed. As part of the ethos of Comenius, I knew it was going to be important to show our guests some of the cultural aspects of the country that they were visiting. With this in mind, I got to work searching for a Scottish restaurant which mixed traditional elements of cuisine with modern culture so that our guests could get an all-round experience.

As well as planning an evening event, we had to plan refreshments for our guests during the day. Our school has a great domestic services team, so they were able to provide lunches and refreshments during the day. Due to the size of our group, we reserved the school assembly hall for our group to use.

As a result we had to order tables and liaise with our IT department to ensure that we had the relevant laptops, projectors and Wi-Fi connections for our meetings. During our visit to Luxembourg, we had enjoyed the tour of their services, so we ensured that this was included. We also arranged a trip to The Garden Coffee Shop which is a business venture run by some of the older pupils at the school.



At the end of the Luxembourg meeting, work tasks were assigned to partner countries. We then had to plan an agenda and arrange the time to be divided into sessions and working groups so that we could meet our goals that had been set in relation to the different sections of the Step Up Project. Once everything had been planned, booked and arranged, our last piece of work before our colleagues arrived was to e-mail the itinerary.

Once our colleagues arrived and the meetings were in full swing, it made all the planning and preparation worthwhile and I hope everyone enjoyed their time in Scotland.





## Spreading The Word About The STEP UP Project

We have been spreading the word about the STEP UP project by displaying the promotional poster at various conferences. In April the STEP UP poster was displayed at the National Conference On Visually Impaired Children And Young People which was held in Stirling, Scotland. In attendance there were approximately 200 professionals from all over Scotland and the UK. One of the aims of this conference was to promote habilitation and independent living skills.

Poster on display at the Royal Blind School stall at the Stirling Conference April 2013.

The poster was also on display at the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) European Conference in Turkey at the beginning of July. This conference welcomed approximately 400 people from a variety of European countries. The ICEVI promotes equal access to education for children and young people with visual impairment. The European Conference aimed to promote good practice in all areas of education for visually impaired learning's including mobility and independence skills.

Both of these conferences offered the opportunity to expose the STEP UP project to a wide audience of professionals interested in promoting skills for visually impaired children and young people.



Display at ICEVI European conference in Turkey, July 2013.



## Big changes ahead for our Scottish project partners

By Angie Bisson, Mobility & Independence Specialist  
(Royal Blind School, Edinburgh)

The Royal Blind School is merging its two school campuses as part of a longer term strategy to become even more specialised in educating and supporting children with a visual impairment, including those who also have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders, motor or learning disabilities.

The School is also establishing National Visual Impairment Education Resource Centre to support the education of visually impaired pupils in schools throughout Scotland. The Centre will provide pupil assessment and support, as well as advice and training for the education sector on working with children and young people with a visual impairment.

The changes mean this is the last year that our iconic building at Craigmillar Park, which was purpose built as the Royal Blind School in 1835, will be used to teach pupils as it is due to be sold.

To accommodate the big move, our more modern Canaan Lane campus has begun a re-development programme that will enable all pupils at the Royal Blind School to be cared for and educated there by Summer 2014. Over the recent summer break a new multi-use games area was built. The re-development of the school will see its excellent facilities at Canaan Lane enhanced to take pupils across the whole curriculum and range of needs. There will also be a new flat for relatives to enable pupils to be with their family during assessments or illness, and will be particularly useful for those whose parents live further afield.



THE ROYAL BLIND SCHOOL

[www.royalblind.org/royalblindschool](http://www.royalblind.org/royalblindschool)



## Drama in education as a way to orientation and mobility

By Klara Eliaskova and Jana Loudova  
(Gymnazium pro zrakové postizene a Stredni skola pro zrakové postizene)

The drama club in our school has had a long lasting tradition. The drama in education in our conception is thought mainly as a means to support the socialization of students with visual impairment, not as a means leading to become an actor.

Performing in drama club puts high demands especially on independent movement and orientation withal it supports development of students' personality, their creativity, immediacy and social relations. Students in the club have different visual problems. The most of them, especially those who can partially see, need a lot of light. On the other hand, other students can be photophobic, so a lot of light can cause them problems with orientation. Blind students usually don't have any special lighting requirements, except those whose light perception is retained. Contrasting costumes (black and white) can be useful for better orientation of students with different visual problems.



Unintentional movement, natural gesticulation and expressional changes are big problems of blind students. Achilles' heel of that is mainly oscillating body move, stereotyped or automatical hand move. Students usually keep this vice from early childhood and it can be hard to preclude it.

As developement of mobility skills is the most important for student's independence, we give a lot of attention to it. During all moving activities, we have to follow right habits and correct faulty body posture, even then students are calm or move. Students with visual impairment naturally have a problems mainly with movement on stage, they have to remember all the changes of coulisses or positions of their acting partners.

Particular moving activities can lead to better orientation on stage and natural gesticulation. We use following techniques:

### Sonic signals

The most often sonic signals that are used for better orientation of visually impaired students are clapping, snapping one's fingers or knocking on some hard surface. We are able to add these sonic signals to a screenplay, so that blind students can move on the stage without any problems.

### Dynamics

Good clue for student's orientation can be dynamics. In some part of a play we can turn up or turn down the music, or ask acting partners for different tone of their voices. For example, during silent music student walks slowly, during loud music they walk quickly.

### Stepping

During some scenes visually impaired students can count their steps. This technique is very reliable but it puts high demands on actors' concentration.

### Fixed landmark

We have good experience with a fixed landmark. It is usually a chair or a table which stands in the same place all the time of performance.

### Sounded props

If we can use some props during a performance, we try to sound them. Blind students can move on stage towards such a prop. We have worked with a bell-ball, a sounded school bag or small suitcase.

Our performances are very often presented in public, we have played in a hospital or at local celebrations. Every year we are involved in a drama competition. It is helpful because our students can hear the applause and feel succesful. Drama club gives them opportunity to meet new people and spent their free time meaningfully.



## Sensory Garden

by Marija Repe Kocman

(Zavod za slepo in slabovidno mladino Ljubljana)

The first idea for the sensory garden at the Institute for Blind and Partially Sighted Children Ljubljana was given by a student of architecture and she even developed it in her diploma thesis. However it took us a few years that it came true. Since the construction demanded quite considerable sums of money it was only possible to realise it within a project financially supported by Norway Grants (Norwegian Financial Mechanism) and this is its presentation in the application form for the project:

“Arrangement of the garden for the blind with orientation and mobility training facilities.



Description: One part of the surrounding area will be turned into the garden for the blind which can be used as training facilities for orientation and mobility. The visually impaired will be given the possibility to start their orientation and mobility training in safe circumstances before going out into real-life situations. They will meet different obstacles and materials and they will be exposed to various sound effects which can serve as landmarks. The garden will be designed and constructed with all the necessary equipment (different obstacles, simulator of different sounds that can be found in our environment, etc.).”

However, since the opening in June 2010, the Sensory garden has been used for raising public awareness and informing our visitors about blindness and visual impairment. The visitors are kindergarten children, primary and secondary school pupils, students, teachers and any other interested audience. For these groups different guided tours are provided or workshops are run in the Sensory garden. A guided tour lasts for one hour on the other hand the workshops at least three.



The workshops are adjusted to the age of the visitors or can even meet their wishes, demands and interests. Through the workshops visitors are acquainted with blindness, visual impairment and the use of other senses. At the same time they find out more about the work and role of Institute for the Blind and Partially Sighted Children Ljubljana. Our visitors become familiar with the problems people with visual impairment have to deal with and also the use of some basic devices they use in everyday life. Visitors can discover the use of white cane, braille, braille typewriter and printed materials like tactile books, adapted text books, tactile maps etc. which can accommodate the blind. The visitors themselves can experience the world of visual impairment: walking blind folded with a white cane along a specially prepared orientation and mobility training route. The visitors also get the basic information about escorting a blind person.

1876 visitors have visited the Sensory garden and 41 workshops have been held so far in the last three years.



In addition, in the last year the Sensory garden offers a possibility of celebrating birthdays for children and organizing a team building programme for business companies which both include education about visual impairment.



## Mobility is for everyone

(Ekeskolan / Resourcecenter Vision)

First of all we would like to thank you, Angie, Paul and Nancy, for very nice, worthwhile and well organized meeting in Edinburgh. We get closer and closer to the final product and we do enjoy our fruitful discussions which make our work well worked thru.

Just as in all our countries and schools the educational goal seems to be "A or one school for everyone" with increased inclusion as the main purpose. This means that special schools get fewer and fewer pupils and those who do attend special schools tend to have increased needs.

This article is supposed to put an attention to children and young adults with multi-disabilities. How can we think Orientation & Mobility (O&M) having these pupils in mind? This will be our contribution to our third newsletter.

As the catchwords for STEP UP are "Mobility is fun for everyone!" We came to think about occasions when our multi-disabled pupils have fun at the same time as they experience O&M. Occasions that crossed our minds are wheel-chair dancing, swimming and horse riding. We will, of course, also mention how O&M can be a natural part in daily life for our multi-disabled pupils and not only part of an activity.

### Wheel-chair dancing and O&M

What are the connections? We feel that dancing can give fun and joy, self-esteem and basic skills in spatial awareness and perception of time. Wheel-chair dancing also gives the participants knowledge and concrete experience of concepts such as far away, close to, beside, behind and in front of. Furthermore wheel-chair-dancing creates opportunities to practice perception of time, body awareness and knowledge of body parts.

In wheel-chair dancing, one can also fit in the questions: Where am I? Where am I going? How?



### Swimming and O&M

Being in the pool is for many of our pupils one of few places where the pupil can be able to move by him/herself. The pool is a great place to practise direction, distance, spatial awareness as well as body awareness. The pool is also a place to feel free!



### Horse riding and O&M

Horse riding, you can get so much out of this activity! Riding a horse gives spatial awareness, body awareness and an opportunity to practice balance. Horse riding is something you can do indoors as well as outdoors in all weathers.

You use senses as smell, listening, feel and practise concepts as on, over, under, beside, left and right as well as fast and slow.

Interaction and communication are skills that can be practised and experienced in horse riding. As well as in the pool, horse riding can give a feeling of freedom.

If you have difficulties moving by yourself you automatically get movements from the horse.

Last but not least being part of a riding school is a way to socialise and be a participant in the community.





### **Mobility is fun for everyone**

To find activities that everyone in a family can participate in is important. We feel that dancing and movements to music, swimming and horse riding are activities that all family members can participate in.

It is also important to have high expectations on yourself and your child. Research says that high expectations on children's active participation affects the child's ability to learn and develop. Everyone has their right to learn and develop from their own ability.

### **O&M in daily life**

Take the time is the number one keyword in daily life if you want to give children with multi-disabilities a chance to participate in O&M. We feel that mobility and communication are very tightly linked together. Name what you are doing/going to do, especially if something happens all of a sudden. But, don't talk too much, since too much talk can distract and confuse the child!

Creating rituals, making situations predictable and picking-up signals can be to great help practicing O&M in daily life. Rituals and making situations predictable make situations clear and reassuring.

### **The questionnaire**

As a result from the STEP UP questionnaire we found that some of the key-words are knowledge of body parts, spatial awareness and movements in familiar environments, take the time, experience being alone at times, all weathers (rain, wind and snow) and experience different surfaces and awareness of body and space.

All these words fit in as well in wheel-chair dancing, swimming, horse riding as in daily life.

### **Communication**

As for any visually impaired person O&M and communication are very tightly linked together. Working with children/young adults with MDVI means that you have to be able to create opportunities for communication to arise. Ways to do this can be thru wheel-chair dancing, swimming and horse riding. Our experience is that communication is stimulated by movements.

Taking time is also important to emphasize. We have to allow our pupils to adjust before taking action. To make our pupils able to participate in O&M in daily life we have to give them time since we don't want O&M to be an activity but a part of daily life.





(Onerva Mäki School)

Onerva Centre will be a two- to four- storey building that will hold 120 kids. The dormitory will accommodate 60 students.

January 2016 semester start at the new school

**LEMOPIETUKSEN JA TUUKKILAJEILAJEN TILA**  
**SOLU 1)**  
 kokoushuone  
 2 x lämpötila- ja valaistus  
 2 x Ylihuoneen tiskit

**VÄLILÖYKÖN TILA (SOLU 2)**  
 Ylihuoneen kokoushuone  
 2 x Ylihuoneen tiskit  
 21 valaistusta + 12 lämpötila- ja valaistusta

