



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,

Promoted by all!

Understanding and **P**articipation.

STEP UP!

NEWSLETTER 5

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EURO MP PAYS A VISIT TO THE ROYAL BLIND SCHOOL

By Angie Bisson, Paul Taylor,
Nancy Conley Pinkerton

The Royal Blind School,
Edinburgh

As part of promoting the STEP UP project and keeping people posted about its progress, The Royal Blind School have been distributing project newsletters to local interested parties. In response to one of these Alyn Smith, our local MEP, contacted us and indicated his interest in the project. He was keen to find out more about the school's involvement in it and expressed a wish to visit the school and find out more about it.

We were very happy to host Alyn and his team on the 24 January 2014 when we are able to talk about the project, and he was able to meet some of our pupils and observe first-hand the difference that proficient mobility and orientation skills make in enabling them to move around confidently, safely & independently.

Alyn posted a blog on his website about his visit. He said:

"It's always a pleasure to get to know about European educational projects in action and the Royal Blind School is a perfect example of a school that, through the Comenius programme, successfully engages with our European partners for the benefit of our children."

"I am delighted that the school is taking advantage of the 'STEP UP!' programme and takes part in developing resources and ideas about safe travel and movement to support pupils, their parents, carers and education staff."

"This collaboration on a European level means that a delegation from the Royal Blind School was able travel to Sweden and Luxembourg to exchange ideas with participants from eight other countries, and the school was also proud to host international delegations here in Edinburgh."



Environmental audit

By Karmen Pajk and Marija Jeraša

Institute for Blind and Partially sighted Children
Ljubljana

Environmental Audit is one of the outcomes of STEP UP. The final version was presented and tried out during the project meeting in Prague in October 2013 and once again in Jyväskylä in February. The Slovenian team found the questionnaire very useful in many aspects.

That's why when we had returned from Prague we discussed it in a larger group and decided that we would also like to try it out in our environment, at our school. We had to find the right occasion and some voluntaries.

Within the activities of our resource centre there are two workshops per academic year offered to secondary school students, aged 15 to 20, who attend mainstream schools. The workshops are held at the Institute for Blind and Partially Sighted Children in Ljubljana and run by visiting teachers. The number of students taking part in these workshops has been increasing in the last years as they represent an occasion where students with VI, who attend different vocational and grammar secondary schools all over Slovenia, gather and at the same time we, the teachers, try to deliver some special education knowledge and skills like O&M, daily living skill, social skills... packed up in an interesting content. Besides that we try to choose stimulating topics, for instance job career, family life and relations between partners, and so the topic of the workshop in November was how to make the environment more friendly to people with VI.

The two-day workshop was organized and run by three teachers, two are involved in STEP UP and there was a nice group of 23 students. Our purpose was to raise the awareness about the importance of certain adaptations in the environment. We found that this might also be a perfect occasion to test the Environmental Audit. But we started with some theory as it could have been noticed that the students did not pay much attention to the environment and they accepted it as it was. After this theoretical introduction and a lengthy discussion during which we presented them the Environmental Audit they were able to name some good examples and some problems in their school environment which can make orientation much more difficult for students with VI. Furthermore they suggested some improvements.

At this point they were divided into three groups and given precise instructions with one teacher to assist the group. Each group had to check one part of our school environment using the Environmental Audit: the classroom, the dormitory and the parking area with the access to the building. They were critical but also creative suggesting some good improvements. More importantly, they found the Environmental Audit a useful tool since it directed their attention to certain features in the environment.

At the end an analysis was done and we came to the conclusion that firstly we must be aware of the problems and secondly there must be a certain level of willingness to change things, even though many of them are not costly to do.



Literary wanderings – Ways to explore

by Klára Eliášková

High School for Visually Impaired, Prague



Our secondary school offers a range of leisure activities for our students. In the last issue of the newsletter we have described the drama club activities, which by its conception contributes significantly to the development of spatial orientation of our students. To similar activity, which has also become a tradition

at our school for several years, belongs so-called literary wanderings, which are organized as events for a few days twice a year. It is in the form of sightseeing excursions that complement the teaching of Czech language and literature, but are designed to specifically develop self-care and independence, work habits, motor skills, spatial orientation, social interaction, and thus to contribute to the overall socialisation of visually impaired pupils.

Self-care

It is always important to carefully choose the accommodation facilities in given locality. It must include a separate kitchen, in which our students prepare food, stretch table, wash dishes, prepare snacks on trips, etc just on their own. We often encounter problems in the care of their parents, even when working with students ranging from 15 years and above. During the week-long stay at school and boarding school our pupils due to our consistent



approach and in terms of their own skills are able to handle self-manage activities such as cooking, preparing food, cleaning, personal hygiene, etc., but when they return home, their parents perform the activities for them, no matter when the reasons are due to overprotective care, or they want to save their own time. Therefore, we use all opportunities to develop self-care skills and just in terms of the literary wanderings we want to show our students the practical examples in particular, often unfamiliar surroundings, as necessity for their socialisation skills.

Mobility and orientation



In the context of specific cognitive and tourist events of our literary wanderings we try to encourage our students in their preparation for coping with common daily situations, which include crossing the road, independent travel by public transport,

orientation in an unfamiliar area, confident movement in natural terrains, etc. Pupils are, in a natural and funny way together with their friends, improving their perception of terrain slope, surface changes, which they can feel underfoot, also in the perception of airflow, recognition of direction, distance and nature of sounds, they are also practicing to keep straight ahead direction when walking and other skills.

We always try to choose the appropriate and safe route, but it is common in specific trips we run into unexpected obstacles such as fallen trees, muddy, rocky or difficult viable routes and terrain, and due to overcoming such unexpected obstacles we increase confidence and movement security of our students.

Training in social and communication skills

Especially in social interaction visually impaired are often very cautious and timid and in many cases they are afraid to ask passers-by for help, or to eventually refuse help from others. Literary wanderings are representing an unique opportunity to practice social skills in different situations. During our trips we can visit various museums, exhibitions, theater performances, monuments, castles, chateaus but also restaurants, shops, ie events and places in which pupils naturally meet people with whom they must try to communicate efficiently and effectively, appropriately adapt their behaviour to the situation and current social contact. For example our students are buying tickets for a whole group, booking given objects, ordering meal in the restaurant which they pay for by themselves without any help, sorting out complaints or orders of the purchased goods, etc.

We have suggested that the objectives of literary wanderings are different, but the main purpose of this activity is the fact that our students learn about the site, which is associated with an important and well-known literary and cultural person (writer, painter, politician, etc.), of which they heard in class. This activities are leading to completing their leisure time meaningfully and actively so our students are provided with opportunities to explore their own identities, others and the rest of the world. We simply want to show our students that a person with a disability may not be on the fringe of society, but they can become its full members, can practise sports, travel, have fun and live.



OIVALLUS (Finnish for 'insight').

Open and adaptable learning and working environment

By Tuulia Ikkela-Koski and Outi Lappalainen

AT THE BEGINNING of 2013, Jyväskylä School for the Visually Impaired and Haukkaranta School merged into Onerva Centre for Learning and Consulting, which operates hand in hand with Onerva Mäki School. A new building is currently being constructed for Onerva as one of Senate Properties' major projects in Finland. Architectural Office Aarne von Boehm is responsible for the planning of Onerva Centre.

THE STAFF AND PUPILS HAVE ACTIVELY PARTICIPATED IN DESIGNING THE PREMISES and brought their ideas about what a functional building and an enjoyable learning environment are like. During the process, they have also thought about what features should be taken into account in the design, since the pupils have special needs for seeing, hearing and communication.

AN INNOVATIVE LEARNING AND WORKING ENVIRONMENT

One of the aims of the project is to create a new kind of learning and working environment that enables functionality, activeness and the application of new technology. New space arrangements and new ways to use spaces have been created for the learning and working premises, in compliance with modern ideas on learning.

Both staff and pupils can work together with others in the open working area and, for instance, with a peer in the intensive working area, or alone in the silent working area. These different working areas are called the park, fountain and den, adapting Julianna Nevari's learning space concept. In compliance with the space concept, the project is called 'Oivallus'

DYNAMIC MULTIPURPOSE LEARNING SPACES

The new building is optimal for action-based learning because its premises and furniture can be adapted to different purposes. In addition, the target of the project is to utilize the premises efficiently, making the common spaces available to the various



functions, in various ways, from morning to evening. Restaurant Omppu (Finnish for apple) is the heart of the entire building and, at the same time, a meeting place. Other examples are the stairs of learning, which offer the opportunity to functionally practice the key skills of learning: reading, calculation and perception of time.

ACCESSIBILITY AND MULTISENSORY IMPACT IN THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Accessibility refers to the suitability of the premises for everyone. The spaces and routes are clear, barrier-free and safe, and the perception of spaces is facilitated by limiting and outlining different spaces with contrasts. Good acoustics are an important factor that promotes learning. The spaces can also be lit in various ways, which is important from the viewpoint of vision as well as of concentration.

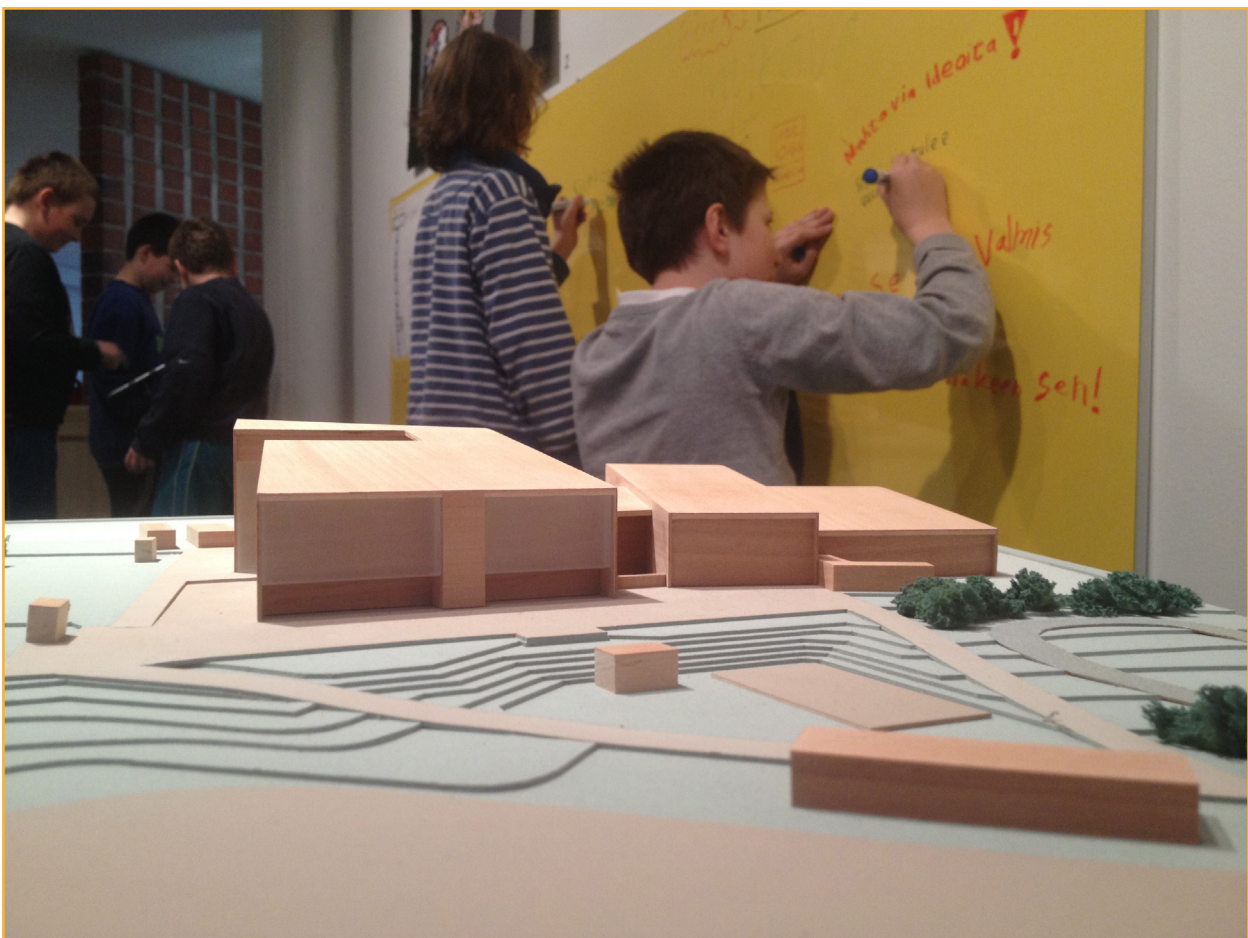
WE HOPE THAT THE BUILDING WILL BE A MODEL FOR A NEW WAY TO CONSTRUCT SCHOOLS – taking into account pupils' special needs both within the building and in its surroundings. The integration and presence of new technology in daily school life supports pupils' networking with peer groups and promotes the utilization of information networks in teaching.

LET'S BUILD THE SCHOOL ARCHITECTURE OPERA

Alvar Aalto Museum

The plot of the architecture opera was devised by the pupils of Onerva Mäki School and set to music by Sanna Ahvenjärvi and Tapio Lappalainen. The opera was directed by Spanish theatre director Jorge Raedó. Besides the pupils, Jyväskylän tanssiopisto, the Rakennetaan kaupunki! (Let's build the city!) Association and students from the Suomalainen musiikkikampus (Finnish Music Campus) took part in the opera's choreography. In the Opera spoken and signed language were used in parallel. The opera performed at Alvar Aalto Museum in April 2014 and a number of third-graders from the Jyväskylä region formed the audience as part of their cultural curriculum.

LET'S BUILD THE SCHOOL! -Exhibition 4.4.-5.4.2014 displayed diverse range of school children's ideas about their future learning environment and the new school building: paintings, structures, clay and plaster pieces and graphic works made under guidance of professionals from various art disciplines. Photographs and video footage of the various stages of the work on the architecture opera were also on display. Concept images of existing plans made by architect's offices conducted a dialogue with the pupils' works. Visitors were able to test out their tactile sense with the aid of a touchable scale model of the building. -Or practice conceptualization by exploring a 3D model of the building. The exhibition also presented the Oivallus spatial concept which included a variety of surface materials and furniture intended to try out.



Making links through Step Up

A record of the visit made by students from Sweden to Ireland.

The week of March 3rd to 7th 2014 saw the welcome visit to ChildVision of two Swedish students and accompanying staff from Ekeskolan, Orebro. Eighteen year Jack Hall and 16 year Albert Uhlin were joined by Per Danielsson, a social care worker and their teacher Jorgen Pihl. On their arrival the group were greeted by our Family Resource and Assessment coordinator, Annemarie who escorted the party to their accommodation In All Hallows College. This is an impressive former seminary situated directly opposite the main ChildVision campus.

On their first evening our guests familiarised themselves with the social facilities to be found in nearby Drumcondra village. Jack and Albert were eager to experience all that was on offer during their visit to Dublin. Their first morning in ChildVision saw our Swedish guests transfixed looking up at an unexpected burst of prolonged and warming sunshine, inexplicably they had been anticipating rain!. That day was also Shrove Tuesday which in Ireland is also known as pancake Tuesday, a day when all luxury ingredients such as eggs were used up in preparation for a period of abstinence. Now it is a time for celebration and Jack and Albert were happy to join together with the young student of our on campus house, Gentili, for the making and consumption of Irish pancakes. They then all set off to Morton Athletics stadium where most of the residential students meet up on a weekly basis for training. On reflection pancakes before sporting activity was probably not the best scheduling but it did not appear to hinder the athletic prowess or sociability of the Swedish team.

The following day was largely set aside for visiting tourist sites around Dublin city. This included a trip to the Guinness Hop Store and provided Jorgen and Per with a chance to demonstrate their O&M skills. Jack and Albert did have the opportunity to join with the young adults of our Vocational Education Course in their weekly traditional music class held in the primary school and taught by renowned Irish traditional flute player, Catherine McEvoy. The craic was mighty and the lively music set the tone for an upbeat and creative visit.

The highlight of Thursday was an outing to NAHVI, the National Association of Housing for Visually Impaired, in Donabate, a village situated on the north county Dublin coast. All the service users here have long term links with ChildVision and our deputy CEO, Mary Leonard, was delighted to facilitate the get together. The lads in Donabate always host a good party and they certainly enjoyed the company of our Swedish guests. Friday came all too quickly and we had to say good bye, overall a great deal of fun was had and a good bit of cultural information exchanged between students. I have heard that Jack wants to move to Dublin so we take that as a positive recommendation of a welcome visit.

Making links through Step Up

Visitors diary

Monday March 3rd

We started from two different cities, Eskilstuna and Örebro and converged at IKEA in a third city Västerås where we took a coffee before we went to Stockholm and the airport Arlanda. The flight went by Copenhagen to Dublin.

It took about ten hours from Västerås to our rooms



in Dublin. When we got to Dublin we went directly to the pub. I had my very first Guinness! Guinness is the national drink of Ireland. Albert and I had fish and chips, Per had a burger and Jörgen a pie. After the meal we went to the hotel to sleep.

Tuesday March 4th

We had a late breakfast at the hotel, the breakfast was very different from a Swedish breakfast.

After breakfast we went to the National Braille Factory/National Braille Production where all study material in braille is produced. Not many students at Child Visison use a Braille Display, they mostly use ordinary books.

I think they are more aware of the environment in Ireland than we are in Sweden. When a student is finished with a book, the book is returned so another student can use it.

After we had been to the Braille Factory we went on a tour around the school. We also visited the nursery. At Child Vision Nursery the parents and children are in contact with the nurse every Tuesday. This gives time to talk about things they don't have time to talk about at the hospital.

Then we visited the animals. They have many animals, rabbits, horses, pigeons and budgerigars.

We also visited students at the vocational program. They work with and study many different things. Many of the students continue to work at the school after they have finished their education.



After we had visited the vocational program we had the chance to visit a Music Therapy class. And then we went to a dormitory to have pancakes. They eat pancakes as a dessert. It was the "Pancakeday" yesterday. Almost like our "Fettisdag".

Then we went to practice Track and Fields, where we among other things participated in a small and short running competition.

After school we went to the pub. I had Ireland's second national drink, a smithwick. To eat I had a lasagna and chips. After the pub we went back to the hotel to write diary, we have to document this trip thoroughly!

Wednesday March 5th

We were awoken at 8 o'clock and had a quick breakfast at All Hallows. We went by bus and taxi to the Guinness brewery where they make Guinness. At the brewery we went thru the museum listening to a taped sound guide. We were taught how to make Guinness. The ingredients are malt, hops, yeast and water.

At the museum we were shown how they made beer kegs in the old days, they used very simple tools and the kegs could last up to ten years. At the second floor they had beer tasting we were shown how to taste Guinness. At last we tasted Guinness but Albert had a Fanta instead, he thinks Fanta is better tasting than Guinness. But I like Guinness. We knew that we were going to have a busy afternoon and evening so we went back to the hotel to rest.

After the break we joined a music lesson where we played different instruments to different rhythms and harmonies.

In the evening we went to the famous pub O'Donoghous to listen to Irish folk music. It was VERY good!

We went back to the hotel about 11.30 pm.

Thursday March 6th

We started the day with two breakfasts! One by 8 o'clock and the other by 10 o'clock. After the breakfasts we joined a music quiz.

After lunch we took a nap.

In the evening we went to Donabates. When we got there we started with sing star. Everyone sang and played. After a while we had tapas Irish style, triangular sandwiches with ham, egg, pickles and tomatoes, sausages and nacho crisps. To drink we had beer, wine or soft drinks. When we had eaten the music started again. The evening passed very quickly and we had a lot of fun! We came back to the hotel by 11.30 p.m.

Friday March 7th

We went to the airport Dublin International Airport. We flew to Arlanda where we went to different directions.

We have had a wonderful time in Dublin which we will never forget! Thank you all!



Our “Extra-curricular” Experiences in Finland

by Gail Lawther

Jordantown School , Northern Ireland

“Google” can disclose some very interesting facts! So I decided to find out a little about Finland and the Finnish people before our project visit to Jyvaskyla.

Here are some of my findings and my thoughts:-

- One and two cent coins are not used in Finland. That's okay because small coins are only a nuisance!
- There are no public payphones in Finland. That's okay because I was taking my mobile with me!
- There are 188,000 lakes in Finland which in winter can be used as roads. That's okay because I would not be driving!
- In Finland the amount you get fined for speeding depends on the amount you earn! That's okay because as I said I would not be driving.
- The mobile phone company Nokia was founded in Finland and the director of Nokia really should know the speed limits as he was fined 116,000 Euros for speeding. And this was based on an estimate of his earnings over 14 days!!
- Finland has the most heavy metal bands per capita in the world. That's okay because I am used to a bit of scary, loud , head -banging screaming in my classroom!
- Finland holds world championships for wife carrying, mobile phone throwing, mosquito catching, swamp football, boot throwing, tractor pulling, sauna and air guitar playing. That's okay but it also meant that I would have some specialised training to do before I go!
- Santa Claus has his office in the North of Finland. That's okay I visited him there last year and saw how busy he was!
- There are 2.2 million saunas, that is 1 for every 2.5 people. That's okay because that sounds like a good relaxing experience! (Though I did wonder if I should bring a swimming costume or just polish my birthday suit?)
- Apart from relaxing in a warm and cosy sauna Finns also like ice swimming! That's okay as long as I remember to pack a wet suit!
- Finns like to go ice fishing and catch fish through openings in the ice on frozen lakes. Sometimes they will fish completely submerged underwater, breathing through air tanks, covered in thermal wear! That's okay because I only like to eat fish and I would have no room for an air tank in my suitcase!

So when our hosts promised us some Finnish experiences I wondered if any of them would involve swamp football or air guitar playing as I am quite good at both of these! But no!



Instead we walked on the lake outside the hotel which luckily was frozen enough to take our weight but we only watched ice skating! We ate many lovely speciality meals and salted liquorice! We saw some amazing ice sculptures. We had a highly competitive snowball throwing competition and other winter games in which there was rather a lot of cheating going on! An experience not to be missed was the Finnish sauna in which we dutifully steamed and boiled until our skins turned red as our hosts poured ladleful after ladleful of water on the coals. The ultimate trial lay in the frozen lake where some of us were brave enough to do ice swimming before and after the sauna (I was exhausted after swimming 20 lengths of that ice hole!).

So would I repeat any or all of the above experiences? I most certainly would! Would I recommend these to anyone? I most certainly would!

Next time I might even try the tractor pulling!

So thanks to our Finnish hosts for giving us some great memories of our trip to your fascinating country :)



STEP UP!