

ESTABLISHING A RESOURCE CENTRE FOR BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED CHILDREN IN SLOVENIA



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The National Education Institute Slovenia

INTRODUCTION

- In the last decade, increased attention has been paid in Europe and internationally to providing comprehensive care for the people with special needs.
- Centres for providing help to the visually impaired, which create opportunities for their successful inclusion, exist in numerous EU countries (in Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and Austria).
- Other EU countries (Germany, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Portugal) are in the process of establishing such centres.



INTRODUCTION

- Although these specialized institutes are closely related to the educational system in each individual country with regard to inclusion, their role exceeds strictly the educational one.
- In addition, they provide incentive to the development of the profession in the area of providing help to the blind and visually impaired, as well as preparing these special needs people for independent life.
- Such centres can meet the needs of different target groups. They support:
 - blind and visually impaired children
 - their parents
 - schools that practise inclusion
 - wider community
 - profession.
- These centres therefore play educational, advisory, and developmental role, in addition to contributing to the development of the profession, and involving social partners.



INTRODUCTION

- In Slovenia a Centre for providing help to blind and visually impaired children does not yet exist.
- According to the Member Register, the Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired had more than 5,000 members in 2010.
- Based on the international and interpolation studies data, there are more than 10,000 people who are blind or visually impaired in Slovenia.



INTRODUCTION

- The incentive to establish a centre was given by the Institute for Blind and Visually Impaired Youth, which laid the foundation for its development in collaboration with the Huseby Resource Centre.
- On June 18, 2010, the Minister of Education and Sport issued a decree (No. 60310-4/2007/18 (03219)) on the introduction of the experiment.
- Two Project Groups were appointed, one at the National Education Institute (NEI), and another at the Institute for Blind and Visually Impaired Youth (IBVIY).
- The experiment was carried out over a period of two years, from September 1, 2010 to August 31, 2012.



INTRODUCTION

- In its trial phase, the Centre consisted of four structural parts or units. For each of them, a special working programme was designed, containing the objectives, contents, and working methods. The units were as follows:
 - The Unit for Diagnostics and Early Treatment
 - The Unit for Inclusion and Support
 - The Unit for Teaching Aids
 - The Unit for Development



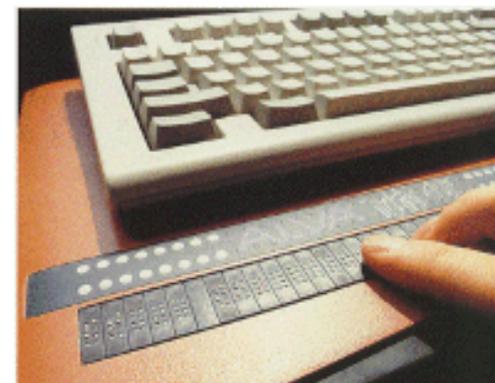
INTRODUCTION

The Unit for Inclusion and Support

- seminars for educators, assistants, counselors, and parents
- formation of a study group of teachers for the blind and visually impaired
- workshops for blind and visually impaired pupils, students, and their classmates
- provision of ASH for the blind and visually impaired

The Unit for Teaching Aids

- borrowing technical devices
- borrowing and preparation of didactic aids
- guided tours of “the garden of senses“



INTRODUCTION

The Unit for Diagnostics and Early Treatment

- diagnosis of all the blind and visually impaired participants in the experiment to provide an estimate of their functional vision
- workshops for children and their parents
- parent meetings

The Unit for Development

- preparation of projects and participation in project bids
- training of the Centre professionals
- ensuring participation in conferences and panels



AIM OF THE PROJECT

- To ensure close monitoring of the **efficiency of new organisational structure**, i.e. the functioning of the Institute for Blind and Visually Impaired Youth as a Centre, throughout the experiment.
- To learn about the functioning of the proposed model with all its features by means of the external and internal evaluation, to upgrade the model, and to suggest the establishment of the new Centre for Blind and Visually Impaired People.



OBJECTIVES

- To determine whether and how blind and visually impaired children, pupils and students, included in special educational rehabilitation treatment, develop with regard to their **independence**, and whether they reach required **standards of knowledge**.
- To recognise changes in the level of **self-esteem** of blind and visually impaired pupils and students, who are included in special educational rehabilitation treatment.
- To determine the changes in the level of **satisfaction** of blind and visually impaired pupils in the second and third cycle of primary school, and of secondary school students with regard to inclusive education.

OBJECTIVES

- To identify changes in the knowledge of special needs and the attitude of **classmates** of blind and visually impaired pupils and students (third cycle of primary school and secondary school).
- To determine the state of **interpersonal relationships** and the **social structure** within the classes in which a blind or visually impaired pupil or student has been included (third cycle of primary school and in secondary schools).
- To identify changes in the level of specific knowledge, and changes in the attitude of **parents** of blind and visually impaired children included in early treatment and pre-school education.

OBJECTIVES

- To determine the changes in the competences and attitude of **pre-school, primary-, and secondary-school teachers and school counselors.**
- To determine the efficiency and adequacy of the **organisational structure** and of the educational activities carried out by the Centre for Blind and Visually Impaired People.

METHODS

- Verifying whether particular objectives have been reached at the beginning of the experiment (beginning of school year 2010/11), and again at the end of the experiment after two years.
- In both cases the same instruments were applied, which made pre- and post- experiment data comparable.



METHODS

Participants:

- 4 pre-school organisations - 4 blind and visually impaired children
- 9 primary schools - 9 blind and visually impaired pupils
- 2 secondary schools - 2 blind and visually impaired students
- 3 blind and visually impaired children in early treatment

Total: 18 blind and visually impaired people

Other participants were:

- parents, (pre-school) teachers, school counselors, headmasters, classmates, Centre experts.



METHODS

The following instruments were used for verifying whether the objectives were reached:

- The rehabilitation committee estimate (2)
- Self-esteem scale (S.Harter)
- Satisfaction survey for the blind and visually impaired regarding their inclusion in regular school
- Questionnaire for the classmates of the blind and visually impaired
- Semi-structured interview for parents
- Questionnaire for teachers, educators and counselors
- Self-evaluation form on the Centre operation

At the conclusion of the experiment:

- Survey of efficiency and adequacy of Centre organization
- Questionnaire to measure interpersonal relationships in the classroom

FINDINGS

- Blind and visually impaired pupils and students **feel well** and **welcome** in their respective schools.
- All of them showed rather high level of general **self-esteem**.
- They all suffered from a complex eyesight dysfunction, which required special educational approaches. Over a period of two years, progress was visible in all competencies assessed. However, no progress was detected in older children and adolescents in the development of their social skills and in other areas, which is cause for concern.



FINDINGS

- At the beginning of the experiment, **parents** were already relatively well acquainted with their children's development.
- During the experiment, they obtained a lot of specialized knowledge to help them in everyday life.
- They developed a more positive attitude and acceptance of their children and themselves as parents of blind or visually impaired children.



FINDINGS

- **Classmates** of blind and visually impaired pupils and students were generally in favour of integration of blind and visually impaired pupils into their classes. Most of them were familiar with the particularities and adjustments that blind and visually impaired pupils need during the educational process.



FINDINGS

- **Interpersonal relationships and social structure** within the class: blind and visually impaired pupils in primary school are relatively well, or at least sufficiently, socially integrated.
- They do not have a very extensive social interaction with classmates, but the existing interactions in many cases are mutual, strong and long-lasting.
- In the case of inclusion of blind and visually impaired adolescents in secondary school classes, certain difficulties arise, which are not necessarily connected with their social integration, however, verification is not possible.

FINDINGS

- During the experiment, the majority of **expert staff** (pre-school, primary and secondary-school teachers and counselors) gained certain knowledge, which enhanced their perception of themselves as being competent for teaching blind or visually impaired children.
- A positive trend is also seen in changing attitudes and perceptions, but it is clear that this is a long-term process.

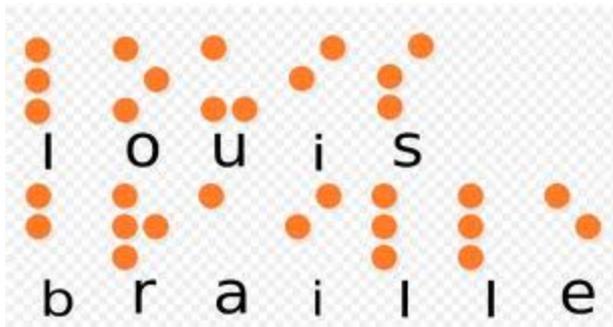


FINDINGS

- The majority of **expert staff (pre-school, primary and secondary-school teachers, and school counselors)** support the inclusion of blind and visually impaired children, pupils and students into mainstream educational programmes, and believe that blind and visually impaired peers are relatively well accepted in the group or class.
- Their suggestions are as follows:
 - *more knowledge on the methods of teaching blind and visually impaired,*
 - *availability of facilities and equipment,*
 - *lower number of pupils in classes,*
 - *continuous expert help,*
 - *assistants - especially in the case of inclusion of blind children in kindergartens or primary school.*

FINDINGS

- **Experts of the Centre** have been effective in executing their tasks.
- Headmasters, teachers and counselors deem their cooperation with the Centre as good and necessary.
- The Centre's expert support has received high marks.
- Experts of the Centre support its organisational structure and objectives.
- The problem is still the provision of technical aids and didactic materials.



CONCLUSION

- During the 2-year experiment, the tested model has proven to be effective. The findings of our follow-up have shown that the establishment of the Centre for providing help to blind and visually impaired is reasonable and viable.
- Special emphasis is laid on an effective and systematic organisation of developmental, educational and other operational activities, providing public care for blind and visually impaired persons in Slovenia.
- The project group is in the process of arranging the gathered data for publication (a monograph, articles).



CONCLUSION

- The present structure of organizing and financing the Institute for Blind and Visually Impaired Youth does not provide a sufficient support to the inclusion process of the blind and visually impaired in the Republic of Slovenia.
- The project group proposes speeding up the process of formal establishment of the Centre.
- It is important to create the provisions for the support centre through appropriate legislation, and to speed up the establishment and development of the Centre in cooperation with the Institute for Blind and Visually Impaired Youth.

