

NOVIR newsletter 2015

Welcome to the NOVIR newsletter 2015.

For the first time the newsletter is produced in English to make sure that we all have access to the same information. The decision to make NOVIR network's common language English was taken on the NOVIR seminar in Stockholm in 2014.

The transition to using English will of course require that we use the time to translate the materials, stories and news, we each want to share. Until this is completely incorporated, we will of course accept contributions in the national language. This due to the motto, that it is better that we share some information than none.

In this newsletter is thus mainly contributions made in English. I thank you for all the contributions made by the Nordic visual staff.

The information in this newsletter is compiled by Marie Fasmer, NOVIR coordinator.

Read more about NOVIR on www.novir.net

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www.ibos.dk

Iceland

The National Institute for the Blind, Visually Impaired and Deafblind in Iceland (the Institute) has made an assessment of the activity levels of blind and visually impaired individuals of working age in Iceland. A special working age team at the Institute registered employment status, education and other types of activity among blind and visually impaired persons aged 18–67 who have sought the services of the Institute. The information was summarised from information on clients that was available in the registry of the Institute. The group consisted of 188 individuals of working age and had 104 men and 84 women.

According to the findings, at least 47.3% of blind and visually impaired persons of working age in Iceland are employed. This is fairly high when compared to statistics in other countries but not high when compared to general job market participation ratios in Iceland which is 81.7%. It is important to increase the opportunities for the blind and visually impaired to seek appropriate education and employment. This could be done through increased educational and vocational rehabilitation.

The findings show that nearly 60% of men are employed, while only just over 32% of women are. It is unclear what the reason is for this difference between genders. It should be noted that job market participation among Icelandic women in general is 79.6%, while it is only slightly higher among men, or 83.7%.

13% of clients are in school, and the largest share of the youngest group (aged 18–30) are enrolled in some type of education programme, or 68%, which must be considered to be quite high. The Institute's clients who enlist in university programs have increased significantly, thanks largely to improved access to educational materials and increased co-operation with university educational counsellors.

According to the findings of this project nearly 21% have university degrees, 33% have some sort of secondary school education, such as a university entrance exam, vocational degree, healthcare training, skills development training or vocational training/rehabilitation and nearly 22% have an elementary school degree. It should be noted that there is no indication as to whether the client received his or her education prior to or after the loss of vision.

By examining the engagement levels of working-age clients, important information is collected on conditions for blind and visually impaired persons in Iceland that can be used in the Institute's work.

The complete report on activity levels of the blind and visually impaired of working age in Iceland: <http://midstod.is/library/Files/Frodleikur/Baeklingar-og-kynningarefni/Activity%20levels%20of%20blind%20and%20visually%20impaired%20individuals%20of%20working%20age%2018%E2%80%9367.pdf>

<http://midstod.is/frodleikur/lesefni-og-kynningar/>

Norway

Statped i omstilling

I 2013 ble Statped etablert som en nasjonal etat som gir spesialpedagogiske tjenester til kommuner og fylkeskommuner. I årene 2012-2016 er Statped under omstilling. Etaten er underlagt Utdanningsdirektoratet og ledes av en direktør. Pr. 31.12.14 hadde Statped 721 årsverk.

Statped er inndelt i fire regioner som har spisskompetanse innen seks fagområder:

- Syn
- Hørsel
- Døvblindhet / kombinert syns- og hørselstap
- Språk/tale
- Sammensatte lærevansker
- Ervervet hjerneskade

Statped jobber i stor grad flerfaglig ut mot enkeltbrukere og samarbeidspartnere. Det innebærer blant annet at søknader om synsfaglige tjenester drøftes på tvers av fagområder der dette er hensiktsmessig, slik at komplekse problemstillinger belyses fra flere faglige perspektiver.

Statped jobber i skjæringspunktet mellom praksis og teori. Vi skal ikke forske selv, men i samarbeid med høyskoler, universiteter, helseinstitusjoner eller andre aktører. I 2015 skal det etableres en forsknings- og utviklingsenhet i Statped som skal koordinere, fremme og samle forskningsinnsatsen på det spesialpedagogiske feltet i etaten.

På det synsfaglige området samarbeider Statped med NTNU (Norges tekniske-naturvitenskapelige universitet) om faglig ferdypning i synspedagogikk på masternivå.

I desember 2014 gjennomførte Statped den første brukerundersøkelsen som nasjonal etat. Resultatene viser at brukerne jevnt over er godt fornøyd med tjenestene de har mottatt. I tillegg oppfatter et betydelig flertall at læringsutbyttet er bedret som følge av tjenestene fra Statped.

Les Statpeds årsrapport for 2014: <http://www.statped.no/Stottemeny/Om-Statped/Arssrapport-2014/>

Faglig utviklingsarbeid

Nye kursmodeller

Statpeds kurstilbud skal være en støtte for barnehager, skoler og voksenopplæring i arbeidet med å gi tilpasset og inkluderende opplæring lokalt. Vi er nå i gang med å konkreti-

sere og videreutvikle Statpeds tjenester på fagområdet, Overordnet mål er å sikre likeverdige tjenester på landsbasis.

Utdanningsdirektoratet har gitt Statped i oppdrag å utvikle en helhetlig modell for samordnet foreldreopplæring til barn og unge med spesialpedagogiske behov. Hovedformålet er å utvikle, styrke og samordne opplæringstilbud til foresatte til barn innenfor alle Statpeds målgrupper. Opplæringstilbudene skal ivareta foresattes behov slik at de i større grad kan delta aktivt og ta medansvar for barnas opplæring. En pilot av modellen skal i løpet av høsten 2015 prøves ut i en av Statpeds regioner.

Artikler og publikasjoner

«Hvor mye vann bruker du når du dusjer?» Forfatter Oliv Klingenberg.

Artikkelen presenterer et undervisningsopplegg om hvordan elever som er blinde har undersøkt og besvart spørsmål om vannmengde og dusjing, og hva forfatteren har lært av elevenes tilnærminger. Undervisningsopplegget er gjennomført på Statpeds kurs for elever som bruker punktskrift i opplæringen. Erfaringene bygger på kurs for elever både på mellomtrinn og ungdomstrinn, og med elever som presterer svakt og sterkt i matematikk. Mål for undervisningsopplegget var at elevene skulle gjøre seg kjent med hvordan en stor vannmengde kan måles. I tillegg skulle elevene bli godt kjent med vanlige kartongstørrelser som brukes i husholdningen slik at noen volumenheter kan fungere som referanse for å vurdere volum i andre sammenhenger. I lys av teorier om hvordan seende elever utvikler kunnskaper om måling av volum, begrunner forfatteren undervisningsopplegget og aktivitetene som elevene arbeidet med. (Tangenten, Tidsskrift for matematikkundervisning 1/2015, Caspar Forlag AS).

«Kjenn hva jeg føler. Samtaler om følelser med barn og unge som er blinde eller sterkt svaksynte.» Veilederen presenterer en arbeidsmåte der symbolske gjenstander brukes i støttesamtaler om følelser. Arbeidsmåten er ment som et bidrag for fremme emosjonell utvikling hos synshemmede barn og unge. Utgitt av Statped, mars 2015. Forfattere: Knut Brandsborg og Bjørn Kjølle. (veilederen er vedlagt som pdf).

Sweden

Pupils with braille as reading media - general guidelines for principal organizers and headmasters

By: Anders Rönnbäck and Ingegerd Viktorin, SPSM, Resource Centre Vision

The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools, SPSM, received in 2014 a special commission from the department of education to develop general guidelines for principal organizers and headmasters with the goal to increase the braille reading pupils' results in different school subjects. In Sweden an agency may issue general guidelines within its area of responsibility. General guidelines are recommendations and should be followed unless the school meets the requirements in other ways.

These general guidelines are based on the Swedish Education Act and the following UN agreements: Convention on the Rights of the Child, The declaration of Salamanca, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The document begins with an explanation of

- visual impairment and blindness according to WHO
- the braille code
- similarities and differences between braille reading and visual reading

The general guidelines emphasize the accessibility of the learning environment. *Physical accessibility* means all indoor and outdoor environments to be available. *Social accessibility* means that the student should have the opportunity to participate in interaction and communication.

Pedagogical accessibility is about the student's possibility to fully take part in the teaching. The general guidelines state that the pedagogical support for a student with blindness always is about teaching and should therefore be given by teachers. Two teachers, who share responsibility for the class, is a prerequisite for a favorable learning environment.

To teach a student with blindness puts high and specific requirements for the competence of the teachers. Therefore, teachers need knowledge about the pedagogical implications arising from blindness in a current teaching situation. The publication provides examples of areas that the teacher needs to master, for example:

- the braille code and the knowledge of tactual reading
- how to adapt and make text available
- how to manage the student's technical teaching aids
- how to provide visual interpretations
- how to promote interaction and participation

Further teacher training in the education of braille reading pupils is given by SPSM.

The general guidelines is in Swedish and can be ordered or downloaded as a pdf-file from SPSM: <http://www.spsm.se/sv/jag-vill/Kopa-laromedel/produkt/?OrderNumber=00558>

“Braille and tactile reading from a literacy perspective” – a NOVIR seminar

By: Anders Rönnbäck and Ingegerd Viktorin, SPSM, Resource Centre Vision

The NOVIR seminar “Braille and tactile reading from a literacy perspective” was held in Stockholm, March 5 – 6, 2015. The seminar was hosted by the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (Specialpedagogiska skolmyndigheten – SPSM) at Lundqvist & Lindqvist Conference center in downtown Stockholm.

36 delegates representing centers/schools within the field of education of children and students with visual impairment in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden attended the seminar.

The seminar was chaired by Anders Rönnbäck and Ingegerd Viktorin, SPSM. The presentations were alternated with group discussions under the guidance of a moderator per group. During the last session each group reported reflections and thoughts based on the presentations.

Presentations

Thursday, March 5

- The pre-school "Pärlan" – a film about activities with different senses
Lena Lindbom and Agneta Westman, SPSM, Sweden
- How adaptation and development of materials in Braille may contribute to the inclusion of braille users in mainstream education
Randi Rusten, Statped midt, Norway
- General guidelines in the education of braille reading pupils, a new publication
Anders Rönnbäck and Ingegerd Viktorin, SPSM, Sweden
- How to help schools to create an inclusive learning environment for a Braille reader and her classmates?
Jorun Hauge, Statped sørøst, Norway
- Assessing the level of literacy in newly arrived braille reading students
Kia Johansson, SPSM, Sweden
- Reading braille – upcoming research and teaching methods
Haldóra Frida Thorvaldsdottir, The national institute for the Blind, Visually Impaired and Deafblind, Iceland
- Support to braille learners
Dorte Larsen and Lone Qvist Ibsen, Syncenter Refsnæs, Denmark

Friday, March 6

- Technical solutions for braille displays and smartphones
Daniel Gartmann, IBOS, Denmark
- Textbooks - technical formats and accessibility
Björn Nyqvist, SPSM, Sweden
- Braille in the digital age
Maria Rutenberg, Keskuspuisto Vocational College and Riitta Kangasaho, Onerva, Finland
- Reading development in six students with blindness or severe visual impairment. Data from a longitudinal case study
Kim de Verdier, SPSM, Sweden

Reflections and thoughts based on the presentations

In the ending summery following thoughts and reflections were noted:

- Close cooperation between our Nordic countries is needed in the field of visual impairment, braille and literacy

- The importance of sharing ideas regarding teaching materials and different ways to communicating knowledge (film, Skype, different digital materials and so on)
- Share arguments to raise the status of braille in order to influence decision makers to enter braille in laws and other governing documents
- The importance of early intervention, support to parents, further training to pre-school and school teachers, access to a variety of good tactile products
- Develop the child's body- and spatial skills – a base for a good literacy development
- The need for continuous support with high quality to teachers and braille reading students
- Focus on attitude towards braille as an equal reading media
- Good quality in the production of tactile school materials
- The need of cooperation around digital tools and technical solutions in education and communication for students with blindness
- Inspire each other how to develop the education of newly arrived braille readers
- The importance of meeting braille reading role models, from an early age and forward
- Trained teachers are a prerequisite for a stimulating and accessible learning environment

Current Swedish research concerning visual impairment and education

By: Kim de Verdier, SPSM Resource Center Vision

A research project is being carried out by Kim de Verdier, lic. psychologist at the Swedish National Agency of Special Needs Education/Resource Centre Vision and Ph. D. student in special education at Stockholm University. The project is going to be part of her forthcoming Ph. D. thesis and consists of two separate studies.

The first study, which was recently completed, aimed to describe the school outcome for six students with blindness or severe visual impairment in Swedish inclusive education. The study included teachers', parents' and students' perspectives and explored experiences of pedagogical support and accessibility as well as psycho-social aspects such as psychological well-being and peer relations. Data on the students' academic achievement and reading development was also collected. Results concerning pedagogical support, academic achievement and reading development was recently published in *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness* (de Verdier & Ek: "A Longitudinal Study of Reading Development, Academic Achievement, and Support in Swedish Inclusive Education for Students

with Blindness or Severe Visual Impairment”, JVIB Vol 108, No 6 nov/dec 2014). Psycho-social aspects of the students’ school situation will be reported in a forthcoming article.

The second study is currently ongoing. One aim is to describe the population of children with congenital or early onset blindness in Sweden with regard to various background variables, such as cause of the visual impairment and presence of additional disabilities. Special interest will be directed towards children with blindness and autism spectrum disorder and an in-depth study will be carried out with the aim of exploring their school situation and different pedagogical solutions.

Hopefully this research project will contribute to deepening the knowledge about the pedagogical needs of students with blindness or severe visual impairment, and implications for the current school system in Sweden.

Denmark

NVT (Neuro Vision Technology) learns Søren to see again

By: Sarah Cecilie Boss, Journalist at Hjernesagen, translated by Marie Fasmer, Development Officer at IBOS.

50-year-old Søren Petersen rehabilitates his sight after four strokes with a long plastic panel with colored lights, a computer and a will of steel. The lightbar teaches him to compensate for the sight he has lost.

It was in January 2013, six months before he turned 50, that Søren Petersen had four strokes. The only thing he remembers from the chaotic days at the Hospital is when the neurologist said that he should not expect to get to see again.

Søren Petersen escaped from the blood clots without paralysis and speech difficulties, it is not all that is that lucky, but his memory and eyesight did not get off quite so graciously. What before was a photographic memory, is now fragmented and full of holes and the sight is reduced to light and shadows and has completely changed.

Today, a year after, Søren Petersen attends visual training several times a week on IBOS, The Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Copenhagen. Here Occupational therapist Gitte Thranum Haldbæk coaches him in a method called Neuro Vision Technology (NVT) which is originally Australian. The method teaches Søren Petersen to compensate for what his eyes cannot see.

Limited vision, no color and twilight

20 - 30 percent experience visual difficulties associated with brain damage, and Søren Petersen has several different visual difficulties: Imagine that you had a patch over the right part of each eye and could only see the left half. At the same time hold a flap down from above, so you only see the bottom of both eyes. Now you see the words only with left lower half of both of your eyes. Then turn the colors off so you only see different shades of

grey, and then turn the light down to only twilight strength. That is how Søren Petersen's vision is today.

With this vision he sits in front of a light panel with two parallel rows of lamps of different colors. His nose is 30 centimeters from the panel, and the panel length is tuned so that the distance equals the width of the field of view of a person with normal vision.

Gitte Haldbæk uses her computer to turn on different sequences of lights on each side of the panel. Søren Petersen has to look at them and say whether or not they are the same on each side. Whether they produce the same figure, for example?

This method has taught Søren Petersen to turn his head so he can get the most out of the visual field he has left. Since he does not see the right part of each eye, he must turn his head a great deal to the right to see what is out right - with the left part of his eyes.

In another training sequence Gitte Haldbæk turns on the lamps in the outer edge of the panel, and then Søren Petersen has to tell when he can see that they are turned on.

"Can you see the red?" She asks at one point.

Søren Petersen laughs: "No, but I can see there is light in it, if that's what you mean?"

Gitte Haldbæk for a moment has forgotten that Søren Petersen cannot see colors.

Better to orientate themselves

"The NVT method teaches Søren to turn his head much to the right to see things that are right and put his head back to see what is above the center of his field of vision. This means that he will be better to orientate himself and can walk the streets without being afraid to walk into things or overlook movements in traffic", Gitte Haldbæk explains.

"Now I can very easily see that there are other people on the road coming against me, or if there is anything other I should be aware of. But I can still be surprised by anything that comes out from the side. It takes time to learn. And I'm constantly lifting my head up and to the back, so you could say that I look like someone who thinks I'm better than everyone else", Søren Petersen says with a grin.

He never leaves home without his sense of humor, although brain damage sometimes makes life heavily.

Where did I put the keys?

Søren Petersen's brain injury means he has difficulty remembering, and that annoys him.

"I have always had photographic memory. It was me, friends called when they had forgotten a phone number. Now I put my keys from me and if I do not put them exactly the same

place as last time, they are gone. It may take a long time to find them again," says Søren Petersen.

The memory has improved with time and training.

"In the beginning I almost redecorated the entire kitchen when I emptied the dishwasher. Luckily I don't anymore," says Søren Petersen.

His faltering memory makes great demands on life at home. A rubber band on the toothbrush tells him that it's his - for when you cannot see colors and have trouble remembering, it can be hard to find your own toothbrush. Things need to be at certain places, and he relies very much on his Mayland calendar.

A ride on the bike was unheard of

The combination of a poor memory and poor eyesight makes it hard to do many things that used to be everyday tasks, e.g. a ride on the bike. The trip home to Herlev Midpoint is short, and Søren Petersen has driven it more than a thousand times. Now it is equivalent to a trip up a mountain with at least one hand tied behind his back. Søren Petersen's poor eyesight makes it hard for him to judge distances and orientation, and the failing memory means that he is lost if he forgets the way. Although he knows some of the way, he cannot just read the landscape as you normally do and find the right way. He does not have a file drawer inside the brain with relevant information he can use when he loses orientation.

So it was like balancing right on the edge, when Gitte Haldbæk wanted him on his bike again.

"My girlfriend was very worried and I felt even that it exceeded my limit in all ways. Was I ready for it?" Søren Petersen asks.

"We took it quietly. First we took small trips on the road in front of our house. Just back and forth. Then a little longer, and finally we went all the way. Today Søren Petersen rides his bicycles on his own, while I wait for him down at Herlev Center, so we know he arrives, and how much time it takes for him to get there", Gitte Haldbæk says.

"The progress has been very impressive", Søren Petersen adds. And although he soon stops on IBOS, he continues the training, both with the bike, with the physical training and with challenging himself.

"When a man has so much motivation as Søren Petersen has, the NVT method can reach very, very much", says Gitte Haldbæk.

Visual Brain Course

Before the blood clots Søren Petersen worked with controlling fire-fighting equipment in schools and institutions. This job he has lost, but he dreams of being ready to work again.

In a short time he will finish his course at IBOS, where he has worked with NVT-training, partly to get to read again. The course he has received is called Visual Brain Course, and here Søren Petersen has been in the hands of a number of specialists, he has trained reading and use of computer and iPad, and he has trained intensively to be able to get safely around with the vision he has today.

Waiting for a clarification of his readiness to being able to work again, where he gets to explore what he can and what he cannot, Søren Petersen himself has already spoken to the recycling center close to where he lives, and they may be able to use him.

"I know the location, I can smoothly find my way around there, and I even know the staff. So you always get the same tales from those who comes to the recycling center to empty their trailer for junk, but then it's lucky for me I cannot remember", Søren Petersen says with a wry smile.

The politicians' blind spot

By: Peter Rodney, Inclusion Consultant at the Institute for the Blind and Partially Sighted.

What would you say if your child had a teacher who could not read or write? It would probably be changed quickly. The situation is comparable to the situation of the blind and visually impaired children and young people whom in almost all schools are taught by teachers who are not trained for it.

Naturally we expect our teachers to be competent in the subjects they teach our children. But this is not the case for Denmark's approximately 500 blind and visually impaired students. The only thing that is being done by competent and qualified people in this field is the visit of the visual consultants. A teacher can request a visit from a visual consultant if he or she has a blind or visually impaired child in their class. The consultant advises teachers on educational matters, but they have no teaching in the classroom.

This issue is about conditions of inclusion in Denmark. Like most other European countries, we include the visually impaired children into mainstream schools.

I have now for a few years been in the Danish Ministry of Education resource centers practice and know-how panel. It is an exciting and challenging experience to be a part of this work. Central to the strategy of the Ministry of Education is that increased inclusion "may enhance all students' learning", but especially to secure that "employee groups working with inclusion have adequate knowledge about the education of students with special needs, and that they have access to resource persons who can guide and support their work". This is where the good thoughts begin to crack. It is obvious that if you teach a child with disabilities, it requires knowledge of how to do it. If the teacher who meets the visually impaired child is not educated in or competent to meet the child's learning assumptions,

there is great risk that the yield of schooling only becomes limited. This is clearly documented by the low education rate and unemployment rate for people with visual impairment approaching 80%. For years, there has been no requirement for skills to teach e.g. blind children.

The weirdest thing is that municipalities are responsible for special education and inclusion and they actually spend a lot of money in this area. They just use them wrong. Many blind and partially sighted people get compensated teaching of so-called support people, but it is only a minority of those who have skills in this area.

The explanation lies in the fact that the specialized competence is not a legal requirement, and that it is the country's municipalities who manage teaching in primary schools. So if you ask the Ministry of Education, you will always be told that a given Minister of Education has confidence that municipalities carry out their work safely.

In recent years there has been written about "too little support for pupils from special classes", "lack of specific special educational competencies" and so on. Many of these descriptions suggest that the implementation of inclusion have it quite hard.

How it turns concrete? I have in March 2014 visited two schools, which illustrates the differences in the conditions for the inclusion of visually impaired students.

The first was a school in Boston, Massachusetts. Here I saw the inclusion of a visually impaired girl in 3rd grade. Three days a week she was taught by a special education teacher from the national resource center. This teacher had a 2 year course in visual pedagogy from the University of Boston (TVI Teacher of the Visually Impaired) and had 15 years of teaching experience of the visually impaired. The teaching was done in the classroom, in close cooperation with the class teacher who had a master's degree in special education. In addition, the class had a practical assistant for 15 hours per week and employees had one hour supervision per week by a psychologist.

The other school was in Vordingborg, Zealand, where a blind girl in 4th class was taught by a teacher and a practical helper with no education in this field for 35 hours. None of them had a special teacher training. None of them had been allowed to attend courses or training in the education of blind children. The head teacher explained, "That kind we simply cannot afford." The only support employees receive is the help of a visual consultant who come to school once a month.

It is evident that these two cases provide a wide variety of conditions for inclusion. For inclusion to succeed, it is essential that teachers have skills that can meet students' learning needs.

At my question in Boston, about "why do you do so much for this visually impaired girl?" I got the answer: "Because the law says that we need to". In Denmark we focus on the good will or as the Ministry of Education puts it in its strategic plan "it is the municipalities that bear the main responsibility for the transition to enhanced inclusion in elementary school" But no authority shall ensure that it is actually happening in a qualified way!

So dear Minister of Education: If it was a legal requirement, we visually professionals could ensure municipalities to meet their responsibilities. And if you did it right by involving us in the practical solutions, I can guarantee that it makes no extra cost. It's a matter of using our resources in the right way.