

Dear participants in this conference

I am very pleased to welcome you all to this first conference of the Professional Interest Group of ICEVI-Europe “Rehabilitation”, with the challenging theme “Expanding Independence in all Ages”.

I thank the representatives of the ministry of Human capacity, The equal Opportunities of Persons with disabilities, Non-profit Ltd and LÁRESZ Association for the Support of Rehabilitation for Individuals with Visual Impairments. I thank you for your kind and stimulating openings speeches.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

As you know, one of the objectives of ICEVI-Europe is to bring together professionals through conferences and workshops to share experiences and knowledge on support of persons with visual impairments and to promote European cooperation between professionals, to create networks between professionals. This conference is the result of this effort.

The title of this conference is “EXPANDING INDEPENDENCE IN ALL AGES”. A great challenge. We all try to improve the quality of life of people with visual impairment.

Sometimes I still think back to my first experience as director of the Royal Institute for the Blind in the Netherlands. Before that I had worked for many years in an institution for people with intellectual disabilities. They were residents in an institute with all the characteristics of a total institution.

As director of the Royal Institute of the Blind I was wondering how should blind children develop residing in an institute located at a nice place in the woods. How do we prepare young people for life challenges, who live fairly isolated from the society? There was no other conclusion possible at that time. I knew this is not the best way.

Fortunately, we now see that in many countries children with a visual impairment go to mainstream schools and that they and their teachers receive special support in education. This is wonderful!

But we are not at the target. In my opinion, there will be always, in all ages a need for rehabilitation activities, services, courses and training-programs.

This necessity arises from the individual needs of visually impaired persons, but also by new insights and knowledge, including technological development.

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, ICF and ICF Child-Youth (ICF-CY) of the World Health Organization (WHO) is increasingly an instrument that helps us to gain insight into the needs of an individual person but also into the group of persons with a visual impairment as a whole and the society.

It is an excellent tool for rehabilitation programmes, scientific research and policy decisions.

That is what this conference is about. How can we offer support to people in their desire to participate in society and live as independently as possible.

That is our task and responsibility as professionals, but also those of universities through scientific research and the responsibility of the Governments.

I therefore hope that this Conference will be a good place for meeting and sharing knowledge and to see how we can promote independence, how can we promote the quality of life of people with visual disabilities.

Beata Pronay, board member of ICEVI-Europe and associate professor at the Eotvos University, here in Budapest is the portfolio holder of the professional Interest Group "Rehabilitation". At the end of these two days she will

certainly be willing to discuss how to proceed for example during the European Conference 2012 in Jerusalem.

Before wishing you a good conference I would like to express my gratitude to the management and staff of LÁRESZ association for the great cooperation in the preparation of this conference. Thank you very much!

For you all, colleagues from all over Europe once again I wish a good and inspiring conference!

Hans Welling