

Report on VSB Conference - Hanover Germany
July 14 – 18th 2008
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(AAPVI)

XXXIV Kongress “Teilhabe Gestalten”

The conference title translates roughly into providing skills for participation and community involvement.

I attended the conference as the President of the Australian Association for Parents of the Vision Impaired. This was at the invitation of Susan LaVenture – Executive Director of NAPVI (America) and Dr Elke Wagner (conference organizing committee member).

I presented with Susan and Guila Seidel (Israel NAPVI children) about the significant impact of parent organizations from around the world.

We presented a power point covering the formation of our respective national organizations with information about collegiate organizations from countries not in attendance such as New Zealand, Malaysia, Netherlands and Philippines.

Each representative spoke of her personal journey as parent in a family with a vision impaired or blind child. The audience appreciated the frank personal stories. These always attract the interest of medical personnel and educators as they set the scene for the importance of parent support groups.

The presentation then moved into details of the formation of the International Parent group in Malaysia at the ICEVI conference in Kuala Lumpur in 2006. There a motion was put and passed unanimously “to enhance and facilitate the work of ICEVI and the global campaign by ICEVI’s endorsement of its partnership with the newly established International Association of Parents of Vision Impaired (IAPVI) and the formation of parent organizations in every country”. Since that time the parents have worked within their regions to forward parent support groups in each country.

This VBS conference in Hanover also afforded the opportunity for board members of the ICEVI parent group to meet face-to-face and to conduct a board meeting where next steps were put into place.

After enjoying the opening ceremony, we attended those conference presentations that were given in English. These included:

- Karen Wolffe speaking on “Career Education of Visually Impaired and Blind Students in the USA”,
- Phil Hatlen: “The last 50 Years of Progress and where we need to go”,
- R. Rusten and B. Susegg: “Development of the Educational Facilities of Visually Impaired Students in Norway”;

- C. Johansson: “ The educational support for students with visual impairment in Sweden.”

Our board meeting, where we engaged in discussion and development of the business plan for the IAPVI proved invaluable in providing a model for the South Pacific region and the Australian parent group in particular. As a parent group we will continue to develop our communication amongst parents, educators and service providers at all levels – state, national and international.

I learned a great deal from the experience of Susan LaVenture and Guila Seidel as their respective parent organizations are further developed, having been in existence for longer times.

I have ideas to discuss with my national board on the further expansion of our parent group as a support for parents, for the work of VI agencies, and as a voice for the resources for, and recognition of, the needs of children and families with VI and blind children.

Gayle Skinner

President

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