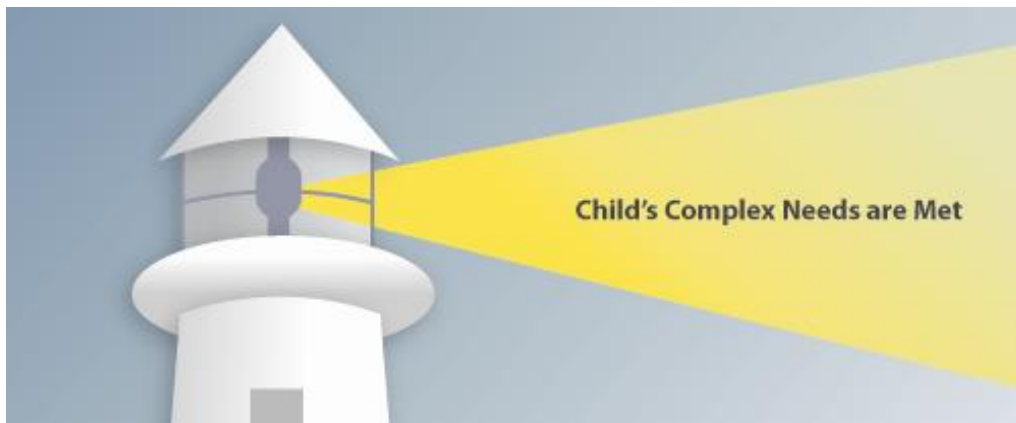




# The Lighthouse Model



## FROM SCHOOL TO NATIONAL VISUAL IMPAIRMENT RESOURCE CENTRE

(Revised Edition January 2011)

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## **Foreword to the revised edition - January 2011**

Since the publication of the original paper, 'From School to Resource Centre', in 2005, the legislative background with regard to social policy and disability, has altered significantly, service structures have evolved and cutting across all areas of life, we continue to live with the implications of the global financial crisis. In 2010 the original project partners, with colleagues in MDVI Euronet, decided to revisit this paper as part of a wider debate about the education provision and resources for young learners with a visual impairment, in light of the factors noted above. This debate was focussed on Europe and Scandinavian provision but it is felt the revised model, with suitable local adaptation, will be continue to be a useful tool on a wider stage.

During the course of this debate we were fortunate to be put in contact with Danielle Hogg, an Australian designer, who put together the graphics for the renamed Lighthouse Model, based on an idea by Robert Jones, an MDVI Euronet member. Thanks also to another MDVI Euronet member, Julie Shylan for suggesting Danielle.

Terminology, nationally and internationally, has also moved on but terms used in the 2005 paper have been retained to keep the flow of the original paper.

This revision is but another signpost on an often complex journey that will continue to evolve.

## **Part One**

### **Introduction (2005)**

The delivery of an appropriate and effective education for pupils with a visual impairment (VI) has been dominated in recent years by those supporting the placement of pupils exclusively in a mainstream setting, and those who believe that the expert provision available through special schools continues to be the most appropriate placement. In reality special schools for the visually impaired are aware that the majority of visually impaired children and young people are and will continue to be educated in their local area.

Special schools are anxious to move beyond the 'them and us' perception and use their existing and ongoing expertise as schools for the visually impaired (a low incidence disability), to play a part in supporting and developing the education of children and young people with a visual impairment at both a regional and national level. This Comenius funded school development project, which ran from 2002 until 2005, aimed to move beyond present perceptions and practice by examining the possibility of developing the role played by special schools to include a national resource centre provision available for all to use. A major focus for the project was the exploration of expanding the role played by special schools in the provision for children and young people with multiple disabilities and a visual impairment (MDVI).

The project identified seven core services which a national visual impairment resource centre could provide to local services educating learners with a loss of vision and with or without additional disabilities. The project identified how the resource centre could work with local services to facilitate effective inclusion, in line with the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Educational Needs (1994), and where such a centre should be based to ensure excellence.

## **Part Two**

### **National Visual Impairment Resource Centre Core Services (2005)**

The research undertaken by the project partners, as detailed in Appendix Three, identified seven core services which a national visual impairment resource centre could provide to support local services in order to ensure the delivery of an appropriate provision for learners with sight loss, including those with multiple disabilities and visual impairment (MDVI). The seven core services are:

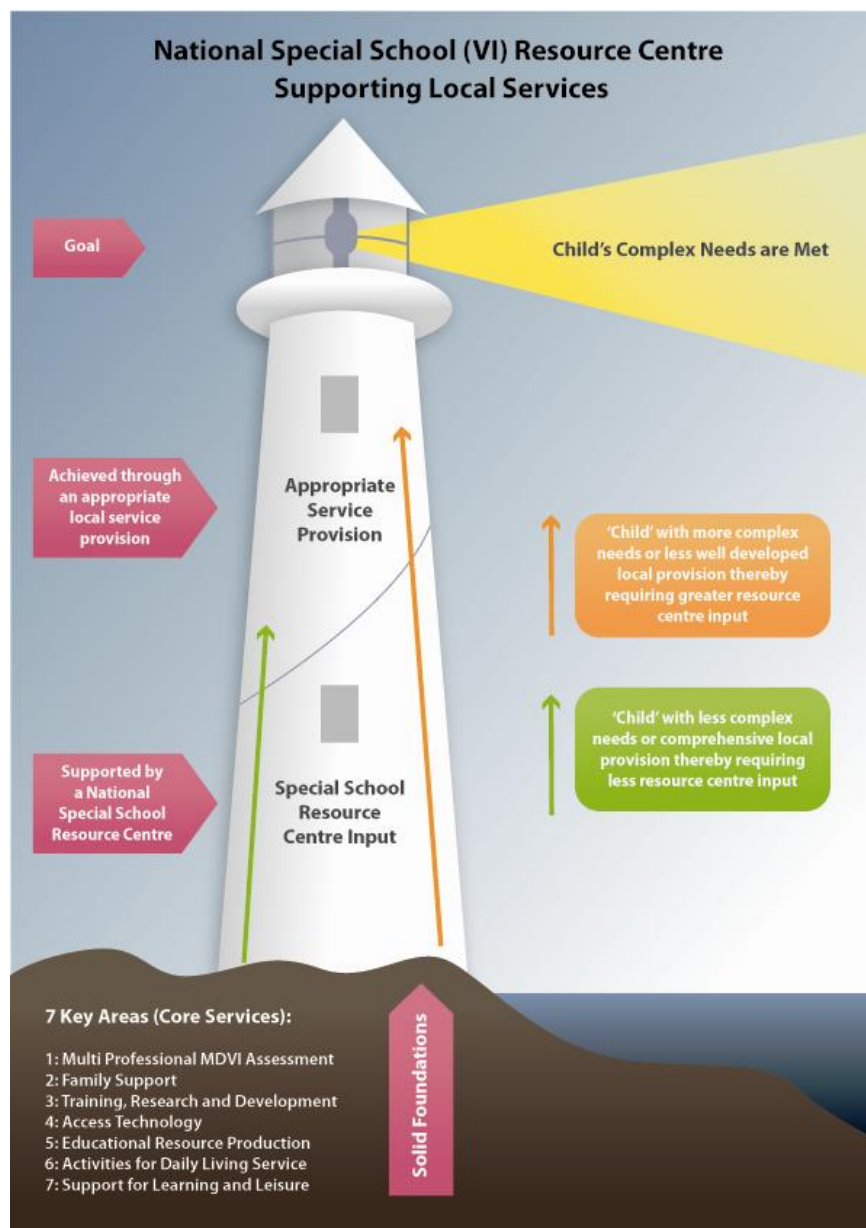
- 1: Multi Professional MDVI Assessment
- 2: Family Support
- 3: Training, Research and Development
- 4: Access Technology
- 5: Educational Resource Production
6. Activities for Daily Living
- 7: Support for Learning and Leisure

A full breakdown for each of the above core services is given in Appendix Four.

## Part Three

### National VI Resource Centre Model in Action (2005)

The National VI Resource Centre will act to support existing local services to ensure that the child's needs are most likely to be met. Where local provision is well developed and/or the child's needs are relatively straightforward there will be less resource centre input. Where local provision is less developed and/or the needs of the child are complex, input from the resource centre will be significantly greater. The model should help concentrate the services that are being delivered to the child and their family.



## **Part Four**

### **Base for the National VI Resource Centre (2005)**

There are a number of alternative locations which could be used to accommodate a National VI Resource Centre:

1. Standalone Unit
2. Within a University Campus
3. Mainstream School Campus which has a VI Unit attached
4. Special School for the Visually Impaired

The choice for the location of the resource centre is crucial. Locating the centre inappropriately will impact on the quality of the service provided and thereby its value.

### Ensuring High Quality of Service

The quality of the service provided by the resource centre will be determined to a very large part by the knowledge and skill of its staff. Those working in the centre must not only understand the effect that a loss of vision has on development and learning, but be experienced in finding ways to overcome the impact. Vision is the primary sense for learning and consequently that on which most traditional education programmes are based. Absence or impairment of vision creates a situation whereby the child has unique educational needs since alternative programmes, not relying on traditional approaches, must be developed for the child to receive an appropriate education. The development of such programmes requires input from trained and experienced staff who have ongoing practical experience to help them understand that loss of vision requires the development imaginative and varied teaching approaches. In addition, the majority of children with a visual impairment also have other needs. Attempting to meet all these needs demands a team input. "The education of students with multiple disabilities or other special needs must involve a team approach, combining the expertise of specialists to competently address the complex needs of these students." (Educating Students With Visual Impairments for Inclusion in Society The American Foundation for the Blind's Josephine L. Taylor Leadership Institute, Education Work Group (2004).)

It is clear that if a national VI resource centre is to provide a high quality service, it is highly desirable to have access to a team of staff with ongoing experience in working to overcome the impact that loss of vision has on the educational development of the child.

### National Service:

The demands on the education budgets of local authorities are numerous. The opportunity costs associated with the development of a resource centre operating at a local or regional level for a low incidence disability are high. Accordingly, the development of a national resource centre with direct funding from government and thereby available for use by all authorities is one which should be given serious consideration.

It is clear that special schools have a pool of experienced specialists working every day to address the unique educational needs of children with a visual impairment. Such schools also have wide catchments areas, national in some cases. The pool of knowledge and experience of working nationally and often internationally, gives rise to a powerful argument that the development of a much needed centrally funded national VI resource centre should be based in a special school for the visually impaired.

## **Part Five: Appendices**

### **Appendix One:**

#### **Project Partners (2005)**

Resource Centre Vision, Orebro, Sweden  
St Joseph's School for The Visually Impaired, Dublin, Ireland  
The High School for Visually Impaired Students, Prague, Czech Republic  
The Royal Blind School, Edinburgh, Scotland

All the partners are active members of [MDVI Euronet](#), a network of professionals dedicated to improving knowledge and practice in the field of the education of children and young people with MDVI.

## Appendix Two (a)

### National VI Resource Centre within the Inclusion Framework (2011)

Whilst the writers of this revised paper are mindful and respectful of the arguments of those who advocate that full inclusion for those with a visual impairment can only be attained by radical change to the continuum of provision, project partners (and MDVI Euronet as a whole), as practicing professionals in the field of education, believe that to attain this goal requires a staged journey. In his pre conference synopsis for a keynote speech at the ICEVI European Conference in 2009, Rodolfo Cattani notes that 'Inclusive education is an on-going process. Teachers must work actively and deliberately to reach its goals.' It is the belief of this paper that a staged approach using a model such as the Lighthouse, making best use of existing resources and skills, remains a key route to the attainment of the aims of the UN Convention on Disability. This paper is not about maintaining the status quo but is about attaining embedded educational and social equality for young learners with a visual impairment.

It is our belief that to fully implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Article 24, particularly Section 3 and 4, within a European context of severe economic constraints and the aging profile of the present population of educators of the visually impaired<sup>1</sup>, means that these goals cannot be attained within the short term. To attain these goals for young learners with a visual impairment, the knowledge required to fully implement the convention in practice, must be institutionalised in society. The Convention notes in Article 24, section 3 & 4 :-

**3. States Parties shall enable persons with disabilities to learn life and social development skills to facilitate their full and equal participation in education and as members of the community. To this end, States Parties shall take appropriate measures, including:**

- *Facilitating the learning of Braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication and orientation and mobility skills, and facilitating peer support and mentoring;*
- *Facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community;*
- *Ensuring that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deafblind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development.*

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<sup>1</sup> As recorded in the proceedings of the ICEVI Conferences in 2005 and 2009, there is in Western Europe concern that up to 60% of specialist teachers will reach retirement age in the next 10 years. With the potential drain of skills that may result, there is a need to maintain wells of expertise.

*4. In order to help ensure the realization of this right, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education. Such training shall incorporate disability awareness and the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, educational techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities.*

To facilitate this requires a greater level of knowledge and understanding, not just in the educational field but in society in general where in a social model of disability and a lifelong learning environment, education cannot be compartmentalised into the first school phases of a person's life. To achieve this wider and sustainable goal, young learners with a visual impairment and their parents, must have continuing access to the support of qualified professional staff who are able to support the young person and their family by offering a wide range of services and skills including their educational and social development. The young person's educators, who are most likely to be in a mainstream setting, must have recourse to expert advice and support related to the individual young learner's visual impairment needs.

In the present 'European' situation there is evidence that the quantity and range of higher education course for educators offered in the field of visual impairment are reducing. In addition there is an often economically driven tendency for specialist services for the visually impaired to be subsumed into generic support services with a potential for a loss of expertise.

The UN Convention on Disability does not explicitly define what 'inclusive education' is. In the view of this paper it should be about allowing an individual to develop and use their abilities within a social based 'model'. At a practical level, this paper believes that the Lighthouse Model has a central role to play in the process of removing barriers and allowing young learners with a visual impairment to creatively function and develop and actively contribute within their own society.

This Lighthouse Model allows for the unique developmental and educational path of the individual as well as supporting the development of a more inclusive and integrated society for all.

## Appendix Two (b)

### The Lighthouse Model and the Salamanca Statement (2005)

#### Special Schools in the Continuum of Provision

When one considers the issues surrounding the debate on the future of Special Needs Education one should refer to the statement of commitment outlined in the Salamanca Statement. The key part of the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Educational Needs (1994), especially for those advocating the mainstreaming of pupils with disabilities is contained within the first paragraph:

*We, the delegates of the World Conference on Special Needs Education ... hereby reaffirm our commitment to Education for All, recognising the necessity and urgency of providing education for children, youth and adults with special educational needs within the regular education system, and further hereby endorse the Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, that governments and organisations may be guided by the spirit of its provisions and recommendations.*

The Statement continues to call upon all governments to:

*Adopt as matter of law or policy the principle of inclusive education, enrolling all children in regular schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise.*

At face value, the ideas and beliefs contained within the Statement leaves little room for the continued existence of special schools. However, if one continues on to read the Framework For Action that accompanies the Statement, thought is indeed given to a future role for special schools for pupils with specific impairments:

*Such special schools can represent a valuable resource for the development of inclusive schools. The staff of these special institutions possess the expertise needed for early screening and identification of children with disabilities. Special schools can also serve as training and resource centres for staff in regular schools. Finally, special schools or units within inclusive schools - may continue to provide the most suitable education for the relatively small numbers of children with disabilities who cannot be adequately served in regular classrooms or schools.*

Though the Salamanca Statement reaffirms the commitment to work towards education taking place within the mainstream, the continued existence of special schools is not only acceptable but desirable providing that these schools can embrace a new role - that of a resource centre supporting pupils in the mainstream.

## Appendix Three

### Research Methodology (2005)

Research began with establishing whether or not there is a local demand for the services of a national VI resource centre. To do this, the partners agreed to perform a needs analysis using a questionnaire. This was issued to parents of, and professionals working with, children and young people with visual impairment who are in a range of different educational services.

The questionnaire established that there are the following needs:

Need 1: Improved Interagency Cooperation and Communication: Agencies supporting young people and children with visual impairments need ask themselves the following questions: “Are we communicating effectively with families?” and, “Are the methods in place conducive to ensuring that parents are aware of all the services and support that are currently available?” Comments from parents responding to the questionnaire indicate that this is not always the case.

Need 2: Improve Quality and Access to Information: Improved functional vision assessment translated into clear implications for educationalists is required along with improved training opportunities for mainstream teachers on a range of issues including: eye conditions, daily living skills, Orientation and Mobility, ICT and access technologies so that a full and holistic educational experience can be delivered locally, within a national context.

Need 3: Outreach Service: Distance proved to be a major concern in providing an effective service for families of and children with Multiple Disabilities and a Visual Impairment (MDVI). A mobile team of teachers, therapists and psychologists based at a national centre needs to be assembled so that these experts are able to meet and assess the child or young person with MDVI in his/her home environment. The team should be able to contact other specialists such as deafblind experts or experts in challenging behaviour when required.

Need 4: After School and Holiday Activities: New opportunities for school holiday activities and specialist workshops should be developed.

It is clear that there are important needs which are currently unsatisfied. Meeting these needs requires expert facilities and advice on implementing appropriate strategies to ensure an effective educational provision for children with visual impairment. This work could be effectively delivered by a national vi resource centre. Much of this work should be delivered free of charge and the funding of such services should definitely not be at the expense of local authorities.

## **Appendix Four**

### **Core Service 1: Multi Professional MDVI Assessment (2005)**

High quality, rigorously tested, properly staffed assessment is the essential precursor to making any meaningful professional intervention in the life of a child with complex needs. The focus of the assessment will be the developmental implications of the visual impairment. A national VI resource centre offers the best mechanism whereby the assessment service required can be provided. This view is premised on the assertion that such a resource centre represents a pool of expertise, talent and insight, which cannot be replicated or adequately maintained in any other context.

The focus of the assessment will vary according to the needs of the child, but may include:

Vision:

- Background clinical information.
- Observation of how the eyes work.
- Observation of how client uses vision in various circumstances.
- Observation of postures and how the head is held.
- Determination of the degree of functional vision present and how it is used.

Other Senses:

- Observation of which other senses are the best and preferred (meaning the most used).

Communication and Interaction:

- Observation of anything done - verbal and non-verbal to make a connection.
- Establishing whether the communication employed is expressive or receptive.
- Determination of the degree of comprehension present.

Personal and Social Development:

- Level of engagement i.e. awareness of what's going on around him/her.
- Ability to engage socially.
- Motivating and demotivating factors.

Staff involved in the assessment will include teachers, parents/carers, ophthalmologists, low vision specialists, psychologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists amongst others.

## **Core Service 2: Family Support (2005)**

A national VI resource centre should offer preschool support which includes counselling, advice and early intervention from birth to 5 years. The centre should be an inclusive setting for the preschool child with a visual impairment, by also accommodating local children and employees' children. IEPs would be developed for each child with a visual impairment. A wide variety of activities and environments would be offered such as a multi-sensory room, swimming pool, soft play environment, safe outdoor play area, independence skills and real experiences.

The centre should also provide a support service for children and young people in mainstream and special education, their families and professionals working in the field of visual impairment. It should offer support by:

- Organising workshops for learners in both mainstream and special education; the topics would relate to minimising the impact of their visual impairment.
- Offering advice and support to parents regarding the needs of their visually impaired child at different stages of development. E.g. sleep counselling.
- Running a calendar of events for parents, children and professionals, including training courses, seminars, exhibitions, weekend workshops, summer camps and activity weekends.
- Providing a resource base on visual impairment to include:
  - Information leaflets
  - Books
  - Toy Library
  - Catalogues
  - Journals
  - A library with Braille and large print books
  - Tactile books, Story Sacks, toys and games
- Offering counselling linked to hospital based services.

## **Core Service 3: Training, Research and Development (2005)**

### Training

The resource centre should provide or contribute to a variety of courses (from in-service through to post graduate certificate/diplomas), for teachers, classroom support staff, other professionals and, importantly, parents/carers of children and young people with severe visual impairment. A working school provides a good atmosphere and working environment for training to take place through the presence of young learners. These training programmes should be accredited.

There should be a variety of means of delivering training including: distance learning, video conferencing, e-learning and Computer Based Training. The national VI resource centre will also setup and maintain a database of training opportunities available from all providers across the country.

#### Documentation and Development of Good Practice

Staff who are involved in training others must be given the opportunity to develop their expertise and keep up with the latest research. Staff working in the resource centre will engage in continuous professional development, learning and testing new developments related to the teaching of learners with a visual impairment. They will record findings as well as their classroom experiences which will be of use to other teachers. The national VI resource centre will also maintain a library of relevant journals and new publications and act as a conduit to inform others of new and interesting practice.

#### **Core Service 4: Access Technology (2005)**

- Training educators in the assessment of pupil needs specific to ICT.
- Bank of latest software and hardware.
- Short term placements for the training of pupils.
- In-service training of teachers and parents/carers.
- Transition planning for leaving schools including pupil technology profiles.

#### **Core Service 5: Educational Resource Production (2005)**

- Specialist Braille, large print and Moon
- DAISY
- Production of play material
- Tactile books
- Early stimulation (tactile jackets for babies)
- Tactile diagrams
- Bank of audio (wav) files for use with computer programs.

The centre should be linked with universities, the IT industry and other Braille production centres throughout Europe to ensure the continual upgrading of services. Countries should be able to purchase each other's materials. A database of materials produced in each country should be available to partners.

## **Core Service 6: Activities for Daily Living Service (2005)**

### Orientation and Mobility Skills

- Assessment, planning and delivery of programmes within RC (staff and learners).
- Outreach Service: assessment to identify mobility needs and devise appropriate training programme with local specialists.
- Advisory role to staff, parents and families.
- Documenting and Development to produce training packages.
- Presenting/hosting conferences, workshops and courses.
- Produce information videos both for training purposes and public awareness.

### Independent Living Skills

Mainstream teachers, classroom support staff, VI services, residential care workers and families must be made more aware of the skills which must be acquired by a child or young person with a visual impairment that will enable him/her to lead an independent a life as possible. A major role of the national vi resource centre will be to make available training opportunities for the teaching of these skills. This will be achieved through the development of:

- Training courses, workshops, conferences.
- Skills checklists.
- Self access training materials for professionals.

The national vi resource centre will lead the way in the establishment of Europe wide standards in the teaching of independent living skills for all children and young people with a visual impairment. The emphasis on the curriculum will be the development of problem solving skills so as to avoid the potential problem of the curriculum being too prescriptive. The curriculum will cover areas which can be delivered in the classroom and those that can be delivered either at home or in residential accommodation.

## **Core Service 7: Support for Learning and Leisure (2005)**

- summer school and weekend workshops (integrated option)
- integrated family crèche for use during parental/sibling visits or attending courses/training.
- Sibling workshops

## Appendix Five

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United Nations - Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

[www.un.org/disabilities/](http://www.un.org/disabilities/)