The Association for Parents of Visually Impaired Children

Childhood, parenting, peer support

The founding meeting of the Finnish Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments was held on 11 June 1970 by 18 mothers and fathers who had realised the importance of sharing experiences and working together to promote their children's interests. These parents' energy and dedication carried the Association forward to what is now a community of more than 700 members, with families of children who have low vision, are blind or have multiple disabilities from all over Finland involved in the activities.

Activities
Family meetings and regional events are the first step into the Association for many families, providing them with the opportunity to meet other families in similar situations.
Camps, courses and national weekend events bring a welcome change to everyday routines. Camp activities include games, adventures, swimming and campfires. Doing things together helps children with visual impairments make friends with their peers.
Be with me! clubs are special clubs for 8–13-year-olds with visual impairments, with *Be with me! s*ummer camps also available for this age group.

Information
The Association's member magazine, *Silmäterä*, was originally a camp newsletter published by volunteers. Today *Silmäterä* is published in four issues a year and is full of information about parenting, rehabilitation, social security, day care, schooling – everything relevant to the lives of our member families. These days the *Silmäterä* magazine is also complemented by the silmatera.fi website.

Advocacy
The Association is a member of many associations in the field of social welfare and health as well as the Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired (FFVI), advocating the rights of visually impaired children and their parents in cooperation with them.

Funding
The Association is primarily funded by Ministry of Social affairs and Health with proceeds from Veikkaus with donations also received from private persons and organisations.

"It's often impossible for outsiders to understand how important the family meetings are. So many of us benefit from being able to tell others about our situations and be understood by those listening. It's such a relief to realise that it's OK to have these feelings in this situation. Hearing the stories of your peers is really comforting. The group allows you to share your experiences as a parent. This shared experience also generates resources that help you cope in the future." (A mother's thoughts about the family meetings)

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