

Subject: Report
Title: Visit of FPD Järvenpää Training Centre
Teacher: Sirpa Suovirta (Coordinator, Educator, Expert – Development & Service Centre of FPD)
Date/Time: 27.05.2011 / 10:00 – 13:00

Some facts:

Eija Honkanen from HAAGA-Helia arranged this visit for us together with Seija Eskola (Seija works for FPD Järvenpää Training Centre but she does a month-long training at HAAGA-Helia) as Sonja and I were interested in seeing different “Special Needs Vocational Colleges” in Finland.

FPD Järvenpää training centre is a vocational education and training institute with special emphasis. Applicants with health problems and other special needs are given the priority in an admission. The centre concentrates on holistic rehabilitation and training of disabled and disadvantaged people and offering an assorted vocational training. The holistic rehabilitation also includes physical, psychological and social rehabilitation according to each individual needs and plans. The essential aims of the vocational rehabilitation and training are employability, further education or empowerment.

Approximately 600 students every year start their education at FPD. The whole staff consists of about 160 co-workers and 100 teachers. Guidance and counsellors, a students’ welfare centre with doctors and nurses and several assistants are available for the students more or less 24 hours a day and seven days a week.

The fields of study contain technology and transport, culture, business, training and additional education. The training centre is owned by the Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities (FPD) and was founded in 1948. All activities are funded by the Finnish government. With the following key words we try to describe the training centre shortly: “House of Opportunities” and “Yes, we can”.

Sirpa Suovirta met us at the railway station and brought us to the Training Centre. As the students have “on-the-job-learning-days” especially on Fridays (we were also informed that two staff members are responsible for job mediation) and furthermore next Tuesday will be the last school day of this year many classrooms were empty.

But some lessons we could shortly visit and say “Hello”. Some students asked us where we are from etc. – we felt the warmly atmosphere in the whole school area and in our opinion Sirpa plays an important role in the training centre. One student titled her as “heart of the school” and we only can agree! She likes to communicate with all the students there. She told us that although she is now a coordinator in the development and service centre she’s still teaching for some hours a week because she wants to stay in close contact to the pupils.

The training centre consists of several buildings where Sirpa guided us through. We were impressed of all the top modern equipment (electrical wheelchairs, special computer equipment, special furniture, e. g. height adjustable etc.).

We saw several workshops there e. g. a jewellery workshop, a watch workshop and the training centre also has an office (with two supervisors) where students do some work for the administration staff of the centre and companies in the near surroundings e. g. bookkeeping activities, administration works, creation of business cards and so on.

The students have 30 lessons per school week – school starts at 8 in the morning and ends at 4 in the afternoon at the latest and of course there's a students' canteen there. The groups consist of approx. 5 to 8 students – but not more than 12. There's always one teacher in the class and minimum one assistant. One main aim of FPD and its teachers is the preparation of the students to an independent life outside with a job – if possible.

Every school year contains of 5 periods and after each period the classroom teacher has to do a report for each student (with grades or the note: participated ==> depends on the subject) and a confirmation/certificate for the students which has to be presented to the ministry of education is filled out twice a year.

After three years of education the students need at least 120 ECTS but more are also possible. But in this kind of education (Special Needs Vocational Education) it's also possible to spread out the courses in four years.

Sirpa told us that it's very important to teach the students in various ways and with various methods. It's always a big challenge but she likes her job very much. She has been already working at FPD for 10 years.

FPD also offers accommodation to its students – a new and very modern building close to the school grounds will be finished soon and will be open for students in August this year.

Our statement:

Our stay at FPD with Sirpa was a pleasure. It was a very interesting and informative morning as this kind of Special Needs Vocational Education does unfortunately not exist in Austria.

Sirpa is a very smart, worldly and sensitive teacher. She always tries to support her students the best possible way. She is not only coordinator at FPD but also teacher and guidance and counsellor. The students always greet her on the floor and they are lucky to see her. We think that all the students could not only profit from the profound knowledge of Sirpa but also from her great personal engagement.

It was very nice to see and feel the warmly atmosphere during our whole stay. Many thanks for getting the possibility to visit Sirpa and the FPD Järvenpää Training Centre.

As this was our last school visit here in Finland we finally want to thank our counsellor Katri Aaltonen for arranging most of our school visits and our programme at HAAGA-Helia during our three months stay and for her patience and her humour and thanks also to Eija Honkanen for arranging our visits at the Special Needs Vocational Colleges. You gave us the possibility to enrich our knowledge concerning Special Needs Vocational Education. We would be lucky and of course we would appreciate to implement your system of individual curricula, guidance and counselling etc. step by step in the Austrian Vocational Education System.

Our stay here was a great experience and also a challenge and we both look forward to a further cooperation between Austria and Finland.