



Nordic Welfare
Centre

NORDIC STUDY PLAN

DEAFBLINDNESS

Table of Contents

Foreword	3
The Nordic study plan and the Nordic definition of deafblindness	5
Structure of the study plan	6
Learning goals	7
Methods	8
Reflection	10
Contents	11
The distinct disability of deafblindness	13
The Interplay of the senses	15
Communication and social life	16
Access to information	18
Orientation and the ability to move freely and safely	19
Life adjustment and changes in life	20
Literature and information	22
About the publication	23



Photo: Mostphotos

Foreword

A shared Nordic study plan for professionals in the field of deafblindness can help to create a common knowledge base and a shared Nordic terminology.

The study plan provides course leaders and lecturers with a framework for planning national educational programmes, and it can be adapted to individual national study plans and local structures. The aim is to strengthen about deafblindness and support and maintain reflective and competent employees in the Nordic countries. The point of departure for the study plan is to provide staff with knowledge about deafblindness and what support is needed. The study plan encourages a learning in dialogue between the course leader and the participants to develop a common knowledge base that can be incorporated into the participants own practice.

All courses should be based on research and knowledge-based practice, and participants are responsible for being active, contributing their own experiences, and sharing knowledge within the courses. Whenever possible, it adds great value and quality to the course if a person living with deafblindness participates in the planning, training, and implementation of the course.

The Nordic Leadership Forum on deafblindness appointed a Nordic working group to revise the two Nordic study plans on congenital (2016) and acquired deafblindness (2017). The working group decided it was time to combine the two different study plans into one, as a key outcome from the Nordic Conference on Deafblindness in 2022 was that people with deafblindness urged the professional field to collaborate more and bridge the gap between the two groups. More unites, than divides, the two groups. And the professional field can draw inspiration from each other, bringing new perspectives to both existing and emerging knowledge. The study plan was developed as a process within the working group and in dialogue with the professionals from the different Nordic countries. The group members were:

- **Sweden:** Sofi Malmgren and Maria Olander Nilsson (Specialpedagogiska skolmyndigheten, SPSM), Monika Estenberger (National Resource Centre for Deafblindness)
- **Norway:** Heidi Kittelsen (Signo), Stine Rognaldsen Winciansen (Statped)
- **Finland:** Riitta Lahtinen (The Finnish Deafblind Organisation, Kuurosokeat ry.)
- **Denmark:** Helle Buelund Selling and Bettina Kastrup Pedersen (Centre for Communication and Special Needs Education)
- **Iceland:** Steinunn Sævarsdóttir and Lilja Þórhallsdóttir (Sjónstöðin)



Photo: Mostphotos

Study plan

The Nordic study plan and the Nordic definition of deafblindness

The Nordic study plan aligns with the Nordic definition of deafblindness.

The Nordic definition of deafblindness (2024) states:

"Deafblindness is a combined vision and hearing impairment of such severity that it is hard for the impaired senses to compensate for each other. Thus, deafblindness is a distinct disability."

As the Nordic definition of deafblindness adopts a biopsychosocial perspective on life with deafblindness, the courses need to emphasise the relationship between health factors and environmental factors, rather than medical conditions, to understand the connection between function, activity, and health.

The study plan, therefore, not only highlights the consequences of deafblindness and how it challenges life but also focuses on the potential, capabilities, and diverse strategies that persons with deafblindness use to navigate their lives.

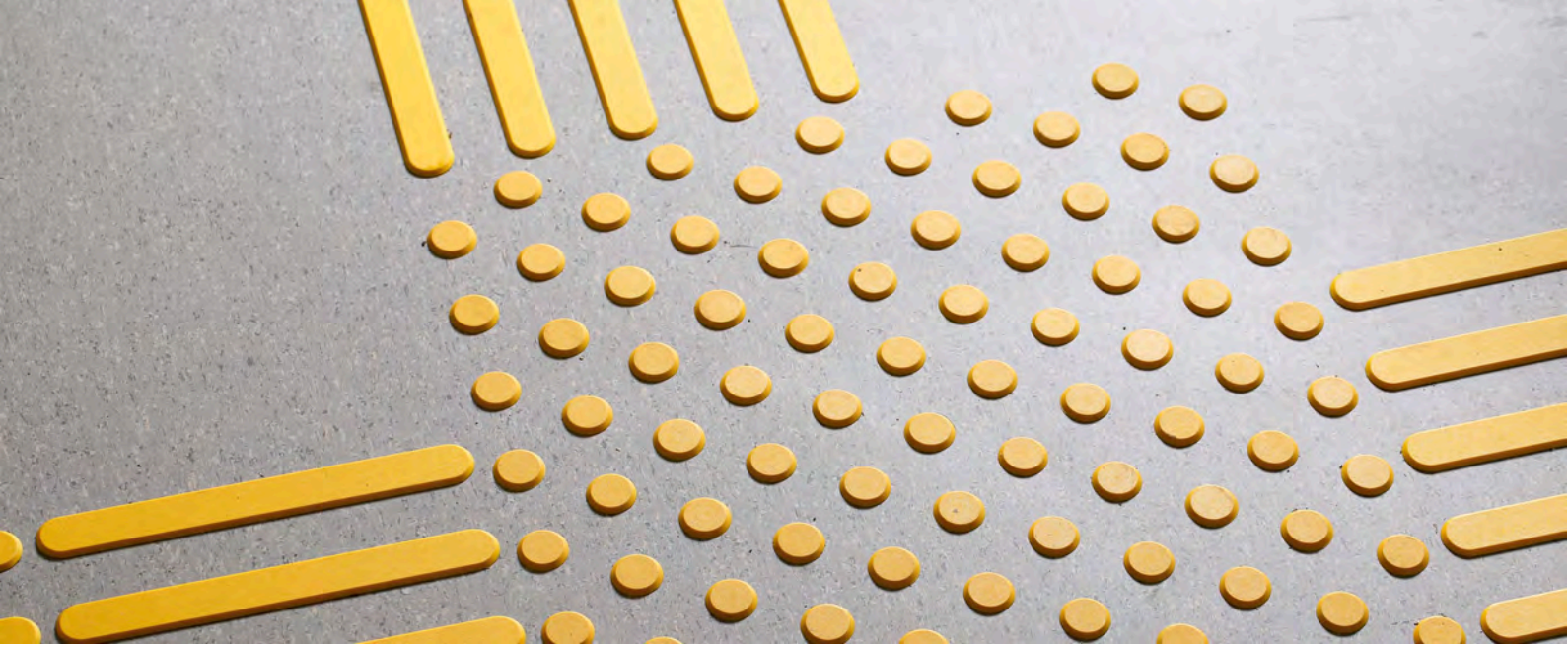


Photo: Mostphotos

Study plan

Structure of the study plan

The study plan is intended to be a dynamic document and can be used as a working tool for course preparation to ensure that there is a connection between the learning goals, content, and methods. It can also be used in the evaluation of the course for development and ensuring quality.

The study plan is divided into four parts:

- **Learning goals**
- **Methods**
- **Reflection**
- **Contents**

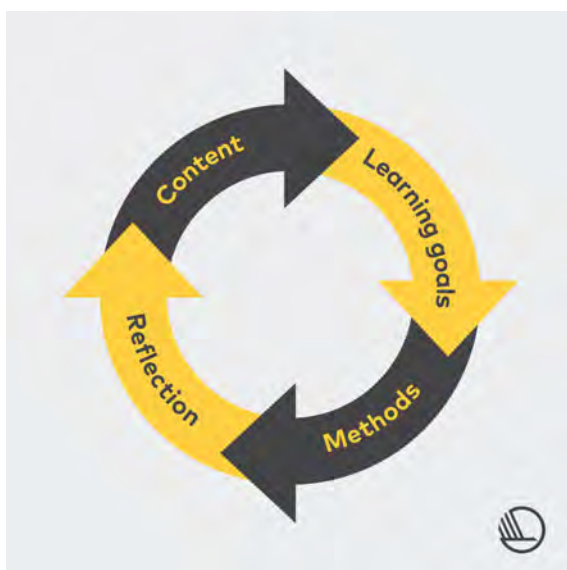




Photo: Mostphotos

Study plan

Learning goals

When planning a course, the course leader must consider the learning goals correlates to the purpose of the course in relation to the Nordic study plan.

To formulate meaningful learning goals, it may be useful for the course leader to reflect, in advance, on the following questions:

- What should the participants know at the end of the course, and why?
- What skills do the participants need?
 - To be able to link theoretical content to practical implementation.
 - To be able to reflect upon their own role as a professional in the meeting with persons with deafblindness.
 - To be able to plan, implement, and evaluate interventions or actions in their own work.

Clarifying the expectations and prerequisites of the participants helps to ensure a dialogical and reflective learning environment. Therefore, it is important that this is done together with the participants at the beginning of the course.



Photo: Mostphotos

Study plan

Methods

This section suggests different methods that can be used by the course leader and participants to create the best possible opportunities for competence development. The methods are developed in a dialogical learning environment based on the participants' possibilities, competences, and qualifications.

- It is expected that the course programme will be case based. The cases should be relevant for the participants, which can involve either work in direct contact with people with deafblindness or a supervisory function for a personnel group.
- The methods should ensure that the participants are able to have an active relationship with their own learning, implementation, and competence development.
- People with deafblindness are an important resource in education, both in planning and implementation.
- Course participants should encounter people with deafblindness in their work.

Proposed methods for achieving the learning outcomes of the study plan:

- Films as a pedagogical tool (video analysis)
- Film illustrations
- Literature and articles
- Home pages
- Practical exercises
- Group work
- Logbooks
- Projects and homework

Forms

- E-learning
- Workshops
- Counselling
- Theme days
- Teaching in plenary
- Study visits
- Study groups/networks



Photo: Mostphotos

Study plan

Reflection

Good quality is achieved through reflection on the learning goals, choice of content, and how the teaching is organised. Reflection is a process throughout the entire course. The course leader and teachers can ask themselves:

- How do we ensure that we go through the relevant content?
- Are all themes sufficiently covered?
- How do we ensure that participants can influence their own learning process?
- Are there any special conditions that the course leader/supervisor should be aware of?
- Is there coherence and meaning in what is being communicated?
- How well are content and theory linked to practice?
- How can counselling/guidance support learning?

Evaluation of the course is to be carried out by both course leaders/teachers and participants. It is recommended that course leaders and teachers continuously reflect on their own performance as lecturers.



Photo: Mostphotos

Study plan

Contents

The content of the study plan consists of different main themes that provide a knowledge base about deafblindness. The aim is for the participants to develop a good understanding of the consequences and conditions of living with deafblindness, both at the individual and community levels. All the themes take their departure from what is common and shared in living with deafblindness.

Topics such as ethics and technology are not described as separate topics in this study plan, as they are expected to be present throughout the courses.

The courses aim to enhance the participants' ethical awareness and understanding, ensuring high ethical standards in their practice. Throughout the courses, the participants are faced with issues that require them to engage in ethical reflections, such as dealing with the unavoidable asymmetry appearing between a professional and a person with deafblindness. The ethical foundation is based on the UN Convention on Human Rights and encompasses a broad set of principles such as participation, accessibility, non-discrimination, safety, respect, the right to communication, and self-determination.

Participants should understand the importance of supporting persons with deafblindness through assistive technology and

adaptive devices in various situations. They need to recognise that vision and hearing devices have to, due to the dual sensory loss, be of high quality and must be combined rather than seen as separate solutions and is an integrated part of life. They should be knowledgeable about the principles and complexities of testing, adaptation, training, support, and use of technology and assistive devices. Additionally, they should understand which professionals hold specific responsibilities and where to seek guidance on technology and assistive devices in their respective context. Furthermore, participants should be aware that assistive devices and technical adaptations are an essential part of life.



Photo: Mostphotos

Study plan

The distinct disability of deafblindness

After the course participants should have a basic understanding of what characterises deafblindness. Further, they should have knowledge about the individual consequences of deafblindness and how to adapt the social and physical environment from an activity and participation perspective.

Description of the disability through:

- The history of deafblindness
- The Nordic Definition
- The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and relevant national laws regarding participation and accessibility
- Identification of the group
- The heterogeneity of people with deafblindness, the population, and their diversity
- Causes of deafblindness
- Differences between congenital and acquired deafblindness

Special aspects of dual sensory loss/deafblindness

- A bodily-tactile modality is necessary to support any residual vision and/or hearing in the development of

- communication.
- Sequential learning (difficulty grasping contexts, connections, and meaning—making takes more time).
- Fatigue and energy loss.
- Self-regulation.
- The risk of social isolation and sensory deprivation.
- A high risk that physical and psychological health, as well as social life, will be affected.
- If not recognised as a communicating individual, the risk of not realising one's potential increases.
- Comorbidity.
- Progression of sensory impairments and changes in modalities.

Special adaptations can include:

- The importance of facilitating and organising the social, psychological, and physical environments.
- Information, communication, and orientation.
- Individual and situation-related adaptations.
- Functional aids, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), and technical supports.



Photo: Mostphotos

Study plan

The Interplay of the senses

Course participants should gain knowledge about the different senses and how they interact with and, influence one another. They should understand the basic functions of each sense to facilitate individual adaptation in different situations.

The function of the senses in relation to one another

- Medical, technical, and pedagogical knowledge about vision impairment
- Medical, technical, and pedagogical knowledge about hearing impairment
- How the senses struggle to compensate for each other
- The structure, function, and stimulation of other senses (tactile, kinaesthetic, proprioception, haptic, smell, and taste), with special focus on the tactile modality as essential compensatory support
- Interoception
- Sensation, perception, and cognition
- Strategies to use when sensory integration does not function
- Observing and describing the use of the senses in different situations
- Optimisation and adjustment in the physical and social environment
- ICT and other technology



Photo: Mostphotos

Study plan

Communication and social life

The participants should have developed an understanding of different ways to communicate and how communication can be enhanced for people with deafblindness. This also includes an understanding of how social life is affected by deafblindness and how to support individuals with deafblindness to develop new methods and This includes direct communication in various social situations as well as indirect communication, such as reading and writing. Participants should also understand the reciprocal influence in interactions with others and recognise that good communication requires building a safe and trusting relationship. They must acquire knowledge of individual adaptations in communication and interaction.

- General aspects of communication
 - Verbal and non-verbal communication
 - Differences between receptive and expressive communication
- Early development of communication (pre-linguistic)
- Shared attention (rhythm, beat, pulse, timing, and tempo –the musical elements are essential for good interaction)
- Awareness and development of the ability to observe, interpret, and confirm bodily expressions

- Shared experiences in meaningful activities
- Exposure to language and the importance of being in a linguistic environment
- Two-party and multi-party interactions and dialogues
- Listening and talking hand positions – mediating and communicating hands
- Different forms of communication and multimodal communication
 - Sign language, spelling, spoken language, written language, and signing in a narrow vision field (the structure of signs and the signing space), etc.
 - Tactile communication: social-haptic communication, tactile sign language, Braille, finger spelling, etc.
- Adaptation from one modality to another (e.g., from visual to tactile sign language)
- Use of interpreters and different interpretation methods
- Technical communication devices and communication support systems

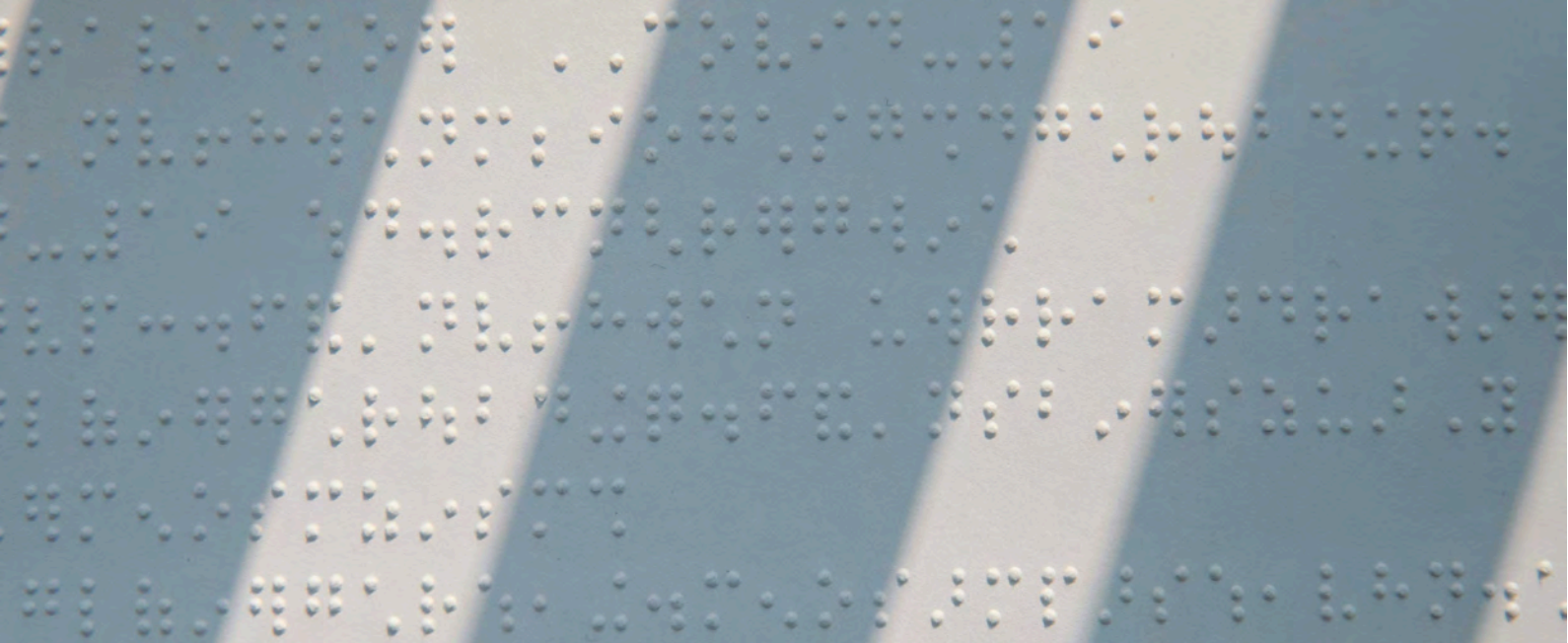


Photo: Mostphotos

Study plan

Access to information

Course participants should have developed an understanding that access to information is limited for individuals with deafblindness and know how to support them in gaining access to their surroundings.

- A bodily-tactile modality approach is necessary to support any residual vision or hearing in accessing information
- Use of exploratory and following hand positions
- Environmental descriptions of general, physical, personal, and social spaces, where visual, auditory, and other sensory information is shared through different methods (haptic exploration, touch, pointing, drawing onto the body, movements)
- Environmental descriptions allow individuals with deafblindness to perceive real-time information, supporting their actions and decision-making
- Different strategies for acquiring information
- ICT and other technology



Photo: Mostphotos

Study plan

Orientation and the ability to move freely and safely

Course participants should after the course have developed an understanding of how to support orientation and mobility, meaning the ability to move around freely and in a safe way.

Awareness of body and space

- Environmental characteristics and information
- Target and distance judgement
- Mobility and guiding
- Aids (e.g., tactile maps, use of red and white canes, technical aids, guide dogs)
- Haptic signals (e.g., vibration through devices), directions, and social haptics



Photo: Mostphotos

Study plan

Life adjustment and changes in life

Course participants should gain knowledge and a deeper understanding of what a radical life adjustment—such as being affected by deafblindness—can mean for both the individual and their family. Many people with deafblindness experience progressive sensory loss, requiring ongoing adaptations and new strategies for everyday life.

By the end of the course, participants should be familiar with key themes and how to support individuals with deafblindness, their families, and relatives in adapting to life with deafblindness. They should also understand the importance of the environment in life adjustment and the factors that can facilitate or hinder adaptation.

The life adjustment model can serve as a framework for making this topic relevant and meaningful for professionals, people with deafblindness, and their families. Other theoretical models may also be used.

Key themes and concepts

- The right support at the right time – timing
- Transitions and the progression of sensory loss
- Constant adaptation and adjustment in life
- Strategies for managing everyday life

- Energy loss
- Identity and self-image
- Isolation and loneliness
- Social life
- The need for support

The importance of the environment

- Personal and professional networks
- Interdisciplinary collaboration
- Facilitating and hindering factors

Special aspects of life changes

- Transitions (e.g., from kindergarten to school, childhood to adolescence, adulthood to ageing)
- Moving from familiar, safe environments to new ones (e.g., homes, schools, workplaces)
- Ageing
- Adjustments following changes in physical or mental health
- Life events (e.g., moving into one's own home, divorce, having children)

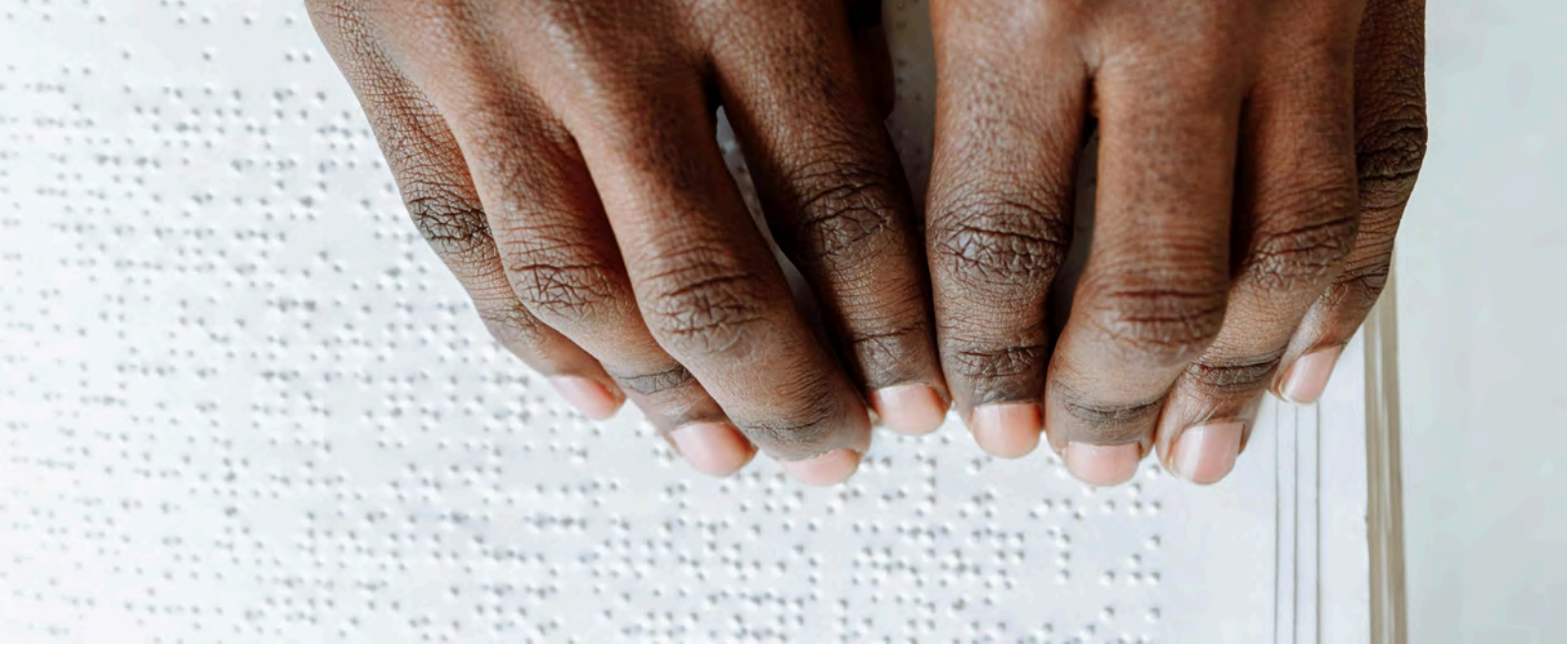


Photo: Mostphotos

Study plan

Literature and information

National literature lists, relevant films, and websites. Updated lists from individual Nordic countries can be found on national websites.

About the publication

Nordic Study Plan Deafblindness

ISBN: 978-91-89787-17-9

DOI: <https://10.52746/HLZA3301>

Published by

Nordic Welfare Centre

© April 2025

The working group on the revision consisted of:

Sofi Malmgren and Maria Olander Nilsson

(Specialpedagogiska skolmyndigheten, SPSM),

Monika Estenberger (National Resource Centre for Deafblindness)

Heidi Kittelsen (Signo), Stine Rognaldsen Winciansen (Statped)

Riitta Lahtinen (The Finnish Deafblind Organisation, Kuurosokeat ry.)

Helle Buelund Selling and Bettina Kastrup Pedersen (Centre for Communication and Special Needs Education)

Steinunn Sævarsdóttir and Lilja Þórhallsdóttir (Sjónstöðin)

Project manager: Göran Forsgren

Layout and editing: Maija Markkula

Publisher: Eva Franzén

Photo: Mostphotos

Nordic Welfare Centre

Box 1073, SE-101 39 Stockholm

Visit address: Svensksundsvägen 11A

Tel: +46 8 545 536 00

info@nordicwelfare.org

Nordic Welfare Centre

c/o Folkhälsan

Topeliusenkatu 20

FI-00250 Helsinki

Tel: +358 20 741 08 80