

## **The activities of the Estonian Support Union of the Deafblind in 10 years**

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Tallinn

**Presented by Heidi Rannik**

### **Richard came to us, too small and too soon**

“Doctors know nothing,” states the colonel’s widow in Juhan Smuul’s immortal tale. Heaven knows how many times I have thought that.

Richard came to us, too small and too soon, the restless and impetuous spirit that he is. In the first months, doctors told us not to hope for anything at all – we did not listen to them. We hoped with everything we had and rejoiced over every little improvement, although our senses told us to consider the other possibility as well. Even so, our bright pink dream of the future was dealt a crippling blow when we found out that the retinal problem common in premature babies affected us as well and that despite everything our son will not be able to have completely normal vision. That’s OK, we consoled ourselves.

### **I don’t need it, it doesn’t concern me**

So when the specialist (Olga Ilgina, of course) came to the children’s hospital to talk to me, I let her in the room, being a polite person, but didn’t pay too much attention to what she was saying. I knew for sure that I didn’t need it and it didn’t concern me. My self-awareness as a woman was shaken as it was, having failed to carry a pregnancy – such a natural thing that every woman seems to manage without any effort. Naturally, I blamed myself for everything that happened to and with the baby afterwards. It took me quite a long time to realise that this attitude helps no one, least of all my son.

### **Imagination and reality**

When the baby is small, it is easy to imagine what he or she could be and not to notice what he or she really is. After a while, we found out that Richard also had a hearing loss. A small hearing loss, the doctors said, and assured us that he will not need hearing or other aids. I was obviously pleased with this assessment – every mother wants to hear that her child is doing well and can cope.

But as time went by, we realised that he couldn’t cope all that well. I don’t wear glasses myself and sometimes I hear all too well, so it is impossible for me to ever adequately imagine my child’s world. Unfortunately, coming to this realisation took me quite a while... Today my son attends the eye group in Linnupesa kindergarten. He wears a hearing aid in each ear and gets additional help from speech therapists and other specialists.

**Is it Richard's dream as well...**

The more help and advice Richard receives at the moment, the easier it will probably be for him to cope later. Our dream is that he could go to an ordinary school because for one thing, there are no educational institutions in Estonia able to meet his special needs.

Besides, he has a constitutional right to learn wherever he wants. Before that we naturally have to find out whether that is just our dream as his parents or is it Richard's dream as well...