We wish you a very happy 2010!

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“Nothing will be the same after this week”. This was the summing up of a participant at the end of the Study Session, and she was probably right about that. But first let me start with an introduction of what this article is about: From 15th to 22nd of November 2009 a Study Session took place in the European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. The subject was “Training for facilitators for inclusion” and it was organised by IFHOHYP. The main topics treated were: Human Rights Education, Inclusion, Teamwork, Conflict Management, Communication and non-formal education. Palantypers, a loop system and microphones were provided.

The participants came from different countries all over the world such as Armenia, Bangladesh, Canada, Denmark, Germany, United Kingdom, Finland, Israel, Italy, Netherlands, Pakistan, Russia, Romania, Slovakia, Switzerland and Serbia. Together they made an impression of young creative and intelligent people, who on the one hand communicate orally and are integrated in the general society, while on the other hand do not deny or feel ashamed of their hearing-impairment. And they are active in hoh organizations in their own countries. I enjoyed very much meeting these people and created good relations with many of them. The whole week stay, with talented and confident young people, who shared mutual understanding with regard to coping with hearing loss, whilst all the activities were fully accessible, produced in me a strong experience that contributed to my self-confidence and motivation. To a great extent, it was like a little paradise that is managed solely by and for the needs of hard of hearing people. As said by one of the participants: “Here I am not ‘this hard of hearing girl’, here I am just Maggie”.

After the first evening with icebreaker – games and getting to know each other - the official program started on Monday morning. During this week we learned everything that is needed to be a good facilitator. A facilitator is someone who initiates a learning process within a group. He accompanies and advances this process in providing the group with tools and techniques and therefore helps them to solve their tasks or to develop a solution. In order to do this he needs to be proficient in these techniques and have a certain knowledge about the subject he is concerned with. Only then he can tap the full potential of every individual within the group as well as the potential of the group as a whole. This knowledge is what we have gained during the study session. Amongst others there has been a workshop about conflict management where we have learned how one approaches a conflict within a group or a team and solves it while remaining respectful and confident. By means of group activities we learned about the elements teamwork consists of and about the premises that have to be fulfilled in order to make it work.

Furthermore we learned about Human Rights Education
and inclusion, because this knowledge is indispensable for working as a facilitator. Especially when one works towards the purpose to improve the quality of life of hearing impaired people by promoting equal rights for hard of hearing young people at all levels of society and rising awareness about the meaning and consequences of a hearing loss.

Every day we had an international coffee break where two countries were asked to present their national food. On one afternoon we went into town and everybody had some free time to go shopping or sightseeing. In the evening we met in a restaurant where we had Tarte Flambee for dinner. Everybody had fun and it was a joyful evening.

At the end of the week the moment of truth came: the group was split into smaller groups and each group had to plan a workshop, organise it and carry it out at the end with all participants. This was a good possibility to apply and exercise what we learned during the week and to show that we are able to implement it. Meanwhile we were observed by the study session team who gave us valuable feedback afterwards. In my opinion this was the most enriching part of the study session. We also received informative resources for continuous independent learning.

The week ended up with a farewell party where everybody was dancing, drinking and having fun.

There is one thing the study session has taught everyone: although we come from different places and speak different languages there is one thing we share: our hearing impairment. And that’s not all: we all care. We all want to change the world. How we can do this is what we have just learned. It is never too late to make a difference. I was also exposed to creative projects that take place abroad and we can import to our own country. We’ll start now. Nothing will be the same after this week.
SH-Jong, the Dutch organization of hard of hearing young people welcomes the current and future member organisations of IFHOHYP to participate in the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in the beautiful town of The Netherlands, Groningen!

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**Date**
The AGM will be held from 1st – 5th of April 2010 during the Easter holidays. SH-Jong provides the accommodation and meals in Groningen. The participants have to pay for their own trips to/from Groningen, The Netherlands.

**Location**
Groningen is the capital city of the province of Groningen in The Netherlands. With a population of 185,000, it is by far the largest city in the north of The Netherlands. Groningen is a university city, inhabited on average by about 50,000 students.

The Martini Tower is the highest church tower in the city of Groningen. The tower is located at the Main Square, is part of the Martini Church. The carillon within the tower contains 62 bells. The citizens of Groningen call their tower “d’Olle Grieze”, meaning “the old grey one” in the local dialect. It is considered one of the main tourist attractions of Groningen and offers a great view over the city and surrounding area. Also Groningen has been awarded the title Best city centre in The Netherlands. A good reason to find out whether this title is merited!

So Groningen is more than worth a visit!

**Official invitation and Application**
The official invitation and application is online at the website of IFHOHYP:

▶ www.ifhohyp.org
What was this one-day seminar about?
Its aim was to raise awareness among the European public, policy-makers, European media and other stakeholders about the cooperation between the office of the High Commissioner and the European Commission. The specific objectives were to discuss and debate on the 3 key topics: **racial discrimination, gender-based discrimination** and discrimination based on disability. Discussion on each topic was expected to explore how discrimination manifests itself and impacts individuals; to analyze challenges and obstacles; and to provide examples of good practices and legislations.

Recommendations made by each of the three panels will be considered in work between EU and the UN against all forms of discrimination and will provide inputs for effective implementation of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights in supporting civil society efforts to fight discrimination.

I turned out to be the only delegate representing hearing loss, which was not too surprising. From disability organizations present, there were European Disability Forum, Disabled People’s International, Light for the World, and a few organizations for blind people.

Interesting thing is that the seminar coincided with OHCHR opening a **new OHCHR regional office in Brussels** – the first ever UN Human rights office be established inside the European Union.

But what surprised me was that, despite my explicit request in the registration form for palantype service, the palantype was not provided! So there I was, sitting with headphones on my ears, intensely listening, taking notes and reading handout papers that helped a lot (luckily, the headphones were over-the-ear kind, not inside the ear,
otherwise I would not be able to use them with my hearing aid...). And I did not take with me my IFHOHYP Phonak FM system, since I was sure that text-on-screen would be right there.

At the disability panel, the EDF President stressed in his opening speech that “UN CRPD is the first ever human rights convention to be ratified by the European Community (the ratification is expected - or hoped - to take place in early 2010). The European Community will be responsible for the implementation of the Convention areas that are within its competence accordingly with the EC Treaty, such as: free movement of persons, goods and services, transport, consumer protection, gender equality and many others. Employment and education, to a certain extent, are also part of the European competences”.

This demanding list of tasks requires strong coordination on the EU level. That is why the EDF demanded that the focal point (required under Art. 33 of the UN CRPD) is given sufficient powers and resources to properly coordinate the implementation of the CRPD in Europe. EDF also demands the establishment of a strong independent mechanism to monitor the implementation of the Convention. Currently, there is no EU agency that could play such a role. As always, EDF supports the adoption of a strong European equal treatment directive “that would bridge the remaining gaps in protection against discrimination and be a step towards implementation of the UN Convention in Europe”.

EuropeAid programme representative, Ms. Dominique Dellicour, explained the work of the EC to integrate the rights of persons with disabilities into its development cooperation. She said that from 2000 to 2009 the EC has funded some 280 projects (corresponding to over 145 mln. Euros) specifically targeting people with disabilities in 69 partner countries. One of the important features of the EC cooperation in the field of disability is support of capacity development for NGOs of people with disabilities and governments (as public institutions dealing with disability are often weak and poorly financed). EuropeAid DG is now launching a new exercise to examine how effectively their past cooperation has reached persons with disabilities. See more information at:

▶ http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/index_en.htm

Head of the Unit of the Rights of Persons with disabilities in DG Employment spoke about the current developments in European Disability Policy. A speaker from Australia gave several examples of good practices of legislation from Australia in relation to people with disabilities and told about the ways UN CRPD can combat discrimination on the basis of disability and multiple discrimination. It is important to mention, that disability delegates at the seminar, including myself, always raised the issue of disability during the panels on racial and gender discrimination, stressing that in case of people with disabilities discrimination can be manifold.

Finally, it was time to collect comments and questions. That was the right moment, I thought, to raise my voice about the needs of hard of hearing people. After asking questions on EuropeAid, I explained that my request to have a palantype service was not fulfilled. “I could have asked many more questions to the speakers”, - I said, - “if I could follow more. It is obviously necessary to raise more and more awareness about accessibility needs for hard of hearing people. Especially when the seminar is about the topic concerning them directly.” The organizers from the EC side were surprised; it turned out that there was a miscommunication between the UN and the EC as regards to what services exactly should have been provided. My remark sparked off a discussion and during all next coffee break I was explaining to EC and OHCHR representatives what is the “palantype”, “induction loop”, “telecoil”, and how they work! I also said that European Youth Centres of the Council of Europe installed induction loops upon the request of IFHOHYP. The EC representative of the DG External Relations Human Rights unit then said: “If the Council of Europe has induction loops, then we definitely can have them too!”

The bottom line is that I suggested that EFHOH, IFHOH and IFHOHY submit a joint letter to the EC and OHCHR on accessibility of their meetings for hard of hearing people + submit all necessary information about the assistive listening devices, palantype service and induction loops. The letter is underway and will be submitted to the EC and the UN soon.

The seminar in part aimed to raise awareness on disability-related discrimination. I think that with the help from delegates of disability NGOs (and a bit from myself) the awareness on specific disability issues - especially on hearing loss - was undoubtedly raised.

Last but not the least, I want to extend many thanks to EFHOH for their financial support of my travel and accommodation for this important seminar.
What lead to a success!

Thuan was born in 1981 in Hue City, Vietnam. He is profoundly deaf in his left ear and he has 30% hearing in his right ear. Thuan wore hearing aids but he stopped wearing them due to the stigma attached to hearing aids. When Thuan was 3, he went to Hanoi with his parents, a trip of six hours away from home by car, and went to the Center for Early Prevention of Ear Nose Throat Hospital for information on how to help Thuan learn to listen and speak.

After one month at the hospital, Thuan and his parents returned home equipped with fifty practical lessons. According to Thuan’s family, “we were very poor at that time and had to earn for a living, so we could not stay in Hanoi as long as possible”.

As a result, Thuan’s mother made much effort to teach her son those lessons at night; she used a flashlight at the words and taught her son. The lessons continued right up to Thuan’s graduation from the Culture and Art College of Hue.

As stated in the IFHOHYP’s previous newsletter, acquiring inclusive education will be very difficult for deaf people without early intervention, and Thuan’s family worked to integrate him into mainstream schools and into society.

In addition to Thuan’s mother’s support, he also had the support of his teachers in school. In subjects such as mathematics, physics, and chemistry, Thuan’s teachers gave the lessons to his mother so that she could teach him in preparation for his classes. Thuan had the good fortune of two excellent students sitting near him in classes; they explained lessons to him during his high school programs. Thuan’s parents also encouraged his friends to study with him at his home. Thuan also had help from his three older sisters in his studies.

As a person with a hearing loss, Thuan encountered difficulties to choose his career after graduating from high school. His parents tried to find careers (such as tailor, electrician and artist) for him to choose from. They
recognized that Thuan has had an aptitude for drawing, especially lacquer art.

Thuan is currently the owner and operator of Light Star Gallery in Hue, and he is also a teacher of lacquer art and karate.

The love with peers
Possessing of a good condition to develop individual capability, Thuan did not forget to help peers. Thuan and his family share their experiences supporting another family with a person with hearing loss. Thuan met and participated with the Ho Chi Minh City Deaf Association, and he wants to “establish a club or association for people with hearing loss in Hue”

Duong Phuong Hanh of the Ho Chi Minh City Deaf Association is planning a schedule to instruct him how to establish a self-help group as well as run the club. Hanh promised him a presentation at the founding meeting of his organization and help him in making the organization more established.

Effort to go in man’s heart
Thuan is famous for his lacquer artwork, his family have had felt that Thuan can benefit from more education and they have sought out good artists who can give Thuan further knowledge and experience. Upon hearing about an artist known for oil painting in Ho Chi Minh City, Thuan went there to meet with the artist and he met Hanh and the Ho Chi Minh City Deaf Association. Thuan told Hanh that “I try to study about painting to make the beautiful pictures feel and touch everyone.”

Writer’s note
When Thuan was studying oil-painting in Ho Chi Minh City, his family heard about me and invited me to meet him at his relative’s house. I am really excited in Thuan. According to my experience and knowledge on Deaf Education in Vietnam, the process that Deaf children have to be educated early intervention at kindergarten level and then special education is not wrong with Thuan. I took the opportunity to organize a sharing session between Thuan’s family and the other parents of children with hearing loss as well as students of Special Education of Pedagogic University of Ho Chi Minh City.

Thuan could not hear and speak. He can use Vietnamese sign language but doesn’t require an interpreter. He is strong and independent. I am thinking about a chance of overseas study for Thuan to further develop his skills and training.
In the year 2000, the Council of Europe (Directorate of Youth and Sport) organised the first Human Rights Education (HRE) Forum in Budapest. This Forum arose at the end of the initiative “Europe, Youth and Human Rights” to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Council of Europe (1949-1999), and it gathered participants and activists in youth and human rights organizations, alongside with representatives of institutions and experts. Together they checked the needs and opportunities for human rights education with young people across Europe.

The HRE Forum most important and visible outcome had been the shaping of the Human Rights Education Youth Programme, a programme running since 2001 and carrying the work of the Directorate of Youth and Sport in relation to missions and values of the Council of Europe related to human rights. The Programme had been established in order to bring human rights education into the mainstream of youth work and youth policy, mainly following the concept of non-formal education. It was developed for this purpose, the now-famous “COMPASS”, a manual on human rights education with young people, providing background information on key human rights issues and practical activities to bring human rights issues closer to young people.

The “Agenda 2020” (adopted by the 8th Conference of Youth Ministers of Council of Europe in Kiev, Ukraine, in October 2008) recognised the important contribution of the Human Rights Education Youth Programme to the mission of the Council of Europe and, in particular, its youth sector. More, the Agenda confirmed the commitment of young people for human rights as a main pillar of this work. The priorities include objectives such as ensuring young people’s full enjoyment of human rights and human dignity, encouraging their commitment in this regard; promoting young people’s active participation in democratic processes and structures; promoting equal opportunities for the participation of all young people in all aspects of their everyday lives, implementing gender equality and preventing all forms of gender-based violence and promoting awareness education and action among young people on environment and sustainable development.

The renewed agenda for human rights education calls for a review of the achievements reached so far, as well as for a strategic reflection on how to consolidate and develop them further so as to take into account the realities of young people, human rights and non-formal education today.

The Second Forum on Human Rights Education with and by Young People, held in October 2009, discussed and provided guidelines about the objectives, approaches and methods to be pursued in the next decade (2010-2020) by the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe and its partners. The most important things discussed were the adoption of a framework policy document on human rights education (and education for democratic citizenship), and the monitoring of its implementation, especially in relation to non-formal education. More, it was discussed the need to place greater emphasis on the access and enjoyment of all human rights by all young people, in particular their access to social and economic rights, the need to increase synergies between human rights education and education for sustainable development; the process of revising and updating the “COMPASS” and the role of pilot projects and the need to take stock and learn from the actions of young people at local level. At last, the consolidation and development of national and European networks for human rights education with and by young people and the overlapping agendas of human rights education and the participation of children. Finally, were discussed issues and dilemmas related to gender equality and people with disabilities.

In the framework of the Forum there were 11 different workshops, and one of these was focused on people with disabilities. Two people from IFHOHYP participated, namely Andrea Pietrini from Italy, and Aleksandar Bogdanovich from Serbia, the former as workshop facilitator. Although this workshop had less audience than other ones, participants succeeded in post a remark about disability in the last “Final Declaration”, pointing out problems and needs of people with disabilities, so often mismatched and underrated.

More, a special session or seminar/symposium organised by COE and dedicated specifically to disability issues appears to be necessary, and participants pointed out this needing during the workshop.
On behalf of IFHOHYP I and Karina Chupina attended to a conference about induction loops, which was organized by the European Federation of Hard of Hearing People (EFHOH), Pro Audito Winterthur Schweiz Audito and Pro. The conference took place from September 25 to September 27, 2009 in Winterthur, Switzerland.

To the conference attended an estimate number of 100 people from different countries. They had hearing loss or they were representing organizations for hard of hearing people or other institutions, like Phonak (assistive technology manufacturer).

On Friday, September 25th, began the conference at 6 p.m. and took place at the College of Winterthur. But before the conference began, we got some food and drink first where I had the chance to meet other participants. After the snack there was a welcome and introduction speech to the conference. We also had the opportunity to see Swiss yodelers and an Alphorn duo. At half past 10 it all ended and we could return to the hotel.

Next day, on Saturday, we had a presentation from Dr. Volker Kühnel of Phonak AG. He talked about why assistive listening systems are important in speech as a basis for understanding speech. A curious remark: in all Nordic countries hearing aids come with a default t-coil setting, but in Switzerland some people don’t choose the functionality of aids with tele-coils. They choose the cosmetics of completely-in-the-canal aids.

Following Dr. Volker Kühnel, David Norman gave a speech about the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) standard for the loop systems. He also talked about the loss of sound in buildings.

After David Norman, it was the turn of Richard Brooks of UK loop manufacturer Ampetronic. He talked about audio frequency ring piping. He also demonstrated strategies for maintaining an even field strength in
modern buildings with embedded metal.

After lunchtime there were several presentations by various speakers on the situation of people in their countries, for example from USA, Sweden and the Netherlands. The people who gave a presentation were Janice Schacter, Bert de Jong of the NVVS, Emma Harrison, Jan Lambry and Siegfried Karg. Janice Schacter showed us a PowerPoint slide show with photos of loop installations from all around the world. After the presentation there was a panel discussion with speakers.

Once the conference’s day was finished, we took the train to Zurich where we had a boat trip across the lake “Zurichsee” to Rapperswil and back to Zurich. During the trip we got salad, pasta and ice cream with fruit. This was sponsored by Ampetronic Ltd, United Kingdom.

Sunday, September 27th, was the last day of the conference. On this day workshops were held. You could choose between 2 workshops. The first one was about “Basic planning and testing of induction loop systems”. You could follow this workshop in English or German. The second one was about “Strategies of Hard of Hearing / CI organizations in the social and political arenas, with suggestions for practical implementation”, which included some short presentations by:

- **Dr. Hannes Seidler**, Germanwings Hard of Hearing Organization DSB, Questionnaire concerning accessibility for hard of hearing people in churches, cinemas, lecture halls.

- **Brenda Battat**, Executive Director (Hearing Loss Association of America), Hearing aid compatible mobile phones (FCC regulation) and their relevance for afilé; Brenda told us about the success of HLAA to support the requirement of volume-controlled, hearing aid compatible phones.

- **Erwin Gruber / Hans Willi**, Pro Audito Switzerland: Training people for afilé quality control.

- **Daniel Ziegler**, IGGH Switzerland: Mapping afilé via “Google Earth”.

After the presentations we made a resolution, which included some recommendations on the topic:

1. Hearing aid manufacturers, manufacturers of cochlear implants, physicians, audiologists and hearing instrument specialists shall communicate the benefits of hearing aid/cochlear implant telecoil receivers for phone listening and assistive listening and educate people who are hard of hearing accordingly.

2. Venues and service points where sound is broadcast shall offer assistive listening, such as induction loop systems designed to the IEC 60118-4:2006 standard, that broadcast sound directly to hearing aids and cochlear implants, enabling them to serve as customized, wireless loudspeakers (without the need for extra equipment).

Karina and I opted for the second workshop. I think it was an interesting workshop to follow.

At the end of the workshops there was a final presentation by Dr. Sc. Tech. Michael Büchler about the uses of technology for people with hearing loss. Following this speech there was a discussion about the future and about the resolution that was made in workshop 2.

At 15.00 p.m. the conference was finished and it was time to go home again.

**My experience**

It was an experience in itself. It was very different to what usually happens in IFHOHYP and by my own national organisation. It was a conference at a high level and I had to really keep my attention on the topics. I also had the chance to meet many people and acquaintance. All in all it was a fun and interesting experience.
Life with SmartLink FM system
By Juraj Variny (Slovakia)

For a long time I theoretically knew about FM systems, but could not find any real-life information how it feels using one, advantages and disadvantages. I even had opportunity to try it for several hours directly at the manufacturer when I was at IFHOHYP AGM 2007 in Switzerland, but this did not help much. Hopefully this article will help to fill this gap.

To not make the article overly long I assume you already know how FM systems work. If not, you can always ask your audiologist or assistive technology dealer. They should be happy to do it, as FM systems are rather expensive and it is good prospect for them if you are interested in one.

Being finally able to buy a FM system from Slovak government’s subsidy for starting entrepreneurs, I have chosen SmartLink SX transmitter from Phonak, together with built-in receiver for one of my two Phonak Naida hearing aids. The SmartLink promises:

- to improve voice in noisy environments by using filters and microphone switchable between directional/omnidirectional
- seamless integration with mobile phone via Bluetooth
- ability for listening to music (or any external audio) using standard audio cable with 3,5” jack.
- remote control of my Phonak hearing aids.

Microphone
SmartLink has 3 settings for directional microphone: omnidirectional, directional and narrowly directional. It does good job picking up voice in noisy environment, when the noise is not caused by voice. For example, it was very helpful in car on the highway when there was quite loud ambient noise. In situations where background noise was created by voices (in busy restaurant), the ones you need are still a bit more recognisable with SmartLink than without. But the difference was not immediately obvious, so I was not always sure that everything works, if receiver is really receiving and had to find out which microphone setting is optimal. One has to prepare and check it, it may not be sufficient just to put transmitter on the table and turn it on. So sometimes I rather decide it is not worth the hassle and
revert to lip-reading. Another situations where FM system should be useful is in school lectures. As I now don’t study, I can’t comment on it. Only used it once in work-related training where I put it on the table before colleagues who were running presentations. I decided to put it on table instead of having them wear it on the neck because speaker was changing very often. The sound was quiet, but better than without FM system.

That brings me to next point, sensitivity of the microphone. I found the microphone too sensitive to air blowing from the mouth of the speaker, noise caused by friction to clothing and by handling when speaker holds FM transmitter in the hand. I noticed it even when testing during AGM and asked Phonak engineer why they can’t do anything with it, like adding a filter. He rolled his eyes and said, of course there are filters. After more experience I can’t buy this explanation, because even cheap mobile phones handle such circumstances (contact with hair, blowing air from mouth, etc.) better. It does not always happen, just that you may be occasionally negatively surprised, and it could contribute to telephone voice quality problem described below. For example I expected to be able to hang the SmartLink around the neck of a person I am talking with, while we are both walking. But the noise kicked in so the sound, while usable, isn’t as great.

Transmitter and receiver

SmartLink FM transmitter range is adjustable by attaching one of two antennas. According to the manual, it should be usable even without antenna for very short ranges, but I got interferences even in below 1 m distance from receiver. So I always have at least short antenna attached and it works flawlessly in several meters range. The long antenna, named “lavalier cord” can also serve as a loop for hanging around speaker’s neck.

As I mentioned, I have built-in FM receiver without any on/off switch and as the dealer said “You don’t need to pair it with transmitter. It will pick up the strongest signal without you having to do anything. It is an advantage”. In practice, however, any time there is a FM transmitter around, the receiver will turn on automatically, starts beeping and receiving, whether you intend it or not. If not desirable for me, I have to switch whole hearing aid into ‘music’ program, where FM receiver is completely deactivated. But then I also lose noise-reduction features of the hearing aid. It happened to me often during IFHOHYP study session.

Because people having transmitters use the longest antenna (with strongest signal) by default, the receiver regularly picked up a signal even through floors/walls of reinforced concrete.

I found the built-in FM receiver more sensitive to humidity than hearing aid alone. I wear hearing aids during sporting, without aids it would be no fun. As my FM receiver cannot be detached, it got its share of sweat. After several weeks of usage it started to activate randomly and produce loud noise. After I started to use desiccant every night, this problem subsided. So this is an reminder – even if you don’t have any problems, the hearing aids need proper care.
Interfacing to mobile phone

I have looked forward to this functionality with most enthusiasm. Using mobile phone in normal way is often not possible for me because of ambient noise and sound distortion. To get as good sound from the phone as possible, I used to have wired hands-free always attached to phone, and when calling I put the earbud behind my hearing aid and switched on the T-coil. This meant unraveling cables every time the phone rang, or when I made a call. With SmartLink it should be easier – it is connected to the phone as a bluetooth headset. I tried it with both my two Nokias, and with computer, the pairing was straightforward and basically it worked. But later, whenever I dial or accept a call, it always takes several seconds for SmartLink to wake up itself, then wake up FM receiver. Then it beeps for another second and then finally it is ready for me to listen and talk. Together it can be around 5 seconds. This delay means that when you start dialing with SmartLink in standby mode, the other party can accept the call before the “headset” is active, then everyone is confused and whole situation turns awkward. I found inquiry about this on Phonak website and they recommend to turn on keys sounds on the phone, so that SmartLink wakes up earlier. This also means you have either to hear the annoying beeping of phone keyboard transmitted directly to your ear when doing anything with the phone, or you have to turn it off and on all the time.

After starting to use SmartLink with phone regularly, I started to receive complaints about sound quality from people on other end of the line. I was surprised, yet there was clearly a distinction for them. They could not say what was exactly the problem, sometimes breathing or ambient noise, sometimes unusual colour of the sound.

Needless to say, if above would be standard features of bluetooth headsets, I doubt anyone would use them.

External audio

SmartLink enables you to connect any external audio source via standard 3,5” jack. There is also external microphone jack, but I didn’t test that one. Both inputs need provided adapter to be attached.

The dealer was rather surprised when I was asking him if I could listen to stereo audio, with FM receivers on both ears. He presumed I want to hear exactly the same mono sound in both ears and it took me quite a while to convince him that I, despite my severe hearing loss, expect true hi-fi stereo. At least now I know exactly what “audism” means. But no, SmartLink can’t do it, nor any industry standard FM system can. So I decided only for one FM receiver and for listening to music I prefer headphones. After connecting the audio source, SmartLink turns on only after some signal is detected. The whole system, including receiver, seems to react faster than with bluetooth connection. Actually, I even tried connecting the phone this way, instead of bluetooth and it is more usable this way. Because I speak to the phone, not to SmartLink, the person on the phone gets the sound s/he expects, as well. If it wouldn’t be unwieldy and funny – the phone strapped to SmartLink by cable – I would actually use it this way.

Remote control of hearing aids

According to the manual, the SmartLink allows to change volume, change program and turn on/off the hearing aid microphone when FM receiver is active. Unfortunately, on my SmartLink this is not working. I realized it only later after a purchase and now it is in warranty repair. So I had no chance to test this functionality until time of writing.

Battery

With bluetooth on, battery lasts maximally two days in standby mode, when it is used it is even less. Without bluetooth it is several days, but it is hard to estimate because of variety of things you can do with SmartLink transmitter. The battery allows fast charging in 2 hours using provided charger, what is helpful. I don’t like that charger can’t be connected directly to transmitter, but it needs the adapter which is small and can be lost easily.

Conclusion

Overall, I enjoy the microphone functionality, it is often helpful in noisy environment. However, I must say that the usability with phone was a total disappointment for me: it is not reliable for everyday use at all. The external audio functionality is OK when mono sound is sufficient. I am looking forward to when remote control would be fixed. All in all, after this own personal experience, I’d likely prefer another or cheaper FM system without bluetooth.
The mission of IFHOHYP

IFHOHYP is committed to promoting equal rights for hard of hearing young people at all levels of the community. We believe that hard of hearing young people have the right to a good education, freedom of choice, the right to equal treatment at labour market, necessary support and technical aids they need to assimilate to life in the hearing community.

To encourage a better understanding of hard of hearing young people and their problems among the general public.

To defend the interests of hard of hearing young people and express them towards international bodies.

To serve as a platform for cooperation and exchange of information between organizations of hard of hearing youth.

To establish links with organizations of and for hearing-impaired people, improve communication and cultural interchange between all hard of hearing young people worldwide; to receive new information from other international youth or disability organizations and provide with it hard of hearing youths in different countries.

To collect and make available all information on different aspects of hearing loss, on technical advances, facilities and assistive listening devices for hard of hearing people.

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