

77.00 With citizens rights comes duties

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Hedensted Kommune (Council of Hedensted), Denmark) and its residential home Bofællesskabet
Syrenvænget, Juelsminde, Denmark

From the first announcement of the XVII AIEJI World Congress

The media play a role in the creation of efficient and flexible producers – and consumers. However, the media is also the place where globalization may hit back, because it will become increasingly difficult to conceal abuse of power, violations, and misery.

How do social educators make themselves familiar with and learn to master the global media to ensure focus on social exclusion – wherever it takes place? And how can we use the new media in the struggle against social exclusion?

The ambition is to come up with answers to these questions in such a way that they can be used in our daily work as social educators.

Paper session

A 34 year old female resident of a small residential home for years hurt her self (scratching her body with sharp tools and so on) and verbally and physically abused staff and co-residents.

She would scream very loud, bang the doors and get very angry when the staff tried to motivate her to do ordinary things in her home. The resident wouldn't accept help from the staff to bathe, groom herself and maintain all personal hygiene, so she was eventually in a state where staff, co-residents and her co-workers was both afraid of her and shyed away from giving her any specific attention because of her hygienic state.

The staff eventually by the help of a special consultant achieved paedagogical methods and coordinatory skills to work together as a unit, so the resident would feel safe in the communication she got from the staff. Through dialogue with the resident about 'what's on and what's not' in society when you are a grown up citizen and in her residential home, she eventually decided that she wanted to stay in her home, rather than have to move to a different home with more special care.

This has lead to far lesser episodes of anger and daily shouting, there has been no episodes of violence since the educational program started. The point of the program was to make the staff decide, which daily decisions the resident with her abilities actually can take in an enlightened way, and which decisions the staff will have to either guide her towards or take for her.

In this paper session we discuss 1) The mentally impaired citizens rights and duties in daily decision-making and how they too must face the consequences of their decisions and 2) The challenges the staff are faced with in order to this.

If we really mean, that mentally impaired grown ups are citizens with the same rights as everybody else – we have to show them the respect of letting them choose for them selves, including the hard or boring choices in life.

Many places in Denmark: My theory is that many social educators give out such an amount of care for the individual in their care, that they “keep them wrapped in cotton wool” so the mentally impaired person won’t get hurt from the punches Life presents everybody with.

The social educator takes a lot of choices for the other person, so that he or she never face reality, experiences rejection by others or defeat in learning strategies . . . or experience the happiness of having made it in life on “my own terms”.

On the other hand and at the same time: the social educator respect the mentally impaired persons right to make his or her own decisions even to an extent even where the person cannot take responsibility for the consequences of the choice – for example:

Susanne in Syrenvænget:

When the staff told her it was time for her bath, she often yelled and screamed at them, and sometimes was physically violent towards them.

The staff drew away and most days let Susanne make the choice of not bathing today – although they knew, that hardly anyone then wanted to spend time with Susanne because of her hygienic state, all in conflict with the superior value of social contact, that most social educational work revolves around.

This together with many other incidents on a daily basis led to nearly a “Terror regime” led by Susanne, where she had many conflicts with co-residents and staff every day.

This happened up until the summer of 2008, where Denmark had experienced a lot of media attention on different residential homes, where journalists with hidden cameras had revealed appalling pictures of abuse of power by staff, misery amongst the residents and so on.

Together with the management of the Social Services of Hedensted Council the staff decided that the everyday life in Syrenvænget couldn’t stand up to the prying eye of a journalist undercover, and decided to make a social educational effort to make Susanne live up to the expectations, that every citizen have to live up to:

- Keep conflicts with others at a minimum
- Keeping her own flat tidy
- Keeping a hygienic standard, that won’t make others shy away from her
- And so on

Syrenvænget was given a special consultant that put the staff through a string of courses. The staff also together with all the residents defined what a resident has to do in order to live in Syrenvænget, for example:

- Everybody is expected to speak politely to other people in common areas of Syrenvænget
- One has to keep his or hers flat tidy
- One has to wear clean clothes, smell nice and so on
- Everyone has to help out with practical chores in the common areas to the extent that the person is able.

Susanne was then asked in an individual meeting with her contact-persons, if she wanted to live in Syrenvænget under these terms or if she would want help to find some where else to live.

Susanne chose to stay in Syrenvænget, and to let the staff help her with her daily hygiene and so on. The staff via their courses had trained new ways of communicating their expectations about the daily routines to Susanne, so we now address her in a more respectful manner, too.

The results today – May 2009:

- **The amount of daily conflicts are drastically reduced**
- **Susanne is far happier in her daily life and has lots more energy to do nice things with others – staff or co-residents – during the day.**
- **Susanne is met by staff in a more respectful manner**
- **Susanne has daily baths and is now met by people who can actually stand to spend time with her.**
- **Syrenvænget is now far less vulnerable to media attention**
- **Syrenvænget now meet the standards of both general Citizens rights and the Danish Act of Social Services, that states that everybody has the right to experience Quality of Life seen from the citizen's own point of view.**