

76.00 From violator to human being.

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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.

Workshop

A mentally impaired resident with schizophrenia in 2006 tried to strangle a member of staff. The Male resident had lived in the small residential home with 8 other mentally impaired people for 14 years, and he had never done anything this violent before.

The council decided that the resident had to be moved to a more secure institution. However nobody actually did anything to find a new institution, so a year dragged on and then the resident once again tried to strangle a member of staff. The staff now moved into psychological crisis and had long periods of sick leave.

A suitable institution was then found, but as the cost of that was DKK 2,3 million per year and his present home only cost DKK 200.000 the staff together with the council decided to achieve the necessary educational methods to meet the residents needs, so that he wouldn't experience to be moved against his will. A move that he with his mental impairment would hardly have understood, and that the staff feared would trigger him into psychosis.

For 10 months the staff went through different educational activities:

- Self-defense, so they now know how to defend themselves and give out a vibration of selfsecure authority
- Psychological therapy to help the staff through their fear
- Behavioral communications to be aware of the staffs own communication to the resident
- Finally we discovered the residents need for more visible daily structures and were taught the method TEACCH, a method used in the work with people with autism.

In October 2008 the results show that the resident clearly has a better life than ever before - according to his own accounts and the staff observations:

- There has been no violent episodes and he hasn't been given tranquilizers (which he used to get nearly on a daily basis before) since the 'course' started.
- All staff is back at work full time and nobody quit their job.
- The council invested in education for their staff and has saved enormous amounts in the years to come.

So: A win-win-situation for all parties has arisen - rather than the gloomy perspectives that was in front of all of us 18 months ago.

In the workshop we would like to discuss

- 1) What it takes from all co-workers in all levels in the Social Services to secure 1 human beings quality of life and
- 2) How to change the outlook on a person from violent/schizophrenic/mentally impaired to competent adult with needs the same as everyone else.

The residential home Åbo - 2007

9 residents – semi independent

3,5 full time social educators – (there are no night personnel)

Peter – then 47 years of age

- Normal school until 7th grade
- Submitted to psychiatric assessment at the age of 15, where he stayed for months in the hospital – supposedly against his will and without his understanding of ‘Why?’
- Lived until he was 33 in the attic of his parent’s house. His mother was diagnosed with Schizophrenia. She and Peter both slept during the day, and then wandered through the house in the dark at night, where they would occasionally meet.
- When his parents weren’t able to have Peter in their house any more, he was moved to Åbo – again against his will and without his understanding of ‘Why’. The staff spent years trying to make Peter safe and confident at Åbo, which they to some extent succeed with during the years in the sense that Peter eventually would consider Åbo his home.
- But his behavioral pattern through the years shows that he had to make rather “loud statements” in order for the staff to hear and see him: For a period he talked a lot about ‘little girls’, making the staff fear he was going to assault small girls. When the staff had talked him through this period, he would occasionally set on the fire alarm making the fire engines come and so on. Peter have continually asked the staff to kill him, or he’s said that he’ll kill a member of staff so that someone probably then will kill him for that. In December 2006 he for the first time tried to strangle a member of staff.
- It was decided that a new residential home was to be found, so he could move out of Åbo. For different reasons this wasn’t done, so in December 2007 he had his 2nd attempt of strangling the same member of staff. Crisis now broke out among the staff and a solution had to be found quickly.
- New home WAS found – at the cost of DKK 2,3 million. His home and services at Åbo cost DKK 200.000. The staff and the management of Social Services of Hedensted Council decided to spend the money in stead on giving the staff new qualifications.

Åbo and the Council of Hedensted

were on the brink of making **Social Exclusion**, with the decision of moving Peter out of Åbo without wanting to take his position into consideration.

If we take the stand, that the modern media is the ultimate controller of the way we treat mentally impaired people, the media possibly wouldn't have made a big fuss over Hedensted Council having found a new home for Peter – because that was and is the practice of the Danish Social Services System.

But with the decision of trying to respect what we thought to be his wishes:

- To stay in his own area close to his relatives
- To prevent him from experiencing yet another traumatic “send away”-situation
- To get a life filled with activities, that he would like to participate in

we had the opportunity to tell a very good story to the media after we saw our new strategies take effect.....and save the Council a LOT of money – which also is a good mediastory.

And

The staff was given an opportunity to make good social educational work – rather than exclude a person from their care.

How did we change our outlook on Peter:

Before

- We were very focused on Peters diagnosis, Schizophrenia and had a tendency to interpret all “strange” things, Peter said or did as symptoms on his psychiatric condition (setting on the fire alarm, “Please kill me”, the attempted strangling, “There’s a ghost in my bedroom and it wont let me sleep at night”)
- Peter was and is in many ways the intellectual “star” of all Åbos residents, which perhaps made us think that he can manage many things better than the others. When staff was off sick and so on we let him deal with everyday things on his own, because the other residents “more clearly need help”. We didn't prioritize Peter in the way that his needs need prioritizing.

During the project:

Our different consultants led us to look at Peter differently:

Schizophrenia or Autism?

Since the symptoms of Schizophrenia and Autism are very alike, there's a hypothesis in some corners of the professional world of social educational work, that a lot of mentally impaired people are diagnosed with Schizophrenia - and therefore treated as such – whereas they are perhaps Autistic, and therefore have very different needs, that aren't met.

During the project we have tried out different methods normally used in the work with people with Autism. For example: Peter used to be very restless during meals. He swallowed his food very quickly and wanted to leave the table very soon after the meal began. Peter can read the time on a watch, but the project opened our eyes towards the possibility that Peter might not have a sense of time and a sense of how long activities

take from start to finish. We gave Peter a “Time-timer” that visually tells him, how much time there’s left before the meal finishes.

We also think now, that Peter benefits from the method of TEACCH - *Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communications Handicapped Children* - a method to create visible structure and recognizable everyday routines

Poor attention is better than no attention!!

During the project the staff was taught the method of ABA— *Applied Behavior Analysis*. We analyzed the way we communicate with Peter and discovered we often ignored all the good things, that Peter did for him self and others during day. But when he tried to communicate with us, for example by saying “strange Schizophrenic things” we first made a big fuss and then offered him tranquilizers. If he set of the fire alarms the fire engines came, and the staff would give him A LOT of attention. Peter did the best he could to get any kind of attention: Poor attention is better than no attention!!

The ABA-method made the staff reward Peters acceptable behavior rather than ignoring it or “punishing “his unacceptable behavior. It also made us look for things, that Peter likes to do, so we can help him fill his day with meaningful activities for him.

Maybe the things he said weren’t so strange?

The consultants motivated the staff to explore all the things Peter says and does, rather than just labeling his actions as “strange and schizophrenic”. So where the staff used to shy away from what he was actually talking about when it came to “little girls” “I want you to kill me and so on” the staff now ask Peter what he means with what he says. The staff sometimes find out, that he’s actually talking sense and now get good conversations about what’s so dreary in Peter’s life that he want to leave it.

Åbo - Before

9 residents
3,5 full time social educators
DKK 200.000 per year/Peters services

Peter - Before

Tranquilizers daily
“Scizophrenic” behavior weekly

Violent behavior appr. 1 per year
Restlessness
Sleeping during the day/being awake at night

Many missing days at work
Nearly no activities felt interesting to him

Åbo - After

9 residents
5,5 full time social educators
Aprr. DKK 500.000 – which is a lot cheaper still than the home we found that cost 2,3 mil.

Peter - After

No tranquilizers since March 2008
Says “strange things” from time to time monthly – but he staff doesn’t shy away
No violent behavior since March 2008
More collected, stays till the end of activities
Normal sleep pattern sleep ins by appointment
Goes to work nearly everyday
The staff has planned activities, that we know Peter like and that he can choose between every day. (Studies English!)

