

**On the occasion of
the Third International STEPS Conference
Lidingö, May 15-17**

WORDS OF WELCOME

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It is a great honour for the municipality of Lidingö to be part of the STEPS - project representing Sweden. It is also an honour for the municipality and the Department of Social Services for Elderly and Handicapped to be hosts of this third STEPS-conference. I sincerely hope that your stay in Lidingö and the capital of Sweden in this, the most beautiful season of the year, will be a wonderful experience and an inspiration for your future work

Some of you have spent this day visiting our services and activities for those with intellectual disabilities. I very much hope that you have found our organization and way of work interesting. As you perhaps know the services to persons with these disabilities were reconstructed in Sweden in the middle of the nineties. Earlier the regional county organization had the responsibility for these services which very much led to large, institutional solutions. Now the local municipalities, with their competence to handle social issues, have the responsibility for developing housing, daily activities and leisure adapted to each individual. The goal is to give everyone the opportunity to live an independent life with respect shown to the individual's own wishes and personal integrity.

This work started in Lidingö in the middle of the eighties. The regional county, as I mentioned, still had the responsibility for the care and services for these groups. But an agreement was settled that Lidingö was paid by the county to carry out and develop the services. Thus, our municipality has ten more years of experience than most municipalities in Sweden in this respect.

Nobody from Lidingö with an intellectual disability lives in a residential home or institution today. Some of them live with their families or in their own apartments with staff support in various degrees. Many of them live in group homes with a few others. The group homes can be situated in small houses integrated among other villas or in a block of flats. We put a lot of work in forming the groups so that their needs can be handled in an appropriate way.

A matter of great importance is to provide stimulating leisure activities and my Department has a very fruitful cooperation with the Department of Cultural Activities and Recreation within the municipality which provide various activities such as theatre, sports and other facilities.

Another matter of great importance is to provide our citizens with intellectual disabilities meaningful and fulfilling daily activities. We often get the question why we have so many intellectually disabled in Lidingö. Statistically this is not the case. I think that the explanation of this impression is that our disabled are so much more visible than is often the case in other communities. We interpret this fact as we have succeeded in integrating them in to society.

Our daily activities are organized in the "Ö-gruppen", the Island Group. As you know Lidingö is an island in the Stockholm archipelago. The organization is divided into a great number of small groups which facilitates the integration in the local community. You can meet members of the "Island Group" anywhere in the community: office services, laundry service, the mobile meals service distributing food for elderly, working in the riding house, in the nursery for dogs, in a café or shop, cutting firewood, working with computers or industrial services. At lunch time you can meet them in your own lunch restaurant including the restaurant in the Town Hall.

But, of course, there is more to be done. At the present time, as a part of our local STEPS-project, we emphasize the opportunity for the intellectually disabled to increase the influence of their own lives, especially in everyday matters.

The reforms for the intellectually disabled in Sweden have led to significant improvements for these groups. I, as head of social services in different municipalities for thirty years, have seen many changes. When you go to work every day you sometimes feel that things are slow, that nothing happens. But when you look back thirty years you must admit that a revolution has taken place in the social services in my country, especially for the intellectually disabled. Anyway the work with these issues have been a source of fulfilment for me and my staff over the years. It, of course, costs a lot of money for the municipality. As the Head of the services in Lidingö the budget can cause me sleepless nights but I think it is worth it. I am very happy to be a part of this challenge and that we have been given the opportunity to develop our services further within the frames of the STEPS-project.

Once again, very welcome to Lidingö!