

Europe for us!

The Newsletter of the European Self-Advocates Movement

June 2003



Editorial

On 24 and 25 May, Inclusion Europe held its general assembly in Madrid.

Together with the assembly, there was a conference.

This conference was called 'Valuing diversity'.

Gitte Christensen is a self-advocate from Denmark.

She spoke about her life in this conference.

She told us about her wish to have a family life.

It was a very good and beautiful speech.

That is why you can read her whole speech in this newsletter.

Ulla Topi

President of EPSA



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Speech Gitte Christensen 1

Love flourishes between people - even between us with a learning disability

I would like to begin with telling you about family, life and love, being allowed to give and receive love. Feeling how the feeling grows, feeling how your cheeks get warm when you think of another human being. I believe that everybody knows that feeling. I know it, even though I have a learning disability. My friends know it, even though they have a learning disability. And you know what? It is a wonderful feeling! I think we all can agree that the feeling is nice. When you have found the right person, fortunately many people feel like building a family. You feel like being with the person you love, like melting into one.



With support of the European Community Activities in Favour of Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

You can also call it having children.
The desire to having children lies deep in most of the people,
even if they have learning disabilities.
Before I agreed coming here to make a presentation,
I really had second thoughts.
It is because it is *my* life that you are hearing about,
it is *my* pain that I am telling you about,
the disappointments that you hear about are *mine* .
It is not a trivial situation.
it is *me*, it is *my* story of not being chosen.



Denmark is a free country.
There are many possibilities.
Generally all people are equal - and yet not.
Everybody knows that people are different.
Yet they have the same desires and needs,
whether they are blond or red-haired.
In spite of that many people think
that people with learning disabilities
should not have the right to have children.
That is not a fair treatment!



There are no laws in Denmark
to regulate who should be allowed to have children,
not even for us with learning disabilities.
The interesting part is not
whether we are allowed to have children.
There are no exceptions in any laws.,
which gives us the same rights as everybody else in Denmark .
But one thing is what the laws tell us.
A quite other thing, is how people judge us.
The majority of the Danish people think
it is terrible if people when learning disabilities have children.
They often feel that they are best protected
by having us sterilised.

Never have so many children
been removed by force in Denmark as now.
We with learning disabilities are competent.
We are not so competent, though,
that we have had all the children that are removed by force in Denmark.
In other words there are also other people in Denmark
for whom it is a big task to have children.

As persons with learning disabilities,
we get help to have and maintain a home,
to have a work, to have friends
and with our personal hygiene.
The only reasonable thing would be that the family
with or without learning disabilities -
were given the necessary pedagogic resources,
when the authorities see or assess that we as parents
have difficulties in coping our tasks.
That would not only help people with learning disabilities.
It would also help a large group of ordinary people with poor resources.

I think it is a problem that we are doomed in advance.
We never get the chance to show what we are able to.

The big question about having children
is not the right to have the child, but the access to information.
The Danish public school gives much sex instruction.
It is part of the curriculum - also for us.
Still, we seldom get to that in the special schools.

When you are grown up,
you have access to a lot of information about contraception
and what it is all about being a parent.
But all this material is built on the assumption
that you are able to read and to translate what you read
to useful knowledge in your head.
There are people who are fit for being parents
and there are those who are not.
I know people with learning disabilities in both groups.
When you are going to decide whether you want to have a child,
it would be much easier if you also had access to information.
If you do not know how to read
or do not understand what you read
there are many other ways of getting knowledge,
for example through a practical example.



Today the world offers a lot of technical possibilities for couples
to try their skills as parents.
In the USA they have produced training dolls that cry, pee, eat
and have to have their napkins changes.



I think we all agree that some of the preconditions
for getting a stable and harmonious child is security, love and care.

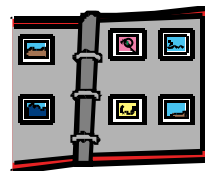
Many of those who take the decisions in Denmark, say that we are not able to give a child much. I disagree with that. We have a lot of time and love. Our daily lives are not as stressed as the lives of many other people, who take their children to the kindergarten at 7 in the morning and fetch them again at 5 p.m. They also claim that we are not able to help our children with their homework when they get bigger, but here it is easy to find help. There is always coaching.

I would like to end my presentation, by telling you about Lissy. Lissy has had two children and is today the grandmother of two wonderful grandchildren .



By the way, she has a learning disability. Lissy had her first child removed by force. It has always been her big sorrow that she has not been able to participate in her upbringing. After her child has grown up, she has established contact with her. Lissy has brought up her second child, a boy, herself. It has been a success. Lissy has made an effort to tell in the school that she has a learning disability. That's why her son has not been mobbed by his school friends.

Today Lissy proudly shows photographs of her children and grandchildren. Her son, especially, is her pride. He has got a career in the army.



If the public authorities always remembered to treat others as they would wish to be treated themselves if they were dependent of support, things would not be so bad. Then all people, regardless of race, religion, colour of skin, sexual orientation or handicap, would be treated with dignity.

Gitte Christensen (Denmark)



- To get information
- To tell us about news and meetings

Please contact us!

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