

# **An inspiring activity for developmentally disabled adults**

**-The Public Library of Ersboda,  
Sweden.**

**Monica Strandberg Johansson and Åsa Lindgren**

**Monica:** My name is Monica Strandberg Johansson and I work at a branch library in the northern region of Sweden, in a city named Umeå and in a district named Ersboda. Ersboda library support the approximately 8 000 people living in the Ersboda district. I am fortunate to work within walking distance of my house. My husband and I have two children, an eighteen-year old daughter and a son of sixteen who have never lived anywhere else. They have been students at the schools in the area and we are familiar with many people, and I thought I knew everything of importance about the district where I both live and work. In the business world, it is important to keep track of the surroundings in order to stay on the cutting edge - I believe they call it "Environmental scanning" or sometimes "Business Intelligence" Knowing one's proper area, keeping an eye on the possible needs of library services in ones district is of course extremely important also for the branch libraries.

I will soon return to it and explain that I was wrong, cause two years ago I didn't know what Ersboda day care center was.

**Åsa:** My name is Åsa Lindgren and I'm drama teacher.

I work in a day center for people with intellectual disabilities with additional impairments of mobility, speech, hearing, vision.

Earlier I worked with children on preschool and then we often visit the local library.

Day center is a place fore these people who can't work in the community because of their various disabilities, they can't have a pay job so in Sweden we have day center.

My task is to give these people mean full jobs, mean full activists on their level.

We work with the five cense, we smell, we hear, we see...

We also work with communications, we like to be outdoors, sing-and music is also things we do. We have computers, we cook and of curse- we have drama!

**Monica:** The Public Libraries is funded by the taxpayers, Therefore, it is an important starting point that they are accessible to all. This is a democratic right. It is clearly stated in the Swedish Library Act which says that:

"Public and school libraries should pay special attention to the disabled, immigrants and other minorities including by offering literature in other languages than Swedish and in forms tailored to their needs."

**Åsa:** In Sweden we have a law who helps people I work with.

The law says that they have right to have a mean full day, with activities on their own level. So all of our group member have its own schedule. They have activist in group and they have individual activities with me our my college Sofia , or with their assistant.

Our goal/aim is that these people will get so many different experience as possible in the community. So we are visiting some local environment. We go to church and listen to music, we go to a craft club, we have easier jobs at a factory, we deliver mail, we visit the Opera in Umeå.

In order to create more contacts in the community I took contact with the local library On Ersboda, and there I meet Monica who was willing to se this group of people.

**Monica:**The common ground for cooperation between libraries and social services is therefore the library law and the social services law formulations of the right of everyone to receive library services and the right to have a meaningful existence with others. That's where our two departments meet: in the mission to pay particular attention to the disabled, and in care goals to seek stimulation outside the walls of the institution.

## **How?**

**Monica:** This meeting emphasizes, among others, the particular need to identify marginalized groups to tailor the library services.

It can be converted to a question: How do we identify marginalized groups?

In 1998, Swedish Arts Council published a report in Sweden, which surveyed people with disabilities access to culture <sup>1</sup> (Rapport från Statens kulturråd 1998:3) It showed that cultural activities are usually carried out within a day center, of the same kind that Åsa is working at. The Cultural activities will vary in quality depending on staff skills and interests.

In other words - disabled participate more in their own culture than in the ordinary culture, which may be due to cultural institutions are not good at making the activities available to the disabled.

About 400 000 people in Sweden have some form of impaired brain. For some 40 000 people is the handicap so extensive that they are receiving education in special school or care.

Neurologically disabled is a potential audience for libraries and other cultural institutions, but it will require staff to know how to receive them, the information developed and disseminated so that it becomes easy to understand and that the premises are physically accessible and easy to navigate in. So says the report from the Swedish Arts Council.

In my case, I can't blame that hadn't seen them, the disabled and the neurologically handicapped who often walked past my window, escorted by an assistant. The problem was that I didn't identified them as a coherent group, not until that spring day in 2008 when Åsa visited me at work and told me about the group she works with.

Therefore, based on my own experience how difficult it is to discern and identify marginalized groups, so I can not stress enough how important it is that as the library collaborates with other institutions and organizations. Collaboration is the key word – to interact with others is the only way for libraries to develop.

You will soon see a movie that shows a sample of what Åsa's group experience when they visit us at Ersboda branch Library. It shows an activity in which I use the library's media and the participants will be amused at a level that suits them.

Åsa: On Ersboda day center, where I work, there are four groups with different orientations. Totally we are nine persons who work here and it's about 30 persons who have their daily activity here.

The group I'm response for, with Sofia, consist off 13 persons and their assistant.

All people in our group has it's own assistant. They help them with their daily lives,

Give them food, help them with personal hygiene and so on.

The assistant is the eye, the ear and the mouth for our groups members.

---

<sup>1</sup> Funktionshindrades tillgång till kultur: kartläggning och handlingsprogram. Stockholm. Statens kulturråd. 1998.

The people in our group are between 21 to 45 years old but their talent level is between 3 months and 5 years.

They all communicate in different ways and the spoken language is in minority.

We use pictures, characters, photographs, sign language and real things when we speak to each other.

### **Description of the film**

**Monica:** The film has speakertext in English. It is seven minutes long. A normal booktalk takes about 30 minutes, so what you see is a only small sample.

The film begins with an introduction, you hear a song and then shows a number of still pictures in black and white, like old photographs.

Then you hear my voice, I am reading a book, Knock Knock Knock by the children's author Anna-Clara Tidholm. You hear a knocking sound, it is we who are knocking on doors in the book.

Then you hear that we sing, we have a song about riding a bicycle, and another song that is about how lovely and warm the sun is, both songs complemented and reinforced by movement, sign language support for speech. We exaggerate any movement, as several participants are also visually impaired.

Then you hear a song on acoustic guitar, it's a sound the filmmaker has chosen to put on while he shows pictures of us when we make moves. Then you hear us sing again. The song is about taking the bus through the city, and we use sign language to support the words in the song. Then it will be more meetings with the book, this time a picture book in which we imitate different animals together, followed by an ABC book that brings much joy. The film ends with music that is associated with a children's book character, Mamma Moo, a cow rowing a boat. We use a blue fabric to illustrate the waves on the lake, we will raise and lower the cloth and put the air in motion and as you will notice the participants seem to think it's exiting. The film ends with a piece of music..