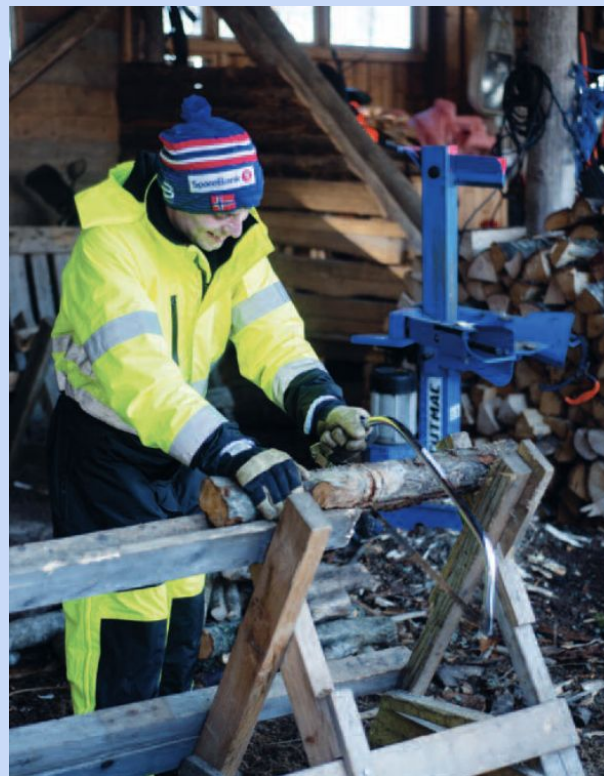


# The value of work

Steffi Hagedorn

Steinerhøyskolen, 12.9.24



# The value of work

Part One: The human image

Part Two: The value of work

Part Three: Creating supportive workplaces

Part Four: Challenges of today and possibilities for the future



# Part One: The human image

A simple truth: Everyone is unique. Everyone is on their own unique life path.



# The inner core behind the “everyday personality”



- In every person, there is an inner core behind the "everyday personality", behind developmental disabilities and challenges
- That inner core, the core of our identity, is always healthy and unblemished, it's the essence of our full potential.
- In every person challenges and obstacles arise in between the core and the world, in how that core can show itself in this world, in this body, in this biography



- this applies to all people, we all have challenges, and obstacles that make it difficult to realize our true self
- the inner core remains whole and perfect no matter what happens to the body or the brain, and it is consistent throughout life, from the small child who cannot speak, through an maybe independent adult life and right up to a possible old age with dementia, the core is always there .
- The “everyday personality”, the manifestation of the inner core can and will change throughout life.

# Man as a developing being

- To be human is to be on a journey of realizing this inner core in this world, a manifestation of our own true self in the context of our surroundings.
- Man seen as a developing being, in a biographical context and constant development. A quest to become oneself. "Man, know thyself"

# Menneskemøter - human encounters

- Menneskemøter - human encounters are at the core of the human experience.
- The small fleeting moments where two people meet, when we get a short glimpse of the other person in their true self, and when we for a short moment feel seen as who we really are.



# The human encounter in social therapy

- In social therapy we embrace the notion of equality, of meeting “eye-to-eye”, and stepping out of the hierarchy of power and capacity.
- We try to create a space where these human encounters can take place, even though they may not come through often, they are for many of us what we cherish most in our places.



# View of people with learning disabilities: From discrimination to emancipation

- today - we have a goal of achieving equality and inclusion in society
- human rights convention on the rights of persons with disability
- Recognition for people's individual biographies, talents and learning processes
- appreciation for the value of everyone's experience - it is no more "right" to live a "normal" life than a life where, for example, you have a developmental disability

# disability - or “different set of abilities”?

What we traditionally call a “disability” might also be called a “different set of abilities”, maybe struggling with some abilities that our societies are built around, but bringing other abilities to the table, that in the right setting can be very useful. Many people with a “disability” can have other “abilities” that are further developed than in many people without a so-called “disability”.



# Mutual learning

We can learn from each other!

What can people I meet in my everyday life teach me?

# Some of the answers from a social therapy course for new volunteers in Camphill Solborg

- authenticity - be who you are
- being honest with your feelings and emotions
- being in the moment
- high level of energy
- asking for help is not a weakness
- ability to trust the unknown, trust strangers, new staff
- high motivation
- high enthusiasm
- seeing other people's needs
- acceptance
- give immediate feedback
- know their needs
- joy of life
- self-confidence

# What can it be like to live with a developmental disability?

An experience of being “other”, of not being like the others. For some - a source of sorrow. For some - a complete acceptance of being myself, and a pride in being who I am without worrying.

Vulnerability

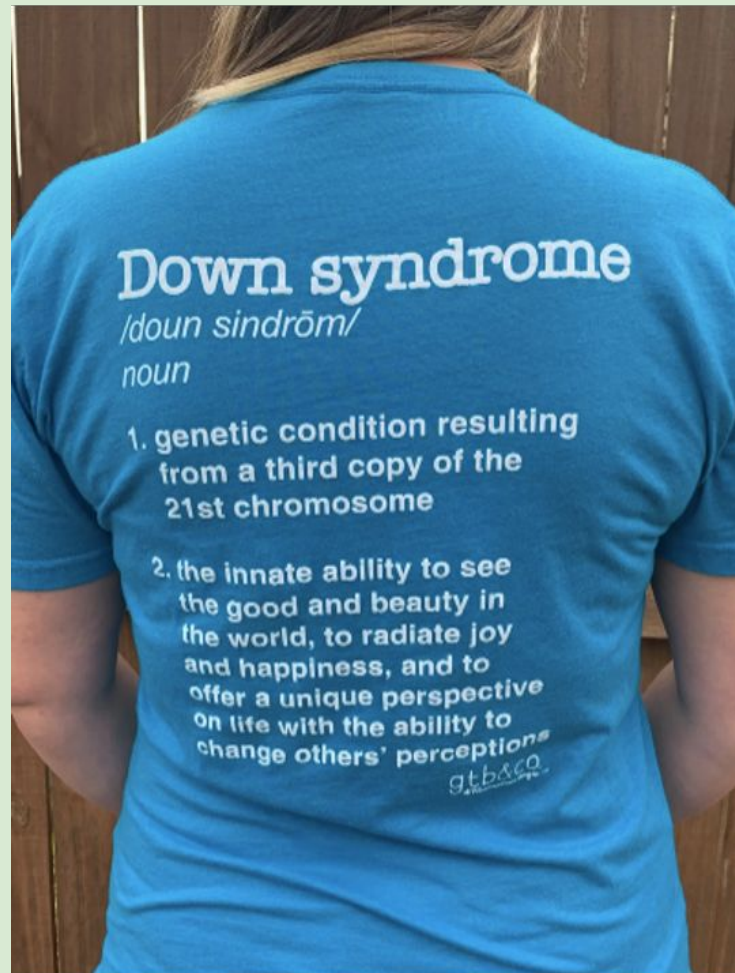
Possibilities

Some can have an experience of not having access to the same arenas as other people, f.eks. through not being able to use social media and smartphones.

**// 499 babies out of 500 SUFFER  
from a LACK of Down syndrome**



**my parents were incredibly lucky! //**  
**Fionn**



## Down syndrome

*/doun sindrōm/*

noun

1. genetic condition resulting from a third copy of the 21st chromosome
2. the innate ability to see the good and beauty in the world, to radiate joy and happiness, and to offer a unique perspective on life with the ability to change others' perceptions

atb&co.

# Depending on others for help and support

Living in dependence: Being in a life situation where you are surrounded by people who guide you, and who you are dependant on for support. Not really being alone, not really getting the chance to make mistakes on your own.

Depending often on a good relationship with your supporters - this can lead to giving the answers the other person wants to hear, rather than what you really want.

In Norway people with developmental disabilities can often be ushered into “normative”, average life-styles, as what their supporters think is suitable for them.

# Making decisions about your own life

For many people with a learning disability - making decisions about their own life is a struggle and an achievement in itself.

The “window” of decisions they make on their own, without support or “guidance” is often narrower than for others.

On the other side - many of people with a learning disability can be very clear about what they want and don't want.



# Standing outside the norm

Some can experience that social “markers” in life are unreachable:

- having a home of your own
- getting an education and a degree
- finding a job and earning your own money
- finding a partner, getting married, starting a family
- getting a driver's license and owning a car
- having an adventurous time of being a young adult, finding your path, making mistakes, travelling on your own

Some people can experience sorrow, disappointment or frustration over this.

# Being human is being “other”, being “unique”

Ultimately - what does it mean to be human? We´re all different, none of us is like “everyone else”, and most of us will in some way not reach all of the “social markers” or expectations of society.

Being human in some way could be described as coming to terms with that and embracing one´s uniqueness, finding one´s own path in this life on this earth.

Many people with disability have that experience and can show their uniqueness and their love of life and of people very openly. An honesty, a directness, a presence in the moment that many of us strive to achieve.

# Not being seen or heard

Many adults with a learning disability can experience being treated like a child, being spoken about and over your head, not feeling seen or heard.

Statistically - people with disabilities have a high risk of experiencing bullying and abuse.

# Creating a space for people to come into their own

Creating a surrounding where people feel seen and heard, where they can realize that they have a voice and come into their own is at the core of social pedagogy.



## Part Two: The value of work

- What is the value of work?

“Without work there would be chaos - nobody would build the roads, nobody would teach the children, nobody would treat the sick in the hospital, nobody would grow food. Without work, society would collapse very quickly.”

(response from my daughter, 10 years old)



# Participating in society through work

Work as a foundation stone of our society, there is an unspoken agreement that we participate in creating and supporting our society through work.

Being a “worker” and having a job can feel like being a functional part of society, of belonging to the bigger context.

In many countries people with disabilities in large part do not have the same access to work, and can feel “outside” society.

On a personal level, regardless of disability, work can be an arena of experiencing:

- belonging
- meaning
- achievement and mastering abilities
- contributing to others
- identity
- self - determination
- motivation



# Meaningful work can help to build resilience

Having meaningful work to go to, experiencing belonging and meaningful relationships with others can help build resilience.

Suffering unemployment can be devastating for many people, regardless whether they have a disability or not.

Even stepping out of the workforce as a pensioner can be a tough transition for some, losing the structure and rhythms of work life, and experiencing a feeling of not being needed anymore.

It is important for us to build inclusive workspaces, in order to give people the possibility to benefit from having a steady work to go to.

# Antidote to the “loneliness epidemic”

In our modern societies there is a “loneliness epidemic”, that people with disabilities are especially vulnerable to.

Loneliness can make people more prone to suffering from deteriorating physical and mental health.

Having a meaningful workplace where you feel belonging and appreciation, and where you are missed when you are not there, can be an antidote to loneliness.



# The workplace as a social arena and a meeting place

A good workplace can be a valuable social arena and a meeting place.

We can meet new people, maybe make new friends. Hear news or even gossip over a common task or over a cup of coffee in the breaks.

Working on a common task can give us an experience of connection with other people.



# Work as a marker of identity

Having a job to go to and identifying with a profession is for many people an important marker of identity, for example being a farmer, a baker or a gardener.



# The value of work in modern society?

- work as a “necessary evil” to earn enough money to have time off - focus on leisure activities
- work as an arena for status and rank, prestige
- We also see a difference in inner motivation - some are deeply motivated, they are connected to their work tasks and see meaning in the tasks and do their utmost to raise the quality - and others are "inner quitters", who know that they must be physically present at work for a certain number of hours and perform certain tasks, and who drop everything to do with work the moment they can

# From ego-focus to community - focus

In our society it can seem that free time and leisure activities, travel, etc. are the most important things in life. This can easily lead to becoming a certain ego focus, me, me, me. Work is in this context something that should be ended quickly, or avoided, and only gives us the funds to do what is really important.

But meaningful work in a good workplace with good relationships with colleagues is an important and sometimes underestimated factor in quality of life. It opens up a more community-based focus, on meaning, community, on togetherness.



# Social therapeutic workplaces: the social as therapy

In social therapy, the idea is not that the staff perform a therapy towards the "patients" or the residents, but that we together create a social organism, a social connection that has a therapeutic effect on everyone who is in it.



# Meaningful and motivating work can be therapeutic for the individual

No one is set to do a task because the staff think it is therapeutic for this resident, but that together you find meaning and motivation in necessary, meaningful work, and this experience can have a therapeutic effect on the individual.

It can also be therapeutic for the staff to get to work alongside people with disability, who often have a dedication to labor and craft that is lost in modern society



# Experiencing community and belonging through work

Working together like this in the potato harvest before the rain comes, can be a wonderful experience of community and belonging.



# Pride in the work

One aspect that comes up again and again when speaking to people with learning disabilities about their work, is their pride in their work and their pride of the products and services they provide to others. A big motivation is also knowing the customer.



# The social experience of working together

In the social pedagogic workplaces we create space for being together, for experiencing the joy of working side by side.



## Part Three: Creating supportive workspaces



# Lighting the flame

It all starts with an idea, a vision of what you´re trying to do.

Finding people who connect with the idea, and finding a space and a time where it is possible for this idea to become reality



# Shaping the workplace according to the needs of everyone there.

Developmental disability is not a static quantity in itself, but can also be described as the distance between the demands the physical and social environment places on the individual and the individual's opportunities to meet those demands.

If we facilitate the environment and remove obstacles, more people can be "resource-strong" and independent contributors.



# Creating an inclusive physical space

thinking through the physical design of the workplace, for example:

- providing necessary aids as railings, special tools, support structures
- removing barriers, such as steps, or changing the signs to pictograms, braille or other, depending on the people in the workspace
- being mindful of noise levels or other factors that can be challenging for some
- having space, and not crowding the workplace, can be hugely benefiting for many

# The rhythmic structure of the workplace



We strive to establish a rhythmic structure to the working day and working week, a conscious shaping of the surroundings - start together, end together, say a verse, morning assembly, ring a bell, etc.

Repetitive structures can create security and help the individual to find their place.

# Adapting the task to the individual

- divide complicated task into simpler steps and tasks, which the individual can and wants to master
- provide thorough training, be patient. It can take many repetitions, and perhaps many months, before a task is mastered. But once it's mastered, many people have an amazing ability to keep up the task to a high standard every time.



# Scouting for opportunities and possibilities

Change the view of who is "capable" and "not capable" - maybe we just haven't managed to create a framework yet, where the individual can find their place and their task.

See the possibilities, and help find the often hidden talents.

Provide challenges and the opportunity to learn, and be curious about what the individual wants.



# Supporting the individual

- Facilitate the individual, and support the individual in their journey to find themselves, their identity, their talents.
- Can characteristics that can be defined as "challenges" or "weaknesses" also be a strength?
- Create frameworks so that the individual's voice can be heard. Be patient, this is a group of people who are used to being overlooked and judged. Some react to it by being extra clear and loud in their wishes, others have become used to being "good" and acquiescing, giving in to please the other rather than saying what they themselves want.
- Building trust in order to go unknown paths, meet new situations and learn to master new skills.

# Meeting each person for who they are, and where they are

There is no "universal" code when we try to support people in their life path.

Each person is different and special and we need to meet them for who they are, where they are

Each of us who try to provide support is different and special. Something that works for one person, doesn't work for the next.

The magic happens in the individual human encounters.



What does it take to be a good social pedagog?

# Inner work!

I am my own tool in social pedagogy

The social relationships and human encounters are completely dependent on me working on myself and knowing myself well.

We act on the other person with our whole being, including those parts of ourselves that we may not have fully processed yet.

In social pedagogic workplaces, we often support people in their innerwork journeys, for example through training.

# Self- awareness is crucial

We must be aware of our own reactions.

Working with yourself and your own challenges is a prerequisite for being a good and liberating helper.

Otherwise, there is a danger of mirroring one's own needs onto the resident or turning the resident into a tool for self-development

# Communication skills and good collaboration

Good self-awareness and a willingness to work with communication are crucial.

Openness and honesty between the employees is important to develop a good and respectful collaboration.

Conflicts in the staff group are destructive to the quality of life of the people we are supporting.

It is also important to work with and become aware of one's own attitudes, which characterize the work. Being confronted with many different attitudes and different sets of values can be challenging for the people we are supporting.

# Social pedagogical institutions as cultural beacons

- Culture is nourishment for the soul
- Having a rich cultural life is an important marker of our institutions and we make space for different expressions of culture, such as arts, music, theatre, dance.
- Celebrations are an important part of working life and create unity and joy
- We strive to establish beautiful, aesthetic surroundings which contribute to the healthy and dignified experience of the places



# Arts

We often make space in our places to be creative together, for example through painting, either in a social painting or individually.



# Theatre

In many places setting up plays together is an important expression of the culture. Here we can be together and experience being equal, we can try out new roles, and we bring a beautiful experience to the audience. There is enormous joy and bonding in setting up a play together.



# Music and concerts

Creating music through singing or playing instruments is important in all our places. It brings us together - and it's fun! Many places host also concerts regularly, where professional musicians come and play for the community.



## Part Four: Challenges of today and future development possibilities:

providing access to higher education and job training:

- initiatives in some of the institutions to provide more formalized job training over several years
- an initiative at the Steiner University College to give people with learning disabilities access to higher education

## Empowerment, self-determination and co-determination

- how to contribute to even more participation - not facilitate for but facilitate together with?
- Finding ways to support the individual to make decisions, to take more ownership over their own lives.
- some places have residents' councils - can we deepen these?
- Can all be involved in management decisions, advisory bodies, formal structures?
- Create meeting forms and decision-making processes that open up for everyone, so everyone can participate and be heard.

# Keeping the flame alive

At the core of every social pedagogic initiative there is a vision, an idea, a flame of inspiration

In everyday life we meet all kinds of challenges, maybe with procedures with the government, maybe with funding, finding the right forms, the right people.

Through all of this it is essential to keep the flame of inspiration alive, finding your way of doing it.



Thank you for your time

Takk for meg.