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Newsletter No. 5

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Dear partners and friends,

End of January we had the first International Conference with all Partners in Hamburg. But how to summarise 4 days of intensive partnership-building, mutual discussions, visits and verse-vice understanding that takes place when 18 partners from 5 European countries, 5 teams of 5 European cities meet for the first time? It is impossible to share the joint commitment, the culture of discussion and the atmosphere of this meeting, even if the social aspects of partnership building have been just as important as the discussions regard to the content. On the following pages Michael Langhanky gives some ideas of the crucial points of the schedule and basic information about the agreement.

Best wishes

Dorothee Bittscheidt, Michael Langhanky, Anne Ernst

The First International Network-Conference in Hamburg

28th – 30th of January 2002



First of all: **Who met whom and why?**

Dorothee Bittscheidt gave in her introductory speech at the Convergence a helpful picture of the partnership-building and the institutions taking part in “steps”:

“The very first step to STEPS was the collaboration between Dorothee Bittscheidt, today’s president of the **HWP – Hamburg University for Economics and Politics**, and Michael Langhanky, Professor at the **University of Applied Sciences for Social Work**, in developing a programme for the qualification of staff in institutions and services for people with learning disabilities in 1997. One of the conclusions after a series of terms was that changing the perspective of staff members into a person-centred approach presupposes a fundamental change in the organisational settings, a change in organising and delivering the services towards community based services.

At that time the **Protestant Foundation Alsterdorf** as the biggest provider in Hamburg started discussing “Community care” and an other important provider, the **Foundation “Rauhes Haus”** was just decentralising care for disabled people. Furthermore, the local authority, the today’s **Ministry for Social Welfare and Family**, represented a review of the political strategy to improve care systems for the disabled stressing the issue of self-determination and the instruments which should be developed for a corresponding process.

Together the five institutions started to build a network and designed the application in the EU-programme to combat discrimination. The application was successful and the Hamburg Partners had the chance to build up an European Network with the following partners:

First of all there was the **Tizard Institute of the University of Kent, Canterbury**, with an established tradition of research in issues of learning disabilities. Tizard accompanied the closure programme in Great Britain and the restructuring of the services with researches and consultation.

Tizard was highly engaged to introduce its established contact to the **Parkside NHS Trust, Executive of Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster Health Authority in London**, and with the **Social Service Department of the London Borough of Kensington/Chelsea** into the project. As a provider the Parkside NHS Trust is responsible for the community care and for care for special needs for disabled people in a big area of London. The Social Service Department is for example responsible for the finances, the quality standards and control and the advocacy system in the area. Both are working together in the field of Community Care for people with learning disabilities: Joint Planning, Joint Commissioning of Learning Disability Services, and Partnership Boards.

The contact to the Swedish partners started with a visit of Kent Ericsson and Patricia Ericsson in Hamburg. She had been responsible for social administration in Stockholm, he for research about the Swedish closure programme of institutions for handicapped people at the **Department of Education, University of Uppsala**. Both are engaged to develop the community based services further and to carry out ways which leads to better life – in Sweden and in other Countries.

Kent and Patricia established the contact to the **social services of the community of Lidingö**, close to Stockholm. The system of the community based services for people with learning disabilities is an outstanding example for the consequences of the Swedish political strategy in the field of care and support for disabled people during the last decades. Sweden executed a closure programme of all residential institutions for people with disabilities and changed their care and support system to community based services.

Networking for the purpose of this project would not have been so highly successful if we would not have got in contact with the quite different system of care and support in Barcelona. Due to the activities of Xabier Ballesteros we got to know, that the different cultural background shapes its own organisation of care, services and additionally the focus on struggle for human rights. There is the large **Grup Aspronis** similar to the above mentioned institutions for residential care and support including sheltered work. Aspronis was founded in 1986 as a result of a parent's initiative. It shows the great importance of the family and network based care in Spain which influences as well the services: Individual support (besides residential care) is located in the community of Barcelona. The focus is on support for families by improving services available for all people with special needs.

Family and community based services are supported by a system of guardianship. The **Foundation Aspanias** was created to achieve a better coordination of actions and activities within the providers as well as in non-residential living conditions. Since then very encouraging experiences were made by taking persons, who cannot manage their own lives, under an adequate guardianship of physical or legal persons, in case the people in question don't have family or other relatives to ask for help.

As a City of Human Rights declared by the framework of the contract of Amsterdam Barcelona has a special **Non-Discrimination Department**. The Department could be an example for developing the human rights advocacy for disabled people along with the improvement of its care and service system.

The **Institute for Education at the University of Barcelona** will support the local network and the Project with scientific contributions. It is experienced in research in the field and Mr. Garranto the former director asked Isabel Paula to continue his work in "steps". The **Deputation of Social Services for the county of Barcelona** is giving advice and

reglementations for the way services for people with learning disabilities are provided. We are happy to have a strong and very committed administration in the project, that is able to install and promote a non-discriminative approach and to contribute its wide experience within the service-network of the city of Barcelona.

Looking at the partners in Rotterdam there are first a lot of similarities between the provider **PameijerKeerkring** and its development to a decentralised residential care system to our Hamburg provider Alsterdorf. Both are engaged in building up an individualised system of support for all people with learning disabilities they are responsible for. There are similarities too in the development of qualifying the staff. To change the whole services offered now into a community-based service system in the near future without putting at risk the high standard of care which has been achieved is the challenge for both providers – but at the same time the reason for their engagement in this project.

There is another point of interest for the project. Rotterdam could contribute a sort of best practice referring the integration in the labour market. Some years ago PameijerKeerkring started its collaboration with the private employment society OMIJ. About 75 persons with learning disabilities are working in the OMIJ outside the care system together with other people distanced from the labour market. Integration into the community by work has highly encouraging results especially for self-esteem. The Ichthus Hogeschool in Rotterdam will help to exploit these experiences for the European Network of “steps”.

Which agreement was aimed at the Conference?

After visits in several institutions, discussions in the administration and with the universities the main task of the Network-Conference was to reach a joint agreement on reductions of discrimination through service providers and administration. The agreement which we worked out is the shared consensus how “steps” should approach the aim of structures towards emancipation, participation and solidarity.

The conference started with an opening-speech by the Minister of Social Welfare and Family in Hamburg, Mrs. Schnieber-Jastram. She gave her support to “steps” and made clear that shortages of the budget for services in learning disabilities will not happen under her government.

After two more introductions, a wellcoming speech by Mrs. Barbara Rose, President of the University of Applied Sciences, and some notes from Michael Langhanky about the EU programme to combat discrimination, three papers were discussed and agreed on:

- ?? **Starting Points** - a paper that describes the key challenges for “steps” and the partnership. Kent Erricson and Bart Branderhorst opened the discussion with a statement to the paper.

- ?? **Perspective for Steps** –a discussion paper that works out the key values of “steps” partnership, which are shared by all partners. Josep Tresseras worked out a clear statement and Hector Medora, Zenobia Nadirshaw and Steven Carnaby gave an introduction to the paper.
- ?? The **Main objectives**- which were written down in the third paper: After speeches from Theo Maas, Michael Tüllmann and Renate Kurt-Petersen the paper was worked out more precisely and reduced from a too heavy load of objectives. The discussion lead to a very clear agreement on the objectives in “steps” signed by every partner the next day.

Happy-End

After nearly four days of very intensive discussions, meetings throughout the day and even sometimes the night we have several agreements, which are not only the joint agreement of our STEPS- partnership but a lot more:

- ?? A firm and committed team (trialogue) of providers, administration and scientific institute gathered - sometimes for the first time - for every involved city. Discussions on joint projects were held, the input of every triologue was shaped and ideas were born.
- ?? Bilateral partnerships were built: Exchange of staff-members was planned, exchange of users of services were aimed and exchange of data and concrete practices were agreed.
- ?? All the partners signed or will sign the Trans-National Cooperation-Agreement with the above mentioned Papers as an enclosure of this agreement.
- ?? Friendships, exchange of books, ideas and commitment to the topic of non-discrimination grew during the meeting and firm partnership relations were tightened.

So in the end all partners were convinced: We will have to continue this work according to the aggrement in phase II and we will be successful!

Michael Langhanky, Hamburg