

No 1•99

The Swedish Special Group for Children at Risk in the Baltic Sea Region

Children at Risk



In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration.

Article 3, Convention of the Rights of the Child

Joint efforts needed

"It is great to be a child!" That was the reply from a Swedish boy when asked how he felt being a child. Far from all children in our countries around the Baltic Sea today feel as secure. Children are abandoned, mistreated and sexually exploited.

In the Baltic Sea Region, the Swedish government has initially agreed to act as recipient and disseminator of information concerning children at risk in the region.

At the conference in Tallinn in September 1998, the first steps towards regional co-operation against sexual exploitation in the area were taken. Main points were legislation, training and co-operation.

In order to prevent children from becoming involved in criminal activities, addiction and sexual exploitation, each country must take responsibility for expanding its services to prevent, protect and rehabilitate children. The best results are achieved by adopting a multi-disciplinary approach both within and between nations. We must exchange experience in legislation, research and methods.

Decision-makers in the region have a joint responsibility to highlight, evaluate and spread knowledge about how to best care for the interests of children at risk. As a step in this direction, I have now invited all ministers in the region with responsibility for issues concerning children to a meeting. At the ministerial meeting, I hope we all will provide an insight into how we at the highest political level jointly can develop co-operation to assist these children.

Joint efforts have already been initiated through support from authorities, agencies, development assistance agencies, NGOs, universities and colleges as well as twinning municipalities. Activities, training schemes and projects are in progress to raise skills in working with abandoned, maltreated and sexually abused children and youngsters. In this issue of the magazine, we focus on present experience and a few activities and training projects. The publication will be distributed throughout the region.

I hope the magazine reaches as many readers as possible and inspires all those that work with children at risk at all levels to develop knowledge and skills as well as to build networks.



Maj-Inger Klingvall
Minister of Social Security
and Children

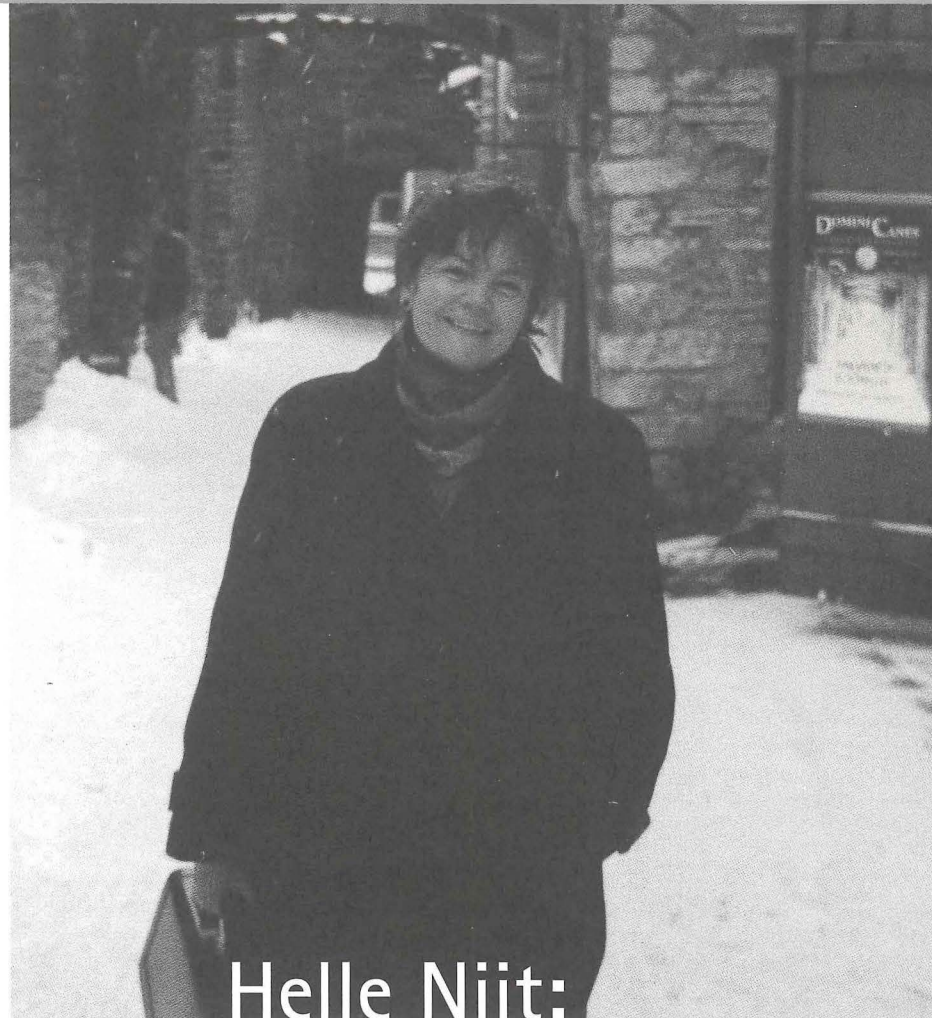
Who are the children at risk? I think we might speak about special groups of children that are more vulnerable than others.

First, these are children that lack parental care and functional parental relations; children left to seek their own social contacts. Situations such as these are not always bound by economic circumstances but exist in all walks of life. However, in many cases parents cannot provide adequate housing or financial support for their children who therefore take to the streets.

Second, we must include children in institutions when defining particularly vulnerable groups. In Estonia, approximately 1,100 children today live in institutions and we have a number of children waiting for a place in institutions. There is simply not enough

care available. Additionally, we should focus on the care provided; care which often is inadequate. Children leaving institutions are not equipped for future life and easily fall victim to crime and exploitation. We need more field workers to provide the needed support and care for children at risk. Today, most of our child welfare workers are confined to office work.

I would also like to see further developments in co-operation between specialists in different fields who are focusing on individual children. We need to broaden networks to encompass pre-school teachers, primary school teachers, child psychologists, social workers and all others involved in child welfare. This idea, which is fully accepted



Helle Niit:

Photo: Ingrid Åkerman

Time to move child support out on the street

in for example Sweden, has also in principle been adopted in Estonia. However, in practice much remains to be done.

We need a fully accepted and universal definition of child abuse that not only outlines which criteria constitute abuse and the characteristics of abuse. Many good definitions exist but it is vital that we agree on one prevailing definition. Personally, I would like to see child abuse defined from the point of view of the child; abuse takes place when the victim experiences psychological or emotional trauma. The investigative process must be developed; we cannot simply victimise a child. We must strive to provide safety in a psychological sense for all children.

To succeed and develop, it is important that specialists in all

fields related to children meet in small workshops and exchange practical knowledge and ideas. These should focus on skills and procedure. As a psychologist, I believe it is important for all children to have adults in their environment who are sensitive to their individual needs. Other criteria such as income or housing standards are, by comparison, much less important.

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Photo: Karin Naucler



Ingrid Åkerman, Eva Rimsten and Bo Henrikson.

The Swedish Special Group for Children at Risk in the Baltic Sea Region was established after the Conference in Tallinn on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Baltic Sea Region 1998 by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs in Sweden. The Working Group's mandate is to serve as information centre for children at risk and to pursue follow-up activities of the Conference in Tallinn within the social area.

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In organising society's efforts and services for exploited children there are four levels: awareness and recognition, plan of action, education and co-operation. Regardless where we work or to what profession we belong, it is our duty to do our utmost to prevent children from being exposed to sexual abuse. When abuse already has occurred, it is our duty to investigate and offer assistance in such a way that children and families can benefit without adding further distress.

Sexually abused children require special professional skills

It is well known that when people are unaware how to act, they seldom react to signs of abuse. Information, policymaking and changes in attitude are therefore crucial.

Estimating the prevalence and incidence of sexual abuse constitutes a major problem. The greatest difficulty is identifying unknown and unreported cases. Studies suggest that approximately 10-20 percent of all women and 3-10 percent of all men in Europe have experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18. With regard to organised sexual abuse, reliable data is even more difficult to obtain. One study from Great Britain showed that five percent of all sex-crimes during a two-year period involved children in sex-rings. In the same study, 13 percent of the children were documented in pornography. Several studies of prostitutes show that they were used in pornography in their childhood.

There is no single symptom or syndrome that constitutes proof of sexual abuse. Kendall-Tackett et al, in a study of the impact of child sexual abuse, noticed that almost two-thirds of abused children showed psychological disturbances or behavioural disturbances in the aftermath of sexual abuse.

However, no single symptom or behaviour was characteristic for the majority of the children. Fear, posttraumatic stress disorder, behaviour problems, sexualised behaviour, and poor self-esteem were the most prevalent symptoms.

When comparing sexually abused children with other children with mental problems two characteristics stood out, namely posttraumatic stress disorder and sexualised behaviour.

It is occasionally forgotten that sexual abuse is not a disease but a traumatic event. Like other traumatic events it causes stress and



"We owe the traumatised child professional treatment," writes Associate professor Carl Göran Svedin.

Photo: Sven Oredson/megapix

in this case also interferes with the normal development of sexuality. Lasting effects of sexual abuse are evident in a clear overrepresentation of mental illness in this population with diagnoses such as depression, self-destructive behaviour, suicide attempts, eating disorders, substance abuse, psychoses, promiscuity and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Factors that influence the seriousness of sexual abuse trauma are complex and dependent of both non-specific factors and abuse related factors. Socio-economical and family related factors such as poverty, family violence and substance abuse among parents are non-specific factors. In every society in turmoil or wherever poverty is widespread there is an increased number of run-away children, street-children, child criminality, and child prostitution.

The more forceful the abuse is and if penetration has occurred is connected to a worsened prognosis.

The intensity, frequency, duration and if the abuse has taken place over a longer period of time are also factors related to an increased trauma. If there is a close and dependent relation between the child victim and the perpetrator is also associated with a more negative prognosis. Organised abuse with several perpetrators and documentation of the abuse in forms of photos and videos, adds a considerable burden to the child's possibility to later adapt to a normal life.

When problems are recognised, tools in order to effectively – but carefully – deal with the problem are needed. Legislative assemblies must pass laws that forbid sexual abuse of children. National boards of health and welfare or other governmental bodies must issue guidelines to assist local professionals in performing their difficult task. Social workers must protect the child, police and prosecutors enforce law while

the role of the health system is both to provide medical forensic evidence and evaluate the child and the child's need for treatment.

The evaluation process could be characterised as solving a puzzle with the disclosure and a statement from the child often as the only information to act from. How the police carry out their interview with the child is essential for the whole process.

We owe the traumatised child professional treatment. The child treatment has both short term and long term issues to deal with. Short-term issues are treatment of medical injuries and sexually transmitted diseases, protection for the child and crisis intervention. Long term issues are dealt with in the so called trauma-oriented or abuse focused psychotherapy and general psychotherapy. In the trauma oriented psychotherapy the child is

Continued on page 5

Alfie Atkins, Alfons Åberg, is well known to most Swedish children. A fairly ordinary child, around seven years of age, living with his equally ordinary single parent father, he shares the common concerns about fear, insecurity, joy, love and play with most other children his age. The first Alfie book in Latvian was recently published and Latvian children can now watch animated Alfie stories on television.

The right to a good book

"By addressing everyday issues from a child's perspective, other children discover themselves and that all children have the same apprehensions," says Latvian-born Swedish editor Maija Zeile-Westrup. "That helps provide comfort and recognition."

Having closely followed Swedish children's literature for decades, Ms. Zeile-Westrup took the initiative to an exhibition, which opened in Riga in January. Other language versions of the exhibition will be on display throughout 1999 in Estonia, Lithuania, Kaliningrad Oblast, Poland and the Ukraine. The exhibition is organised by the Swedish Institute and the Swedish Institute for Children's Books.

The exhibition is much more than a pictorial show of prominent illustrators and writers. The purpose is rather to demonstrate to teachers, librarians, writers, illustrators and other groups how modern child psychology and teaching methods – with a great deal of humour and imagination – characterise the Swedish picture book for children.

In countries where children's literature and children's culture – along with much more – has

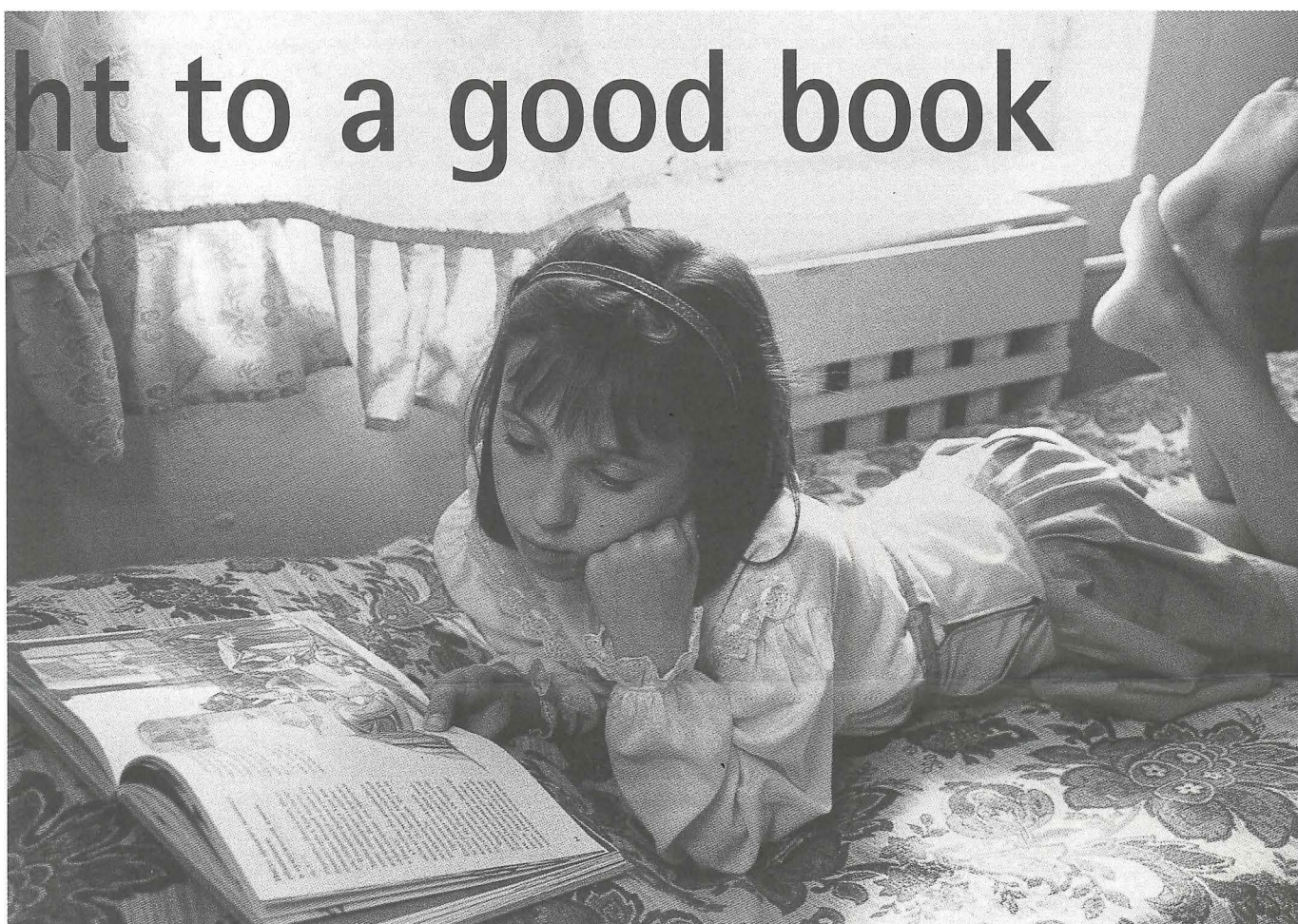


Photo: UN

stood still for decades, parents, teachers and other adults each day meet children without sufficient psychological insights. Sweden has long been considered a leader in children's literature and children's culture and hopes, through the exhibition, to show how basic values concerning the needs and rights of children are reflected in Swedish children's literature.

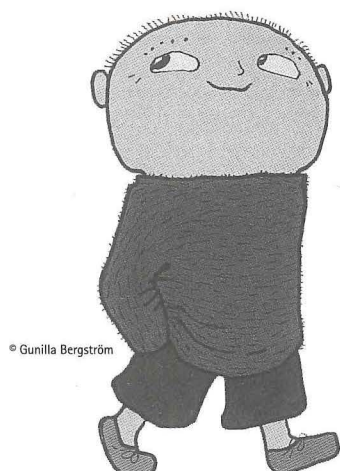
"We must be careful not to

impose our view of how others should relate to children," says Project Manager Birgitta Tennander at the Swedish Institute. "However, we want to emphasise the fact that all children have a right to a happy childhood."

The exhibition follows the development of Swedish children's literature from the late 19th century when childhood starts being perceived not as an

intermediate state towards adulthood but as a unique period in life.

Good children's literature takes into account the characteristics associated with each age and stage in the learning process. Children aged 4-5 years, for example, can relatively proficiently perform complicated movements without premeditation. However, more practice is needed. Having mastered the



© Gunilla Bergström



Popular Latvian actor Arnis Miltins introduces Alfie Atkins and raises issues with children.

Focus on Poland

In Poland, the children's book exhibition opens in Gdansk, 8 April. The exhibition coincides with the Swedish government's focus on Poland during 1999. Nine so-called Sweden Days are planned with the first in Gdansk, 6-9 April, followed by Wroslaw, 12-18 April, when Prime Minister Göran Persson will be present. The children's book exhibition

opens in Wroslaw, 15 April, followed by a seminar. Later the exhibition and special events are planned for Szczecin, Poznan, 14-18 June, Lodz in September, Krakow in October, November and finally in December.

In Tallinn, Estonia the exhibition opens at the

body, excess energy can be channelled to other areas. Language develops by leaps and action can be planned ahead. Joy and expectation, jealousy, fear and disappointment enters life. These factors form the basis for Alfie Atkins' and Lotta on Troublemaker Street's world, a world the four-year old can easily identify with.

Perhaps best known abroad is Astrid Lindgren's Pippi Longstocking, introduced in 1947. The feisty 9-year old became an inspiration to children throughout the world with her rebelliousness, strength, wealth and courage. From the 1960's, books began to address issues such as violence, fear, expectations, sorrow, illness – most often with a touch of humour.

"Over decades children's literature has been neglected in my native country," says Ms. Zeile-Westrup. "For many years, writers weren't permitted to write freely about that which is really important to children. Instead, the classics were reprinted and nostalgic rosy tales were written. Nowadays, mass-market literature is being translated and published. I don't necessarily disapprove of all such literature but we need books that discuss problems, books which provide insights and inspiration for children."

When the exhibition opened in Riga, Ms. Zeile-Westrup particularly remembers the librarian who remarked that the illustrations brought back recollections of childhood, a time that she remembered as always being happy.

"Children have a right to enjoy good books," Ms. Zeile-Westrup emphasises. "Good children's books do not have to be special, the important thing is that they communicate directly with youngsters and not detour in allegories through princesses and trolls."

Computers for kids

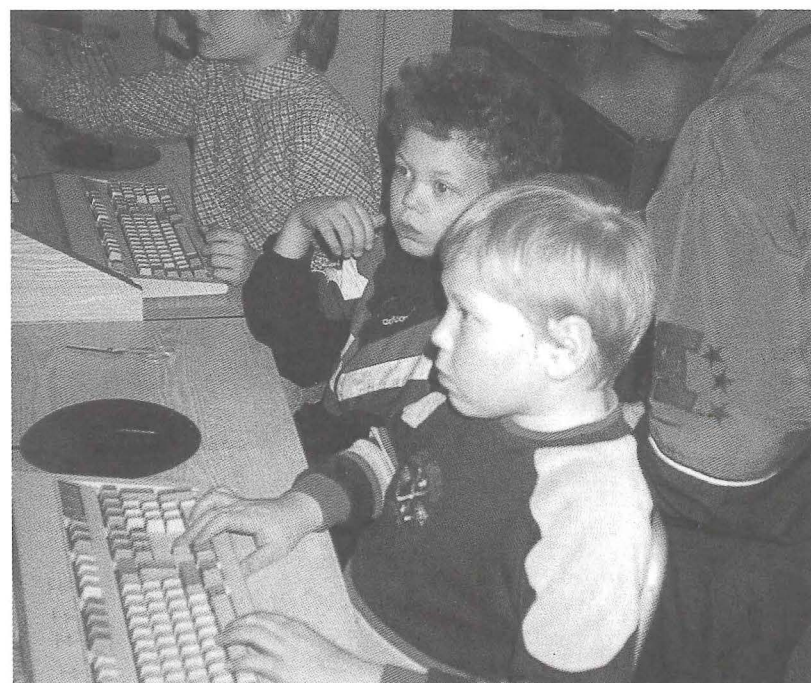
"If we can't give street children an adequate material existence, we should at least give them a future," says Christina Haig, one of the founders of EuroKids.

With limited material resources, Christina Haig and Anne-Marie De Geer discussed means of attracting children off the streets and back in school. They contacted IBM, which donated several computers that had been used for the Olympic Games in Lillehammer. IBM, while in the process of establishing its business in the Baltic Sea countries, also saw an opportunity to use its new staff in training.

In November 1997, the first EuroKids centre opened in Katleri, just outside Tallinn. Located in an old schoolhouse, earlier used by the Soviet military, it operates as an afternoon and evening school.

To gain attendance to EuroKids, the child must show up for school. Each day he or she receives a stamp from their teacher to verify attendance. Previously, Tallinn's street kids showed up for school at the beginning of the term with attendance steadily deteriorating and finally ceasing altogether. With regular school attendance a prerequisite for EuroKids, they are finding their way back to school.

The children are often referred by relief organisations. Today, 55



children – of whom two-thirds are boys – attend the Tallinn centre. With a growing waiting list, the centre has been forced to accept children only every other day in order to accommodate more students.

Upon arrival at EuroKids, children receive hot chocolate and sandwiches. They then play computer games and solve problems assigned by their instructors. Because English is the international computer language, language training is also given – an advantage also in regular classes.

EuroKids' current activities in Estonia include centres in Tallinn and Tartu with plans for expansion and a new centre in Narva. In Kaunas, Lithuania, a EuroKids centre opened in 1998 at a home for visually impaired

children while another centre is located in Vilnius. Additional centres are planned for Riga and St Petersburg.

"We are presently working to provide all children with individual e-mail addresses," says Christina Haig. "By providing the means for swift communication, we hope children more easily can contact us if the need material support. We can, for example, deliver shoes or carpets for cold floors but we need to know what their needs are."

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Sexually abused children... continued

prompted to tell repeatedly and in detail about his or her other sexual abuse experiences. The child also needs to express feelings of anger, guilt, shame, disgust, powerlessness and sorrow.

In later stages of the therapy the child needs to learn and acquire the skills of how to protect itself; how to say no and avoid risk behaviour. To strengthen the child's self-esteem, learn about normal sexuality and promote peer relations and group oriented leisure activities are goals in the closing stages of the therapy.

Education To perform these different and delicate tasks, each profession needs a sound knowledge

of and training in co-operating with others. The police require basic knowledge about how paedophiles think and act. The social worker needs knowledge about sexual abuse characteristics, child development, behaviour disturbances, psychological defence mechanisms and pattern of family dysfunction. Most importantly, the social worker must be able to make a detailed risk assessment of the child.

Co-operation between authorities is often difficult. Real co-operation is characterised by a genuine wish to work together, an interest and knowledge about the other parties and mutual confidence.

Respect for individual roles and competence as well as respect and awareness of the own professional role and its limitations are necessary. Genuine co-operation may be difficult to achieve and maintain but can provide results by preventing children from being abused, helping abused children and taking measures against child sexual offenders.



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April, with
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National

Library 26-27 April, in
Kaliningrad, 8 May, at the
Children's Gladar Library and in
Novgorod, 11-13 June.

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As in all former Soviet republics, Latvia has thousands of orphaned children and youngsters. They grow up under very difficult conditions at a variety of institutions. At the age of 16 they are required to leave their institutions and support themselves – without work, training, a home, money or the support of relatives. Consequently many youngsters are easily drawn into criminal activities, prostitution or drug dependency.

Livslust, a private Swedish initiative, has established a miniature community in Aizupe, 110 kilometres west of Riga. On the Livslust property at Aizupe needy youngsters can develop into independent individuals with the chance to build a more meaningful life. It is hoped that this project will be a role model and inspiration for similar efforts in the future, not only in Latvia but in other countries as well.

Livslust offers a special educational program divided into two areas: instruction in theoretical and general studies and vocational training. General studies include Latvian, Mathematics, English, Social studies, Bookkeeping, Computer sciences, Business administration, Ethics and Environmental protection.

Vocational training activities are linked to Livslust's own small enterprises, where theory and work are combined. The youngsters can choose between building construction, textiles, agriculture, cooking, shop keeping, information technology and a cafe, all under the watchful supervision of skilled instructors.

Livslust has special adviser working/partnerships with the Snickers garment factory, the Skanska building and construc-

tion company and the Swedish telecom company Telia. Snickers trains the seamstresses and is helping to start Livslust's own small garment factory, Skanska contributes towards construction training and later will allow the boys to train on their building sites and Telia is the partner for IT-training.

The agricultural project was initiated in 1996 producing potatoes, vegetables and grain as well as hiring out agricultural machinery. The goals are partly to be self-sufficient and partly to provide education to those youngsters who choose to study agriculture. In 1998, the farming area was increased to 100 hectares. If everything works according to plan, agriculture will become a valuable source of income in the future.

Livslust takes both Latvian and Russian youngsters from the age of 15. The length of time they remain in the project depends on each individual's needs, but the norm is typically two years. Livslust hopes that some will stay on as adults to help guide coming groups of youngsters.

In 1994, the Latvian Government donated the property to Livslust. Last used as a tuberculosis sana-

torium, the building was in decay. Now it has been totally renovated by unemployed Swedish and Latvian builders. Livslust youngsters have also contributed to the renovations as part of the training they received from the builders.

The youngsters come from different areas of Latvia and most have been raised in orphanages and boarding schools. Some come from families with alcohol-related problems with parents unable to care for their children. They often arrive at Aizupe alone and insecure, with all their worldly possessions in a small parcel or bag. After some time at Livslust they begin to feel secure and self-confident, which results in a happy and positive atmosphere in the house. Everyone helps with the general tasks of cooking, cleaning and washing and each resident has his or her own area of responsibility. During working hours they continue with their education in both practical and theoretical subjects.

The local Livslust staff has a keen interest in working with young people and are open to new ideas and methods. The staff receives further training in psychology, pedagogy, bookkeeping, computers and English language skills.

A major part of their daily work involves dealing with human interaction problems. Teenagers suffer from their difficult formative years and express this in various ways. Psychotherapists regularly offer the staff professional help and advice. They also meet the youngsters in groups and for individual talks. The number of staff will be kept to a minimum to increase possibilities for youngsters to exercise initiative and accept greater responsibility.

Alcoholism is a widespread problem in Latvia and nowadays there is also an increasing use of other drugs among young people. Livslust has employed one person to work especially with drug prevention among its youngsters and later expand activities to include other youngsters at risk outside the project.

In a country that has long been autocratically governed it is especially important to address the issues of democracy and individual responsibility and how these factors can combine to increase personal initiative. The staff and the youngsters work together, each with his or her individual area of responsibility. Two of their peers represent them on the management committee and take part in weekly meetings on current activities.

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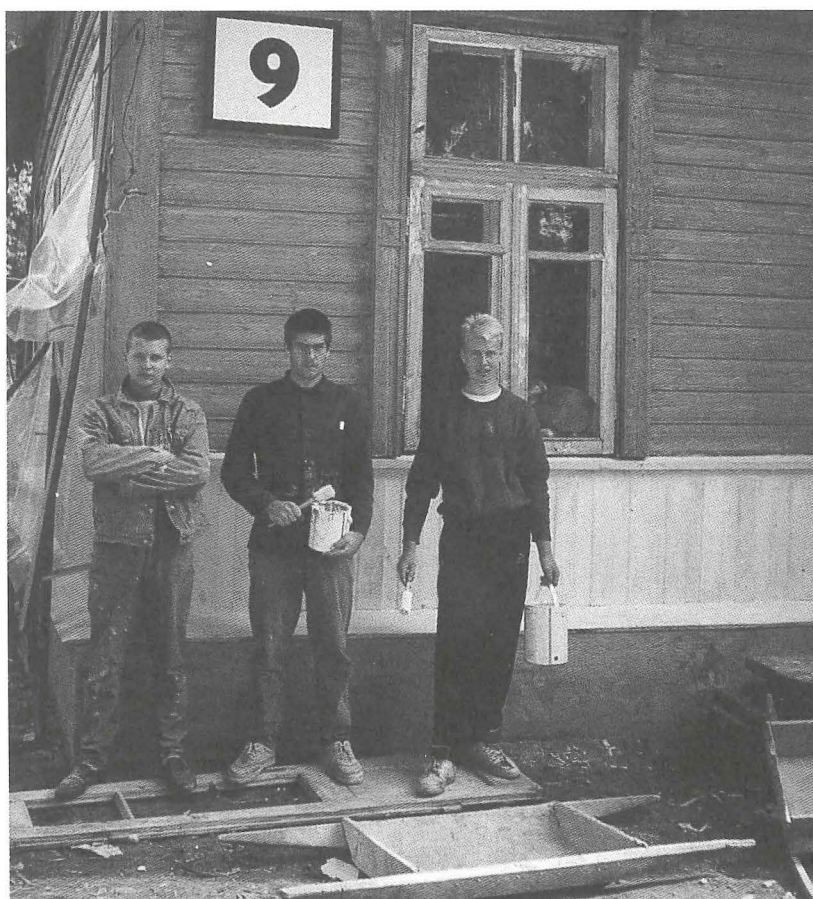
Centres for care

Lithuanian Gelbekit Vaikus, Save the Children, today manages 15 day care centres for socially disadvantaged children. Located throughout the country, the centres are attended by more than 200 children.

The initiative was taken by volunteers in Katmas after observing hungry children spend time on streets. These neglected children easily become involved in criminal activities. If they at all attend school, they have no place for homework.

The centres now provide a secure environment for children from poor, asocial, abusive families. They offer protection from physical, moral, sexual abuse, crimes and vagrancy while giving children educational, medical, social, psychological and legal assistance. Parents can also receive qualified help. Previously, work and support for children from socially disadvantaged families always involved separating them from their families.

The centres are mainly staffed by Gelbekit Vaikus volunteer members. Municipalities contribute to the program by providing free premises and utilities. Remaining expenses – repairs, equipment, cultural and educational activities – are generally funded through sponsors. Unfortunately, funds are only suffi-



cient to satisfy the basic most needs and a continuing acute problem is lack of money for food purchases.

Eventually, Gelbekit Vaikus hopes to be able to hand over the day care centres to the local municipalities. To date, only the centre in Katinas has been taken over by the municipality.

Another major Gelbekit Vaikus project is Zuvedra – the seagull – a care home for teenagers. However, Zuvedra is not a care home as generally understood but a home for orphaned teenagers unaccustomed to independent life, without professions or places to live. The project sought to establish a small, cosy care institution with opportunities to complete secondary education and acquire professional skills.

These children were forced at their age to leave boarding

schools and literally left in the street. They are a risk group and might easily become involved in criminal activities. Thus, Zuvedra acts as a shelter during the difficult adolescent period helps provide a better future for teenagers.

"These two projects have proven highly successful in spite of financial difficulties," says Birute Malinauskiene of Gelbekit Vaikus. "We have tried to find solutions to the problem of neglected children. In future we hope that projects will continue to exist not only with international support but with Latvian government and local authority funding."

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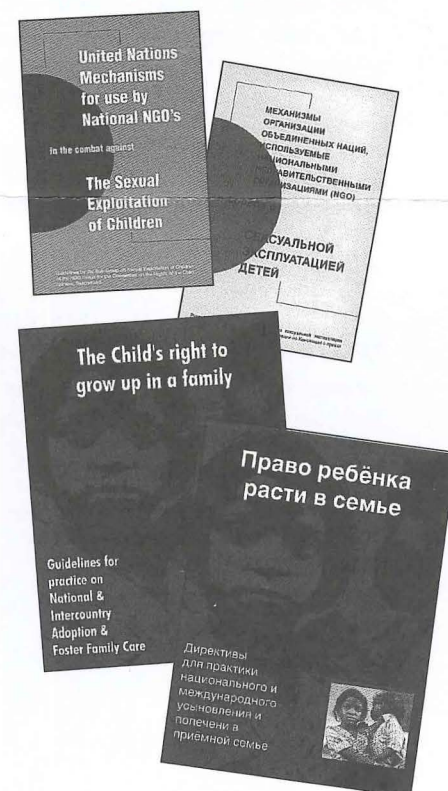
CALENDAR

Stockholm Ministerial Meeting on Children at Risk, 17 March 1999.
Organiser: The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Sweden.

Children and Residential Care – Alternative Strategies International Conference in Stockholm, 3-6 May, 1999.
Organisers: Stockholm University, Department of Social Work, Ersta Sköndal University College, Adoption Centre, Swedish Society for International Child Welfare, Swedish National Committee of ICSW.

The Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Advanced International Training Programme, 25 October – 5 November 1999.
Organiser: The Office of the Children's Ombudsman in Sweden.

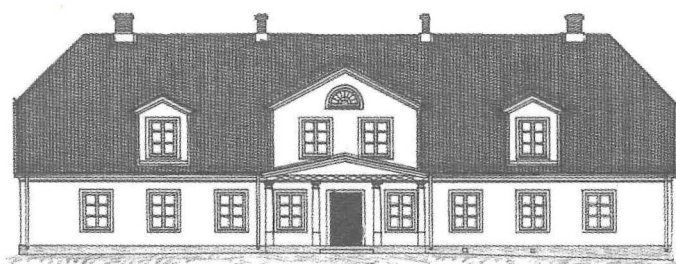
LITERATURE



Palme estate becomes social centre

In 1994, the Skangal estate in Latvia was returned to the Palme family. Skangal had been home to assassinated Swedish Prime Minister, Olof Palme's, grandparents, Woldemar and Elisabeth von Knieriem. The Palme family then donated the estate to the Salvation Army for social programmes.

Skangal is situated in Llepa municipality, a farming community with 3,500 inhabitants. Unemployment figures are high. When completed, Skangal will



provide work opportunities.

Several of the buildings on the 52-hectare estate are in a severe state of disrepair and are gradually being restored. A school home will accommodate 32 chil-

dren, 7-14 years of age, and a nursing home will provide care for mothers and babies. Future plans include a secondary agricultural school as well as a Nordic cultural centre.

Developing social work

Since 1998, the Stockholm University Department of Social Work participates in a three-year project to assist St Petersburg in developing social work. The project has three components: assistance in preparing new social legislation, training and seminars and, third, pilot projects in the social field. Several of the projects aim towards redirecting resources from institutional care and instead developing social care in the home environment.



Photo: Cecilia Kjellgren

Preventing violence in families

In January 1998, the city of Kristianstad was asked by its sister city in Lithuania, Siauliai, to support the project "Preventing violence in families".

The Municipality of Siauliai and the Siauliai municipal police had initiated the project and requested knowledge and training for professionals and volunteers. The cities agreed on a plan for training activities assisted by professionals from Kristianstad with

a three-day session in October 1998, followed by a two-day session in April 1999. The Swedish Association of Local Authorities supported the project financially.

The first training session focused on:

- Dynamics of domestic violence – psychological effects on battered woman and the impact on children witnessing domestic violence;
- Physical abuse of children – escalating violence and its effects on children. How abuse is discovered, procedures for the medical examination, risk assessment of repeated abuse and child protection;

- Neglected children – increased risk of abuse or neglect;
- Sexual abuse against children – victim identification and short and long-term psychological effects;
- Offenders – adolescents and adults, male and female. Distinguishing characteristics between offenders of physical and sexual abuse, the cycle of abuse and offender psychology;
- Approach to victims and offenders as police investigator, social worker or therapist.

A multi-disciplinary approach was adopted to training activities with child protection represented by socialworker Cecilia Kjellgren, therapy and treatment by psychologist Bodil Hjalte and medical care by pediatrician Beata Skanse. The team had previous experience working together in the Kristianstad region with child sexual and physical abuse cases.

Training activities were held at the Siauliai central police station in. Thirty participants – police officers, prosecutors, child psychiatric clinic staff, socialworkers and volunteers – took part.

The group of professionals we met displayed a great deal of empathy in standing up for victims of abuse. They particularly appreciated the practical approach with illustrative cases.

A goal was to share our experience working together in the field of physical and sexual abuse. One single profession cannot adequately deal with victims and abusers. It is necessary to recognise the limits of our professions and our different roles.

We will conclude the training project in April 1999 with a two-day seminar in Siauliai, organised within the framework of Femina Baltica. The seminar will focus on violence against women and women as decision-makers.

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Twinning in the Baltic Sea Region

The Kristianstad twinning project is only one of a great many examples of collaboration between municipalities in the Baltic Sea region supported by Sida, the Swedish International Development Agency.

In the field of children and education, a pre-school in Åmål, for example, exchanges ideas and experience with a counterpart pre-school in Türi, Estonia. The municipality of Nynäshamn has assisted Liepāja in Latvia in establishing a youth centre. The municipality of Norrköping together with the country police authority works with crime prevention in Riga. The municipality of Karlskrona has joined forces with Klaipėda, Lithuania in drugs prevention.

Local level co-operation needed

Following a request from the Council of Baltic Sea States, the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs offered to contribute experience on multi-disciplinary co-operation at local level in the Baltic countries, Poland and St. Petersburg.

At a seminar in Riga, held in October last year, the need for increased knowledge and awareness concerning abused children was addressed. The seminar

was attended by physicians, psychotherapists, teachers, police, prosecutors, welfare ministry staff and "child inspectors" from all over Latvia. Participants agreed that:

- Sexual abuse constitutes a serious failure of care, a breach in fundamental trust with possible lifelong emotional and developmental detriment to the child;
- Children must be given the necessary self-confidence and security in order to be able to say no and not allow themselves to be abused;
- The secretiveness that surrounds abuse must be broken and the burden imposed on the

children eased by listening to the children themselves. Failure creates further trauma;

- Signs of sexual abuse are seldom clear and evident. In fact, they are similar to signs of other forms of neglect;
- The perception of perpetrators has become more differentiated – he/she is often a previous victim in need of assistance. Punitive measures and treatment must therefore go hand in hand;
- Dissemination of information concerning sexual abuse is vital. Professionals require additional knowledge and training. Children must have access to care and other institutions

where their problems safely can be dealt with;

- Myths – such as "it's her own fault, she asked for it by dressing like that" – must actively be refuted;
- multi-disciplinary and cross-sectional co-operation is necessary in view of the fact that sexual abuse is a symptom of major and complex problems.

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