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Newsletter No. 8

Hamburg, 21st January 2003

Dear Partners and Friends,

We would like to wish you all a happy new year 2003 with much health and happiness! We hope that you have enjoyed some quiet and relaxed days with your family and friends over Christmas and New Year.

After a successful start of STEPS in the last year we look forward to deepening the European co-operation. It hopefully will be a gain for your daily work as well.

Please let us inform you shortly about the discussions and plans for the next month.

Comments and news from the local Partnerships in STEPS are always appreciated! We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best wishes

Dorothee, Michael, Anne

APPOINTMENT for the Third International Conference in Lidingö, Sweden

The Third International Conference of the STEPS-Network in Lidingö, Sweden, will take place from

Thursday until Sunday, 15th – 18th of May 2003.

We hope to welcoming all STEPS-Partners in Sweden!

Main subject of the Conference will be "Organisational Development". In this field all questions which we have started to discuss in Rotterdam should be further developed. The local Partnership in Lidingö will surely enriched the exchange of ideas with their experiences with future planning methods.

During the next weeks we will prepare the Conference together with the partners in Sweden. The planning will be documented on the Steps-homepage ("Conferences"). Further we will inform you by Email to co-ordinate the ideas and plans.

How does self-determination work in practice?

Discussion of the T-Group of People with Learning Disabilities

Eleven people took part at the second meeting of the T-Group of People with Learning Disabilities at the End of November in Hamburg.

The T-Groups in STEPS evaluate regularly the outcome of the discussions in the International STEPS-Network. The members monitor the process with their claims, concerns ideas and advice. About 15 people with learning disabilities who are living or working in the Protestant Foundation Alsterdorf and the Foundation "Rauhes Haus" contribute to the T-Group.

Corresponding the Second International Conference of STEPS "Equal Opportunities for People with learning disabilities" in Rotterdam at the second meeting the T-Group formulated their answers to the question: "How does self-determination work in practice?"

Firstly the T-Group demands to organise as well an International Conference for People with Learning Disabilities in co-operation with STEPS. The group started to think about a Conference in Hamburg in 2003, the European Year of People with Learning Disabilities. Together with the Project Management in Hamburg the T-Group would like to organise an International Meeting.

On the basis of biographical notes of the T-group members the following paramount demands have been developed:

1. Self-Determination in the field of work and employment is often demanded, but is not taken in consideration in the field of Education and Training.
The T-group members would like to have as well free access to the labour market as to the education system.
2. In the field of care and assistance the people with learning disabilities have in mind a care system with fluent transitions according to the individual needs and wishes of the people. They defend themselves against stiff or rigid categories and classifications.
3. The people themselves want to decide about housing and living: the form of living and care, size and location of the apartment, flatmates etc.
4. People who want to live in their own flat should not be 'punished' with less care and assistance.
5. As well people with severe learning disabilities and high needs of support should have the choice to live in residential care or in their own apartment.

The next meeting of the T-Group will take place on Tuesday, 4th of February.

Support, Advocacy, Assistance – Ways to support self-determination and self-advocacy of people with learning disabilities

The first meeting of the T-group of professionals of the social services

A second T-group to evaluate the STEPS-Project met the first time at the beginning of December. Members are around 15 professionals of the Protestant Foundation Alsterdorf and the Foundation "Rauhes Haus" in Hamburg.

After a presentation of the objectives of STEPS and the previous discussion in the International Network the T-groups started to think about the suitable understanding and

extend of support to strengthen self-determination and self-advocacy. Which qualification do people need to support the people with learning disabilities to speak for themselves?
Where should support or advocacy be established – in- or outside the institutions?

Practical experiences of the professionals – users advisory boards, guardianship, advisory offices, service offices - were evaluated with regard to their effects and effectiveness.

The members agree that advice/advocacy should be established outside the institutions. The offices should be independent regional contact points for people needing advice, situated at central places in the community ('meeting points'),
Different institutions and provider could be represented in the advisory office, as well guardians, solicitors and self-advocacy group.

A second debate deal with the distinction between ambulant and residential care in the German care system. The distinction is a historic opposite, which should be overcome. Instead the individual need should be starting point and central standard for the individual support.

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