

“Better language, better care – SpråkSam is leading the way” is a handbook for workplaces that want to promote language development and communication. In the course of two years, the SpråkSam Project has developed and tested a method that inspires and supports language development. Here you will find a brief introduction to language development and learning at work, as well as tips for managers and colleagues to create an encouraging and positive environment. “Better language skills, better care” is aimed at care managers and staff, but will be useful to anyone who wants to improve language skills at work. The handbook was produced during the spring of 2011 by the EU-financed project, SpråkSam.

* SpråkSam means ‘Talkative’

Better language skills, better care

SpråkSam is leading the way



“Better language, better care – SpråkSam is leading the way” was produced during the spring of 2011 by the EU-financed project, SpråkSam. The handbook has proved a popular tool for care managers and staff wanting to develop their workplaces. In spring 2011 the City of Lidingö initiated a new project, ArbetSam, in the Stockholm region. This project builds on the work of SpråkSam to develop language skills in the workplace. ArbetSam also aims to help workplaces become continuous learning environments.

On account of the interest SpråkSam’s work has generated outside Sweden, the ArbetSam project decided to translate the handbook into English and make it freely available as a PDF download.

The translation was supported by a factual review undertaken by Alexander Braddell, a workplace learning specialist with experience of the adult social care sector in the UK.

I am glad to introduce this book in English and I hope it will be useful for people outside Sweden!

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The pictures were taken at Skolörten’s health-care accommodation in Hässelby/Vällingby, Stockholm

Contents

Foreword	4
How do you learn a new language?	9
Why is language development necessary?	13
“We are investing in you!”	15
Staff appraisals for language development	18
The Council of Europe’s language scale	19
The manager’s important role	21
An action plan steers the work	24
Language representatives – a factor of success	27
Record-keeping is a must	32
Templates and tips.....	36
Template for welcome talk	36
Template for curriculum vitae	37
Tips for telephone conversations	39
Planning for meetings	40
To consider, templates for minutes	41
Reading tips, reports about SpråkSam	42

Foreword

During the two years from April 2009 to April 2011, the SpråkSam Project worked to develop the competences of employees at risk of labour market exclusion due to a lack of knowledge of Swedish. "This is the most enjoyable thing that I have done in my working life!" is a common comment from teachers, researchers, managers and others. Creating a workplace that develops language skills is not easy, however. Where should you start? How do you proceed as a manager if you want to discuss inadequate language skills during a staff appraisal? What does a workplace that develops language skills actually look like? This handbook (compiled by Bitte Lundborg) aims to answer these and many other questions and – we hope – help and inspire you in your own work.

SpråkSam was delivered by Stockholm Gerontology Research Centre of Stockholm County Council and financed with SEK 30.6 million from the European Social Fund. The City of Stockholm invested a further SEK 10 million in order to promote the project to more workplaces. The project was premised on a simple idea: that Swedish-speaking and non-Swedish speaking staff have a shared responsibility for language competence and development at the workplace. Learning Swedish is hard work and support is needed from those who do speak it. The project's basic goal was to increase occupational competence by developing language competence.

The project aimed to:

- promote linguistic, communicative and professional competence in the workplace
- create language-supportive environments in the workplace to support those who are still developing their knowledge of Swedish.
- enhance cooperation between education and the work-

place by developing the knowledge base around language learning and language use at work.

- produce new language learning methods and models with support from researchers.

SpråkSam was delivered in 24 workplaces within elderly care and care of people with disabilities in the municipalities of Järfälla, Lidingö, Solna, Sundbyberg, Södertälje and Stockholm. From the approximately 1,600 employees at these workplaces, 300 staff were selected for a combined program of Swedish as a second language and health and social care skills. This program was delivered to small groups in the workplace by teachers from Komvux (municipal further education) and SFI (the government-funded Swedish for Immigrants programme) in the municipalities concerned. The training took place during working hours for half a day per week over an 18 month period.

Managers and two language advocates in each workplace were trained to support the participants. During the training for language advocates, language researchers and other experts with knowledge within the field gave lectures. A lot of time was given to discussions about how to turn the particular workplace into a place for language development. A few of the language advocates also attended a course in reflective practice with a view to helping colleagues problem-solve at work. In addition, participating workplaces received support from tutors who led group discussions in the workplace. Language trainers gave short presentations at every workplace and coached managers in how to apply the SpråkSam methods in practice. Four of the workplaces also participated in more in-depth method deve-

"Language is learned in a social context. This applies to both native and non-native speakers. This insight resonated, opening up new possibilities."

*Kerstin Sjösvärd,
Project leader SpråkSam*

lopment working with researchers from Stockholm University and Södertörn University.

The project's ideas and working methods have changed attitudes towards language learning among those involved as learners, their managers, colleagues, teachers and many others. From "lack of Swedish" being a problematic, conflict-generating issue that was difficult to discuss and handle, language learning is now beginning to be seen as an important part of care work.

Swedish is naturally the language of communication in Swedish health and social care workplaces, but knowledge of several languages is a resource. Many project participants have testified that the atmosphere at their workplace has improved and that the self-esteem of programme participants has grown.

SpråkSam's workplaces are all within the health and social care sector, where language is one of the most important tools at work. SpråkSam's ideas, however, can be applied across the spectrum of working life and we hope that the handbook will benefit other sectors – not least because creating harmonious multicultural workplaces is often held up as one way to strengthen Sweden's development in the future.

Within health and social care in Stockholm County, a majority of employees speak Swedish as an additional language, which means great cultural diversity. By handling the difficulties that arise from some employees having limited Swedish language skills, the multicultural workplace can become an asset instead of a liability. SpråkSam's work is leading the way towards the development of a working life where diversity becomes a real factor of success. SpråkSam's ideas and methods have already spread outside of the project to other workplaces in the city of Stockholm and other municipalities. The project has also aroused interest outside of Sweden's borders.

This success is the fruit of the hard work of three hundred participants, their language advocates and colleagues, mana-

gers, teachers, researchers, administration management and many, many others. A huge THANK YOU to everybody involved, from the project management team!

Stockholm 5 April 2011

Kerstin Sjösvärd

Principal Project Manager



How do you learn a new language?

In Sweden today, more than 200 languages are spoken. In the space of just a few decades, Swedish has become the second language for perhaps two million people with a native language other than Swedish.

It is no easy task to learn a new language as an adult. Nor is Swedish a particularly easy language to learn.

It is often said that if you can just enter the labour market then you will learn the language. This is seldom true. A job does not necessarily enable you to use the new language. It is easy to end up outside of social groups at work when you cannot understand the language.

International research shows that immigrants who move directly into employment without language training often gain only a very limited grasp of Swedish vocabulary and grammar. This language may be enough for basic communication, but it is not sufficient for active participation at work or in the community. This limits individuals and stops them progressing at work.

Language learning is affected by:

- motivation
- the difference between the learner's native language and Swedish
- age and educational background
- environmental factors including life circumstances, contact with Swedes and Swedish, stress and so on.

Motivation to learn is crucial. *Inner motivation* is the strongest factor; a strong personal desire to learn the new language. There is also *external motivation* where circumstances create demands and expectations that motivate us to learn new

skills. For migrants, learning the language of their new country enables them to become participating, accepted members of the community. This involves more than just studying the new language, however. It requires the migrant to adapt to the new culture, even to create a new identity within it.

Learning a new language means engaging with a new culture, perhaps a new way of looking at the world. The greater the difference between the culture of the learner's own country and that of their new country, the harder it may be for the learner to immerse themselves in the new language. Language and culture shock are a reality for many people.

Age and education play significant roles in language learning. Previous learning experiences are crucial. If learning also involves adopting a new writing system, it may take significantly longer to read and write Swedish. For those that have not previously attended school, it can be difficult to take part in formal learning. All too often, language teaching overlooks the needs of these learners.

Environmental factors play a crucial role in the ability of immigrants to learn Swedish. It is not just the individual that must exert him- or herself. Those surrounding need to take an interest and offer help and support. Language development occurs to a large extent through social contact. Having Swedish friends means being able to practise the language, as does speaking Swedish in the workplace. Some Swedes act as if immigrants who cannot express themselves properly in Swedish have no other skills or abilities. In this way, language difficulties can obscure all the knowledge, resources and experience that a migrant brings to their new country.

Source: "Andraspråksresan" (Second Language Journey) by Inger Lindberg, Professor, Stockholm University, Department of Language Education. Issued by the Folkuniversitet 2009).



Why is language development necessary within health and social care?

Here are the starting points:

- The demands put upon those working within elderly care are increasing. All employees must be able to complete every element of their work. This entails social and health care, but also being able to use a computer, keep records, have discussions with relatives and other employees within the care sector. Those that want to continue working or change workplaces must be able to cope with all of the duties that are involved in the work – these are the requirements at present.
- Many employees within elderly care speak Swedish as an additional language. In Stockholm County, this applies to approximately half of all staff. The majority speak good Swedish, but there are also many that have limited language skills. This can mean a lower quality of care. An improvement in their Swedish is a priority, now and in the future.

Learning a language requires studying, but study on its own is not enough.

For the learner to start to really live in the language, they need to use it every day and in social contexts. For this to happen, a welcoming environment must exist where native speakers actively encourage the learner to develop.

In a workplace that develops language skills:

... language difficulties are not swept under the rug.

... an encouraging environment exists, where everybody dares

to ask about and discuss language-related misunderstandings. ... space is provided for the correction of one another's mistakes in a respectful way.

... it is seen as an asset that there are several languages in the working group.

... cultural differences around communication are discussed.

... routines, knowledge and tools exist for handling problems relating to language and communication.

Managers have clear duties:

- To motivate their employees to commit to learning better Swedish.
- To create the conditions for this to happen.
- To ensure language development remains an on-going priority in the workplace.

CONSIDER:

- That working and communicating in language other than one's own often entails great effort. Learners of Swedish may struggle to communicate the nuances they want to.
- That learning a new language entails learning many new words and also understanding the deeper meanings of the words. This might relate to idioms, sayings, and different ways of expressing wants, desires and instructions.

“We are investing in you!”

Åsa Hjalmarsson is the unit manager of a care home not far from Stockholm. Together with SpråkSam’s language and care teachers, she planned a programme for staff who speak Swedish as an additional language. Participants’ knowledge of Swedish was evaluated using the Common European Framework of References for Languages, the CEFR scale from the Council of Europe (see page 19).

Åsa had individual conversations with each one of the people that were assessed as needing teaching and support. The first reaction was often negative: “Shameful to be picked out”, “I’m coping well with the job”, “I’m good enough as I am!”

But the distrust disappeared after Åsa’s reassurance:

We employees are here for the residents. As the manager, I will create the conditions for you to be able to perform good work. If not, the residents suffer, the elderly. Things will go wrong, and that is natural. But it becomes a problem if the documentation is not done as it should be. We are investing in you now because we want you to stay here! You should see it as an offer to develop in this work.

This turned it around. The feeling became instead, “I’ve been chosen”, “This is a chance”.

– Unbelievably enjoyable, says Åsa, to see the change, that language development is now viewed as an attractive learning opportunity. It made a great difference to the climate in the work teams. What also happened was that those who spoke good Swedish, according to the evaluation, also wanted to take part in the programme.

Traditional sayings for pleasure and profit

We use our internal TV to promote the language. Now lists of words and traditional sayings also scroll across the screens, not just menus and information about activities. Each week we introduce one new saying. This leads to questions, conversations, guesses and much laughter. The following week we provide the actual meaning via TV together with a new proverb. This has been highly appreciated! “More meat on the bones” gave many people something to think about. “One of the suggestions was that it related to portions that were too small and that the residents needed more food.”

Åsa Hjalmarsson, Unit Manager, Södertälje



Irena Bergström and Ingrid Ohlsson

“As a language learning advocate, I got the courage to ask when I didn’t understand. The key is to not be ashamed. I became a role model, and now there are more and more people who dare to ask when they don’t understand. I have developed greatly through SpråkSam.”

Tigist Hailemariam, Heijkensköldska gården, language advocate and assistant nurse, has worked within the care industry for ten years. Together with her colleagues she will now lead a study circle during working hours which will focus on Swedish traditions, among other things.

Staff appraisals for language development

Language trainer Karin Mattson has coached managers within SpråkSam. She provides suggestions here about how a manager can design a first appraisal with a colleague about language development:

Begin by talking about the aims of the language learning programme!

Questions to ask:

1. What languages do you speak?
2. What language do you speak best? ... Which language comes next?
3. a) How effective is communication in Swedish at work?
b) Can you give examples of situations communication worked well between you and your colleagues?
c) Can you give examples of situations where language problems interfered with communication?
4. Do you think that you need to improve your Swedish?

A question for everybody:

5. Are there communication problems at work that are more related to cultural differences than language? Can you give examples? ...

If the colleague answers ‘yes’ to question 4:

- a. What would you like to improve? ...
- b. In which situations do you think that it is easier to speak Swedish? ...
- c. Do you perceive that others find it easy to understand

you? Who? Colleagues, residents, relatives, your manager? In which situations? ...

- d. What would help you to learn more Swedish at work? What type of support would you like? ...
- e. Do you think that colleagues can support you in developing the language? How? What could colleagues do to help you improve your Swedish? ...
- f. Would you want to attend a course in Swedish? ...
- g. Have you attended any course previously? Was it good? What was good/bad? ...
- h. What type of Swedish course would suit you now? What is most important for you to learn effectively?

If the colleague answered 'no' to question 4:

- a. Ask the colleague to make a self-assessment of their Swedish. This self-assessment often needs to be made with guidance. See document from an earlier project, FAIR (Future Adapted Inclusive Recruitment) about *Self-assessment, instructions + language competence*
- b. Compare the need for communication as part of the job with the colleague's self-assessment. See: FAIR's *matching form*
- c. Together with the colleague, decide which language skills primarily need to be improved
- d. Make an *individual plan* for how this shall function in practice: will it be the colleague's own initiative? Work friends' support? Language course?

The Council of Europe's language scale

SpråkSam uses the Council of Europe's language scale for the assessment of a person's language knowledge. The scale has six levels, A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2. Level A1 is a beginner's level. Level C2 corresponds to an academic level. The Council of Europe's language scale lists five proficiencies: listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing.

On SpråkSam's website, www.spraksam.se, the European language scale can be found in five languages: Amharic, Somali, Tigrinja, South Kurdish and Arabic.

More information about language development can be found at www.spraketifokus.se. Language scales for European languages and Arabic are available there.

LANGUAGE LEVEL AND WORK WITHIN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

- C1–C2 are advanced levels where the second language speaker should be able to communicate with ease in the majority of health and social care situations.
- B2 is a level where the second language speaker should be able to communicate adequately in the majority of health and social care situations.
- B1 is a level where the second language speaker should be able to communicate adequately in many health and social care situations, but not all.
- A1–A2 are levels that are too low for second language speakers to be able to communicate satisfactorily in the health and social care workplace.

By Karin Mattsson and others, adapted by Ingrid Skeppstedt

*“Group work is developmental regardless of language. Reflection and conversations concerning dilemmas at work develop the professional role, provide training in communication and language usage, and are educational in themselves.” “It has become more acceptable to be clear and ask when you don’t understand. The group has gained increased cultural understanding, spoken about differences and social codes. This has led to discussions about how you can help through **doing with** instead of **doing for**, for example, training with Swedish-speaking colleagues, writing together.”*

Kerstin Lahti, instructor, SpråkSam

The manager’s important role

– It is not just about certain individuals needing to develop their language skills. It is just as important to make the entire workplace participatory. The managers have an important role: they have to motivate and lead so that everyone is part of developing this work with language and communication.

It is simply not enough to take isolated measures, states language trainer *Karin Mattsson* who has been a coach for the managers in SpråkSam for one year. She is happy to share her experiences.

What do managers need help with?

- To incorporate language development into their existing management duties! A project leader leads a project, then disappears after a certain time. For the work to last, the manager must drive parts of the work from the beginning and plan to lead it in the future.
- To clearly show that language requirements have increased, for example, to be able to express oneself in writing. This applies to everybody within elderly care.

How does a manager motivate their colleagues?

- First, the manager must be entirely convinced that change is necessary and be prepared to set the work in motion. The goals should be clearly defined, both for the organisation and the individual. What language knowledge is necessary in order to perform different work duties? How will every individual acquire that knowledge? How will other colleagues support them?
- Managers should move away from subjective judgments, “I think that you should ...”. Use the language

scale for estimation instead: "To perform the work duty X, you really need language at level X."

To speak about language and language development means coming closer to the integrity and identity of individuals. It is therefore very important that managers and colleagues meet as people of equal merit to discuss the support that is needed.

"Do you perceive that your Swedish is sufficient for everything that you do in your work? Do you need support in order to develop one or more parts?"

Using the language scale provides facts and the conversation becomes less charged. The "wrestling" between colleague and manager is avoided in most cases. *"Promoting language and communication is something we are doing together and all of us must help."*

Nobody can ever be forced to learn and change. However, each and every person's way of learning must be supported. Language is learned by communicating with others. The question is also what colleagues can do to help those who are working hard with the language. Those that receive individual support develop their language in most cases.

How can language development function in practice?

- Work with the learner's motivation and reinforce self-esteem – that is the most important thing! Pay attention to both small and great improvements. Do not forget those colleagues who take part by supporting others to develop. They also need encouragement.
- Connect the language learning to the individual's work duties and needs as well as to the goals of the organisation. This means that care and language teachers need to adapt the learning to both the workplace and the individuals.

- Set aside time for planning and reflection, otherwise it will be difficult to work in the long-term. At present, we see more urgent measures being taken and too little planning for the longer term.
- Remember that good examples motivate! Make sure that they spread.
- Produce an action plan, share strategies that work and make room for language questions in daily operations.
- Make sure that regular meetings are scheduled so that managers, teachers and language advocates meet. If people do not meet and discuss, it is difficult to develop the programme.
- Elicit ideas from all staff.

What impact has the SpråkSam Project had?

In the workplaces where SpråkSam has been implemented, improved morale and more discussion of language-related questions have been reported. Awareness and knowledge have increased. There are many examples of good work.

The work with developing communication must be seen as a process of change where those with difficulties are also supported.

Developing language, communication and professional skills on-site in the workplace is new for many. This implies great changes regarding roles and participation.

The creation and maintenance of a workplace that develops language skills is ultimately a question of leadership. SpråkSam is not just a development project. SpråkSam can also be seen as a change project that can offer significant challenges to the leadership skills of managers.

An action plan steers the work

An action plan might look like this:

*Action plan for a workplace that develops language skills
– Skoga Care Centre, City of Solna.*

.....

To speak to and understand each other are some of the most important elements of health and social care. At Skoga, many staff are from other cultures, and they have come to Sweden as adults. Improving their Swedish language skills while at the same time enhancing their occupational competence requires language learning integrated with work.

Development areas

1. Make all staff aware of the importance of expressing themselves effectively in speech and writing.
2. The welcome talk (a mandatory procedure in Swedish elderly care) should be made clearer and designed as more of a conversation than a formal interview
3. Aim to develop social relations with the residents
4. Aim to develop knowledge about traditions and the celebration of festivals
5. Respect that everybody in the work group can and will speak and write
6. Involve all colleagues in quality and workplace development

Goals

1. All colleagues will be aware of the importance of language skills for work and communication
2. We will work together to create an understanding and encouraging workplace where we actively support each other in order to avoid misunderstandings in contact with residents and team members as well as during meetings.

3. All staff will be able to converse with the elderly about social needs and interests, attend to the individual's interests and resources and support the elderly to enjoy a meaningful everyday life.
4. All staff will be able to create social relationships with a respectful everyday dialogue with the elderly during, for example, mealtimes and afternoon tea.
5. All staff will understand and contribute to the celebration of festivals and traditions
6. A positive attitude to supporting and helping each other with language development

Method

1. The language advocate shall work actively to support the development of documentation skills, providing individual support as well as attending regular meetings with the group.
2. When new documents are written and new guidelines or procedures are created, the language advocate will take part in their formulation.
3. During staff appraisals, the manager reviews the requirements for language development and the opportunities for the individual employee.
4. Language questions are a recurring matter during workplace meetings. All colleagues are given the chance to participate in discussions, and everybody has a turn to keep the minutes.

Division of responsibility: Operations manager - Unit managers - Language advocates

Timetable

Follow-up: Occurs continuously in work activity, staff appraisals and resident surveys

Responsible manager: Mia Thorn Lundquist



Language advocates – a factor of success

Evaluation of the SpråkSam project demonstrates, not unsurprisingly, that workplaces have had varying degrees of success with developing language skills and communication. A lot depends on the pre-existing conditions. The commitment of the managers and leadership is of crucial importance. So is the appointment of language advocates, who, in the majority of cases, have provided crucial support.

The language advocate's duties are to:

- Have a particular responsibility for matters of language development in the workplace. Inspire and inform about language questions.
- Discuss situations where misunderstandings and any conflicts have arisen together with the manager and colleagues as a result of language and cultural differences.
- Design language development activities with the manager and support all colleagues in performing them.
- Help colleagues with anything to do with language and communication, from everyday language usage to supporting colleagues who speak Swedish as an additional language. This can involve providing support in keeping minutes, writing e-mails or documenting their work.
- Work together with the manager, teachers and other resource staff to develop the workplace.

What is needed for the language advocate to be able to do good work?

This is the answer given by Pia Juhlin Åstrand, who, with Ingrid

Skeppstedt, evaluated the work of the language advocates:

- The person that the manager wants to appoint as language advocate must be interested. The assignment should not be forced upon anybody. First explain to the person what the assignment involves so that they can make up their mind about the offer.
- Everybody in the workplace should know who the language advocate is and what their role involves.
- The manager must support the language advocate, follow up with how the work is progressing and give feedback.
- The language advocate can certainly have Swedish as their second language, but should have sufficiently good knowledge in Swedish to be able to support others.
- The language advocate shall preferably work at the same time as his or her colleagues and be located in the same workplace. This means that, for a multisite employer, several language advocates may be needed.
- It is good to have several language advocates in the workplace since they can then support each other.
- The language advocates should receive training, preferably similar to that which is offered within SpråkSam.
- If at all possible the language advocate should be allocated dedicated time to undertake their role.

“I have lived in Rinkeby for 40 years and I have always helped when someone has difficulties with the language, both in everyday life and at work. When the Language Advocate assignment appeared, I applied for it immediately! Nowadays, colleagues dare to ask when they don’t understand.”

Those who have received the training have grown in their professional roles and in their language skills. In a reflection group that I lead, thoughts, feelings and ideas emerge, and many are eager to talk. The whole thing is extremely rewarding for me as well. One thing is very important: that the manager gives the language advocate good support. If not, it becomes a difficult assignment.”

Christin Ferm, language advocate and care provider at Stranninge sheltered accommodation in Tensta-Rinkeby, Stockholm. Her tip is to solve children’s crosswords together as an easy language training exercise.

Language advocates as role models

Skolörten’s service buildings and health-care accommodations are in Vällingby, Stockholm. Approximately half of the staff that work there speak Swedish as an additional language. Of Skolörten’s 90 or so residents, all but a handful are native speakers of Swedish.

For the service’s home manager, Agneta Hollingworth, it was self-evident to appoint people with foreign backgrounds as language advocates: Leonel Vasques from Chile, who has worked in elderly care for 19 years, and Raman Majid from Syria, who began working with the elderly six years ago.



- Leonel and Raman function as role models and provide hope. If they could learn good Swedish, then their colleagues can also do that, says Agneta.
- We employees work to give the elderly the best quality of life possible. With better Swedish, contact with the elderly becomes more natural and the work flows better for us, says Leonel.

The language advocates – and also the manager, Agneta – participated in the Swedish learning programme that was organized for colleagues who want to develop their Swedish. Subject matter for language exercises came from the everyday life of the health and social care workers.

For workers with limited Swedish, written reporting and record-keeping present real difficulties. Previously, colleagues often offered to write for anyone reluctant to sit down in front of the computer. Nowadays, a language advocate or another colleague sits beside them to give support. Providing guidance in handling a computer took a lot of time in the beginning.

Before she sends information out, Agneta, the manager, checks it with the language advocates. The question for Leonel and Raman is: *Will everybody understand what I wrote?*

An incentive to staff for reading her weekly newsletter is that anyone who contacts her with viewpoints receives a free cinema ticket.



Agneta Hollingworth

HERE IS SOME ADVICE FROM LEONEL VASQUES AND RAMAN MAJID TO PROSPECTIVE LANGUAGE ADVOCATES:

- Tell your colleagues that you have the manager's support.
- Be clear about your role. You are not teachers, but colleagues able to give advice and support about workplace language and documentation.
- Create an encouraging environment so that everybody feels confident enough to ask questions.
- Work on winning trust and capturing interest in order to develop language skills.
- Adapt the support to the individual and respect his/her integrity.
- Build up your colleagues' self-confidence by providing step-by-step support.
- Begin with texts that are easy to read and understand.

What has SpråkSam meant to you as manager?

Agneta Hollingworth, Unit Manager for Skolörten's health-care accommodations:

– We can now speak openly about better Swedish being necessary for us to complete our tasks. It has become easier for me as a man-

ager to lead the work. The discussions are more open and frank than before, and we all recognise the benefits of a simpler and more clearly articulated language. It has been so exciting to learn more about language and learning! There was no template, so we have instead worked in a way that suits our operations.

Record-keeping is a must

Doing paperwork – or providing health and social care? These days, that is a false dichotomy. Record-keeping is a must for all staff within elderly care.

“Many speak Swedish as an additional language. Despite this, a number of them keep exceptionally good records. Even Swedish-born people have difficulties with spelling and many have limited writing skills. More than one has sought work in elderly care in order to find a practical job where they avoid writing tasks.”

The Instructor’s Testament

– Record-keeping is an essential part of providing good care, asserts Olov Hemmingsson, who works at St. Erik’s home for the elderly in Kungsholmen, Stockholm. He knows a lot about the obstacles, difficulties and opportunities since he has been an instructor in record-keeping protocols for four years.

There are two absolute musts: The *care plan* and the *case notes*. Regulations specify what must be recorded, but not who should do the recording. The natural procedure would be for those in daily contact with the elderly to do it, particularly the key worker, but also others.

There are no templates regarding how things are to be written. However, it may help to consider what the different types of documentation aim to achieve.

What is the care plan good for?

- It is a work tool that is necessary in order to be able to provide good care. One of the elderly has received a decision about assistance, X, Y etc. – and the plan describes how this help shall be provided. This shall be designed together with the elderly person and provide a real opportunity for her/him to influence its content. The same applies to relatives, if they are assisting.
- A care plan helps new staff to assist in the right way. It is also necessary in order for the administrator who

awarded the assistance to be assured that the elderly person is actually receiving what was agreed upon. It is also required during quality controls.

What should be included in the care plan?

- By far the most important point is that it describes HOW the help shall be provided. Often, too little is written about this.
- Something else that should be clarified is “what” – what type of help the elderly person should have. Thereafter, “how” and “who” should be asked. Also, who or which people will provide the help and even “when”. The goals that have been set should also be stated, for example, that the elderly person should do what she/she can and wants to (self-determination). There is a risk that care workers take over more than is necessary.
- Many think that it is difficult to write a care plan. But, if the question, “What do my colleagues need to know?” is asked, the plan seldom goes wrong. It is also then important to use the plan.

“We learn when we write. To put words to what should be done in a plan or describe what has happened in a case-book is to think about it. What is the goal of what we are doing? How can we best achieve it? What actually happened and why? Was it good or bad?”

The Instructor’s Testament

Olov Hemmingsson reminds us: – If you write a plan for someone who receives 24 hour care at a home, do not forget to find out what social activities that elderly person can and wants to take part in! Stimulation is required, and at a care home this concerns people living the rest of their lives in a dignified manner.

At St. Erik’s care home, there is a check list to help staff when they write a care plan. A few of the headings are: mor-

ning procedures, bathing, food and mealtimes, excursions, medicines and contact with relatives.

Case notes should also provide an overview of the needs of the elderly person, what is being done to fulfil them and what results are being achieved. Staff should also write down what others need in order to provide good quality care. A question to ask yourself might be, “How does my writing this benefit the resident?” Also, “*Would I enjoy reading this about myself?*” The notes should describe a course of events. There should be “a common thread,” as Olov puts it.

And with that, we enter the sensitive area regarding choice of words and how sensitive matters should be expressed. It is not permissible to express yourself in an insulting manner about the elderly person and his/her behaviour in their case notes. “Refuse” and “unpleasant” are examples of forbidden words. Less subjective words should be used, such as “declines” (the offer). It is worth remembering that it is not the reactions of the staff that should be noted. Olov’s tip is to ask yourself “*Is this something that somebody else needs to know in order to provide good care?*”

Olov Hemmingsson mentions two other conversations that should be recorded, the *welcome talk* and the life story *vitae*. A person moving into a home comes first for a visit to see how it looks and to explain a little bit about what type of help he/she expects. The key worker receives that person, and the aim of the welcome talk is to create rapport. In the home help service, the key worker sits down and talks in peace and quiet during their first meeting with the elderly person.

The elderly person’s life story provides important information, particularly for people living with dementia. – They are gold for us in dementia care! says Olov. Then you can gain knowledge about the person’s background, childhood and early adulthood, education, profession, interests and health and illness history.

Why is the life story so important?

A good deal must be known about the person’s background in order to be able to offer effective care. It helps us to understand why the person reacts as he/she does. It is easier to like a person that you know something about. Olov Hemmingsson and six colleagues who have worked as instructors in record-keeping for several years have written a report which they call “Handledarnas testamente” (The Instructor’s Testament). It discusses a wide range of matters including, for example, that there must be sufficient time to record, that support and encouragement is given to all those who try and learn how to keep records, that the work on developing good procedures for record-keeping is on-going.

“Record-keeping is a tool for creating good elderly care.”

The Instructor’s Testament



Leonel Vasgues together with Ingrid Ohlsson

Templates and tips

Welcome talk

Resident.....

Any relatives

Date

Participating staff

Comments.....

.....

.....

Specific wishes.....

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.....

.....

.....

Has information been provided about the executor and their services?

.....

.....

The template has been taken from the City of Stockholm's documentation programme ParaSol.

Life Story

We would really appreciate it if you would fill in this curriculum vitae and leave it with us. Knowing about your background helps us to provide you with better care.

What you tell us is, of course, entirely up to you. You don't have to give us any information if you don't want to!

The resident.....

Information provider

Date

Friends/social network.

Childhood and youth.

.....

.....

Adulthood.....

.....

.....

.....

Education (for example, type of education, type of school, names of schools).....

.....

.....

.....

Professional life/work (for example, trainee post, profession, workplaces, important colleagues)

.....





.....

 Interests (for example, sport, culture, nature, animals or other)

 Traditions.....

 Important life events.....

 Health and illness history

The template is taken from the City of Stockholm's documentation programme ParaSol

Tips for telephone conversations

Keep a phonetic alphabet by the phone or in your pocket, to help with spelling when you call, for example, to order a transport service.

Here is *SpråkSam's* own *phonetic alphabet* with both women's and men's names! Use the alternative that suits you best or replace it with another name!

- | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|---|----------------------|
| A | Amina - Anila | P | Patrik |
| B | Bosse – Bezima | Q | Quintus |
| C | Carina – Camilla – Carmen | R | Rolf – Ruben - Raman |
| D | David | S | Sara – Saba – Silvia |
| E | Eva - Elka | T | Tage – Tomas |
| F | Felix – Frank | U | Ulrika |
| G | Greta – Gunvor | V | Vera – Viktoria |
| H | Harald – Herman | W | Wilhelm |
| I | Iris – Irma | X | Xerxes |
| J | Josef | Y | Ylva - Yngve |
| K | Karin | Z | Zohra |
| L | Linus – Leonel | Å | Åsa |
| M | Maria - Marie | Ä | Ärlig |
| N | Nisse – Nadja | Ö | Örjan |
| O | Olga | | |

Planning for workplace meetings

When you plan a workplace meeting (WPM), consider the following:

- Make an agenda that colleagues can review in advance.
- Put language development on the agenda at every meeting.
- Make sure that everybody present participates actively.
- Encourage attendees to discuss important issues in small groups of 2–3 people that then feed back to the meeting. This is particularly important when there are many participants at the meeting.
- Stick to the advertised agenda. The person(s) taking minutes should use a template with pre-printed points.
- Double keeping of the minutes: two people keep the minutes and then reconcile them with each other.

Add your own ideas here on how to involve everyone attending the meeting.

- –
- –
- –

Questions to consider:

- How do we know that everybody has understood?
- How do we know that everybody has been allowed to express their opinion?
- How can we find that out?
- How can we find out if misunderstandings have arisen?

Template for minutes for workplace meetings

Name of workplace:

Date:

Present at the meeting:

Comments on notes of previous meeting:

.....

.....

Today the following points were brought up:

1.

2.

3.

4. etc.

For the following points it was decided:

.....

.....

Additional information, for example, suggestions which were made during the meeting, open discussions about issues that did not result in decisions:

.....

.....

Minute taker:

.....