

Speech by Stig Langvad, The Danish Council of Organisations of People With Disabilities, at the joined European and World Conference of users and survivors of psychiatry, Vejle, Denmark, 2004-07-20

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you at the end of this joined European and World Conference of users and survivors of psychiatry.

I have not been here all the time but I have been told that it has been a very successful and inspiring conference.

Since I have not been a part of your debates I will take the opportunity to reflect a little over some observations I have done through my political life in the disability movement.

As some of you maybe know I am the chairperson of The Danish Council of Organisations of People With Disabilities. It is the umbrella organisation of 32 Danish national and democratic organisations of persons with disabilities representing 75% of all persons with disabilities in Denmark. The council was established in 1934 and is the oldest disability umbrella organisation in the world.

The theme for your conference is "Networking for our Human Rights and Dignity". I will use that that theme for my reflections and hope I can add a few new angles or perspectives to your approaches to change the world to be better to cope with persons with a psychiatric disability.

As chairperson I am the spokesperson on disability issues of mutual interests to all the member organisations. And - believe it or not there - is a great deal of the disability policy that is of mutual interest for us all. I think that about 80 percent of the disability policy is the same regardless of the kind of disability a group of persons have. It is only about 20 percent that is so called disability specific.

I know it can be very difficult to see and realize that ones own disability often are depending on the same policy and support as other disability groups and that the same approaches often are needed.

As examples of such areas of general and mutual political interests I can mention:

- That all persons with disabilities are depending on the positive attitudes among the non disabled majority of the population towards creating a society for all.
- That all persons with disabilities are claiming the right to self-determination.
- That all persons with disabilities without any possibility to achieve employment through their own activities on the labour market need guaranteed access to an alternative and sufficient income such as a disability benefit or pension.

It is only through close and respectful networking with fellowmen and persons with other disabilities that one discovers and fully understand that we have more in common than in differences. It will be clear to all that the rule of 80/20 percent exists.

If we realize that we have a lot of mutual interests we can join together and collaborate to achieve our common goals. And it is clear to all that if the disability movement stand together and work together in solidarity we are pretty strong and can over time achieve our goals that essentially are the same as everyone else. We want to obtain our full human rights and personal dignity.

If we don't work together we will be played out against each other and loose the momentum given by a unified fighting approach.

If we realize that only a small part of the disability policy is unique to every disability group we can use our resources more efficiently to identify the unique areas and develop and implement the right approaches to reach the goals. Sometimes alone. Sometime together with others groups with similar challenges. Sometimes together with the disability community as such. Sometimes together with professionals.

We can see that this collaborating strategy is very well functioning in New York where we together work for a disability specific convention and where WNUSP are playing a significant and leading role.

Since 1934 we have tried to follow this collaborating strategy in Denmark and with some pride I can say that we have achieved a significant influence on the Danish disability policy.

It is not easy. But we can do something ourselves to generate the right environment to create success. The right environment consists among other things of the following:

- Strong single disability organisations that are run by and are in touch with its roots.
- Organisations that is able to express and achieve the full and comprehensive needs of their constituencies.
- Organisations that respect each other and can work together.
- Organisations that is able to create links to and understand other actors and their organisations.

I think the national and international disability community are moving in the right direction.

I will end this speech by expressing the hope that we together can rock the world to the benefit of the 10 percent of the population with a disability.

Thank you for allowing me the floor and for listening.