

# **What's Best for Esther – A pedagogical activity involving Service User from the Social Work program at Jönköping University**

A pedagogical activity called “What’s best for Esther?” took place in a Swedish elderly care home and gave social work students the possibility to develop a care plan and to interact with Elderly in need of social services.

This pedagogical activity is implemented within the social work program at Jönköping University and aims to stimulate students’ awareness of the challenges for providing social services for Elderly and the importance of always consider the perspective and voice of service users. The phrase: “What’s best for Esther?”, is borrowed from the Esther network which is trademarked and dealt with quality improvement within health care. The same principal to always acknowledge “What’s best for Esther?” is here transferred into social work. The name: ”Esther” do not refer to a specific person, with a specific gender, ethnicity etc. “Esther” symbolise any person with complex needs.

Social work students were asked to work in groups with a case-based task about Esther a 91 years old woman and her husband Kalle 93 years old. In the task students were asked to make a care plan for Esther and Kalle. In order to make a care plan an investigation has to be started and students need to collect information from “Esther” and professionals, relatives etc, to be able to develop the care plan. To make sure that their care plan matches the service users’ needs of the social services did the task require that they continuously ask the question: What’s best for Esther?

## **Preparation and plan**

Everything started out by selecting the group of service users and the venue for were to implement the activity. Elderly was selected based on two reasons. First, most of the social work students at JU end up within elderly care and secondly are students seldom having initial interest for this group of service users during the social work program.

Case studies is a pedagogical tool often used in the social work program at JU. It is allowing for cases to be used that are either real or close to reality. They are either unidentified real cases, or fictive cases. We decided to develop a fictive case that was highly realistic. To do this, we needed help from elderly service users themselves.

A fictive case concerning the married couple Esther 91 and Kalle 93 was developed in collaboration with elderly persons who have experiences of social services due to old age and functional limitations and ill health. Professionals working in an elderly care home was also included in this work to surround the elderly with familiar persons to ease the contact between the service users and teachers.

## **Implementation of pedagogical activity**

The pedagogical activity took place in a care home for Elderly, where the elderly themselves are in their comfort zone. Students where there for a full day of activities including lunch and fika (coffee) in the care home facilities to give them a sense of a context for where elderly can live

and spend their days. During lunch and fika (coffee), except the elderly included in the activity, students had the possibility to interact with elderly from the care home who joined them.

*Disposition:* The education activity was divided in three main sections.

1) *Information and presentation:* Students were greeted and welcomed by the elderly coordinator at the care home, who gave a short introduction about the elderly care home as well as about the social welfare for elderly in Sweden. After this an Esther coach gave a presentation about the work within the Esther network. The coach told the students about the importance of collaboration between the municipalities and health centers. The Esther network includes professionals, service users` (Esthers) and Esther coaches as a natural support to develop the best care and services for Esther.

2) *Case and task:* Teachers started the pedagogical activity by presenting the task and give practical information as were and when things were to be done. Students were also divided in groups.

Then students listen to Esther`s story. A service user played the role as Esther and described her, and her husband`s living conditions and care needs, social services. The teacher handed out the case and task in writing.

The students started to work in groups on the task to start an investigation to be able to make a care plan for Esther and Kalle. They were asked to continuously ask the question: What`s best for Esther?

To help the students to develop a care plan in lines with Esther`s own understanding of the needs and solutions they had the possibility to ask questions to Esther (played by service user) herself. Students also had the possibility to ask questions to social work colleagues and other professionals. Except students and teachers are the following persons and characters included in the pedagogical activity:

- Esther played by a service user
- Ingrid (Esther`s Daughter) played by a teacher
- A social worker played by a social worker
- A nurse played by a nurse
- A occupational therapist played by an occupational therapist

*The twist:* When the students were almost finished with their care plans, they got information about major changes in Esther`s life. These changes demanded that the care plan was reconsider and modify.

3) *Students` presentation and service user feedback.* During this last section students present and motivate their care plan for the Esther and their peers. Esther gives feedback on the care plan from her point of view.

### **The Case and Task communicated in two ways**

The case and task were communicated in two ways to the students. First verbally by Esther and then in writing.

*Esther story – the case verbally communicated*

This is the story told by Esther. Hi, my name is Esther Davidson me and my husband Kalle live in a three-room flat in central Nässjö. We moved to our flat after we sold our house two years ago Our flat has everything we need and there is an elevator in our building Kalle and I grew up in Nässjö. And we met and fell in love when we were very young. We have lived together for 71 years and have been married for 69 years now.

We have four children three girls and one boy. And we are lucky to have thirteen lovely grandchildren. Our youngest daughter live here in Nässjö. Her name is Ingrid. Er meet her often but we seldom see the other children because thy live too far away. One Malmö, one in Stockholm and one in Kiruna.

Kalle and I have lived a long, healthy and happy life together. And have never been really sick. But we are not 30 anymore. We are old and have notice this for the last seven or eight years. We do not have the same strength as we used to have. We cannot do all the things we did when we were younger.

We live by ourselves and do not have any support. We manage quite well, and we are most grateful that our Ingrid live close by and can help us with some things. Ingrid is strong and she is helping us to carry home the heavy bags from the supermarket. She is also driving us to the doctor or to other places when needed. She is taking good care of us, and we are so grateful.

We are mostly at home and do not meet friends as we used to do. Most of our friends have passed away. The ones who are still with us are sick. I spend my days at home cooking food and make sure that we have clean clothes and a tidy home.

I enjoy baking and knitting. But do not bake as often as before. We have few friends over on fika now, so cookies and bakery tend to get old. Knitting is something I still do sometimes since my grandchildren like my handknitted socks. But after diner I am often so tired that I end up in the sofa watching TV with Kalle. We watch many TV-shows and follow the news every day. Kalle watches a lot of TV also during the day. He is also spending many hours with his stamp collection which means a lot to him.

Our life changed three weeks ago when I found Kalle lying on the floor. I called 112. The ambulance came and took him to the hospital. It was terrible Ingrid, and I went to the hospital. We were so worried.

Kalle suffered a major heart attack. It was the worst day of my life.

But thank good Kalle was strong. I don't know what I would have done if he would have left us.

Kalle has been at the hospital since then. He is very weak now and can hardly walk on his own. He needs help with most things. Like lifting his arms, putting on socks, taking a shower, and to walk and to move around.

Today the doctor said that Kalle is ready to leave the hospital in two days. I am a bit worried about what will happen. I am not so strong that I can help him with everything. What will happen.

Please help us.

*The written Case and Task about Esther 91 years and Kalle 92 years*

Esther and Kalle are living in a three-room apartment on the 3d floor in central Nässjö. They moved to their apartment two years ago after selling their villa. The apartment is modern, and the house has an elevator. Esther and Kalle grew up in Nässjö and that's where the couple met when they were very young. They have lived together for 71 years. Esther and Kalle have four children and thirteen grandchildren. One of the daughters, Ingrid, lives in Nässjö, the other children are spread across Sweden.

Esther and Kalle have been health trough their lives and they have not had any serious illnesses. For the last seven or eight years, Esther's and Kalle's physical strength has diminished. Both feel that they do not have much energy these days. They have taken care of themselves with some support from their daughter Ingrid. Who helps them with shopping and other things as accompanying them when they visit the dentist or the doctor.

The couple is mostly at home nowadays. Socializing with friends is not so common, since most friends have passed away and those who live are ill. Esther is taking care of the household. She is coking, washing, and cleaning. She enjoys baking and knitting. But after taking care of the household, she has little time and energy to do the things she enjoys. Kalle watches a lot of TV and engage himself with his stamp collection which means a lot to him.

Kalle suffered a major heart attack three weeks ago. He has been hospitalized since then. He is very weak and cannot walk on his own. He needs help with most things related to hygiene, dressing and to walk and to move around. He will be discharge from the hospital in two days.

*Task: Make a care plan for Esther and Kalle*

Work out a care plan for Ester and Kalle together with you peers.

The task is divided in three steps:

1. You have 70 minutes to prepare the care plan. One group member takes notes.  
What are their needs and which interventions/provisions/support will they get? Always consider the question: What's best for Esther?  
You have the possibility to visit Esther and ask her questions. But prepare yourself before visiting Esther. You can also consult a social worker colleague or a nurse or an occupational therapist who can help you with more professional matters.
2. You have 20 minutes to Prepare a 10-minute-long presentation of the care plan. Include motivations for choices when needed.
3. Present the care plan for Esther and your peers. Answer questions if you get any. Esther will give feedback on the care plan from her perspective.

### *The Twist*

When students had worked on the care plan for 50 minutes, they received the information about major changes that will influence the care plan.

The student groups receive independent information that they need to include when finishing their care plan.

Examples of scenarios for the twist:

1. Kalle has a stroke and becomes paralyzed on one side of his body, he also has difficulty speaking.
2. Ingrid, the daughter, is seriously injured in a car accident
3. Kalle just committed suicide
4. Esther begins to get confused and a dementia investigation begins.
5. It comes to your knowledge that Esther is suspected to be a victim of violence
6. Esther ask for help with her alcohol problem

### **Process and some experiences**

*Service users' participation:* Service users was involved continually in this educational activity. Starting in developing the case and as playing an important role when implementing the task and well as giving students feedback.

The planning part when the case was developed can be characterized as creative. Service users took the main floor in this part. The teacher strived to let the service users be in charge of the case development. Service user developed a fictive case base on both own experiences as well all experiences from others they know. And all these experiences grounded the case in reality. The importance of a twist was also pinpointed by the service users. One service user said: "You never know what happens and people working with us elderly always need to be aware of this". So, the twist was included in the activity.

The elderly who was included in developing the case said that they appreciated to be involved and that they saw their involvement as important because they can help students get a better view of the challenges that they will experience later as social worker.

The service user played the role as Esther and enjoyed interaction with the students. She said that she was amused by playing the role of Esther. Playing a role instead of herself was both a bit hard but also easier since she did not need to share her own personal experiences for the students.

*Students' experiences:* Students at JU enjoy visiting the fields where service users live or vistas. So, to locate pedagogical out in the "field" is given extra value and so do this activity. Swedish students who know the Swedish welfare system know the frames for doing the care plan in a way that international students do not. International students therefore pay attention to the Swedish welfare system and compare it to other welfare systems in a way that give extra values to the

pedagogical activity: What's best for Esther. On the other hand, this focus might also risk paying less attention to service users' participation.

The tasks focus was on developing the care plan not on interacting with service users. On the other hand, was the possibility to ask questions to Esther view as crucial and giving the activity added value.

The twist in the case was first experienced as frustrating by the students. However, did all groups manage to rethink and modify the care plan in accordance with the new circumstances. Including the twist give students the possibility to experience themselves that service users' lives are not fixed and simple. Therefore, social worker needs to be flexible and always open to rethinking and modifying their plans to provide service users with the right services.

### **Impact**

Students learned the following skills:

- to consider what's best for service users
- to collaborate professionally with fellow students, service users and other professionals
- to be flexible and to reconsider and modify initial plans

Service users participated as follows:

- As co-producers of pedagogical material
- Played the character in a fictive case
- Interacted with students
- Gave feedback on student's tasks