

Preface

by Tom Andersen

A beautiful book about *both* the ordinary *and* the extraordinary.

As a reader there is a lot to be glad about in this book. It deals with “ordinarity” and with “ordinary people”, which as paradoxically as it may seem has become quite extraordinary.

In the book there are stories about working with people who have found themselves in such great difficulties that it often is a matter of life or death. Many of them have experiences from many years of treatment. For most of them, treatment was unsuccessful. However, the book tells with great force that they have not lost their longing: “Longing for finding yourself and longing for belonging. Longing to understand and longing to be understood. Longing to get a job and stand on your own feet. Longing for a life of your own to begin. Longing for a home of your own and for your very own family. Longing for adventure and the hitherto unknown. Longing for giving love.”

The author of the book, Carina Håkansson, wanted to create space for people’s longings, and this was a bit extraordinary. She did not want to go along with what was the ordinary way of thinking that you should give up on “such people”.

She saw that the usual treatment efforts were not very successful. Therefore she turned to Tyra and Bertil and Ingvor and Lennart to listen to what they thought about her ideas that “such people” should rather live together with ordinary families. All four of them said that of course it would be better for them to live in an ordinary community instead of an institution, prison or hospital.

Thus the Family Care Foundation was initiated more than eighteen years ago. Carina’s wish for this book was to let everybody’s voice be heard and she has succeeded in that; the therapists of the clients and the supervisors for the family homes¹: Maggan, Lena, Eva, Maria, Joakim, Teo, Liv and Bosse. The social workers who relate to the Family Care Foundation, and not least those who have lived in the family homes, grown ups as well as young people and children. And maybe first of all the family homes themselves: the Jonsson’s, Annki and Jonas, Ulla and Stefan, Tyra and Bertil, Sven, Mats, Gunilla, Stina, Uno and Tomas with their families, Ingvor and Lennart, Siv and Leif, Lena and Lars.

All of them tell things about what happens in the various meetings, between clients and family homes, between family homes and supervisors, at the weekend seminars for family homes twice a year when all family homes, supervisors and therapists meet, between the Family Care Foundation and the world around.

¹ Family home, in Sweden, is a kind of foster home in a therapeutic context. We use the term “family home” instead of foster home as it better describes the task for the family which is to invite the client into their family and life for a while. The main task is not to “foster” the client, but to share their life and experiences with the client.

Carina is very clear in her descriptions of people. It is *not* done in the shape of either-or; such as, for example, is done within psychiatry where you see dead descriptions (diagnoses) of living people, thereby describing ordinary people as extraordinary people.

Carina insists on both-and. People are both happy and sad; they can be both sensible and crazy. She wants descriptions of persons to include many possibilities; “he was crazy for a little while, but as we did this and that he became his usual self and wiser than me.”

Carina wants to use both-and instead of either-or, but, when I read the book it strikes me that there is also a neither-nor. It is something more than what we can *understand*, it is neither this nor that, but something greater we get hold of. Something we can only sense. I had an experience of this on Hönö during a week-end seminar in which I was invited to take part. At dinner I sat together with Tyra and Bertil listening to their quiet account of what has been important for them. There I got a sense of what solidarity really can be.

Yes, I think that is the Family Care foundation in a nutshell, solidarity, namely the consideration and concern for the other.

When I was invited to their 18 years anniversary I gave them a gift; I invited Ingvor and Lennart together with Carina to come and talk with our students in Tromsø.

There Lennart described what it could mean for him to meet one of the “clients”, “For instance, when I lie on the couch reading the newspaper, one of the children often comes and lies down on my belly as it is soft and nice to lie on,” he said and visibly moved went on, “We tend to rest like that for quite some time and I’m going to miss that”.

Two events in the book made a special impression on me; Maria who stayed with Lena and Lars had experienced so much trouble in her life that she had almost got out of the habit of speaking. However, she appreciated being in the cowshed with Lena. One day Lena heard Maria saying her name clearly and distinctly, “Lena, are you there?” and Lena responded, “Yes, I’m here.” Such moments contain the greatest seriousness of life.

The other was when Anna, one of the clients, said, “This with being ordinary is important, to be one among others.”

So, let us quit doing the special that makes us special and extraordinary and rather do as Carina and all the people she is working with do and become ordinary.