

# 'Ageing Together' – a network for integration

The aim of the network 'Ageing Together' is to bring about greater understanding and contact among the elderly, both those born in Sweden and those who have moved here from abroad. We also want the community to make the same level of service available to everyone regardless of background. Those of us who are involved in the network come from different pensioners' and immigrant organisations in Gothenburg, the Workers' Educational Association and the City of Gothenburg.

Immigrant organisations and Swedish pensioners' organisations in Gothenburg had already been working together for several years when in 2004 we set up the network 'Ageing Together'. Things got under way properly the year after. Initially, the steering committee comprised representatives from the Co-ordinating Body for Ethnic Organisations in Sweden, the National Pensioners' Organisation, the Swedish Pensioners' Association, the Allégården Pensioners' Association, the Workers' Educational Association and the City of Gothenburg Sports and Associations Committee. During the first few years we received a project grant from the Sports and Associations Committee.

## Why we set up 'Ageing Together'

There were several reasons for establishing the network:

- We wanted to create a platform for a dialogue and joint activities to raise the level of understanding between different groups.
- We realised that our organisations needed to highlight integration issues and the need for community service for a group that was growing in size: pensioners with an immigrant background.
- We wanted to encourage more immigrants to join pensioners' organisations and contribute with new knowledge and experience. In doing so, the organisations could exert greater influence and contribute to a more integrated society.

## How we began

We visited immigrant associations and spoke about the project and stated that immigrants are welcome to join PRO or SPF and that we could act together on current issues related to integration and the situation of pensioners with an immigrant background.

We are part of the  
'Ageing Together' network:

SIOS, the Co-ordinating Body for Ethnic Organisations in Sweden, is a non-profit umbrella organisation that is without any political or religious affiliations. The Regional SIOS in Gothenburg comprises districts and associations that are part of national associations that are affiliated to National SIOS and work in Gothenburg and the surrounding areas. They are organisations for national minorities and other associations founded on ethnic grounds, totalling more than 70 and with over 16,000 members. Associations without a national association are also welcome to join. The Regional SIOS in Gothenburg co-operates with different organisations and institutions and other democratic forces to bring about a multicultural, democratic, equal, just society for everyone living in Sweden.

PRO, the National Pensioners' Organisation, is the largest pensioners' organisation in Sweden with more than 400,000 members. Apart from being an organisation to promote a feeling of community and solidarity, PRO monitors the interests of pensioners in various social issues, including care of the elderly and housing. PRO Gothenburg has around 13,000 members, divided into 56 local associations. PRO does not have any political affiliations.

SPF, the Swedish Pensioners' Association, with around 262,000 members. SPF works to promote empowerment, freedom of choice and quality of life among the elderly. Important issues for SPF are care and welfare, housing and public health. The Gothenburg district has over 7,000 members in 29 local associations. SPF has no political or religious affiliations.

ABF, the Workers' Educational Association, the largest educational association in Sweden. ABF in Gothenburg runs the majority of its activities in residential areas, often in collaboration with different associations, particularly immigrant and cultural associations. ABF supports the associations' study circle activities and cultural activities based on their needs and conditions. ABF's aims include a greater capacity for those involved to take part in the change process, acquire greater understanding of the opinions of others and establish better contact with other people.

The Sports and Associations Committee provides support and financial assistance to non-profit associations, including some 220 immigrant associations and 320 pensioners' associations. An association consultant is part of the network as a municipal resource person.

A More Secure and More Humane Gothenburg, the City of Gothenburg's central crime prevention and safety promotion committee. Within the committee, the city authority, the university, public authorities, organisations, associations and companies work to promote the safety and security of the people of the city and ensure that public environments in the city are available to everyone. The official responsible for cultural issues is involved in the network as a resource person.

During the first year we arranged three joint theme meetings for members of immigrant pensioners' associations:

- A meeting that included a talk about ageing in a multicultural society. This was part of an attempt to recruit and educate 'integration representatives' in local pensioners' associations.
- A meeting where the head of the Senior Development Centre, City of Gothenburg, which is the municipal development centre for matters related to the elderly, spoke about their visions for the future for the older members of the population.
- A meeting where the city politicians had the opportunity to put forward their views on matters related to the elderly. The five political parties on the city council were represented, including the municipal commissioner for eldercare.

The year after we entered a new phase with more concrete initiatives. We pursued our work along four paths:

1. We tested different types of meetings to bring together older people with an immigrant background and older people born in Sweden who were active in different pensioners' organisations.
2. Within the Regional SIOS we encouraged our associations to form their own pensioners' associations and we provided them with support in this process.
3. SIOS also arranged joint meetings for older immigrants from different groups and provided them with information about their rights as older persons in society and how they could exercise those rights.
4. We tried to stimulate opinion in matters related to the elderly and to make decision-makers and representatives of Swedish pensioners' organisations more aware of and take greater account of elderly persons with an immigrant background and their needs.

## What we have done and what we are doing

After a number of years, the project became the network 'Ageing Together' with the same organisations involved.

We are continuing in different ways in our attempts to exert an influence in matters related to the elderly.

We have meetings at which members of immigrant associations and Swedish pensioners' associations can socialise and enjoy each other's company. One association acts as host and provides refreshments and there is also a musical performance or some other cultural element. Each meeting has a theme. It could be related to the host association or another topic of interest to the participants.

At some of the meetings we invite along politicians or public officials from the city authority who are responsible for issues related to the elderly. This gives the participants the opportunity

to discuss with them. The topics covered are mainly eldercare, municipal healthcare and housing.

At the beginning of the project the Allégården Pensioners' Association invited different immigrant groups and spoke about everything that can be done in the building. Each year the association organises an international day with information, discussions and socialising together with food and entertainment from different cultures.

We have made an inventory of the immigrant associations' work related to pensioners and their background history.

We have run a study circle dealing with health and quality of life among the elderly, entitled 'Passion for Life', where the participants came from different backgrounds.

We have been involved in project work related to a film about the elderly, diversity and safety and security:

**'The Bag – a film not to be afraid of'** was made by director Nasrin Pakkho and is the result of collaboration between a number of associations, organisations and community institutions. The film is a basis for group discussion about matters related to safety and security.

The background to 'The Bag' is that several of us in the network were involved in the working group 'Safety, Security and the Elderly', which was formed in 2003 on the initiative of the City of Gothenburg pensioners' council and 'A More Secure and More Humane Gothenburg'. It comprises representatives from different pensioner organisations, the Västra Götaland Police Authority, the Senior Development Centre and A More Secure and More Humane Gothenburg. The group produced a folder with information, advice and hints on safety and security for the elderly. The 'Secure Together' folder also included the film 'Have the Courage to Live Life', produced by the Crime Prevention Council in Örebro.

The 'Safety, Security and the Elderly' group had used the security package as a basis for discussion at many meetings with the elderly in immigrant associations and noted that another film was needed; one that reflected the situation of elderly immigrants in Gothenburg. This was the reason why we laid plans to make our own film about safety, security and the elderly.

As several of us were involved in both 'Ageing Together' and 'Safety, Security and the Elderly' we decided to make this a joint project.

We wanted to produce a film about and involving pensioners with an immigrant background; a film that addresses safety and security issues in daily life: how to prevent accidents, create security and have the courage to be active regardless of age and gender. A film that would act as a basis for discussion in groups dealing with difficult issues such as perceived security, a sense of community and democracy.

The film could be used, for example, in study circles at associations but also to provide eldercare staff with greater insight into the conditions of elderly immigrants. As a basis for the film, Lena Salo from the Sports and Associations Committee, Nélida Becerra from A More Secure and More Humane Gothenburg and Nasrin Pakkho visited many different immigrant organisations, showed 'Have the Courage to Live Life', and held discussions about safety and security. These meetings were documented by Nasrin Pakkho.

'The Bag' is a silent film with signs in 12 languages. It is made with humour and warmth. The film and the handbook deal with how to protect yourself against crime and accidents, what you should do if, despite everything, a crime or an accident were to occur, and how to make new friends. The film was completed in autumn 2010 and since then we have worked on distributing it, showing it and encouraging discussions about safety and security matters at associations and other places.

## Our plans for the future

During spring 2011 we held general meetings with association representatives to find out what they felt it was important for the network to focus on. The organisations' many needs emerged as well as constructive ideas for work in the future.

The focal areas at the present time are:

- We will continue to discuss with, inform and attempt to influence those in a position of power to improve conditions for elderly immigrants in Gothenburg and to work to bring about greater integration.
- We will continue with joint meetings for pensioners with different backgrounds.
- We will invite more groups to take part in activities and become involved in integration work.
- We will attempt to find different ways of facilitating contact between associations.
- We will focus on health and fitness issues.
- We are investigating the potential to start a friend service/ visitor groups for the elderly in languages other than Swedish.
- We will highlight in different ways the role of older immigrants as a workforce and their contribution to Swedish society.
- Vi har planer på att börja med närradiosändningar och bli synliga på Internet.

We are always open to suggestions about what we should focus on and how we should be moving ahead.

