

The Malmo Declaration

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This document was passed by the delegates of the FICE International at the **August 1986 FICE Congress held in Malmo, Sweden.**

“At the biannual Congress of FICE, the International Federation of Educative Communities, held in Malmo on August 28, 1986, we the delegates drawn from 20 countries wish to express our great concern for the plight of children and young people who are unable either temporarily or permanently to grow up at home with their natural parents.

These children require residential or other out of home services that are threatened by financial cutbacks. The current financial crisis adds further deprivations to the existing problems of these children and their families.

Even in times of economic crisis society cannot afford to ignore or damage its weakest link. In our view it is essential that ways of caring for neglected children are directly related to their real needs and are not considered only in terms of cost.

1. Community care is an important task of society

Children and adolescents who grow up in homes, in supervised living groups, in foster homes and other youth care settings often have a heavy biographical load to carry. Most often, the personal and social difficulties of adults are the reason why young people can no longer remain in their families. They are in danger of bearing the brunt of the adult world's errors as if in place of their parents. They are dependent on the help of society for an improvement in their living conditions. Various forms of community care give children and adolescents a chance to develop in this direction. They thus fulfil one of society's tasks and need the corresponding social support.

2. Community care is in a period of transition

From mere custodial care in past generations, community care has developed into a really qualified and efficient aid to education in recent years. The dominating position of large institutions, insofar as they have not developed into well-organized pedagogical centers with a differentiated choice of school and training programs, is being challenged more and more. Treatment-oriented, interdisciplinary institutions employing people with a variety of backgrounds are springing up next to the traditional institutions, or even replacing them. The youngsters usually stay in the home for a limited period of time only; very small homes of foster families are often available to provide an alternative or an addition to traditional institutional education. The most important feature of this form of care is that the tasks, working hours, and time off of the personnel in these various facilities overlap. Finally, the tendency towards increased cooperation between homes, youth care facilities and members is notable, with the goal in mind of reintegrating the child in his own family as soon as possible. This development needs even more support, however.

The sphere of action “Residential care-community care” includes a variety of different environments today. These include among others:

- houses for children and very small homes, in which children and adolescents live together with adults;
- communal residences for young people focusing on life and development in the peer group;
- relatively independent living groups on the ground of an institution or external living group in the context of the wider educational system;
- pedagogical, therapeutic facilities providing special treatment and protection;

- qualified schools and vocational training for subnormal children connected to an institution serving children and young people from the surrounding area;
- flexible care for young people living in their own flats and receiving support and counseling;
- day care groups of children who live in their own families and environment, where they receive intensive care and support during the day;
- foster homes, sometimes in connection with institutional education.

The goal of all these differentiated possibilities is to find individual solutions for each child, thus minimizing his handicap and increasing his chances in life.

3. Community care is making a profession of living with others

Modern community care is not limited to keeping children in the custody of various institutions; rather, it is a therapeutic-pedagogical approach to furthering behaviour and practical, intellectual and social capacities in the child. Qualified personnel is necessary to fulfil this goal, and that costs a lot of money.

Decisions concerning appropriate educational help must not be taken from the financial viewpoint alone. No one who has taken on a responsibility in working with the young can afford to rest on the achievements of the past years. Every youngster who comes to a home only after a long and painful ordeal is an example for help that was not proffered early enough. Education in a residential setting still remains the last chance for human development for many children and adolescents. A modern conception of community care, however, should most definitely not allow homes to be labeled as the last resort for children in need of help. Residential institutions should not be isolated social services; they should, rather, take their place in a regional network of various family and community educational support structures.

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4. Community care requires favorable conditions

Young people who cannot grow up in a family due to a set of special conditions have a right to humane, active, qualified, and enduring educational personnel. Care in residential settings must continue to provide a positive atmosphere and a comprehensible environment for those who live in them, giving them the opportunity to create their own network of dependable social relationships. Strong hierarchies, strict working rules for educators, detailed, petty regulations to govern every possible eventuality, and a rigid handling of guidelines prevent such an institution from developing the independence and equality needed for its daily work. In order for group education to stay close to reality, creative freedom as well as funds for pedagogical projects are necessary. In order to assure the educator's optimal freedom of decision in their pedagogical work, maximum leeway in the distribution of financial means and personnel resources is necessary.

People working in this field need good working conditions in order to cope with their difficult daily tasks. They need qualified counseling and continued vocational training. Personnel and money must be available to fulfill these needs.

Older educators should benefit from increasingly flexible working conditions, making it possible for them to continue working in their field or to change over into another, appropriate, line of work. All those responsible are asked to take even more initiative in this vein. Precisely those who have worked in education for long periods of time should be given a chance to take occasional leaves of absence allowing them to gather renewed strength and to improve their own qualifications.

5. Community care needs new models for development

In addition to the trend towards smaller size and greater differentiation within the large institutions, leading to family-like units, the fact that homes are opening up to the community

and to a combination of residential and non-residential care also plays an important part. The inclusion of parents, the social network, neighborhood, and community in their work has become an ever more important concern for educators, for this helps to create a much more real, supportive environment for children and adolescents.

There is a tendency to create more closed forms of institutional custody in spite of professional criticism of this development. Isolation (walls and keys) as a prerequisite for intensive individual and group work can usually be seen as a defeat of pedagogical goals, and their therapeutic advantages are overrated. Other alternatives, such as independent living groups or various forms of individual care which have already been tried and tested successfully in a number of countries should be encouraged, instead.

Older children are not usually released back into their families, but are sent out to make their own way into life, equipped with the training they have received. More than for anyone else, the motto "No future:" must not apply to youngsters raised in residential institutions.

Community care, too, serves to develop meaningful concepts for life. Financial resources for developing new ways of integrating work in daily life are especially needed. This also holds true for education in residential settings as well as for urgently needed after-care.

The participants at the international FICE Congress 1986 in Malmo urge all persons holding responsible positions in society and government to do their utmost to make the demands in this paper possible in the interest of children and young people everywhere, even under today's difficult economic conditions:

- to consider "Children's Homes" and comparable provisions not as a last resort for children needing care but as an important available intervention to be used at an appropriate time in the development of those children for whom it is desirable.
- to recognize that residential care and education is a legitimate pattern of education which makes a distinctive contribution to the nurturing of many children and young people. For some it will be the preferred experience;
- to assure that children's placements and care are determined by their real need and not by financial expediency;
- to seek greater stability and continuity in the care of children with special needs;
- to promote research and evaluation in this field, aimed at securing a service more effectively geared to children's interests.

We, members of FICE, as educators, child care workers, administrators, trainers, public representatives and policy-makers, are ready to continue to invest all our energies to improve the life of children in our care. To do this we need the moral, political, public and financial support which will allow us to meet an urgent and pressing social need."

Malmo, Sweden,

August 28, 1986

FICE International

