

As patron of the Agrenska Foundation of Estonia, I have the pleasure of opening and greeting the participants of this joint venture organised by the Agrenska Foundation, Tammistu Family Centre, Tartu University Hospital, Tartu University Hospital Children's Foundation and Tartu University Children's Hospital entitled "Child with Impaired Development – Why is Early Detection Important?".

This information day is dedicated to an extremely important problem – early detection of impaired development and the opportunities available for influencing a child's development. Why was this information day organised and why are we focusing on impaired development?

One of the most important functions of the Estonian Agrenska Foundation is the organisation of training courses for specialists working with children with special needs and for families of children with special needs. The early detection of impaired development and identification of children at risk has become a 'hot issue' in international research literature in recent years, as special needs individuals identified as early as possible and their diagnosis will allow for the implementation of individual development programmes, which will considerably contribute to the ability of such children to cope in the future. Therefore, I hope that by the end of today we will be all a bit wiser than before coming to this event. I would like to highlight the activities of the Agrenska Foundation Project Manager, Dr. T. Stelmach, in both organising the information days and the provision of practical services, including family camps, focused on specific special needs/illnesses.

The early detection of impaired development is a team effort, in which parents, grandparents, kindergarten teachers and later teachers are all key persons; general practitioners/family doctors also play an important role here, as they have the opportunity to observe a child's development periodically, by identifying the presence of impaired development or the risk for the incurrance of the problem. Studies emphasise the importance of the early identification of special needs, particularly the risk of incurrance of special needs, as an area that requires the effective knowledge of doctors, and they also emphasise the need for regular monitoring of a child's development. The identification of the REASON for impaired development is highly important and determines the treatment plan.

It gives me great pleasure to announce that the participants of this conference will hear talks by Liina Lokko and Marianne Kuzemtšenko, who are both specialists and parents and can share their knowledge and experience, which is valuable for both specialists and parents of children with the same problems. It is important and necessary to acknowledge that both mothers have

committed their knowledge and experience to helping people with special needs and their families all over Estonia – Marianne Kuzemtšenko is the chairwoman of the Board of the Estonian Autism Association, an internationally acknowledged co-operation partner in programmes for children and young people suffering from autism all over Europe. Liina Lokko started her work for the community in response to the special needs of her daughter Annabel (Anni), and she established the Anni Mängumaa (Anni's Playground) kindergarten; the mission of the kindergarten is stated on its website as follows: *Anni's Playground's goal is to achieve equal treatment and subsistence among children and adults in families with special needs children compared to other families raising children. By constantly developing the services for special needs children and deprecating the generally scornful reputation of special needs children at a public level, we give these families the opportunity to become valuable members of society.*

Today, Liina Lokko is the Chairwoman of the Board of Villa Benita; as an experienced specialist, she is responsible for the strategic development of the institution.

Essentially, today you can listen, and discuss.

Let us all be active listeners and contributors!

I wish all of you a pleasant and fruitful day, with new ideas, new contacts and the wish to be there for each other.