

The greeting of Evelin Ilves at the "Everyone Matters" conference, organised by the Estonian Agrenska Foundation on 8th June 2010 in Tammistu

My good Agrenska Foundation family, dear parents, and all present.

I would like begin with something I heard from a mother whose child suffers from a progressive disease: "Perhaps I have been deemed capable enough to be entrusted with this child and through him/her I have been shown how heavy a burden I can carry".

The truth is that it all starts with the family, from determining the special needs of the disabled child to figuring out how to live as a family without turning the other children and the parents themselves into a family with special needs.

Estonian mothers and fathers may be very strong. However, they also need some support, so they can always be there for their child – day after day, year after year. Spiritual help is needed as soon as the diagnosis has been given and concerns come to the fore, when parents begin asking questions that are almost impossible to answer. Why me? Why my child?

Last year, at the 20th anniversary of the Swedish Ågrenska Foundation, I saw how the family centre there helps parents of children with rare diseases. They are counselled by professionals, and trainings and camps are organised. The parents can put the child under temporary care to get time for some rest and to gather their strength.

And what is even more important is that parents of disabled children can meet each other,

exchange experiences, and support and encourage each other.

I am extremely glad that the Estonian Agrenska Foundation has already made several long strides towards providing our children and families with equal opportunities. However, much still needs to be done and we have to go a long way before we achieve an ideal outcome. I am quite sure that our combined efforts will assist us in this. Fortunately, there are always those with hearts of gold, whose mission is to help those in need in our society.

We saw only recently how a good mother – Liina Lokko – was enterprising and committed enough to use a TV song contest to introduce to people in Estonia the idea of young people with intellectual disabilities learning a profession to help them cope with their lives. Many people are now familiar with Anni's Academy and support it.

It is good if we can draw strength from each other – family centres, companies, local governments and families themselves – to create for our special children and young people the opportunity to live safely and be cared for in their homeland. The power of joint caring and small good deeds is stronger, by far, than the billions from individuals, corporations, or even states. A small contribution – yours and mine – can give someone a new quality of life. Today, right now, or in the future.

Everyone matters!

I wish you a big heart, good ideas, and pleasant co-operation. May this conference contribute to building a better future!