

## **Welcome speech by Her Majesty Queen Silvia**

Childhood's 10-year anniversary seminar:

*"How can internet be used as a tool to help and assist children and youth at risk"*

Nalen, Stockholm, September 17<sup>th</sup> 2009

When Childhood was created ten years ago we set out to help and assist children who had been abused, exploited and neglected. Through innovative ideas and tangible projects we wanted to show good examples and provide viable options as to how the children, most at risk, could be helped. Most of all, we wanted to be where the children are, to not only talk about the problems, but to actively work with the children and show concrete results of that work which then could be replicated and spread to other areas and countries.

During the past ten years our work has expanded and today we are active in fifteen different countries with over 100 active projects. But our mode of work still remains. The innovative ideas and the importance of being where the children are, are still imperative. This is why I have the pleasure of welcoming all of you to this seminar celebrating Childhood's first ten years.

In the past ten years the internet has more and more become an integral part of our lives, in a way we could never have imagined 20 years ago. For the younger generation it is not only a useful tool but has also become a way of life. Days are being spent in the virtual world where friends are made, games are played and schoolwork is being done. People even fall in love on the internet. As in any new setting there are positive and negative side effects. Children who have been bullied and harassed at school have found a new arena where they have been given a new chance at friendship and many times strengthened their self-confidence. The

possibilities to stay in touch with friends and family and the wealth of information provided are other positive side effects.

However, we can never turn a blind eye to the risks of any new setting. For a very long time children have been able to roam the internet without the supervision of caring adults, putting themselves at risk of being exploited and abused. We have also seen proof that the internet is being used by adults who do not have children's best interest in mind. To prohibit the use of internet among children is not and should not be an option. Instead we, as adults, must take our responsibility in making the internet a safe place. Also, we must learn to use the internet to assist those children who are at risk. In many ways the internet provides a fantastic tool which enables us to work preventive. We have seen projects where children are more prone to speak to adults and seek help if they, at the onset, can do so via the internet. If we can identify children who have a tendency to risk behavior then we have a much greater chance of helping them before they are harmed, whether it is in the virtual world or in the real world.

It is my hope that this day will provide insight as to what can be done and how we can work on the web with children at risk. Each one of you has been invited here today because of your experience in working with children on the internet. We will hear some of you on the stage, but we are also counting on the audience to contribute with discussions, insights and information. Hopefully this day will also give you a chance to network and make use of each other so that we can cooperate in creating a safer environment for our children.

Welcome to Childhood's tenth anniversary seminar.