



I've got a fantastic life in Sweden, thanks to Livstycket!

So says **Parvaneh Asgharzadeh** or Pia as she usually calls herself in what has been her new home country since 20 years back. She radiates warmth and joy when she talks about her way into Swedish society. And it was Livstycket in Tensta that showed her the way ...

Parvaneh, her husband and their three children lived in Tehran, Iran. Her husband was a successful businessman. However, his political views were not those of the then Ayatollah Khomeini. So he left Iran and went to Germany and after that he moved on to Sweden. Three years later the family was reunited in Sweden.

- I knew nothing about Sweden, except that it was cold. And I had heard that everybody ran around naked!!!! But my husband had no future in Iran; so I felt I had no other option than to follow him to Sweden, says Parvaneh when we meet.



I'm forever grateful to Birgitta Notlöf that I got an opportunity to get into Swedish society. It would never have happened without her energy and affection says Parvaneh Asgharzadeh.

Parvaneh was a trained nurse in Iran. She is a caring soul who loves to help. During the last years in her home country she was at home and took care of their three children.

Initially, the family came to Oskarshamn. Then they moved to Dalarna. The children started school and became quickly acclimatised; they learned the language and were soon among the best pupils in the school.

It was more difficult for Parvaneh.

- Nobody knew who I was or what I was capable of. I felt like a real nobody; one of the many immigrants who could not speak Swedish and had no job. To be able to work as a nurse I needed to complement my training and I didn't have the energy to do that then. I was homesick. Home to my culture, my friends, my language. I was depressed and life was difficult, it felt very dark.

Her marriage was in trouble. Her husband met another woman and wanted a divorce. Parvaneh resisted; she did not want to let go of her family. Not only that, the children needed their father. Eventually she realised that she could not fight it anymore and she decided to move to Stockholm. She managed to find a home in Hjulsta where she moved with the children who were then 16, 10 and 8 years old. Life continued to feel very tough. But the children liked their new life, which of course was a great comfort.

Life took a turn for the better. One day she walked past some premises, Livstycket, in Tensta. What was this? She asked her case officer at the Employment Services who talked about the unique activities for immigrant women. Both school and creativity in the same activities!

At Livstycket Parvaneh met **Birgitta Notlöf**, who runs the activities and soon she became one of the gang. "Draw a cup", the person responsible for the creative activities requested of her. I thought that seems a bit too easy, Parvaneh remembers. But then Birgitta came in with a large vase of beautiful summer flowers that I drew. That drawing became the foundation for a pattern for her first cushion. That pattern was followed by many others. Among other things, it was Parvaneh who drew the façade of the Hallwyl Palace, which has since been printed on fabric.

Then followed four happy years at Livstycket. Parvaneh's creativity and independence grew. She learned Swedish and she flourished. Life had taken on a new form. And Parvaneh was so grateful.

I had not drawn since school time, but now I was challenged, says Parvaneh. And that suited me.



Without Birgitta Notlöf, Livstycket would not be what it is today. Birgitta is an entrepreneur and an enthusiast with clear objectives. She has received many awards for her amazing efforts helping immigrant women to integrate into the Swedish society.

After the first successes, I decided on my patterns myself and I worked completely independently. I loved it! But then came the day when it was time for Parvaneh to move on. Out into Swedish society. Today, she works in the care of the elderly and has managed to buy her own home. All the children are well integrated with education, jobs and housing. And that is what is most important to Parvaneh who now looks forward to welcoming her first little grandchild! Without the contact with Livstycket and Birgitta Notlöf she does not know what would have happened to her ...

Dedicated enthusiast

It all started in 1992 when Birgitta Notlöf took the initiative to hold a flea market. She earned SEK 3 720, which became the first contribution towards a non-profit organisation. She named it Livstycket after the garment that had kept women warm for generations.

She identified a clear vision, which was to help immigrant women to shake off their isolation, learn Swedish and become self-sufficient.

Now, today, in the 900 square metre large premises in Tensta there are several classrooms but in addition to that there are also large areas full of sewing machines, tailor's dummies, patterns, bales of cloth and spools of thread in various colours.

Birgitta has gone through the challenges of life herself and can easily identify with how it feels for those immigrant women she meets at Livstycket; women who have left or lost everything and who have had to start all over again in an unfamiliar and perhaps frightening new environment.

I have learned to accept life as it is, with both light and darkness, she says. I try to convey this to our immigrant women. Livstycket means a lot to many women and I am proud of what we are doing, she says.

LIVSTYCKET- integration in practice

Livstycket is a modern knowledge and design centre in Tensta where women from all over the world take part. Livstycket combines artistic activities with instruction in the Swedish language, social studies and more. The women engage in handicrafts such as textile printing, sewing and design. An important objective is to give the women an opportunity to integrate into Swedish society. Even if the activities are targeted towards women, men are also welcome to participate. The activities are

financed through various grants, primarily from the city of Stockholm.

Text: Marianne Wilöv Photo: Jana Eriksson



-Livstycket carries out important activities and is also a meeting place for women from various different backgrounds. For me it goes without saying that the city should support such work. Working creatively, actively and from a functional basis, the women are given the opportunity to study social issues and also to more swiftly learn the Swedish language. This is a good example of the strength of non-profit organisations. I think that the activities Livstycket has built up over the years are very impressive, says Karin Wanngård, Mayor of Stockholm. Photo: Magnus Selander

CONTACT LIVSTYCKET

Birgitta Notlöf, CEO

cellular: +46 (0) 70 - 440 27 28

mail: birgitta.notlof@livstycket.com

phone Livstycket: +46 (0) 8-760 43 15

website: www.livstycket.se

