

Whose responsibility is it to increase the value of unremunerated work?

The last 8 years I have been working in my country; Sweden, without getting paid. It's a job that goes on for 24 hours a day and it's a job somebody has to do. My family is the core in everything I do and our home is the centre of our universe. I don't think I have to explain to anybody how much work it is to manage a home and a family. I've got five children. The work that I do, why is taken for granted. Is it because I'm a woman, is it simply because working with children isn't valued or could there be other reasons?

In Sweden we do not get tax reductions for dependence in the households. Spouses are taxed individually therefore having a stay at home parent is a real challenge financially. Our taxes are used to subsidised day-care with 16 000 US dollars per child and year.

Sweden is a highly developed country and the living standard is very high throughout the population. Because we are a welfare state, we have a strong social security network. Our children are growing up with endless possibilities, still there are increasing problems with children's and teenagers mental health. No one can explain why this is happening and no one performs extensive research on the subject. The biggest change in children's lives over the past 30 years is time spent with parents. It has been reduced with 50 %.

In 1980 21 % of all children between 1-6 years old attended day care. By 2005 day care attendance had increased to 83%. There has been a shift on how we view day cares. 1998 an educational plan for day-care was created by the government and instead of day care it is called pre-school from one years old. This causes Swedish parents to feel they are not adequate enough to take care of their toddlers. There is a new trend that when there's a new baby born the older sibling is still left at day-care, and unemployed parent also leave their children to day-care. This is because of the notion that day-cares are better than parents, supposedly they need their friends and teachers more. On our governments webpage it states that starting pre-school is the first step in the life-long learning process. I suppose they see the teaching I do as not part of the learning process.

With a new elected coalition government, new possibilities has been presented. A small benefit for stay at home parents will be introduced this summer. This benefit amounts to 460 US dollars per child under three years every month. Another change this summer is the introduction of an equality bonus; If the parent with the highest income uses the parental leave the working parent with the lower income gets a tax-reduction. This obviously promotes fathers staying home.

Compared to most other countries the Swedish parental leave is very generous, but when the parental leave is ended, the unpaid work that follows if you continue to stay at home is completely unrewarded and the family supporter is taxed as heavily as someone without a family.

This, in combination with the high Swedish tax rate makes it almost impossible to have a stay at home parent.

Haro, our organisation is working actively to increase the value of the unremunerated work in Sweden.

Many petitions have been made and sent to politicians.

The increased use of the internet over the last years has been a tremendous help in our work of making a change.

We have created a mail list of all our elected politicians and we continuously send e-mails to them.

We specially focus our energy and attention to the politicians and journalists that are on our side. Politicians needs our support to brake new ground. We have seen that the results from this are better than when we try to change the opposition.

Haro has a media strategi, where we take turn to watch for articles and programs of our issue. This includes responding writing debates articles and making phone calls.

Haro sends out press releases when there are important matters to comment on.

We have a magazine for our members, in which we several times have printed prewritten postcards to send to key persons.

A very simple and effective way for our members to participate.

We have created newsletters and internetgroups that are ready to write on Haros blogg, write to politicians or answer with articles when necessary.

Another unique possibility to lobby with politicians, we have one week every summer during the politicians week in Almedalen. Almost every single politician comes to our biggest island, to speak to the people, journalists and NGO's. They are very available, since this is a small place, and great opportunities to influence agendas are possible. Haro has been there the last three years.

To answer my initial question; Whose responsibility is it to increase the value of unremunerated work? I must say that this is every bodies personal responsibility and that every change has to come from every personal choice of lifestyle.

To make these choices there has to be different opportunities and more than one solution.

The invisible work I do as a mother to my children must of course have a real value. No one can do what I do, the way I do it.

The understanding that I have of my children is a result of time spent with them and the interaction between us is the best way to create strong and independent individuals.

Being a parent demands having time, availability, patience, sensitivity and an ability to be flexible and able to evolve as the children evolves.

The work I do is almost considered worthless in Sweden, but I have a strong conviction that it is absolutely necessary for the development of mankind.

