



Opening Plenary

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Ladies and gentlemen, delegates, friends

We are born as free individuals. To start with, totally reliant on the care of others, until we gradually grow and mature and can look after ourselves.

At the same time, however, there's our fundamental need for a sense of belonging and community. Especially so, perhaps, when times are tough.

Picture for yourselves the toddler who has just taken her first faltering steps without the safe grasp of her daddy's hand. Suddenly footloose, she waves away all attempts at help. The world is at her feet. For a few moments, she experiences total freedom and liberation.

But then the inevitable happens: she slips on the gravel and scrapes her knee. She cries out to attract the attention of those around her. Her thirst for liberty, so strong only seconds before, has been overtaken by a longing for comfort and security.

Our little girl grows. Her steps are no longer hesitant. She dashes into the kitchen one Friday afternoon and sees her parents making dinner. "Can I do something?" she asks, eager to help and feel useful.

The search for attachment is an innate quality. One that goes hand in hand with our desire to be free and independent individuals.

Our first and, perhaps, most long-lasting community consists of our family and friends. As we grow and mature, our needs do likewise. We find natural bonds with others at school and college, at work, and through countless other social networks.

As these different networks expand, so do our expectations of how we can and should play our part. This is how it ought to be. We feel valued when we can contribute something that's not only useful for ourselves, but for others.

In short, taking part in the community and the world of work is a natural and extremely important part of life.

So what happens when we suddenly find ourselves in a situation where it becomes hard to take part? In school, at work, or in society as a whole?

We can all understand that a nurse with a broken arm will struggle to carry out their duties. We know that it will take four to six weeks for the break to heal and for the nurse to return to work.

People tend to find it easy to speak about things that are plain to see and understand. A graze, a broken arm – these are visible; physical; specific.

But when things are not so visible? When your self-esteem has taken a hit? When you can't sleep at night because a plaster and a few words of comfort are no longer enough? And no one can tell you how long it's going to take until you feel better. Or even whether you'll ever feel truly better again?

For some reason it's harder to talk about mental health. The health we can't see, but can feel so intensely. That doesn't heal like a graze or a broken arm does, but needs other ways, and sometimes requires more time and attention.

Dear everyone,

It's an enormous pleasure for me to be here today to open the Clubhouse International World Seminar.

Allow me to congratulate you on your 25th anniversary as Clubhouse International, and to commend you on the vital work you do for your members across the globe.

You have worked tirelessly for several decades to put mental health on the political agenda and to help us understand that everyone needs to belong and to be of use. Never more so than when our psyche and our self-esteem are at a low ebb.

Far too many of those affected by mental health problems find themselves standing on the sidelines. Of school, work and the community.

It's not just the individual who loses out here. We all do.

The health service supports and follows up those in need of help. Yet preventing social exclusion and promoting inclusion requires a more comprehensive approach. For this, we as a society must work closely with other operators.

It's the only way to provide secure social arenas for those who unwillingly find themselves on the outside.

The global Clubhouse International network has unique knowledge and skills in this field, both collectively and individually. Clubhouse International creates valuable meeting places. Individuals are treated with respect and equality, and mental health expertise is turned into a working partnership that promotes health and well-being.

A few weeks ago, I was lucky enough to visit the Oslo Clubhouse. There, I had the privilege of witnessing at first hand the kind of work that Clubhouse International does.

And I represent an institution that has worked closely with you for many years. For several decades, the Norwegian Parliament has done its best to enable members of the Oslo Clubhouse to re-establish their ties with the world of work and community life.

In my view, it's crucial that we as a national assembly take responsibility in this field. And the good news is that several clubhouse members have since become permanent members of staff in Parliament.

Good news for those concerned, and, not least, good news for us. We can only benefit from the skills and capacity of people with different backgrounds and experience.

Regardless of one's life circumstances, everyone deserves to be seen for what they are – complete people. I know this approach is a central part of the work you do, day in, day out. And I'm convinced it's one of the keys to your undoubted success.

With that, I would like to wish you the very best for the years ahead, and hope you have rewarding and inspirational days here in Norway.

Thank you for your attention.