

## **IT-Technology for the elderly, ACTION - caregiver support in sparsely populated areas**

The project is a co-operation among the local authorities in Vasternorrland county. Aim for the project is to reach family caregivers in sparsely populated areas, and offer them good, flexible and interactive caregiver support.

Most of the county of Vasternorrland is countryside, with a few small towns, and mostly sparsely populated areas. The number of habitants is decreasing due to many persons moving out of the area. A great part of the elderly population live alone or together with a spouse, in the countryside, far from towns and services provided by the local authorities.

Modern society with its technology offers many opportunities to give information, advice and support, needless of physical meetings. IT technology has made it possible to communicate and interact regardless of geographic distances. In Sweden, as well as in the rest of the EU, the value of social activities has been pointed out as important for a persons well being. It is a matter of justice that elderly people living isolated in the countryside also should be able to take part in social activities, using modern technology and service.

**ACTION** (Assisting Carers using Telematics Interventions to meet Older people's Needs) is a modern technology which is intended for providing service to elderly persons living in sparsely populated areas.

ACTION was developed at University College at Borås, and is as a support- and service system for family caregivers and elderly. Evaluations of projects involving ACTION have showed good results. So far ACTION has been used mostly in the south of Sweden. Local authorities in Härnösand have used ACTION while giving support to six individuals with early onset dementia and their families.

**ACTION - a program for information and education**, gives the user an opportunity to communicate and interact with other care givers as well as health- and nursing staff. Through a computer with high speed internet and a webcam, the user can reach a nursing center with experienced staff. The nursing staff can give "face to face" support, counselling, information and education, both in matters regarding nursing needs, caregiver support and matters regarding using the hardware needed for participating in ACTION.,

### **ACTION includes the following:**

- Programs for information and education. These are the actual ACTION-programs that the users and care givers have access to in their homes, and include information about: nursing, care giving, all day living, ideas on how caregivers as well as patients can manage to get through the day, help and support offered by local authorities, technical aids, and more.

- A computer with webcam and high speed Internet connection, called the ACTION-station. With the computer users can contact health- and nursing staff as well as other caregivers or elderly who are signed into the system. Internet, e-mail and an easy version of word processing is also included. The web camera is an important part as it makes it possible to see the person you are talking to.
- An ACTION center, where experienced nursing staff is available. The ACTION center can be one for each local authority, or several local authorities can join together in order to maintain one joint ACTION-center, that provides service to all users in the selected region. The staff gives advice and support and contribute to establishing and maintaining informal support networks among the users.
- Education and support to users and care givers regarding the use of the ACTION service is provided by the staff at the ACTION center.

**Purpose** with this project is to adapt the ACTION service to the needs that are specific for the sparsely populated areas in a Mid Sweden region, Vasternorrland. The project will be evaluated from different perspectives: how useful it is to the user, how it affects quality of life for the user, and the cost effectiveness of this method of caregiver support.

**Target group for using ACTION** in this project is family caregivers to elderly who live in sparsely populated areas in Vasternorrland. Also family members (such as children) who live in other parts of the country and have a long-distance relationship with the elderly, can take part. The service will be adapted and continuously adjusted to the needs of the elderly and their caregivers.

**The motive for this project is** to, based on ACTION, develop a service adapted to the specific circumstances of those living in the sparsely populated areas in Mid Sweden. The use of ACTION can help to:

- strengthen the elderly, caregivers and their families in their caring tasks
- increase social interaction and participation
- counteract isolation and feelings of being alone
- offer increased information about nursing
- offer increased information about services available through local authorities
- make it possible for caregivers to keep their own health, and avoid unnecessary strain
- help caregivers save strength and time by excluding the need for long and time consuming travel in order to keep contact with other persons.

### **Expectations**

- improved quality of daily life for family caregivers through increased security in their role as caregivers
- increased satisfaction in care giving through improved control over their own situation
- richer daily life with increased interaction with the person being cared for as well as other caregivers and nursing staff.
- increased participation in social interaction through access to Internet and other services offered by modern society

- reduced stress and improved personal health among family caregivers
- new and innovative ways to, within limited financial resources, support family caregivers and elderly living in sparsely populated areas
- give new possibilities for elderly persons to continue living in their own home

**During the time of the project** 30 users will get education on how to use ACTION. Continuous network meetings with participants from local authorities and users will take place. The project coordinator will be responsible for gathering elderly consultants from each local authority for information and education. Action Caring from Borås will execute the education to the persons responsible in each local authority. The center for family caregiver support in Harnosand will provide support, information and education.

**Results will be spread** through evaluation made by the R&D unit at the association of local authorities in Västernorrland County (LAVC). The project will be presented at the national Anhörigriksdag. Information will be available on internet home pages at LAVC, as well as each of the local authorities, Swedish Institute of Assistive Technology and national competence center for caregiver support in Kalmar.

**Evaluation of ACTION** has previously been made on several occasions by the researchers who developed the service. Evaluations have shown positive results and confirm that use of ACTION has positive effects that can contribute to:

- increased quality in daily living (increased autonomy, independence, skills and security in care giving, and decreased isolation)
- increased feeling of being part of society, through interaction with other users as well as other IT features offered by modern society
- new innovative ways to work for nursing- and caring professionals (contributing to higher sense of work satisfaction and in the long run it may have positive effects on recruiting staff to work with elderly)
- higher cost efficiency, an average saving of 96 000 SEK/user and year after reduction for costs for ACTION (through users and care givers feeling more competent and secure, as well as less isolated and less worried. This has decreased the need for home service and nursing home placement)

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