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# Melissa Wells, Associate Professor of Social Work, COLA travels to Sweden

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UNH Global

# Melissa Wells

## Associate Professor of Social Work - Sweden

I am very thankful for the UNH CIEGE Faculty International Development grant, which provided financial support for my summer travel to Sweden. It was a great opportunity to enhance a research collaboration, to add an international component to a child welfare elective that I am developing for spring 2017, and to pursue study abroad possibilities for our Social Work students.



Prof. Melissa Wells in the old town/Gamla Stan in Eksjö

My family and I first went to Småland, which is a province in southern Sweden. Småland is best known for Kosta Boda and other crystal and glassworks, Pippi Longstocking performances at Astrid Lindgrens Värld, and as the founding location of IKEA. We spent several days in Eksjö, which has an old town (Gamla Stan) with buildings dating back to as early as 1568.

Also in Småland, we hiked into Skurugata, which is a stone canyon near Eksjö. We went on a demanding hike to the summit of Skurugata for a picnic at one of the mountain top grilling sites. We learned at the top that there was also an alternative route designed to allow people using wheelchairs and baby strollers to travel to the summit.

While in Småland, I traveled by train to Linköping University (<http://www.liu.se/?l=en>) and pronounced "*Linshooping*") to meet with my colleague and co-author Gisela Priebe. Gisela was previously at UNH on a fellowship at the Crimes Against Children Research Center. Gisela has recently accepted a position at *Barnafrid* (*Child Peace* <http://www.barnafrid.se/>) (<http://www.barnafrid.se/>)), a new research and

Prof. Wells and family at the summit of Skurugata

training institute to support child welfare workers and child victims at Linköping University.

Professor Carl Göran Svedin, the director of Barnafrid, met with us in their new center. We discussed current and emerging research and activities related to protecting children in Sweden. These included training development for child welfare social workers, issues of juvenile sexual exploitation, and emerging issues of technology and child victimization. Later in the day, we enjoyed a delicious Swedish meal of shrimp salad with coffee at the Tropical House, a restaurant alongside the city's horticultural park.

The child welfare system in Sweden differs from that of the United States I will include content related to Swedish social welfare policies in an elective I am developing for spring 2017. It appears that at least some of the difference in terms of the nature of child abuse and neglect is due to laws against any form of corporal punishment, the overall low income inequality, and the general Swedish philosophy of *lagom*, which values consensus and equality. At the same time, many of the research and training topics at Barnafrid are timely and relevant here in the U.S. Dr. Svedin and his colleagues developed the Child Advocacy Centers within Sweden and



(l. to r.) Gisela Priebe, Melissa Wells, and Carl Göran Svedin at *Barnafrid*


have built evidence-based models of intervention with child victims. I am looking forward to future collaborations with these researchers at Barnafriid. It was a pleasure to spend time with them on this trip.


I also traveled to Stockholm, where I was able to combine one of my love for thrift shopping (*Loppis* or yard sales and antiquing are very popular activities in Sweden) with an insider view of Sweden's unique approach to supporting vulnerable members of communities.. The Stockholms Stadsmission (<http://www.stadsmissionen.se/>) is a large service agency that has been "reducing vulnerability" in the city for 160 years. Their agency includes thrift shops within the city that fund employment, training, camp opportunities, and other supports within Sweden. The agency has several thrift shop locations around Stockholm, and the Stadsmission gets some incredible donations, including entire homes and antiques. They auction off the very valuable items and then others are sold at one high end and several more traditional thrift shops. I traveled to Stockholm's Stadsmission shop with Hans Adelöw, an appraiser who works with a group of experts assessing donations for the agency. Hans owned his own antique store for 30 years and has been providing antique appraisals for the Stadsmission for the past decade. Spending time at *loppis* with Hans and learning more about the Stadsmission outreach to vulnerable populations was a highlight of my time in Sweden.


I look forward to continuing my collaborations with these wonderful Swedish colleagues, exploring possible experiences for our students, and including content on comparative Swedish child welfare in an elective I am developing this fall. Thank you so much for supporting this experience.

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