

SWEDISH  
COUNCIL  
of America



## A Summer of Textile Arts at Sjölund

By Gregg White, Executive Director, Swedish Council of America

“It is very important that these traditions live on in the next generations. As we sat in a circle, doing our textile work, we would talk a lot while working together. They go together, language and culture. It is so much easier to learn a language while doing.” So said Kristina Hagander, a Swedish textile arts specialist after spending three weeks instructing campers at Sjölund, the Swedish language camp at Concordia Language Villages (CLV) in Bemidji, Minnesota.



*Kristina holding a group needle-felting project that everyone in the whole village was invited to contribute to. Photo: Emily “Kajsa” Pyenson*

Kristina has spent her career working as a textile arts teacher in elementary schools across Österlen, the portion of southern Sweden made famous in the Wallander series of detective novels. With a background in pedagogy and textile arts, her focus is on incorporating her skills in weaving, embroidery, knitting, crochet and pattern writing into a learning curriculum for the students. “They have so much fun learning the traditional arts, that they forget that they are also learning a language,” she said.

“This is my first time in the United States,” she continued. “I had no idea the connection between Minnesota and Sweden remained so strong. This is why my experience at Sjölund so impressed me. It was like being in a big family, one where everyone wants to learn and preserve the Swedish heritage here in America.”

Kristina was at the camp as part of *A Summer of Textile Arts at Sjölund*, one of 20 special projects promoting Swedishness to receive financial support from Swedish Council of America (SCA). Other 2017 SCA Grant recipients include the Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery in Lindsborg, Kansas; the New Sweden Center in Wilmington, Delaware; SWEA International in Fort Lauderdale, Florida; and the American Association for Runic Studies, in Roseville,

Minnesota, to name just a few. A full list is on the SCA website.

Working with Kristina were experienced Sjölund staff members, Valorie Stavem Arrowsmith, Gretchen Jones and Lesley Darling. While she was a student at Gustavus Adolphus College in Saint Peter, Minnesota Lesley was also a 2015 SCA Humanities Scholar. She used her scholarship from SCA to research the Orsamål dialect in Dalarna, which is especially notable as Leslie was able to locate several old Swedish immigrants in Minnesota who still speak this very localized vernacular.

*Textile Arts* is the third special project at Sjölund funded by SCA that incorporates Swedish traditions in language instruction. In 2016, *A Summer of Music at Sjölund* brought two accomplished music teachers from Sweden to enhance the camp’s musical offerings as they used music as a cultural bridge to better understand Swedish language.

*A Summer of Dance at Sjölund* fostered Swedish-American cross-cultural exchange through a summer-long focus on dance as a cultural medium. This 2015 project brought two artists-in-residence from Sweden as they joined the CLV program staff in providing a variety of dance-oriented opportunities to the campers while they deepened their interaction with, and understanding of, Swedish language and culture.



*A hand-sewn and needle-felted bag, an example of the projects that Kristina worked on with villagers. Photo: Emily “Kajsa” Pyenson*

Since 1975, SCA has been providing grants to projects that either promote better understanding of Swedish heritage and culture in North America or build stronger ties between North America and Sweden. Learn more at [www.swedishcouncil.org](http://www.swedishcouncil.org).

**SCA** is Swedish America’s community foundation. Our mission is to promote knowledge and appreciation of Swedish heritage and culture in North American life and to strengthen contemporary cultural and educational ties between North America and Sweden. We achieve this by providing grants to organizations, scholarships to youth, recognition to leaders and communications to the community – all focused on furthering our mission. [www.swedishcouncil.org](http://www.swedishcouncil.org)