

# IN FOCUS

## **Mental Health among Young People**



**norden**

Nordic Centre for  
Welfare and Social Issues



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## IN FOCUS: MENTAL HEALTH AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

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# FOREWORD

**MORE AND MORE** young people in the Nordic region are saying that they are suffering from mental ill health issues, and we have young people who risk ending up in vulnerable situations on account of a range of factors. The growing level of mental ill health among young people is one of the greatest challenges facing public health in our Nordic societies.

This is why it is particularly pleasing to see that Nordic politicians have agreed to earmark resources for the Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues so that we can attempt to find solutions together.

As part of our project "Unga in i Norden – psykisk hälsa, arbete, utbildning" [Young People in the Nordic Region – mental health, work, education], we are looking at initiatives that could help prevent early retirement among young people aged 19 to 29, as well as considering initiatives for young people risking long-term exclusion due to the fact that they are not in employment or education.

There is currently major diagnostic focus when it comes to determining which young people will receive help with their mental health issues. But for young people who feel bad, experience anxiety and are not "ill enough" there are no easy inroads to getting help. We have to take young people seriously when they describe their self-perceived mental illhealth.

In this publication, we will be presenting Nordic organisations that we hope will provide inspiration and contribute to the greater Nordic synergy. We are working in a similar way in the Nordic region with the heterogeneous group of young people who risk ending up in vulnerable situations on account of a range of factors. But we are working and are sufficiently different to be inspired by things we can develop, and we are aiming to improve the things we are already doing.

Our welfare systems are overloaded in many respects, and so multisectoral cooperation is necessary if we are to be able to get this work done effectively. We are already providing excellent support to young people in the Nordic region, and the organisations described in this publication are proof of this. When we look at these organisations,

we can see that they all apply different forms of organisation, they are headed by different people, they use different forms of finance. But a strong youth perspective is something they all have in common! The young people involved are treated with respect, seen and listened to. And the other common theme is that no matter what form of organisation is applied, there is a culture of openness towards multisectoral cooperation – in other words, an unpretentious approach where the needs of young people are the controlling factor.

The organisation Headspace from Denmark clearly indicate that civil society can be a vital and supplementary stakeholder in the structured cooperation between government and municipality and make a difference for young people.

We hope you will be inspired by these organisations and the thoughts expressed in this publication. And who knows – maybe you could implement a suitable part in a specific context somewhere in the Nordic region.

**Ewa Persson Göransson**

**Director**

**Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues**



**Photo:** Fredrik Sjögren



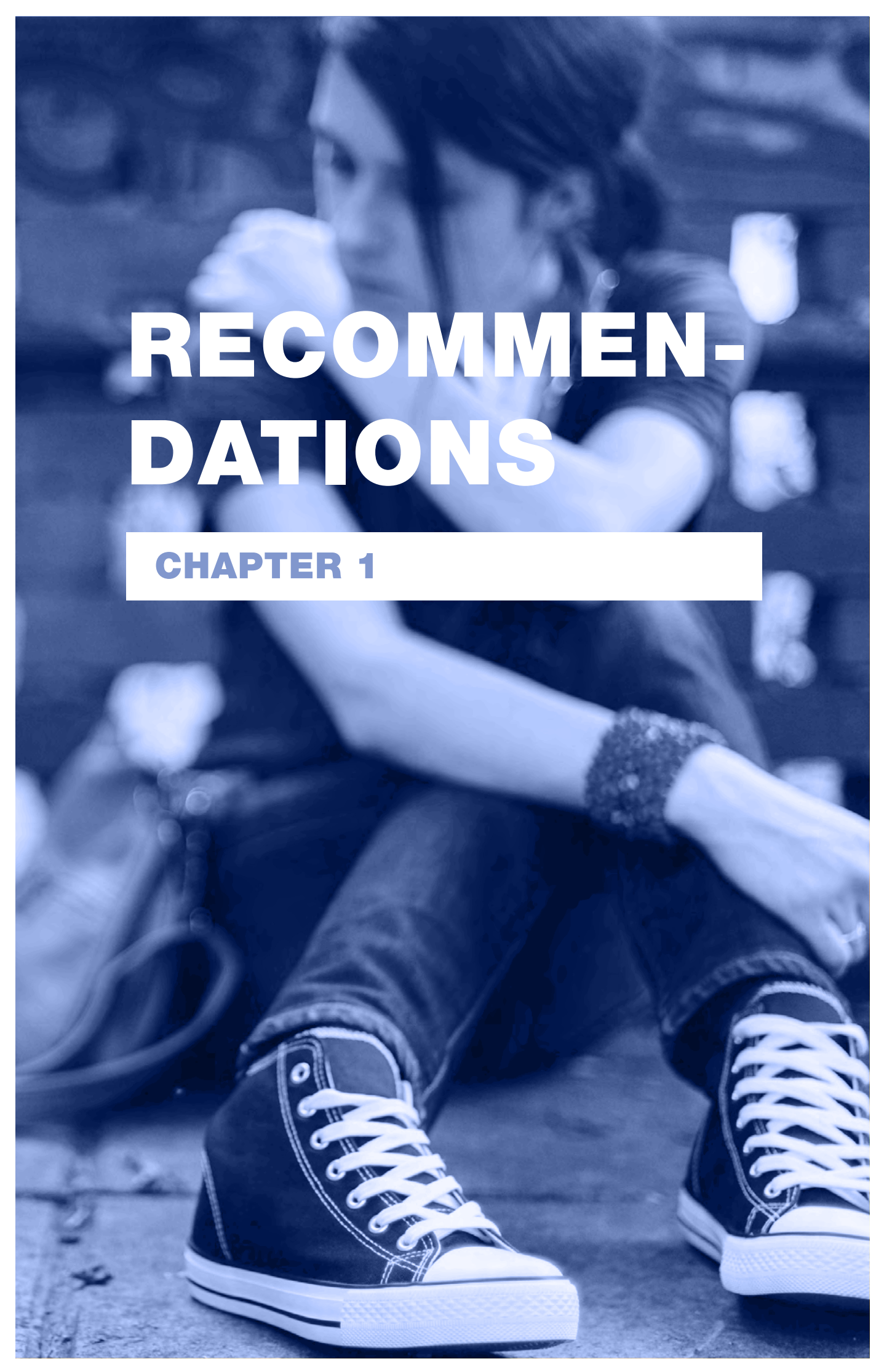
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*“The routines and the team spirit are the best things about being here. During the morning meal, we often chat with the supervisors about the kind of mood we’re in. The staff usually come over for a chat if they notice I’m feeling a bit down or something.”*

A person is sitting on the ground, their head buried in their hands in a gesture of despair or exhaustion. They are wearing dark jeans and black sneakers with white laces and soles. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a paved surface and some distant lights. The entire image has a blue color cast.

# RECOMMEN- DATIONS

## CHAPTER 1



## NORDIC CENTRE FOR WELFARE AND SOCIAL ISSUES RECOMMENDS

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**BOTH YOUNG PEOPLE** and adults are a very diverse group of people in need of varying degrees of support from the security systems we have in the Nordic region. All children and young people are an enormous resource, and we have never had as many educated and talented young people in the Nordic region as we have today. That said, more and more young people are saying that they are suffering from mental ill health, and we have young people who risk ending up in vulnerable situations on account of a range of factors. The growing level of mental ill health among young people is one of the greatest challenges facing public health in our Nordic societies. When working with this group it is important for us to have inherent flexibility and skills in our welfare sector so that we can make quick decisions on who needs what and provide the correct guidance. Some young people need more extensive action and long-term monitoring, while others need access to the right network or briefer, less resource-intensive action.

Nowadays, we know all too well that early action for children, young people and their families is worthwhile from a socio-economic point of view and helps to alleviate personal suffering. There are a range of success factors when working with children and young people who are risk of some form of exclusion, and we know what they are.

We currently have major diagnostic focus when it comes to determining which young people will receive help with their mental ill health, but for young people who feel bad, experience anxiety and are not “ill enough” there are no easy inroads to getting help. We have to take young people seriously when they describe their self-perceived mental ill health.

Our welfare systems are overloaded in many respects, and so cooperation is necessary if we are to be able to get this work done effectively. We are already providing excellent support to young people; we have NAV in Norway which is founded on cooperation, and we have the financial coordination of coordinating associations in Sweden, for example, but things are moving too slowly. We have to do more, and what we do has to be even better. And we have to do it now.

Our recommendations are based on the things we learned when visiting the selected organisations presented in this report, as well as other publications and research reports which we studied and produced as part of the Unga in i Norden [Young People in the Nordic Region] project.

We have chosen to divide our recommendations into two categories; structure/organisation and youth perspective.

## RECOMMENDATION: STRUCTURE/ORGANISATION

### **MULTISECTORAL COOPERATION, ABILITY AND KNOWLEDGE OF ONE ANOTHER'S RULES AND CULTURE**

National authorities, regions, county authorities, municipalities, county councils, the psychiatric service and civil society have different fields of responsibility in the Nordic countries, as well as the Faroe Islands, the Åland Islands and Greenland. Irrespective of structure, organisation and fields of responsibility, a collective multisectoral cooperation relating to young people in need of help and support is crucial. Cooperation is not easy in this context; we have to be familiar with one another's work, rules and culture. In this cooperation, it is important to know who bears overall responsibility for individual young people and who bears coordinated responsibility.

Flexibility is vital. The professions should be receptive and learn from young participants, and they should be willing to change course if needs arise which differ from the ones for which plans were laid.

Many of the young interviewees bear witness to the fact that welfare state bureaucracy can resemble an impenetrable jungle. In this context, it is crucial that the bearers of the complexity are our authorities and organisations, and not our young people.

### **EDUCATION AND WELFARE SECTOR**

We know that good, completed schooling is the strongest protection factor for all young people, but this is particularly the case for young people who risk ending up being excluded in some way.

Children and young people spend a large proportion of their childhood and adolescence in school, continuing until the age of 16 at least – or most commonly 18 in the Nordic region. Young people who are not in work or education and who suffer from mental ill health often cite negative experiences from their years at school. They experienced bullying or exclusion, felt that they did not fit in or did not receive the support of their teachers in order to learn all the things they needed to, and many left school early.

The heterogeneity of the youth group requires more education alternatives.

The health of students is very important to schools, but if teachers are to be able to teach to the best of their abilities schools should invest in multi-skilled staff where everyone can work together to create a school that promotes health.

Schools should maintain broad cooperation with the various support initiatives offered by the welfare sector and civil society, and they should be open to various forms of cooperation.

Besides knowledge criteria and grades, much of the work in schools should involve ensuring a health-promoting work environment for everyone.

Mental health could be introduced as a school subject.



## RECOMMENDATION: THE YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

**The young people interviewed cited the following factors as important as regards the support they receive, so our recommendations are:**

### **LISTEN TO YOUNG PEOPLE!**

Being listened to and treated with respect are so fundamental that many of us take these things for granted. However, this is not accepted as a matter of course by the young people interviewed. Everyday conversations characterised by respect for one another are an effective ingredient in these activities.

### **HELP US TO FIND A DIRECTION**

The majority of young people interviewed dream of being able to support themselves in the future. The majority of young people are possessed by the dream of having a job to go to in future. Everyone is good at something. We have to help young people to find their strengths and believe in their abilities.

### **HELP US TO SUCCEED**

The feeling of not being good enough can be devastating. Many young people taking part in the activities described here share a sense of not fitting in, of not being good enough. Time and time again it has been proven to them that they do not fit in – in education, in the workplace. After numerous failures, they are relieved to be part of a group where the demands on them are reasonable and where the people surrounding them wish them well.

### **WHAT ARE OUR RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS?**

Many young people indicate that the bureaucracy of the welfare state can be like an impenetrable jungle. Like having to “go hunting” for help. Many people in need of the services of the welfare state feel it to be nearly impossible to make their way through the thorny issue of complicated rules.

### **WE WANT TO BE PART OF A CONTEXT**

Loneliness is closely linked with mental ill-health, and having lived with anxiety or depression for a long time, for example, often means that social contact with family and friends is ravaged. Participation at these centres has frequently involved swapping isolation for a sense of social community. The individual acts of laughing with others, cooking and eating together or going for a walk are perhaps trivial phenomena, but collectively they are described as a kind of “kit” that brings meaning to life. It is also important to reinforce the social network of young people; if, indeed, this exists.

### **TREAT US WITH RESPECT AND GIVE US A SECURE FOUNDATION**

Interaction between young participants and professionals in particular is crucial. The climate prevailing among participants is also important. Trusting relationships, or at least contact characterised by respect are a necessary prerequisite for participation at the centre must be perceived as a positive, strengthening factor. Many vulnerable young people have had negative experiences with the security systems when it comes to the kinds of activities described here. Taking these experiences seriously is a central element in the creation of the important trust platform.

# FACTS

## CHAPTER 2

## THE ACTIVITIES, THE SUCCESS FACTOR

*Text: Sara Hultqvist*

**ALTHOUGH IT HAS** been pointed out over the past few years that the Nordic welfare model is perhaps not quite as unique as it is sometimes claimed to be and that the European countries have now come to resemble one another more extensively, there are still features in the Nordic countries which justify discussion of the Nordic model at this time, a little way into the 2000s. As regards features such as a high standard of living and small differences in income, there are a number of other countries which resemble the Nordic countries. The combination of a high standard of living, small differences in income and low levels in respect of poverty nonetheless characterise the Nordic region in comparison with the rest of the world (Valkonen & Vihriälä, 2014).

Behind the outcomes which have led to the Nordic model being regarded as a role model, the five countries share a view of how the state ought to deal with social risks and safeguard the security of its citizens (Nygård, 2013). As a result of this shared view, all the Nordic countries have developed extensive social security systems which are largely financed through tax on gainful employment. Hence one important political target has been to encourage as many citizens as possible to play an active part in the labour market. The ambition has been for women as well as men to work outside the

home. The theory refers to a dual-breadwinner model where household finances are based on dual incomes. Whether this model has unequivocally promoted gender equality between men and women has been discussed in social policy research (Borchorst & Siim, 2010, O'Connor, 2008), but the fact remains that the female employment level in the Nordic countries is one of the highest in the world (Nygård, 2013).

Furthermore, active labour market policy is one of the features often highlighted as being characteristic of the Nordic welfare model. With the work-first principle as a political principle, the Nordic countries have invested a great deal of effort in initiatives and programmes aiming to ensure that as many adults of working age as possible play an active part in the labour market. Political measures involved in active labour market policy include everything from funding for companies to help them take on new staff, via extension of care for children and the elderly so as to move women away from their traditional work in the home and into paid work, to day centres designed to make it easier for participating unemployed and ill people to find a job in the long term.

The last of the above examples of active labour market policy in the Nordic countries is the subject for discussion here. While unemployed



people have historically been the most common target group for political programmes with the work-first principle as a driving force, people regarded as unfit for work due to medically induced incapacity for work have also become a target group over the past few years (Nørup & Hultqvist, 2015). The consequence is that not only unemployed people, but also people who have been granted early retirement after having been assessed as having such extensive disabilities that they are unable to remain in gainful employment are now often involved in programmes where the aim is to equipped participants for paid work. The paradox is clear. On the one hand, the welfare state has deemed these people to be unfit for work. On the other hand, they are being referred to centres where the objective is to get them back to work.

This paradox is incorporated in the field of activity known as vocational rehabilitation, a field which also goes back a long way in the

Nordic countries. A form of work rehabilitation was introduced as early as the 1913 pension reform in Sweden. This reform provided an opportunity for people deemed permanently unfit for work to apply for a certain amount of care and training if they were considered capable of returning to work (Montan, 1988). Work rehabilitation – then as now – can be viewed as an expression of the Nordic welfare model’s aim to involve as much as possible of the workforce in paid work on the labour market while also guaranteeing that the important social needs of citizens are met (Lindqvist, 2001).

The Nordic cooperation concerning the element of policy regulating work rehabilitation goes back a long way, not only by virtue of its roots in active labour market policy, but also as part of disability policy. Back in 1953, an agreement was concluded in Reykjavik with regard to benefits for ”invalids” when staying in another Nordic country, and there has been organ-

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

We have carefully selected organisations that work with young people who suffer from mental ill health issues and risk ending up in vulnerable situations and early retirement. The Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues has worked with a Nordic team of experts who have helped us with quality assurance of our selection. Important criteria included in our selection are:

- Evaluated
- Socially inclusive
- Innovative
- Working with equal opportunities
- Good at working in partnership with other stakeholders in the welfare sector
- Producing good results related to their expressed targets (which may include quality of life, transition to work experience/work, studies, mental and physical health)

When we visited the organisations, we interviewed a responsible manager or chief and a young man and a young woman receiving help. We used a semi-structured interview template.

PhD Sara Hultqvist analysed interviews from all selected organisations in the Nordic region and was tasked with focusing on the youth perspective; in other words, what the young people cite as being important and good about the support they receive.

ised cooperation between individual disability organisations since late 19th century (Montan, 1988).

Of all the people regarded by the Nordic welfare states as having a medically induced incapacity for work which is so extensive and permanent that it provides entitlement to an income via a social insurance scheme, the percentage of people suffering from mental ill-health is increasing. This phenomenon is most apparent among people aged 19 to 29. The majority of all young people who take early retirement have a psychiatric diagnosis on their doctors' certificates which forms the basis for compensation (Olsen & Tägtström, 2013).

All examples of programmes on the boundary between social policy and labour market policy are activities regarded here. These are, to varying extents, the fruits of the work-first principle, but they have also arisen from a shared Nordic view that the state bears major responsibility for the wellbeing of the members of its society. The next section will present five of the keys to success described as necessary tools for the selected organisations to regard themselves as successful examples. "Successful" is defined in this regard from a user perspective, and the stories of participants – rather than printed descriptions from the organisations – provide empirical data.

### **BEING RESPECTED**

Being listened to and treated with respect are so fundamental that many of us take these things for granted. However, this is not accepted as a matter of course by the young people interviewed. They have experience of the reverse – having been neglected or insulted. For the young people interviewed, this issue of being respected as a human being is one of the positive elements emphasised as an important factor when they describe the activities they are now taking part in and enjoying.

Everyday conversations characterised by respect for one another are a seemingly trivial but effective ingredient in these activities. It is all a

matter of allowing everyone taking part in the conversation to have their say without classifying the things being said as right or wrong, but first and foremost showing interest and genuine care. Further, it involves giving people a sense of being seen and respected for the person they are. At Jobbskolen in Kristiansand, emphasis is placed on the everyday lives of the young people, and it has been found that many of the participants felt alone and were without a secure foundation in the home even if they were surrounded by family. At Jobbskolen, participants must feel at home – this is a basic prerequisite.

Another aspect when it comes to conveying a sense of security involves adapting structures for young people instead of attempting to force young people to adapt to existing structures. At SVEPS in Helsinki, the staff cite the option of customising jobs to suit the wishes and abilities of young people as a success factor. If the structures are flexible, they can be formulated so that each and every individual can utilise their own unique potential. If the structures are rigid, on the other hand, young people have to comply in order to fit in.

Many young people suffering from mental ill-health share the experience of having their life situations assessed and named in order to receive the right support and assistance. When meeting with a variety of people in authority, they have ended up being categorised on the basis of medical and bureaucratic terms. In many of the activities studied here, there is a specific principle of dealing with each individual on their own terms without translating the young people's own descriptions into existing welfare state categories such as "unemployed", "unemployable" or "incapable of work".

### **GIVING LIFE A DIRECTION**

The majority of young people interviewed dream of being able to support themselves in the future by working. This is something they refer to time after time. A job or a place on a course leading to a job hovers like a beacon over the activities. Irrespective of the organisational

targets of the centres, which frequently involve encouraging the majority of participants to continue their studies or find a job, the majority of young people are possessed by the dream of having a job to go to in future. At the same time, internships at a place of work are options available at several of the centres. A number of the people interviewed feel that going to a place of work is significant, even if the tasks they do are not the same as the tasks done by the staff or the payment they receive for the work they do is lower.

Although paid work acts as a kind of ideal and target for the participants, staff at some of the centres point out that it is not possible to focus on the target of paid work to the exclusion of all else. Much of their work involves attempting to give the young people a realistic view of the labour market. Excessive emphasis on getting the right education or sharpening up a CV can reinforce a negative self-image when the individual becomes aware that a huge amount of personal effort is not enough to get a job. Giving people time is also important. Healing processes take time, and for many people who suffer from mental ill-health peace and quiet are a must, allowing them to recover. Stress can have direct adverse consequences. Financial considerations are another aspect. One of the young people interviewed described how taking part in Lyra "created scope in my life" in that when charting and planning her future, she was made aware that she could finance her studies at a college via the Social Insurance Office. These college studies in turn made it possible for her to start studying at university, and at the time of the interview she was just about to start her second year studying social work.

According to some of the staff interviewed, concentrating on the wellbeing of young people and helping them to find an everyday structure that works is more effective than presenting big numbers in the annual report showing the number of young people who have found jobs. In other words, it is all a matter of helping young people to get back on track: not a track marked out by

society, but a track defined by the young person in question.

### **BEING GOOD ENOUGH**

The feeling of not being good enough can be devastating. Many young people taking part in the activities described here share a sense of not fitting in, of not being good enough. Time and time again it has been proven to them that they do not fit in – in education, in the workplace. After numerous failures, they are relieved to be part of a group where the demands on them are reasonable and where the people surrounding them wish them well. One of the young people interviewed reckons that the staff at Lyra are like an arm you can take hold of, "someone who can help you cross the bridge". A genuine interest in individuals and an instinctive feel for what each individual participant is capable of are vital success factors in the professional approach adopted by the staff towards the participants.

Many of the people interviewed also highlight the abilities of staff to emphasise the merits of each individual rather than pointing out all their flaws. A number of Nordic studies confirm the fact that feelings such as shame and humiliation are common among citizens who have consulted the welfare state's aid organisation in the hope of receiving support (Julkunen, 1992, Solheim, 2001, Hollertz, 2010). Encounters with social services and the care sector have often been problem-oriented, while the emphasis at these centres is placed on resources and skills. One of the participants describes her time at Lyra as a treasure hunt, constantly finding new skills and abilities within herself with the guidance of the staff. "Wow, did I do that?". The staff bear witness to the fact that time after time, they have seen young people grow as human beings while they have remained with the centre. Regaining their faith in themselves gives them a brighter future. The young people learn to build on their strengths instead of constantly perceiving themselves to be hindered by their weaknesses.

## GETTING HELP WITH DEFENDING THEIR RIGHTS

Many of the young people interviewed indicate that the bureaucracy of the welfare state can be like an impenetrable jungle. One of the young people interviewed describes how he has to "go hunting" for help. Earlier research (Hollertz, 2010, Hultqvist, 2014) reinforces the view that many people in need of the services of the welfare state feel it to be nearly impossible to make their way through the thorny issue of complicated rules. And when they finally find the right door, there are no guarantees that it will be open to them. Long waiting lists can discourage anyone, but for anyone who is young and suffering from anxiety or depression it is important for help to be available when they are motivated to seek it.

Finland has outreach youth work, the purpose of which is to make it easier for young people not in employment or education to get the right support. At its core, outreach youth work involves ensuring that all young people have access to secure, trusting contact with adults. In other Nordic countries, the knowledge that welfare bureaucracy can be difficult for citizens to work their way through has provided

an incentive for the development of 'one-door solutions' for relevant authorities. The principle behind these is that instead of having to maintain contact with a number of authorities such as the Social Insurance Office, the Employment Service, the municipality and the psychiatric services, citizens instead maintain contact with a person in authority who represents the elements of welfare bureaucracy needed by the individual citizen. Instead of the citizen having to stay up to date with a plethora of rules, this person's needs are charted and responsibility for being aware of the rules is placed with an officer. Arranging personal representatives is another way of tackling the problem of complex bureaucracy and making it easier for citizens to defend their rights. This personal representative works on behalf of the individual and acts as a point of contact between the citizen and the authorities. In other words, they act as a kind of advisor for people suffering from mental ill-health.

Young people turn up at Sherpa in Copenhagen after having attempted in vain to get help elsewhere within the welfare state. The psychiatric services have told them that they are not ill enough, and they have then queued for primary care without receiving adequate support. "These







young people have done what they were told to do and waited nicely in turn. One day, they won't be able to wait any more and they'll just collapse," explains a member of the staff team. Collectively, the staff at Sherpa have a broad range of skills, including experience of social services and psychiatric services. As a team, they are very familiar with how the various welfare state organisations work and are able to provide the young people with guidance.

**EXPERIENCING A SENSE OF SOLIDARITY**

Humans are social creatures. Feeling a sense of community with other people is a human need. A number of the young people interviewed describe how important being part of the gang, feeling a sense of solidarity has been to them. Loneliness is closely linked with mental ill-health, and having lived with anxiety or depression for a long time, for example, often means that social contact with family and friends is ravaged. Participation at these centres has frequently involved swapping isolation for a sense of social community. The individual acts of laughing with others, cooking and eating together or going for a walk are perhaps trivial

phenomena, but collectively they are described as a kind of "kit" that brings meaning to life.

At Vamos in Helsinki, a number of the young people interviewed reckon that the team spirit that develops is one of the best things about being part of the centre. Meeting up with other people who are in the same boat eases the feeling of being alone with their worries. "Vamos has given me support, and above all I've received the support of my colleagues", says one of the participants.

Research has also shown that social support under certain conditions can contribute to recovery and help the individual to develop resistance to stress factors (Lindqvist, 2001). Although social support is difficult to define, the testimonies of the young people are in line with the findings of studies into what factors promote and hinder rehabilitation. Feeling appreciated, receiving help to overcome problems and having physical contact with others appear to facilitate recovery processes.

Community with others is important to individuals, therefore, but from a social standpoint

it is also important for people to feel a sense of solidarity with one another. The institutions that form our society will crack without a certain degree of interpersonal trust and a sense of belonging. Social isolation poses a risk to individuals, but also to society as a whole. In other words, "exclusion" is a threat to democracy as well as human wellbeing.

### **THE TRUST PLATFORM AND FINANCIAL SECURITY**

When we borrow the viewpoints of the young people and assess the organisations visited from their perspectives, the interaction between young participant and professional in particular appears to be crucial. The climate prevailing among participants also seems to be important. Trusting relationships, or at least contact characterised by respect as a necessary prerequisite for participation at the centre must be perceived as a positive, strengthening factor. For Norwegian sociologist Liv Johanne Solheim, this involves a trust platform (Solheim, 2009). Many of the participants have had negative experiences with the security systems when it comes to the kinds of activities referred to here. Previous encounters with other parts of the welfare state have made the young people mistrustful of the aid organisation. Many of the young people view welfare state representatives as opponents on account of their experiences of not being believed or even listened to. Taking these experiences seriously is a central element in the creation of the important trust platform. Acknowledging the negative experiences of young people will allow trust to be built back up. Using the trust platform as a secure foundation, it is possible to move on and recover from long-term mental ill-health and develop skills that are in demand on the labour market.

The trust platform is the sum of the success factors specified most clearly by the young people. However, the trust platform cannot be shaped unless a central framework condition is in place. That framework condition is financial security. To borrow an expression from German playwright Bertolt Brecht's "Threepenny Opera":

first we eat, then comes morality. In other words, basic needs – such as food for the day and a roof over our heads – must be secured before people can absorb new knowledge and develop new abilities. Research confirms that there is a link between mental ill-health and relative poverty (Read, 2010). We do not know what precise form this link takes, but the results of an extensive Swedish study carried out recently show that an improvement in financial conditions promotes recovery among people with mental ill-health who have lived under poor financial conditions (Topor et al., 2015).

Applied to the young adults participating at the centres examined, there must be a financial security system which avoids them having to worry about having no money to buy food or pay their rent. They must be able to rely on the welfare state guaranteeing them a secure income when they have no pay from work.

To summarise, financial security for young people and the existence of a trust platform from which young people can take inspiration are basic criteria which allow for work rehabilitation at the organisations examined here to be regarded as successful examples.

# FROM REALITY

## CHAPTER 3

## NORWAY | "EVERYONE SHOULD HAVE HAD A YOUTH OFFICE"

*Text and photo: Bente Haarstad*

**"I WOULD NEVER** have got this far on my own. I am now ready for working life", says Rebecca Straume. She is one of the approximately 90 youths who have been followed up by the youth office in Sund outside Bergen since 2010. None of them wanted to become dependant on social services.

Rebecca contacted NAV, Norway's agency for labour, social security and social services, when she dropped out of upper secondary education after just six months. She knew nothing other than having to go there to sign on.

### **EXPECTED DAILY CASH BENEFITS**

She expected to remain in receipt of daily cash benefits, but was quickly put in contact with the youth office in the municipality. They arranged an experience placement for her in a daycare nursery. After a period of three years and close follow up, she is ready to take a craft certificate and for working life.

– "I am a very shy person, and would not have tried a day nursery on my own, since it is necessary to have contact with parents and many people. I was very worried about starting, but found it was surprisingly good. All that remains now is the craft certificate, and then I become a child and youth worker. Who would have believed that, I was very discouraged when I dropped out of school", says the 22 year old.

### **LOTS OF DEFECTION IN NORWAY**

Rebecca Straume is among the many Norwegian young people who drop out of upper secondary education. A report published in 2014, based on the defection statistics from 2012, shows that Norway is among the countries with the lowest completion of upper secondary education. 72 percent complete and pass their exams in standard time plus two years in Norway, whilst the average in the OECD is 87 percent. The defection is especially large in vocational subjects, where 60 percent of Norwegian pupils complete within two years after standard time, compared with 79 percent in the OECD.

### **FROM DRESS-MAKING TO CHILDREN**

Dress-making was the vocational subject Rebecca started, and within six months she realised this was not for her. Dress-making was OK as a hobby, but she realised this was not a vocation for her and she was not at all content. Suddenly she found herself without school, frustrated and not knowing what to do with her life. Given early and close follow-up, it was possible to get back on course, and Rebecca cannot stress enough the good follow-up she has received.

– "The youth office has assisted me in many ways. From sitting with homework, to finding the information you need to write a CV and work applications, as I have been doing now. I was able to contact them about all sorts of



things, whatever the time, but as time went on we made appointments for meetings, because then you can make more time available. I feel I have grown during this process,” says Rebecca, some days in advance of her subject examination in the vocation of child and youth worker.

#### **ANDREAS WANTED TO BECOME A CARPENTER**

The frustration was also great when Andreas Vorland dropped out, but for him it was illness and not a difficult choice of vocation that meant that he could not continue. He had started a vocational course that had been in his dreams since he was a little boy, and it was very difficult to see his dream go down the drain. This was what he felt. At this point in time he had completed the actual school subjects, but had only completed six months of his practice place as a carpenter.

– “I loved building things, doing things where you can see that you are achieving something. I wanted to become a carpenter, something I had dreamed about as long as I can remember. It was very frustrating having to give up school and carpentry. Yes, it was very simply a great stress factor”.

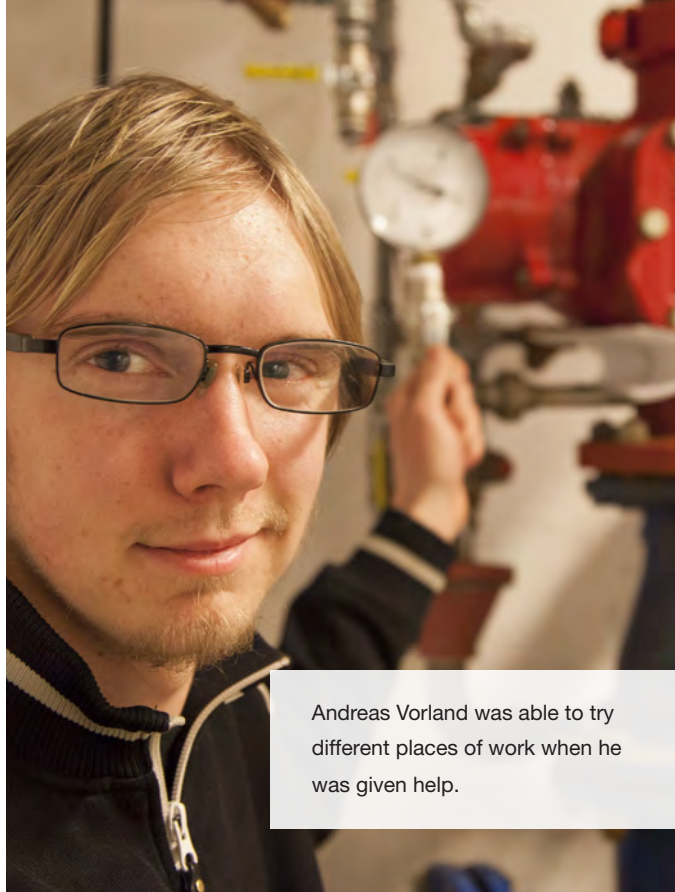
#### **OVERWHELMING HOPELESSNESS**

The hopelessness was great, almost overwhelming, when Andreas contacted NAV. He was fairly quickly referred to the youth office. The initiative was completely new when Andreas was referred; he had never heard of it, and was in reality frustrated at being referred on.

– “Sund is a small place, and it was not far to go. The youth office is in fact located in the basement of the NAV building, but I must confess that I was a bit sceptical. After having to leave school, I got a little troubled about speaking to



The manager Annette Henden together with her staff Tone Stikholmen, a nurse (left), and NAV adviser and home monitor Lene Kvigne Lerøy.



Andreas Vorland was able to try different places of work when he was given help.

people. My dreams were crushed, and I pulled away from everything and everybody. This is why I was sceptical about everything new and unknown”.

#### **FROM FRUSTRATION TO MASTERING**

Andreas took the chance, went to the youth office, and he has never had cause to regret this action. Three to four years later, he is now employed in a temporary position as a caretaker in the municipality. He has completed the education of his dreams, and is now a qualified carpenter. And he is planning to take further qualifications in the brand new subject of Building Management. His motivation is at an all-time high, and he is aiming even higher than his original dream.

– “Building Management is the actual subject for caretakers, because we are the ones running the buildings in, for example, the municipalities. The new subject sounds good and I have therefore applied. It is good to have more competence, and I know what I am going to use it for. I want permanent employment, preferably in Sund. I have found my niche, and this is where I belong.”

Andreas says he was completely without any driving force or determination when he first visited the youth office, and that he would not have managed to start anything on his own.

– “I don’t know where I would have ended up if it was not for the youth office. It has meant a lot to me. Not only have I completed my education and got into working life. I have also become much more self confident. The office has not just contributed with practical issues, but also mental issues. I feel a lot better about myself now.”

#### **FEEL THAT MANY YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SUFFERING**

Rebecca and Andreas agree about one thing, and this is that all young people should have an initiative like the youth office to contact if they are stuck and don’t know what to do or become in life.

– “It is very useful to spend time with someone when you have to figure things out,” says Andreas.

– “Everyone should have a youth office, because many young people are suffering; they are stuck and don’t know what they want or how to do it. I was helped to figure it out, and everyone else who is stuck should also get this help,” says Rebecca.

The youth office in Sund was started as a project by the child welfare authority in the municipality during the autumn of 2010. Mostly in order to coordinate efforts against drop-out from school, but also to avoid the development of behavioural difficulties and drink and drug problems. Today there is one person in full employment as well as two project staff at the office. The office has 350-400 visitors per year, and this far approximately 90 young people have received close follow-up. Approximately 45 of these in the spring of 2015. Much the same as the rest of the country, three out of four are boys.

## **EVEN 13 YEAR-OLDS**

The youth office is not just for those who experience problems, and not just for youths, explains its management. Sund is a small municipality with around 6,700 inhabitants, and anyone who wants to can contact the office. The target group is children and young people between 15-24 years of age, but the manager Annette Henden says that they often become aware of even younger children.

– “We are working with children down to the age of 12-13, because we can see that the ones we have been in contact with have had long term problems before coming to us. Absence is the most important early warning sign for what at a later stage becomes a lack of school motivation, conflicts at school, anxiety about attending school or problems at the point of entering upper secondary education.”

### **FACTS ABOUT THE YOUTH SOCIAL SERVICES ORGANISATION IN SUND**

#### **Responsible for the organisation?**

The municipal authority is responsible for the initiative.

#### **Cooperating/collaborating organisations?**

NAV is represented within the Youth Social Services Organisation through a part-time position (20% FTE). NAV is a collaborative initiative between the Norwegian State and the municipal authority. The organisation reports directly to the Child Welfare Service, which in turn belongs under the Municipal Executive, Children and Young People.

#### **Target group?**

The target group consists of young people aged between 14 and 24 who are at risk of being unable to complete an education, who are in danger of developing psychological disorders and/or drug/alcohol abuse problems. Young people who have been granted a disability pension are not included in our target group.

#### **Who finances the organisation?**

The municipal authority finances the organisation and coordinates the position within the organisation. Around 20% of the coordinator position has been funded by the Directorate of Health.

One position in the office, LOS position. Is covered by funding from the Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs.

#### **Professional profiles of the staff?**

The coordinator within the organisation is a qualified child welfare officer with further education in psychosocial work with children and young people.

The LOS in the organisation is a qualified nurse with further education in psychiatry. The others who are affiliated to the organisation are a teacher with training as an advisor, a hairdresser who has pedagogics training and has also started training as an advisor, a social worker and a cultural advisor.





Rebecca Straume dropped out of upper secondary education when she understood that dressmaking was not something she wanted to work with. The experience put her at a loss, but thanks to the youth office she got onto a new track and is today a fully qualified child and youth worker.

The youth office collaborates with a variety of agencies, and the three employees have between them a diversity of competence. Henden is a child welfare officer with further education in psychosocial work. Of her staff, one is a social worker with further education as a residential monitor, and the other a nurse with further education in psychiatry. Among other things, they use the “pilot” method. This means that they accompany the young person to where they are going, whether to the doctor or to work.

#### **COLLECT YOUNG PEOPLE WHO DO NOT TURN UP**

–“What works it to meet the young people where they are. The youth office has no criteria for admission, as many other services have. This makes us into a low threshold offer that is easy to contact. It also gives us the opportunity to tailor the follow-up to each person. We often do this in collaboration with other services.”

– “We try to see everything from one standpoint and follow up the ones who need it very closely. So closely that if they do not turn up for school one day, we go and collect them. This produces results”, says Annette Henden.

One week has passed, and we make contact with Rebecca. She is very happy that the vocational examination is over.

– “I have completed the craft certificate and got a mark of very good in the test,” says the 22 year old, who has her future mapped out. What she wants is permanent employment in the field of her education.



## NORWAY | THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY

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*Text and photo: Bente Haarstad*

Anders Grasaas from the Job School is on his way to a company on the outskirts of Kristiansand. Two of the pupils are there for their work experience placement, that is to say that one of them has recently become a permanent employee after a few months on trial, whilst the other one has only been there for a week. Grasaas' work is to secure contracts and work experience placements in industry, and to follow-up on the youngsters.

– **“THE FOUNDATION IS** laid at the Job School. We cannot help anyone to get a job until they are ready for it. It must be made clear in advance that they are able to get to work on time and actually be awake. It is does not help to be a time waster at work, that is how to be shown the door.”

Anders Grasaas sounds strict, but it is not necessary discipline it is all about, as both Ivar and Nikolai light up with pleasure when they spot him. They probably feel that someone who wishes them well is coming.

– “It was very good to be offered a job here, since I have used up my three-year right to schooling, and because I had been trying for a few months to get a job by myself. I took what possibilities were open, like shop work and courier driver, but it never turned into anything proper,” says Nikolai.

### **HAPPY WITH WORK EXPERIENCE**

The 20 year-old was originally dreaming about becoming an electrician, but the dream has become a bit pale, and he is now very happy after a time at the Job School and now in work experience. Oil and Process Services is a group encompassing both a mechanical workshop and

a production company for composite, or glass fibre as it is also called. Both the youngsters are working in this last department. Nikolai is convinced that the preparation for working life has been useful.

– “The Job School showed me step by step how things need to be done, from how to be interviewed, to turning up even when you lack the motivation. They are very clever, and I no longer have problems with motivation. I am extremely content, and in addition I have a role model here”, says Nikolai and nods to his work mate Ivar.

Like Nikolai, Ivar alternated between attending school and attempts at getting a job without any success. He tried by himself, and he tried by going through NAV, but there was no end result until he was given a place at the Job School, Ivar explains.

– “NAV just add you to a pile of papers. It is an eternity mill, where nothing comes out”, says Ivar.

– “What makes the difference is that they have time for you at the Job School. Lots of time if needed,” Anders Grasaas quickly adds.



Ann-Carina could not get into working life because of illness, and it was not successful when she made an attempt with assistance from NAV. It was only when she started at the Job School that the plans became a reality.

### FINALLY A JOB

Ivar got a foot in the door, but after a few months there were redundancies. The oil industry is performing badly, something that is also noticed in the supply industry. But again he was lucky and was able to transfer to the mechanical department for production of composite. This is where he is today, with new permanent employment.

– “This is wonderful. Permanent employment has been the goal all along, but very difficult to manage on your own. I tried, probably a hundred times to complete the schooling, but it did not work,” says the 23 year-old, who like many others suffers with reading and writing difficulties.

– “What is it like to get to work, you probably have an early start as you work in industry?”

– “We start work at seven o’clock. I arrive about half past six and it’s not a problem,” says Ivar.

– “It is just a question of getting to bed early.

A wonderful thing happened when I started to work, I also became tired early in the evening. It is not a problem at all”, adds Nikolai.

Ivar and Nikolai are lucky. In future, there will be even fewer possibilities of getting a job without formal competence. Even cleaners require a trade certificate today, and there is competition to be tested in working life. In many places hundreds are queuing for one job.

### MORE DIFFICULT WORKING LIFE

It is not just the educational requirements that are higher, but there is also competition for jobs. “Several thousand Swedish youths have come to Norway to work,” says Perry Helmundse, Coordinator at the Job School.

– “There are many Swedish people working at Ikea in this area, and this is also the situation in other industries. Many of the Swedish youths are more determined. They are possibly more desperate due to a difficult job market at



home. They often have better qualifications. In these circumstances, a lazy attitude is useless. You don't get far with a half finished vocational education and low marks for attendance. This is how brutal the world has become."

In the meantime, Anders Grasaas has arrived at yet another company in the centre of Kristiansand. This is where Ann-Carina Rønnaases has her work experience placement, following preparation at the Job School. The 24 year-old has for several years been dependent on support from NAV due to illness, and was also assisted by NAV to try her hand in working life. She is of the opinion this did not work.

**SHE WAS TOO ILL TO SUCCEED**

– "NAV were just focusing on me getting to work as fast as possible, but I was off sick so often that it did not work out. I have now taken some subjects at the Job School and completed my upper secondary education, and I am happy at my shop work and hope for permanent employment. I am unable to work full time because I still have periods when I am not well. This is now being taken into account."

Ann-Carina was a bit sceptical about the Job School at the start, and had the impression that

it had what she called a rather "heavy" environment. After a few months, the impression is completely different.

– "There are people from different backgrounds at the Job School, but the most important thing is to be taken seriously. As time went on I felt I was being heard with regard to my wishes and needs. I was very happy there, and I am very happy in this job. That is quite a new experience for me," says Ann-Carina.

The Job School exists for those who for various reasons have ended up outside school or work, and the school is concentrating its efforts in three focus areas. One is to increase competence and preparation for working life. Another area is to focus on school subjects. The third focus area is possibly more unexpected. The Job School is also concentrating on the daily life of the pupils.

**CONCENTRATING ON SOCIALISING**

– "Some young people grow up alone, even when there are other people in the house. Many feel lonely, or need to be socialised for other reasons. We all have our lunch together at the school and in general we put great store by togetherness," says Helmundsen.



*“What makes the difference is that they have time for you at the Job School. Lots of time if needed.”*

This last point becomes even more obvious when an earlier pupil pops in to show off the uniform she has been issued with in her new job as a security guard. Hugs are exchanged by everyone and the happiest face is the one who is just visiting.

– “Some of our pupils have not had the follow-up they should have had at home, so we become their mums, dads, uncles and grandmas. The complete family that they have been lacking, or not been getting help from,” adds Anders Grasaas. “We are carers. Youngsters need to be seen and have good experiences, but we also give them the push they need. For some of them a little push is all they need. Others must be lifted from where they have sunk to.”

### **MIXED COMPETENCE**

The employees at the Job School have differing professional expertise, such special educator and preschool teacher with special competence in behavioural problems and socio-emotional problems. Human characteristics and experience also count for a lot.

– “One of the most important characteristics Anders has is for example that he is compassionate, not that he has 40 marks for team work or the like”, says Helmundsen about Anders Grasaas. His colleague was managing shops for more than 30 years before he was employed by the Job School; he worked in close contact with young persons in recruitment positions.

It can be difficult to get young people back onto the right course, and everything does not always go smoothly at the Job School either. Quite the opposite, sometimes it can be both painful and problematic. One employee has received death threats, and one pupil had to leave the country. And not least, they have experience of youngsters who have had very difficult home lives, the

young people having had to become mum, dad and social services for their own parents.

– “They arrive at this place with the belief that they don’t know anything, since they have no formal competence. Sometimes it rips deep into the soul. It is really a wonder that some youngsters are still in one piece.”

– “The Job School is in a way a normal NAV initiative, but multiplied ten times with effort and resources,” says Svein Marcussen, head of the youth department at NAV Kristiansand, under which the Job School is placed. The Job School was established as a project during the spring of 2013, and he too is excited about how it will be when the project eventually becomes permanent. This is what all the people involved are hoping for, including the person responsible at NAV.

– “The Job School is there for those who “there is nothing the matter with”, but who have fallen into the gaps. We have poured in resources, and the figures show that the Job School is successful. It will be a challenge to turn this project into normal operations, as the same funds that are helping 100 persons at the Job School can be used to help 800 normal NAV users, or 350 persons with reduced working capacity. The aim is to achieve a permanent option, because the Job School is a very good initiative,” says Marcussen.

– “Besides, I believe there are huge socio-economic gains,” adds Helmundsen. “All you need to do is to save one or two from missing out on working life completely, and this will enable us to finance the whole of the Job School. The challenge is to make the politicians and others understand how important this is.”





Ivar has finally found a job that he feels is right for him. He is happy after nearly a year at OPS Composite Solution AS, a production company and mechanical workshop located in Kristiansand. He was given a permanent position nine months after starting.

### FACTS ABOUT JOBBSKOLEN (JOB SCHOOL)

**Responsible for the organisation?**

A collaborative project:  
NAV Kristiansand/Vest Agder County Council/Kristiansand Municipality

**Cooperating/collaborating organisations?**

See above.

**Target group?**

Vulnerable adolescents aged 16-25 who are at risk of falling out or who have fallen out of upper secondary education, minority adolescents, adolescents who are in the process of developing criminal behaviour, trying drugs and/or alcohol and young recipients of social assistance.

**Who finances the organisation?**

The Labour and Welfare Directorate throughout the entire project period.

**Professional profiles of the staff?**

Three full-time employees from NAV Kristiansand's Youth Department. Two are qualified special educators and one is a trade and industry coordinator.

## DENMARK | A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH

**Text:** Iben Nørup **Photo:** Camilla Falkenberg

**“We are called Sherpa for a reason. We don’t walk the path – or chose the path - for anybody, but we can make the walk easier. And we are pretty good map readers. What we can do is to light the roads or little paths, and also points to the ones you tend to overlook. And we can make the choices that you make and the possibilities you encounter along the way more visible for you. That’s what we can do.”** Lene, Mentor.

**WHEN ONE ENTERS** the premises of Team Sherpa in Copenhagen it doesn’t look like your stereotype image of a place that offers help, facilitates motivation, activation and such to vulnerable young adults. If you didn’t know any better, you would think you had just entered a private company working perhaps with some sort of creative type business. The rooms are light and airy; and the atmosphere is warm and welcoming, yet professional.

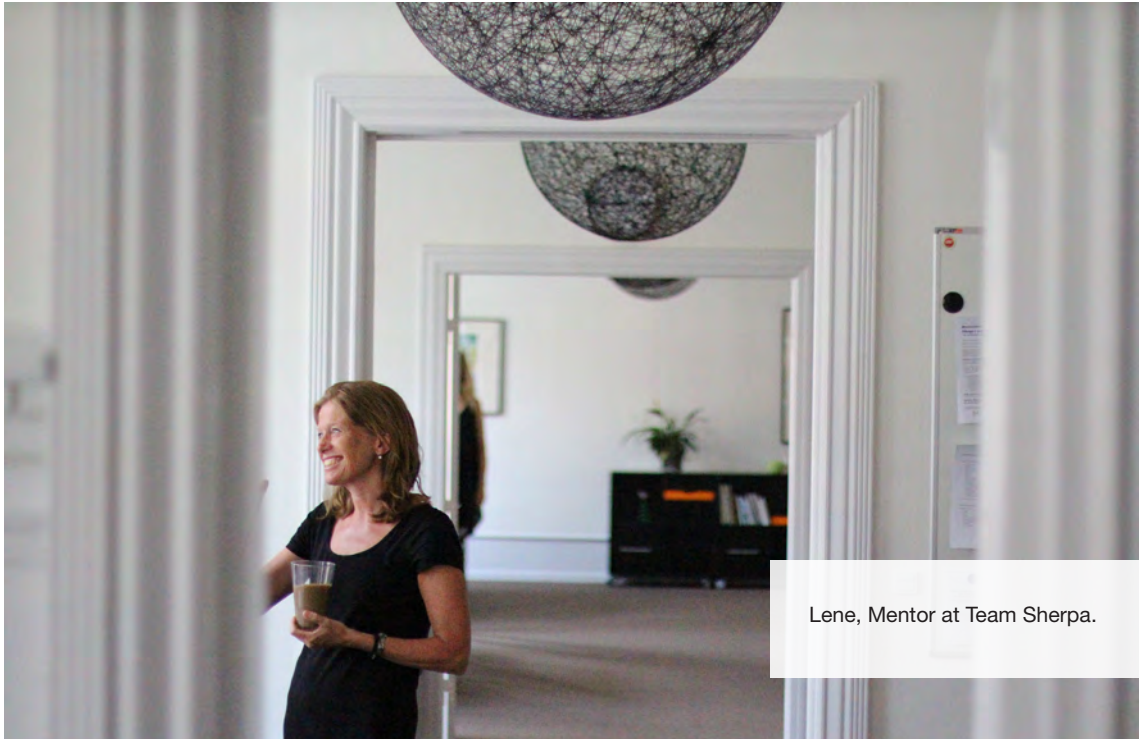
But Team Sherpa is not a design company or consultancy. It is company working with vulnerable young adults with mental disorders, helping them getting back on track, the adult’s own track that is. They do not offer typical activation to education or employment, but concentrate on helping the adult cope and recover from mental disorders, navigate in the social system and finding the right path – career-wise as well as with life in general. In that sense, Team Sherpa is not a traditional private company hired by the municipality as a so called “other actor conducting activation of citizens receiving social benefits” and controlling their availability and readiness to take up work. Yet they do have cooperation with municipality and the municipi-

ality does refer some of their residents receiving social assistance or sickness benefit to Team Sherpa.

### A PATH OF THEIR OWN

This arrangement is a choice made by the manager Trine Lindahl because she doesn’t want Sherpa to have the obligations that comes with being an “other actor,” such as reporting back to the municipality when the young adult cancels a meeting or prioritizes other activities over the appointment with a mentor. As Trine Lindahl points out, not showing up, rescheduling, or choosing to do something else, can be a very positive thing. There is the possibility that many other appointments or activities are much more important to prioritize on that particular day for that particular individual. And in general one doesn’t get positive output from forcing people to attend a meeting with at mentor or career advisor.

*“Everybody comes here voluntarily, no matter who is paying. Of course there are persons receiving social assistance who have been referred to Sherpa by the municipality and have been told, that if they don’t accept this offer then*



*their benefits will be cancelled. And here you obviously can discuss whether they show up by choice. But I do not force anybody to show up. If they don't feel this is right for them or don't want to be here, then it's not right now that they should be receiving the help we offer. And then the municipality must find another offer for that person,"* Lene, Mentor.

The voluntariness and autonomy is a key value at Team Sherpa. Not just when it comes to the young adults' right to cancel or reschedule, but is also one of the core values of the work that the mentors and career and educational advisors do with the young adults.

*"There is just the way you choose for yourself [...] only what you think is the right path in life. I have no entitlement to think that I know better than you. I can sit beside you, I can support you, and I can challenge you or question what you say or do, but I will never say or think that I*

*know better than you. Never!"* Lene, Mentor at Team Sherpa.

In practice this means that the essence of each meeting is to help each individual person get closer to making the decisions and to prioritize what they find right or valuable.

When asking Maria, a former user at Team Sherpa who was diagnosed with depression, she finds that this was one of the differences from the help she has experienced previously.

*"I thought to myself- 'oh no, not another person pushing me and more stuff I have to do.' But it wasn't like that at all."* Maria, 23 years old.

Trine Lindahl stresses that this is not the same as just asking a completely open question about what the person wants in life. It is much more about clarifying what that person's options and alternatives are and what the consequences of

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***"If you give people time, then they will also find the right path."***



each choice imply, and then letting the person decide which path to walk down – or if needed. Letting the person wait at the crossroads taking more time to decide if that is what is needed.

### ENOUGH TIME

*“If you give people time, then they will also find the right path. Sometimes they can obstruct things for themselves, but even so, I dare to lean back, give it time and wait. Because if you are tormented, as most of the young adults here are, then of course you want it to stop. And I believe they want to and are able to find out what is the right way for them, and I will of course support them in the process.”*

*“When she [the mentor] was visiting, it never felt like she had something on her schedule that she needed to do right away. It felt like she had all the time in the world.”* Maria, 23 years old.

This also means that the young adults typically are in touch with Sherpa for quite some time, most of them about 18 months. This is what differentiates us from many other offers to this particular client group. Another important difference from the offers generally given as part of the traditional employment effort is that the

mentor support doesn't stop just because the young adult finds a job or becomes enrolled at an educational institution.

*“Their need for support doesn't stop just because they enter the educational system or get a job. Quite contrary, actually. This is where their real life begins and where they really need support and role models. It is hard starting at a school, for instance going on “freshers' week” and finding out how to deal with alcohol while being on psychoactive drugs – that's not easy...”*  
Trine Lindahl, Manager.

### MENTOR SUPPORT AND CAREER ADVICE

Sherpa offers mentor support combined with career or educational counseling. Most of the meetings with mentors take place at the young adult's home or at places the young adult has chosen. This could be, for instance, at a café or even walking around in a park. The meetings don't have a pre-fixed agenda; rather the focus is on what is important for the young adult at that particular point in time. This could be simply having somebody to listen to his or hers concerns or thoughts about the future, about a job, educational program, or such, or it could be just having an everyday chat about problems



Trine, the manager at Team Sherpa, in the lunch room. Many of the mentors work a large part of the day outside the office visiting clients in their home or out in the city, so it isn't everyday they all meet up at lunch.



and experiences one encounters in their daily life, or it could be having someone given a helping hand to go grocery shopping or taking the dishes if that has become a challenge.

*“We do the things that are needed for each individual. If that means doing the dishes or going to a grocery store with the young adult, then we do that. And that’s where we differ from many of the municipalities’ offers. They don’t see all this everyday stuff as their job, but instead they give the young adult their assignments for following week. We don’t do that. We help them getting things done as role models.”* Trine Lindahl, Manager.

Alexander, who was diagnosed with severe anxiety, is very positive about this type of support.

*“In the beginning we just talked about how I felt. I was in psychiatric treatment and that took up a lot of my focus [...] I needed some structure. I mean there is a lot of stuff you need to do, and it gave me some peace of mind to know that when we got to Thursday each week [where the mentor was visiting] we would reply to all the important e-mails and apply for stuff if that was needed. Like... you know – because the fact that I knew it was getting done means that I didn’t need to stress out.”* Alexander, 25 years old.

Knowing that someone was there – also to help with the practical stuff – was also important to Maria:

*“When I got assigned to a mentor, I thought it had something to do with education. But it wasn’t like that at all. She was just someone who was there. She was more like someone I could lean myself against. A support, or a friend [...] she just helped me with everyday stuff – like getting groceries. Little things maybe; but they are very difficult when you simply cannot get your life to work.”* Maria, 23 years old.

Along with the mentor support, the young adults are typically also referred to either a Team Sherpa career advisor or their educational

advisor as one of the first things after starting at Team Sherpa.

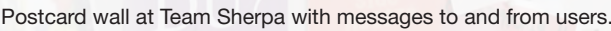
*“To have a career doesn’t mean crawling up the ladder. Here it means having an interesting day. That you have something that makes sense. So career advice is about finding out what you want. Many of the young adults have things they care about and are interested in. Some of them have parents who have an education and know the educational system, but many of them don’t. And they don’t have any image of what it means to complete an educational program. So instead they have told themselves that education or a degree probably isn’t for them because they weren’t good at math. They’re aware of all the different ways you can put an education together. So what we can see is that when they get to talk to a career advisor who knows the educational system, then we were very quickly see a spark. They remember what they like and what they were good at.”* Trine Lindahl, Manager.

*“We go out with the young adult and visit the schools and training programs. We don’t wait for a formal introduction day. We go out and talk to the teacher and the students. And we sit in the schoolyards when there is a break and observe what it is like to be a student, in order for the young adult to be able to find out if they can picture themselves there.”* Trine Lindahl, Manager.

Maria explains how she needed to try something other a restaurant job, but she didn’t really know what. She liked the idea of working in a retail shop, but didn’t really know how to get such a job.

*“Henrik [career advisor] and Mette [mentor] went with me around in the stores in the city to ask for a job. It was difficult for me, but having them as a back-up helped. Also knowing that they stood outside waiting and cheering for me meant a lot.”* Maria, 23 years old.

Social workers/case officers, nurses, educational courses, coaches/therapists. The common denominator is that they all have experience of working with the target group from the public system (e.g. from the health sector, the social system or the employment system).



Alexander who is now studying to be teacher also points to the importance of support and help to find out what he wanted to do – and how to achieve it.

*“At one point I got this idea. I don’t know where it came from because I had no experience in this field. But there was a position as a pedagogic assistant at a youth club. I thought maybe I should apply just for the job. I got assigned a session with the career advisor and he helped me with my resume and application. Well, I didn’t get that job, but I did get a job at the youth club next door instead, and I have been working there ever since. I found out that working with kids what was I wanted to spend my time doing.”* Alexander, 25 years old.

Alexander had concerns about undertaking a formal education, but after working in the youth club and realizing that this was something he was good at, he decided to give it a try.

*“I was never that academically strong. Yet now I am harvesting all the best grades!”* Alexander, 25 years old.

Sherpa do not offer treatment for the mental disorders the young adult suffer from and hence many of the young adults are also in contact with a psychologist or a psychiatry clinic while they are in contact with Team Sherpa.

## **HANDLING THE PRESSURE AND GETTING BACK ON TRACK**

Then who are the young adults who get in contact with Sherpa?

*“Our young adults are not your typical social services client [...] they are ordinary young adults who have suddenly broken under the pressure and because they aren’t used to being in the social service system and accustomed to dealing with a mental disorder then they don’t know where to ask for help – and when they ask nobody listens, because they don’t appear to be ill ‘enough.’ And first when they are very ill and perhaps have been referred to the district*

*psychiatry, then they get noticed [...] These are young adults who have done everything that was expected of them and kept on doing so for way too long. And one day they just break down.”* Trine Lindahl, Manager.

*“Now I go home from my job and do a lot of cozy stuff at home. Walk my dog and so on. Before [I got sick] it was just about work all the time. That was it.”* Maria, 23 years old.

The majority of the young adults at Sherpa have mental disorders such as depression, anxiety or severe stress, but there are also cases of psychiatric disorders such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. The common denominator is also that typically they haven’t a long history with the social services system. Despite different socio-economic backgrounds most of them have lived a pretty ordinary life before their illness arose. And many of the young adults in fact do return to ordinary education or work when they finish at Team Sherpa.

*“I have become much better at handling the everyday. I now know why I sometimes get tired and irritated. And I know how to deal with it.”* Maria, 23 years old.

*“I have found out what I want in life. I am very happy and proud of what I do [...] I really love working as a teacher”* Alexander, 25 years old.

All of the mentors at Sherpa have a background in working with or counseling adults with mental disorders. Many of them have a background from the psychiatric or social services system.

Maria is now working as a sous-chef at grocery store and Alexander is studying to become a teacher while working at the youth club.

## DENMARK | SOMEONE WHO LISTENS TO WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY

Text and photo: Iben Nørup

From reality | 3

**A huge graffiti painting on the wall and a room furnished with furniture built from used pallets and other recycled materials is the first thing that catches the eye when you enter Headspace in Esbjerg. Even though it is in the middle of summer vacation and the room is empty, one can easily imagine adolescents hanging out here and feeling comfortable and safe being here.**

**AS YOUTH COUNSELOR** the premises of counselor Annette Friis later explains, the furniture was made by the staff and volunteers on a strict budget.

*“We made it all by ourselves before we opened. Many of the things were recycled stuff we found in our basements or elsewhere [...] as the rooms shouldn’t look like an office or like a doctor’s waiting room [...] that is also why we don’t have any offices for the staff. If we need to work at a computer or have meetings, we just use the Common Space room. But most of the time we don’t need having a desk and a computer in front of us. Mostly the Common Space room is used by volunteers.”* Annette Friis, youth counselor and social worker.

### VOLUNTEERS AS A KEY RESOURCE

Despite the summer vacation the place isn’t entirely empty. Further back in the “Common Space” room, Per Frederiksen, who is manager of Headspace, and Annette Friis, who is a social worker at Headspace, are busy discussing today’s public event with a volunteer and the volunteer coordinator. T-shirts are handed out and flyers are stacked. The event is supposed to attract new volunteers. Headspace has some 25 or so volunteers, but as more and more adolescents are using Headspace, more volunteers are highly needed. Per hopes that over the summer Headspace can increase the number of volunteers.

Headspace only has four full-time employees, including the manager as well as a part time social worker from the municipality and a part time employee from the district psychiatry, so the volunteers are crucial in order to provide the help and counseling for all the adolescents who are in contact with Headspace.

*“We have to represent a huge diversity. When we say that nobody is wrong in coming in here and that no problems are too small or too large, then we also need to be able to be versatile. We need to have people who can provide all sorts of help. And that is why the volunteers are so essential. There is no way we could do that without them.”* Per Frederiksen, Manager.







Per Frederiksen, psychologist and manager at Headspace, standing in the front desk, where the adolescents are welcomed

In that sense, Headspace is organized in a rather untraditional way. On the one hand, Headspace is not a traditional activation or social services office that provides assistance, activation to work, or education or other public social services to adolescents. But on the other hand it isn't a traditional helpline run by volunteers either.

### **COUNSELING ON THE ADOLESCENTS' OWN TERMS**

Headspace offers anonymous counseling or sometime simply just conversations with someone who listens and understands to youth between 12 and 25 years old. The young persons are using Headspace voluntarily. The project is financed by foundation grants and by grants from the municipality and the regional authorities. Thus it is not a private company nor is it a traditional public service.

As manager and psychologist Per Frederiksen explains the original intent is to help and counsel youth who are not ill or troubled enough to be eligible for help or treatment in the district psychiatry or elsewhere in the health care system, but who nevertheless still needs support

or a helping hand in order not to develop more serious psychological or social problems.

*"However we also have a rather large share of youth who need more than what we can offer. They need psychiatric treatment or more formal help elsewhere in the system. In those cases we help them get in contact with the right place as well, because we don't offer treatment."* Per Frederiksen, Manager.

It is not uncommon for the youth who use Headspace to have a psychiatric diagnosis and even though they need to go elsewhere to received treatment, many of them still use Headspace as a place to talk freely about their worries or concerns about being young and having to live with at mental illness.

Volunteer Tina was diagnosed with a chronic mental illness herself, but has been without symptoms for some years, explains it like this:

*"Many of my conversations are with adolescents who have recently been diagnosed. It is often about learning to accept the diagnosis and learn how to move on from it [...] there is a lot*



*of fears when you're diagnosed. Like - can other people see it? Can I start or continue with my education now? And so on. So you need to get all that played down. And sometimes you just also need to talk about other problems or worries that have nothing to do with being ill."* Tina, Volunteer.

As Per Frederiksen as well as youth counselor Annette Friis and volunteer Tina stress the starting point for each session or conversation between a young person and a volunteer or staff at Headspace is the things that the young person wants to talk about.

*"We don't have an agenda, when the young person enter the door. What we do here is entirely on the adolescents own term."* Per Frederiksen, Manager.

*"Just having an ordinary conversation with someone who listens to what you have to say. No matter what it is. And someone who cares about and about what you say... you know - that just means so much when you're vulnerable."* Tina, Volunteer.

Camilla who frequently uses Headspace points out that this approach was the reason why she started using Headspace.

*"I have always been very much against going to see a psychologist when people have suggested that to me. But this is different. It is only the stuff that I want talk about that is discussed. They don't have a form or a list that they need to fill out and to check off the boxes. It becomes less... hmm how do you explain that... less formal, perhaps. They pay much more attention to what you need and you want and are a better at putting themselves in your place. They haven't drawn any conclusions beforehand."* Camilla, 21 years old.

*“Headspace is with you all along the way. That was very crucial to me.”*

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#### **NO PREFIXED AGENDA**

The fact there isn't any prefixed agenda also means that the goal at Headspace is not to clarify or make the young person ready for job or education.

*“They [youth] are extremely aware that job and education need to be clarified, that they need to find out what they should do. And if they just get that in place, then everything else will be all right and their frustrations will disappear. So they rush through everything get that clarified. But despite that, they remain frustrated. And the frustration is much deeper than just about job or education. So that's what we talk about [...] And when that frustration disappears – well they don't necessarily get clarification job education wise but that is not the goal either. The goal is that they should feel good. And then learn to believe that if you or the situations feel good then it will also turn out well.”* Per Frederiksen, Manager.

This also means that Headspace doesn't keep a record of those who utilize their services and they don't record or note down anything from the conversations. This is an important difference from most other social services.

*“Many of our users are not very keen on seeking help from the municipality.”* Annette Friis, Youth Counselor.

*“When youth come here for the first time they sometimes find it odd that we cannot give them anything specific like a place to live, benefits, etc. But I think that is one of our greatest values that we don't hand out these things. Because here, it is not a trading situation. When you go to the municipality, it is always a trade. They give you something in return for something else [benefits in return for seeking a certain number of jobs each week, etc.]. Here we just listens to them.*

*And you can see it in their eyes in the beginning. That they are doubtful about whether or not they are being seen, heard and recognized, and have any value as a human being. We see them, we listen and we approach them with respect, that is something that many have not experiences for a long time...”* Per Frederiksen, Manager.

*“I forgot an appointment with Headspace once, but that was an unintended. I never have that feeling where you dread coming here and think ‘oh no – today I have an appointment with Headspace.’ Quite the contrary actually.”* Camilla, 21 years old.

#### **JOB LEARNING – AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A REAL JOB WITH A REAL SALARY**

Besides having counseling with youth, Headspace in Esbjerg also is part of a project called “Job Learning” which at the moment is a pilot project that is supposed to be replicated in other cities. Job Learning is project initiated by a number of large private companies in Esbjerg. The idea is that the companies hire young adults with psychological or social problems for a period of four month. The young adults are hired on ordinary, fulltime contracts and are paid a normal salary just like everybody else. While they are working at the company, the company provides a mentor.

*“It is about dignity. They have a real situation where somebody is paying them salary on equal terms with everyone else.”* Annette Friis, Youth counselor.

Headspace became a part of the project because the companies needed a method to recruit the young adults.

*“They didn't want the strongest of the young person's we are in contact with, but they didn't*



*want the absolute weakest either. Of course they couldn't just put an ad in the newspaper, so they asked us if we could put recruit some of the adolescents we were in contact with."* Annette Friis, Youth Counselor.

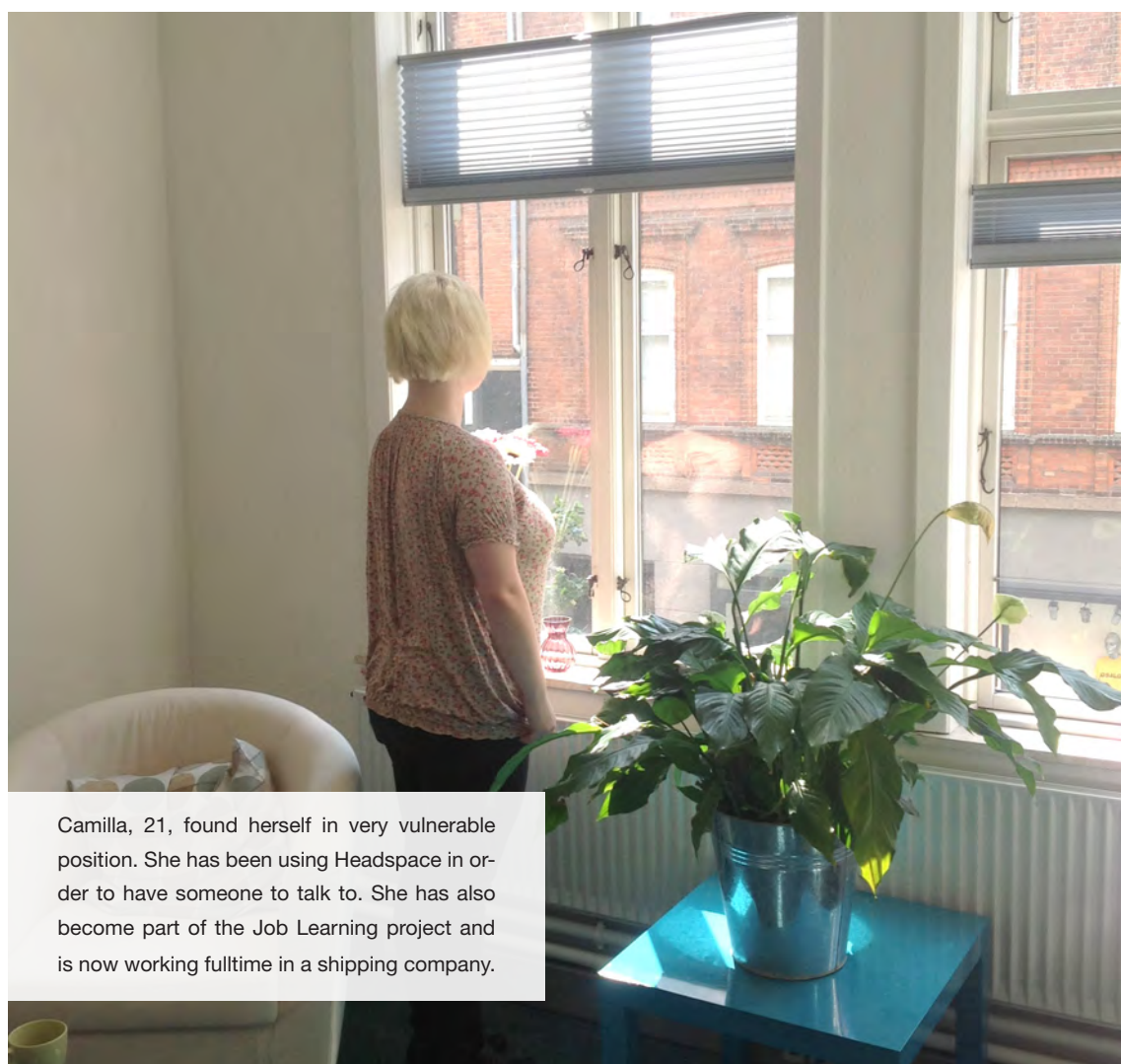
Typically the young adults participating are persons who for a various social and/or psychological reasons have been excluded from the labor market and the educational system. Typically they have tried taking an education, keeping a job or participating in activation to work several times – all ending in failure.

The young adults typically don't stop using Headspace while working at the company, thus Headspace functions as social or mental support during the project.

*"Headspace is with you all along the way. That was very crucial to me."* Camilla, 21 years old.

*"So far 12 young adults have been through the program and the results have been fantastic. The young adults have found the zest for life again. Many of them have made educational or training contracts with the company they have been working at. Others have started other types of educational programs. But common for them all is that they have found the faith in themselves and they have started to believe that they actually can 'do stuff.' And that it is worth pursuing one's goals."* Annette Friis, Youth Counselor.

The young adults who are recruited to the project are in general very positive about the opportunity.



Camilla, 21, found herself in very vulnerable position. She has been using Headspace in order to have someone to talk to. She has also become part of the Job Learning project and is now working fulltime in a shipping company.



*“At first they can’t really believe that it’s true. That they are actually given a real job with a real salary. And that they are not receiving social welfare benefits. These young adults have had so many failures. They have sent out hundreds of job applications but have been deselected because perhaps they have several sentences behind them or have been in psychiatric treatment. And often they aren’t that good at writing an application and selling themselves either.”* Annette Friis, Youth counselor.

*“I felt extremely lucky having that opportunity [...]. It means a lot that it is a real job. [...] Most of the others working there already have a fancy education. I don’t, but they hired me anyway. They didn’t do that just for fun. They have done it because they know they can use me and that I can do something valuable.”* Camilla, 21 years old.

When asked where she will be in 10 years’ time, Camilla answers:

*“I’ve finished my education and training and am working fulltime at that company. I really love that job. I never thought about doing something like that, but now I’m really passionate about this.”* Camilla, 21 years old.

So far 14 companies are participating in the project and 12 young adults have been through the project.

The volunteers at Headspace are very diverse. Many are students studying social work, psychology or similar academic studies, but some have other backgrounds, for instance skilled workers are also represented in the group. Some volunteers themselves have personal experiences with mental illness or loneliness.

The staff consists of a psychologist, two social workers, and a sociologist. A social worker from the municipality and an ergo therapist from the regional psychiatry are working part-time at Headspace.

## FACTS ABOUT HEADSPACE

### Responsible for the organisation?

Headspace is an a non-governmental organisation.

### Cooperating/collaborating organisations?

Headspace is an “independent” NGO, and most people who use its services turn up voluntarily without being referred there by the municipality, for example. However, Headspace operates a partnership, Headspace+, with private enterprises and the municipality.

### Target group?

Young people aged 12 to 25. All young people can apply, but the people who use Headspace are young people with mental health and/or social problems and young people who need someone to talk to, who are alone and vulnerable.

### Who finances the organisation?

Foundations, government grants.

### Professional profiles of the staff?

The staff at Headspace Esbjerg comprise a psychologist, social workers and a sociologist. However, Headspace relies heavily on volunteer workers with very diverse backgrounds, though a majority of our volunteers have degrees or are studying for degrees in social work, psychology, education and similar subjects.

## ICELAND | THE MAJORITY GETS A JOB OR BEGINS STUDY

*Text and photo: Jóhann Hauksson*

**THE CITY OF REYKJAVÍK** began preparations for increasing services for young people looking for work and for the creation of Work Market in 2011. Payment of social assistance by the City had then begun to increase and the city council decided to focus on young people who applied for social assistance and were not entitled to unemployment benefits. “The City authorities wanted to set up a project to provide them with major support on an individual basis, boost their active search for employment and more,” says Tryggvi Haraldsson, Work Market’s project manager at the Directorate of Labour.

### GETTING STARTED

“The state joined the project in its preparatory phase and it became a collaborative effort by the City of Reykjavík, the Towns of Hafnarfjörður, Kópavogur and Reykjanesbær, the Directorate of Labour and the Ministry of Welfare. This was a new idea and preparation was considerable. We travelled to Sweden and acquainted ourselves with the experience of a similar project, Jobbtorg Stockholm. This became a Nordic project, where the expertise and experience gained in one Nordic location is introduced in another location.

We divided the tasks among us. I directed the project in Reykjavík. Four of us who worked for the City of Reykjavík had work facilities at the

Directorate of Labour. I had previously worked in the welfare department of the City of Reykjavík. We relied completely on cooperation, as half of our workforce came from the municipalities and half from the Directorate of Labour. The Directorate of Labour was where the jobseekers came. We went into their service centres to welcome people co-operating in the project. I don’t think there are any previous examples of such extensive co-operation between the state and the municipalities in this area.”

### CO-OPERATION THE DECIDING FACTOR

Tryggvi relates that a large number of people were involved in the preparations, ranging from city councillors to ministerial officials. “I was working in the City’s welfare department and there were as many as 4 employees calculating what the financial outcome would be. Of course there is some cost involved in this. But this meant dedicating funds to the project for a specific period which would result in savings in the longer term by getting more people in work and reducing the need for social assistance. An extremely good interaction developed between the City’s welfare services and the services of the Directorate of Labour for jobseekers. This is a must: the systems need to collaborate well.



The manpower cost of funding the project was divided equally between the Directorate of Labour and the municipalities. Rental of premises and other expenses were also split equally between the state and municipalities. The Directorate of Labour, however, provided financing for all purchase of remedies. It was to the benefit of the City of Reykjavík to undertake this together with the Directorate of Labour (a state institution) because through this effort people who were not entitled to benefits got access to the same system as others entitled to benefits. There these people could take advantage of various remedies, for instance, take courses in Icelandic and other options which would not necessarily be available otherwise.”

## **YOUNG PEOPLE FIRST, THEN THEIR ELDERS**

One could ask what actions were taken to benefit jobseekers. Tryggvi answers that to begin with the focus was on people younger than 24 years of age, with the idea being that each of them would practically get a personal coach to help them into the labour market. “The coach took the individual under her wing, called him frequently for interviews, examined his situation closely and set up a programme to make the individual more active in seeking work and improving his or her prospects. This was important. At the City of Reykjavík these individuals had a social worker who was perhaps able to meet with them every other month or so. It is difficult to assess the situation under such conditions. Individuals could say they were looking for work but could be doing anything but that in the intervals between meeting the social worker. Now they almost had a personal coach who said: This is what you have to do, this is the way you have to act to have a chance in competing for a job. All of this took time. Sometimes there is this misunderstanding that it’s sufficient to create jobs. But often you have to get people more active, motivate them and get them to understand that this is a good thing.”

As previously mentioned, the project was initially established for young people under 24 years of age who were not entitled to unemployment insurance or their entitlement was running out. “Some had actually never been entitled to unemployment benefits in their life,” Tryggvi says. “Nothing was guaranteed in this project and it was by no means certain that it would work. Pretty high demands were made of people. There’s the question of whether conditions should be set for financial assistance. In other words, we made it a condition for financial assistance that people had to participate, attend a course, etc. in order to receive assistance. This drove people onward. It’s perhaps not a nice method but it’s healthy, if I can put it that way. It urges people onward and increases their activity. You perhaps use the income support to get people moving and direct them into

remedies suitable for them and help them in whatever situation they are in, in this and that instance.”

### ORGANISING JOBSEEKING HELPS

Arnór Ingi Jónsson (26) works in a tire shop in Reykjavík. He’s cheerful and speaks positively of the service he benefited from in seeking work in recent years.

“I’ve turned to the Work Market twice in recent years. Late last year I was looking for a job and registered. I had to turn up twice a week and report on my situation and apply for jobs. It helped me a lot to get all the booklets and sit down at a computer and have everything in the same place. I found likely jobs there, sent in

applications, e-mails and my resumé. You also made reports on what you had been doing and explained your situation to a counsellor. It was very useful.”

Arnór had a temporary job in a machine shop and later shift work for awhile before he got the job in the automobile dealership Bílabúð Benna. He says that nightshift work did not suit him.

“The counsellor I had most to do with at Work Market was very good. She followed what I was doing closely and was always nudging me, encouraging me and recommending me. I have nothing but good things to say about that. I can recommend this without question for anyone. There they are helping people get work and it must be suitable for people of any age who are seeking work.”

Arnór was one of those jobseekers who was not entitled to unemployment benefits and therefore applied for assistance from the City of Reykjavík social services. “The counsellors there worked with the Directorate of Labour and there they sent me on this route. They telephoned me often and kept track of things well. I should add that I don’t have much schooling but I did learn welding in metalworking. The last time I used the service last autumn I was offered a course, either in operating heavy machinery or further welding study. I took the heavy machinery course and last month I got my licence. You don’t have to take the whole thing at once and can continue to add more to it. That is very good of course.”

One of the options Arnór has been considering is to move abroad, preferably to Sweden, with his girlfriend. Through the Work Market it is also possible to check on work abroad. “I would like to try something different while I’m still young.”

The last time Arnór sat down at Work Market and looked through the folders on vacant jobs there was nothing new. “But all the same that’s no reason to quit or give up. You learn that. It’s really good to have everything to do with



Tryggvi Haraldsson: “It turned out that 65% had not had to receive financial assistance anew. This is also considered good success.”



seeking work in one place so you don't have to spend hours over this on the Internet. You sit down there at the computer with the folders and can concentrate on looking for work. The likelihood of missing an interesting job is much less if you're looking for work through Work Market."

*“Unemployment can become a way of life and the situation eats away your self-confidence.”*



Sigríður Brynja Helenudóttir: “The people at Work Market encourage you, instruct you and make you feel that you matter.”

**EIGHT OUT OF TEN SATISFIED**

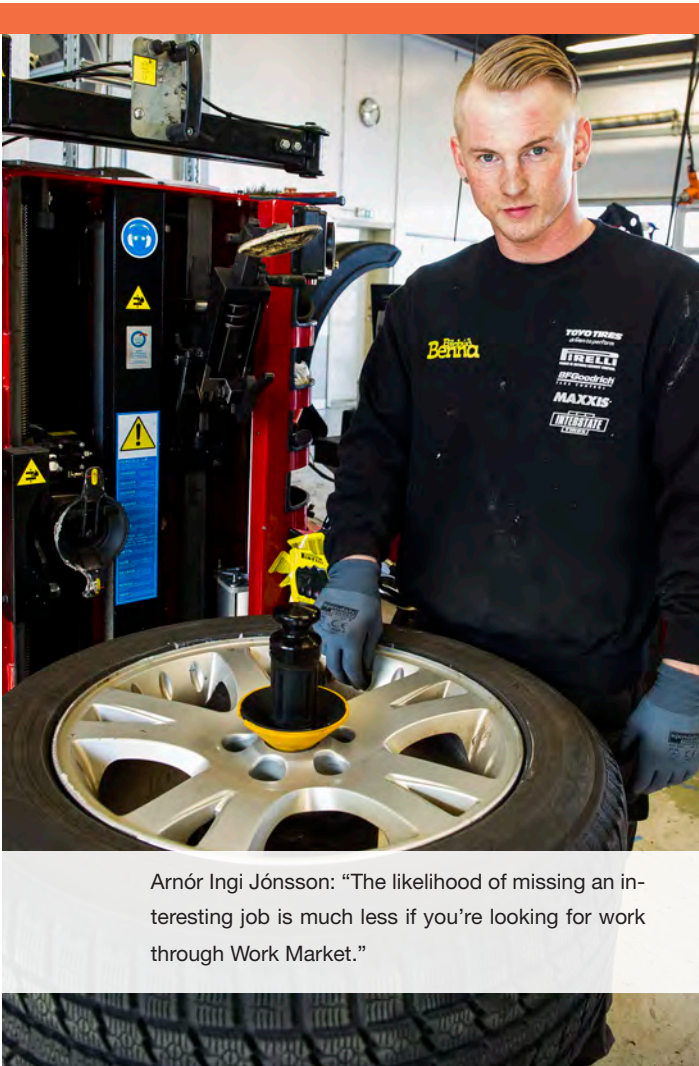
As might be expected, people want to try to assess how successful Work Market has been. And this has been done to some extent Tryggvi says.

“We assessed this one year at a time and took a sample from those persons who had ‘graduated’ from the programme. On average around 60% of those who finished the programme went to work without support or began study. Which is good success. We also looked at the group which had been receiving financial assistance when they came to us. We checked the situation as of 1 January 2014, to see how high a proportion once more had to receive financial assistance. It turned out that 65% had not had to receive financial assistance anew. This is also considered good success.

We have also examined how satisfied people were with this remedy. We asked whether they liked the service. It turned out that around 80% were satisfied with their counsellor. That also perhaps shows that we have had good people working on this on our side.”

The project changed on 1 January 2015. The three-year pilot period concluded and at the beginning of this year the Directorate of Labour took over the project entirely. “Now the Directorate of Labour handles this service, which is very positive in my opinion. The service will continue to be offered and based on the experience we have gained.

We took three years, in other words, and focused on people younger than 24 years of age. After one year we raised the age limit to 30. The last year the age limit was eliminated and now anyone who is not entitled to benefits can use the service. It was very successful, but you could say that the older group is more difficult. Among them are individuals who have been on benefits for a long time and have lost some of their working capacity. We often had to refer people to other remedies, for instance, industrial rehabilitation or the like.”



Arnór Ingi Jónsson: “The likelihood of missing an interesting job is much less if you’re looking for work through Work Market.”

### INACTIVITY IS HAZARDOUS

“The gender breakdown in this group was rather interesting. Around 75% of those referred to the programme were men (boys). This fits in fairly well with the discussion that the dropout rate for boys is much higher than for girls in secondary school and tells us that their circumstances are in some way different than those of girls.

You could say that emergency assistance (financial assistance) for people under a certain age can be hazardous if no suitable remedies or services are offered. It’s actually a dangerous situation to receive financial assistance and be inactive and manage to live on this money. It can become a way of life. It can be dangerous for young people later on to end up like that. That’s how I see it,” concludes Tryggvi.

### SERVICE THAT KINDLES HOPE AND SELF-CONFIDENCE

Sigríður Brynja Helenudóttir (26) has a variety of experiences behind her despite her young age. She was only 16 years old when her daughter Brynja was born.

As a youth Sigríður Brynja’s (Sigga Brynja’s) path had taken various directions. She was anxious and was diagnosed as depressive. Her circumstances were therefore rather difficult and she dropped out of school. She now dreams of finishing high school and perhaps continuing her education still further.

Sigga Brynja’s parents and sister now live and work in Norway. She herself lives in rental accommodation in the capital region with two others and has a regular and good relationship with her daughter.

“I have work now for at least the summer, as I intend to go back to school in the autumn. My goal is to finish my education.”

### TRIED A BIT OF MANY THINGS

Like many others, Sigga Brynja has had difficulty in getting suitable work on a permanent basis in recent years and has regularly been on the unemployment register without being entitled to unemployment benefits. “It can be hard to get work, especially when you have no education. I think it is the right step to finish my studies. But I have had all kinds of jobs in recent years. Among other things I have worked at welding together iron doors, fences, pipes and more. I have been a bartender, supervised kids in leisure programmes and many other things. I lived in Canada for half a year and now it’s about a year since I moved back home from Alberta. I intended to go to school there but wasn’t accepted and took courses instead to make use of the time. So I have a varied work experience. Now I’m going to work as leader of a summer youth work group for the City of Reykjavík, starting early in the summer.”

After returning home, she began seeking a job once more. Her situation was difficult, as Sigga Brynja was not entitled to unemployment benefits because she had just returned from Canada. “I told my social services counsellor from the City of Reykjavík that if I couldn’t start school at once I was going to go straight to work. She got in touch with the Directorate of Labour and in that way I became acquainted with Work Market. This was very good because it’s important to keep active when looking for work. I have really tried always to keep active when looking for work. I learned to play the ukulele and guitar and am pretty good now. I also got a motorcycle licence and take out my bike in the summertime. There’s no reason to sit and do nothing.”

**UNEMPLOYMENT AS A WAY OF LIFE**

“Unemployment can become a way of life and the situation eats away your self-confidence. You live your life that way,” Sigga Brynja says. “Work and study counsellor Ragnhildur Ólafsdóttir sent me on a course which is aimed at improving your technique in applying for a job. You need something like that. When you’ve had no success for a long time hope gradually disap-

pears. There you have to attend, you get support and advice. I went on courses there that were just great. In the middle of one I was asked to go for a job interview. I had applied for so many things that I hardly knew what job it was. It was thanks to the guidance and support from Work Market that this turned out so well. You get to know people of a similar age who have ended up in work problems. This is very important and stimulating in such a situation. Now a difficult period without work is behind me and I look forward to starting work.”

Sigga Brynja speaks well of Work Market and the counsellors there. She is determined to improve her education in the next few years and in so doing improve her prospects in the labour market. “The people at Work Market encourage you, instruct you and make you feel that you matter. This is a very important service for people in the position that I’ve been in.”

**FACTS ABOUT WORK MARKET**

**Responsible for the organisation?**

Directorate of Labour Labour (Vinnumálastofnun) and City of Reykjavik.

**Cooperating/collaborating organisations?**

Directorate of collaborates with the municipalities.

**Who finances the organisation?**

Directorate of Labour and City of Reykjavik.

**Professional profiles of the staff?**

Counsellors, careers advisors with work experience in various areas of social services, employment consultants.

## ICELAND | ENCOURAGEMENT TO PUT ABILITIES TO USE

*Text and photo: Jóhann Hauksson*

**THE PROJECT “PUT ABILITIES – ALL ABILITIES – TO USE”** was set up by the Directorate of Labour in collaboration with the National Association of Intellectual Disabilities and the Organization of Disabled in Iceland (ÖBÍ). It was decided to follow up on an advertising campaign launched by the National Association of Intellectual Disabilities and ÖBÍ, which spotlighted that people with restricted work capacity could perform various jobs. Last autumn it was decided to follow up on this and for the Directorate of Labour to take part in the project.

At the AGM of the Directorate of Labour on 4 November last year the Minister of Welfare officially launched this campaign. “This was then followed up on with letters to state institutions and municipalities. The state and municipalities were the first target group, and the group we are currently working with,” says counsellor Margrét Linda Ásgrímsdóttir, who is in charge of the project *Put abilities – all abilities – to use*.

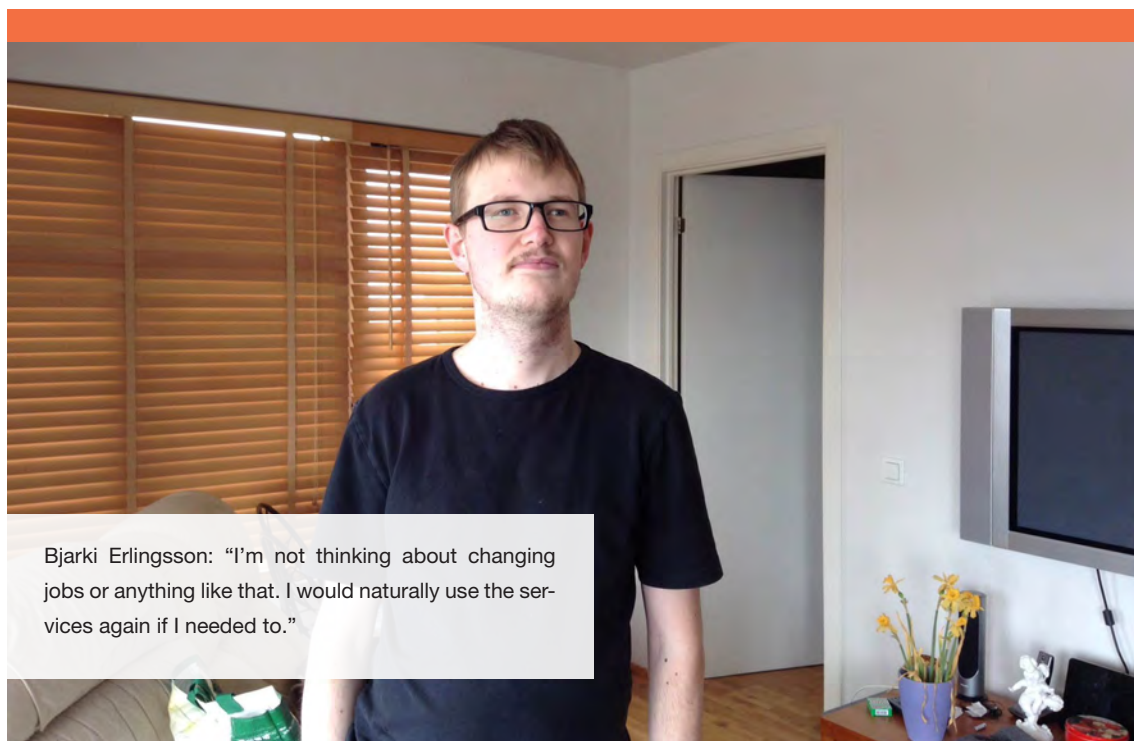
### **ATTRACTING EMPLOYERS’ INTEREST**

“This got started in earnest around the beginning of 2015. We had opened a so-called job portal, where enterprises could register jobs and our task was to pass on these jobs to jobseekers with limited work capacity. To start with success was limited. Only a few jobs were sent in and we had several hundred people with limited work capacity registered with us who wanted to get work. We wanted to see better results. Then we started to work with an advertising agency to design an object as an incentive, which was

delivered to all heads of state institutions and mayors of towns and the City of Reykjavík. This was a blue box containing a blue paper bird, some three hundred of which were folded and packed by workers at the sheltered work training centre Örvi. The box, on the other hand, was made at Múlalundur, which is also a sheltered workplace. We have been distributing these objects in recent weeks to leaders and council representatives here in the capital region, and have also started to distribute them outside the capital area. I have been in charge of this here in the capital region while the directors of eight local service branches of the Directorate of Labour look after this in their own regions. This had to be organised and took some time. Now it has begun to bring in results in the form of jobs for people with limited work capacity.”

Margrét Linda says that around 400 persons with restricted work capacity are registered as seeking work in the capital region. “Since the beginning of this year we have been stepping up the pace of the programme and in recent weeks we have been five to six people involved. It is linked especially to our campaign. We had to make appointments with the heads of the institutions, the mayors of Reykjavík and of various towns to deliver the object to them in person, and it is now beginning to result in more jobs being listed with us. We are aiming at good collaboration with the National University Hospital, which has responded very positively and aims at creating many jobs for persons with restricted work capacity. Employees of the programme Work with support (AMS), are also





Bjarki Erlingsson: "I'm not thinking about changing jobs or anything like that. I would naturally use the services again if I needed to."

involved in this in finding suitable jobs and placing people in them. I look after particularly people who only need assistance in jobseeking and can look after themselves once they begin work. But the employees at AMS have clients who need more support after they have started work and need, for instance, instruction and training in their new job."

Margrét Linda examines jobs which are listed together with AMS employees and together they try to find suitable work for the applicants on the list. They send the workplace in question the resumés of individuals who could be a possibility, but only after consulting with the person concerned.

#### **DISABILITY PENSION AS AN INCENTIVE FOR HIRING**

Margrét Linda also mentions contracts concluded between the jobseeker, the State Social Security Institute and the employer. "Contracts are concluded for people receiving benefits following a disability assessment. People with disabilities can conclude a bilateral agreement to the effect that the State Social Security Institute will refund from disability benefits 75% of the wages

and wage-related expenses for the employee in question to the enterprise. The employee is hired at the same wage as other persons in a similar position. This has proved effective. The refund is 75% for the first two years then decreases after that by 10% each year until it has reached 25%, and can remain at that level indefinitely. This is an incentive for both public and private enterprises. Currently we have around 400 contracts of this sort in the capital region and probably around 700 in the country as a whole. These contracts often result in satisfaction for both parties, the employer and the employee, and often employers realise they have hired especially good workers through this system."

#### **SUPPORT IN A NEW JOB**

Continuing support and advice is offered to jobseekers after they get work, in particular through AMS. "Sometimes it's enough to be in contact several times each year, while others need more follow-up which is then provided from here. We are also experimenting with an innovation we call a work buddy. This will enable a new employee with restricted work capacity to be able to contact and obtain specific support from another employee at the workplace. No special

*“We want to mix with others in the workplace and be where everyone else is, not just in sheltered workplaces.”*

payment is expected to be made for this, but we offer training courses for enterprises and employees who are willing to participate.”

The project is financed completely by the Directorate of Labour, but initially the National Association of Intellectual Disabilities and the Organization of Disabled in Iceland provided workers for the project.

The project *Put abilities – all abilities – to use* has only been underway a short time and no systematic assessment has been made of its success as yet. The project has met with a positive response everywhere, says Margrét Linda.

Employment contracts between disabled persons and the Social Security Institute, on the one hand, and employers on the other, however, have existed for many years and have given good results. There are plenty of examples of people with restricted work capacity who have worked in the same place for many years on the basis of such employment contracts.

## EMPLOYMENT FOR THE DISABLED HER MAIN CONCERN

Aileen Soffía Svendsdóttir (37) has worked for the same company, [the food retailer] Hagkaup, for 13 years and benefited from the services which arose out of the programme *Work with Support* (AMS). She herself is an active volunteer in a subsidiary organisation of the National Association of Intellectual Disabilities called *Átak* (Effort) and was involved in the programme *Put abilities – all abilities – to use*.

“I am very interested in employment issues for people with restricted work capacity so I was quite willing to take part in that project,” Aileen says.

“The public system, public support, needs to be strengthened. I myself got a job in 2002 through the project *Work with Support* (AMS) which had then got underway. It was a really necessary option for people like me with restricted work capacity who were seeking a job. This is a good remedy for both the individual and the



Aileen Soffía Svendsdóttir: “The response from employers in the project *Put abilities – all abilities – to use* was unbelievably positive, actually really incredible.”

company seeking workers. It's good to get company managers to realise this. It's very rewarding to participate in this. We study what jobs we can obtain ourselves. There's a market for innovation everywhere but we have to work hard on examining what we can do ourselves. We want to mix with others in the workplace and be where everyone else is, not just in sheltered workplaces. People should be able to get work suited to their qualifications and ability."

Aileen dislikes how long the waiting lists are for jobs. "Several hundred persons with restricted work capacity are currently seeking work and registered with the Directorate of Labour. This is also a group which perhaps is unable to take advantage of all the options offered to the unemployed or in seeking work. The response from employers in the project *Put abilities – all abilities – to use* was unbelievably positive, actually really incredible. It made me very happy. The only problem I see now is the waiting lists. We have to try and shorten them," Aileen says.

**WORK PRACTICE PROGRAMME SET  
BJARKI ON TRACK IN JOBSEEKING**

Bjarki Erlingsson is a 26-year-old living in Reykjavík. He lives by himself in a rental apartment in Grafarvogur, a suburb of Reykjavík. He is in good physical shape but has some intellectual disability and a speech impediment. He had lost his jobs in two large supermarkets, first in Netto and then in Bónus.

"Two years ago I contacted Work with Support (AMS) at the Directorate of Labour. Several weeks passed and then they phoned and told me I could get a job in the Sundahöfn harbour area in the Warehouse Hotel Bakki. I've been working there since in a half-time position. The people at AMS were helpful, which was a good thing for me. When I was in Borgarholt secondary school many years ago they came to the school with a work practice programme. That was where I first got to know of this. So I went and spent three weeks at workplaces in this work practice programme.

Bjarki says he never thinks about what he will do next in the future. "I would naturally talk to AMS again if I needed to."

Bjarki is well satisfied with his situation. On Wednesdays he leaves work an hour earlier to meet with a drama group in which he is active. "We are not preparing to put on or practicing a play at the moment. We get together now for a dramatic reading of *The Mousetrap* by Agatha Christie. It's a lot of fun," Bjarki says.



Margrét Linda Ásgrímsdóttir: "The employee is hired at the same wage as other persons in a similar position. Accordingly the employer can send a copy of the employee's pay slip to the State Social Security Institute and receive in return 75% of the wages and wage-related expenses."



## FACTS ABOUT PUT ABILITIES - ALL ABILITIES - TO WORK

### **Responsible for the organisation?**

Directorate of Labour and the Organisation of Disabled in Iceland (Öryrkjabandalagið).

### **Cooperating/collaborating organisations?**

The Organisation of Disabled in Iceland and their youth sections collaborates with the Directorate of Labour.

### **Who finances the organisation?**

The Government thru the Directorate of Labour and the Organisation of Disabled in Iceland.

### **Professional profiles of the staff?**

Counsellors, careers advisors with work experience in various areas of social services, employment consultants.





## SWEDEN | HUNTING FOR ASSETS

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**Text and photo:** *Helena Lagercrantz*

– “It’s not just because they’re professional and have the right resources. It’s mainly because I felt that they really do care. It was as though they reached out a hand and said to me ‘Come on, this is going to work!’.”

We’re sitting in the meeting room at Lyra’s premises just outside Huddinge, a suburb a little way south of Stockholm. We’re drinking coffee together, and the sun is beaming in through the windows of this slightly shabby but homely meeting room. Samir (Samir isn’t actually his real name – he’d prefer to remain anonymous) speaks quickly and with enthusiasm. He’s prepared our discussion carefully. He’s made a list on his mobile of all the things he thinks Lyra has given him, along with a few things that were missing from his life before.

– “There are various stations here that you have to pass through in a certain order, more or less like a car wash. You start off with one station, which involves devising sensible routines for yourself, the second station involves finding your strengths, and the last station is all about getting you back out into the world and surviving on your own. And everything is suited to your own specific needs.”

Like for many people who arrive at Lyra, it’s taken a long time for Samir to find his way. He explains how he spent many years blaming himself and desperately trying to find out why he was feeling so bad. He registered at Komvux, an adult education resource, for seven terms, on seven different occasions, and every time he was absolutely determined to complete his courses. It’s only now that he’s spent a year at Lyra that he’s managed to complete his studies.

### **STRIKING A BALANCE**

Samir explains that he’s always had many irons in the fire. Too many, he reckons.

– “When I was at school, I often used to be up all night and tired during the day, which meant I wasn’t able to concentrate when I was in class. I was struggling the whole time, but I didn’t know what to do about it. This was before I knew I had ADHD, and before I managed to get some sensible coping strategies. Apart from school there were loads of other things in my life that I was grappling with, and as a result I just ended up feeling worse and worse.”

While he was trying to get his upper secondary grades, he started an events company and started working evenings as well.

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*“It was as though they reached out a hand and said to me – Come on, this is going to work!”*



– “I find it really easy to make contact with people and I have loads of ideas, so everything went really well for me after a fashion. I was making money, but I didn’t submit a tax declaration for a few years. I kept all my receipts, they were in bags in my flat. So that was the situation. I didn’t want to dodge paying my taxes, I just didn’t know how to go about it. I put everything off, which made me feel really awful.” Through Lyra, Samir has been given help with learning how to organise his life. For example, he’s started using an app on his mobile where he can plan his day’s activities.

– “Thanks to that, I’ve learned how much I can fit into a day, what’s reasonable and the order I should do things in. It’s all about learning how to find a balance. I’ve got so much energy and I can get so much done, I just can’t keep everything in order. Lyra has taught me to do this.”

Social services in the municipality of Huddinge, the Employment Service, the Social Insurance Office and the outpatient psychiatric clinic are

all Lyra partners. The aim of the organisation is to place attendees in a position to mobilise their own resources and control their own lives by finding jobs, for instance.

– “We have one target: 20 young adults in, and 20 young adults out – every year. We have a clear limit: people can stay with us for a maximum of one year. These people have been rolling round inside the system for quite a while, and there comes a time when you have to say ‘that’s enough’! That said, we’re really keen to stay in touch with people. Everyone who’s been registered with us knows they can always drop in and say hi or give us a call. At the same time, they know we’ll stay in touch to find out how they’re doing,” says Marve Diop, project manager at Lyra.

According to Marve, the staff are one of the main reasons for Lyra’s successes. All the people working at Lyra have different professional backgrounds. Some of them have worked for social services, others have worked as employ-



Lyra uses three different types of coaching. The purpose is to strengthen self-confidence, provide insight on health and on his or hers own ability.

ment consultants and a number of them are specialists in fields such as neuropsychiatric disorders. But regardless of their backgrounds, the staff share a common outlook and a commitment to young people.

– “We’ve gone from strength to strength, and we realise now that this is sustainable! We’ve done enough evaluations and can present statistics to demonstrate that our organisation really does work, but what our attendees have to say about us carries the greatest weight.”

Marve worked at the Social Insurance Office and in social services and with educational and vocational guidance as part of individual upper secondary programmes. She explains how she found herself meeting students at school and then these same students turning up at social services while having to be referred for psychiatric treatment time and time again. Lyra’s activities gave her an opportunity to break the vicious circle.

– “We haven’t chosen just ONE method, the way in which we work and our attitudes are the

key to our success. We’re a small team, but we work well together and this gives us incredible strength. Our partners can help us out with any skills we don’t have.”

Attendees turn up every day. This is important as the organisation is based on a salutogenic approach, and a lot of their work is all about social training.

– “Initially, we form an overall picture of our attendees. After that, we devise a personalised schedule that’s always based on what individuals are capable of. Many of the people we see here are struggling with enormous social phobias, which means we have to take things one step at a time.”

Milena is spending her last few days with Lyra after a year of hard work. Two years ago, she was suffering from severe burnout.

– “It was an absolutely awful time. It probably sounds really stupid, but I really thought I was going to die. I lost my memory and had panic attacks, and I couldn’t look after myself or my

children. I remember thinking that if I could survive this, I could survive anything! It took time, but Lyra really helped me. Before I came here, all I did was go and see doctors who prescribed me loads of pills.”

Milena says its as though she and the staff at Lyra have managed to find their way back to the healthy, strong Milena, taking things step by step over the past year.

– “Marve and the others here at Lyra are like coaches. They look for the resources I have instead of concentrating on the negative things. And they see your inner person – they look inside you, kind of. What can Milena do? What does Milena want to achieve? In a way, I reckon they saved my life.”

**FACTS ABOUT LYRA**

**Responsible for the organisation?**

Lyra comes under the Social and Elderly Care Administration, in the municipality of Huddinge. Lyra is run within the scope of financial coordination by Huddinge Botkyrka Salems Samordningsförbund (coordinating association).

**Cooperating/collaborating organisations?**

There are four parties involved in the coordinating associations: the Social Insurance Office, Social Services, the Employment Service and Stockholm County Council psychiatry. These organisations help to finance the coordinating associations in respect of rehabilitation initiatives, on behalf of the government and Parliament.

**Target group?**

Young adults aged 18 to 29 with mental ill health and complex problems. Young people who have experienced exclusion for four years on average, often longer. Usually multiple diagnoses, most failed to complete school.

**Who finances the organisation?**

At present, the organisation is financed entirely by the coordinating association, which receives a budget from the government. In the longer term, the plan is to allow social services to take over the financing of the organisation.

**Professional profiles of the staff?**

Sociologists/behavioural scientists, student counsellors, careers advisors with work experience in various areas of social services, employment consultants, experts in psychiatry, eating disorders, rehab, etc. work, psychology, education and similar subjects.



## SWEDEN | ACCEPTING JOINT RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROBLEMS THAT MAY ARISE

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*Text: Ulrika Fredriksson*

**"I don't think people should be afraid of starting with an activity, because we all have to go through it and everyone finds it hard to be the new person. That's never fun, but you have to be brave. This is the best thing that's happened to me for a few years!"**

These are the words of Agnes, describing how she felt about starting out with DISA after four years of activity compensation, with no activity. Agnes has a neuropsychiatric disorder and battled through her school years. After upper secondary school and a temporary job, Agnes "crashed", as she puts it. She got in touch with the psychiatric services and was granted activity compensation/ early retirement.

The picture she paints when we meet one April day on the DISA premises in Hisingen is brighter, however. She has been with DISA for about a year now, and she feels a lot better these days. Agnes practises together with other participants and a supervisor at a restaurant at one of the activity centres in the city of Gothenburg.

*"I really enjoy it. You learn how to cook, you work in the cafeteria, you learn how to use the till, you bake – things like that. I really love this team!"*

DISA began in 2010 after the Social Insurance Office in Hisingen ran a survey of young people

receiving activity compensation. This survey managed to identify a large number of young people with psychiatric problems, but with whom none of the relevant authorities – the Social Insurance Office, the county council, the municipality or the Employment Service – was working.

*"We saw a passive group of people requiring lots of resources and with a major need for coordination, but they weren't receiving the help they needed to make them active. And so DISA was launched in 2010,"* says Maja Bremell, an administrator at the Social Insurance Office.

DISA is financed by the Delta coordination association<sup>1</sup> in Hisingen, Gothenburg, and DISA's target group is made up of people aged 19 to 29 who have a psychiatric disorder and are receiving activity compensation from the Social Insurance Office.

The vast majority of people active in DISA have been on sick leave for many years, with psychiatric treatment and – in many cases – in-patient

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*1 The activities of the coordination associations are regulated through Lagen om finansiell samordning av rehabiliteringsinsatser [the Act on financial coordination of rehabilitation initiatives], 2003:1210.*

psychiatric care as well. Various anxiety and depressive disorders, neuropsychiatric disorders and emotionally unstable personality disorders are common diagnoses among participants. Nine out of ten participants are female.

Two people work at DISA; an activity coach/coordinator and an administrator from the Social Insurance Office. DISA's work is essentially based on three elements: exercising authority with administration of activity compensation, internal and external collaboration and activity coaching.

Coaching support and collaboration aim to give participants support in all areas of their lives so that they can increase their capacity for activity and work. The objective is for participants to start with some form of activity, and for the coach to support them in this process. This may involve starting to work out or doing a course, or finding a work placement and getting some work experience. In many cases, preparatory training for work is involved.

*"As many of the participants have stayed at home for a number of years, getting started on planning is often a major step for them and so*

*many of them need a long time to come to grips with it. Others are more ready to get started straight away, so for them we might plan for a practical internship directly,"* says Annika Brännberg, activity coach.

*"It's a kind of sliding scale between pre-rehabilitation and work rehabilitation. We work with the entire range – fitness, creative courses, training, activity centres with open groups, and then more customised work training, internships and goals in respect of employment or studies."*

DISA's staff are of the view that they are successful in overcoming the passiveness of their participants, despite their low functional capacity, thanks to the fact that they focus on the needs of each participant and adopt an overall approach to their problems. It is also important to have a long-term plan and be capable of providing persistent support, with close contact and regular follow-ups.

Their working method is based on a salutogenic approach, and they use motivational discussions as well as deriving inspiration from elements of the supported employment method.



Around forty per cent of participants who no longer work with DISA have found jobs, work placements or full or part-time places on courses when they leave. Many of the participants also say that they feel better, with lower anxiety levels and less need for medical treatment.

Given the fact that the target group is made up of young people with psychiatric problems who are deemed to be remote from the labour market, DISA's results are perceived to be very good.

**SUCCESS FACTORS**

The Delta coordination association has evaluated experiences of DISA's activities between 2012 and 2014. Their results indicate that DISA's success factors include their individual-oriented perspective, focusing on individual participants. They attempt to see the participant's entire life situation and interact with the parties named by the participant him/herself as important people to include in planning. The combination of exercise of authority and coaching is important; the administrator from the Social Insurance Office and the activity coach work in close collaboration and are also based in the same building.

*“These aren't two separate authorities that have to meet up and work together. We're all DISA, and our participants are very clear on this too,”* says Annika Brännberg, activity coach.

Accepting joint responsibility for issues and problems that may arise is also important for successful collaboration. Social Insurance Office administrator Maja Bremell describes DISA's attitude towards cooperation.

*“This is our desk, let's sort it out together', rather than 'this isn't our desk, go and ask someone else”.*

**PARTICIPANTS ON DISA**

Amanda, 23 years old:  
*“They're really responsive, and I think this is really important because everyone is completely different and has different needs, and it's really important for people to listen to them”.*

Elin, 24 years old:  
*“It's like an internship, but the important thing is that it's adapted to suit your own abilities. There's no pressure or stress, you just take it at your own pace.”*

**FACTS ABOUT DISA**

**Responsible for the organisation?**

The Social Insurance Office is the project owner and responsible for the organisation.

**Cooperating/collaborating organisations?**

The Social Insurance Office, the municipality, the Employment Service and the Västra Götaland region work in partnership in the organisation.

**Target group?**

The target group is young adults aged 19 to 29 who are receiving activity compensation on account of psychiatric disorder diagnoses and who live in Hisingen, Gothenburg.

**Who finances the organisation?**

The Göteborg Hisingen (DELTA) coordination association finances the organisation.

**Professional profiles of the staff?**

A personal administrator from the Social Insurance Office and an activity coach from the municipality make up the staff of the organisation.

*Text: Jessica Gustafsson Photo: Héctor Montes*

**"One thing a very large number of all the young people coming here have in common is a sense of loneliness. This is rarely caused by alcohol or drug problems or trouble with the police, as so many people believe. These young people have been unemployed for so long that they feel nobody appreciates or believes in them, that they're of no use to themselves or anyone else."**

**THESE ARE THE WORDS** of Olli Alanen, senior specialist at Vamos in Helsinki, a service package aimed at young people aged 16 to 29 who are not in education or employment. Some of the young people who turn up at Vamos have not done anything for a number of years. In their case, developing their social skills is important.

"The people who work here have to be capable of urging on the young people, really observing them and helping them to believe that their lives will turn out okay. The educational backgrounds of the staff are of less importance," says Alanen.

#### **"NOT THE BEST LIFE SITUATION"**

One of the people involved in the centre is 22-year-old Miro.

"I'm here because there's nothing else to do during the day. The routines and the team spirit are the best things about being here. During the morning meal, we often chat with the supervisors about the kind of mood we're in. The staff usually come over for a chat if they notice I'm feeling a bit down or something."

Miro has been working with the centre for about six months after having dropped out of vocational training (metalworking) because he was experiencing "not the best life situation", as he puts it.

"I wasn't capable of attending college back then, but I've just reapplied. Of the things I've learned at Vamos, they've taught me how to function more effectively in a group context," says Miro.

#### **SOCIAL WORK, SEXUAL THERAPY AND CIRCUS SCHOOL**

According to Olli Alanen, everything they do at Vamos always focuses on targets. They do not want just to be a place where people come to pass a few hours.

"We have our own careers officers who try to organise training or jobs for the young people. Where possible, we try to meet the young people's own requests. We work in partnership with small companies as well, so we can also offer jobs that are a little out of the ordinary."

Vamos' other partners include municipalities and various organisations. Young people are offered everything from support from colleagues for addiction problems to the opportunity to take part in a circus school. The municipal services are integrated to an extent in the centre at Vamos. The various units have staff who work with outreach youth work, social work, sexual therapy and advice on accommodation.

"The psychiatric nurses of the city of Helsinki also have their clinic on our premises, which is brilliant. We're the best place for the municipali-





ties to reach these young people. But if the decision were mine, I'd like us to have even greater service packages for helping young people with mental ill health," says Alanen.

#### **GETTING TO KNOW YOURSELF**

Raija, 22 years old, started coming to the Vamos centre just a few months ago after having been a client at a psychiatric day hospital.

"The staff at the hospital recommended Vamos. It's good here, I don't end up just sitting at home staring at the wall. There are lots of other people here who are in the same situation as me, so I don't have to constantly keep explaining myself. Vamos has given me support, and above all I've received the support of my colleagues. The staff here really listen to us," says Raija.

Anna (not her real name), 27, has been coming to Vamos for nearly two years. Before that, she was on sick leave for a fairly long time due to serious epileptic fits and problems with her medication which made her very tired.

"The most important thing for me here is the daily rhythm. I've also got to know myself a bit better, what's suitable for me and what's not. I now know, for instance, that I ought to be working as part of a team. I'm planning to apply to the practical nursing programme, because now I feel I can do it," says Anna.

#### **REACHING OUT TO PARENTS AND FRIENDS**

Vamos regularly assesses its activities in-house and is able to present good results.

"Two-thirds of all our young people go on to find jobs or places at college or in preparatory training. This evaluation also shows that the young people are happier and their belief in the future tends to be stronger," explains Olli Alanen.

But there still remains much to be done.

"The big challenge lies in how we should succeed in reaching out to the people surrounding

our young people. In the long run, simply helping individuals isn't sustainable. We also have to try to overcome the problems of their relatives or friends. I'd also like to work with an even younger target group than we do at the moment. This might help us to prevent problems before they escalate," says Alanen.

### IN TEN YEARS' TIME...

Anna, Miro and Raija no longer hesitate when asked where they see themselves being in ten years' time.

"By then, I hope to have studied education and psychology and to be working with children. I'd

like to be Finland's supernanny!" says Anna.

"I'll have had an education and I'll be working somewhere in the Canary Islands," says Miro.

"I try to live in the here and now. I might have a job by then, but the most important thing is for me to feel better in myself," says Raija.



According to senior specialist Olli Alanen, everything they do at Vamos always focuses on targets.

## FACTS ABOUT VAMOS

Vamos employs around 70 staff throughout Finland (about 30 employees work in Helsinki). Around 1500 young people are involved with the centre on an annual basis (half of them in Helsinki). Vamos has centres in Helsinki, Espoo, Turku and Kuopio.

### **Responsible for the centre?**

Helsinki Diakonia College (a charitable foundation).

### **Cooperating/collaborating organisations?**

The municipal services are integrated to an extent in the activities at Vamos (including outreach youth work, psychiatric nurses and advice on accommodation), along with various companies, training courses and organisations.

### **Target group?**

Young people aged 16 to 29 who are not in education or employment. Vamos works with 12 to 19-year-olds in Turku, a younger target group than elsewhere in Finland.

### **Professional profiles of the staff?**

Social workers, professional supervisors and psychiatric nurses, for example. Vamos emphasises the fact that the training of its staff is of less importance. The important thing is for them to be capable of working with and urging on the young people.



## FINLAND | "YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULDN'T ALWAYS HAVE TO ADAPT TO STRUCTURES"

**Text:** Jessica Gustafsson **Photo:** Héctor Montes

**"I'm a trained practical nurse, and my job included lecturing to young people at a youth workshop. Suddenly, I'm now a client here. It took a bit of time for me to feel comfortable here, but I'm pleased I had the courage to take that step," explains 22-year-old Jenny, one of the young people taking part in activities at the SVEPS youth workshop in Helsinki.**

"I was bullied terribly when I was little, partly because I went to a special school. I had childhood epilepsy and was tested for Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, a group of inherited connective tissue disorders. People are so quick to judge others, and this is why I want to work to counteract unfairness," explains Jenny, who worked in the education sector and the field of senior care until the summer of 2014.

"I fainted at work, and since then I've been on sick leave. My mum just happens to work with outreach youth work, and she was the one who recommended SVEPS to me. So now I've been here for a few months."

### HELP WITH BILLS AND HEALTH

SVEPS runs four different activities: initial training three days a week for young people who have been out of work or education for any length of time, occupational training five days a week, outreach youth work and job coaching. "The best thing about SVEPS is that I can always get help – with bills, with my health or with awkward paperwork from the Social Insurance Institution of Finland," says Jenny.

### CUSTOMISED JOBS

Peter Rolin, centre manager at SVEPS, explains that more than 80 per cent of the young people here have found jobs, places on courses or other positive placements after having taken part in SVEPS activities.

We have relatively good chances of customising jobs to the wishes of our young people as we're based in the capital region. Our job coach maintains good contact with small and medium-sized enterprises, and he can – for example – offer practical assistance with paperwork to small businesses taking on a young person. Further developing the tasks of the job coach is something that could be considered jointly at a Nordic level," says Rolin.

### NOT A UNIFORM GROUP OF PEOPLE

According to Rolin, one of the big challenges in this regard involves viewing young people as individuals.

"We can't simply focus on making sure that young people find a job or a place on the course within a specific time. If someone's been mar-





*“My favourite thing is cooking. We also have guest lecturers, potter about, go to the theatre and often pick up subjects that we spend a lot of time discussing.”*

ginalised for five years, for how long would it be acceptable to offer support measures? This is a constant source of negotiation with officials. “How we could help young people at an even earlier stage is another major challenge. This ought to be considered within the scope of the youth guarantee,” reckons Rolin.

He would like to see the training courses in general being a little more flexible, and on-the-job training being offered to a greater extent than is currently the case.

“I wonder whether we could alter the structures so that they suited the young people better, so that the young people wouldn’t always have to adapt to the structures,” muses Rolin.

#### **COOKING AND THEATRE**

Emil, 18, has been taking part in SVEPS activities for about two months. Before that, he was studying for a BA in Computer Science at the

Prakticum vocational institute, where he still has a place on the course.

“I enjoyed the practical elements but wasn’t able to cope with certain courses, such as native language and ergonomics, so my supervisor suggested that I went to SVEPS. It’s good here, the supervisors are nice people.”

According to Emil, the best thing about SVEPS is that no two days are alike.

“My favourite thing is cooking. We also have guest lecturers, potter about, go to the theatre and often pick up subjects that we spend a lot of time discussing. Now I have something to do during the day.”

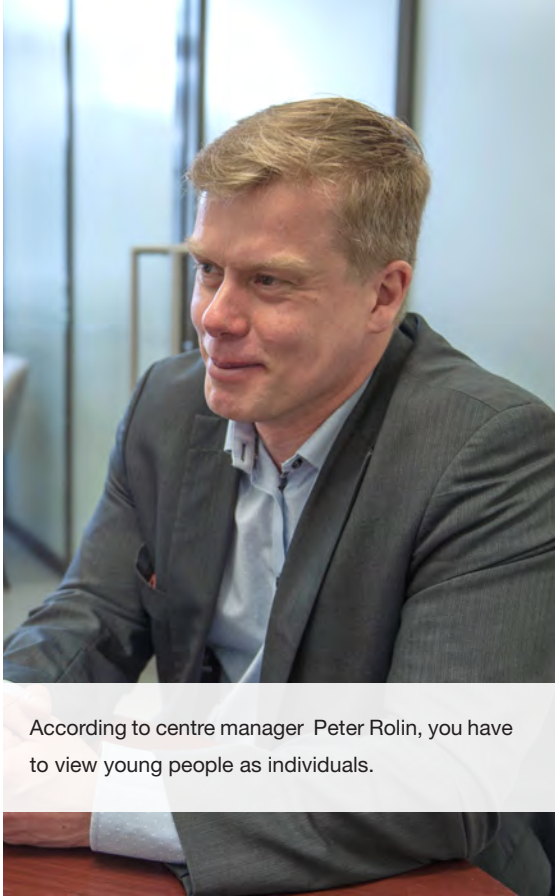
#### **IN TEN YEARS’ TIME...**

Emil is not sure whether he will go back to his studies in the autumn.

“It depends a bit on how I feel. Things might be difficult if there are people I don’t get on with. I have no idea where I’ll be in ten years’ time, I don’t usually think so far ahead. Ideally, I’d like to play World of Tanks professionally.”

Jenny is very clear about her answer when asked where she sees herself being in ten years’ time.

“I really hope I won’t be in a wheelchair because of my illness. I don’t want to be on a disability pension either. I won’t be able to work as a practical nurse any more, but I’d really like to train as a social worker, for example.”



According to centre manager Peter Rolin, you have to view young people as individuals.

**FACTS ABOUT SVEPS**

Around 250 young people receive guidance at SVEPS every year, and SVEPS employs 10 staff.

**Responsible for the centre?**

Folkhälsan Utbildning Ab (Public health education l.c.).

**Cooperating/collaborating organisations?**

Social services in the capital region, psychologists, employment offices and various study and work communities, for example.

**Target group?**

The target group for SVEPS is young people aged 16 to 28 who speak Swedish and are currently not in work or education or who have nothing else to do during the day.

**Who finances the activities?**

The Ministry of Education and Culture, municipalities in the capital region, the Regional State Administrative Agency, Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, funds and foundations.

**Professional profiles of the staff?**

Outreach youth workers, people with degrees in education and social sciences, and social-workers.

## GREENLAND | “I’M MOVING FORWARD NOW”

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*Text: Inga Egede*

**THESE ARE THE WORDS** of 25-year old Sara, who was born with alcohol-induced foetal damage and grew up in a number of foster and children’s homes. In recent years, she has been working at Piorsaavik, an employment centre for young people in Nuuk. The centre has helped her to move forward in life. She now has a job and a place to live.

“I feel like I’m moving forward now,” says Sara. Because she has just recounted a tough and unhappy life, first as a child and then as an adolescent, characterised by failure and insecurity. Sara has never had it easy, but fortune is at last smiling on her now. Sara has been affiliated to Piorsaavik for almost four years now, and she is on the way to emerging into the big, wide world, because she now has a job and a place where she can live for a year.

“My partner and I have got jobs and we have rented an apartment for a year, so things can only get better for us now,” says Sara, who recently got a temporary job as a kitchen and cleaning assistant in a canteen.

Sara was born with alcohol-induced foetal damage, grew up in a number of foster homes, spent some of her childhood in a children’s home and has always been in a special class. She was bullied during her childhood and adolescent years and is embarrassed that she is different from other people. She has tried to commit suicide several times, the first time when she was 13, and she has never been far from suicide since her teenage years. Several people in her family and circle of friends have committed

suicide. Her younger brother committed suicide last year. He was 22.

### **NEED FOR ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

The vision when Piorsaavik opened its doors in 2009 was that the project would be closed down within 10 years. However, the manager of Piorsaavik, Nuuk Nanna Chemnitz, believes there will be a need for the Piorsaavik project for many years to come yet and that similar initiatives should be set up in elsewhere in Greenland.

– We have so many young people in Greenland who do not finish their education and who neither work nor study. There is a compelling need for alternative education paths for young people, a context for individuals to exist in, employment and, last but not least, a drug-free life. Around half of pupils leaving Folkeskole (State primary and lower secondary school) in Greenland do not go on to further education. In 2010, around 53% of 458 pupils did not enter education. In 2011, around 50% of 402 pupils who left Folkeskole did not go on to further education”, says Nanna Chemnitz.

In Piorsaavik, the staff work according to the needs of the individual. The initiative offers creative work, “learning by doing”. Piorsaavik wants to offer a secure place with secure adults where young people can reflect on and discuss their life situation and get the tools and courage they need to take a step towards employment, education and a healthier life. If necessary, the young people get help to come into contact with

*“When I came to Piorsaavik I felt that I had finally arrived at a place where I could get started and be heard and listened to.”*

a psychologist, social worker, hospital or other support body.

– Many adolescents who come to us come from socially challenging homes; around 40% have substance abuse problems; some have had jobs but been unable to keep them. Here, we give them a belief in their own abilities and support them. Everyone is good at something after all and it is amazing to see when they create something with their own hands and find that they are good at something after all – they grow here,” says Nanna Chemnitz.

Sara has been affiliated to Piossaavik for a number of years now and is very grateful for the support and help she has received. She says that for the first time in her life she felt that someone was interested in her when she got a place at Piorsaavik almost four years ago. Piorsaavik helped her to find an apartment, which she has furnished sparsely.



– When I came to Piorsaavik as a 21-year old, I felt that I had finally arrived at a place where I could get started and be heard and listened to. The best thing of all was that there was a kitchen where I could prepare food myself. Because I’ve always enjoyed cooking and would like to train as a chef,” says Sara.

### CHILDREN

Sara is the fourth of six siblings. When she was three months old, she was compulsorily removed from her home and placed with a single foster mother until she was 14. She was a hyperactive child and was bullied at school because she was different.

“I was bullied and stayed away from school. I felt very alone during my childhood. I hid and was embarrassed about being different, but I never told anyone about my feelings. When I started stealing from my foster mother as a 14-year old, I was moved to a new foster mother. It was a very confusing period, partly because after two years with the second foster family I was moved to a children’s home”.

“My first foster mother is the only person who has shown that she loved me. It was therefore very hard when she died a year after I left her. So although I have always kept in contact with my biological parents and siblings, since my first foster mother died I hadn’t had anything permanent to relate to or any close relationships until I came to Piorsaavik as a 21-year old,” says Sara. As a 17-year old, Sara went to a continuation school for intellectually disabled young people in Bornholm. The two years she spent there were very positive. When she arrived in Greenland, she was placed in a home for mentally handicapped young people, where she lived for 18 months.



“It was odd to live with intellectually disable people, because I’m very hyperactive because of my handicap. So it was strange to live with young people with a mental handicap. Because I don’t think about my own illness as such. I’m just hyperactive and restless,” she says.

More recently, Sara lived for a while with a “stepfather”. When she met her partner four years ago, she moved in with him into a small apartment. They lived there until they were evicted because they had got behind with the rent. That is why Sara and her boyfriend had been staying with his parents and various friends until around three weeks ago, when they managed to rent their current small apartment, where they can live for a year.

### **SUICIDAL THOUGHTS**

Sara has tried to commit suicide several times in her young life. She also says that she self-harmed for many years.

“I first tried to commit suicide when I was about 12-13 years old.”

Since then, she has tried to commit suicide several times by hanging herself.

“The feelings of desolation just keeps coming until I reach the point where I want to leave my sad life behind. I have often had suicidal thoughts and I used to cut myself when I was a teenager, but when I stop to think about how much it hurts and how hard it is when someone close to you commits suicide, that is what stops me from doing it,” says Sara quietly.

“Several of my former classmates from the special class and other friends have committed suicide. It’s very hard to take when your family and friends die.”

### **MOVING FORWARDS**

Sara’s eyes light up as she starts to talk about her time at Piorsaavik and her new job and apartment.

“If I hadn’t come to Piossaavik, I could never have coped. The staff have helped me and listened to me. I’ve learned a lot and developed myself. The staff at Piorsaavik have been my rock, and I have felt that people accept me as I am here. My time at Piorsaavik has enabled me to cope on my own and I now have a job. I’m particularly grateful that they have helped me to rent the apartment where we can stay for a year. It seems like I’m on the right path now,” concludes Sara.

### **FACTORS FOR SUCCESS**

Nanna Chemnitz attempts to describe what she believes are the strengths of the initiative: – We meet young people where they are, not where adults think they should be. Many of the staff who work here themselves have experience of dealing with tough challenges in life and we aren’t afraid of feelings. We see the whole individual and include their life situation, but above all else we make time to see and listen. We have learned that there is no single solution or method which can help everyone; every individual requires tailormade solutions and support.”

Nanna Chemnitz stresses that it is important that the staff show that they believe in the young people and their abilities and that they can achieve things. – At the same time, a person’s basic needs must be met before they can work on their personal development. We are prepared to give our young people a second and a third chance and we never promise anything we can’t deliver. Our young people have been failed by the adult world so many times, so their trust in us is vital. We always try to be available and if we have to prioritise our work, we prioritise meetings with young people first and paperwork second.

## FACTS ABOUT PIORSAAVIK

### Responsible for the organisation?

Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq.

### Cooperating/collaborating organisations?

Vocational college, upper secondary school.

### Target group?

Piorsaavik is an employment project for young people aged 16-24 in Nuuk. Young people who do not have Folkeskole (State primary and lower secondary school) qualifications or who achieved low school grades are employed in creative jobs which provide them with the skills they need to move on in education – or work.

### Who finances the organisation?

Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq, under which the towns of Nuuk, Paamiut, Tasiilaq and Ittoqqortoormiut belong, pay Piorsaavik's running costs, while the Government of Greenland pays education support for the young people who are employed at Piorsaavik.

### Professional profiles of the staff?

A manager, three activity leaders, a kitchen assistant, a joiner, an artist, a mentor and a kitchen manager are employed at Piorsaavik Nuuk.





# POLITICS

## CHAPTER 4

## AN INGENIOUS SYSTEM IN THE NORDIC MODEL

**Text:** Caroline Lagercrantz **Photo:** Victoria Henriksson

**"The fact that the social insurance schemes work well and that people have a high degree of confidence in the system provides a fundamental bond in the Nordic social model. This why other countries look up to the Nordic region," says Anna Hedborg, Swedish government official and politician.**

**ANNA HEDBORG CAN** look back on a long period of service to the government. In the 1970s, she worked together with Economist Rudolf Meidner, one of the architects behind the Swedish model's solidaristic pay policy, active labour market policies and the proposal for wage earner funds. Anna Hedborg was the Social Democrat government's Minister for Social Security, Director General at the Swedish National Social Insurance Board and an investigator of social insurance schemes.

"I developed an interest in social insurance schemes early on – their structure is really very clever. These are income-related, mandatory insurance schemes where everyone is a stakeholder. The fact that the social insurance schemes work well and that people have a high degree of confidence in the system provides a fundamental bond in the Nordic social model. This why other countries look up to the Nordic region," says Anna Hedborg.

She points out how important it is to protect the social insurance system for the future.

"The insurance idea is absolutely crucial. I pay for the certainty of knowing that I will have money to live on if I fall ill one day or lose my job. This is why it is important for the system to be formulated clearly, so that I can know how much I stand to receive. Social insurance schemes are also a very powerful tool when it comes to redistribution policy. High and low income earners pay the same percentage of their income through employer contributions and receive the same proportion in compensation should they need it. This may not sound all that redistributive, but it benefits low income earners a lot more frequently as they are affected by illness and unemployment more often," says Anna Hedborg.

"In practice, therefore, income-related social insurance schemes even out the standard of living more than most progressive taxes – and in forms which combine the self-interest



which high earners also have in income security in advance, with redistribution in arrears,” explains Anna Hedborg.

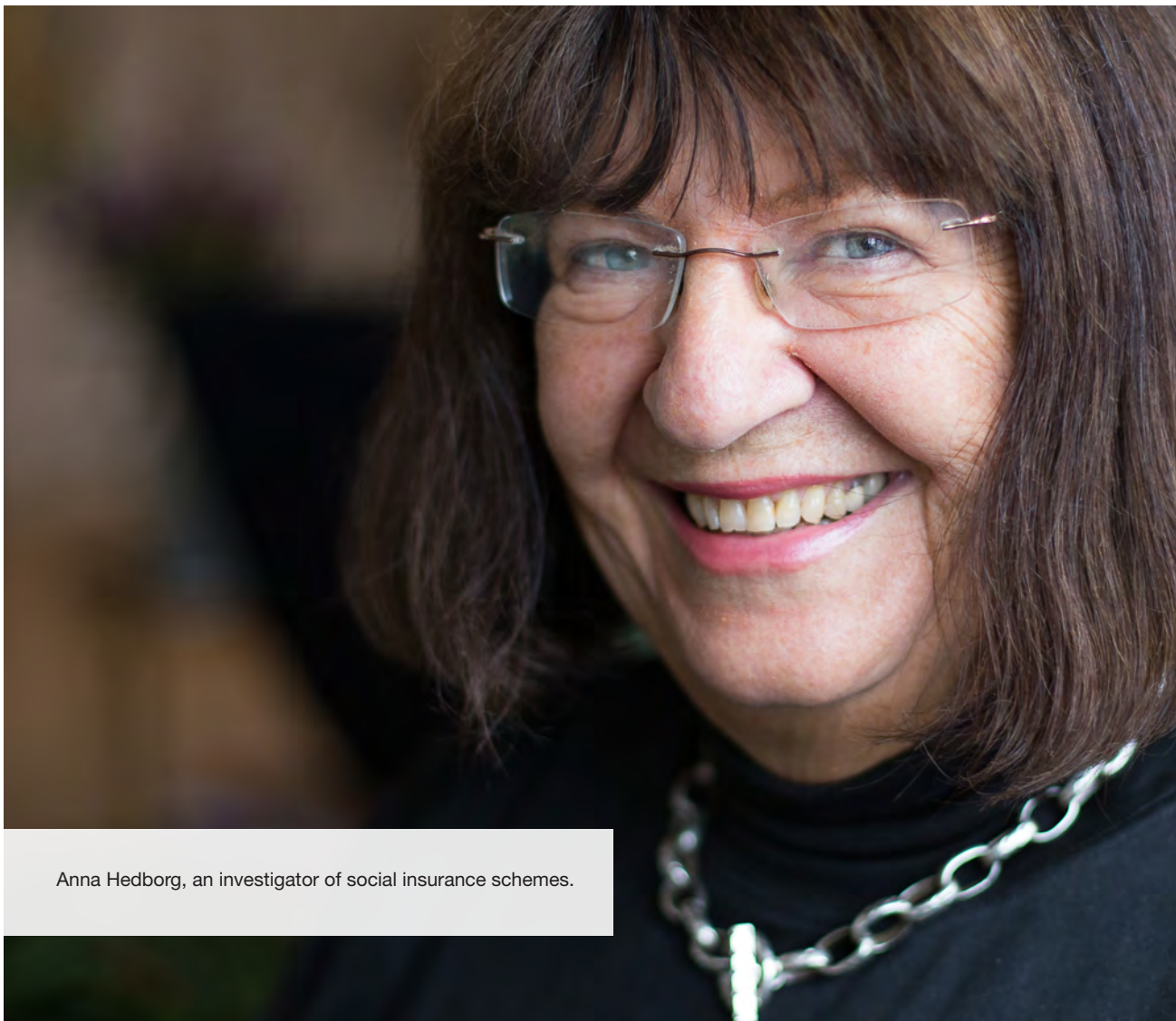
### **NEW PROPOSALS**

The Parliamentary social insurance committee presented its findings recently. These findings point out some of the most serious shortcomings in the current social insurance system. Not enough is being done to help people who have been on sick leave to return to work; impaired standard security means that individuals are often severely affected in financial terms in the event of illness and unemployment, and the numbers of people taking time off sick vary widely over time, but no one really knows why. The committee is proposing a number of changes, including dropping the sunset clause in health insurance and making calculation of sickness benefit more accurate and predictable for employees, as well as gradually increasing caps with regard to social insurance schemes.

Health and medical services would also take on greater responsibility for sick leave through a special initiative.

Anna Hedborg is of the opinion that having a broad parliamentary agreement is a positive thing, but at the same time she perceives certain risks.

“The fact that people have tried to agree on long-term solutions is a good thing, but this also means that we have to work to the lowest common denominator. As a result, nobody is really passionate about the proposals. We need more proposals, specific ones, stating who is to stand responsible for what,” says Anna Hedborg.



Anna Hedborg, an investigator of social insurance schemes.

### CONFIDENCE REDUCED

Anna Hedborg points out that deterioration in social insurance schemes has led to impairment of confidence in the system over the past few years. Since the 1990s, both health insurance and unemployment insurance levels have fallen enormously compared with wage development on the labour market. The risk with the current low sickness and unemployment benefits is that these create divisions in society. People on low incomes risk ending up in poverty if they are unemployed or on long-term sick leave, while people with high incomes find it easier to acquire additional insurance via their employers.

The impairment of standard security has been ongoing for a number of decades, but the previous conservative government's enormous changes to health insurance further increased the gap between people who work and people who are unemployed or on sick leave, reckons Anna Hedborg.

“Taking money earmarked for social insurance schemes in order to finance tax relief for people in work via the earned income tax credit was a massive cheek!”

The sunset clause in health insurance was a change that attracted a lot of attention and criticism when it was introduced in 2008. Many people who had been on sick leave for a long time suddenly saw their sickness benefit being withdrawn, leaving them with no means of support. Anna Hedborg regrets the fact that the reform was introduced in that way.

“Time limits and checks are definitely needed in health insurance, and most Western countries have these. Being on sick leave for a long time with no contact with the medical services is not a good idea, but the changes were made far too quickly, without proper investigation.”

*“The fact that people have tried to agree on long-term solutions is a good thing, but this also means that we have to work to the lowest common denominator.”*

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*“It is important to uphold the best features of the Nordic welfare model, where standard security in the social insurance system has a vital part to play.”*

Anna Hedborg reckons that this was a shame, as things were developing in the right direction at the time. She was Director General at the Swedish National Social Insurance Board in the early 2000s and saw the numbers of people on sick leave dwindling. A good partnership had been initiated with the medical profession, and the National Board of Health and Welfare had issued new guidelines on sick leave periods.

“It is important for doctors to help drive the process forward and work with sick leave as a treatment method as an element of rehabilitation, but this work came to a halt when this drastic change in the rules was implemented in such a short time. The new rules involved pitfalls and an implacable boundary. Doctors were downright furious when many of their patients suddenly found themselves without sickness benefit,” says Anna Hedborg.

#### **SENSITIVE PROCESS**

Anna Hedborg emphasises the fact that the sick leave process is a sensitive matter for the individual in question and requires respect from all involved.

“It is important for patients to be able to have confidence in their doctors. If I am on sick leave, I want to have someone on my side in an insecure situation. People may need professional support to be able to return to work after a lengthy period of sick leave, not least if they were off sick on account of stress or fatigue syndrome, those increasingly common mental problems.

“With the current system, it is common for the Social Insurance Office to use the services of doctors who do not meet the patients; decisions on extending sick leave can be based on doctors’ certificates. A specialist assessment team meeting patients at regular intervals could be a better model. This method is used in countries such as Germany,” explains Anna Hedborg.

The number of people on sick leave varies widely in Sweden, and we are currently seeing an increase in the number of cases of sick leave due to mental problems, not least among young women. The problems are often found in the workplace, in the form of poor working conditions and lots of stress. Anna Hedborg is of the opinion that occupational health services must be improved and take greater responsibility.

Anna Hedborg recently chaired a committee on equality in social insurance schemes for the Delegation for Gender Equality. Committee members are of the view that social insurance schemes are and must remain gender neutral in form, but that the outcomes differ for men and women. This is largely due to the fact that women, on average, earn less than men. The committee points out the importance of taking into account the weaker position of women and people born abroad in terms of the labour market so that they are not disadvantaged in the social insurance system.

“Our ambition must be to get as many people into work as possible, and for that we need a successful labour market policy,” points out Anna Hedborg.

## UPHOLDING THE MODEL

Anna Hedborg emphasises just how important it is to make it possible for everyone to provide for themselves by working: to ensure that people receive the support they need in order to find suitable work, even if they have reduced work capacity. This may involve offering more people occupational training, more protected jobs and important labour market projects in the fields of culture and environmental conservation. As a result, important tasks may be carried out which would otherwise never happen.

“According to the labour movement, the ‘work-first principle’ assumes that almost everyone forms part of the workforce. You work and pay loyally into a system which you know will guarantee you financial security if you fall ill or lose your job, or when you get old. This involves serious work, work which is worth paying a reasonable salary for,” says Anna Hedborg.

“It is important to uphold the best features of the Nordic welfare model, where standard security in the social insurance system has a vital part to play. Not to create a society where people are either ‘in’ or ‘out’, but a society where everyone is covered by a social insurance scheme funded through solidarity. Making the redistributions needed for this is no easy task, but this is what we have to aim for,” says Anna Hedborg.



# RESEARCH AND FUTURE KNOW- LEDGE NEEDS

## CHAPTER 5

## NORDIC NETWORK EMPHASISES YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

**Text:** *Caroline Lagercrantz* **Photo:** *Terje Olsen*

**Research network Unga i Risiko – Young People at Risk – is a hub for researchers from all over the Nordic region who are committed to sharing knowledge about young people who risk ending up in vulnerable situations. This network aims to reinforce the youth perspective in research by incorporating the young people’s own stories.**

**THE YOUTH GENERATION** in the Nordic region has never been as big as it is today. Almost five million people living in the Nordic region are young people aged 16 to 29. At the same time, research shows that between six and 12 per cent of people in each age group risk exclusion. This is a serious matter, both for the young people concerned and the Nordic welfare model. What do we know about the situations of these young people? How can research-based knowledge be developed and converted for use in practical work with young people and the formulation of youth policy? Nordic research network Unga i Risiko was formed in 2013 to examine the answers to these questions. This network is made up of Nordic social researchers specialising in qualitatively-oriented research into young people in the risk zone. One of the initiators of the network is Professor Reidun Follesø of the University of Nordland.

“As a result of the Youth in Flight project, for which I was the research manager, I became more and more aware of the importance of

hearing the stories young people themselves have to tell. Agnete Neidel of the National Board of Health and Welfare in Copenhagen read one of our research reports and got in touch. We discovered we shared a fervent commitment to young people. We made the decision to meet up together with Trine Wulf-Andersen from Roskilde University. This turned out to be a magical meeting, and after ten intensive hours our plan was complete. We were aiming to gather together Nordic researchers who shared our commitment to qualitative research that may be of significance to practical policy. Four months later, 20 researchers met up for the first time. Our network has grown since then, and we have embarked upon an incredibly exciting journey,” explains Reidun Follesø.

The aim of the network is to develop research projects which increase knowledge of young people on the basis of qualitative research. The Unga i Risiko research network now includes 35 researchers from 19 Nordic universities, colleges, research institutes and knowledge envi-



The research network Unga i Risiko – Young People at Risk.

ronments. The researchers are working together to compile, communicate and initiate specific research partnerships between the Nordic countries. The members of the network meet twice a year in the various Nordic countries in order to swap experiences and information. The Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues has hosted the network’s meetings twice, providing information on what is going on within the project Young People in the Nordic Region. Project manager Lidija Kolouh-Söderlund of the Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues explained that this project has benefited greatly from the knowledge of the network and its rich network of contacts.

“For me as a project manager, it is fantastic to have access to a professional network of researchers with qualitative focus from all over the Nordic region, all of whom share an interest in young people and the risk zone. There is a vast amount of knowledge within the network, and for the project it provides a vital channel

out to the Nordic research environments,” says Lidija Kolouh-Söderlund.

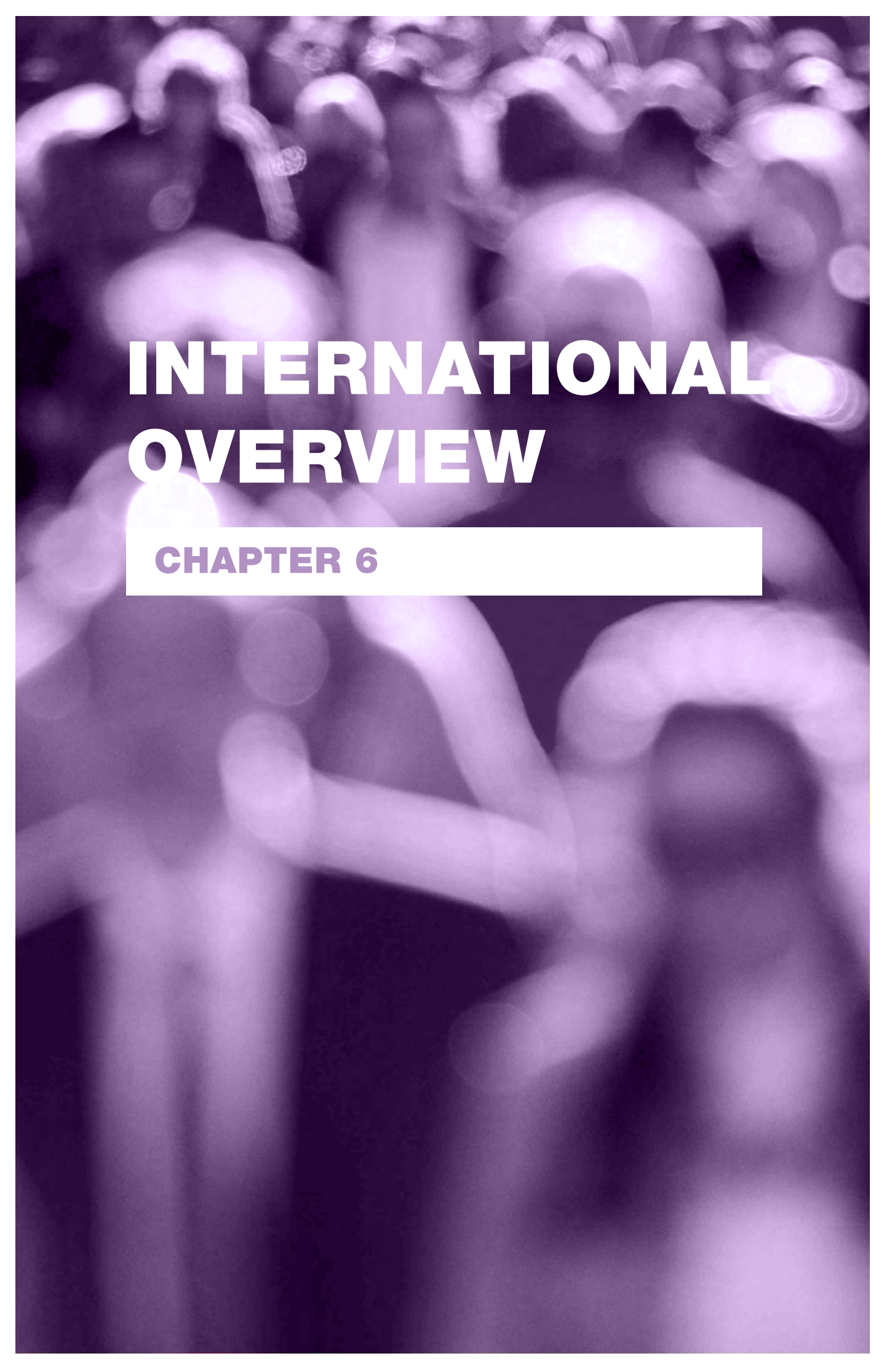
The research network will be publishing an anthology in January 2016, emphasising the living conditions of young people and the things that – according to the young people themselves – make a difference to their lives. This anthology emphasises the youth perspective by providing scope for the young people to tell their own stories. The Unga i Risiko research network is responsible for the anthology, and the ambition is to pass it on to universities and colleges in the Nordic countries and to be able to use it as teaching material there.

“The guiding principle is to show how qualitative research can help ensure best practice in the field of support and assistance for young people in the risk zone. The various research articles can be boiled down into specific policy proposals, you could say,” explains Lidija Kolouh-Söderlund.

*“For me as a project manager, it is fantastic to have access to a professional network of researchers with qualitative focus from all over the Nordic region, all of whom share an interest in young people and the risk zone.”*







# **INTERNATIONAL OVERVIEW**

## **CHAPTER 6**

# ESN BRINGS TOGETHER SOCIAL SERVICES IN EUROPE

*Text: Caroline Jonsson*

**The European Social Network (ESN) enables local public social services in Europe to share best practices. The ESN recently arranged a workshop that addressed how social services can work across sectors to facilitate the inclusion of young people with mental health problems, young people leaving care, and young people with a refugee background. As a member of the ESN, The Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues presented the project “Youth in the Nordic Countries”.**

## **THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL NETWORK (ESN)**

The European Social Network (ESN) is the primary network for local public social services in Europe. The ESN enables its members to come together to improve the quality of the services they provide. The Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues is one of over a hundred ESN member organizations in 34 countries. John Halloran is the ESN’s Chief Executive:

– Today in Europe, young people face a number of challenges, and society and our services need to address these problems. Practically, we need an approach that listens to young people and seeks to understand their particular needs and recognises that many of them feel alienated. We (local public services) need to build support for them as close as possible to where they live and grow up.

Halloran continues describing the importance of cross-sectoral cooperation to support young persons who are at risk of marginalization:

– The increase in poor mental health among young people is acknowledged by many of our members who have identified the importance of

working with other agencies, including education, employment, housing, health, and social services to see how we can help young people to develop their skills and resilience to improve their chances of leading a good life.

## **BRIDGING THE GAP**

The ESN believes that social services must protect and support vulnerable people, uphold their dignity and independence, listen to service users, and promote solidarity between people and their communities. Halloran gives a European example of a best practice that focuses on cross-sectoral cooperation:

– In the city of Offenbach in Germany, near Frankfurt, there’s a project called “Bridging the Gap” (Kein Abschluss ohne Anschluss) where social services and employment agencies help those from ethnic minority groups who are early school leavers.

This project in Germany is integrated with education, employment, and housing. Education takes an early intervention approach to prevent early school leaving and provides tutoring and

vocational education for those having special needs. The social services also connect with ethnic minority communities and empower parents and help them to find solutions.

– Employment services regard this as “transition management” that focuses on active labour market policies to encourage young people to find work, works with employers to promote a demand-led approach, and monitors and reports the ultimate results of the project. So it’s really an integrated approach for young people who have an ethnic minority background who are either early school leavers or at risk of early school leaving.

### **THE HAGUE WORKSHOP**

Young persons at risk of marginalization or early retirement are a diverse group. In recognition of these young person’s varying life circumstances, and as a way of letting the members of ESN learn from each other’s work, the network recently arranged a workshop in The Hague that addressed how local public social services can work across sectors to facilitate the social and active inclusion of young people with mental health problems, young people leaving care, and young people with a refugee background.

– The ESN is indirectly involved in reducing the school dropout rate by sharing good practices and bringing together those in education and children’s services. The ESN’s Rome seminar, which took place a few years ago, looked specifically at this issue, and the ESN’s recent workshop on Vulnerable Youth

Speakers from across Europe participated in the workshop in The Hague, and among them was Project Manager Dr. Kolouh-Söderlund from The Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues, who presented the project “Youth in the Nordic Countries”, which addresses youth and young adults in the age range from 16 to 29 years of age. The project analyses the transition from education into the labour market with regard to risk factors such as neuropsychiatric disorders, dyslexia, depression, substance abuse, and problematic and destructive home condi-

tions. Workshops like this enable members to learn from other European countries and to disseminate best Nordic practices and knowledge.

### **EFFECTIVENESS OF THE YOUTH GUARANTEE**

The ESN believes that the Youth Guarantee launched by the European Union has a lot of potential to provide vulnerable youngsters with opportunities in employment, education, and training. For the program to be effective, it needs to be adapted to the complex needs of young people who are at risk or who have mental health problems, for example, by involving social workers and mental health professionals in helping these young people find jobs and supporting them in the early stages of employment.

– Young people who have been in care are particularly vulnerable because they might lack the social relationship skills that many of us living in families take for granted. They might need additional help moving from an alternative family or institutional care to becoming more independent.

Halloran also addresses how social services need to be sensitive to cultural differences and to build into their policy and practice a working relationship with minority communities to enable all generations to become integrated and to become creative and active members of society.

### **“CAPACITY BUILDING AT ITS BEST”**

– Local authorities need to build relationships with young people that continue beyond the usual school leaving age and follow them into their twenties to ensure they are properly settled in adult life, continues Halloran. He mentions the project “Right Here” as a good example of empowering young people who are at risk of marginalization. This project from Northern Ireland addresses the 40% of young people who are affected by mental illness as a direct result of unemployment.



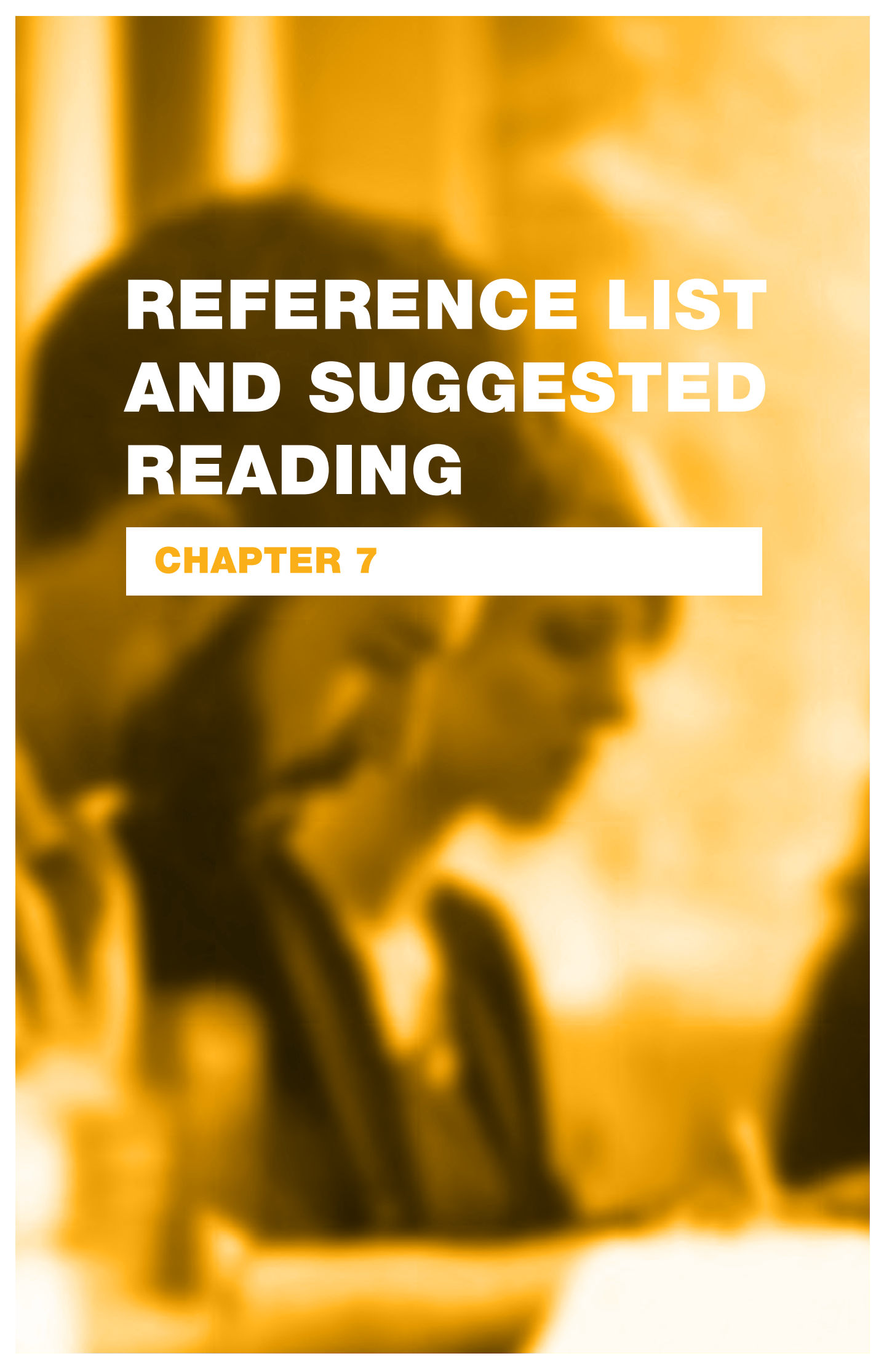
John Halloran, Chief Executive, European Social Network.

– In fact, one tenth of these young people have been prescribed anti-depressants, and this rate actually doubles to 25 % among those who have been unemployed for over six months. This project and its youth work component helps to strengthen empowerment and resilience among these young people who might be experiencing

a lack of confidence or who might have been impacted by a troubled upbringing in a segregated environment. This is capacity building at its best.

*“ The increase in poor mental health among young people is acknowledged by many of our members who have identified the importance of working with other agencies, including education, employment, housing, health, and social services to see how we can help young people to develop their skills and resilience to improve their chances of leading a good life. ”*





# **REFERENCE LIST AND SUGGESTED READING**

## **CHAPTER 7**

# REFERENCE LIST

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## SUGGESTED READING

### PUBLICATIONS FROM THE PROJECT

#### Young People in the Nordic Region – Mental Health, Work, Education

##### ***Vi arbetar med unga i Norden.***

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During spring 2016 you will be able to download more reports, so follow the project:  
<http://www.nordicwelfare.org/Projekt/Unga-i-Norden/>

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## **SWEDEN**

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# ABOUT THE PROJECT

## YOUTH IN THE NORDIC REGION – MENTAL HEALTH, WORK, EDUCATION

The Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues project, Youth in the Nordic Region – Mental Health, Work, Education, was commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers for Health and Social Affairs.

The main aim was to provide knowledge that will be useful in developing initiatives for young people at risk of mental ill-health and social marginalisation. One objective of the Nordic countries is sustainable welfare, and one area of focus is the work to prevent mental ill-health,

early retirement and exclusion, and to promote rehabilitation. One constant challenge is how to ensure social security at a time when the labour market is undergoing constant change.

The direct target group for the project is politicians, officials, practitioners and researchers in the Nordic countries, and the indirect target group comprises the young people aged 16-29 who are at risk of exclusion.

[www.nordicwelfare.org/unga-in-i-norden](http://www.nordicwelfare.org/unga-in-i-norden)

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*Dialogue*

We create dialogue between politicians, researchers and practitioners.

**Our focus areas are:**

Welfare policy  
Disability issues  
Labour market inclusion  
Alcohol and drug issues  
Welfare technology



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