



Sundhedscenter Vollsmose

# Healthy Children in Healthy Families

How did we cooperate with civil society

Best practice script on barriers and promoting factors

May 2013



ODENSE KOMMUNE

# Introduction

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Sundhedscenter Vollsmose has throughout their engagement in the project 'Healthy children in healthy families' (HCHF) met some barriers and promoting factors that can serve as inspiration for others in the creation of sustainable and solid cooperations with chosen types of partners in the civil society - and thereby also cooperating with volunteers.

The report has been created in an open information environment with discussions and is thus built on the basis of a best practice analysis model. The objective of the report is to pragmatically keyword collaborative ways of working with different partners and can be viewed as a retrospective description of the barriers and promoting factors met in these partnerships. Every description is built around a textbox with keywords related to the barriers and promoting factors, and furthermore questions for further discussions are listed.

Also a small description of how the scope of this project has served as inspiration in the development and creation of another project involving volunteers is included in this report. The report is completed with a summary of the most important traits listed as recommendations.

Sundhedscenter Vollsmose has parallel to the creation of this report produced a two-sided post card summing up this report, which is to be handed out at the final HCHF conference in Bruxelles, May 2013. This post card serves as a practical tool for others initiating sustainable partnerships between local authorities and civil society.

## **Definition of civil society**

We are all part of civil society. Society is used as a generic term for actors and groups that exist between and independently of privacy, the market and the public in a democratic society. The limits between the different spheres is often not clear-cut, and many activities in the society therefore often cross. Civil society can be, in other words, difficult to define.

Civil society consist of associations, foundations, non-profit institutions, groups, interest groups, network and much more. Civil society is also independent schools, football clubs and not least the many active citizens and volunteers in the different organizations. Civil society is also a great social resource. It is difficult to quantify how large it is, because the values of citizenship and cohesion cannot be quantified. We know, however, that around 35 per cent of the Danish adults do voluntary work. Many thousands of Danes take an active part in civil society and even more have benefited from the work of civil society contributors.

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## Cooperation between local authorities and civil society in Denmark

The Danish Government has in recent years become aware of the area concerning volunteering and working with volunteers. This increased focus was evidently expressed in the Government's Civil Society Strategy which was launched in autumn 2010. The political focus is initially stated as follows: *"Civil society unites us as a society because civil society bears some basic values in Danish society. Values such as democracy, personal responsibility and good citizenship thrive and develop civil society. Civil society, in other words, is the basis for active citizenship and cohesion in society."* (The Danish Government, 2010)

Odense Kommune believes that cooperating with volunteers in civil society creates consistency and value for the individual. Odense Kommune wants to create the best possible conditions for voluntary work in Odense. A diverse and active civil society provides the citizens an active life and a high quality of life.

Odense Kommune believes that working with volunteers can be an inspiration and benefit for all. As an employee you can get new inspiration and more time for core tasks. As a volunteer, you can make a meaningful effort - and maybe gain new members to your organization.

As a citizen you can participate in new and different things - and perhaps help to develop them. The volunteers are therefore in high demand in the municipalities. Virtually all municipalities in Denmark have increased their cooperation with volunteers in recent years and it is expected that they will incorporate volunteers even more in the future.

# Cooperation with civil society

## Cooperation with Mulernes Legatskole (Independent High School)

### Partner description

*Mulernes Legatskole* became an independent institution in 2007 and is a modern and development-oriented high school. In a collaboration with other educational institutions and other partners they ensure that students get a modern education preparing them for further high education and active participation in society. A high school in Denmark is a school where students after three years of schooling is provided access to a free higher education institution. The students can be enrolled into high school immediately after primary school (secondary schooling), which is after approximately nine years of schooling.

### Brief description of how cooperation has been established?

Getting in contact with the students at Mulernes Legatskole was not without obstacles. It was difficult for the project coordinators to sell the concept of students engaging in volunteer health work. The students seemed difficult to reach, even though they were the obvious target for creating role models when promoting health among children and youth.

A presentation at the schools morning gathering, where all students were represented along with their teachers was conducted. Afterwards a sign-up spot was created, which attracted plenty of students. The list of signed students were above expectation but their commitment, or lack of it, became obvious afterwards, when the second contact meeting was made. Only 10 students out of at least 50 students

participated in the final education as volunteer *health ambassador*.

### What are the promoting factors, this cooperation has given?

**Local settings:** The school is placed in local settings related to a target area, which has a positive influence on anchoring the project locally and getting in touch with the target group.

**Role models and peer education:** The greatest benefits from cooperating with high school students are the aspect of *role models*, since young people are proved to have a better effect on their peer students, friends and surroundings.

**Strengthens the curriculum and affects future careers:** Those students who did sign up and completed the education as health ambassadors seemed to have an agenda including a broadening of their résumé and curriculum. This element should not be underestimated because their title as health ambassador has and can affect many of them to continue their career in the field of health or helping others on a voluntarily basis, especially the vulnerable groups in society.

**Knowledge and experiences of volunteer work:** The students have gained relevant experiences with voluntary work and that can affect them to look at it in a more positive way.

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## What are the barriers this cooperation has met?

### *Education and careers seem more important:*

High school students do not serve as a united group with a common denominator, other than the importance of having an education. Therefore the students focus on different elements within this area. Another aspect is the lack of support from the teachers. It does not affect the school whether they gain success with their education as a health ambassador. The school serves as a place of educational teaching and learning.

*Uncertain motivation among the students:* Being a volunteer did not seem to have a level of importance for the high school students, so their motivation for signing up as volunteer health ambassador was not remarkable. In the end, they did not see themselves executing the job. Their signing up was done in as a spontaneous act, group pressure or for gaining popularity among fellow students. Their motivation was not pure, and certainly not based on the values of helping others. The time between signing up and following up was too long for the students, because they had already found interest in something else.

*Lack of local area attachment among the students:* Even though the school is placed in local settings, the students are mostly not. A high

percentage of them live in other areas and are active in other civil society mechanisms such as e.g. sports clubs. Furthermore, the students are only enrolled into the school for 3 years, and then they leave the area altogether, because the school is not situated in their local settings.

*Strong theoretical approach:* the objective for becoming a health ambassador was based more on individual goals related to theoretical attainment, than a shared vision like those existing within organizations or other communities.

*Weak link to strengthening civil society:* This level of cooperation is not linked to the grass root level of civil society. They are still assigned to some rules and laws of teaching and education, which does not leave much time for other activities.

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## Keywords on barriers and promoting factors when cooperating with Mulernes Legatskole

Barriers	Promoting factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ A strong theoretical approach</li><li>◆ Uncertain motivation among the students</li><li>◆ Lack of local area attachment among the students</li><li>◆ Education and carriers seems more important</li><li>◆ Weak link to strengthening civil society</li><li>◆</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Local settings</li><li>◆ Role models and peer education</li><li>◆ Strengthens the curriculum vitae and affects future carriers</li><li>◆ Knowledge and experiences of volunteer work</li></ul>

### Questions for discussion

- ⇒ *What other ways could you propose, when trying to gain interest from the students at a high school?*
- ⇒ *Are high school students a relevant group for this type of cooperation, and why/why not?*
- ⇒ *How can you attract and sustain an interest for volunteer work among high school students?*
- ⇒ *Can you name theories that are relevant for analyzing this type of cooperation?*

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## Cooperation with 'Healthy People' (local CSO)

### Brief description of how cooperation has been established?

The contact to 'Healthy People' was gained through a colleague, by asking her whether she knew any civil society organization of relevance to the project. Being socially rooted in the local target area she had a great network to benefit from. And she came up with the contact information to the grass root organization 'Healthy People' where she was and still is a member.

### Partner description

'Healthy People' is an organization that supplies the citizen with advice on exercise and health for both men and women in Vollsmose. They also give advice to diabetics, while the activities listed below are offered additionally;

- Gymnastics for girls and women
- Homework assistance for young women.
- Excursions
- Walking groups for elder people - both women and men
- A monthly lecture about healthy nutrition and nutritional counseling.

The members are mostly elder women, but the aspect of creating a subgroup for their children and other young people was of great interest. Therefore their children signed up for the health ambassador education and brought some of their

friends as well, creating a good mixture of different ethnic representatives.

### What are the promoting factors, this cooperation has given?

**Locally anchored at a grass root level:** The fact that the cooperation is locally anchored and established through an employee at Sundhedscenter Vollsmose has created a fertile ground for establishing further contact. This approach excels e.g. in relation to gaining access to a large group with common vision rather than attracting individuals. Furthermore this cooperation created new relationships within the group, which can serve as to be more accepted and respected as a local grass root organization. They seemed to have nothing to lose, and everything to gain, so their motivation was genuinely strong and not interrupted by other unknown factors.

**Accountability:** Overall, the volunteers were more willing to engage in something new because they had relationships that could recommend it. This made them more accountable since they had to account for more than just the authority.

**Great practical approach:** It is not the education aspect as well as the theoretical part that encouraged them to participate, they had a more practical approach to the completion of the tasks, which served the project in a positive way.

**Strong empowerment aspects:** Educating health ambassadors helps to benefit their own vision on health and life, and gives them strong competencies to engage in a more healthy life themselves.

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***Different ethnic groups gathered:*** In relation to strengthening the project area and target group, it also seemed to be a strong promoting factor having different ethnic groups gathered around the same objective. This meant a broader representation of the target group, and therefore their approach were more holistic and embracing.

## **What are the barriers this cooperation has met?**

***Group pressure and not well-considered:*** Their participation in the health ambassador education was not as well-considered as perhaps the high school students and might have an affect on their performance.

***Lack of theoretical approach:*** They do not pay attention to the underlying knowledge, and may create their own aspects of right and wrong.

***No future orientation:*** they did not seem to focus on the future benefits of their participation, which though can be both a barrier and a promoting factor depending on which objective you focus on. A barrier can be the doubt about their true engagement and objective for participating, which might affect their performance.

***Different motivation factors:*** Being the children of other members in Healthy People might pressure some into doing something they did not want to do; although they seem to have found it interesting it might not have been genuine.

## Keywords on barriers and promoting factors when cooperating with Healthy people

Barriers	Promoting factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Group pressure and not well considered</li><li>◆ Lack of theoretical approach</li><li>◆ No future orientation</li><li>◆ Different motivations</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Locally anchored in grass root level</li><li>◆ Strong empowerment aspects</li><li>◆ Great practical approach</li><li>◆ Accountability</li><li>◆ Different ethnic groups gathered</li></ul>

### Questions for discussion

- ⇒ *Are grass root organizations a relevant group for this type of cooperation, and why/why not?*
- ⇒ *How can you attract and sustain the attraction and motivation among the volunteers in a grass root organization?*
- ⇒ *In which way can you ensure a flexible approach in order to sustain the motivation among the volunteers in a grass root organization?*
- ⇒ *Which theories are relevant to include to analyze this cooperation?*

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## Cooperation with The Vollsmose Secretariat 2020 (local authority)

### Partner description

Vollsmose Secretariat 2020 is the coordinating office for the social initiatives in Vollsmose. The Secretariat undertakes the tasks related to the Master Plan 2012 - 2016 (called 'Vollsmose 2020') and is the Initiative Agreement signed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Municipality of Odense in 2011. The efforts of the secretariat are based on supporting partnerships concluded with the parties making an effort in Vollsmose. It concerns local initiatives, private initiatives and neighborhood democratic action activities.

### Brief description of how cooperation has been established?

A status meeting with a health coordinator from the secretariat was arranged to share information about initiatives and experiences as well as discussing possibilities for cooperating. Allowing for health ambassadors to be mentioned and the health coordinator to have a great interest in using the health ambassadors for other health projects in Vollsmose that includes help from volunteers. In this way, a road to new cooperations that involves the health ambassadors has been created. Sundhedscenter Vollsmose has served as a gatekeeper and can now leave the health ambassadors in the hands of another authorities. This corresponds well with the wish to establish/anchor the health ambassadors.

The health project, with help from the health ambassadors, is to create returning healthy nutrition

schools for children in the age of 12-15 years. These schools should be anchored in Vollsmose and take place in the autumn and winter holidays starting in the autumn 2013. The intention is to anchor it in Vollsmose, and thereby in local settings, to ensure that the logistics are not a barrier for the target group. The idea is that the health ambassadors shall coordinate the nutrition schools by preparing the weekly doses, doing grocery shopping, create activities, develop day plans etc. with support from the health coordinator in the Vollsmose secretariat 2020.

The nutrition school concept is created by a national civil society organization. By activating the health ambassadors in the project it creates the possibility of establishing a sub group in Vollsmose having the health ambassadors as responsible actors. Furthermore, the plan is to create a local community center housing all local CSOs, in order to broaden their network and thereby give them a reason for commitment.

The health ambassadors have therefore been transferred to the nutrition school project and the Vollsmose 2020 secretariat. Furthermore the educational programs and materials / evaluations from HCHF have been communicated to the Vollsmose 2020 secretariat.

### What are the promoting factors, this cooperation has given?

*Network and Creation of relations to promote health:* Copying the education plan from HCHF in a pure form is not easy, but a knowledge sharing across departments and administration has great benefits and supports the development of network.

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**Peer education and role models:** It can benefit the project to maintain a large focus on peer education. It serves the health ambassadors, since they are one step ahead compared to new volunteers, and thus perfect to view them as trustworthy. This can make the health ambassadors, responsible for new nutrition school ambassadors.

**Strong involvement:** An appreciation of the health ambassadors' qualifications creates a great incentive for keeping them involved.

**Great aspects of sustainable effects:** Sustainability is well rooted in this cooperation, finding new ways to benefit from the competencies that the health ambassadors have gained. The money is well spent.

## **What are the barriers this cooperation has met?**

**Not directly rooted in civil society:** It is not anchored directly in civil society, as long as it is under the administration of Vollsmoste 2020. But in the long term, the idea is that it should maintain itself. It requires most likely more steps and further cooperation with several municipal agencies/projects.

**Lack of flexibility drains the motivation among the volunteers:** To maintain the volunteers, there must be room for flexibility in which and how communication and communication channels are being used. Furthermore, it pays to define a limit to their volunteer engagement; otherwise it can drain their motivation.

**No clear responsibility division:** It is difficult to define how long Sundhedscenter Vollsmoste should continue to contribute to this cooperation

and how many hours it requires transferring the health ambassadors completely.

**Big age differences:** Although we try to establish the best opportunities in peer education, age can also be a barrier, since the age group of interest can vary greatly and affects their act. Especially the impulse driven choices of activities are frequent.

## Keywords on barriers and promoting factors when cooperating with Vollsmose 2020

Barriers	Promoting factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Not directly rooted in civil society</li><li>◆ Lack of flexibility drains the motivation among the volunteers</li><li>◆ Big age differences</li><li>◆ Not clear responsibility division</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Network and Creation of relations to promote health</li><li>◆ Peer education and role models</li><li>◆ Strong involvement</li><li>◆ great aspects of sustainable effects</li></ul>

### Questions for discussion

- ⇒ *Which other promoting factors from this cooperation can you think of?*
- ⇒ *Which other barriers can you think of?*
- ⇒ *How can you transfer the responsibility of the volunteer health ambassadors in a promote way?*
- ⇒ *How can you ensure a continuing commitment among the health ambassadors as well as other authorities taking flexibility and age differences in consideration?*
- ⇒ *What theories could be used in the analysis of this cooperation?*

# Shared experiences

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## Sharing experiences with another project involving health volunteer

Transforming the objective of Healthy Children in healthy families into a sustainable objective with a continuing outline of a cooperation between civil society and Sundhedscenter Vollsmose has received great interest. By the time of initiating the HCHF project, Sundhedscenter Vollsmose already had a project involving volunteers. Having the same project coordinator involved in both projects has provided an opportunity to look at what profits the local project has gained from HCHF. Therefore the shared experiences are outlined in this report.

## Project description

Sundhedscenter Vollsmose have alongside their involvement in HCHF been connected to a national project with a focus on process coordination. Through a survey, ideas for subprojects were discussed and it was decided to train volunteer nutrition guides in order to offer citizens a volunteer helping hand in relation to eating healthier. The idea came as a result of a similar concept to have Exercise guides for people who needed more physical exercise in their daily lives. However, it shall be found in the educational element, that the structure and themes are inspired by the education plan in the HCHF project.

It is the same project coordinator who has been responsible for both projects and this gives a good base for transferring different promoting factors.

The nutrition guide project and thereby the volunteers also undergo a time-limited education before they execute the required activities. To have these two projects running simultaneously have therefore generally fostered the transfer and exchange of ideas, and they have supported each other in creating the most successful way of educating volunteers.

Sundhedscenter Vollsmose has then been able to benefit from the pros and cons across the projects and in the following bullets the pros of the Nutrition guide project, compared to HCHF, are outlined:

- Teaching is conducted internally by an employee in the municipality that in relation to the training of volunteers possess the necessary skills.
- Responsibility division are evident in performing the task both strategically and practically.
- Anchoring the project responsibility locally has great economic benefits lowering the administration costs.
- Coordination and responsibility of the volunteers is handled only by employees in the municipality
- Few responsible employees from the local authorities, for the volunteers to cooperate with and keep track of.

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- Precise terms of reference for the volunteers are available and necessary for the volunteers to take initiative.
  - It seems more manageable and effective to collaborate on local terms rather than being nationally or internationally depended. Working with local volunteers, one must be anchored locally.
  - Concrete tasks, only coordinated by the municipality, creates less administration tasks
  - Limited time contracts makes it more manageable for the volunteers
  - Major functions in relation to knowledge sharing
  - Coordinating one-to-one person arrangements are less comprehensive than too coordinate group based or community-based health work.

# Recommendations

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The most important traits from this report are listed as recommendations in the following part.

- \* The local authority can serve as a gate keeper to civil society organizations
- \* The local authority can engage the volunteers in more than one activity or task encouraging them to take future active part in civil society.
- \* The local authority can find organizations with the possibility to include volunteers into new geographically placed subgroups potentially without costs.
- \* Communication and information channels should be very flexible and have short time interval to keep up the motivation among the volunteers in regards to recruitment, planning of meetings, initiating activities etc.
- \* The project should incorporate an exit strategy in order to secure the transfer of health ambassadors into more sustainable activities that promotes health. Otherwise they might disappear in the transition and thereby gain little impact
- \* There is a need to have clear terms of reference including which demands the volunteers should attain.
- \* Appreciating the work of the volunteers should be outlined as necessary in the project objectives in order to gain continuous motivation.
- \* You cannot expect volunteers to work without boundaries, time perspectives and appreciation.
- \* Working with vulnerable areas heightens the benefits of working with volunteer grass root organizations to gain success and impact.



Sundhedscenter Vollsmose

For more information, contact:

Charlotte Bødker

Sundhedscenter Vollsmose  
Egeparken 2A  
5240 Odense NØ  
Denmark

+45 20374911  
chgb@odense.dk



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