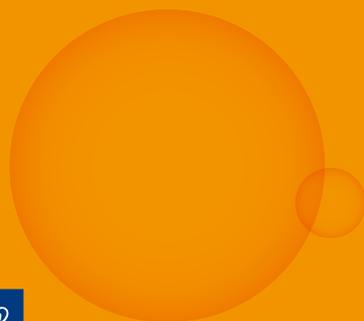
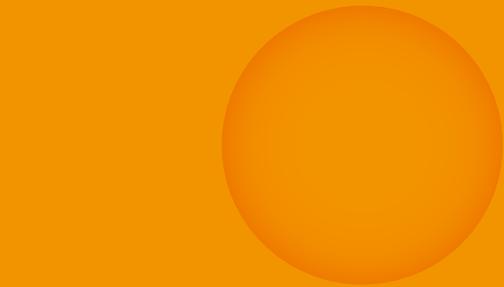
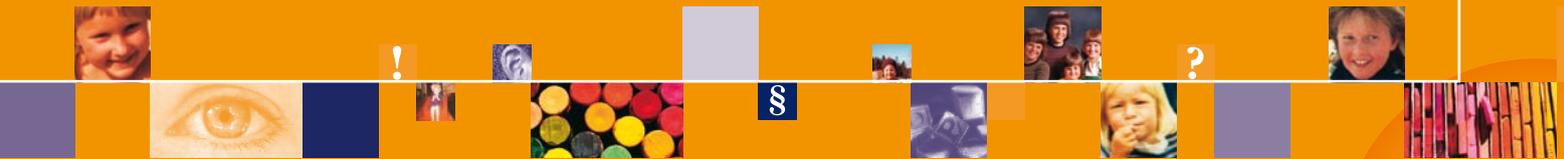




From day care to website

- examples of children and young peoples participation in municipalities



NORWEGIAN MINISTRY
OF CHILDREN AND EQUALITY

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Foreword

Ensuring greater participation and more influence for children and young people is an important part of the effort to improve their quality of life. It means ensuring that the services used by children and young people correspond more closely with their interests and needs. It means ensuring that children and young people have good opportunities to participate, state their views and make constructive contributions in all the arenas where they spend their time and develop. Giving them influence promotes and encourages the commitment, responsibility and innovative thinking of children and young people. Listening to and acting on their opinions may also help to strengthen their self-confidence.

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrines the right of children to express their views in all matters that affect them. Serious efforts to comply with Article 12 require great diversity and a broad approach. It is a matter of attitude, but it is also a matter of knowledge. This brochure will provide a few ideas about how to increase the participation of children and young people in various municipal areas. It gives examples of how this can be done in day care institutions, schools, youth clubs and youth councils, and in connection with various municipal projects.

In 2006, the Ministry of Children and Equality published a circular on the participation and influence of children and young people in municipalities and a manual on youth councils. This brochure is intended supplement these publications. Journalist Frode Aga was commissioned by the Ministry of Children and Equality to write the articles and he contacted the municipalities that are represented here. We are grateful to the municipalities concerned for their interest and their contributions.

We hope that the examples in this brochure will inspire further work in all municipalities in Norway.

Ministry of Children and Equality, April 2007



Norway ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991. In 2003 the Convention was incorporated into Norwegian law. In practice, most of the rights enshrined in the Convention are dependent on municipal measures and priorities. Municipal authorities play a key role in translating the Convention into practical action. One of the main principles is the right to participate, as expressed in Article 12:

- 1) States parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
- 2) For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.





The right to participate in day care institutions

THE ACT RELATING TO DAY CARE INSTITUTIONS

Section 3. Children's right to participate

Children in day care institutions shall have the right to express their views on the day-to-day activities of the day care institution.

Children shall regularly be given the opportunity to take active part in planning and assessing the activities of the day care institution.

The children's views shall be given due weight according to their age and maturity.

- It's a matter of attitude

Since 2001, Ski Municipality has been working actively to give children in day care institutions the right to participate in their own daily lives.

- It's a matter of ensuring that we adults have the right attitude. Employees must always bear children's right to participate in mind, says Bente Aronsen, head of the day care sector in Ski Municipality.

In 2001 they initiated a pilot project entitled Children's Right to Participate and this programme has now been incorporated into all the day care institutions in the municipality.

- The most important thing is for adults to listen to the views of the child and recognise the child's right to have its own opinions, feelings and experiences. But at the same time, we have always stressed that the right of the child to participate does not mean relinquishing control, says Bente Aronsen.

Preventive

The result is that children have far greater influence on the activities that are planned in the municipality's day care institutions. They often choose more consciously between activities. They are allowed to decide on the content of play, meals and clothing to a far greater extent than

before. Their suggestions are accepted more frequently. They are consulted. They take part in children's meetings on relevant topics. They are more often divided into small groups in day-to-day situations and in play so that their wishes and thoughts can be heard more easily.

- This work is extremely important from a preventive point of view, as regards both bullying and other things children may find difficult in their everyday lives. It is important to teach children to put their feelings into words from a very early age, says Bente Aronsen.

In Ski they have based their work on the philosophy that every day in a day care institution has a great effect on the child in later life. Every child must practise functioning in a democratic society from the time it is very small.

- Giving children the right to participate means encouraging involvement and strengthening their skills and self-confidence, thereby making them actors in their own lives. By improving children's ability to express their needs from the time they are small, we also give them a chance to take responsibility for themselves and their actions later on in life.

More flexible

The employees of Ski's day care institutions believe that their working conditions have improved since children's right to participate became part of everyday life. In a survey carried out by Ski Municipality, they say that they have become more flexible at work, their plans for content have become more open, they are more aware of what they say to the children, they let the children give reasons for their own choices, they use observation, interviews and conversations with children more often in their work, and they have become better at interpreting children's signals.

- It's easy to freeze a situation by asking closed questions. That is why we have focused on asking open questions. A classic example we often use here in Ski concerns a little boy who had been on a fishing trip with his father and wanted to tell the group about his experiences. The adult started by asking how many fish they had caught. For the child, however, the fishing was not actually the most important part of the trip. He wanted to tell them about everything else he had done with his father, but he didn't have a chance because the first question was closed, says Bente Aronsen.

A paradigm shift

Making each employee responsible has been important in the municipality's efforts to promote children's right to participate

- The way we adults behave has a great influence on the participation of children. In Ski, we have focused strongly on giving more responsibility to the day care assistants. We have given them a more meaningful job, and when employees feel more valuable in the workplace, this affects their behaviour towards the children, says Bente Aronsen, who has received positive feedback from employees since the changes were implemented.

- At the moment, they compare the time before and after the Children's Right to Participate programme was introduced in Ski Municipality. Job satisfaction has increased, and the employees feel that the work they do is meaningful. This benefits both the children and the adults," says Bente Aronsen.



PARTICIPATION: Ski Municipality has been working actively for six years to give children in day care institutions the right to participate in their own everyday lives.

”Our daily bread”

When a new kind of bread is to be served at the Kråkstad day care institution in Ski, the children help to decide which kind it will be.

- It may sound banal, but children are proud of being allowed to take part in small decisions like this. And of course the children who are actually going to eat the bread each day should be allowed to give their opinions when we change the type of bread, says Agnethe Løken Svingningen, head of education at the Kråkstad day care institution. She lists several examples of areas where the children are allowed to make decisions:

- It may be something as simple as being allowed to choose which hat they will wear, or which activity we should arrange within a given topic. And if the children have finally settled down and are playing well together, we adults don't have to break it up, even if we should according to the clock or the timetable. We must be flexible, but of course we don't encourage child anarchy. Everything takes place within limits set by adults, says Agnethe Løken Svingningen.

More trust

Agnethe Løken Svingningen believes the results are clearly apparent. For instance, there is more trust between children and adults

REVIEWING THE RULES: - The first thing we did was to review all our rules. We asked ourselves why we had them and who they were really for,” says Agnethe Løken Svingningen, head of education at the Kråkstad day care institution. Bente Aronsen (left) agrees.



- Listening to the children and taking them seriously has made it easier for them to take no for an answer. And if we say that they can do something but not right now, they make sure to remind us about it after a while. They trust us to mean what we say, she says.

Dividing the children into smaller groups, for both play and conversations with adults, has been an important prerequisite for success.

- To persuade the most introverted children to open up, we have divided the children into smaller groups, with very good results. They don't all dare to say what they think when all the children are together, but their voices are heard in smaller groups.

More daring

Several of the children who previously had difficulty in stating their views in larger groups have become more daring.

- We have noticed that after they have talked about something in small groups, they also dare to open up in larger groups. It's no longer a matter of the survival of the fittest. Another big advantage with small groups is that each child has more access to us adults," says Agnethe Løken Svingningen, who believes that the adults also have a far better working day since the change of course in Ski's day care institutions.

Children correspond with the administrator

When the jungle room at Stokka day care institution was to be converted into a fishing room, little Sondre wanted to buy fishing toys at IKEA. So he wrote a letter to the administrator

- Sondre had heard that they had those kinds of toys at IKEA, so he wondered if it was possible to go there to buy things for the fishing room, says administrator Sonja Iversen, who answered the letter from the little boy in the Stokka day care institution in Stavanger.

- When I receive letters from children telling me what they want, I write a letter back. Sometimes I have to tell them that we don't have enough money to go shopping right now, while at other times I give them a positive response. In Sondre's case, I replied that he could go with an adult from his department and they could buy toys for the fishing room together, says Sonja Iversen.

At the Stokka day care institution, they have been concerned to give the children the right to participate in their own daily lives for many years. Sonja Iversen says that it's a matter of taking the children seriously and teaching them about democracy from an early age.

- The good old suggestion box, where children can post letters about matters that concern them, has been and still is very important for us. We have always worked closely with parents so that they and their children can write down what the children want to tell the adults and the other children. It can be anything, from what they think is nice or silly to what they want to do in the day care institution, says Sonja Iversen.

The children's suggestions are read out at a children's meeting once a week.

- At the meeting, the children sit in a semi-circle and we have a chairman and a minute-taker who

writes the minutes and records what is said. The minute book is on display so that all the children's parents can follow what is said and done at the children's meeting, says Sonja Iversen, who demonstrates two examples from today's mail in the suggestion box.

- Ine tells us that Grandma and Grandpa have been on holiday, and another girl writes that she wants to have a pyjama party in the Maurtua (Ant-hill) department. Sometimes their suggestions are complied with, but they have no difficulty in accepting that no means no. Naturally, we can't do everything they want and, kids being kids, if Ine suggests a pyjama party one day, four or five others will suggest the same thing soon afterwards, says Sonja Iversen.

However, observing the children's group is at least as important as exchanging letters and reading out suggestions from the suggestion box. It is important that adults listen to and converse with children to enable them become involved and be heard.

- At the Stokka day care institution we want the children to express themselves and have influence over all aspects of life here. Children's right to state their views must be taken seriously. Children express how they experience life in the day care institution both orally and through their body language. The smallest ones usually express their views through body language, facial expression and other forms of sensory expression. Children must be encouraged to think for themselves, and they must be actively encouraged to express their thoughts. The staff members must take these forms of expression into account if children's rights as participants in the day care centre are to be safeguarded, says Sonja Iversen.

Inspired by Reggio Emilia

The work that is done on participation at the Stokka day care institution in Stavanger is inspired by the Italian Reggio Emilia philosophy.

Participation is strongly emphasised in the Reggio Emilia philosophy, and various interests in the children's group are studied on the basis of observations made by adults. At the same time, it is important for adults to listen and converse with the children in order to ensure that they become involved and are heard. Documentation and illustration of the work that is done on specific topics and of their children's daily lives in the day care centre is important information for parents.

- If we adults are to give the children the feeling that they have taken part in deciding something, we must watch or ask the children. What is Per interested in? What does Ine like doing? We must find out about these things, says Sonja Iversen, administrator of the Stokka day care institution.

The main characteristic of the Reggio Emilia system is that the children work on a specific topic over a period of time. There is emphasis on the fact that children are born curious and they ask questions about how things work. There is also emphasis on creative work, and observation is an important working method. Documentation and illustration of the work done in the day care institution is also important.

From the Framework Plan for Day Care Institutions, 1.5 Participation

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasises that children have a right to state their views on all matters that affect them, and that children's views must be heard. Children have a right to state their views and to influence all aspects of life in a day care institution. How comprehensive this participation is and how the right of participation is practised depend on the age and maturity of the child. Children must both experience a sense of belonging and a sense of community, and feel that they can decide for themselves and express their own intentions. Children must be helped to put themselves in other people's situation and show consideration for others.

Children express how they feel both physically and orally. The youngest children communicate their views through body language, facial expression and other ways of expressing their feelings. Children must be taken seriously when they express feelings. Children must be helped to wonder and ask questions. They must be actively encouraged to express their thoughts and opinions and their expressions must be recognised. When children's self-confidence is violated, this will lead to a lack of consideration, bullying and a lack of empathy.

The day care institution must base its activities on how children express themselves. Staff must listen and try to interpret their body language and observe their actions, their aesthetic expression and gradually also their verbal language. The day care institution must allow room for the different perspectives of different children and show respect for their intentions and experiences. Children's right to freedom of expression must be protected, and participation must be integrated into work on content in the day care institution. For children to be able to participate, there must be good communication between children and staff, and between staff and parents.

Children's right of participation requires time and space to listen and converse. Educational activities must be organised and planned so that there is time and space for the children to participate. In this way, they can be motivated to influence the daily life of the day care institution. Children must experience clear, responsible adults who take the whole group into consideration.



User participation in schools

Built a new school with pupils' help

Pupils from the pupils' council at Andebu Lower Secondary School were members of the project team when the school was renovated and extended. They had clear ideas of what the content of the new school should be..

- We needed more space and had to extend the school because we received more pupils who needed a great deal of help. And since we were going to extend the building, we also had the opportunity to renovate the old school, says Jan-Erik Pedersen, explaining the reason for the extensive building project at Andebu Lower Secondary School.

It was natural for him to include the pupils when a “new” school was to be designed.

- They knew where the problems lay just as well as the teachers did, and over time they had felt the effects of the lack of space. It was important to receive their suggestions and thoughts concerning the content of the new school, says Jan-Erik Pedersen.

Clear wish list

The municipal authorities commissioned an engineering consultancy company to carry out a feasibility study. In connection with the study, a project team was established to present proposals for various solutions for the building. The project team comprised two tenth grade pupils, a project manager, representatives of the municipality's technical department, the head teacher, the head of the children and youth department, the health and safety officer, representatives of the teachers and an ergotherapist. The pupils brought a clear wish list to the meeting of the project team.

- New individual toilets in the school building, group rooms attached to classrooms, pupils' lockers, a mediatheque with a computer department and library, and a pupils' canteen were among the most important things on the list that were approved. They were also very interested in the idea of an auditorium, a room that is now very popular.

Study visits

The head teacher adds that the project team arranged several study visits in connection with the expansion and renovation project.

- Both we and the pupils found inspiration in what we saw at other new schools.

- If the pupils had not been on the project team, would the school have looked different today?

- It's hard to be certain about that. It's possible that other people would have presented the same proposals as the pupils did, but we are certainly satisfied with their commitment. We are also satisfied with the way the school functions in practice. The only unfortunate thing is that the two pupils who were on the project team did not have the opportunity to attend the new school themselves.

Work began on Andebu Lower Secondary School in January 2003 and the school was completed by Christmas 2004.

A “pupils’ council” for each grade

In the lower secondary department at Kjølkelvik School in Bergen, each grade has its own grade council.

- The 1997 Curriculum stated that pupils were to participate in their own development and take part in preparing their own plans. The way our school was organised, with a pupils’ council that covered all the grades, we realised that this would be difficult to implement in practice. It was just too much for the pupils’ council to work on the educational content as well as dealing with its other responsibilities, says Evy Oppegaard, team leader for the 8th grade at Kjøkelvik School.

She took part in designing various organisational models for the Bergen school, which ended up with a separate grade council for each grade.



GRADE COUNCIL: This picture was taken at a meeting of the 10th grade council at Kjølkelvik School in Bergen in spring 2006.



- Each grade council consists of two pupils from each class, plus a teacher from the same grade. The work that is done here frees up a lot of time for the school's pupils' council, says Evy Oppegaard, who explains what the grade councils do:

- Our annual plan is divided into six periods, and for each period we prepare a theme brochure, which contains a plan for each of the six weeks of the period. The important thing is to set competence targets in order to know what we want to achieve. Common to all subjects is the fact that we have some methodological targets and some social targets that we have to meet. The pupils help to prepare these targets. They also have their own page in the theme brochure – the grade council's page.

From the subject point of view, the teachers still make the decisions. The framework is clear, but here too the pupils can present proposals for how the targets will be achieved, for example which methods will be used. Sometimes pupils have prepared entire plans, including the subject content.

- Sometimes pupils are not committed to their own learning, and the advantage of giving them responsibility is that they become interested in the subject. They are also trained in democratic work processes, says Evy Oppegaard.

The grade councils have been responsible for planning major joint events for their grades as well.

- Among other things, they have arranged sports days and a Christmas market, the proceeds of which were donated to the Salvation Army. Some of the grade council members and members of the primary school pupils' council have even given lectures for teachers from their own and other schools.

- What topics did they speak on?

- Now that we have become a demonstration school, one of the topics has naturally been pupil participation and grade councils.

- How are the grade councils constituted?

- Sometimes we have elections, while at other times the pupils apply to take part. It varies from one year to the next, and it's largely up to the current grade council to decide. When they start lower secondary school in 8th grade, it's usually appropriate to arrange an election, but the grade council then decides how it will be done the following year, says Evy Oppegaard.

Kjøkkelvik School has been using the grade council model since 2000.

THE EDUCATION ACT

Section 11 2. Pupils' councils at primary and lower secondary schools

At each primary and lower secondary school there shall be one pupils' council for class levels 5–7 and one for class levels 8–10 consisting of one representative from each class. The representatives shall be elected at the latest three weeks after the beginning of the autumn term.

A teacher at the school shall have responsibility for assisting the pupils' council in its work. This staff contact for the pupils' council has the right to attend and speak at meetings of the pupils' council.

The chairman of the pupils' council may call a meeting of the council in consultation with the staff contact for the pupils' council. A meeting of the council shall always be called when so requested by one-third of the members of the council or by the head teacher.

The pupils' council shall promote the joint interests of the pupils at the school and work to create a satisfactory school environment. The council shall also be able to express its views and present proposals in matters relating to the pupils' local environment.

Amended by the Acts of 27 June 2003 no.69 (entered into force on 1 August 2003 pursuant to Resolution of 27 June 2003 no.774), 17 June 2005 no.105 (entered into force on 17 June 2005 pursuant to Resolution of 17 June 2005 no.660).

Section 11 6. Pupils' councils and general meetings at upper secondary schools

At each upper secondary school there shall be a pupils' council consisting of at least one member for every 20 pupils. The pupils' council shall be elected by written ballot.

Among other matters, the pupils' council shall work to improve the learning environment, working conditions and the welfare interests of the pupils.

If so requested by the pupils' council or by one-fifth of the pupils, a general meeting shall be held for all the pupils of the school. The pupils' council is bound by decisions of the general meeting in matters referred to in the summons to the meeting when more than half of the school's pupils are present and vote.

“Now we’re redecorating the canteen!”

For three years in succession, the pupils’ council at Brundalen Upper Secondary School in Trondheim has presented a clear recommendation concerning what should be refurbished in their run-down school, which was built in the 1970s. Their wishes have been granted every time.

- Brundalen Upper Secondary School was completed around 1970 and we do not deny that we face major challenges as regards maintenance and keeping the school in good order, says head teacher Jan Erik Vold.

This gigantic school in Trondheim has to be refurbished bit by bit and the pupils are consulted when the priorities are set.

In 2005, the pupils’ council strongly recommended refurbishing the canteen, and this brought results. Today the school has a brand new pupils’ canteen. In 2006, the floors of three school gymnasiums were high on the pupils’ list of priorities. Their opinions were heard in this case too. This year the cloakrooms and showers are to be refurbished according to the pupils’ wishes.

- We do this despite the fact that a facelift for other rooms at the school is probably even more urgent, says Jan Erik Vold.

The projects have not been cheap. NOK 500,000 was spent on the canteen, and the gymnasium floors cost around NOK 5-600,000.

Brundalen Upper Secondary School has 1,300 pupils. They are divided between twelve blocks and each block has its own pupils’ council. The twelve pupils’ councils send representatives to a pupils’ council executive committee for the entire school. To keep in constant touch with the pupils, the head teacher or one of the deputy heads meets with the pupils’ council executive committee once a week.

- Although this is a big school, our goal has been to ensure that contacts with the pupils are as close as possible. Both pupils and employees must therefore have easy access to the head teacher. We ensure good contact by having a regular weekly meeting with the pupils’ council executive committee.

But the head teacher does not conceal the fact that keeping in touch with the pupils still poses major challenges.

- Communication between the pupils’ council executive committee, the head teacher and the school administration is often better than communication with pupils in general. It can be difficult for the pupils’ council and its executive committee to keep in touch with a large number of pupils.

At Brundalen Upper Secondary School, the chairman of the pupils’ council executive committee is also chairman of the school committee. The school committee consists of two politicians from Sør-Trøndelag County, one representative of the Confederation of Norwegian Business and Industry (NHO), one representative of the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO), representatives of the employees, the head teacher and two or three representatives of the pupils’ council.

- We have had a pupil chairing the school committee for the last four or five years, the intention being to increase pupils’ participation. I don’t know what this has meant in practice, but if a pupil is very active and creative in this role, he or she can achieve a great deal. Perhaps this also sends a signal to other pupils that we take them seriously, says Jan Erik Vold.



*NEW CANTEEN: The canteen at Brundalen Upper Secondary School has had a proper face-lift thanks to pressure from the pupils.
(PHOTO: Tone Andersen, pupil 3MK 1)*



NEW FLOORS: Renovating the floors of three gymnasiums at the school ranked highest on the pupils' council's list of priorities in 2006. Today the gymnasiums look very different than they did before (PHOTO: Tone Andersen, pupil 3MK1)

Pupils' councils supported by a municipal pupils' council

The municipal pupils' council in Ski aims to raise the standard of all thirteen pupils' councils in the municipality.

- The goal is to ensure that the pupils' councils work even more professionally, says Ellen Nylenna of Ski Municipality. She is responsible for the municipal pupils' council that was established at the beginning of 2006.

- We want to help the pupils run good pupils' councils in Ski Municipality, and after one year of operation the results achieved by the municipal pupils' council have been very good, says Ellen Nylenna.

The idea is for the municipal pupils' council to be a place where the chairmen of the pupils' councils can share their experiences and learn from each other.

- For example, the pupils can explain how they organise the annual Day at Work, report on individual issues they are working on and, not least, tell the others how they are working to eliminate bullying at their school. And if a pupils' council doesn't function properly, it is easier for us to find out what is wrong and do something about it, says Ellen Nylenna.

Pupils' council seminar

The municipal pupils' council has also arranged a seminar for all the newly-elected pupils' council executive committees in Ski.

- The pupils' council seminar was both popular and useful, and was one of the measures we introduced to help pupils improve their working methods. We want to raise the status of the work done by pupils' councils and show that it is meaningful.

The "cooperative council" comprises representatives from all thirteen pupils' councils in Ski Municipality and has a working committee consisting of a chairman, a deputy chairman and a member of the executive committee. Ellen Nylenna is secretary of the working committee and believes that good adult follow-up is important to ensure that the municipal pupils' council functions properly.

- It's a matter of young responsibility and adult presence. Children and young people need plenty of backup. The members of the pupils' council change each year, and adult guidance is essential for continuity. But we don't want adults interfering or deciding what it is appropriate to say or not to say. The pupils decide that for themselves, emphasises Ellen Nylenna.

One from each school

The municipal pupils' council meets twice each term and only the chairmen of the pupils' councils are allowed to attend.

- Several teachers and head teachers were sceptical about having only one pupil from each school, but their fears have proved unfounded. It has functioned very well, says Ellen Nylenna.



Arenas where children and young people exert influence

Full speed at the Town Hall Meeting

The Town Hall Meeting in Porsgrunn gives children and young people a chance to make rapid moves that bring rapid results.

Once a year, children and young people from all the schools in Porsgrunn are allowed to allocate funds for fast track measures in the municipality.

- Many measures have been implemented in the Porsgrunn area thanks to the Town Hall Meeting. Pedestrian and bicycle paths, football pitches and skateboarding facilities are just a few of the things that have been achieved at the request of the young people themselves, says Kjell Lillestøl, Child and Youth Coordinator in Porsgrunn Municipality.

The aim of the Town Hall Meeting is to ensure that the administrative process through the municipal bureaucracy is as quick as possible.

- The process from idea to resolution and implementation must not be discouragingly long, says Kjell Lillestøl.

Selects cases

Before the annual Town Hall Meeting in May, school classes submit proposals for measures they believe should be implemented in their neighbourhood. The most important measures are then selected and discussed at the meeting. Fulfilling the wishes of children and young people often requires only minor investments. But their proposals sometimes trigger larger investments too.

- As a result of the process through class councils, pupils' councils and up to the Town Hall Meeting we receive many proposals. The ideas that are proposed are often expensive, and they are sent on to various municipal agencies, with the result that large sums of money from municipal budgets are spent on measures that have been proposed by children and youngsters, says Kjell Lillestøl. He uses a new pedestrian and bicycle path on Herøya as an example of how it is possible to get major projects under way after a Town Hall Meeting.

- In that case the new road cost NOK 700,000, says Kjell Lillestøl.

He adds that the inputs from children and young people can often focus attention on matters and problem areas the politicians were unaware of.

- In 2006 large holes appeared in the road close to Brevik School. People fell over and were injured when they cycled in the area, but the politicians did not know about this. They decided to allocate NOK 1 million to improve the road. We have similar examples every year.

Motivation

Another goal of the Town Hall Meeting is to promote direct dialogue between children and youth on the one hand and politicians and the heads of municipal departments on the other. Lillestøl believes that the Town Hall Meeting plays an important role in motivating young people to make an effort.

- The total budget of Porsgrunn Municipality amounts to NOK 1.4 billion, so it is obvious that the money distributed at the Town Hall Meeting is peanuts compared with the big picture. But they are important peanuts. This is important money that has a motivating effect on young people.

Working to reduce the number of dropouts

The number of dropouts from upper secondary schools in the Grenland area in Telemark County is far higher than the national average. Porsgrunn's youth committee intends to do something about it.

Thirty-five per cent of young people in the region have not completed their upper secondary education by the age of 21, while the national average is 25 per cent.

- Grenland, Moss and Sarpsborg are the areas that clearly have the highest dropout rate in the country, and this has partly to do with culture and tradition. All these places have strong industrial traditions and, in the past, if you dropped out of school you could usually get a job anyway. The situation is different today, and if we are to succeed in turning the negative trend around, we have to do something about the way education is organised. This is the youth committee's highest priority in this year, says Kjell Lillestøl, Child and Youth Coordinator in Porsgrunn Municipality.

Out into the local community

The young people have therefore considered examples from New Zealand, Australia and the USA, where service learning over a fairly long period of time has produced good results in efforts to keep pupils in school. Service learning is about using pupils' involvement in the local community in the educational programme and vice versa.

- Today's schools are fairly isolated from the rest of the community. Through service learning, the youth committee wants pupils to go out into the local community and make themselves useful. It may be a matter of working one day a week at the nursing home or working in a local business. Service learning can be so many things, says Kjell Lillestøl, who believes this model is a good alternative for young people who are fed up with school.

- Today, employers usually require more education and better qualifications than they used to, and the youth committee does not want the only response young people who are tired of school are met with to be. "Sorry, you will have to attend school for another 10-15 years to get a proper job".

Good results

However, service learning is not only an alternative for school dropouts. Experience from other countries shows that it gives most pupils greater understanding of what they are learning and why. The pupils make themselves useful and are regarded as a resource for the community, they achieve better results at school, and the differences between strong and weak pupils are eliminated.

A working group has been established under the youth committee to work particularly on this issue.

- A youth council is a minimum requirement

Municipalities must make arrangements to ensure that the voices of children and young people are heard. The most important step is to appoint a capable, committed adult resource person.

This is the view of Kjerstin G. Lundgård, chairman of the youth council in Hedmark County. She has long experience from pupils' councils, municipal children's and youth councils and the county youth council.

- There is a big difference between listening to young people and taking what they say seriously. I believe a large number of young people in Norway find it difficult to be taken seriously and the municipal authorities have a job to do in this area, says Kjerstin Lundgård.

- What do municipal authorities have to do to promote greater participation?

- A minimum requirement is to have a youth council, and there must be an adult resource person at the disposal of the youth council. This must be a person who knows how the democratic system is built up and how the administrative process in the municipality works. This adult resource person must also be genuinely interested in the participation of children and young people, and this person must be interested in doing something to help the young people in the municipality, says Kjerstin Lundgård.

- So a 10-15 per cent post is not enough?

- No, it must be more or less a full post if anything is to get done.

Kjerstin Lundgård also emphasises how important it is for the youth council to feel it is taken seriously.

- A youth council can quickly become a talking shop if it doesn't work systematically. There must be direct contact between the chief municipal officer and the youth council, and the council must be allowed to work on specific issues.

However, she points out that the young people also have a responsibility to make themselves heard.

- Nothing will happen unless you take the initiative yourself, says Kjerstin Lundgård, who urges young people to spend their time well at youth council meetings.



FUN: Kjerstin G. Lundgård from Stange is chairman of the youth council in Hedmark County. She believes that municipalities must take the views of children and young people seriously, and that they must facilitate participation in matters that affect these groups.

- If you want to be taken seriously, you must contact your municipality in a serious manner. This may be through an application or a recommendation to the chief municipal officer where you list your wishes specifically. If you have sent a formal letter to the municipal administration, you are at least guaranteed a response. This is a far more serious way of working than merely chattering at a youth council meeting. If want to participate, you have to make an effort.

This committed 21-year-old has done just that. She has been a member of the pupils' council in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary school. She has also been active in the children's and youth council in Stange Municipality, and in recent years she has been chairman of the youth council in Hedmark County.

- There probably aren't many 21-year-olds working to promote greater participation for young people, but I believe it is important that some people stay involved for a while. If people stop being active the day they reach the age of 18, important continuity on cases that are being processed is lost. It can take time to get your wishes fulfilled.

She was elected to chair the Hedmark youth council until October 2007.

- When that period comes to an end, it will be enough. But we will have to see if I manage to stay away entirely. I would like to help if I'm needed, and I hope I can still be used as a resource person, she says, adding:

- Because it's great fun after all!

Whether the effort will be successful depends on factors such as:

- **Clear guidelines/mandate, which are evaluated regularly**
- **Clarification of issues where children and youth can be consulted, present their own proposals and ideas, have the right of recommendation and have authority to make decisions**
- **Contact and backup from the municipal administration and politicians**
- **Having their own resources**
- **Genuine influence on individual issues**
- **Clear procedures for feedback on wishes, inputs and proposals, both those that will be followed up in the short and long term and those that will not be followed up**
- **Contact with other children's and youth groups**
- **Information about what is going on in the municipality**
- **Dissemination of information out about the work of the youth council**

*Circular Q-27/2006 The Participation and influence of children and youth
– information and guidance for work in municipalities*

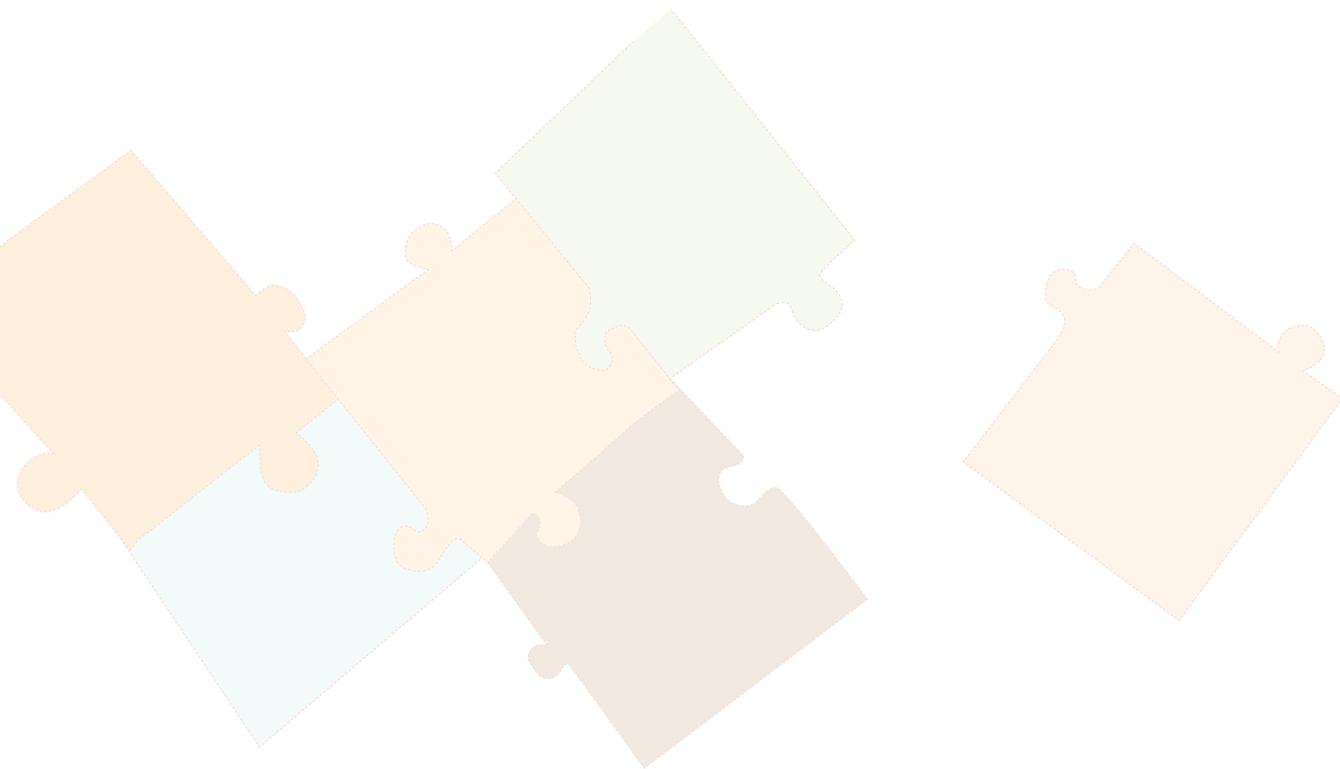


- Getting involved bears fruit

In recent years, the youth council in Hedmark County has achieved several of its priorities.

- Things take time in a bureaucratic system, but our results show that getting involved bears fruit, says Kjerstin G. Lundgård from the Hedmark County youth council. She lists some of the projects that have succeeded in her home county:

- The county youth council secured the appointment of an ombudsman for pupils and apprentices in the county's upper secondary schools.
- Young people in the county have a youth card that can be used as both a school ID card and a bus pass. Those who wish to do so can also use the youth card as a bank card.
- Vending machines for carbonated soft drinks have been replaced by water dispensers.
- They have ensured cheap, safe transport home for young people through the "Home for NOK 50" project.
- They are also working actively to expand school nursing services in the county's upper secondary schools.



The Local Government Act 1

Following an interpretation of the Local Government Act, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development has reached the conclusion that young people may be given the right to attend and speak at meetings of the municipal council/county council. Youth representatives may be given the right to attend and speak even if they are not elected, provided that the municipal council/county council itself wishes to give them such rights. However, the Ministry points out that no-one other than the elected representatives may be allowed the formal right to present proposals in publicly elected bodies.

From Circular Q-27/2006 The Participation and influence of children and youth – information and guidance for work in municipalities

The Local Government Act 2

With respect to participation in municipal councils and committees, young people may be elected as representatives with full rights to boards, councils and committees even if they have not featured on the list of candidates for the municipal and county elections. In principle, there is no lower age limit for election to publicly elected bodies other than the municipal council/county council, but young people under the age of 15 should not be given access to confidential information.

From Circular Q-27/2006 The Participation and influence of children and youth – information and guidance for work in municipalities

Children and young people may participate in planning and decision-making processes in different ways that offer various opportunities for influence:

- Children and young people participate as informers and advisers
– as a consultation body
- Children and young people contribute their views and proposals on specific cases
– as discussion partners
- Children and young people take part in decision-making – as negotiation partners



Dialogue with children and young people

Focus on youth = building

Can youth participation and focus on youth make people turn their backs on the city and return to their home community? Yes, believes Rune Øygard, Chief Municipal Officer in Vågå.

- Young people possess a great deal of important knowledge, and we wish to listen to them and make use of it. We want to know what they are thinking, what their desires are, and in this way we hope to give them as good an experience in their childhood and teenage years as we can. Happy young people are the most important foundation on which to build our community, says Rune Øygard.

Like many other small municipalities, Vågå has been experiencing negative population growth for several years. The municipal politicians want to turn this trend around. The method is to focus on youth.

- If young people go away to study thinking “Vågå is a bad place to grow up in and I’m certainly not going back there” it will be difficult to persuade them to come back home. But if we create a community that young people and the rest of the population are proud of, we will be in a stronger position when the time comes for them to establish their own families. If we can also manage to persuade them to speak warmly of their home municipality to other people from other parts of the country, we may even manage to recruit a few more.

Vågå Municipality has been focusing strongly on youth participation for several years and Rune Øygard believes many things in the community would have looked different today if the younger generation had not been allowed to state its views.

- The cinema at the arts centre would probably not be as good as it is today. In that case we received clear signals that we had to invest in a proper sound system and high picture quality. We did, and it has paid off. Today the cinema in Vågå has the highest audience ratings of any cinema in the Gudbrandsdalen valley north of Lillehammer.



BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE: - By investing in our young people we are also investing in the future,” says Rune Øygard, Chief Municipal Officer in Vågå Municipality. Marte Linderud is pleased about the energetic focus on youth in her home municipality

- Some politicians also proposed demolishing the building that is now called the Activity House and is home to the arts school and youth club. We saved the building as the result of an initiative from the young people. They must also be credited with ensuring that we have a full-time post for a municipal youth officer, believes Rune Øygaard.

He is in no doubt that focusing on youth is important for the entire Vågå community.

- Investing in young people is far more important than building nursing home places. Of course we must do both, but we cannot conceal the fact that focusing on youth is building for the future, while establishing nursing home places is just patching up.”

Registering children’s movements

Horten Municipality has good experience of mapping children’s movements in connection with building and land use projects..

- In connection with work on the land use part of Horten’s new municipal master plan, it was decided that we would map children’s movements in Skoppum and Kirkebakken to identify the areas where children played, says landscape architect Rakel Skjerve.

The purpose of registering children’s movements is to draw attention to the interests of children and young people in planning projects. The data will help to document the areas that are used by children and young people and how they are used, and to identify any need for special measures. In February 2006, pupils at Lysheim School in Skoppum sat down in the classroom to decide which areas they thought it was important to conserve in their neighbourhood.

- There are plans for building a new road and railway line in the area; that is why we started registering children’s movements. Hopefully, the politicians will take the results of the project seriously, says Rakel Skjerve.

Horten Municipality uses a method developed by Vestfold County. Pupils are divided into groups of 8-12 children. Each of the groups has one or two adults to assist and help the children to make notes and use a map of the area to be studied.

- Briefly, the method is for the children to use a map to fill in the areas where they play, after which the adults fill in a form for each of the areas and note any special characteristics. Finally, all the information is collected and stored in a digital database. This enables us to identify which areas we must take into account, in future too, says Rakel Skjerve.

Horten Municipality used mapping children’s movements as a working method for the first time in connection with a land use plan in 2000.

- Our experience of including children in the process is good. Among other things, this was an important working method in connection with a golf course extension a few years ago, says Rakel Skjerve.

12-year-old Michelle Bang from Skoppum was involved in the most recent children’s movement project.

- It was a bit difficult to find our way on the map, but if we got stuck the adults helped us. And when we had found our houses and large buildings that it was easy to recognise, it worked out fine, she says

The children did not work outdoors to register their movements.

- One criticism of this method is that it is not easy to remember all the play areas when they are not physically out in the field themselves. But when they work in large groups, the children manage to remember a great deal with each other's help, says Rakel Skjerve.



CHILDREN'S MOVEMENTS: Michelle Bang, Bjørn-Kristian Svendsrud, Youth Secretary Raymond Johnsen and landscape architect Rakel Skjerve study the map that was used to register children's movements in Horten Municipality

Mutual respect

Non-violent communication, mutual respect, understanding and responsibility were key words when the Gamle Oslo District invited young people in the district to a major youth conference in December. Now the conference is to be an annual event.

The project is entitled "Diversity and Dialogue" and its purpose is to elicit young people's views about what it is like to be young in a multi-cultural district like Gamle Oslo.

- It can be challenging to grow up in an environment where there are many different nationalities, religions and cultures. Conflicts may arise if you are not prepared, and we therefore wish to give young people the necessary tools to be able to resolve the conflicts and problems they encounter through dialogue, says Mehrdad Ganji, head of the Youth and Qualification Unit in Gamle Oslo District.

One of the reasons for starting the project was the conflict that arose in connection with the publication of cartoons of the prophet Muhammad. Verbal and sometimes physical confrontations occurred among youth in the district, both in schools and in various leisure arenas. In the period during and after the conflict, measures to prevent the development of negative behaviour and violent confrontations were regarded as being extremely important.

- This is also a step towards preventing events such as those we saw during the Paris riots a while ago.

-Work continues throughout the year and will culminate in an annual conference like the one that was arranged this year, explains Mehrdad Ganji, adding that the district is in the process of initiating several courses for local youth.

- For example, we will be offering courses on house-hunting, job-seeking, education and private finance. We are also initiating a peacekeeper project in four schools, Hersleb School, Etterstad Upper

Secondary School, Jordal School and Hovin School. Through this project, which is partly theoretical and partly practical, we aim to train peacekeepers to resolve conflicts at their schools, with advice and guidance from us.

Pupils from the same four schools were invited to contribute to this year's Diversity and Dialogue conference at Oslo Plaza.

- There were 120 pupils and 15 adults at the conference altogether, and we had a varied programme with a number of different cultural performances and activities. The young people took part in sketches and role play in which we touched on serious topics such as discrimination, forced marriage and violence. After that we formed groups and discussed the issues that had just been illustrated. This gave rise to many interesting discussions and the young people had highly nuanced views and were very positive all the time, says Mehrdad Ganji.

"Diversity and Dialogue" aims to create a youth environment that is characterised by positive attitudes and appreciation of the diversity of the Gamle Oslo District. The project aims to promote dialogue as a form of communication, as an alternative to violence, and to promote mutual respect among young people.

The target group for the project comprises children and young people who live in the Gamle Oslo District, those who attend school there and those who use district services.

The project takes place in close dialogue with the young people themselves. The district authorities are careful not to arrange an activity plan that is too strict and detailed. They fear that this would conflict with the intention of allowing the young people to participate actively themselves.

The Planning and Building Act and the National Policy Guidelines for strengthening the interests of children and young people in the planning process state that municipalities must organise the planning process in such a way that views that concern children as a party are heard and that different groups of children and young people must be given the opportunity to participate.

YOUTH CONFERENCE: From this year's Diversity and Dialogue conference at Oslo Plaza.





Designing meeting places

Planned a new youth club

When Årdal Municipality was to establish a new youth club, young people were involved in the planning process from A to Z.

- We had to choose between two different locations when we were planning a new youth club at Årdalstangen: the basement in the community hall, or Brakka (the hut) where we are currently located, says youth leader Sonja Øren in Årdal Municipality. To find the most suitable location, lower secondary school classes were invited to vote for their favourite place.
- They visited both locations and were given the opportunity to make suggestions and ask questions. Ninety per cent of the young people voted for Brakka and their choice was given weight in the proposal that was presented at the end of the project period, says Sonja Øren.

Allowed to state their views

The Municipal Council voted for the young people's favourite and the youngsters then took part in designing the content of the new club.

- We had regular meetings and worked closely with representatives of the municipal authorities. They listened to our wishes and thoughts about the building. If there was something we didn't think would work, they listened to us and came up with alternative solutions, says Thomas Norheim Moen (17). Thomas was a member of the advisory group that decided everything from colours and equipment in the disco room to computers and how the space was to be partitioned. He is very satisfied with the final result.
- We're really pleased. The only thing I regret today is that we didn't knock down the wall and extend the rock workshop. We now have a corridor outside the practice room that is hardly used at all. But perhaps we can get something done about that later, says Thomas Norheim Moen, who was also a member of the group that built the eight PCs in the Internet café.
- It was a bit cheaper to build them ourselves, and since the group is very interested in computers, we decided that we would do it.

Vastly improved

The Brakka youth club at Årdalstangen has a Playstation room with a video canon, a rock workshop, a discotheque, a kitchen, an Internet café with broadband connection, a billiard room and a sitting room.

- The youth club at Årdalstangen has been vastly improved. From the time we were located in temporary premises to the present day, membership has increased from 10 to 80, says Sonja Øren.



PARTICIPANTS: Thomas Norheim Moen (left) was in the advisory group that helped to design the new youth club in Årdal. He is highly satisfied with the final result. So are William Gullaksen, Martine S. Holsæter and youth leader Sonja Øren.

Democracy at the youth club

In the ActivityHOUSE in Vågå, young people are involved in most of what goes on.

- We have three basic rules at the ActivityHOUSE: there must be no substance abuse, it must be open to all, and it must be run democratically. In other words, users must participate and share responsibility for the daily life of the club,” says youth officer Annette Garden Sveen in Vågå Municipality.

- How do the young people participate?”

- We have a club executive committee comprising six young people who are elected at a general meeting. We regularly arrange general meetings where everyone who wishes to do so can state their views, and we have a suggestion box people can use whenever they wish. The club executive committee shares responsibility for running the ActivityHOUSE and is in charge of things like purchasing goods for the kiosk and various events. At the general meeting and in the suggestion box, there are often suggestions for things we can buy to make the club even better. The best suggestion is rewarded with a free cinema ticket.



- But of course it's important to point out that there are conditions and budgets that limit what we can do here. It's not a matter of anything goes."

Representatives of the club executive committee meet once a month.

- We have meetings in school hours and members are allowed to be absent from lessons. We always try to have representatives from all the different age groups so that we have a diversified executive committee.

The ActivityHOUSE was opened in 2002 and is used every day. On the ground floor there is a youth club that is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays. There is also a club evening one Friday or Saturday each month. On the first floor there is an arts school with a music room, craft room, art room and Black Box for dance and drama.

- The building is an old secondary school and some people had proposed that it be demolished. The young people in the village, who at the time were having difficulty in finding new premises for the youth club, reacted to the demolition proposal and suggested that the building could be renovated and made into a new activity house. By working together and exchanging ideas, they have taken part in designing the finished product.

The youth club part of the building now has a discotheque, a kiosk, an Internet café and a large games hall with billiards, Playstation and other games.

- The number of visitors has been growing since the house was inaugurated in 2002. In 2004 there were between ten and twenty visitors on an ordinary evening, while this year the average has been around fifty people. We are pleased with that, says the youth officer.

- There are not many meeting places in a small community like Vågå, so it is especially important to have this kind of informal meeting place. It is socially inclusive and provides good services for young people who are not interested in sport. It has something to offer everyone, says Marte Linderud of the Vågå youth council.

Motivation for involvement

- We have practised many types of participation in our youth clubs, but it was in the field of motivation that we realised we faced a serious challenge.

These are the words of Geir Aarrestad Eriksen, head of the Children and Youth Unit in Gamle Oslo District. Things are happening at the Jordal Leisure Club and the Gamle Oslo Activity House (GOA). Getting young people aged 13 to 16 to join to a user committee or a club council is a major challenge in itself. At that age the hormones are boiling and the young people want to do quite different things than attend youth club meetings. We have therefore made active efforts to make it more attractive to be a member of the club council, says Geir Aarrestad Eriksen.



PARTICIPANT: Thomas Norheim Moen.



1) GOA: the young people at the Old Oslo Activity House will have more influence through the new club council.
 2) JORDAL LEISURE CLUB: Old Oslo District wants to motivate young people to serve on the club council.

At the end of February 2007, the Jordal Leisure Club held a three-day election to appoint a new club council.

- Before that, we had a nomination committee consisting of three or four young people who were given the job of finding suitable candidates for the council. They produced a list of fifteen people who stood for election by club users. To ensure that as many people as possible took part in the election, we decided it would take place over three days. We also had an external observer to ensure that everything was done properly, explains Geir Aarrestad Eriksen.

In the multicultural Gamle Oslo District, it was also very important to involve all user groups in the work of the council.

- Many different cultures are represented at both the Jordal Leisure Club and GOA. Many different needs and opinions have to be taken into account in this type of community, so it is even more important to ensure that such diversity is well represented on the council. When we were recruiting people to the new club council at Jordal, this was one of the criteria the nomination committee had to bear in mind, says Geir Aarrestad Eriksen.

He points out that good information and clear parameters for what the club council can achieve have been two of the cornerstones of the effort to motivate young people to become involved in running the Jordal Leisure Club and GOA. Which decisions can they make? Which issues will the club council deal with? What can they achieve by taking office?

Geir Aarrestad Eriksen lists various areas where young people can make their mark.

- It may be a matter of handling applications, managing members' funds and deciding what users will pay in membership fees and entrance fees for the various activity groups. This will strongly influence the operation and content of the club.

The idea is for the new club council to formulate the plans for autumn 2007.

- The newly-constituted club council is just starting work at Jordal and GOA, and the goal is for the council to largely decide on the content itself.



Geir Aarrestad Eriksen says that one of their main goals has been to raise the status of council members in the eyes of young people. To achieve this, the district has tempted young people with a few carrots along the way. Gaining even more influence through a seat on the district youth council is one such carrot. A two-day social seminar where democracy and youth participation are on the agenda is another.

- We invite the club councils to an overnight social trip to Husberg Island in the Oslo Fjord. Contributors include an expert who gives a lecture on user-governed club councils. Later there may be study visits to other clubs, in Norway and abroad. We believe measures like these may motivate people to take an active part in running the youth clubs.

Gamle Oslo District also believes that the possibility to develop competence by serving on a club council over time may be a driving force for committed young people.

- Being a member of a club council can provide important knowledge about meeting techniques, meeting ethics, democracy, the administrative process, roles and the clarification of roles, and decision-making. I also believe it can help to make skills development more fun and promote a sense of security, trust and enjoyment, says Geir Aarrestad Eriksen.

Fixing a new motor club

Motor-mad youngsters in Hareid are allowed to run the show at the municipal motor club. Now they are renovating a new club house.

In cooperation with the police and supported by crime prevention funds, Hareid Municipality established a motor club to attract young people who are not interested in the other leisure activities the municipality has to offer.

- We realised that some boys were not benefiting from leisure services and were not interested in the activities offered by voluntary clubs and organisations. The motor club offers boys who are interested in cars, motor bikes and mopeds a service that they are interested in, says Gunn Berit Gjerde, Chief Municipal Officer.

The club is a service for young people between the ages of 15 and 25. The idea was to interest boys who are at risk of becoming involved in substance abuse and crime.

- The motor club is not earmarked for boys at risk. It is primarily a club for everyone who is interested in engines. However, the club also manages to attract some boys who would otherwise have been at risk. The ripple effects are positive and we can see that this service involves them, says Gunn Berit Gjerde.

Now the boys are in the process of restoring a new club house.

- The club is moving house and the young people are organising most of the work, with a little supervision. Many of the boys who belong to the club are apprentices and they can use the skills they have learned in their work on the club house. However, professionals come in and check that things like the electrical and plumbing work are done properly, says Gunn Berit Gjerde.

A skateboarding paradise by Lake Mjøsa

With plenty of help from Hamar's skateboarding community, the skatepark at Kolgen has become one of the best in the country

A sad landfill site has been transformed into a fine shoreline with a beach, beach volleyball courts, basketball courts and a skatepark at Kolgen in Hamar. A total of NOK 17 million has been invested in the area and the brand new skatepark was opened in 2005.

- While the municipality was working on a new zoning plan for the shoreline, the skateboarders lost their permanent venue in town. We had to look for new places where young people could skateboard, and Kolgen was suggested as one of several alternatives. We decided it was essential to utilise the expertise of the people who were actually going to use the facility, says Marian Skutlaberg, Children's Representative in Hamar Municipality.

Praise for the municipal authorities

It was in connection with the skateboarding part of the project that the young people had the most influence on the work that was done. This resulted in one of the best skateparks in the country.

- Several of the young people in the skateboarding community were allowed to give their opinions during the project, and I believe both Hamar Municipality and the skateboarders themselves have





reaped the benefits of this. In the worst case, the municipality might have ended up spending large sums of money on something that would not have functioned well and that, over time, might have remained empty, says Hamar skateboarder Kristoffer Kumar, who also works for tacky.no the biggest skateboard website in the Nordic region.

Marian Skutlaberg believes that the help given to the municipality by the active skateboarding community benefited the project. But it was also challenging to stay in touch with a fairly disorganised group.

- The skateboarders have their own club here in Hamar, but the club's organisation was fairly slap-happy. Our contacts were therefore with individuals from the community, people who were active throughout the construction period. Among other things, they participated actively in the choice of materials and the actual design of the park, says Marian Skutlaberg.

Challenging

The skatepark is made almost entirely of concrete. This means that the skateboarders have a venue that requires little maintenance and is less noisy for neighbours than a wooden structure would have been.

- There was a heated debate about the facility in the period before it was built, and noise was the main

bone of contention. We had initially built a temporary installation out of wood, but the neighbours objected to the noise. Concrete was therefore the best solution. It is less noisy and at the same time more durable than wood. The disadvantage is that it can't be changed once you have built it.

- That is why it was even more important for us to have a well-planned installation that would withstand the test of time. We feel we have succeeded in this respect, says Marian Skutlaberg.

As a result of the new skatepark, the skateboarding community in Hamar, which was already large, has grown even larger.

- The community has flourished. New faces are turning up all the time and you can see that facilities like the one at Kolgen have attracted new, far younger user groups. Good, easily accessible skateparks have made it easier to recruit new people, and now you can see children as young as 10 or 11 having fun in the skateparks, says Kristoffer Kumar.

Tvibit gives young people space and resources

- Tvibit is not a house where you are stored until you grow up. It's a house where you use your teenage years to grow up.

Says Magne Amundsen, leader of the youth house in Tvibit, Tromsø. Tvibit is based on the participatory principle.

- Tvibit provides a cultural service for young people between 15 and 25 years of age and we mainly target pupils in upper secondary schools. We base our activities on participation from a cultural perspective. By this I mean that we work on the basis of a resource perspective, not a problem perspective, says Magne Amundsen.

Most of the activities that take place in the house are the result of project-based participation. When the young people have an idea, the Tvibit staff coach them and help them to apply for funding for their various projects.

- In many ways, Tvibit is managed through the various projects. One week film production might be on the agenda, the next week it might be music. Different people use the house for different projects all the time, and this gives us many legs to stand on. It is also highly dynamic. Something new is happening all the time, explains Magne Amundsen.

- And the young people don't have to be experienced film-makers, musicians, arrangers or artists to put their ideas into practice.

- No, if somebody wants to make a film the threshold for having a go is low. Young people can come straight in from the street and borrow one of our cameras. We have no membership fees, so in a way this is democratisation of the media.

The biggest music festival in northern Norway is one of the events that was born at Tvibit. The nationally renowned Bukta Festival was established under the title "North of Nowhere" and was founded by two girls aged 16 and 17.

- The girls wanted to arrange a free festival in Tromsø and their philosophy was fairly simple: if we



TVIBIT: Tvibit in Tromsø is a cultural service for young people between the ages of 15 and 25 and largely targets upper secondary school pupils. Tvibit bases its activities on participation.

The Tvibit Philosophy:

1. Dare to make the impossible possible
2. Don't be afraid of failure
3. Dare to make a change and change the world
4. Never forget where you came from
5. Remember to notice and encourage others

are going to arrange a free festival, we don't need money. They had learned their lesson by the following year. Of course, everything from renting sound and lighting equipment to stage sets and artists costs money, as they soon discovered.

But the girls were not discouraged by their shaky start. By the second time the festival was arranged, they had corrected most of their beginners' mistakes, and the third year it was elected the best rock festival in the country.

- This proves that young people are allowed to think big, and these girls have developed enormously. They learned and grew from the mistakes they made, says Magne Amundsen.

He believes project-based youth participation is just as important as and perhaps even more important than political participation.

- Young people can come here with an idea and put it into practice. All the projects have a beginning and an end. And this is good training for entrepreneurship. If you make a mistake you develop and learn from it. If you arrange a hip-hop concert the first time, perhaps you will arrange a hip-op concert with a demonstration next time, says Magne Amundsen.

Tromsø Municipality inaugurated the Tvibit youth house in June 2000.

As regards local community and sports facilities, the goal is to develop facilities that meet young people's need for challenge and variation. Young people must be given the opportunity to participate in designing them and the facilities should function as good social meeting places in the local community. Local facilities should be designed with a view to the rapidly changing interests, trends and needs for physical activity of children and youth..

*Circular Q-27/2006 The Participation and influence of children and youth
– information and guidance for work in municipalities*



Ensuring cultural services

At the barricades for the cinema

For three years, Bjørn-Kristian Svendsrud (14) fought for a cinema in Horten. A brand new cinema with four auditoriums was opened in autumn 2007.

11 September 2001 is a day Bjørn-Kristian will never forget. Primarily because the terrible terrorist attack on the twin towers in New York took place that day. But also because it was the day Horten's cinema was closed.

- The fire protection equipment was in such poor shape that the building had to be closed, so we didn't have a cinema in Horten at all, says Bjørn-Kristian.

He started the cinema campaign in his home town when he became a member of the children's council as a sixth grade pupil in 2003.

- Of course a town like Horten should have a cinema. That is why it became my pet project, and one year after I was first elected to the children's council we were given the opportunity to speak at municipal council meetings. Every time they had a meeting, I turned up and spoke about the cinema.

It think the politicians were fed up with me in the end, and sometimes I was fed up with the whole thing as well. It's hard to keep going when you are rejected time and time again. But when you have first stood up and fought for a cause for so long it's not easy to give up either. And I am a Horten patriot after all, so I don't give up so easily!

Today Bjørn-Kristian is pleased that he didn't give up because the cinema enthusiast finally began to see the results of the work he had done. The cinema was included in the budget on 19 June 2006, and on 11 December the same year the resolution that Bjørn-Kristian had been waiting for for three long years was passed: there would be a new cinema in Horten.

The official opening of the cinema in the Vestfold County town is planned to take place on 6 September 2007.

- In cooperation with private interests, the municipality is building a premiere cinema



NEW CINEMA: Bjørn-Kristian Svendsrud did not accept the fact that Horten Municipality lost its cinema and never gave up trying to persuade the politicians to build a new one.

with four auditoriums and a total of 550 seats. This is very important for everyone in Horten. When it is completed, it will also be a cinema for the whole of northern Vestfold County. We expect between 80,000 and 100,000 visitors each year and this will have positive ripple effects for the entire municipality. Traders expect to increase their annual turnover by approximately NOK 7 million and that shows how important this project is.

Raymond Johnsen, cultural affairs officer in Horten Municipality, is convinced that Bjørn-Kristian Svendsrud's contribution has played a crucial role in connection with the cinema issue.

- It has definitely been decisive. The efforts of the children's council, the youth council and Bjørn-Kristian have highlighted this issue and they have not left the politicians in peace. When they saw him come into the council chamber time after time, they immediately knew what they had in store, says Raymond Johnsen.

With 21 votes against 20, the resolution in favour of a cinema in Horten was adopted by the municipal council by the smallest possible majority.

Running their own short film festival

Aspiring directors Torfinn Rønning Sanderud (18) and Eirik Sæter Stordahl (19) are the prime movers for the annual TILT short film festival in the Tram Shed at Kjelsås..

- One of the things that inspires me to make films is the possibility to tell a story. If you don't have anyone to tell your story to, making films is not so exciting. TILT gives young people who are interested in film-making a chance to show their work to others, says Eirik Sæter Stordahl, and Torfinn Rønning Sanderud agrees.

- It's good to have an arena where you can hear and see the audience's reactions. Have you succeeded in saying what you wanted to say? Do they jump if something is frightening? Do they laugh if something is funny? Making a film takes a lot of work, so it is very important to be able to show it, he says.

TILT was arranged for the second time in the Tram Shed arts centre in Kjelsås in Nov. 2006 and the short film festival will be an annual event by and for young people in Oslo and the surrounding areas.

- We have noted a slight increase in the number of films submitted this time, but it is not so marked that we can say for certain that this is a growing trend. However, we hope to gradually increase interest in film-making.

Good, broad-based marketing of the film festival is one of the measures they hope will persuade budding young directors to use their cameras. Among other things, Torfinn has designed posters and developed a special website for the film festival. Mailing lists and debate forums on the Internet have also been used actively to market TILT. However, most of the pair's time has recently been devoted to a major project to make an advertising film for the festival.

- The advertising film will be our most important marketing tool in the future and we have made it as timeless as possible so that it can be used for several years, says Torfinn, who put a lot of work into raising money for the project.



- We applied for funding from various grant schemes and managed to collect NOK 68,000. Most of the money was spent on renting a 16 mm camera and other proper equipment for a weekend. But we are very happy about what we achieved with the money we had at our disposal.

Nearly 70 young people took part in the film project and the film will probably be shown in Oslo cinemas to promote the next festival.

- We hope this will generate even more interest in the festival, say the two young men, who have every reason to be satisfied with the 60-second advertising film. Judging by the final result, the budget could have been NOK 680,000 rather than NOK 68,000.

- The goal was to make a film that looks very expensive on a small budget. We feel we have succeeded in doing that.

The TILT short film festival is arranged in cooperation with the Tram Shed, the Kjelsås Boy Scouts and the Nordre Aker District Youth Council in Oslo.



PRIME MOVERS: The TILT short film festival was arranged for the second time in the Tram Shed arts centre in Kjelsås in November 2006. The short film festival will be an annual event by and for young people in Oslo and surrounding areas. Aspiring directors Torfinn Rønning Sanderud (18) and Eirik Sæter Stordahl (19) are the prime movers for the festival

Cultural life flourishes in the Tram Shed

Young people who are interested in the arts have a good environment for cultivating their interests in the Tram Shed in Kjelsås, Oslo.

- Part of the reason for establishing the Tram Shed arts centre was that young people in the neighbourhood wanted a proper café and meeting place in the local community. That was the vision behind the project and the young people played an important part in developing the centre. They worked in groups in an organised project to plan an operating model for the entire Tram Shed, says Anne-Berit Haavind, head of the Culture and Youth Unit in Nordre Aker District.

Many ideas

The result is a large, impressive cultural centre that opened its doors in autumn 2003. In the Tram Shed, the youngsters have their own café, a music workshop with three practice rooms and a studio, a computer room with good film editing and design software for Mac, a meeting room and a large, flexible auditorium that is used for concerts, theatrical performances and exhibitions.

- The young people had a hundreds of creative ideas about how we could develop the centre, and in order to systematise all the ideas and suggestions we brought along an interior architect. He started from the young people's ideas and came back to us with various suggestions for what the centre might look like, says Anne-Berit Haavind, who points out that the users had clear ideas about the content of the centre, and especially the café.

- A large serving counter was vitally important. A large sofa was also high on the wish list. I think the comedy series "Friends" was an important source of inspiration for the design of the café, smiles Anne-Berit Haavind.

Financial priorities

The young people also fought hard to have a proper coffee machine behind the counter.

- They had to present extra strong arguments for that. It's an expensive machine and whether we should have it or not was therefore a financial issue. We adults managed the financing of the project and the young people just had to prioritise which equipment they wanted most, explains Anne-Berit Haavind.

There is a great deal of activity at the centre and much of it is organised by the youngsters themselves. The Tram Shed is open every day. Twenty-five bands practice in the three practice rooms, there is theatre sport in the café every other week, the district youth council holds its meetings here, concerts are arranged featuring Norwegian bands and artists, big and small, and the centre organises its own dance festival and arranges an annual short film festival.

- There is activity here every day, all year round, with the exception of the summer holiday. Then the Tram Shed is closed too, says Anne-Berit Haavind. She points out that the activities at the centre are not limited to young people.

- Even if the target group is young people between the ages of 13 and 20, people of all ages are welcome. We have children's theatre once a month, which is a popular event for families, and no-one raises an eyebrow if a 60-year-old sits down for a cup of coffee in the café. The centre is open to all comers, says Anne-Berit Haavind.

PROJECT WORK: -The young people worked in groups in an organised project to plan an operating model for the entire Tram Shed, says Anne-Berit Haavind, head of the Culture and Youth Unit in Nordre Aker District.





Consultation on health

Told the Prime Minister

In autumn 2006, pupils from Eidskog Lower Secondary School took part in a round of consultations on mental health in schools. Their opinions reached Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg himself.

- Among other things, we told him that we want the school nurse to be available more than one day a week, and that adults should be more involved in the school life of their children. It is important for us that adults show that they care about us, said 15-year-old Ingunn Melbye to the local newspaper Glomdalen after having been to see Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg.

The round of consultations was carried out under the auspices of the voluntary organisation Adults for Children and Eidskog Lower Secondary School. Sylvia Brustad, Minister of Health and Care Services was also present to receive the pupils' message.

- Nervous? You bet! My cheeks were bright red when it was our turn to speak, but he's so nice, said Ingunn, who travelled to the capital city with 13-year-old Silje Mobæk.

The two girls took part in the consultations on mental health in schools along with eight other randomly selected pupils. Environment worker Anita Seterlien Olsson from Eidskog Lower Secondary School is left with a very positive impression of the project.

- It has been a success, and we intend to continue working on mental health. To obtain as correct a result as possible, we have used methods other than merely handing out a questionnaire.

- Why did you do it that way?

- Adults don't always understand what children and young people really think; they often use actions rather than words to express themselves. That is why we wanted to give them a chance to make their opinions clear in connection with the consultation round, says Anita Seterlien Olsson.

The pupils first wrote down their thoughts about what might be the causes of good and poor mental health in schools. Then they were divided into two groups, which selected four points to work on in more detail.



STATED THEIR VIEWS: Ingunn Melbye and Silje Mobæk from Eidskog met Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg and Minister of Health and Care Services Sylvia Brustad last autumn. They presented the results from a round of consultations on mental health in schools. Photo: Ole-Johnny Myrvold, Glåmdalen.

- They had to choose two positive things and two negative things from the final list. Thereafter, they were asked to illustrate these situations, first with sketches and then with a digital camera each.

- We noticed that the pupils managed to express things that they otherwise find difficult to talk about. Among other things, we received pictures that very clearly showed a person being excluded from a larger group, says Anita Seterlien Olsson.

The pupils' pictures were mounted in a large album that was presented to the Prime Minister.

“He was genuinely interested in talking to us and he allowed us more time that was originally planned for the meeting.” The pupils thought it was very positive to be able to present their thoughts to the Prime Minister himself.

Pupils from Gol, Rjukan and Arendal, who had also carried out consultation rounds at their schools, presented their results to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health and Care Services on the same day as the Eidskog pupils.

A selection of points that emerged in connection with the topic of “Good Mental Health in Schools”:

- Being noticed
- Having someone to go to
- That people are nice and don't bully others
- That you can trust people
- That people respect each other
- That teachers are not bad-tempered so that you are afraid of going to lessons
- That you have good friends
- That everyone can talk to each other without conflict
- Having someone to talk to
- Good-tempered teachers
- That everyone has an opportunity to express himself/herself
- That no-one feels excluded
- Always having a teacher to talk to
- Feeling safe
- That everyone feels accepted and not rejected
- That we stop rumours that lead to argument

A selection of points that emerged in connection with the topic of “Poor Mental Health in Schools”:

- People who make unkind comments that can hurt others
- People who think bullying is tough
- Teachers who don't care
- That perhaps you don't have any friends
- When teachers punish a whole class for something one person has done
- Excluding or bullying
- Not getting help from teachers
- Pupils talking behind other pupils' backs
- Bad attitudes

Consultation on mental health at Eidskog Lower Secondary School, autumn 2006.

Schools carry out an annual pupil survey. This must be followed up by pupils in their pupils' councils and class councils so that they can present proposals for changes to the school administration and the municipal authorities. Pursuant to the regulations "Environment-oriented health care in schools and day care institutions", a meeting with the person responsible for the school health service may be necessary.

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By using methods such as a future workshop, children and young people state their views about what is good and bad in the municipality. Experience shows that children and young people are interested in many topics that affect their lives today and their possibilities for the future, such as:

- Road safety
- Quality of playgrounds
- Substance abuse
- The indoor climate
- Meeting places
- Health clinics for young people
- Job possibilities
- Collective transport
- Sports services
- School services
- Environmental protection
- Skateparks and other sports facilities
- Crime prevention
- Cultural services
- Bullying
- Racism
- Youth clubs
- Leisure activities
- Education
- Housing
- Outdoor life



Opinions about road safety

Wanted to meet the head teachers – received a clear message from the pupils' councils

When a new road safety plan was to be drawn up in Stange, the municipal politicians arranged to meet the head teachers. Instead, they were confronted by the chairmen of the pupils' councils who had strong opinions.

The politicians wanted to know which dangerous school roads should have priority in the new municipal road safety plan. But they totally forgot to ask the people who were really affected – the pupils themselves. The chairmen of the pupils' councils in Stange's schools wanted to do something about that.

- It's a day I will never forget. The politicians faces dropped when they entered the room and were met by the chairmen of the pupils' councils instead of the head teachers. I was really proud, smiles Youth Secretary Else Bjørke from Stange Municipality as she recollects the events in 2005.

The pupils presented their opinions on the dangerous roads in the municipality and the politicians took these opinions into account in the administrative process. In some places the traffic situation has improved, while in other places measures will be implemented gradually.

- They were heard, and road safety measures have been implemented in the most dangerous places. But many of the projects in the road safety plan are still awaiting implementation. These things take an unconscionably long time to materialise in a bureaucratic system, especially seen through children's eyes.

Nevertheless, the pupils are proud of the results of their efforts, and this has given them additional motivation and inspiration to work hard to achieve their main goals.



TAKE THE INITIATIVE: - I believe it is important to make children and young people feel responsible. I have told them that if they want a facility of some kind, they must take the initiative themselves, says Youth Secretary Else Bjørke. Here with the chairman of the Stange children's and youth council, Eirin Roen Martinsen, and deputy chairman Ingeborg Madsen Sveen.

- They realise that taking action bears fruit,” says the Youth Secretary, who has an important message to impart when representatives from the children’s and youth council in Stange attend their first meeting as youth representatives: “Nothing happens if you don’t do something yourself”.

- I believe it is important to make children and young people feel responsible. I have told them that if they want a skatepark, they must take the initiative themselves. I don’t skateboard and I don’t need a skatepark. Nor does the Chief Municipal Officer. So I tell them that to make people realise that this is something young people in Stange want and need, they must make an effort to achieve it themselves.

One of the ways of reaching the people in power is to use the media. In this Hedmark municipality, the children’s and youth council has actively contacted the local press in connection with issues that concern it. This has brought results. Among other things, the youngsters have campaigned for free fruit in municipal schools. This is now being introduced in lower secondary schools, but the primary schools will probably have to wait a while longer.

- It is clear that politicians take more notice if a little pressure is exerted through the local media.

The children often write open letters to politicians, the administration and the media when they are concerned about something.

- That is how we ensure focus on issues that are important for children and young people in Stange Municipality. However, journalists sometimes contact us directly without us having to tip them off. We have a good overview of the journalists and know which of them have a positive attitude to youth activities and which are rather more negative. It’s a matter of adopting a tactical approach in our contacts with the press, says Else Børke.

Redirected construction traffic

Every day, heavily loaded lorries drove back and forth along the school road in Michelle Bang’s (12) home town. The chairman of the children’s council found this unacceptable.

- The teachers, pupils and parents were all shocked that no-one had informed them that the lorries were to drive many thousand tons of mass along our school road every day, says Michelle Bang, chairman of the Skoppum children’s council in Horten.

Because the surplus mass from road construction was to be used to expand the Horten docks, the school road was suddenly transformed into a dangerous transport route for large lorries that drove shuttle for the municipal harbourmaster.

- I remember we were in a maths lesson when my head teacher took me and a representative of the pupils’ council out of class to attend a meeting with two men in uniform. We agreed that I would take the matter up with the children’s council so that we could present proposals for what could be done to make the traffic situation safer for us at Skoppum, says Michelle, who lists the various proposals the children’s council submitted to the harbourmaster.



STOPPED THE LORRIES: Michelle Bang, chairman of the children's council, was not daunted by the heavy traffic.

- Among other things, the children's council proposed installing a barrier, using traffic lights and constructing speed bumps. It was not easy to implement all the measures, but several of our proposals were accepted.
- We had found out that we could make a ring road for the lorries so that they were empty when they drove along our school road. We also got the speed limit reduced from 50 to 40 kilometres an hour. And we arranged a bus service for children who had to cross the road that was used by construction traffic, says Michelle, who was especially interested in the issue because it affected Skoppum, her home community.
- It was also the first proper issue we worked on in the children's council, and it was extra fun when we achieved the things we wanted. We even asked for compensation for the lorries that continued to drive on part of our road. We were taken to another meeting with the harbourmaster, where I was told we would receive NOK 25,000. We could use the money for class outings, smiles Michelle, who thought it was fun to be heard on an issue that affected the entire population of Skoppum.
- We were very happy when we achieved these things. It shows that it's always worthwhile to say what you think, concludes Michelle Bang.

National Policy Guidelines to strengthen the interests of children and young people in the planning process:

Requirements regarding the municipal planning process:

The municipality shall:

- a. Consider the consequences for children and young people in the processing of planning and building cases pursuant to the Planning and Building Act.
- b. Undertake an overall evaluation of the environment in which children and young people grow up in order to incorporate objectives and measures into work on the municipal master plan.
- c. Adopt guidelines, rules or by-laws relating to the size and quality of areas and installations of importance to children and young people, which shall be secured in plans that affect children and young people.
- d. Organise the planning process in such a way that views relating to children as an affected party are heard, and that various groups of children and young people are given the opportunity to participate themselves.

Circular T-4/98 Children and Planning



Pupil-controlled environmental project

Collected several tons of rubbish

In Hareid Municipality, lower secondary school pupils collected tons of rubbish in a pupil-controlled school project.

In connection with this clean-up project, the pupils were responsible for identifying and mapping rubbish in the municipality, dialogue with land-owners and, finally, the collection of several tons of rubbish. Large quantities of plastic, the remains of old agricultural machinery, car tyres and ugly car wrecks were collected by the hard-working pupils.

- The youngsters did a magnificent job. If we had carried out this kind of project with municipal labour, it would have taken far longer than it took the children, says Gunn Berit Gjerde, Chief Municipal Officer in Hareid Municipality.

First of all, approximately 25 lower secondary school pupils spent their gym lessons cycling round the entire municipality to map everything that could be removed. Then the 8th grade pupils worked with Hareid Municipality's technical department and together they studied the land registers to find out who owned the various sites. The next step was to send letters to the landowners informing them about the rubbish collection campaign that was in progress.

- They received plenty of positive response and the local newspaper published several articles on the clean-up project. This resulted in people calling in and telling the pupils where they could find more rubbish.

The pupils worked on the project for six months.

- Our aim was for them to see the results of their work quickly. It was a fairly intensive project and it was possible to incorporate many different subjects. It entailed everything from writing letters and working on computers to finding out how the municipality operates. This was relevant in relation to both Norwegian and social studies, says Gunn Berit Gjerde.

And it resulted in highly committed pupils.



- We received very positive feedback from the teachers. In one class that had previously been one of the worst in the school, the positive changes were noticeable. Pupils who were otherwise not very active were motivated by the practical work. They all found areas where they could do a good job, says the Chief Municipal Officer, who has also noticed a decline in vandalism in the municipality since the project was carried out.

- I believe the work that was done has led to greater understanding of the fact that we must not leave rubbish lying about. In conjunction with other youth projects we have carried out in the municipality in recent years, I believe this has contributed to less vandalism and less rubbish in Hareid.

They are now working with the Chief Municipal Officer to organise another, similar project using the same method. This time the registration of footpaths is on the agenda.

- The objective is to produce a brochure with maps and pictures of footpaths in the municipality. There are many fine hidden treasures to be found in our varied landscape and this project may make these young people aware of how beautiful their municipality is. At the same time it may persuade more people to go out walking, hopes Gunn Berit Gjerde.





Young people interview job applicants

Interviewed by young people

To be accepted for the job of Youth Officer in Vågå Municipality, Annette Garden Sveen had to undergo tough rounds of interviews with the municipal administration and, not least, the young people themselves.

- Two representatives of the youth council attended the interview session and they asked at least as many critical questions as the municipal officials did. Among other things, the youngsters wanted to know my views on youth participation and how I thought the Vågå youth club should be run, says Annette Garden Sveen, describing a job interview that took place two years ago.

But the youth council was not only involved in the interview itself. They also reviewed the applications prior to the round of interviews and presented their own recommendation for who should get the job. However, one point was especially important for the young people:

- The man who had the job before me had a 50 per cent position that was divided between the posts of youth officer and sports officer. The youth council strongly emphasised that they wanted two people in two posts to be sure that they had their own officer who was not distracted by other tasks. Their view was accepted, explains Annette Garden Sveen.

Today the position of Youth Officer has been changed from a 50 per cent post to a full-time post.

- That was largely thanks to the young people themselves, she says.

Incorporated

When a new club worker was to be appointed to the ActivityHOUSE youth club, the youth council played a pivotal role in the preparatory work, the round of interviews and the recommendation.

- This system is in the process of being incorporated in Vågå and I think it's great. Personal chemistry, personality and, not least, ensuring that everyone is aiming for the same goals are very important factors in promoting interaction between the young people and the people who are to work with them. If you wish to obtain a proper impression of the applicants, it is important to involve young people in the whole process, believes Annette Garden Sveen.



INTERVIEW: Youth Officer Annette Garden Sveen (left) had to submit to tough rounds of interviews with the municipal administration and the youth council when she applied for a job in Vågå Municipality. Marte Linderud, chairman of the youth council, thinks it is great that young people in the village are genuinely involved when new people are appointed to positions that affect them.

The current chairman of the youth council, Marie Linderud (19), was not involved in the appointment of either the club worker or the youth officer, but she finds it very encouraging that the municipality includes young people in important decisions.

- Compared with other municipalities I think we have a lot of influence here in Vågå. I have met many other young people, both here in Gudbrandsdalen and elsewhere in the country who have much more difficulty in being heard than we do. The politicians and the administration have a positive attitude, we are allowed to state our views and we are heard, says Marie Linderud.

Positive attitude

Both she and Annette Garden Sveen believe that the municipal focus on young people has affected other people in Vågå.

- For instance, we notice it when events are to be arranged in the village or when private companies are planning various projects. Young people are always invited to take part, and people look upon us as a resource that can benefit the entire municipality, say the two girls.



Information to and from young people

Collaborating with the local press

The young members of the Brakka youth club in Årdal run their own newsroom and submit articles about what is going on in the youth community, both to the local press and for municipal information brochures. They also run their own website

- We cover various things that are happening in the local youth community. It's a fine way to reach people, says Thomas Norheim Moen (17).

Ever since the Brakka youth club at Årdalstangen was opened in May last year, Thomas Norheim Moen, Martine S. Holsæter and William Gullaksen have run their own newsroom from Brakka's Internet café. Most of their work is devoted to the website www.ardal.no/ung, but they also produce information material about the local youth community.

- We also work closely with the local Internet newspaper, Porten.no, and we get a lot in return for that, say the youngsters.

Porten.no covers the neighbouring municipalities of Årdal and Lærdal and the editor of the website, Hanne Stedje, is permanent group leader and "media teacher" for the Brakka newsroom.

- We have an editorial meeting once a week and Hanne gives us advice and tips about how we should develop articles and what we should bear in mind when take pictures for an article. Sometimes she asks us to take pictures and write articles for Porten.no too. When our material is published there, we reach a larger readership, says William Gullaksen (16).

Important resource

The Porten editor regards the young people as an important resource.

- They mainly submit pictures to us, but they also contribute articles. It is important for us who run the Internet newspaper to reach young people, especially because this group consists of the keenest and most active users of Internet media. That is why we want to focus on issues that concern young people. It is therefore natural that they contribute tips and inputs concerning issues they think we should write about, says Hanne Stedje.

The largest local newspaper in Sogn has also benefited from the young people's work.

- We have sold material to Sogn Avis and the money we received went straight into our newsroom kitty, says Martine S. Holsæter (16).

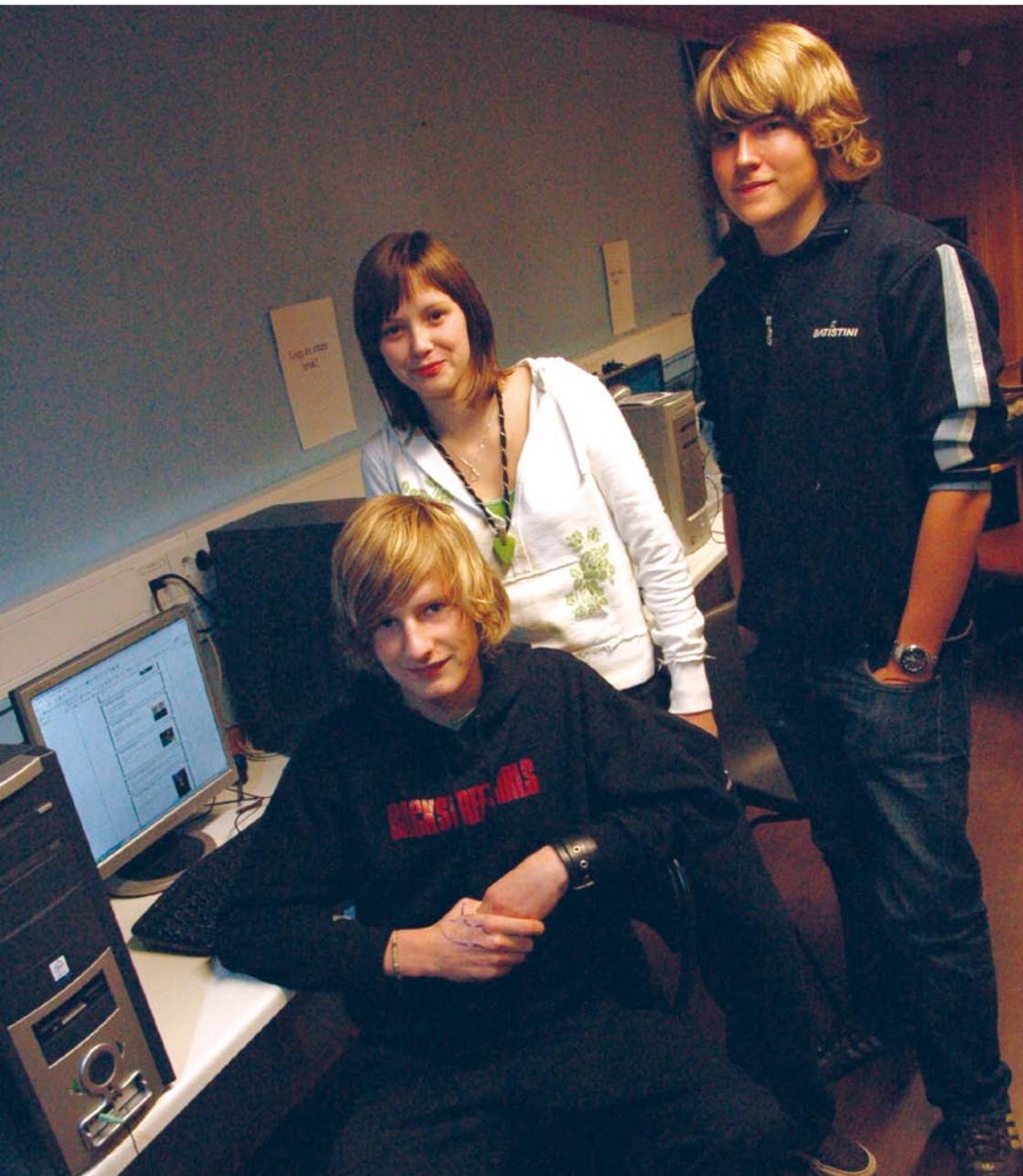
Reflex camera

The money was useful. They recently bought a brand new reflex camera for the newsroom.

- We received a grant from Frifond to buy a camera and it has been used a lot. We have also been given a picture editing course by a local computer company, so we have had good support, says Martine.

The youngsters publish their own articles on www.ardal.no/ung and they have also been given publication software for their private computers.

- If an article has to be published quickly, we can do it from home. We don't have to wait until the editorial meeting, which is a great advantage if it's an urgent matter, says William Gullaksen



UNAFRAID: In Årdal, brave journalists Thomas Norheim Moen, Martine S. Holsæter and William Gullaksen contribute material on young people both to the local press and for municipal information brochures. They also run their own website.

With respect to information concerning events in the municipality, official responsibility for providing information is enshrined in the Local Government Act. Municipal and county authorities must actively provide information about their activities. This must also apply to information for children and young people.

Children and young people need information about many areas. If children and young people are to benefit from official information, such information must be adapted for the target groups. Participation and interaction are strengthened by increasing the supply of information and the possibilities for communicating.

From Circular Q-27/2006 The Participation and influence of children and youth – information and guidance for work in municipalities

Article 13

- 1.** The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.
- 2.** The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:
 - a)** For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or
 - b)** For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child



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