

Report

Poverty among children, young people and families

– a booklet of information and experiences



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NORWEGIAN MINISTRY
OF CHILDREN AND EQUALITY

Foreword

Poverty among children, young people and families has been the focus of much attention in the last few decades. The poverty experienced in the Norwegian welfare state is complex, and there is not one simple solution that can help to eradicate it. Poverty must therefore be combated in a range of areas and on a number of levels: local, national and international.

The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs (*from 1st January 2006: the Ministry of Children and Equality*) has for many years supported initiatives aimed at children, young people and families affected by problems associated with poverty, including through the Urban Youth Projects¹ (*from 1st January 2006: Urban Children and Youth Projects*) grants scheme and through a special effort linked to the child welfare services in a range of local authorities². The efforts have been targeted at local authorities that face major problems associated with living standards and score high in terms of child poverty. The local authorities have focused their work on two main areas in particular: holiday and leisure activities for children, young people and adults, and initiatives that can engender the involvement in the labour market of young people with little or no qualifications. The work against poverty will be continued and increased.

Information about poverty and sharing experiences are very important. This publication presents some contributions from researchers and several local authority initiatives. The examples show that social restrictions and exclusion from social situations form an important part of today’s poverty picture. The experiences also show that it is possible to get vulnerable young people involved in the labour market through close follow-up and adapted provision.

The booklet was produced by Ingunn Torgerstuen Stensholt of the Fafo research foundation on behalf of the ministry. We wish to thank the researchers and local authorities for their contributions and comments. We would especially like to thank all of the children, young people and families who contributed quotes and their stories.

We hope that the booklet will be an inspiration to everyone interested in children, young people and families, and help to strengthen and develop the work further.

*The Ministry of Children and Equality
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Definitions of poverty

Income after tax is used as a measure of the financial resources individuals have at their disposal. In Report No. 6 to the Storting (2002–2003) *Plan of Action for Combating Poverty* the threshold for low income is set at **50 per cent of median income**. This means that everyone whose income after tax is lower than 50 per cent of the median income belongs to the low income group. In order for a person to be defined as poor according to the action plan, his or her income must have been less than 50 per cent of the median income for at least three years.

The median income is the middle income in the distribution of incomes, i.e. the income figure that splits all incomes in a group into two equal halves after the incomes have been arranged in order of magnitude. For example, the median income in 2003 for the entire population *after tax* was NOK 178,000. If one sets the poverty threshold at 50 per cent of the median income, this means that people whose income was lower than NOK 89,000 in 2003 fell below the poverty threshold.

The number of people with a low income will vary according to how one takes account of economies of scale in a household. A so-called «equivalency scale» is utilised to allow comparisons to be made between families of differing sizes. Using equivalency scales allows one to find out how much income a household with, for example, four members has to have in order to enjoy the same standard of living or financial welfare as a single person. There are many different equivalency scales. *Plan of Action for Combating Poverty* utilises an equivalency scale that only attaches moderate importance to economies of scale.

By way of comparison, the EU sets its low income threshold at **60 per cent of the median income**.

In addition to this it utilises an equivalency scale that attaches a relatively large amount of importance to economies of scale.

A more in-depth explanation of the various definitions of poverty can, for example, be found on www.ssb.no or in Fløtten (1999) *Poverty in Norway*.

Child poverty in Norway – what is the problem and how can we solve it?



Child poverty in Norway – what is the problem and how can we solve it?

Tone Fløtten, research director of the research foundation Fafo

For many years child poverty was a non-subject in both the political debate and research. This has changed. Today the fight against child poverty has emerged as an important socio-political subject. The authorities are producing plans and initiatives to combat poverty, and there are many research reports describing the development, scope, distribution and consequences of child poverty.

The question of how many children are living in poverty in Norway is not easy to answer. The extent of poverty depends on which measure of poverty one applies. Based on the measure of poverty used in *Plan of Action for Combating Poverty* (2002–2003) 3 per cent of all children between the ages of 0–18 lived in a family with persistent low income in the period 2001–2003. This amounts to around 34,000 children. If we apply the EU's measure of poverty, the figure is 8 per cent, or more than 90,000 children³. In addition to this there are many children who do not belong to the low income group, but who are growing up in a household receiving social assistance benefits. In 2001, this applied to 56,000 children (*Ytrehus 2004*).

Despite the fact that Norway is one of the countries in the world with the least child poverty, there are still a substantial number of children living in poverty in our country as well. Poverty does not strike randomly either. Children who have parents with a low education level or only a loose connection to the labour market are particularly vulnerable. The same applies to children living with single parents and children with non-Western ethnic minority backgrounds.

The idea of a child in Norway growing up in poverty goes against our notion of justice. Children themselves cannot be blamed for the situation they are in and nor can they do anything to change their social situation. We also fear that the poverty will have negative consequences with respect to the child's opportunities and standard of living in both the short and long term. For these reasons a series

of initiatives intended to help parents out of poverty have been introduced on the one hand, while on the other measures have been introduced to improve the present situations of children here and now. Both of these approaches to child poverty are necessary. In some cases it will take a long time to help a family out of income poverty and during this period the children's needs have to be attended to. Children in poor families must be given an opportunity to participate in the same activities as other children and they must be ensured an acceptable material standard of living.

At present we know little about the consequences of growing up in a low income family in today's Norway. Nor do we know enough about whether the consequences of short-term and long-term poverty are the same. Research has shown that the majority of children growing up in poor families have a relatively normal material and social standard of living. Most of the children living in low income families have access to many of the same consumer goods as other children, they display more or less the same personal patterns of consumption, and most of them report to have good social relationships. At the same time there are exceptions. If we compare the situations of children growing up in a family with poor finances with other children, we find that a larger proportion of the children living in poverty are struggling socially, not participating in leisure activities, and perceive themselves to be socially isolated. Besides this, it is reasonable to assume that the longer a child lives in poverty, the greater the negative consequences.

«Children themselves cannot be blamed for the situation they are in and nor can they do anything to change their social situation.»



So far research has not provided an answer to whether it is the lack of money in itself that creates these standard of living problems, or whether there are other factors in the family that help to explain the child's social situation. In any case we have to work on the basis of these problems. And the question then becomes what will help. How can we help to ensure that children growing up in families with very poor finances neither experience major problems here and now, nor replicate this poverty in their own adult lives? There is, of course, no simple answer to this question, but we do have some indications of what is important.

First, it is essential that the poverty is taken seriously, and that all social agencies that have contact with families with poor finances take into account the children's situation. This means, for example, that the social services, whose primary concern is the situation of the adults, must be aware of the children's situation. Equally, the child welfare services must take account of how a family's finances affect the children with whom they are in contact. This is to a large extent already happening, but efforts could be better co-ordinated.

Second, research shows that public financial assistance for families with children are of great significance with respect to keeping poverty figures down. Countries with generous welfare schemes have far lower poverty rates than countries with low levels of public financial assistance. Since children who live with single parents are more vulnerable to poverty than other children, we have to ask ourselves whether or not the financial assistance schemes are good enough. We must also question whether we have schemes that enable single parents to combine participation in the labour market with childcare.

Third, we must accept that poverty can have both different causes and different consequences. The fact that

children with ethnic minority backgrounds are significantly over-represented among children living in poverty indicates that we must assess whether special measures are needed to counter the problems in this segment of the population, among both children and adults.

Fourth, we must remember that many adults in low income households do participate in the labour market. This may indicate that many poor people could perhaps improve their participation in the labour market, and we must find out how increased labour market participation can be facilitated. Some people can strengthen their participation in the labour market and work their way out of poverty; others ought to be assessed with respect to, for example, a disability pension. And this again leads back to the question of whether the rates in different pension schemes are generous enough to keep people out of poverty?

Fifth, we must continue and develop schemes that help to alleviate the situation of children living in poverty in those cases where the family's finances are not improved in the short-term. The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs' (*from 1st January 2006: the Ministry of Children and Equality*) efforts through Urban Youth Projects (*from 01.01.06: Urban Children and Youth Projects*) and the funds allocated to local authorities in connection with the child welfare services are good examples of such schemes. Even though the struggle against poverty must primarily be fought at a national level, local variations in poverty mean that local authorities may face differing challenges. By channelling funds to local authorities that have both high rates of poverty and high numbers of social assistance recipients, the effort and creativity necessary to resolve problems are stimulated at a local level. ■

Children who grow up in a family with poor finances may have less opportunity than other children to participate in various social and cultural activities. Awareness of this has grown and many local authorities have now introduced initiatives and activities that seek to provide good holiday and leisure experiences. Some local authorities have emphasised activities for children, while others have produced schemes that take account of the family as a whole.

Trips for children, young people and families

THE CITY OF TRONDHEIM, DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE

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It is obvious that children and young people in low income households have less access to benefits that are taken for granted by other children and young people in today's welfare state. Visits to family parks or amusement parks are holiday experiences that have become relatively commonplace among families with children in Norway. Families with children with financial problems may, however, have difficulties enabling the entire family to participate in activities, outings, weekend trips and holidays together.

In the City of Trondheim the Department of Culture have in recent years offered overnight trips to Hunderfossen Family Park to entire families. The trips are basically open to everyone who wants to participate, but an extra effort has been made to reach out to families who, for financial or practical reasons, cannot go away on holiday. They may, for example, lack a car or other means of transport, have a small social network, etc.

Families are recruited for the trips through the child welfare services, social services and health service. The Department of Culture is interested in facilitating the participation of families experiencing financial difficulties. The trips are largely funded by the national government and local authority, which means that the amount the families themselves have to pay is affordable.

Trips for the whole family

The Department of Culture has arranged this holiday provision for a number of consecutive years. Overnight trips have become a tradition and in 2005 it arranged a two-day trip with 11 families and four leaders from the Department of Culture. The children on the trip ranged in age from 3 to 16. There was a preponderance of single mothers on the trip. Some knew each other from before, while others made new

friends. Forming social networks is an important secondary goal of the initiative.

The trips include transport, overnight accommodation in camping cabins, a barbeque and activities in the evening, breakfast at a hotel, and then a whole day in the family park. There are many exciting activities for both children and parents here. Among other things, you can try rafting, go-carting and gold mining, and one can also visit the fairytale palace and fairytale grottos.

Shared summer memories

A scheme like this allows a whole family to go away on a holiday trip together. Having poor finances is stressful and it can therefore be good to take a break from your ordinary life and take a little holiday from the worries and stress at home. It is a good opportunity to recharge your batteries with a pleasant holiday experience the family can look back on together. Such shared experiences can strengthen family bonds and improve relationships between children and their parents.

Positive feedback

The feedback from participants has been good. Both adults and children report they have been very pleased with the scheme and the trip. They all got on well and everyone helped each other and enjoyed each other's company. All of them would participate again, if offered it. In addition to families having an opportunity to enjoy each other's company, these sorts of trips can have other positive ripple effects. The children get to take part in ordinary summer activities and it can feel good to have something to tell friends and fellow pupils. They have done other things during the summer rather than just staying at home. ■

Summer camp in scout cabins

THE MUNICIPALITY OF SARPSBORG

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Poverty in Norway is often associated with situations in which children and young people experience social restrictions and exclusion from social situations for financial reasons.

In 2005, the Municipality of Sarpsborg arranged a summer camp for a group of pupils of lower secondary school age. 20 young people aged between 13 and 16 were taken on a week's free camp during the summer holidays during which the keyword was *memories*. There were an equal number of boys and girls on the trip. The summer camp was the idea of two teachers in the school health services of two lower secondary schools, Sandbakken and Hafslund. It was an inter-agency event in which social counsellors, a health visitor, and the outreach office of the Municipality of Sarpsborg joined forces to provide a group of boys and girls with experiences and holiday memories they would otherwise not have had an opportunity to gain. The idea behind this was that a positive holiday experience would help to make their everyday lives easier and strengthen their social networks.

Fun, relaxation and experiences

The summer camp was held at a local scout cabin, a place with great outdoor areas and good opportunities for varied activities. The water was a stone's throw away and the forest their nearest neighbour. The young people canoed, fished, played volleyball and went on various kinds of excursions. Among other things they had a chance to go sailing on a Viking ship from Ullerøy to Halden, go to the cinema, and reach heights and depths at Tusenfryd amusement park. The summer camp leaders emphasised that a holiday was a holiday, and that at the camp the participants were allowed to relax and choose what activities they wanted to join in themselves. Meanwhile the activities were enjoyed by most of them. They also experienced many kinds of accommo-

dation. The young people switched between sleeping in the scout cabin, in a Sámi tent called a lavvo, and in a 'barbecue cabin'. As well as typical holiday activities everyone had certain chores to do such as cooking, fire lighting and cleaning.

Positive holiday memories

The emphasis was on activities and tasks that allowed the young people to experience a sense of mastering and which improved their self-image. Participation in a social group is an important part of a young person's life. The young people made new friends at the summer camp and gained good memories created in the company of others. Being away from home for a week often creates strong bonds between people who are together morning, noon and night. The organisers prioritised young people who, due to their family's financial difficulties, seldom or never go on holiday, but they also chose to take pupils who did not come from families with poor finances. They did this in order not to contribute to the further stigmatisation of young people who come from poor families. This mix of pupils proved to function very well.

Successful event

The organisers, two teachers, a health visitor and the local authority's outreach office, wanted to create good holiday memories and the pupils to enjoy themselves and relax. The young people were supposed to come back to their friends and school after the holidays and be able to say they had had experienced something fun. This goal was achieved and the feedback from the pupils and parents has been exclusively positive. A week of new, exciting experiences, challenges and friendships left them wanting more. ■

Furuhuset – the house of opportunity

THE CITY OF OSLO, ALNA DISTRICT

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Most children and young people growing up in poverty in Norway have a Norwegian primary breadwinner. At the same time, children and young people with a primary breadwinner with a non-Western immigrant background are significantly over-represented. Immigrants with non-Western backgrounds participate in the labour market less, experience higher levels of unemployment than the rest of the population, and are over-represented in the group of people who experience persistent low income problems.

The Furuhuset family centre

The district of Alna in Oslo faces major challenges and scores badly in terms of poor living standards. The proportion of families with children with immigrant backgrounds is high. Among the services on offer to people in the district is Furuhuset family centre. Some keywords that describe the family centre are: co-ordination of services, holistic services, and low threshold services. In practice this means a common arena with an open nursery school, maternal and child health centre with a midwife and health visitor, child welfare services, and a family office. The aim of Furuhuset is to promote good health for children and parents, strengthen the environment in which children and young people grow up, and improve the social networks of children and parents. An additional important goal is to support and strengthen the parents in their caring and childrearing roles. The staff at Furuhuset believes that a multidiscipline family centre like this based on early intervention and better integration into society has many advantages.

Open nursery school

Every Monday to Thursday from 09:30 to 13:30 the Furuhuset nursery school welcomes children and adults to various activities, a communal lunch, and social interaction. The scheme is free and, as the name implies, open to everyone. Many families with immigrant backgrounds live in the district and the open nursery school service provides children and parents with immigrant backgrounds with opportunities to develop both their social and linguistic skills. The feedback from the parents has been good. They are happy having a

place to go where they can meet other parents and share experiences. Besides this, they have an opportunity to familiarise themselves with and form an impression of other social services such as child welfare services and the family office, and this lowers thresholds when it comes to asking for advice and help when it's needed.

Furuhuset has managed to reach out to users who would otherwise be in an isolated position in Norwegian society. For many parents with immigrant backgrounds the open nursery school can be the first step towards becoming familiar with the society in which their children are going to grow up. Many of the children do not understand Norwegian when they start at the open nursery school and gain a lot from the service. The staff sees that the children learn Norwegian by being together with other children, singing Norwegian songs and participating in language groups, if they come to the open nursery school regularly. As well as the language training the children participate in activities such as drawing, art, jigsaws and different types of physical activity.

Leisure time school and open house

Furuhuset has also started a leisure time service for children in years 2 to 10. They run a club every Wednesday for children in years 5 to 8 with funds from the Urban Youth Projects grant scheme (from 01.01.06: *Urban Children and Youth Projects*). There is also a club on Thursdays for children in years 2 to 5. Children can participate in various activities such as theatre, cooking, homework help, and training in the gym. Sports activities are also provided for children in years 5 to 10 in co-operation with Furuset Allidrett sports club. The leisure activities are very popular among the children. The sports leaders have, however, experienced that getting parents with immigrant backgrounds involved in their children's leisure time can be a challenge, and they are therefore working on developing a stronger network and co-operation with parents. Developing close links with various voluntary organisations and immigrant organisations forms an important part of this work. ■

Child poverty – children's stories



Child poverty – children’s stories

Karin Gustavsen Tvetene, researcher at Vestfold University College, the Henær centre

Knowledge about how children experience everyday life living in financial poverty, provided by children themselves, is an important contribution to understanding how poverty expresses itself. It also represents an important contribution when trying to put measures in place to combat poverty.

Poverty as children experience it is about, among other things, experiencing exclusion from a group that children perceive that many others are able to participate in. Participation in this group requires money: «I am so used to being alone. I have always been alone a lot. So therefore I think that it happens quite rarely, but really it happens quite often. I am used to people going to the cinema without me, or other places without me, on holiday and that sort of thing.» (Quote from boy 13 years old, Tvetene 2001: 50)

We find similar experiences in Hjelmtveit’s survey: «Leisure activities: «I haven’t been able to join in going to the cinema, swimming and other things like that.» «After all, it costs money to get onto the ski slopes and go to the mountains and so on, we have never done it.» (Hjelmtveit 2004)

Hjelmtveit (2004) says that the lack of the actual material benefits and activities also entails a simultaneous perception of *social* deprivation. Not having things and not being able to do things at the same time also has an additional dimension that relates to social ranking.

However, some children also state that the family’s poor finances have a totally concrete impact when it comes to diet: «I know we are always broke. We never have dinner every day. If, for example, we have dinner two days in a row, it can be weeks and months until next time. We don’t get cornflakes and such things either. Mum says it takes so much milk.» (Tvetene 2001:49).

A person’s material standard of living refers to both our physical and environmental surroundings, as well as physical working environment, housing conditions and purchasing power. Material factors will also affect health.

For example, purchasing power is related to the ability to purchase healthy food, warm clothes, dental services, etc. There is reason to believe that groups with low incomes are in a vulnerable position with respect to the ability to consume in a manner than prevents health problems. There are various theories about which factors have the greatest impact. For example, whether poor purchasing power in itself can explain any lack of a nutritious diet, or whether it has to do with how information about dietary needs is reaching the various social groups in the population (Stolanowski & Tvetene 2005). Surveys have shown that social variations in health clearly correlate with social variations in the conditions in which people grow up. Stress and strains during childhood result in an increased risk of poor health in adulthood (*The Challenge of the Gradient* – 2005).

NOVA’s⁴ survey concerning children’s living standards in families with low income shows that children and parents answer questions about their standard of living quite differently (Sandbæk (ed.) 2004). The study shows significant differences between the low income group and the control group when parents are asked about their standard of living, while the differences are far less when the children in the

«Worrying, sadness and anxiety over the family’s financial situation are also things we find among children living in poverty.»



groups are asked. However, the studies by Ridge (2002), Hjelmtveit (2004) and Tvetene (2001) show that children are exposed to poverty. Underlid’s (2005) study, which shows how poor adults experience shame, devaluation and a lack of worth, tells us that the mental stress associated with poverty is so strong that it will be very difficult for parents to shield their children from it over time.

The accumulation of stress will also affect how poverty expresses itself. When financial poverty occurs simultaneously with other variables, for example if the parents themselves have grown up in poverty, if the children have lived in poverty throughout their upbringing, if the parents have a low level of education and/or poor health and thus little chance of influencing their situation, there is reason to believe that the likelihood of the children being exposed to poverty to a greater degree increases (Backe-Hansen 2004).

It is difficult to study the mental stress to which the children are subjected (Stolanowski & Tvetene 2005). This is both due to children and young people not having developed the vocabulary to describe such feelings, but perhaps an equally important explanation is the difficult experience of shame we must be able to assume that the children are also impacted by, which can result in silence and withdrawal. In this situation it is also interesting to note the following on how early children experience being different: «What emerges is a disturbing picture of how children begin to experience the reality of their differentness at an early age.» (Ridge 2002: 5)

In Hjelmtveit’s (2004) material he found that some of the respondents’ stories showed that even as young as seven

years old they experienced that they were different to other children: «I was seven-eight years old when I began to notice that it wasn’t fun having less money than the others in the class» (Girl, 15).

Worrying, sadness and anxiety over the family’s financial situation are also things we find among children living in poverty. And it is also the case that the negative consequences of growing up in poverty appear to be worse the earlier in childhood one experiences the poverty, and the longer the poverty persists (among others Duncan et al 1998, after Fløtten 1999). It also appears that income in early childhood has a greater effect on subsequent school performance than income during one’s upbringing (Fløtten 1999).

Poverty does not strike randomly. Among families with children, it is first and foremost single parents who are affected, and there is a larger proportion of children living in poverty among children with non-Western backgrounds than among children with ethnic Norwegian backgrounds (among others Epland 2001, Ytrehus 2004). Unemployment is the most important cause of poverty, and a poor education the most important cause of unemployment. Combating child poverty will therefore have to involve many different measures. Children’s stories tell us that securing income, i.e. ensuring that families with children have enough to live on, is absolutely key (Tvetene & Stolanowski 2005). In connection with this it is important to remember that the UN’s Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been incorporated into Norwegian law, is intended to ensure children’s civil, political, financial and cultural rights. This is the children’s own law. ■

Activity group for children with mentally ill parents

THE CITY OF TRONDHEIM

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There is a documented correlation between low income and poor health. Recent surveys show a relatively moderate but nonetheless clear correlation between mental ailments such as angst and depression and low income problems. How are the children and young people in these families doing?

Mental illness can be a contributory and direct cause of poverty due to the problems the illness causes vis-à-vis education, participation in the labour market and the development of social skills. Mental illness can also result in parents not being able to follow-up their children's leisure activities as they would like to. The picking up and taking to fixed activities, communal efforts, and other obligations that can be difficult to fulfil when mother or father is ill. A couple of years ago, the City of Trondheim started a service for the children of mentally ill parents.

Background

The children of mentally ill parents are a vulnerable group that deserve special attention. This was the background against which employees in the Department of Culture, mental health workers, and the maternal and child health centre in the City of Trondheim joined forces to start an activity group for this group of children. Children with a mentally ill mother or father are often anxious about their parents and try to alleviate their ailments and comfort them. The activity group provides the children with support and gives them an opportunity to share their worries and experiences with adults. At the same time it is important that these children also have an opportunity to participate in leisure activities and utilise their resources together with others.

Room to breathe in everyday life

Many of the children in the group thought that they were the only people with an ill mother or father, and thus got to experience that there are others in the same situation. By gathering the children together one created common ground. The initiative seeks to provide the children with support and alleviate their feelings of being alone. At the same time, another important element is to provide the children with room to breathe in their everyday lives, where they are allowed to be children and escape the adult role many of these children have at home. Feeling a sense of mastering something through activities is also an important experience to have.

Varied arrangements

The support service consists of an activity group in which eleven children participate. They are picked up from school and come to a regular meeting place where they eat before starting various activities. Some times they do physical activities such as swimming, bowling, climbing and fishing. The group has also been on a three-day trip away from home involving rafting, wilderness camping, hiking and various games. At other times the meetings are calmer with games, looking after animals, meetings with topics picked by the children, talks about hygiene and cooking. The adults also talk to the children about various topics to do with mental health such as, for example, angst, sleeping problems, anger, depression, the division of responsibilities between children and adults, etc.

Good experiences

Examples of the feedback from the children show that this is an important service. Some think «that it is really cool» being part of the scheme and say «they have looked forward to the group all day». Parents have also commented that they can see that their children are enjoying themselves here, and that they are glad the children are taken on various activities that the parents just couldn't manage. During the project parents have got in touch to discuss subjects to do with their own illness, setting boundaries and other issues.

It takes time to build up a sense of trust and security, but after a relatively short period of time (16 months) the activity group's staff can point to good results. An assessment conducted by the leaders of the group shows that the children perceive their everyday lives to have unimproved. The children have fewer headaches/stomach aches and seem generally happier. They knew little about their parents' illnesses before taking part in the group, but now have more insight into their parents' problems. The children know they are not alone. They no longer blame themselves for their parents' illness as much as they did before. The children seem more confident in social situations and have attended several cultural and social events. Several of the children have made close friends with someone their own age through the group service and strengthened their social network. ■

Leisure opportunities in Gamle Oslo District

THE CITY OF OSLO, GAMLE OSLO DISTRICT

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The proportion of children in poor households is highest for children in Eastern Norway, and the proportion is highest in the largest local authorities, including the City of Oslo. There are major variations between the districts regarding the proportion of children living in poverty and the proportion of children growing up in households that receive welfare benefits.

The district of Gamle Oslo and the other districts in inner Oslo's east end do poorly in living standard surveys. Among other things, poor housing conditions, a high percentage of welfare benefits recipients, and high percentage of unemployed are particular challenges. There is a great need for holiday and leisure services in this district, which has too few leisure and play areas. The district has neither direct access to the fjord nor the forests.

Annual calendar of activities

The children and youth projects unit in the district of Gamle Oslo arranges a series of different holiday and leisure activities throughout the year. They work together with FRIGO (the outdoor centre in Gamle Oslo) on a series of events. *The summer club* consists of two groups: one for the youngest school children (years 1 to 4) and one for the middle years (years 5 to 7), and the children get to participate in activities of various kinds every day throughout July. For example, we have arranged canoeing trips, swimming trips, and boat trips with barbeques in the fjord. Together with other districts in Oslo, the district of Gamle Oslo has invested in boats that allow the organisers to take the children out on the Oslo Fjord.

The holiday camp on Husbergøya is for children and young people aged between 10 to 16 years old. They are divided into two groups, 10-13 years old and 13-16 years old, and spend a week each in the cabins on Husbergøya. In recent years, time and money has been put into renovating two cabins with water, electricity, a toilet, a balcony, an outdoor barbeque, etc. The children and young people have a chance to try out various activities including fishing, swimming,

ball games and treasure hunts. In addition to this, another important element is strengthening the children's social networks.

Similar holiday trips, in which the district utilises its surrounding areas, are also arranged during the autumn and winter holidays. The district creates a skating rink in Rudolf Nilsens Plass during the winter where children and young people can borrow skates at a reasonable price. The rink is open two nights in the week, and Saturdays and Sundays. It is a popular amenity, which has hired out as many as 800 pairs of skates in one night.

Better self-image

The various holiday and leisure services provide the children and young people with experiences and holiday memories they would otherwise not have had, and this is possible largely thanks to the good infrastructure with boats, cabins, vehicles and outdoor equipment. Improving the self-images of the children and young people through confirmation from others and a sense of mastering low threshold activities is a prioritised task.

All activities are basically open to everyone, but recruitment to the services takes place through social counsellors, maternal and child health centres, child welfare services and pedagogic institutions. In this way the district reaches the target group of children and young people in families with socio-economic problems. They reach both children with ethnic Norwegian backgrounds and children with immigrant backgrounds. Thanks to a good network and child and youth work that has had a high degree of stability over time, it is easier to recruit children and young people to the initiatives. Most of the activities are completely free. In those cases where activities cost something, the price is set at a low level so that all children have an opportunity to participate. Participants have to pay a symbolic amount, and the idea behind this is to give them a feeling of being able to pay their own way. The various activities are popular. For many this is their only opportunity to get away from the city and out into nature. ■

Anti-child poverty initiatives



Anti-child poverty initiatives

Elisabeth Backe-Hansen, Research Director at NOVA (Norwegian Social Research)

The best initiatives against the occurrence of child poverty are socio-economic – through access to work one can make a living from, to other forms of income if one is out of work, and to a deliberate redistribution of resources to families with children. The subject of this chapter is, however, initiatives aimed at combating the effects of child poverty.

This means primarily what various actors in local communities and society at large can do to compensate for the social consequences children and young people face due to the fact that their families have very poor finances or live below the poverty threshold.

A relative phenomenon

Child poverty in Norway involves to an overwhelming degree what we call *relative* poverty. Therefore, initiatives aimed at combating the effects of child poverty must be aimed at lessening the relative differences between children and young people from families with very poor finances and their peers as they meet them in nursery school, at school and on other leisure arenas. As I will elaborate below, such efforts must therefore involve several types of initiatives. Some initiatives should be targeted at the family to make their everyday lives easier to manage. Others should be targeted at the environment where children or young person grow up to counter the social exclusion that is perhaps the most serious social consequence of poor family finances in our society (Backe-Hansen, 2004).

Universal and selective initiatives

Since child poverty is a multifaceted phenomenon in Norway, both universal and selective initiatives are necessary. It is also necessary to utilise a *spectrum of initiatives* rather than

individual initiatives against the effects of the financial constraints the children and young people experience. Further, it is also important to be able to see anti-child poverty initiatives in the context of other social initiatives for children and young people, for example under the auspices of the child welfare services, the pedagogic-psychological services (PPT), or maternal and child health centres. In general, initiatives aimed at combating child poverty should also be seen in the context of efforts to organise social services for children, young people and their parents in more user-friendly ways than is often the case today.

Examples of initiatives targeted at children and young people

Much of the research literature (for example see Ridge, 2003) underlines that one important effect of child poverty is social exclusion. If finances are poor or very poor, it can, especially over time, be difficult to participate in activities that cost money, maintain consumption at the same level as that of one's friends, or go away on holidays. Even if the Norwegian low income survey (Stefansen, 2004) did not indicate very great differences between low income families and others, like for example Ridge or Adelman et al (2003) found in the UK, there are still reasons for ensuring that children and young people can participate to a reasonable degree.

«It is an unavoidable fact that children and young people from families with poor finances have less and do less than others, even if their parents try to shield them from this.»



It is an unavoidable fact that children and young people from families with poor finances have less and do less than others, even if their parents try to shield them from the effects of having poor economic resources. This will particularly be the case if economic hardship goes on for years, and the parents do not have any reserves or a supportive network to draw on. Nor is it a goal in itself that everyone should have an opportunity to maintain a high level of consumption. However, at the same time things can be done to ensure that participation in social contexts is possible in order to counter social exclusion. The two most important arenas in which children and young people meet without their families are nursery school/school and in their leisure time. Here they can have loss/defeat experiences that entail a risk of poorer happiness and well-being, and the subsequent development of problems. On the other hand they can have positive experiences that in turn can counter risks that are, for example, associated with growing up with very poor finances.

General initiatives in these arenas will be anything that can increase the likelihood of children and young people being able to participate on an equal footing with others without this requiring a financial contribution that exceeds the level the parents can afford. Examples of such initiatives, which can always be means-tested, are the public subsidisation of nursery schools and after-school schemes, or the payment of participant fees and equipment in connection with leisure activities. As of today some people have such expenses paid by the public services under the auspices of the child welfare services, usually for reasons to do with other problems in the family. Such schemes could well be expanded and, for example, turned into part of the

redistribution schemes that are currently administered by the public sector.

In the last couple of decades we have increasingly seen that sports clubs and others demand both increased parental payments and increased contributions from adult supporters. For many children this can represent too great an expense for the individual family. As Sandbæk (2004) suggests, giving children and young people an opportunity to participate in at least one free leisure activity would be an alternative. Besides this, increasing council grants, e.g. through the councils paying for hall rental, would alleviate the pressure on organisations to raise money from the parents. Furthermore, sustaining council (and reasonably priced) services such as youth clubs and other places to hang out with attractive leisure provisions can be a good alternative to the trend we are seeing now in the direction of more commercialised – and expensive – leisure provision for young people, in particular.

The importance of developing non-stigmatising initiatives that are also included in the general spectrum of initiatives for children and young people cannot be stressed enough. The research literature consistently states that adults and children who are defined as living in poverty by the public authorities or researchers do not themselves want to be called poor. There is a stigma attached to poverty that many people do not want to be associated with; they would rather be someone struggling to make ends meet. One way of dealing with this dilemma is precisely by seeing the big picture vis-à-vis initiatives and linking initiatives for children and young people from families with poor finances to the general initiatives in a local authority. ■

The VIT Project (growth – attention – well-being)

THE MUNICIPALITY OF ÅLESUND

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Children, young people and families living in poverty often have problems in a number of areas and require help and support from a variety of agencies. It is therefore important to see initiatives aimed at combating child poverty in the light of other social services.

Background

The Municipality of Ålesund has started a project that is targeted at children with behavioural difficulties and is embedded in the child welfare services. The background for the project is that the child welfare services felt that they were letting these children down and that there was a lack of initiatives that resulted in positive change. The project has been integrated as part of the provision for children and young people in inner city areas (child welfare services and the maternal and child health centre).

In autumn 2004, the challenges within the youth environment in the local authority became markedly greater and the needs for extra action clear. There was drug abuse, threatening behaviour, truancy, vandalism, and bullying. The local authority started planning an initiative based in families and homes. The aim was to build a network in the child's environment at an early point in time, which could support the child with positive resources. Initiating a dialogue with children and young people can provide an important, supplementary picture of the situation, compared with the picture sketched by, for example, schools, child welfare services or parents.

Talking to the youngsters

To start with, every family in the project has contact with a family and network therapist for three months. Thereafter the initiative is assessed in relation to the goals. A new partnership contract can be signed if the therapist and the family see a basis for continuing to work together. The therapist talks to the child and the parent, and helps to construct a structure and clear framework for their everyday lives. A great

deal of emphasis is placed on including the child in the work. The child is allowed to participate in formulating the concerns associated with him/her and arriving at areas in which he/she wants to change. Goals are set for the work and the child and therapist talk about how they are going to achieve the various goals together. Some children are unused to such a role. The therapist therefore spends a lot of time familiarising the child with this type of participation.

Social networks are very influential with regard to a child's development. Their families, friends, school and neighbourhood can influence and contribute. All these environments are therefore included in the work of turning around negative trends. The network will be invited to describe what they perceive to be the cause of the difficulties, suggest goals in order to get out of them and to describe which strengths and needs they see in the network that could contribute to positive change. A network can, for example, consist of relatives, friends, school, a football coach, and so on.

Follow-up and evaluation

Long-term, positive results are achieved through the efforts of the family and community. A good relationship with the school, voluntary organisations and local authority services for children, young people and families is important with respect to achieving a good result. So far the project has followed up seven families. The goal is to work actively with 15 families at any given time. The scheme is demanding, and the abilities and skills of the therapist are very important. The project is followed by both an evaluation of the process and a final evaluation. So far, the general impression is very positive. The service has been well received by the families and the staff has the impression that the target group greatly appreciates the service. ■

New Page

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Voluntary organisations and user organisations can play an important role in the work of combating poverty. Voluntary organisations and various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) do not only have a role to play in preventative work, but also when it comes to catching many of those who fall outside the social services' safety net.

From the perspective of society, social inclusion is important when it comes to preventing marginalisation, social unrest, criminality, etc. It is through participation in social groups and various networks that individuals develop independence and are bound to society through social ties. For some groups of young people the establishment of close relationships and close follow-up is necessary to achieve this.

Background

New Page has carried out preventative youth work since 2000. It started as a collaboration between the outreach office and the Ulriken Eagles basketball club in Bergen and developed into an NGO with «tribes» or branches in several places in Norway. As of today there are projects in Bergen, Oslo, Kolbotn, Asker and Stavanger.

New Page's staff performs direct relationship building work with at risk young people aged between 12 to 18 years old pursuant to an agreement with the child welfare services. In addition to the child welfare services, they work closely with schools, guardians and the police. A shared characteristic of the young people New Page works with is that they have major personal and social problems that the child welfare services believe can be changed through close individual follow-up. These are generally vulnerable young people involved in a negative environment linked to drugs, criminality, and anti-social behaviour. The goals and the extent of the follow-up match the young person's needs. The young people are in different phases of their lives. We therefore tailor agreements to the individual. These can involve 4 hours to 20 hours of follow-up a week.

Special support contacts

From a purely formal point of view New Page offers services to the child welfare services in the form of support contacts. However, these are a special kind of support contact. They are role models and guides with regards to young person's main arenas: school, leisure time and family. We are talking about a friend who is always there for them, never mind the time of day, and who is always a positive role model for the young person.

New Page does an important job of motivating and closely following up young people, and including them in a group. All of New Page's staff work on the basis of certain core values which they believe are necessary for growth and development. They must display empathy, be there, be positive, be consistent, be reliable and be genuinely interested. The support contacts build up the young people through care and love. By building relationships based on respect, understanding and availability, the support contacts and the young people together create a sociable, safe space for the work on changing.

Summer camp

It has been the New Page staff's experience that the summer holidays are an especially critical time for vulnerable young people. They are off school and their days thus have less structure. They are out a lot and a lot can happen in the course of the summer months. New Page therefore regards being available and there when the young person needs you, including in the summer, as very important. Among other things, a summer camp is arranged for all the New Page tribes, i.e. young people and staff in Bergen, Oslo and Stavanger. Almost 60 people spend a week together at a holiday camp outside Kristiansand.

A camp like this is an important experience for the young people, but it is also a tool in the relationship building work. Among the young people we find people who are growing up in financially poor homes, or who have parents for whom their

children having this type of experience are not a priority.

At the summer camp the young people have many positive holiday experiences and make new friends. Everyone is really pleased with the trips. In the staff's experience the mix of young people has functioned brilliantly, as long as they agree on and consistently apply fixed rules and boundaries. This dampens the scepticism that others may have about gathering so-called «troubled youths» in one place.

With New Page to Lithuania

New Page recently started a partnership project with the child welfare services in Lithuania. In the summer, a group of selected young people from New Page attended a summer camp outside Vilnius together with a group of children in care from Lithuania. Young people from both the Oslo branch and the Bergen branch came, and part of the purpose of the trip was for them to get to know each other better. We also wanted to bring together Norwegian and Lithuanian youths, and provide the Norwegian youths with a new perspective on their own situation.

The trip made a big impression on many people. In Lithuania they met children and young people who are growing up in extremely poor material conditions and who experience tough everyday lives. Perhaps for the first time the young people from New Page experienced that they could do something for others and that they were valuable. Having the attention move from you to someone else was a new experience for them. Even though this was something serious, there were at the same time a lot of games, fun and social interaction during the visit to Lithuania. The Norwegian youths got involved and want to make a contribution to help the children in Lithuania. New Page will continue to work and stay in touch with the children's home.

New Page Work

New Page has also started a project aimed at increasing vulnerable young people's participation in the labour market. Many young people want a part-time job, but are excluded from this arena because they lack a network, have low self-esteem, poor qualifications, etc. They therefore need positive work experiences and a chance to show that they can work.

In Bergen and Oslo some of the young people perform various activities at New Page. For example, they have a chance to experience being an assistant at the youth club or having a trainee place at New Page. New Page's staff wants to give them gradually more responsibility. Some of them may well stumble, but in New Page they will get support and a second chance.

New Page is also working on creating links with positive employers who can give the young people part-time jobs. The idea is that both the employer and the young people will receive close follow-up and that the young people can have a chance to get a job they perhaps would otherwise not have got. Getting a reference, a document that says you have done a good job, can make it easier to get job number two later on.

Personal development social change

After being in operation for a few years, New Page has seen its work with vulnerable young people achieve major successes. Many young people are getting the help they need and showing positive developments in that they have changed their networks, participate in new activities, and have changed their habits and patterns of behaviour. New Page is helping them assume responsibility for their own lives. ■

Interview:

Network building and active leisure time

The Municipality of Vestby is one of new 20 local authorities to have been allocated funds for a special effort to combat poverty through the child welfare services. The director for health and child welfare services, Bernt Hovind, sees many opportunities with the grant they have received from the ministry.

«Not only will we be able to reach out to more children and young people in need, but the child welfare services will also have a golden opportunity to become more visible in the community. There are many myths associated with the child welfare services' work. We will now have a chance to influence this image.»

Hovind also highlights the opportunity of a more multidisciplinary co-operation. The child welfare services have joined forces with the health service, school and police in a series of initiatives and activities – a multidisciplinary partnership from which they are gaining a lot. Hovind stresses that as long as the services do not need to compete they get a great deal out of such co-operation.

«We believe in bringing wise heads together. We have to be humble and think that it is through meeting others that one develops.»

Child poverty

Vestby received extra attention from the ministry because statistics showed that the Municipality of Vestby had a higher proportion of children living in poverty than the average for the local authorities in the region. Families lacking in experiences, money and networks were recruited through the child welfare services and the maternal and child health centre. Hovind acknowledges that it has not

been possible to reach *everybody*. However, they have been able to provide *some* families with close follow-up and these in turn have experienced new things and expanded their networks of acquaintances.

«Mastering and acknowledgement are key terms in a person's life.»

Varied activities

The families gather for various types of activities organised by the multidisciplinary team. Hovind reports that they want to offer activities that are locally anchored. They have utilised the local district and illustrated the possibilities it presents. Among the things he mentions are forest walks to Rådehula – a cave within walking distance of the town centre. Here they light a fire and barbeque. The sea, which is a few minutes away, is also used a lot. They have taken trips on lifeboats and other small craft during which everyone received training in and knowledge about sailing. They have also organised overnight trips and island hopping

«at strategically picked times,» according to Hovind. In other words, right after or right before school starts. It is important for the children's memories to be fresh with the fact that they have done something special during the holidays and not just stayed at home. One mother said that her son was dreading the start of school because he had been on his own a lot. After the island hopping in August he was beaming. He had made new friends, who even went to the same school. «That says something about how important networks and alliances are,» remarks Hovind.

Mopedmekker'n

In recent years there has been a lot of criminality and substance abuse among young people in Vestby. The young people think there is little to do during the evening. The child welfare services have therefore, together with the police, started a special moped workshop – called Mopedmekker'n – for young people in the local authority. Here they can work on old cars, mopeds and boat engines. The goal is to prevent young people getting into negative environments with substance abuse and criminality. As well as the social aspects, with waffle cooking and chat, one also wants to engender positive attitudes and healthy interests in the young people. The director of the child welfare services points out that the child welfare services have traditionally not seen as much of children as they would want to, but that this is a way of having a presence where the young people are. He regards Mopedmekker'n as preventative, and also thinks the young people get on well in the workshop.

Mopedmekker'n allows young people to have better contact with other young people with shared interests. The director of child welfare services has great faith in peer-to-peer exchange, which means that the young people receive advice and help with the work from other young people. The feedback from the young people is also good. They are very happy with the fact that Vestby offers things other than just traditional leisure time activities.

The common thread throughout the activities, whether

it is fixing mopeds or boat trips on the fjord, is that it is the children and parents who are in focus and being put in situations in which they can utilise their own resources and be praised for what they are doing. «Mastering and acknowledgement are key terms in a person's life,» points out Hovind.

«The common thread throughout the activities, whether it is fixing mopeds or boat trips on the fjord, is that it is the children and parents who are in focus and being put in situations in which they can utilise their own resources and be praised for what they are doing.»

Social exclusion and participation among young people with immigrant backgrounds



Social exclusion and participation among young people with immigrant backgrounds

Jon Horgen Friberg, researcher at the research foundation Fafo

Today, Norway is a multicultural society with inhabitants with backgrounds from more than 200 countries. People with immigrant backgrounds are today growing up in every local authority in the country. One prerequisite for successful integration into Norwegian society is that ethnic minorities are included on an equal footing with the rest of the population in various arenas of participation and social fellowship.

In the case of children and young people, this participation includes, for example, youth clubs, hobby clubs, political youth organisations, or sports clubs. Participation in such leisure activities can offer a sense of social belonging, a sense of community and positive experiences in a vital phase of life in which one's identity and network are formed. These organisations are also bearers of key humanistic values, are often referred to as «schools in democracy», and can play a vital role in the integration of young people from ethnic minorities into Norwegian society.

However, young people from ethnic minorities participate far less often in this type of leisure activity than young people with ethnic Norwegian backgrounds, and some groups are almost totally absent from participation in these arenas. The findings that are presented here are primarily based on a survey of all pupils in the first year of upper secondary school in Oslo, and on a survey of Pakistani, Somali and Norwegian parents of compulsory school aged children⁵. There are great variations in the levels of participation between the different ethnic minority groups and young people with Pakistani backgrounds, who form the largest group of young people with ethnic minority backgrounds in Oslo, stand out due to their particularly low level of participation. However, among young people with other non-Western backgrounds participation is also significantly lower than among young people with ethnic Norwegian backgrounds. Girls with ethnic minority backgrounds in particular have a low level of participation. While 58 per cent of the pupils with ethnic Norwegian backgrounds were active members of one or more organisations and teams,

this was true for only 12 per cent of the girls with Pakistani backgrounds. A large majority of these were members of religious organisations. Among the girls with Pakistani origins in the first year of upper secondary school only 1.5 per cent were active members of sports clubs versus approx. 40 per cent of the young people with ethnic Norwegian backgrounds. In the case of boys with ethnic minority backgrounds a somewhat lower level of participation in sports clubs is balanced by the fact that they participate to a greater extent in unorganised sports activities with friends outside sports clubs. Girls do not participate in this arena either. The same group that participates the least in organised leisure activities, more often than others has little contact with friends during their leisure time. Also when it comes to participating in school related social activities – such as day outings, camp schools, or school parties and other arrangements – young people with ethnic minority backgrounds are prevented from participating to a far greater extent than their ethnic Norwegian fellow pupils.

The reasons behind young people with ethnic minority backgrounds' lower levels of participation in organised leisure activities are complex, though lower motivation does not seem to be a determining factor. Young people with ethnic minority backgrounds evaluate the positive and negative aspects of participating in organisations just like other young people and state, to an equal extent, that they are interested in the things the youth organisations are engaged in. The same groups that participate the least are actually those who most often state that they want to participate in something new. No less than 93 per cent of girls with Paki-

«Financial and cultural resources are not evenly distributed, and immigrants have on average both less income and education than the rest of the population.»



stani backgrounds state that they want to participate in an organised leisure activity in which they do not currently participate.

On the other hand, young people with ethnic minority backgrounds encounter various barriers that can prevent them from participating in organised leisure activities. Firstly, it may be a question of resources. Financial and cultural resources are not evenly distributed, and immigrants have on average both less income and education than the rest of the population. Even though the parent's education and family's difficult financial situation may be of significance vis-à-vis a child's participation in organised leisure activities, the uneven distribution of these resources cannot fully explain why some groups of young people with ethnic minority backgrounds participate so little in both sports clubs and other types of clubs. Among those who participate the absolute least, the resources situation in the family is not at all a determining factor. In the case of other groups of immigrants – especially those who have not lived here long and are in a generally difficult financial situation – finances may be more of a factor.

Secondly, it may be a question of how inclusive and open the organisations are themselves vis-à-vis the groups who do not participate very much. Recruitment to organised leisure activities takes place through friends and informal networks. The less contact there is between young people with ethnic minority backgrounds and those with ethnic majority backgrounds, the less likely it will be that young people with ethnic minority backgrounds know someone on the inside if participation is already low in these circles to begin with. In those groups that participate the least, many more respondents state as reasons for why they do not participate in any activities that: they do not think they would fit in with the others who participate in the organised leisure activities, that they do not know anyone who takes part and that no one has asked them. This indicates that there is certain recruitment potential for the organisations

by being more inclusive vis-à-vis marginalised groups.

Thirdly, the low level of participation could be linked to more culturally linked traits in the various groups with ethnic minority backgrounds and the parents' attitudes to the children's use of their leisure time. It can be difficult to participate in organised leisure activities if the family's expectations do not concur to any significant extent with the Norwegian model for leisure time and social interaction. This can manifest itself in other obligations after school time that makes participation in organised leisure activities difficult. More than one third of the Pakistani girls state for example that they spend their leisure time doing housework at home every single day. Very few young people with ethnic Norwegian backgrounds state this. Or it can manifest itself in the fact that parents have negative attitudes to allowing their children to participate in typically «Norwegian» leisure activities. This appears to be an important reason in those groups that have the absolute lowest level of participation.

The parents' attitudes to their participation in organised leisure activities and school related social activities have on one hand to do with different cultural traditions in relation to gender roles and degrees of control over the young people's leisure time. And on the other hand, there is the question of knowledge and confidence. Many parents are uncertain about what actually takes place, especially when girls join in leisure activities. A lack of knowledge about the contents of various leisure provisions and the values in school and the rest of Norwegian society may increase the need to control and limit their opportunities to act. A lack of confidence is the expression most of the parents themselves choose when they state in their own words why they will not allow their children participate in activities. This indicates that a better dialogue and information, as well as other measures that may result in the parents having greater confidence in relation to children's leisure time activities, may have a positive effect on their participation. ■

Activities for girls with immigrant backgrounds

THE CITY OF OSLO, SAGENE DISTRICT

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It has been seen that girls with non-Western immigrant backgrounds are at especially high risk of social exclusion. Social exclusion here means being excluded from participation in one or more arenas in society such as, for example, interaction with friends or participation in various leisure activities. Girls with non-Western immigrant backgrounds are far less likely to participate in leisure activities than other children and young people participate in. Some local authorities have turned their attention to this group and initiated measures to encourage the participation of a group of young people who are unlikely to take advantage of other provisions.

The girls group

The district of Sagene in Oslo has for several years organised a girls group at the local library for social interaction, homework help and various activities. This year the group moved to an activity house where the girls aged 13-20 years old meet twice a week for various activities. The girls have different backgrounds including Turkish, Somali and Pakistani. Some are subject to strict restrictions from home with respect to what leisure activities they can participate in. Many parents think it is okay to send the girls to this type of activity since there are only girls in the group and a female adult is present.

With this initiative the district is hoping to provide the girls with positive experiences and good integration into society. They meet to cook food, chat, take photos and do other hobbies. In addition to this, theatre and the cinema trips are organised, to the extent that they have the permission of their parents to go on these. Experience shows, however, that this is easier to get when it is under the auspices of the girls group.

The number of girls that turn up varies from evening to evening. All in all there are around 40 girls in the group, though usually around 15 – 20 girls turn up during an evening. The members of the girls group are recruited via networks. Those who know of the offer introduce it to other friends and acquaintances.

Jentivalen – no admittance for boys

At the moment the girls group is working on a partnership with Sweden and Denmark to arrange Jentivalen – a cultural and activity festival by and for young girls. The aim of the event is to create a festival at which one can meet up for a number of different activities and be inspired by each other. The event is characterised by the fact that it will be user steered, i.e. the girls themselves shall decide what should be on the agenda. Such a festival can offer many exciting activities and challenges, new friends and inspiration.

Part-time work

Some of the girls in the girls group have also got part-time jobs such as helping to wash the activity house. New cleaners were needed and instead of employing someone from outside the district asked the girls who used the premises if they were interested. Both parties are very pleased with the arrangements; the girls earn extra money in a place that is safe and familiar, and the staff is pleased with their work. ■

African Youth In Norway: Superbrain

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Immigrants with non-Western background participate less in the labour market and experience higher unemployment than the rest of the population and are over-represented in the group with persistent low income problems. It is important to prevent social exclusion and poverty being passed from one generation to the next.

Background – African Youth In Norway

African Youth In Norway (AYIN) is a resource centre in Oslo run on a voluntary basis. We co-ordinate activities for children and youth of African descent.

The organisation was founded in 1995 and we focus on identity, culture and doing something positive with your life. Through AYIN young Africans get to know each other, have a great time together and get information, advice and support. Together, we find solutions to problems experienced by African children and youth in Norway. AYIN has approx. 200 members, with backgrounds from more than 30 countries. Most members are between 13 and 25 years old, but there are also activities for children aged 6-12 years.

Superbrain

Surveys⁶ show that fewer young people with ethnic minority backgrounds than young people with ethnic Norwegian backgrounds complete upper secondary school and take higher education. Superbrain is a service for pupils at lower and upper secondary school who want assistance and mentoring in some school subjects. These young Africans meet twice a week for Superbrain meetings. Around 20 young people aged between 13 to 20 years old receive help with both big and small school questions from older students. If necessary groups for special subjects are arranged, e.g. mathematics. In the classroom there are many who hesitate to raise their hands. At Superbrain everybody is in the

same boat and the threshold for asking questions is low. As a rule, the homework help takes place in the organisation's premises in Grünerløkka where those who have come along have PCs available, plus a mini library with textbooks and African literature. In addition to homework help Superbrain has prepared an additional syllabus which all participants follow. This has been specially designed to generate greater interest in school and education, and not least to strengthen the identities of young people with African backgrounds.

Good role models

Many children and young people with African backgrounds need positive role models. Even those who are doing well at schools, find it difficult to believe that they will get a good job if they gain an education. In addition to helping children and young people with their schoolwork, Superbrain introduces them to Africans who have made careers and become something «important» in Norway. The goals of Superbrain are both to improve academic performance and increase the young people's self-confidence.

Superbrain arranges careers guidance and visits educational fairs and various workplaces. All the young people who participate in Superbrain do courses in project management, management development, etc. AYIN does not just want young people to do better at school; they also want to develop leaders.

Strengthening vulnerable groups

The common thread throughout AYIN's work is the strengthening of vulnerable groups. Superbrain helps to strengthen relationships vis-à-vis schools and work, and increase resources. The aim of this is to catch and counter problems and challenges. The aim is to motivate the young people to be active participants in shaping their own lives in society. ■

Agenda X: «Read more, learn more, change the globe»

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Involvement and talent

Agenda X is part of the Anti Racist Centre in Norway and is a youth programme targeting vulnerable young people through follow-up and mastering experiences. They offer courses, outings and activities. The majority of the young people have immigrant backgrounds and come from a variety of districts in Oslo. The staff at Agenda X says that they are a service for young people who want to make a difference. «Or those who need help to find their strongest and smartest sides.» The goal is for young people to become participants in their own lives and genuine participants in the society they live in. Agenda X wants to help young people be heard by developing their talents.

Prioritising topics

The young people in Agenda X themselves suggest which topics and activities they should focus on. Some of the prioritised topics have been poverty that affects young people, young people with ethnic minority backgrounds who are excluded from the labour market, preventing the closure of youth clubs, and strengthening local communities. Agenda X helps young people to see opportunities, set goals and find ways of achieving their goals. Agenda X provides job seeking services and a job seeking course, trainee places and vocational training, and various holiday and leisure time activities, including the summer camp in Arendal.

Fourth summer camp

Agenda X organised its first summer camp in 2002, and this was an immediate success. Every year young people and group leaders go away on a week's camp on Tromøya in Arendal. Young people from the whole of Norway participate, though the largest group comes from Oslo. Few of the young people who are members of Agenda X go away on holiday

during the summer holidays. Many are struggling with poor finances, poor participation in the labour market and do not have a place in school or an apprenticeship. This initiative offers 100 young people a week's holiday by the sea. The summer camp consists of both meetings about relevant youth topics and various leisure activities. Six whole days of job seeking courses, workshops, topic meetings, rap courses, dancing, swimming, boat trips, and good food are some of the things the young people get to participate in. In addition to this, they are also responsible for practical chores such as cooking, tidying up and washing up. Every year before returning home Agenda X arranges a concert in the centre of Arendal in which the youngsters can show off some of what they have learnt during the week. Many fine talents take the stage and perform music, raps and dances.

Pleased participants

The young people who participate in Agenda X's summer camp gain experiences and memories that leave their mark and provide energy and drive. Such trips contribute to social inclusion and a close sense of community, as well as expanded networks. The scheme is based on a team effort and voluntary work. All the group leaders, drivers, cooks, nurses and junior leaders work for free but get a small amount of «pocket money»

Feedback from the young people who have attended the summer camp indicates that it is a successful and well thought through event. The atmosphere is good, even in poor weather. As one of the participants put it after the summer trip: «For the first time in the history of our summer camps it was pouring with rain when we left, but the mood was just as good as despite this.» On the coach journey home the youngsters are tired, but happy – bursting with impressions and holiday experiences. ■

Youth – unemployment and receiving welfare benefits in Norway



Youth – unemployment and receiving welfare benefits in Norway

Christer Hyggen, researcher at NOVA (Norwegian Social Research)

The labour market is the most important arena for combating poverty and unemployment benefit the most important protection against financial problems in Norway. Being out of work – unemployment – is a big threat to an individual's standard of living, and if one is also excluded from national insurance the risk becomes urgent.

Everyone risks being left without income from employment during the course of their lives, but the risk and consequences of unemployment are different for different groups of people in the labour force. The risk is particularly great during certain transitions. People who are transitioning between school and the labour market risk not gaining access to the labour market at all. This is especially true for young people.

Unemployment is more widespread among young people than the rest of the labour force. The proportion of young people without work is about twice as high as the proportion of people out of work in the rest of the population. This is true in both Norway and large parts of Europe. Young people are very vulnerable during downturns in the economic cycle since they have the lowest seniority and poor protection against dismissal.

Unemployment among young people is generally regarded as a problem for several reasons. However, periods of unemployment for an individual do not necessarily entail insurmountable problems. It is when the unemployment persists for a long period of time or when individuals experience several consecutive periods of unemployment, only interrupted by shorter periods of employment or temporary jobs, that the unemployment becomes problematic.

It is possible to survive in Norwegian society without fulltime work, but one is excluded from many important social arenas in the form of networks and routines. In addition to providing an opportunity to earn a living, paid work is often considered as a benefit in itself. It helps to structure an individual's time, it is a source of creativity and power,

it is a source of identity and self-realisation as a social individual, it is a source of interaction and integration, it provides a sense of purpose and meaning, and it provides a moral income (Jahoda 1982).

If a young person's first encounter with the labour market is unemployment, this may have unfortunate consequences. Young people who have no previous employment history or work experience are not only excluded from the labour market, but also from the Norwegian national insurance system. Very many young unemployed people are not entitled to unemployment benefit because they have no history of employment. In cases where young people neither have income from paid work nor family to support them financially, they have to visit a social welfare office to get a living allowance. There is a strong correlation between unemployment and receiving welfare benefits. A significantly larger proportion of unemployed people receive welfare benefits than people with other sources of income – and it is also the case that as many as two out of three long term recipients of welfare benefits are also unemployed. In 1993, a period of very high unemployment in Norway, 10 per cent of people aged 20 to 24 years old were receiving financial social assistance. Thereafter unemployment fell and the proportion that was dependent on welfare benefits was reduced. When unemployment began to rise again, however, the proportion increased again, and in 2003 it amounted to 8.5 per cent, i.e. no less than 25,000 people in the population's 20 to 24 year old age group were receiving benefits. In other words; a significant share of young people starts their employment careers as social clients (Bay et. al. 2005).

«In addition to the problems associated directly with the labour market, young long-term unemployed people and social clients often experience problems associated with substance abuse, behaviour and mental health.»



Research has demonstrated that standard of living problems accumulate among welfare benefit recipients. Young people who receive welfare benefits score poorer in the vast majority of measures than other people their own age. They have poorer health, poorer finances, lower levels of education and poorer housing conditions. New life cycle studies also show that receiving welfare benefits while a youth can have long-term effects. The fact is that differences in living standards propagate to later phases of life. A fresh life cycle study shows that young welfare benefit recipients adapt to work much worse later on in life than young people who do not receive welfare benefits, and also poorer than young people who for periods receive unemployment benefit. Young welfare benefit recipients are more likely to end up in jobs with temporary contracts, fewer opportunities for promotion, and fewer development and continued education opportunities. In adulthood they are less motivated to work and are less satisfied with their work situation than those who managed the transition from young person to adulthood without receiving welfare benefits. A significantly larger proportion is also without work or completely outside the labour force in adulthood as well (Hammer & Hyggen 2006).

Who ends up unemployed for a long time or unemployed social clients in Norway is not random. In addition to the problems associated directly with the labour market, young long-term unemployed people and social clients often experience problems associated with substance abuse, behaviour and mental health. For these groups, labour market measures or job seeker courses may not be enough. The government is staking out a course towards continuing and strengthening targeted measures – especially those aimed at young people and the long-term unemployed. This course will among other things involve a proposal concerning a young person's guarantee for everyone under 25 years old. The young person's guarantee is intended to ensure indi-

vidual follow-up and offers of work, education or training. In the case of young people with complex problems this sort of judgement based, tailored approach may prove to be a sensible strategy, both with respect to integration into society in general and in the labour market in particular.

In Norway there are a number of publicly funded initiatives aimed at the integration of both the long-term unemployed and social clients into the labour market. An overall assessment of the Norwegian labour market measures shows that these sorts of things generally have a positive effect on the participants' future employment careers, with the possible exception of measures targeted specifically at young people (Raaum, Røed & Torp 2002). An evaluation of the effects of the labour market measures for social clients finds that measures that combine gaining qualifications and vocational training, or gaining qualifications and pay subsidies, have strong positive effects on both income and employment activity after participation in the measure. It is especially young people who participate in measures of this type (Dahl & Lorentzen 2005).

The most obvious effects of the labour market measures are the effects on the participant's skills, willingness and abilities vis-à-vis job seeking. One problem with the active labour market measures is the so-called locking in effects. This means that the system itself to some extent prevents participants gaining work quickly. Reasons for this can include a job seeker becoming particular about which jobs he or she is willing to take, or having less time for active job seeking. There is also often a desire to complete a measure before the unemployed person starts working, both on the part of the unemployed people themselves, but also on the part of the social workers involved in the measure. If the most important goal of labour market measures is to get individuals into paid work, it is possible that young people would benefit from getting help to apply for jobs before they are offered a place on a measure (Hardoy 2003). ■

Vocational training for young people

THE CITY OF OSLO, SAGENE DISTRICT

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There is a strong correlation between non-existent or weak involvement in the labour market and long-term low income problems. Involvement in the labour market is also important with respect to feeling valued in society and for a young person's perceptions vis-à-vis inclusion and mastering. Vulnerable young people need close follow-up and support in order to achieve a good relationship to employment as soon as possible. There are several examples of initiatives that focus on vocational training for young people who need it.

Grønn Patrulje (Green Patrol)

The district of Sagene has focused on vocational training for young people for several years. Young people aged 14–18 years old are offered a chance to apply for summer jobs in the district, and work for standard pay for a period of four to five weeks. In previous years the work has largely consisted of street sweeping in the district according to fixed routes. New this year was the district's co-operation with the Change the World and Samfunnshuset organisations on renovating green areas in the community. They started an innovative project with local young people to design and shape sculptures and flowerbeds with a varied mix of flowers, fruits, medicinal plants, kitchen herbs, berry bushes and climbing plants.

The project included the important participation of local young people in all phases: planning, execution and evaluation. During the process the young people received theoretical and practical training in group work and social integration, and a feeling of responsibility and ownership vis-à-vis the public spaces.

Not just pure vocational training

Many of the young people working in Grønn Patrulje (green patrol) have previously had contact with the child welfare services and were especially encouraged to apply for summer jobs in the district. Everyone had to send in applications stating why they want to a summer job, and come for interviews. This provides the young people with training in all phases of the process of finding a job, in addition to the actual work experience. It is important for all of the formal conditions to be in place, and that the entire process vis-à-vis Grønn Patrulje is as similar to a normal employment relationship as possible.

Good results

Routine and rhythm is valuable in day-to-day life during the summer school holidays. The most important aspect of this initiative is providing the young people with work experience and teaching them to stick to a schedule. Even though the efforts made during the work varied, the district was very pleased with the initiative. The young people have had a chance to prove that they can tackle a normal work situation and they will be one step closer in relation to the labour market later on. Their motivation to work has increased since they have seen that they possess the necessary resources. Some of the young people have subsequently got jobs in shops.

Giving young people opportunities to acquire relevant work experience means a lot for their self-confidence. A job proves both to yourself and others that you have abilities and mean something. The vocational training also gives the young people an opportunity to develop their social networks. The experiences of inclusion, mastering and participation are of vital significance when it comes to preventing mental and physical afflictions. ■

The summer job project

THE MUNICIPALITY OF KRISTIANSAND | TEL: (+47) 38 10 41 50

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In the summer of 2005, the Municipality of Kristiansand initiated a summer job project for young people aged 16 to 22 years old with little or no work experience. The young people had either dropped out of upper secondary education and/or had been in contact with the child welfare services or the social services, and needed special follow-up.

Background

The summer job project is a partnership between the Youth Unit, child welfare services and the follow-up service for young people. The Youth Unit is a collaborative project involving Aetat (the Norwegian Public Employment Service), the national insurance office and the social services in the Municipality of Kristiansand. The basic goal was to offer vocational training to young people who needed it. A secondary goal was for the summer job project to act as a social arena and challenge the young people with respect to working together with other people with different backgrounds. Another secondary goal was for the vocational training to result in less criminality, violence and substance abuse, because the vocational training would provide the young people with an earned income, close follow-up and something to fill their days with.

Jobs

16 young people were offered summer jobs linked to the parks department, who assigned the work and provided the necessary training. The young people were divided into two groups which each had their own foreman who supervised them. The work varied between oiling and painting, for example, buildings, benches and bridges, to litter duty, trimming vegetation and tidying up. Wages were thought to be a major motivation factor with respect to getting the young

people to accept the job offers. The young people could earn NOK 600 a day or NOK 3,000 a week with 100% attendance.

Co-operation and social interaction

In the three weeks of the summer job project the young people gained good experience in working with others and sticking to schedules and agreements. The summer job project was also intended to provide social interaction and among other things there was a shared lunch every day. The groups also did various activities at the end of the working week, e.g. playing football, swimming, barbequing, or going for a pizza.

Positive ripple effects

The parks department, foremen and young people were left with many positive experiences at the end of the summer job period. Some of the young people developed a better sense of responsibility vis-à-vis each other and became better at working together. They were proud of having a job and were happy at receiving praise from both foremen and passers-by. Some of the young people said: «it was the best summer they had had». The summer job project made it easier to stay away from substance abuse and other problems, unlike when they had nothing to do. Several said they were looked forward to going to work and think it was fun getting to know new people.

It was not totally pain free. As well as some start-up problems, two of the young people left because of breaches of the rules. The rest of the young people completed their jobs and, all in all, the project manager was very pleased with the project and the results they achieved. There is a strong desire to continue focusing on this type of initiative. ■

Møteplassen (The Meeting Place)

THE MUNICIPALITY OF SARPSBORG

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From passive recipient of welfare benefits to active citizen

Møteplassen (the meeting place for young people) is a newly started project in the Municipality of Sarpsborg. The local authority's social services have joined forces with AOF (the workers information association, adult education) to reach out to young people aged 18–25 years old who are receiving welfare benefits. The local authority is aware of all the negative consequences young people can experience from not having work and having to go to the social welfare office. In addition to being unfortunate because one's finances suffer and one is excluded from the social arena that work represents, it also has negative effects on self-image and the opportunity to realise one's potential. The local authority wants to meet young people who are not in school or work, and Møteplassen is intended to make young people independent of welfare benefits.

«Clarification station»

Prior to the young people coming to Møteplassen the social services conduct a thorough assessment of them. They put together an overview of the various people's social backgrounds, completed schooling, any work experience and any participation in other initiatives.

At Møteplassen the young people are offered an educational course every day from 09:00 to 15:00. During the first two weeks the young people complete a so-called motivation plan, the goal of which is to increase their self-awareness and to think through who they are, what they know, what they want, etc. This is followed by two to three weeks of

general instruction in which the group reviews important topics for young people who are going to enter the labour market for the first time and who may perhaps be going to live away from home for the first time. Examples of topics are substance abuse, finances, health and diet. The participants are then divided into groups based on the leaders' opinions formed during the assessment and instruction. Some of the participants will be ready for vocational training, trainee places or ordinary work, while others will be ready for school and education. Møteplassen's staff emphasise setting up a course that is tailored to the individual's needs. There are also some young people who are considered unfit for work after the assessment. These are helped to apply for the correct social security benefits.

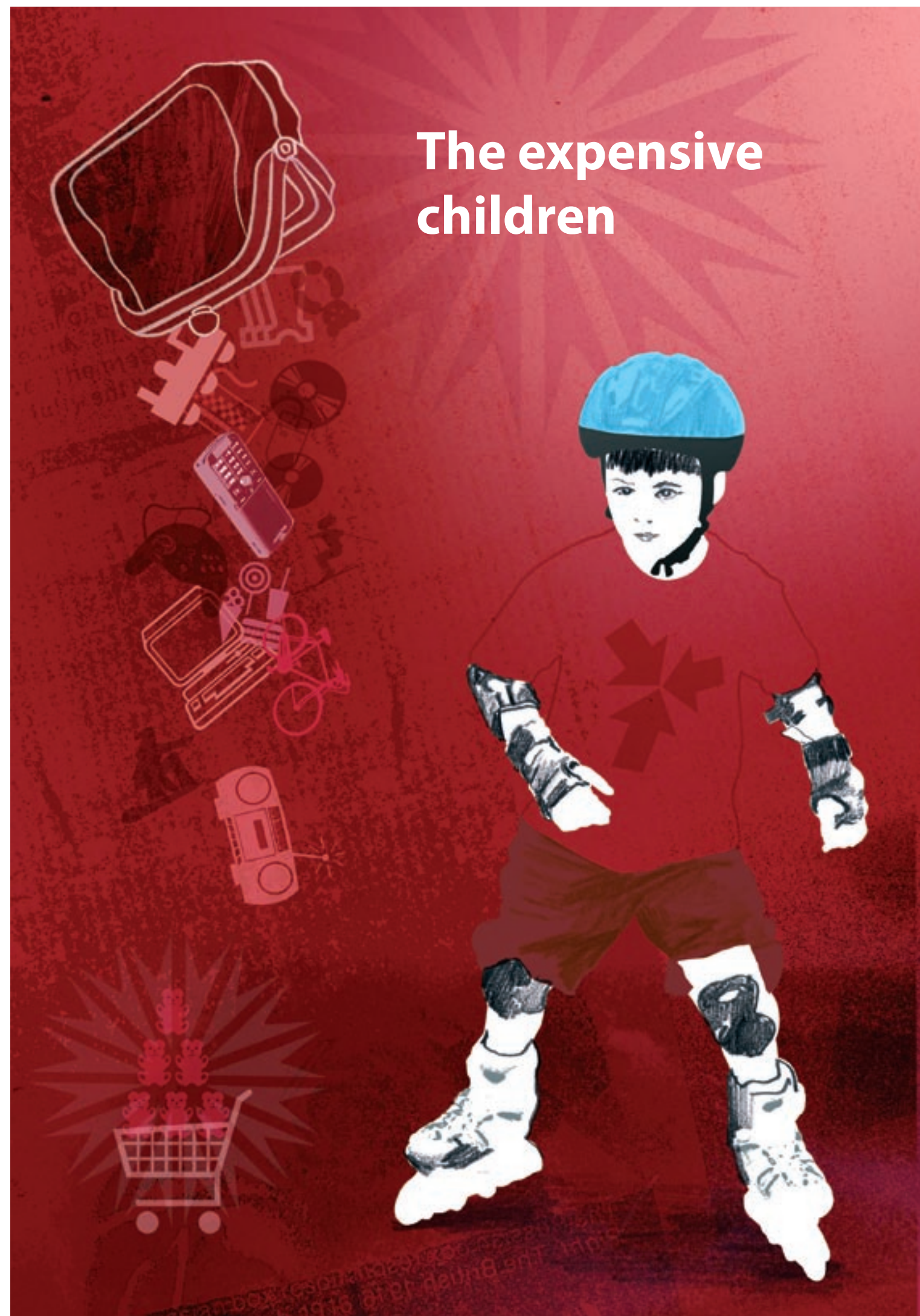
There is close contact between the relevant partners at Møteplassen. The social services, Aetat and AOF co-operate with others such as schools, employers, and 'the reading and writing shop' (AOF's reading and writing course).

One step closer

Møteplassen aims to bring vulnerable groups closer to education and employment, and to make them more able to help themselves. Møteplassen has now had 17 people through its doors and soon 25 new people will undergo an individual assessment. The goal is to accept *all* young people in the target group from the social services in the future.

Links have been established with similar projects in other places in the Nordic countries. According to Møteplassen's staff, it is a good idea to share experiences with others working in the same field. ■

The expensive children



The expensive children

Ragnhild Brusdal, researcher at SIFO (National Institute for Consumer Research)

Living standards have risen in the western world, and with this so have the consumption of adults and children. Childhood no longer involves just a few games and experiences, but an endless series. A good childhood involves, among other things, having and doing the same as the majority of other children of the same age.

This is not about just heaps of teddies and branded clothing, it is also about developmental toys, about new technology such as PC games, PCs and mobile phones, and it is also about various activities one can do and learn from. An increasing process of individualisation in society means that consumer goods have gained greater significance as symbols of identity. Today's children start a construction phase early on, which lasts their whole lives and in which consumption plays a large part. It is about looking like their peers and about having the same things.

In parallel with this there is an ongoing commercialisation process in which new areas are being subjected to the market. Children's leisure time is one example of this. Children spend little of their time meeting on the street or in the park to play. Nowadays, much of leisure time is organised and participation in various organisations costs both in the form of fees and equipment.

Consumption is, in other words, an integral part of the modern upbringing, and in some way or other consumption forms part of most activities. Consumer goods can among other things serve as *communication symbols*. With the aid of these we can communicate values and what we like and do not like, and which group we belong to or want to belong to. Consumption can contribute to integration and standardisation, and, especially in the case of young people, it can be good to lean on established and recognised identity packages. However, it is important to remember that consumer goods also have an *utilisation aspect*. Consumption is often a prerequisite for being able to participate in certain activities. We need a bicycle to be able to go bicycle riding,

Internet access to surf online, and membership of various clubs in order to participate in them, etc. When the consumption of children and young people is described, it is often the symbolic aspects that are highlighted and criticised, and it is therefore important to remember that much of the consumption is linked to activities that also have skill learning aspects.

The commercial upbringing presents new opportunities for activities and challenges, and there is much to choose from for those with money. However, the commercial activities and places have their prices and entail new opportunities for exclusion, depending on how high the price of participation is and what resources the family has. This commercialisation can for some mean exclusivity like expensive leisure activities, expensive branded clothes, top quality sports equipment, and access to exclusive leisure time arenas. For others it means exclusion. From such a perspective, this commercialisation involves the potential for increasing social disparities.

A survey of the commercial pressures on families with children in the Nordic countries shows that a relatively small percentage of the parents state that the children's consumption desires affects the family's finances. The majority also believe that their children have what they need. Unfortunately, this does not apply to everyone. A number of families with children are struggling, financially speaking, and are unable to purchase for themselves and their children what most others have. However, this applies to a larger number of children than the number of families because many of these families are large families. In any

«Nowadays, much of leisure time is organised and participation in various organisations costs both in the form of fees and equipment.»



case these children will belong to a minority that does not have what most of their peers have. Being one of the few who cannot join in activities, who cannot afford to go to birthday parties, or go on skiing outings because you have no skis, is very difficult.

Families with poor finances have to prioritise and minimise. They want their children to be like other children. Studies indicate that these parents often put their children's needs first and prioritise their children's consumption, and push their own needs into the background. While the children get new clothes so that they look nice and proper, the parents buy little for themselves. By providing their children with the right, nice clothes, both the children and parents are maintaining a façade of being ordinary, i.e. being like everyone else.

But money spent on clothes and how one looks accounts for less than one fourth of what children and young people consume. Most of the money is spent on social activities, on technical gadgets, on experiences, entertainment, equipment and various kinds of snacks and sweets. The fact that one cannot afford this can again result in exclusion from not only social participation with friends, but also in exclusion from the skills that the actual activity provides. Another area that is said to create differences between children is modern technology. A great deal of development has taken place in this field and many of the products have found their way into childhood and adolescence, and have become more or less standard pieces of equipment. This means that it is easy for one to be excluded from various activities if one doesn't own these things. The things' utilitarian value becomes important. If you do not have a mobile phone, it is easy to be left out of socialising because this is often communicated thorough mobiles. If you do not have a PC, it is easy to miss out on information and skills that are necessary in school and in the knowledge society.

Another element is the idea that the good childhood and upbringing appears to contain some things and experiences that are obligatory. We are talking about a sort of standard package that is perceived as more or less natural. One should have a bicycle and one should have visited some amusement parks and have done certain things. Should this not be the case, it is easy to be left out.

Children and young people are on the road to adult society and along this road there is a lot for them to learn. Much of this learning is not free. If one is unable to participate, this can result in major drawbacks in one's social life. Children feel solidarity with their parents, and isolate themselves and say they are not interested in various activities when they know that their parents cannot afford them. Much of this participation develops skills, and not having the equipment and thus not having access to certain activities means that these children are cut off from acquiring these skills.

Another danger from the strong focus on the symbolic aspects of the consumption in these families is that it is the maintenance of this façade that becomes the most important thing. The symbolic aspects of the consumption is highlighted, it is about branded clothes and other symbols of identity. This consumption provides little by way of skills, apart from possibly social skills, and in turn contributes to the fact that much of the consumption that is both developmental and socially integrating is given such a low priority that it vanishes.

It is also the case that poor families have additional problems and that these children therefore need the sense of social fellowship and the integration that this consumption and participation can give them more than others. It is therefore especially important that these children take part in activities with other children and that the participation in the activity arenas of children and young people is not steered by the depth of their parents' pockets, but is something in which everyone can participate. ■

Enjoying leisure time

THE MUNICIPALITY OF HAUGESUND, HARALDSVANG LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL, FAGERHEIM CAMPUS

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The «*Å ha det godt på fritiden*» (enjoying leisure time) project started up in 2005 and is a service offered to particularly vulnerable children in lower secondary schools in the Municipality of Haugesund. The goal is to provide young people who are out of their depth in the ordinary leisure time provisions with an opportunity to participate in meaningful activities in a safe environment. The project was initiated by teachers at one of the lower secondary schools in Haugesund and the activities primarily take place on the school's premises. Two adults have been employed to run this pupil group and they work closely with the child welfare services, the pedagogic-psychological service (PPT) and the police's preventative group. The police have participated in some of the afternoon activities.

Evening activities

Every Wednesday evening the local authority offers the young people a hot meal before continuing the evening with various activities. These can include, for example, fixing bicycles, mopeds and other machines, fishing, boat trips, or computers or films. The activities depend on the season.

In addition to the set evening activities, the project arranges weekend activities once or twice a month. The type of activities the children go to during the weekends depends on the season and what they suggest. During the skiing season, trips are arranged to Hordadalen where the main focus is on snowboarding. During autumn, there have been sea excursions, trips to football matches and outings to motor sports events.

Interdisciplinary co-operation

The organisers of the project think it is very important to work closely together so that things work efficiently and quickly and one avoids getting bogged down in bureaucracy. In addition to working closely with the various professional agencies (child welfare service, PPT, police) the leaders have

close relationships with the pupils' parents. At the moment there are six young people gaining experiences in familiar surroundings, run by adults who most of the young people know from their school environment. The provisions can be expanded to include more people, but the organisers believe it is important to create a safe, good atmosphere before they expand to include more participants.

Results

Through this provision the local authority is providing vulnerable young people with good leisure time experiences that show there are alternatives to hanging around town. The young people become acquainted with new types of activities that are both exciting and provide a sense of mastering, as well as being a fine opportunity to enjoy being physically active. The feedback so far shows that the pupils think it is fun to participate in the various activities. The project's leaders also point out that these also provide the young people with an experience of self worth: «Worth so much that adults care about them during their leisure time as well». The staff is very strict about absenteeism, but so far the scheme has worked so well that this has not been a problem. ■

The Mind the Gap music factory

THE CITY OF TRONDHEIM

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There is a clear correlation between level of education and participation in the labour market. People with poorer qualifications are more vulnerable to unemployment than people with higher education. The correlation between long-term unemployment and level of education is also strong. It is therefore important to provide young people who are struggling at school with space to breathe and the experience of mastering something.

Background

Mind the Gap's home is in the ISAK cultural centre in Trondheim and it is a provision for young people who have problems adapting to everyday life with respect to school, work or leisure time.

Many young people are struggling with school, have poor attendance records or do not go to school at all. Many of these pupils are struggling with sleep problems and psychological problems, some have behavioural difficulties and others social adaptation difficulties. The background for the project was a desire by the local authority to provide an alternative to young people who were struggling at school and to give them a chance to try something different. Mind the Gap is not intended to be an alternative to school, but now and then an alternative to schooldays may be needed.

Music factory

Mind the Gap offers courses in music technology, studio/stage, music videos, writing lyrics, guitar playing and DJing. Mind the Gap requires no prior knowledge and the course leaders take the level the young people are at as their starting point. Mind the Gap works closely with the schools the participants come from as well as Aetat (the Norwegian Public Employment Service), the child and family welfare services, and Work and Skills, which is a local authority unit tasked with securing vocational training, employment and advice for people who are dependent on financial social

assistance. The participants in Mind the Gap receive individual follow-up the whole way. With its mix of people with professional social services expertise and capable subject instructors, the staff believes that they can provide the young people with a good service.

Arena for challenging, mastering and fellowship

Mind the Gap is intended to improve the young people's opportunities to develop their creative skills, and create and produce their own things. The course leaders want the young people to experience a sense of mastering by participating in the courses. Such a sense of mastering can result in a better self-image. A better self-image can in turn rub off on other aspects of the young people's lives such as, for example, them becoming more motivated vis-à-vis education and work, and making conscious choices in the future. The idea is as follows: people who dare to succeed in one thing prove to themselves and others that they can also succeed at something else.

Earlier this year Mind the Gap helped organise an experience sharing seminar called «*5 fot fram*» (5 feet forward). Several of the boys and girls at Mind the Gap got the chance to play a concert for the first time and showed what they could do.

Positive ripple effects and feedback

Those who work at Mind the Gap are pleased with the fact that the young people come, become involved and «blossom» through creativity. So far Mind the Gap has had about 30 course participants on several different courses and the inflow of young people who want to have a go is steadily increasing. The feedback from course participants has been exclusively positive. Some say that Mind the Gap makes their days easier because they now have something to look forward to. Being at school is easier since they can do something else during the days, which they think is fun. Others say that they have become more motivated by participating in Mind the Gap. ■

Leisure equipment for loan

THE MUNICIPALITY OF KRISTIANSAND, LEISURE DEPARTMENT

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The leisure department of the Municipality of Kristiansand has built up a depot of leisure equipment. The equipment was purchased with the aid of grants targeted at children and young people affected by problems associated with poverty and supplements an existing depot. One important reason for buying this equipment was that children and young people should be able to experience a sense of mastering and positive experiences without this requiring financial contributions in excess of that which their parents can afford. Many children and young people do not own sports equipment and have to say no to trips and outings because they lack the necessary equipment. The loan of equipment can make it easier for them to participate. The equipment is meant to be used in two important arenas inhabited by children and young people, namely school and leisure time.

Wide range

The equipment depot holds clothing, skiing equipment, snowboards, guide steered sledges with skis as runners, canoes, fishing equipment, tents, sleeping bags, storm kitchens, and other smaller items that can be used to experience nature. One of the department's leisure managers is responsible for the depot.

From autumn 2005, the equipment depot will be located in the Randesund district administration building. This district administration building is new and one of the local authority's largest district administration buildings. This has resulted in the depot having a visible location and being noticed by both public sector employees and children and young people otherwise. The leisure department has noted increased interest in the equipment depot from other local authority agencies that serve children and young people. One example of this is the fact that an interdisciplinary group consisting of the police, health service, schools, child welfare services and leisure allocated NOK 50,000 of interdisciplinary local authority funds to the equipment depot in November 2005 without being asked.

Trips and activities

The equipment has been used a lot for trips organised by the leisure department since many of the users of their initiatives do not have the financial resources to acquire such equipment themselves. The existence of such a depot from which they can borrow equipment is absolutely vital for some of the users. Without this depot they would not be able to participate in the various cultural and leisure initiatives.

The leisure department operates two outing and outdoor groups a week in which the equipment from this depot is used regularly. During the winter holiday initiatives are arranged involving cross-country skiing, alpine skiing and snowboarding. In the winter and autumn various trips are arranged involving fishing, canoeing, cycling, hiking in the mountains, and the like.

In line with the local authorities' goal that everyone should be able to participate in the cultural and leisure arenas despite impaired functional abilities, financial problems and other everyday barriers, people in such situations are offered the use of the equipment. Following the purchase of sports/ outdoor equipment more participants have participated in initiatives and events.

As an example of how important it can be to have some equipment the department would like to highlight that they have had users with serious physical and mental functional impairments with them up in the alpine facilities. Here they have, with the help of a guide been able to sledge down the same slopes as everyone else on sledges with skis as runners. The staff believes that this has strengthened their sense of mastering and increased their self-confidence. Physiotherapists have said that after a week's trip with the leisure department they have seen marked improvements in strength, motor functions, and co-ordination. ■

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Footnotes

¹ 23 cities/towns and 7 prioritised districts of Oslo are included in the urban projects scheme: Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim, Stavanger, Kristiansand, Tromsø, Drammen, Skien, Fredikstad, Sandnes, Sarpsborg, Bodø, Sandefjord, Larvik, Ålesund, Arendal, Porsgrunn, Haugesund, Tønsberg, Halden, Moss, Hamar, Gjøvik, Sagene, Gamle Oslo, Grünerløkka, Søndre Nordstrand, Alna, Stovner and Grorud.

² 20 local authorities are included: Vestby, Eidskog, Grue, Askim, Eidsberg, Birkenes, Nome, Nedre Eiker, Re, Surnadal, Inderøy, Bjugn, Fauske, Vestvågøy, Balsfjord, Lenvik, Vadsø, Strand, Gloppen and Sund.

³ <http://www.ssb.no/emner/05/01/inntind/tab-2005-10-14-02.html>

⁴ Norwegian Social Research

⁵ Friberg, Jon Horgen (2005): *Ungdom, fritid og deltagelse i det flerkulturelle Oslo*. Fafo paper 2005:16

⁶ Including Lødding, B. (2003) *Frafall blant minoritetsspråklige*. NIFU scripts no. 29/2003

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Information about the Urban Children and Youth Projects grants scheme can be found online at:
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