

***The information in this document reflects the situation when it was written in 2006. Please bear in mind that some contact information may since have changed.***

## DISMANTLING A MYTH

In Denmark, just like in any other EU country, the care sector has always been almost entirely a female domain. Tipping the gender balance in that sector by making it more attractive to men was the ambition of a Danish Development Partnership (DP) named SOS-MX or Social og Sundheds Mainstreaming Experimentarium (Health & Care Sector Mainstreaming Laboratory). *"It is as if people were convinced that women possess something like a Florence Nightingale gene, enabling them to be ideal carers and [SOS-MX](#) was geared to dismantle that myth,"* says Helga Pinstrup, the Project Director.



This was really the right idea at the right time, as it responded to the challenge that the care sector was, and is, facing. The growing numbers of elderly and very old people that need daily life and health care cannot be supported by the current and projected numbers of qualified care and nursing personnel. A large percentage of the predominantly female staff is approaching retirement age, and there are fewer and fewer candidates for this kind of career. The sector suffers from a poor image in terms of working conditions and pay and it is attractive neither to young people entering the labour market nor to adults who, after a period of unemployment, are looking for a new career. Many men, who might be even be desperate for a job, feel that both the work content and environment are so markedly feminine, that it would be impossible for them to settle in that sector or to have any sort of work satisfaction. This unfortunately was also reinforced, in Denmark, by the experiences of some men who had taken such employment but found it difficult to acquire the relevant knowledge and skills and to develop a style of caring attitude that often requires a great degree of intimacy with their clients.

### WORKING TOWARDS RENEWAL OF THE CARE SECTOR



Coordinated by the North Jutland Continuing Vocational Training Centre, the DP pushed for the renewal of the care sector. It looked into the causes of gender segregation in vocational counselling, guidance and training, recruitment, work organisation and pay. A study was designed to map out the aspirations and needs of current and future employees, both male and female, for their working and private lives. The results indicated that existing approaches to training and labour market integration, which have been adopted by women, for women, do not respond to men's ways of learning and their ideas about job performance. Young people have problems with the often hierarchal structures in both institutional and home-based care and men with family responsibilities find that shift work is a serious obstacle to reconciling work and private life.

### Everybody on board undertake a difficult task

SOS-MX forged a coalition between all relevant players which had the potential to deliver innovative models for change and also to achieve dissemination and mainstreaming. Partners included vocational training providers, social and health care schools, local communities, which in Denmark are responsible for the care of older people, the County of Northern Jutland, that amongst other things, is responsible for the care of people with disabilities, the Danish Educational Committee and Social Partner Organisations. All were very aware that their task would not be easy but, early on, they were able to introduce some important facts and figures into the public arena that helped to reinforce structural and attitudinal changes. The DP argued that the proportion of the older people in the population will continue to grow over the next decade

and this will, in turn, generate a huge demand for qualified staff. It also emphasised that the care sector would have to develop a competitive edge to attract enough people into training and employment in the sector. It also argued that it would be particularly difficult to recruit new entrants to the labour market, as there would be fewer young people and thus, these young people would be able to take their pick of the existing career opportunities, many of which might appear to be more attractive than the care sector.

However, the DP also took account of the fact that Denmark was moving from an industrial to a service and information society and, as a result, a large number of men had lost their unskilled or semi-skilled jobs in the industrial sector. This group was encountering great difficulties in re-accessing the labour market and was being encouraged to fill jobs that required basic qualifications, in particular, in geriatric care.

### Four strands of action

To address the complicated issues of reshaping the care sector, the DP established four "development and learning groups", each focusing on a crucial component of its strategy:

- The **Gender and Culture in Career Guidance** group focused on counselling targeted at the social and health care sector. As a result, a **continuing training course** involving two modules was developed and tested for counsellors from different institutional environments. The core elements of the concept are stereotype-free counselling, gender questions in career choices and employment possibilities in field of services for senior citizens;
- The **Education** group scrutinized the content and methodologies of the existing training programmes in the care sector from a gender point of view and this resulted in an **introduction training concept** for male entrants to the care sector;
- The group that worked on **Organisational Development** used a public employer as its laboratory: the Senior Service Department of the Municipality of Aabybro. This group developed a coherent concept for the organisation of institutional care and introduced incentives and mechanisms to enhance the employees' occupational, social and personal competences;
- The fourth group had the **Image of the Care Sector**, as its main concern. It designed and marketed a new profile of the social and health care sector, especially through working with media to make career possibilities more visible and understandable to men. A **Corps of Ambassadors** was also created from men working in the care sector and they acted as male role models for the media campaign and related counselling events. Moreover, a **Forum Theatre** performance was staged that brought attention to gender sensitive issues in the work place and initiated a debate about the realities in different environments. The main product of the group's work was a documentary entitled "**A Job for Real Men**" that was broadcast by the regional TV channel. Also two short **spots** were produced for use in electronic media and on TV. The documentary and the spots were reproduced on DVDs and CD ROMs and distributed widely to schools and careers counselling services.

The research undertaken resulted in an up-to-date, gender sensitive picture of the Danish care sector. Over 1000 copies of the final analytical report, "**Florence Nightingale in retreat**", were distributed to professional staff, social partners and working environments connected to the sector.

### GENERATING TRANSFER AND SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

The project results, originating from both the research and the outputs of the four development groups, succeeded in influencing guidance services, training agencies, recruitment practices and work environments. In particular, the Social and Health Care School of North Jutland, which was the only body offering accredited training for jobs in the sector, changed its recruitment practices to be more gender sensitive. The school's experience clearly demonstrates the increasing number of male applicants, which is a direct result of the media campaign and the films being used for careers counselling.

As a direct result of the project, key actors in the care sector now realise that new and more holistic approaches are needed to cope with demographic change. This was the stimulus to the creation of a 2<sup>nd</sup> Round EQUAL DP: [Factor 2007](#) for gender balance, diversity in the senior service sector of the future. This project is expected to create some valid future scenarios for the sector over the next 10 to 15 years and to suggest a set of methods and tools to cope with the anticipated challenges.

SOS-MX also benefited from its Transnational Partnership. Together with DPs from Germany, France and Italy, comparative surveys were conducted on education and training systems, as well as recruitment and retention practices in the sector. A series of thematic study visits and workshops supported the development processes in the DPs and enabled an [exchange of experience](#) amongst professionals and the channelling of new ideas and competences which raised the quality of work in the institutions and agencies, which were members of all the DPs.

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Link to EQUAL database description: [DK-15](#)