

## **Social Community Teams against Poverty (The Netherlands, 19-20 January 2016)**

### **Framework of Social Services in Denmark<sup>1</sup>**

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#### **1. The Legislative Framework**

##### **The Consolidation Act of Social Services**

The legislative framework of social affairs in Denmark is regulated by the Danish government through the Consolidation Act of Social Services, which states that it is the municipal council that shall make decisions as to services and facilities provided under the Act. In general, the social sector is organised with a high degree of decentralisation of social responsibilities to municipalities and the local authorities have a high degree of autonomy when implementing social services.

The purposes of the Consolidation Act of Social Services are:

1. to offer counselling and support so as to prevent social problems;
2. to offer general services designed to serve as preventive measures at the same time; and
3. to satisfy needs resulting from impaired physical or mental function or special social problems.

Thus, the Act does not specifically focus on needs resulting from poverty but in a broader context on combatting and preventing social marginalisation.

The municipalities are obligated to ensure that everybody is given the opportunity to obtain free counselling. The counselling shall be offered on an anonymous and open basis. The purpose of such counselling is to prevent social problems and to help the citizens overcome immediate difficulties and, in the longer term, enable them to deal with problems as they arise without outside assistance. Counselling may be provided separately or in connection with any other assistance under the Consolidation Act of Social Services or under other legislation.

In connection with the counselling, the municipalities shall pay attention to assessing whether the recipient is in need of any other assistance under this Act and advice about other relevant legislation, e.g. the Consolidation Act on an Active Social Policy, which aims to secure financial safety to people who are not otherwise able to obtain the necessities for a living.

According to the Consolidation Act of Social Services, local authorities are obligated to cooperate with voluntary social organisations/associations and annually reserve an amount to support voluntary social work. In general, local government cooperation with civil society is growing in Denmark. As an example, municipalities and private organisations cooperate on helping vulnerable people from Greenland living in Denmark. The private organisations arrange social activities for the target

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group and refer people to local authorities when they observe someone with an unmet need for help. Furthermore, the private organisations offer continuous support and guidance to the citizens. However there is great variation in how government and civil society collaborate. The growing municipal involvement in voluntary social work has resulted in an increase in the number of people who are employed to develop and coordinate the voluntary social area and cooperation with associations.

### **National funding resources to civil society initiatives**

In 2015-2018 and 2016-2019, national funding resources have been allocated to initiatives with the aim of strengthening and developing the social work of the civil society.

For example:

1. Partnerships with focus on socially vulnerable people's inclusion and participation in local communities will be developed and tested. The purpose is to support equal participation for the socially vulnerable and to create a setting where socially vulnerable people have an opportunity to volunteer themselves.
2. Also, peer-to-peer communities for vulnerable citizens will be tested. The idea is that socially vulnerable citizens' own experience and positive life stories can make a positive difference to other socially vulnerable citizens, because the help and support comes from a person who has also had social problems and can be considered an equal and peer.
3. Also funds have been allocated for an analysis of the main actors in the area of social voluntary work contribution to the development of the social voluntary work in general.

### **Voluntary debt counselling**

Furthermore, since 2008 national funding resources have been allocated to voluntary debt counselling. The aim has been to reduce the debt of socially exposed people as it is often an obstacle for recovering from other social problems. The counselling has predominantly been carried out by civil society actors.

## **2. Integrated approaches**

In Denmark, various integrated approaches to help people who are (or are at risk of becoming) socially marginalised have been initiated in the recent years. Since 2013, all municipalities in Denmark have established interdisciplinary "rehabilitation teams". In addition to that, several municipalities are working with methods such as Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) and Critical Time Intervention (CTI) to promote a holistic and integrated approach.

### **Rehabilitation teams and resource rehabilitation courses**

Their main task is to help people with health problems and special social problems into education and jobs. The initiative of establishing rehabilitation teams was a political response to an increase in people claiming disability benefit (in most cases due to mental health problems) and thereby risking permanent inactivity and social exclusion. The intention is to largely abolish disability benefit for people under the age of 40, replacing it with a new comprehensive rehabilitation model aiming at integrating the municipal social and health services and employment support.<sup>i</sup>

The rehabilitation team always consists of professionals from the public sector representing the job centre, the health sector (municipal and regional) and the social services. The education sector must be represented in regards to people



under the age of 30 without professional education and training. The team discusses needs, makes recommendations, and coordinates actions and services, but is neither executing any services nor making any decisions. The decisions are instead made by each of the relevant institutions towards an agreed goal. If the municipality does not follow the recommendations made by the team, the case is sent back to the team.

The model also involves a coordinator (typically a job centre caseworker), whose job is to coordinate action and services as well as support the individual citizen through the assigned rehabilitation programme.

The main objective of the interdisciplinary approach is to overcome problems with the organisation of different schemes and the coordination at municipal and regional levels in regards to health advice as well as across the different institutions within the municipality. The model aims at creating sustainable solutions for people ensuring support as needed with work seen as part of the solution.

The first contact between a citizen and the rehabilitation team is established through referral by a job centre caseworker. There are directions as to which citizens are eligible to be referred to the rehabilitation team. It is a service limited to a number of people who are referred to the team because of comprehensive and often multiple problems that cannot be adequately addressed by the regular services offered by the job centre.

Although the model is promising, it remains to be concluded to what degree it helps people to enter and stay in employment. Often the team will assign people to a rehabilitation programme for 1-5 years and it is therefore too early in the process to say if the model is effective.

### **Strategy to reduce homelessness**

In 2009, the Danish government introduced a national strategy to reduce homelessness. The strategy adopts a housing-first approach. The goal of this approach is to provide a permanent housing solution for the homeless person as quickly as possible, in combination with the necessary social support. This differs from a more traditional approach, where the question of housing is not considered before the citizens' psychological and social issues have been resolved.

During 2009-2012, eight municipalities received governmental funding to transform the homelessness strategy into specific initiatives including applying different integrative methods for home support (e.g. ACT and CTI). The results showed that with the right combination of housing and targeted support most homeless people actually exited homelessness.<sup>ii</sup> However, the number of homeless people in Denmark is still rising, and thus there is a need for continuous awareness of how to further prevent homelessness and reach out to the target group. Currently the initiatives are being implemented in a greater number of Danish municipalities.

### **Integrative methods**

ACT and CTI are increasingly used in Denmark as two different methods to apply an integrated approach. Besides being integrated in initiatives to reduce homelessness, both ACT and CTI are currently also applied to support people with mental health problems and/or substance abuse issues. In ACT, a team of professionals from various fields ensures that multiple perspectives and solutions are considered. In CTI, a case manager is responsible for guiding the service user through the system and coordinating actions with relevant professionals from different fields. Usually both methods are integrated with services that the citizen has to be referred to by a caseworker/special admission team. Thus it is not possible for the citizens to present themselves directly to the team/case manager.



Integrated methods		
<p><b>ACT</b></p>	<p>ACT is based on an interdisciplinary, mobile team (a social support worker, a psychiatrist, an addiction counsellor, a nurse, a social office worker and a job centre worker) which delivers support services in the citizens' own home. This method is useful for individuals with complex support needs such as severe addiction problems or a dual diagnosis.</p>	
<p><b>CTI</b></p>	<p>CTI is based on a case manager who offers support for a limited time period of 9 months to citizens in a transitional phase (e.g. transition from residential institutions or care homes to independent living).</p>	

**End Notes**

- <sup>i</sup> OECD (2013): Mental Health and Work Mental Health and Work: Denmark. OECD Publishing.
- <sup>ii</sup> Rambøll & SFI (2013): Hjemløsestrategien. Afsluttende rapport. [The homelessness strategy. Final report]. Copenhagen: Rambøll & SFI.

