



TOGETHER

Youth Integration Project



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Author: Berit Berg

YOUTHS NEED A SENSE OF BELONGING AND FRIENDS

A year ago we started the TOGETHER Project with three brave pioneer municipalities. Today, the model is spread to 16 municipalities and boroughs, and around two hundred young people have participated in small project groups across the country.

We have felt every day that it has been a successful model, and now we are happy that this report expresses the same: the TOGETHER model should be spread further, developed more and become part of the important work municipalities do to integrate children and young people who have fled to Norway alone. At the same time, this report provides important input on the further development of the model when it is now going to be spread and used by even more municipalities.

Youths are youths. They are different, but still quite similar. They need contact with peers and a sense of belonging to where they live. They need to meet friends and do things they like. The TOGETHER Project is all about bringing together like-minded youth and working out of common interests.

Ideally, adults should stay at an arm's length and let youngsters do things. At the same time, we know that many committed municipal employees who have joined the project hook, line, and sinker have often played a crucial role in helping young people find their way.

The TOGETHER Project cannot guarantee eternal friendship. But we have managed to develop a model that brings new acquaintances, exciting lessons, unforgettable experiences and lots of fun.

On behalf of SOS Children's Villages Norway, I can only say that we are looking forward to the continuation!

*Sissel Aarak
Program Director – SOS Children's Villages Norway*



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INTRODUCTION

We cannot provide the best friends, but we will work hard to create true and good relationships.

(Sissel Aarak, Program Director, SOS Children's Villages Norway)

This booklet is about TOGETHER Project which is aimed at making it easier for young refugees and single minors to get acquainted with their Norwegian peers. The project has been established by the initiative of SOS Children's Villages Norway and is being implemented in close cooperation with municipalities that settle single minor refugees. The essence of the project is that young people meet and do things together. Common interests are therefore an important key to what is also referred to as Young-to-Young Project. The purpose is to establish contact and friendship across language, cultural and experience barriers based on equality and reciprocity. The project is referred to as an Integration Project. This means that the project has a bigger goal than establishing friendship. It will help to create a better understanding of other people's backgrounds and ways of living, and to reduce prejudice and prevent xenophobia and discrimination.

The booklet is based on the evaluation conducted by NTNU Social Research and includes the first year activities. The data collection was carried out by Berit Berg and Gry Mette D. Haugen, while the booklet was written by Berit Berg. The evaluation is based on discussions with representatives of SOS Children's Villages Norway, project managers and youths participating in the project, on participation in three network gatherings, as well as on reviewing written documents. In addition, we had access to videos, online reviews and photos of various activities. In order to get as recent update as possible, a short questionnaire was sent to all municipalities participating in TOGETHER Project at the end of the evaluation period. This survey is therefore also included as part of the data basis.

BACKGROUND

Before we go into the detail of TOGETHER experience, we will represent the background of the project. We will start with some brief visions of refugee situation in recent years and how it would feel to be a young refugee in Norway. Then we will briefly describe the work of municipalities on settlement and integration of young refugees. The purpose of this is to put TOGETHER Project into context and to indicate the areas of the refugee and integration work field which need innovation and more systematic efforts. The key word here is closer cooperation between municipalities and volunteers. But first, a little bit about the refugee situation.

YOUTHS ON THE RUN

Over the last three years, almost six thousand single minor refugees have come to Norway. The vast majority came in 2015, the year when Norway and the rest of Europe spoke of a “refugee crisis”. The answer to the so-called refugee crisis was border closures which resulted in only a few hundred single minors that came to Norway in 2016 and 2017. Most of them came from Afghanistan, but there were also single minors from Eritrea, Somalia, Iraq and Syria, just to name the countries which most refugees were from. Single minors are refugees under the age of 18 who have come to Norway without parents or other caregivers. Most of them have been on the run for many months. Some have been on the run for several years. They are from countries suffering from war or civil strife, or from countries where groups of people are being persecuted for their faith, ethnicity or political ideology. They have fled to save their lives and to have a future without fear of persecution. They are going to know a new society with a new language, other ways of living and unknown laws and rules. This is also true for children and youths who have fled with their parents. They are not alone, but they are also going to learn about living in a country that is different from their homeland. Just getting used to another climate, sunshine in summer and darkness in winter can be difficult enough. But the hardest thing is learning how to live in a new country.

Many of them have been on the run for a long time. They have had to be strong and independent while at the same time they have, of course, also been afraid and worried about their future. They have had to take on adult roles, although they still

have been children and adolescents according to their age. They are what many have referred to as both dependent and independent for they are both victims and survivors¹. A social research on children and adolescents on the run emphasizes this duality. They are not either dependent or independent, but both dependent and independent, and they are not either victims or survivors. They are both victims and survivors. When young people themselves are asked, most of them emphasize that they, first of all, want to be “normal youths”. They want to get to know Norwegian youngsters as soon as possible. They want to go to the same school, spend their spare time together and do things together to feel acknowledged.

SOCIAL RELATIONS, NETWORK AND INTEGRATION

After years being on the run and many months of waiting for asylum applications to be processed, the transition to being “normal youths” can be challenging. Many of them feel that they do not “fit in” even if they are trying more than ever. One of the obstacles is language, but it’s also a matter of cracking cultural codes and finding out how the society works. Municipalities which settle refugees are required to find suitable housing and care facilities and a customized school option, but a municipality alone has limited means of connecting single minors and other young refugees² with other youths in the municipality. Establishing a social network, developing relationships and creating friendship is not something we think of as typical municipal tasks. Municipalities can facilitate integration, but the integration process itself takes place in meetings between people where they live, work or go to school and where they spend their free time.

When young people with refugee background are asked what they miss most of all, most respondents say that they miss Norwegian friends. This is evidenced by a series of research reports on situations of single minor refugees, and is repeated

¹ For a more detailed review of the situation of single minors, see the summary of individual minors [Svendsen, Berg, Paulsen, Garvik and Valenta, 2018] and the doctoral dissertation by Moa Nyamwathi Lønning (2018) on Afghan refugees’ fleeing from Afghanistan to Europe and Norway.

² See, for example, Oppedal, Seglem and Jensen, 2009; Svendsen, Thorshaug and Berg, 2014; Garvik, Paulsen and Berg, 2016; Svendsen and Berg, 2017.

by young people saying it on social media, in meetings with voluntary organizations and in other forums where youths take the floor. But when the youth's answer is so clear why is it so hard to do something about it? The answer is probably what we have already mentioned. Creating relationships is meeting people, but it requires meeting places. And now we are getting to the core of the subject. Young refugees and Norwegian youths have few arenas where they can naturally meet. Most single minor refugees are over the age of 16 when they come to Norway. They are therefore not entitled to an ordinary elementary school, but they are also not qualified for high school. They are therefore offered adult education to learn Norwegian and to take elementary school subjects to qualify for high school education. It is up to municipalities to organize this education. Some educate them together with adult refugees, while others decide to let young refugees study in their own classes at high school³. It is basically possible to get acquainted with others than your classmates at high school, but learning Norwegian and elementary school subjects while others are taking high school education often creates a distance. The distance does not become shorter because of limited language skills in the beginning. Superior-subordinate relationships emerge quickly.

School is what most youngsters have in common, and that's the place where they spend every weekday. It is also a venue for planning social activities and for free time appointments. If you're not included in these processes, you'll easily become a social outsider. It's not necessarily because Norwegians do not want contact with refugees, but it just does not happen. If we had asked Norwegian youths whether they wanted to get acquainted with young refugees, many of them would probably answer "yes". Yet, this does not happen. So the question is: what is needed to make them meet?

The answer of SOS Children's Villages Norway is TOGETHER.

³ See, for example, Svendsen, Berg, Paulsen, Garvik and Valenta, 2018.

INTEGRATION PROJECT

The TOGETHER Project development work started in autumn 2016. The idea was clear: creating the opportunity for young people who have fled to Norway alone to get acquainted with Norwegian youths. This idea was further developed at a workshop on January 19, 2017. The concept was still under development, but it was anyway quite clear that three municipalities (Asker, Lillehammer and Oppegård) had agreed to become the project's pilot municipalities. These three municipalities have followed the project all the way and have been important contributors to what currently is TOGETHER Project.

THE KEY IS DOING SOMETHING TOGETHER

The basic idea of TOGETHER is that young people should do something together, and not that the Norwegian ones should be guides or mentors for those who have come as refugees. The focus is on friendship based on equality. In this regard the project clearly resembles the Red Cross Friendship Project. Oppegård, one of the pilot municipalities, established cooperation with Red Cross at an early stage. Instead of looking like a competitor they became a partner. Lillehammer decided to establish cooperation with Nansen School, while Asker municipality collaborated with the Adults for Children Organization. The real key to the project is that it is a Young-to-Young Project. SOS Children's Villages Norway puts it this way:

Committed Norwegian youth is the key to a natural integration of single minors in Norwegian society. Without them, the Norwegian authorities do not have a chance! We are confident that young people have the power that is required and they only need to be invited, get a part and "discover" what incredible difference they can make completely locally, just where they live. It will simply be better to live there if everyone is involved and is part of the local community. This is a common motivation. Adults can facilitate, make it safe, interesting, fun, and what is essential is that they need to trust that youths will actually do that, and they want that. Young people shall take responsibility for creating their own future together.

The development of TOGETHER has been a process where young people, representatives of the three municipalities and SOS Children's Villages Norway further developed

the project. Social media have always been an important channel to spread information about the project. One of many headlines about the project directly addresses the Norwegian youths:

Is there going to be a new classmate, has a new boy appeared in the neighborhood, or is there a new girl in the football team?

Minor refugees coming alone to Norway are like you and most other young people. The difference is that they have had to leave their family and friends and their homes. It's not easy to be a newcomer in a new country. Now you can make an important difference and at the same time be part of some fun.

THIS MEANS: TO DO SOMETHING TOGETHER

Within a few weeks, a group of six young people, three Norwegian and three newcomers to the municipality, will create something together. You will be on the team and determine what their project is going to be and will jointly implement it.

SOS Children's Villages Norway and your municipality will facilitate the project, but your commitment is essential for its proper success.

YOU SHOULD STICK TOGETHER
YOU SHOULD PULL TOGETHER
AND CREATE TOGETHER
YOU ARE TOGETHER!

CROSS-COLLABORATION

Cooperation across organizations and institutions has always been a prominent goal of the project. The Together Concept is therefore not only about Norwegian youths and youths with refugee background, but also about the cooperation of municipalities with the voluntary sector, the cooperation of various NGOs with

each other and the contribution of private and public institutions to the project in various ways. In other words, they participate in TOGETHER Project at different levels:

- Individually, developing peer relationships based on equality and reciprocity
- Locally, involving them in the life of the neighborhood and of the local community
- Socially, cooperating with social institutions

Integration is the stated purpose of the project which also defines the organizational practices. The concept of integration itself has not been discussed explicitly, but such formulations as active participation based on equality, respect and recognition still provide content and a clear direction for it.

TOGETHER is part of the project Our New Children, which is a model for settlement and integration of single minor refugees and collaboration between SOS Children's Villages Norway and municipalities that settle single minor refugees. The Housing Bank and the Egmont Foundation have contributed financially to it. In a media report in connection with the launch of the project, SOS Children's Villages Norway Project Director Sissel Arak says the following:

We know that children and young people wait a long time to be settled in a municipality. When they finally get their home they often stay alone. Many of them have minimal or no contact with Norwegian youths, and it takes them a long time to integrate into the local community. It can lead to exclusion and isolation, and is not good for either youths or the community they will live in [...]

Schooling and language learning are important for children in order to become part of the local community. But the sense of belonging is also about being able to deal with a society with its activities, culture and social interaction forms, which for many of them are too different from what they are used to. The best way to get to know this is to make friends and to spend time with peers. An important component of this project is therefore a Young-to-Young method. In this way young newcomers to a municipality establish contact with someone of the same age who becomes a kind of "guide" to the local community and the Norwegian society. Social connection and network are parti-

cularly important for single minor refugees, and what they need most of all are friends and contact with their peers.

The importance of contact with peers is emphasized by young new immigrants to Norway. This is evidenced by a series of research reports in this field⁴ and is described as an important factor for the integration process. The lack of meeting places is one of the reasons why these friendships do not develop naturally. Contact is a prerequisite for friendship development, but it also assumes having (or developing) common interests. It is difficult to create equal relationships if contact is based on one party helping the other. Conversely, if contact is based on activities that both parties are interested in, the activity itself becomes a driving force.

ORGANIZING AND RECRUITMENT

TOGETHER Project is based on cooperation between municipalities that settle children who have come to Norway alone and the voluntary sector. The situation in 2016-2017 when the project was being developed was that several thousand single minor refugees were to be settled in Norwegian municipalities. There were 5297 single minors in 2015, which was more than twice as many as last time we had high arrival figures (in 2005 and 2009). Many municipalities were asked to settle unaccompanied minor refugees, and municipalities lined up in what many described as the “national volunteer effort”. Most municipalities were on focused on must-do tasks, such as housing and school. The invitation from SOS Children’s Villages Norway to join TOGETHER project was the opportunity to develop integration-related aspects individually, locally and socially.

Positive response and feedback clearly indicate that effective measures to help children integrate in the Norwegian society in a quicker and easier way, in addition to good settlement solutions, are in demand. (Sissel Aarak)

⁴ Eide and Broch, 2010; Eide, 2012; Berg and Tronstad, 2015; Garvik, Paulsen and Berg, 2016; Svendsen and Berg, 2017; Svendsen, Berg, Paulsen, Garvik and Valenta, 2018].

Municipalities across the country showed their interest to participate, and 16 of them began to establish TOGETHER Groups in 2017. This occurred at the same time as both single minor refugees’ arrival and settlement figures dropped by less than one-tenth. Besides, the experience of many single minors was that either their asylum application was rejected or that they were granted a temporary residence permit until the age of 18⁵. This made the situation in municipalities turn upside down. The challenge was no longer the difficulty with creating enough places but an overcapacity. The situation changed so that municipalities instead of planning for a much larger number of people than usual were suddenly forced to plan for a smaller number. This might have resulted in the whole TOGETHER Project to become irrelevant. However, it did not happen. Focusing on integration and building good relationships is not about how many newcomers settle in a municipality but about welcoming them.

The work on establishing TOGETHER project continued in 2017 and 2018 and followed the general outline of the original plan made at the first workshop in January 2017.

Four project development phases were outlined at the workshop:

1. The development phase when three municipalities are involved in the concept development together with SOS Children’s Villages Norway.
2. The execution phase when a pilot project is carried out in three municipalities followed by a startup in 12 selected municipalities.
3. The continuation phase when all 15 municipalities roll out the concept and new municipalities join the project.
4. The implementation phase when all country’s municipalities can start using the concept, and when new partners join and expand it.

⁵ See the report of NOAS, Save the Children and FO (2017) on the situation of single minor refugees with temporary residence permit. See also Hilde Lidén’s book from 2017 on children and migration.

During 2017 and the beginning of 2018, the number of municipalities increased to 16, and the goal now is to increase further to 25 municipalities. The project is now in so-called implementation phase. This phase is focused on continuation and expanding the project to all the country's municipalities. Besides, there is an aspiration to invite new partners.

The ambition to expand the project to all the country's municipalities may seem too optimistic in a situation when settlement figures are as low as they are at the moment. However, if you expand the target group and include those minor refugees who have come with parents or other caregivers, the project will be applicable to all municipalities which settle refugees. In this case you will be quite close to the ambition of "all municipalities". Additionally, if you include children and youths who have lived in the municipality for a while but are missing a network of peers, the ambition will suddenly become realistic. This has essentially happened in several municipalities where the project is in progress and in municipalities that are in the start-up group. Several municipalities participating in TOGETHER project found it unnatural to limit it to unaccompanied children and young people. Those who come with parents and siblings also need places where they can meet Norwegian youths.



MUNICIPALITIES' EXPERIENCE

Municipalities participating in TOGETHER Project are at different stages of its implementation locally. Some have been participating in it for a long time while others have just started. The three pilot municipalities Asker, Lillehammer and Oppegård have been participating in the project for a little over a year and have managed to arrange many groups. The same is true for such municipalities as Levanger, Bjerke, Nesodden and Arendal which joined the project later. Other municipalities have just started up or are in the process of establishing groups.

FLEXIBILITY AND LOCAL CUSTOMIZATION

Prerequisites for the project implementation are different in many ways. The factors involved are the municipality size, geographic distances, the number of refugees in the target group and activities offered in the municipality, while at the same time these factors turned out to be less crucial than one might have imagined in advance. A large municipality has many cards to play both in terms of the number of youths and activity options, but this also means that competition for deals will be higher. Smaller municipalities have fewer activity opportunities, but this can also make TOGETHER Project experience extra important. The municipality size does not therefore appear to be a determining factor in the project implementation. As for the recruitment basis, it is obviously easier to establish more groups in a municipality with a large target group. It is hard to imagine several parallel groups based on different interests if there are only a few single minors in the municipality. This is also one of the reasons why many municipalities have included other young refugees in the groups. When it comes to recruiting Norwegian youths to the project, municipalities have chosen a number of different approaches. The way in this case was appearing as they walked it. This is one of the characteristics of a project work. The map must be adapted to the terrain, and changes along the way should be taken into account in the implementation's process. One of the project work advantages is flexibility. If the number of single minors being settled changes drastically, it will obviously have consequences for the recruitment to the project. This requires both flexibility and local customization.

LOCAL PROJECTS

Now we will briefly present local TOGETHER Projects in order to give a picture of how they have developed across the country. This is not a complete review of what has been happening but some brief glimpses to highlight the project's variety. The review is based on what has been provided at network meetings for all project municipalities, during participation in external events where TOGETHER Project has been presented, questionnaires for municipalities participating in the project and conversations with some of the local project managers. Besides, the SOS Children's Villages' Central Management Team has provided important information, and we have also received press releases with presentations of local TOGETHER Project activities. It is important to emphasize that the "tidbits" from the local projects are short glimpses only and not a complete review of the activities. The point in this context is primarily showing examples of local adjustment to a common TOGETHER Concept. We will start with three pilot municipalities. The other municipalities are presented randomly. At the time of evaluation, some municipalities had just started their participation in the project. They are therefore only mentioned in the summary.

ASKER MUNICIPALITY

The municipality established its first group in April 2017. During the year, they initiated another three groups. There were in total 16 refugees and 19 Norwegian youths participating in the project. Organizing and managing the groups was the responsibility of the municipal Youth Refugee Coordinator. One group was led by Asker Active. The groups had the following activities:

- Climbing course more than 9 times + bowling and going to a restaurant
- Dance group that performed at Asker municipality's anniversary conference dedicated to the work with single minor refugees.
- Active Together, a group that exercises together once a week.
- Graffiti spray painting on canvas.

Young refugees were recruited for participation in the project by an invitation distributed by local project manager through the municipality's special contact

employees working with single minor refugees. Norwegian youths were recruited via a newly established SOS Young Group of high school students. Most of the group members wanted to participate, and they also recruited their friends to join TOGETHER Groups that were established later.

LILLEHAMMER MUNICIPALITY

The first group was established in May 2017. There were in total five groups of 15 young refugees and 15 Norwegian youths. The work was organized by the Unaccompanied Minor Refugee Service which is part of Lillehammer municipal Child Welfare Service. The groups had the following activities:

- Cooperation to set up a food drive at the Birkebeiner Race in June 2017.
- Dance course with instructor from Dansehuset in Lillehammer.
- Football group which played football or FIFA football game.
- Photo group where participants were learning to take pictures that would be exhibited after a while.
- Breakdance group gathering with own instructor. The group will perform at the final show of The Norwegian Youth Festivals of Art (UKM).

Single minor refugees were recruited through social carers working in housing facilities. There were also organized social evenings for all youngsters to get information about TOGETHER Project and understand its content. Norwegian youths were recruited through three of the municipality's secondary schools, as well as through youth clubs and other youth meeting places. Information about the project was also distributed through the county education manager, youth organization and other adolescence agencies and the municipal culture department.

OPPEGÅRD MUNICIPALITY

The municipality carried out two group projects which both started their work in October 2017. The work was supervised by Refugee Health Service Advisor. During the pilot phase, the municipality's volunteer coordinator also participated, and the implementation phase was conducted in dialogue with the local community

and the housing facilities for single minors. These two groups had the following activities:

- The group which was meeting once a week to do different activities together such as football, bowling and burgers, billiards and pizza, shuffleboard, escape room and various game activities in one of the houses for single minor refugees.
- The group which had photography meetings once a week. They hired a photographer who held a photography course and helped to select pictures for an exhibition.

Four refugees were recruited to the project via housing facilities. Besides, two sisters who lived together with their families joined the project. They were recruited by refugee counselor. Norwegian youths were recruited via the elective initiative "Effort for All" and participated in the project as part of their schooling.

OS MUNICIPALITY

The local TOGETHER project was organized as collaboration between the municipal section for unaccompanied minors and NAV (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration). The municipality received funding for various activities via so-called "poverty funds". Os municipality conducted one group project with four refugees and five Norwegian youths.

The group had various activities, such as kick-off and billiards, sports hall activities, ski sledding, swimming at the wellness center in Røros, gingerbread baking, bowling, cooking Eritrean food, cabin trip, climbing in Verket and horse-drawn sleigh riding.

Refugees who participated in the group were recruited in several different ways. The first one was recruited through the community for unaccompanied minors, the other one as a neighbor, the third one via NAV and the refugee service, and the fourth one was a former resident of the community for unaccompanied minors. Norwegian youths were recruited through acquaintances and by using the snowball method, i.e. someone who knows someone, who again knows someone!

LEVANGER KOMMUNE

TOGETHER Project in Levanger was organized as a culture department project with a volunteer project coordinator. A youth center employee was the project manager and a group mentor. In addition, the unit for upbringing and the immigration unit were involved in the work. The first group started its work in June 2017. There were in total three group projects with 9 young refugees and 9 Norwegian youths. The groups had various activities ranging from sowing and harvesting vegetables and herbs to bowling, overnight trips, go-karts and participation in events like The Norwegian Youth Festivals of Art (UKM) and the local "Marsimartnan".

The recruitment of refugees was conducted by the youth center and the community for unaccompanied minors. The cooperation with the community for unaccompanied minors went well. In the recruitment work it was emphasized that all participants would receive a participation certificate, opportunities to participate in exciting activities, experience and knowledge of the local community, and that the participation also had a learning potential. The response was positive and everyone joined the project. Norwegian youths were recruited through various municipal youth communities, such as sports teams, youth center, The Norwegian Red Cross, online cafes, etc.

DRAMMEN MUNICIPALITY

The project was assigned to the Department of Child Welfare and Unaccompanied Minor Refugees of the Adolescence Center with the head of the department as project manager in cooperation with a coordinator between the Center and the municipality's volunteers. There were initiated two groups with a total of six young refugees and 7 Norwegian youngsters.

Each group started with "Get-Acquainted Evenings", with different group divisions and activities to get acquainted. After that they conducted various activities such as bowling, a trampoline park trip, paintball, taco and game night, visiting sports

teams, football and volleyball practice evenings, attending a school play, English Eve, a visit to the mayor and an excursion to the town hall.

Refugees for the project were recruited through contact persons from the municipal Department for Unaccompanied Minor Refugees. The Project Manager also conducted individual interviews before the startup. Norwegian youths were recruited via Drammen Red Cross.

ARENDALE MUNICIPALITY

In Arendal, the project was assigned to the section for unaccompanied minors with two employees of the community for unaccompanied minors supervising the project. They were working closely with the youth club. The municipality had one TOGETHER Project group initiated in autumn 2017. There were in total three young refugees and three Norwegian youngsters who joined the group. They are planning to establish one more group. The groups were recruited via housing facility for unaccompanied minor refugees and the municipal youth club respectively. Norwegian youths also helped to recruit youngsters.

The activity of the group was organized around street art. Youngsters painted two different paintings, and a wall and a "bar" in the youth center. The work was supervised by a professional artist within "Street Art". The exhibition at the youth center received a lot of positive attention. Both politicians and the local newspaper were present at the opening ceremony, and youngsters were proud of that. They told about the paintings and the process behind it. One of the youngsters also sold his painting to one of the visitors of the exhibition.

THE BOROUGH OF BJERKE IN OSLO

TOGETHER Project Bjerke was organized by the adolescence and culture department of the section for local community, culture and volunteering. The project manager worked in the culture team which was responsible for all courses and activities offered to children and young people in the borough. The section also has youth clubs and open meeting places, as well as an environmental group doing

school-oriented work. Child Welfare Service has a separate section in the adolescence and culture department that cooperates closely in conducting preventive work with children and youths.

The first TOGETHER-group at Bjerke was initiated in October 2017. They have now had two groups and have started the third one. The first group was collaboration between the boroughs of Bjerke and Nesodden and its activities were completed in November 2017. The second group was initiated in February 2018, at the same time as the last group's activities started. There were in total 10 refugees and 8 Norwegian youngsters who joined the groups. The groups had the following activities:

- Group 1 worked with music. They composed a melody and recorded a music video. Besides, the group participated in different activities such as Go-kart and Rush trampoline park.
- The topic for group 2 was exercising where the participants' goal was to push themselves and each other. The group's final activity was "indoor skydiving" with the goal "The sky is the limit", which was a big step forward for many participants. The group was also involved in other activities in addition to exercise days.
- The topic for group 3 was acrobatics/exercising.

The first two groups were filmed, and the videos made available for download from Youtube⁶. Refugees were recruited to groups through the community for unaccompanied minors and through reception classes at schools of Veitvet, Bredtvedt and Årvoll. In addition, recruitment was conducted through networks. Norwegian youths were recruited through a network of youth workers living in the borough, in addition to recruitment through various partners.

⁶ See URLs of the videos in the reference list below.

NESODDEN MUNICIPALITY

The project in Nesodden was focused on physical activity and social work. Two TOGETHER groups were initiated, one of which was organized in cooperation with the borough of Bjerke in Oslo and was focused on music, and the other one was an own group of Nesodden municipality. The first group (together with Bjerke) was started in October 2017 (see description under the presentation of Bjerke). The second group started up at the end of the year. The head of Nesodden community for unaccompanied minors was the project manager for the work with the second group. In addition to the project manager, a project supervisor who had previously worked in the follow-up team and in the community for unaccompanied minors was appointed. He spoke the same language as many of the unaccompanied minors, and it made it easier to recruit participants of TOGETHER Project group. On the other hand, it was harder to recruit Norwegian youngsters. This was one of the reasons why Bjerke and Nesodden established cooperation. The situation in Bjerke was rather the opposite. It was easier to recruit Norwegian youths than refugees from the target group there. Therefore, they decided to recruit their respective groups and then collaborate on activities.

The activities in TOGETHER Project groups were proposed by youths and determined jointly. During the project, youngsters participated in riding, boxing, basic exercises, sports games, weight exercises and exercise classes. Youths were given the opportunity to train their mental and physical strength by doing various exercises. The experience showed that this form of training was perceived as fun and motivation and provided the experience of working in teams. The evaluation made by young participants was unequivocally positive. They said they had fun throughout the project and were happy about the supervisor and the activities they participated in. The only negative thing was that the project ended!

LIER MUNICIPALITY

The project was organized as collaboration between Lier Municipality Culture and Leisure Administration and the Refugee Service. They established their first group in January 2018 and are still at the early stage. The group which is a pure girl group includes four young refugees and four Norwegian girls. The activity of the group is primarily dancing. To get started, they contacted a dance group leader in the

municipality. This helped to push the recruitment process. In addition to dancing the group had a get-acquainted evening with pizza and visited a trampoline park. The group is not only focused on unaccompanied minors. Young refugees living with their families participate in its activities as well.

OTHER PROJECTS

In addition to the ten projects that have been presented here, there are TOGETHER Project activities in such municipalities as Aukra, Bodø, Bærum, Horten, Nordstrand and Salangen. Several municipalities started their cooperation with SOS Children's Villages Norway when the unaccompanied minors' settlement rates were on top (at the end of 2016-beginning of 2017). The dramatic decline in settlement figures after 2017 had major consequences for many municipalities. Too few unaccompanied minors were coming to municipalities. Some experienced no newcomers at all. This meant that many municipalities had to change their plans. The latter was also applicable to some municipalities that were late with joining TOGETHER project.

However, reassessment of plans does not mean that the plans have been shelved. It's about making adjustments – both in terms of participation and in terms of activities. The experience of municipalities that are well underway shows that many of them have made such adjustments. For example, some of them have invited young refugees who have a family in Norway to join the project. This makes it less vulnerable and helps to offer activities to a larger number of participants.

MUTUAL LESSONS

The experience of TOGETHER Project shows that there is a great need for this type of projects. Whether you decide to call it a friendship project or an integration project, it is about creating arenas where young refugees and Norwegian youths can meet. Many refugees feel that they are on the margins of the Norwegian society and especially on the margins of Norwegian youth communities. They often go to their own school classes, many of them live in their own housing and care

facilities for single minors, and all of them in one way or another indicate the lack of social networks that can help them to enter the Norwegian youth environment. This is the background of TOGETHER Project and the reason for investing in a project based on young-to-young methodology.

The project is based on the youngsters being able to decide and (in the long run) manage the content and activities in various TOGETHER Project groups. In a bit more than a year with activities in 16 municipalities, a lot has happened both in terms of the content and relationally. Various activities can be listed and described. It is more difficult to say something about the effects of what has been happening. We know that more than two hundred youths have participated in activities under TOGETHER Project, and we know that youths have been recruited through both formal and informal channels, as well as we know about the big range of activities. But a project like this is very much more than figures and facts. It is about cross-cooperation and building relationships. The review of local projects shows that many municipalities have had close collaboration between different municipal entities and the voluntary sector. In some municipalities, these collaborative relationships have existed for a long time, while in other municipalities cooperation has been developed more specifically for this project.

In a project like this there are both success stories and stories about challenges, and there are stories of small and big challenges that had to be handled and were handled. All these experiences, both good and less good, create learning. So, what are the mutual lessons? And which experiences have a transfer value for others who will initiate similar projects? In the survey form that was sent to participating municipalities we asked them to summarize the most important lessons learned during the project. Below we have collected a bunch of quotes. They show variation of experiences and views, but in most areas they are unanimous when it comes to planning, organization and implementation. It's about spending time and being flexible with specific project plans. This applies to both the project as a whole and the activities of different groups. Participation is an important keyword. Without participation of those whom it concerns and their ability to decide it is difficult to achieve good results.

PLANNING

We spent a long time planning for the success of the first activity. It is important to be well prepared and always have a plan B. Then we must dare to go beyond the project proposal if it is necessary to achieve the best results. Spending time on follow-up work with participants is also required. This is important in order to increase the chance of a good and lasting effect.

Mentors were reminding youngsters of the activities to be chosen well in advance. The purpose of that was that youths should be able to make plans themselves and the mentor should have the opportunity to make all necessary preparations with regard to different activities. All kinds of activities were presented to the youths as suggestions, and they made decisions jointly.

Planning and guidance, implementation and evaluation of various activities were based on the youngsters' level of functioning. The activities were different, but the goal was the same: strengthening the youths' self-esteem and identity through physical activity and socializing.

RECRUITMENT

The preparatory work was done well in advance of the project start. Several unaccompanied minor refugees were informed and interviewed. Three unaccompanied minors were recruited long before the project start. I visited both classes of unaccompanied minors and presented the project to the youngsters. After the presentation, young people were given the opportunity to sign up and at the same time write briefly why they wanted to join the TOGETHER project. Good contact with the youngsters and their trust made recruitment easy.

It is a big plus if those who recruit have both the experience of working with unaccompanied minor refugees and/or the municipal cultural sector and who know all the youth and municipal services [leisure clubs, youth centers, sports teams, etc.] We have good recruitment experience when it comes to identifying interests and connecting youths with similar interests.

It is important that the recruiter has a strong sense of ownership and direct involvement in the project, and is related to the youth environment in the form of one-on-one

recruitment. This can happen, for example, via sports teams, youth centers, the Red Cross, Internet cafes, etc.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Vi hadde god erfaring med å ha litt hyppigere møter i begynnelsen (mer enn en gang We had good experience of having more frequent meetings at the beginning (more than once a week). It is also important to have a permanent meeting day, time and place to prevent misunderstandings. In this case it is particularly important to have good communication with youngsters and especially with unaccompanied minors.

TOGETHER is a very good project. There have been many good moments for the youngsters. At the same time, it has been challenging to make our youths (the unaccompanied minors) to come every time. Perhaps it was hard to understand the concept, what it means to be part of a project and the obligations?

The commitment of Norwegian youngsters varied. Some were very busy and were off to something else as soon as the session was finished. Sometimes they wanted to go a little bit earlier and could not always come (...) Others stayed longer, took better care of refugees by talking more to them, helped them to do things and participated in additional activities.

I think, it's an advantage to know the youth. And you have to conduct the activities even if not everyone wants to participate each time. Do not wait until everything is perfectly planned, be impulsive and jump in it as an adult.

INTEGRATION

We see that the project work has created spin-off effects and another social inclusion work at schools and elsewhere. This builds on some of the same thinking that TOGETHER Project is based on.

The dance group has become a great success despite many challenges along the way (poor attendance, lack of commitment). It seems that the relationships among the girls are developing well and the undersigned sees that they are in contact with each other and plan to meet outside of the scheduled activity hours. Whether the goal of lasting relationships has been achieved is currently uncertain, but the way it looks now the girls seem to have become friends across nationalities and cultures.

It has been very nice to get Norwegian friends. We have got to know each other well and the Norwegian girls are very nice and kind. I think we will stay in touch and continue to find things to do together.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ADULT SUPPORT

It is important to have dedicated adults who participate in the entire activity. It's also a great advantage if the mentor has a relationship with the participants and that there is good communication between the mentor and youngsters.

Adult support is always important to keep up the motivation. Those who execute the project must have experience of working with youths and integration. It is important to find the right person! It should be the municipal employee who will always be in charge of the project, preferably in collaboration with voluntary teams and associations.

SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES' FOLLOW-UP

SOS Children's Villages' follow-up has been very important. They have always been closely involved and have helped us to "stick together". SOS Children's Villages have been available for information and advice, and for answering questions. At the network meetings we have had a great opportunity to share our experience with other municipalities. Both Heidi Melby and Tina Skogmo have been helpful in giving advice and providing guidance.

SUCCESS FACTORS: EXPERIENCE OF LEVANGER MUNICIPALITY ⁷

We have decided to present a summary of success factors of Levanger municipality's work under TOGETHER project. The summary reflects a perception that most of the participating municipalities have conveyed through talks, network meetings and written feedback. Having variety and nuance differences is just as much about local variations as that people are different. The recruiter must have a strong sense of ownership and direct involvement in the project.

- Relation to the youth environment that youngsters are recruited from.
- One to one recruitment to the project. For example, through sports teams, youth centers, the Red Cross, Internet cafes.
- Connection with municipal chief executives from relevant entities (child welfare service, refugee +-service, adolescence and culture administrations).
- Constant adult support to keep up the motivation.
- Experience with youth and integration work.
- Municipal employees who always are in charge of the project, preferably in collaboration with voluntary teams and associations.
- It is important to make sure that everyone is contributing to what they are good at.
- Lay emphasis on certificates.

If we look at this in the context of what has been described we get back to some key factors, such as good planning, recruitment based on proximity to youth, high-level of embeddedness in the municipal system, close cooperation with the voluntary sector, constant adult support and the last but not least – youths' own participation. Young people are keen to get a visible proof of participation in the project. Therefore, the certificate they receive when group projects are over is important. It gives recognition and becomes a visible evidence of that they have participated.

⁷ From TOGETHER Project presentation for refugees in the County of Nord-Trøndelag (November 2017)

SUMMARY AND THE WAY FORWARD

I just want to say that an incredibly happy boy has just entered the door. He was grinning from ear to ear and was so happy because it was so good at the project. It's so much fun to see youngsters coming home with such a smile. You are doing a really good job!⁸

TOGETHER Integration Project has established groups of friends in 16 Norwegian municipalities within just over a year. The aim of TOGETHER Project is to help young people who have fled to Norway to become acquainted with Norwegian youths and vice versa – to help Norwegian youths to get to know refugees. The key point of the project is exactly this reciprocity. Under TOGETHER Project, Norwegian adolescents and young people with refugee background get to know each other by doing things together.

Unaccompanied minor refugees have been a special priority group. These are youngsters who have fled alone and who are to establish a new life in a society they are not familiar with. They have experienced persecution and flight, and they have experienced waiting at the care center or asylum reception center. In other words, they have lived lives that are very different from Norwegian youths' lives. At the same time they are youngsters with dreams for the future and the wish to get acquainted and to do things with their peers.

When SOS Children's Villages started planning the project the key element was the "young-to-young" perspective. This is not a project where one party is to help the other, but a project where youngsters meet based on their common interests. But it is necessary to make arrangements in order to achieve this in practice. Norwegian youths and young refugees have too few common places to meet, and it is hard to get to know each other without common meeting places. The role of

⁸ Provided by an employee of a community for unaccompanied minors

SOS Children's Villages was to work out a viable model to develop the project and recruit municipalities to establish TOGETHER Project in their communities.

The municipality's role is to recruit young people, make unaccompanied minors and other youngsters with refugee background familiar with the offer and provide "mentors" who can help to get the work started.

The experience of the first 16 municipalities participating in TOGETHER Project shows that a lot has happened within just one year. Although municipalities are at different stages of the project and the activity level varies, the project has helped hundreds of young people across the country to get to know each other through activities. The list of activities is long and includes street art, music videos, climbing courses, go-karting and bowling, dance shows, cabin trips, tobogganing, cooking together, etc.

The activities are based on the interests of participants and on local opportunities. TOGETHER is an integration project where activities are not an end in themselves but a means of getting acquainted. The experience so far is that it works. Meeting each other on the basis of common interests makes youths' roles more equal. At the same time it creates learning opportunities for both parties. Refugees can train their language skills and become introduced to Norwegian youth environment and local communities. Norwegian youngsters learn about refugees' cultural and refugee-related experience. Both parties learn something about differences, but above all they get shared experiences through specific activities. This is part of the key element. If a project is to be viable over time, both parties need to have something worthwhile to participate. To a great extent it seems that the local projects have managed to create this reciprocity.

TOGETHER Project involves individuals, groups, local communities and the whole society. The goal of integration applies to all levels. Individuals should develop equal relationships with others, and groups should get a sense of belonging to youth groups and local communities. An important keyword here is networking. The project helps to create networks that can be the beginning of friendship. It is too early to say whether the project creates lasting friendship between participants, but it nevertheless makes Norwegian youths and young refugees to get to

know each other. This in itself is valuable as well as is contributing to the prevention of prejudice and xenophobia.

TOGETHER shall be a project for youth, with youth and of youth. There is no doubt that the project is for and with young people. The question is whether it is a project of young people meaning that they are managing it. Both SOS Children's Villages and municipalities play important roles as facilitators of the project. There would be no TOGETHER Project without them. However, it does not mean that TOGETHER is controlled by SOS Children's Villages or municipalities or that the activities are determined by adults. The organizers were important at the initial phase, but the goal was that some activities could continue without external support. It's too early to say how the project will evolve over time. Although it has only been a time-limited activity, participation in TOGETHER Project has helped young people with different backgrounds to become acquainted. Time will show whether this develops into lasting friendship. However, it has contributed to greater understanding which is a prerequisite for integration.

TOGETHER Project represents an important contribution to integration efforts in general and in the work with unaccompanied minors in particular and should therefore be continued. This requires both a predictable resource situation, organizational framework for the project work and a recruitment basis for establishing local TOGETHER Project groups.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- TOGETHER Project should be established in all municipalities that settle young refugees, both single minors and those who come with their families.
- TOGETHER Project should be included in “sets of measures” of all settlements municipalities as a permanent cooperation between a municipalities and volunteers.
- TOGETHER Project should further develop methods for involving Norwegian youths in the project.
- TOGETHER Project should focus more on what happens after the end of the group activities in order to contribute to more long-term effects of the work.
- The work under TOGETHER Project should be documented and evaluated on a regular basis with a particular focus on youth’s experiences.
- For å bidra til mer langsiktige effekter av arbeidet bør SAMMEN ha et større fokus på det som skjer etter at gruppene er avsluttet.
- Arbeidet med SAMMEN bør dokumenteres og evalueres fortløpende, med et særlig fokus på ungdommenes erfaringer.



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TOGETHER Project online:

<https://www.sos-barnebyer.no/va-rt-arbeid-for-barn-i-norge/sammen>

<https://www.sos-barnebyer.no/fant-sammen-i-sammen>

YouTube videos of TOGETHER Project activities in the borough of Bjerke:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ghz20AfoxGU>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5sKftrwXcE>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZFexvZ3umg>



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