



Housing and Services



Self generated activities TOOL BOX

SUBPROJECT: Housing and Services

Project managers:

Eva Hortell

eva.hortell@soc.lulea.se

phone: +46 920 45 57 60

Ann-Christin Lahti

ann-christin.lahti@soc.lulea.se

phone: +46 920 45 36 74



**Northern
Periphery
Programme**
2007–2013

Innovatively investing
in Europe's Northern
Periphery for a sustainable
and prosperous future



European Union
European Regional Development Fund

Background

An aging population and fewer in production is a problem concerning all countries in Europe, but more so in the Northern Periphery. The sparsely populated area in the Northern Periphery represents a problematic environment; to provide elderly service in this area is both difficult and expensive.

“Our Life as Elderly” (OLE, 2004-2006) was a transnational collaborative project between the City of Luleå in Sweden, the Municipality of Bodø in Norway, the Faroese Association of Municipalities, the Centre for Rural Health in Scotland and the Municipality of Lieksa in Finland as well as other organisations.

OLE was actively focusing on developing elderly care based on the citizen’s needs, demands and wishes. This was done through active citizen’s dialogue targeting people that will be in need of care in 10 to 15 years. The dialogue with citizens through interviews, questionnaires and focus groups showed both similarities and difference between the participants. Citizen’s dialogue showed that there was a concern for unwanted loneliness and project suggestions, among others, was that society should arrange meeting places where elderly could participate in various activities. The project also suggested that the society would appoint a co-ordinator responsible for connecting volunteers and other actors interested to contribute in any way.

Findings from OLE has been transferred to the EU project OLE2, which focuses primarily on implementation and a presentation of products that were the result of the project OLE.

The care of senior citizens is regulated by the social services law and the health care act. Social services act chapter 5 §4 states that *“the department of social services shall work to ensure that senior citizens are able to live independently in a safe environment and have an active and meaningful existence in community with others.”* The Swedish government believes that the social needs of older people are in need of more attention and that to develop this area it is important that the municipalities strengthen the cooperation with the voluntary sector. Meeting places and other open activities are important means for senior citizens to uphold their social life and gain substance in their everyday life. Active participation breaks isolation and results in valuable connections.¹

Retirement is an immense change; the social interaction with colleagues stop and every day there are several hours to fill with new content. Today, a newly retired person may count on a minimum of 10-15 years of good health before old age ailment sets in. According to the world health organization (WHO) an active aging entails being able to participate in social, economical, spiritual, cultural and civil affairs. The

¹ **Socialdepartementet, Regeringskansliet. Riktlinjer och villkor för användning av medel till vård och omsorg om äldre personer. Bilaga 1 till regeringsbeslut 2007-01-18 nr 6.**

decision to be active is a choice made by the individual but the authorities and other entrants are to create the opportunity for an active aging.²

The proportion of elderly in our population increases, as well as the interest of public health care directed at older people. Studies show that targeted interventions will have positive effects even in old age. Biological and genetic factors affect aging, but other elements of great importance are lifestyle, experience and environment. The changes that previously were considered normal may be affected and prevented. Poor diet, physical inactivity and smoking are examples of factors that negatively impact on the aging process. Although aging cannot be prevented, one may speak of an “unnecessary aging” where senior citizens become inactive, lose interest in their surroundings and prematurely takes on the role of being old. This might be a natural reaction of not feeling involved in society.³

Social contacts and activities have been showed to hold a great importance regarding an older person’s health. The risk of premature death, disease and disabilities are prevented by a high level of both physical and cultural activity. Nature and animals also have positive health effects; interaction with animals may affect your mood as well as result in lower blood pressure and reduced levels of stress hormones. Physically active elders often meet more people and thereby gain social interactions which by extension lead to a better appetite and eating habits in addition to a diminished need for medication and health care.⁴

The Swedish national institute of public health (Folkhälsoinstitutet) considers that there are four cornerstones essential for a good development of the health for elderly – social connection, physical activity, good eating habits and a meaningful occupation, to feel needed.⁵ A good example of the use of these cornerstones can be found at Frivilligcentralen (voluntary centre) in Umeå, Sweden. Berit Hedlund, one of the volunteers, says:”*to me volunteering means wellness for the soul*”.⁶ When asked why they choose to volunteer the answers are:

- » *I feel needed and awaited*
- » *What I do is meaningful*
- » *I gain new experiences*
- » *I meet new friends*
- » *I feel included*

² Lindström, I., Blom, H., & Olmänder van Erk, I. (2006). *Ett aktivt liv som senior*. Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting

³ Agahi, N., Lagergren, M., Thorslund, M. & Wänell, S E. (2005). *Hälsoutveckling och hälsofrämjande insatser på äldre dar*. Statens Folkhälsoinstitut

⁴ Lindström, I., Blom, H., & Olmänder van Erk, I. (2006). *Ett aktivt liv som senior*. Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting

⁵ Nilsson, E. (red.). (2008). *Var med och bestäm! Delaktighet och inflytande – en förutsättning för hälsosamt åldrande*. Statens folkhälsoinstitut, Östersund.

⁶ Simo, T. (2009). *Givande möten, 10 år med frivilligcentralen i Umeå*. Trunde Simo och Premiss förlag, Stockholm.

Current situation

Today, over 20 local senior citizens organizations exist in Luleå municipality. The organizations offer a wide range of activities, mainly directed at their members, and can apply for municipal grants for their activities. Operating subsidies amounts to 45 SEK/member, rent subsidies is granted up to 80% of the rental price or to a maximum of 500 SEK/member, to a total at 60 000 SEK annually at most. Furthermore, each club is granted 1000 SEK annually in the form of an administration grant if the association is connected to a national organization and has a minimum of 25 members.⁷

In the present day there is no incentive for the organizations to operate outside their own club. In some Swedish societies suggestion has been made where the clubs are required to counterpart for them to receive operating subsidies. The approach is used in Linköping municipality, where the organizations in their application for subsidies must describe what activities they will offer to seniors in residential care. When reviewing the applications, Linköping municipality's officials also consider how the clubs collaborate with other participants, if the activities also address people outside their own members, how and also how well the offered activities complement or strengthen the municipality's operations.⁸

In Luleå there is little tradition of volunteer service performed for and by seniors. At the beginning of the OLE 2 project the only association performing such voluntary activities was Church of Sweden. In other parts of Sweden volunteering is a growing sector; Frivilligcentralen in Umeå is a good example.⁹

Self generated activities

Senior citizens week 080908-080912

During the OLE project period came the idea to collect current information, lectures and cultural activities all with a focus at the elderly people in Luleå during an intense autumn week. Thus the senior citizens' week was born. The project managers begun planning the event in May and the program were completed after a couple of stressful weeks in August. Thankfully, the departments IT-manager helped out by compiling and designing the advert. The first ever senior citizens week contained activities such as lectures about safety and good eating habits, light entertainment such as accordion and choir singing, water exercises, Nordic walking and a fashion show. Activities were also held at the municipality's nursing homes during the week.

The senior citizens' week received quite a lot of attention in media, articles in local newspapers as well as interviews in both radio and television. (Appendix 1.)

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<http://www.lulea.se/forinvanare/fritidochidrott/foreningsliv/sokabidrag/vilkabidragfinnsdetochhursokemandem/bidragtillpensionarsforeningar.4.6ebed23a109d954a359800011102.html>

⁸ <http://www.linkoping.se/sv/Kultur-fritid/Foreningsliv/Foreningsbidrag/Pensionar/>

⁹ Simo, T. (2009). Givande möten, 10 år med frivilligcentralen i Umeå. Trunde Simo och Premiss förlag, Stockholm.

Visitors to the senior week were asked to fill out a simple evaluation and the feedback was important when developing the next year's senior citizens week. An issue that was noted in the evaluation was the bad timing of the event – in early September many pensioners still remain in their vacation homes and can therefore not attend the activities. Another point made was that senior citizens' associations, interest groups, adult educational associations and Church of Sweden wanted to have more responsibilities and be included in the process of designing the program for the following year. (Appendix 4.)

Senior citizens week 091005-091009

The search for clubs, associations etc. interested in helping to organize the 2009 senior week began with advertising in March. Guidelines for the project were drawn at a joint meeting where the municipality's "next of kin consultant" and employees from the "dementia team" also participated. The group then gathered three times during the spring. This year's senior citizens week was in October and since the "National Carers day" was celebrated during that week it was natural for the "next of kin consultant" to have the main responsibility for the activities during that day. The week's activities started off with current information from social services and afternoon dancing to nostalgic songs of the past. The "National Carers day" in Sweden takes place October 6th. Students at the food program had a quest to design a pastry in honor of next of kin carers and that pastry was served on the "National Carers day". That day also contained lectures and massage was offered for all carers. Wednesday's activities were held by the senior citizens' associations and adult educational associations had primary responsibility for Thursday. Church of Sweden joined during "National Carers day" their volunteers helped out serving coffee and pastry to all visitors. Senior citizens organizations were responsible for activities on Wednesday and on Thursday adult educational association took responsibility for the program. The week ended with a fashion show and sing-along to live music. (Appendix 2.)

Senior citizens week 101004-101008

As previously we started our planning by advertising for interested participants in Mars. This year there were many senior citizen's associations; choirs etc who wanted to perform during the senior citizens week. It was a difficult task to give all an equal opportunity to perform and show their organization to the visitors. (Appendix 3.)

Tool Box, from concept to reality

- ✓ Establish contact with interested people and organizations. Advertising in newspapers is a good way to go.
- ✓ Conduct information sessions where you establish budget and other guidelines regarding the project.
- ✓ Form a working group and schedule meetings. Since the elderly of today often have a busy calendar it is important to send notices in advance.

- ✓ Set a time and place for the event. When establishing a date, try to consider local “happenings”. For example, in Luleå the hunting season for elk is an important event that cannot be challenged.
- ✓ Discuss areas of interest and divide all tasks amongst the group members.
- ✓ Develop a common program for the week. Try to create a mixed program with activities which may suite many – dare to think outside the box and try something new.
- ✓ Design the layout of programs, posters and adverts. Make sure to start on time in case you might need help with layout and prints.
- ✓ Contact media, send out press releases and do not forget to designate press contacts.
- ✓ Have a grand opening ceremony with pomp and circumstance!

If you are interested in how to organize a senior week, you can get more information in the brochure "How to prepare a senior citizen's week". (Appendix 5.)

Conclusion

Self generating activities is a relatively new phenomenon in Luleå, but we have found that the cooperation between the different participants is facilitated when there is a practical task to gather around. To meet all requests regarding the date and type of events is difficult, almost impossible, but we found that a simple evaluation filled in by the visitors is a great help. Since elderly of today often have a busy calendar it is a must to send out summons for the meetings on time. To access the targeted audience it is important to advertise in newspapers, informing the senior citizen's associations and use press releases to get media's attention. We have also learned that our senior citizens' associations offer a wide variety of important activities for its members. We would wish, however, that the clubs' activities were accessible to people outside its own membership ranks – perhaps that may be solved by a difference in entry fees. In order to get a sustainable solution we think it is important that the municipality can agree about a “Letter of intent” which describes how the municipality intends to work with the voluntary sector. A good example can be found in Umeå ¹⁰

The first ever senior citizen's week was held in Luleå in September of 2008. Since then the concept has spread nationally as well as internationally with senior citizens conventions have been held in the Faroese Islands and Finland, amongst others. We want to conclude by thanking all those involved who in different ways made the senior week, as well as other events for Luleå municipality's seniors happen.

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http://www.umea.se/download/18.653eee8a12e4c2b49f58000526/Avsiktsf%C3%B6rklarings_Riktlinjer.pdf

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Internetsources

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http://www.umea.se/download/18.653eee8a12e4c2b49f58000526/Avsiktsf%C3%B6rklarings_Riktlinjer.pdf

Appendices

1. Advertisement, Senior citizens week 2008
2. Advertisement, Senior citizens week 2009
3. Advertisement, Senior citizens week 2010
4. Evaluation form, Senior citizens week
5. Brochure, How to prepare a senior citizens week