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May 24, 2013

# Newsletter from the Nordic Labour Journal 4/2013

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Theme: Nordic hunt for solutions to youth unemployment



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## **EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

Björn Lindahl

## **EMAIL**

[nljeditor@gmail.com](mailto:nljeditor@gmail.com)

## **WEB**

[www.nordiclabourjournal.org](http://www.nordiclabourjournal.org)

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# Editorial: What to do with the youth?

Make no mistake: youth unemployment is foremost in Nordic politicians' minds. Especially NEETs, young people not in education, employment or training. They make up between five and ten percent of Nordic youths. But what will politicians do for them?

## COMMENTS

23.05.2013

BY BERIT KVAM

'Everyone' who's involved in fighting youth unemployment met in Stockholm on 16 May; Nordic prime ministers and labour ministers, employer organisations and trade unions, youth organisations and labour market authorities. They were all there to discuss how to include those who find themselves the furthest away from the labour market.

The venue, Stockholm's Fryshuset, began as an alternative school and activity centre to help the very youths who were in danger of falling outside of the system. Beatrice Clarke used to be one of those young people. Now she runs Fryshuset and could address the powers that be.

The politicians appeared humbled by their task - perhaps not surprisingly, as youth unemployment has been near the top of their inbox since 2009, soon after the start of the economic crisis.

Sweden's Minister for Finance Anders Borg nevertheless pointed out that the Nordic countries are doing much better than the rest of Europe and the rest of the world. One reason, he said, was the Nordic model with its strong cooperation between the social partners. Still, youth unemployment remains high especially in Sweden and Finland.

Norway's Prime Minister Stoltenberg said youth unemployment figures follow the general unemployment figures, only they are two to three times higher. In Norway, as in Sweden, drop-out rates from upper secondary school remain a major problem. Just 70 percent finish their education.

The Nordic governments come in different political hues, and the systems and measures aimed at getting youths into work and education are different. Yet there is increasing agreement on the direction in which to take the fight against youth unemployment; seek out those who are not in education or work, help boost their self confidence and basic skills, improve the coordination and cooperation between institutions that are in touch with young people.

As Sweden's Minister for Employment Hillevi Engström put it:

No size fits all; we need to work with individuals.

Norway's Minister of Labour Anniken Huitfeldt highlighted the need for everyone to learn how to read and write. Even a storage worker cannot get by without being able to read box labels. There is also a common desire to invest more in training and to further develop cooperation with employers so that they can open up for even more young people. Failing that, there is a great danger that unemployed youths will keep struggling with unemployment also later in life.

What to do with the youth?

The willingness to take action is there, as demonstrated by those attending the 16 May meeting at Fryshuset. The challenge, as Beatrice Clarke put it, is for the politicians not to punish but to astonish young people.



Nordic labour ministers listen to Beatrice Clarke from Fryshuset

## "Don't punish us, astonish us"

To really listen to young people and see each individual in light of their own merit, cooperating across sectors while also focusing on schools - where life-long learning begins. To learn from the other Nordic countries and benefit from the common Nordic labour market - these were all themes when Nordic prime ministers and labour ministers met in Stockholm on 16 May.

THEME

23.05.2013

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN, PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

The conference 'More Youth in Work' gathered 600 people at Stockholm's Fryshuset - widely known for its work with young people at risk of becoming outsiders. Beatrice Clarke, who works there, introduced the meeting by shedding a light on the reality faced by many young people, not least in the suburbs - a world where criminals are better than employers at recruiting youths.

"Forgotten kids become suburban kings and it doesn't matter which methods we use if we don't understand why young people become outsiders," Beatrice Clarke told the government ministers.

Citing Fryshuset's founder Anders Carlberg, she also challenged the politicians: "Don't punish us, astonish us."

### "Everyone was there"

Sweden's Minister for Employment, Hillevi Engström, was the conference host. 'More Youth in Work' was organised as part of Sweden's Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The huge number of participants, not least top politicians, was proof of the great interest in this issue. All the Nordic prime ministers took part, as well as all the labour ministers

with the exception of Iceland, where a new government was just being formed. There were also representatives from Greenland, the Faeroes and Åland.

Hillevi Engström used her opening speech to point out how unique it was that politicians, social partners and organisations from across the Nordic region were gathered to discuss youth unemployment. The situation varies between the Nordic countries, with Norway enjoying low unemployment also among young people, while Sweden and Finland have many young unemployed.

"We are facing a considerable challenge, and for many youths the road back [to employment] is long and winding. But we have much in common in the Nordic region and can meet the challenges side by side," said Hillevi Engström.

### **A priority**

Youth unemployment is without doubt a priority for the Nordic countries.

"All unemployment is bad and youth unemployment is wrong," said Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg.

Helle Thorning-Schmidt, the Danish Prime Minister, talked about the importance of preventing another lost generation.

This happened in Denmark during the 1980s, which she experienced growing up herself. Many of her contemporaries who didn't find work then are now living on early retirement.

Helle Thorning-Schmidt underlined the importance of not getting stuck on benefits but get into paid work. Those who can, must work, and those who can't must be given help.

### **Globalisation and technological advance**

"Getting youths into work is one of the most important tasks facing us. Everyone, regardless of background, should have the chance to take part in society. Yet this is our sore point and we know that we ought to be doing more," she said.

Sweden's Minister for Finance Anders Borg provided a macro perspective on the development which has made it particularly difficult for many young people to get into the labour market. We are living through tough times, he said. The crisis is testing for the labour market and there is a risk that unemployment takes root. Then there is globalisation and technological progress which means the labour market is also facing structural changes. Fewer people do more and this puts pressure on people with lower education in particular.

Anders Borg highlighted four main focus areas for getting young people into work: education, the transition from education to work, creating demand for those with the weakest position in the labour market as well as the matching of unemployed people to vacant positions.

"It is important to discuss our problems and to have the courage to face them. The key to the Nordic countries' progress is to manage these changes. The social partners are our strength, but we must use them actively. It is also important to underline that there is no single solution to this," said Anders Borg.

Many of the participating politicians also suggested it was important to start with the individual. There are no standard concepts, so there is a need to find solutions which inspire the individual and fits him or her. More jobs must also be created.

### **Start in schools**

Education was time and again described as the single most important issue. "No one in our time has ever learned enough" said Helle Thorning-Schmidt.

Finland is often praised for its good education, and the Finnish Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen honoured the teachers for that.

"Our strength is our teacher training. It is of high quality and teachers learn new ways of teaching. There is also increasingly a better link between schools and businesses," said Jyrki Katainen.

The labour ministers laid out what each country does for its young unemployed and also talked about the group which represents the greatest worry - so-called NEETs (neither in education, employment or training). Norway's Minister of Labour Anniken Huitfeldt talked about a follow-up service for school drop-outs. Sweden has a similar scheme.

"Earlier, it was possible for those with no education to find work, but today skills are needed across the Nordic labour market. If you don't know how to write, you are in a very weak position. That is the most important issue and we are focusing on it," she said.

### **Also hope**

During the day there was also time to look at the good examples and to express hope for the future. After all, many young people are unemployed for shorter periods of time only. The most optimistic noise came from Åland, where there are many nationalities and many jobs.

"Move to Åland! We have plenty of jobs," said Åland's Minister for Trade and Industry Fredrik Karlström.





Karen Bøhle Aarhus from Norwegian JobbX tells Swedish Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt and his Danish colleague Helle Thorning-Schmidt how Fardin Abdullah (on the right) went from having no job to having four - or was it five?

## Youth Employment Forum showcasing the good Nordic examples

“A murderer can become a fantastic worker. He has been in prison, thinking. Employers who dare hire a former criminal get very loyal workers,” says Nanna Ravn Hansen, a consultant at High:five.

THEME

23.05.2013

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

The Danish project was one of 26 good examples of youth unemployment-reducing measures presented during the Youth Employment Forum at Stockholm's Fryshuset on 16 May.

High:five works with under 30s who are at high risk of entering a life of crime or who are about to be released from prison.

“We get to know the youths so well. Every one is subject to a personal review and we guarantee that they are free from

drugs. We have found work for 900 people since we started in 2006. 80 percent of those we've helped since 2010 are still in steady work," says Nanna Ravn Hansen.



*Nanna Ravn Hansen works for High:five.*

Not all organisations work with equally demanding tasks. Sometimes all it takes is just a little push in the right direction. Norwegian JobbX is a voluntary organisation working with 16-26 year olds and especially with minorities.

"We try to get in touch with the youths even before they become unemployed. We offer intensive courses of 3 x 3 hours to help them map their own motivation and skills; we train them in interview situations and help them write CVs," says Karen Bøhle Aarhus.

### **The wrong end of the stick**

This sounds like something a job centre would do, but the difference is that help comes at a very early stage.

"I started with the wrong end of the stick. When I was looking for work, I started by writing 'Hi, I am an 18 year old guy', instead of describing what it is that I can do," says Fardin Abdullah, who arrived in Norway from Afghanistan four years ago.

After thinking about it for a while, he introduced himself as someone who masters five languages – Persian, Norwegian, English, Urdu and Pashto.

"Now I've got four jobs. I choose a job rather than waiting for a job to choose me. I now work for the Oslo amusement park Tusenfyrd, two hotels and the temping agency Adecco alongside finishing my degree."

"And you're running courses for us at JobbX," says Karen Bøhle Aarhus, who we met shortly after Swedish Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt and his Danish colleague Helle Thorning-Schmidt had visited their stand.

### **"With a job you can think about the future"**

Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg visited Swedbank's stand, where he met Natalia Tozlovaku from Moldova and Anna Szymik from Poland. They have both managed the difficult transition of learning a new language and finding a job, thanks to the bank's internship programme.



*Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg chatting with Natalia Tozlovaku from Moldova and Anna Szymik from Poland.*

"The best thing about having a job is that you can find a place to live and you can travel. You can start thinking about the future, about having children," says Natalia Tozlovaku.

"I feel safe and you get money," says Anna Szymik, who was asked by Jens Stoltenberg why she chose to move to Sweden and not Norway.

"It's love," she said.

"Yes, that is a very good reason," said Jens Stoltenberg, who also got to hear about a project in his own country, where the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service (NAV) uses culture to boost self confidence among young people who struggle to settle in school and who cannot find work.

### **Culture makes youths thrive**

The project is called 'We just do it', and is aimed at NEETs (youths neither in education, employment or training). This group is most at risk from ending up in long term unemployment.

The project is run by NAV in the Midtre Namdal region in the middle of Norway.

"We started the project because we wanted to get better at reaching young people. We use culture as a meaningful activity which can get youths to thrive. We use theatre performances, music or looking after cultural heritage as tools. The mentors represent the most important part of the project. Each youth get his or her own mentor who can give them at-

tention and encouragement,” says Øyvind Rasmussen from NAV Midtre Namdal.

Some of the many other projects participating at the forum were Finland’s Sanssi card - which proves that employers have the right to have some of the young person’s salary covered by the state, Iceland’s Fjölsmidjan - a youth employment service offering their own car garage, computer department, domestic science department and joinery, and the Volvosteget – which is working to safeguard the long term skills development for the Volvo group.





Sweden's Minister for Finance Anders Borg opening the research conference on youth unemployment. Yet researchers are better at identifying what doesn't work than finding clear answers to what needs to be done

## Researchers: blunt measures against youth unemployment

It is difficult to find political measures which actually do get more young people into work. Sweden's dramatical reduction in employer contributions for youths in 2007 and 2009 has led to few new jobs.

THEME

23.05.2013

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

"Reducing the employer contribution is an expensive way of improving the chances for young people to find jobs," says Per Skedinger at the Swedish Research Institute of Industrial Economics.

A range of Nordic researchers presented the results of their research projects on youth unemployment at the 15-16 May Nordic conference on youth unemployment in Stockholm.

The host was the Nordic Economic Policy Review, NEPR, which will also be the publication carrying the research articles.

The negative effects of youth unemployment are well known. Several British studies show that youth who become unemployed face a weaker wage development for the rest of their

working lives compared to youths who have never been unemployed.

### **Norwegian youths in danger too**

Øivind A Nielsen and Kathrine Holm Reiso at the Norwegian School of Economics have also looked into the increasing risk of becoming unemployed later in life if you have been unemployed earlier.

They looked at all Norwegian youths aged 15-24 and concluded the men faced a 30 percentage point higher risk of becoming unemployed again one year after initial unemployment, compared with those who never were unemployed in the first place. The risk then falls to five percentage points after five years since the initial unemployment. For women the graph looked the same, although the numbers were somewhat lower.

Yet while researchers agree on the dangers youth unemployment present, there is no clear advice on which measures will help fight it. It sometimes comes down to factors beyond political control, like the youths' parents and social contacts.

Employers aren't first and foremost looking for subsidies when they decide whether or not to hire a young person. Informal information is as important. When an employer is considering whether to hire a youth who has not had a steady job before, the informal contacts are more important than later in life, when work experience and references from previous workplaces provides better background information.

### **Important networks**

Lena Hensvik and Oskar Nordström Skans at Sweden's Institute for Evaluation of Labour Market and Education Policy, IFAU, have gone through literature detailing the importance of networks when it comes to young people's chance of getting their first job. They have also done a registry study of youths who have attended vocational training as part of their higher secondary education. Half of Swedish youths take this kind of training, which differs from purely academic education by tailoring the course to fit specific occupations. Compared to Denmark, apprenticeships aren't particularly common, but five weeks a year are put aside to attend workplace training.

Earlier research shows a third of young people found their first job because of their social network, one third through applying for jobs and one third through formal channels like job centres.

An earlier study by Oskar Nordström Skans has shown that



parents' influence is important and that girls often follow their mothers' choice of work and the boys do like their fathers.

Eight percent of boys follow in their fathers' footsteps, and 5.5 percent of girls choose their mothers' line of work.

### **Summer jobs important**

A new study looking at 39,000 19 year olds who had finished higher secondary vocational education shows that summer and part time jobs - and the social contacts resulting from these - improve the youths' chances of finding a permanent job five months after graduating.

31 percent of those who did not have a summer or part time job found a permanent job, rising to 38 percent for those who did have experience of working.

So how can this information be used to help creating policies for reduced youth unemployment? Politicians have no influence over who the youths' parents are, but helping them find summer and part time jobs is important. People have a 35 percent better chance of getting a job in a workplace where they have previously held a summer job.

### **Fear of mis-hiring**

According to Lena Hensvik and Oskar Nordström the fear of mis-hiring could explain why employers don't make full use of the subsidies which are available in Sweden for hiring young people.

Per Skedinger at the Research Institute of Industrial Economics has looked at the effects of tax rebates linked to hiring youths. His conclusion is that this is an expensive way of reducing youth unemployment.



as a result of increased pressure, which can lead to an even longer path back to employment.”

The Swedish government introduced cuts in employer contributions for hiring people aged 19-25 in 2007 and 2009. The first time it was cut by 11.1 percentage points from 32.42 percent to 21.32 percent, beginning 1 July 2007. From January 2009 a further cut brought it down to 15.52 percent.

Previous studies show there is a considerable risk that subsidies will cause wages to increase in the long run and that the effect on employment is lost as a result. The employer could also write off the reduced employer contribution as a bonus by not hiring more young people.

Per Skedinger has studied the retail sector, an important employer of young people. His conclusion is that few new jobs have been created there as a result of lower employer contributions.

### **Intensive measures lead to more sick leave**

Jonas Maibom Pedersen, Michael Rosholm and Michael Svarer from Aarhus University have been looking at whether labour market measures can reduce youth unemployment from a Danish perspective. They conclude that the more aggressive labour market measures introduced in the wake of the 2008 finance crisis might have resulted in fewer young people in work - but that this has been a desired result because it means people took further education instead.

Denmark's labour market policies are often presented as 'flexicurity', which means it is easier for employers to fire workers while unemployment benefits remain high and many labour market measures are in place to help people find new jobs.

The three Danish researchers studied a group of people who had been offered intensified labour market measures like more meetings with job centre staff and more activation. The dilemma, however, turned out to be that the positive effect of young people studying for longer was equalled out by the negative effect from the intensified measures, which led to more unemployed youths claiming sickness benefit "perhaps in an attempt to get away from the intensified treatment, or

# Denmark: More focus on job rotation

Job rotation is a golden egg which gets people into employment and improves the skills of permanent staff, according to the Danish government. The social partners agree. But it takes time to get businesses to use the scheme.

THEME

23.05.2013

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

Job rotation is a central element to the Social Democrat-led Danish government's fight against unemployment. Experience has shown it to be one of the most effective tools for securing work experience for unemployed and newly educated people, and job rotation is highly praised by trade unions, job centres and experts alike.

One of the latter is Henning Jørgensen, Professor at the Centre for Labour Market Research, CARMA, at Aalborg University:

"Job rotation is a splendid instrument which targets young and old and kills two birds with one stone. It combines the efforts to get people employed with efforts to increase employment," says Henning Jørgensen.

## **Paid temp**

Job rotation allows a business to send its workers on courses for skills development while taking on someone without a job to cover for them. That person is provided by the local job centre, which will also cover some of the cost. As a result there are few or no real costs to employers when they send workers on courses and get a temp to cover. Job rotation has also proven to be one of the most effective measures to get unemployed people back into the labour market.

"There is real evidence that job rotation works. It is a Danish invention which was being used a lot in the 1990s, when the rest of the Nordic region and the EU was inspired by our actions. We unfortunately almost allowed the system to be forgotten, even though it proved to be very effective," the Professor says.

He is happy that job rotation is again becoming a political priority, and would like to see a more systematic gathering of evidence of how effective job rotation can be. The only recent major research was done by the Nordjylland employment region in 2012, which turned out some impressive results: more than six in ten long term unemployed people became self sufficient after taking part in job rotation.

## **Tricky start**

The government has granted several hundred million kroner to job rotation schemes several times in recent years. In May of this year the Danish parliament granted an extra 120 million kroner (€16m) to job rotation work. More than 300 million kroner (€40m) has been set aside for job rotation in later years' budgets, in the emergency package and the youth package.

Despite all the economic support, businesses have been slower than expected to adopt the job rotation scheme. Private companies are particularly cautious. Some fear too much red tape.

Henning Jørgensen says the scheme is a slow starter also because businesses have been making cuts to further training during the crisis, and many job centres have had very little contact with businesses.

"Municipal job centres have had next to no contact with businesses in later years, and that is a major problem. Job rotation is dependent on close cooperation between a business and the job centre in order to find unemployed people with the right skills to fit in as job rotation temps."

The Professor is happy that the Minister for Employment, Mette Frederiksen, has launched a thorough investigation of job centres and told them to spend more time cooperating with businesses.





Maya and Jakob have taken part in Merit, where Tahir Yawuz is a shop manager and coach, while Jennie Bergsten is the project leader

## "Thank goodness – I'm a Svensson"

Youth unemployment is a priority for Stockholm Municipality. Considerable work is being done within the city and between the city and other authorities, in order to get young people off benefits and into work or education. Two projects show that strong support on an individual level can be a recipe for success.

THEME

23.05.2013

TEXT AND PHOTO: GUNHILD WALLIN

"I am 24, a mother of three and I will never again live on benefits. Filur helped me realise that I am unique," says Nadja.

The audience applauds. Nadja is on a podium together with seven other youths.



What they all have in common is that they are young, used to be unemployed and used to be pretty far from working life or school - some of them very, very far. But that was then, and



their stories of change is the reason for this audience's enthusiastic applause. It is mid May, the venue is a large conference hall at Hilton Hotel in central Stockholm and the mood is almost like during an exam.

Today they are presenting two Stockholm based projects called Filur and Merit and their work with unemployed youth. Both are financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) and Stockholm municipality, and have for several years worked with young unemployed people with weak links to the labour market. Today both efforts and results are being presented.

### **Starting with the individual**

Unemployed youths are often lumped together as one group. Together they make up a number which in Sweden and in the rest of Europe is so high that it is a source of great unease among politicians on all levels. There is even talk about a lost generation.

Perhaps that is why these young people's stories about change are received so enthusiastically by the audience here today. They give hope and show that things can work out. They also demonstrate the importance of what is the very core of these two projects: to start working with what the individual person wants to do, to find the driving force in each person and use this to create structures which give them the possibility to move on into work or education.

Meder (26) from Vårby gård south-west of Stockholm is another one of those who have managed to change their lives despite all odds. He makes the audience laugh with his humorous way of talking about his problematic background - including his so-called "involuntary holidays" in an institution. He was unemployed for ten years after dropping out from upper secondary school. One day he took a look in the mirror and decided he could do better. Being "the man of the house" he had to shape up - for his mother's sake. He frequented what is known as Jobbtorg (Job market) Stockholm, but only to claim his benefit.

When he heard about the Filur and Merit projects he thought they sounded dodgy - a bit like returning to upper secondary school. But in reality they proved to be different. At Filur he got to discuss ethics and morals and learned how to see himself and his role in the group. He says he learned to be strong and realised that he was not a rejected person despite his past. Today he works as a temp helping people with psychiatric problems become self sufficient. His old mates accept his new life and call him doctor Meder.

"Today, thank goodness, I am a Svensson [Joe Blogs, an average Swede]. It's the best thing ever. I get up, drink coffee and go to work. I was given an opportunity," he says.

### **Work equals self esteem**

The eight youths' stories describe completely changed lives. They are stories about the importance of work and the feeling

of regaining control over your life and economy - things which are very important to your self esteem. And it has all happened through the Filur and Merit projects, which both grew out of Jobbtorg Stockholm. Jobbtorg operates out of six venues and aims to get people off benefits and into work. But for many the move from passive unemployment to the available activities or jobs was too hard. The projects have been focusing on finding a way to ease the transition from benefits to self sufficiency or studies.

Filur's target group is the young people who have struggled the most trying to enter the labour market. The programme spends the first eight weeks focusing on strengthening the participating youths' self esteem, while also helping them understand their own role within a group. The groups work together, but consist of around 15 people who have started the programme one month apart. Several participants talk about how the group has been almost like getting a new family.

The idea has been to make the youths more self aware, give them more self esteem to prepare them for the labour market. They have been taught how to dare to accept the labour market measures which are out there. After the initial eight weeks, the youths are given four weeks practical work with the support from a coach and supervisor.

Nadja says she was sceptical in the beginning. She is one of the project participants who for a long time had very weak links to the labour market, hardly any at all in fact. She had not had a job since 2007, but attended Jobbtorg to draw her benefits with little enthusiasm between her periods of parental leave. The Filur project did not tempt her at all.

### **The best eight weeks of her life**

"I was so negative in the beginning and could not separate the authorities I met in order to get my benefit and the support I got through Filur. I was stuck in the system, bitter and constantly broke. I thought I knew everything about myself, but little by little I learned that I can be a positive person and that I can get a job by simply being myself," says Nadja.

Today she is a support teacher in a primary school and has decided to study to become a remedial teacher. She is saving money and believes in the future. She describes the first eight weeks of the project as the best ones of her life, which brings tears to the eyes of project leader Helen Starkman, who is listening in. Time and again during the conference it becomes clear that one of the things which drives this forward is the strong commitment of those who work on the projects or with other labour market measures.

"Our approach within the groups has been to work within a jointly agreed framework and to support each other," says Helen Starkman.

At the end of each week as the participants have evaluated what the past days has given them, they have underlined the

importance of being given the tools to take one step further on their own.

"The soft skills - social competence, improved self esteem - are important," says Helen Starkman.

The Merit programme has taken a different approach. It began in 2010 and was due to finish in July 2013, but has been extended to run until 2014. It targets unemployed 16-29 year olds who are not quite as far away from the labour market as the young people targeted by Filur. Yet they still need extra support to be able to take advantage of the labour market measures which do exist. The project participants spend one to two weeks with preparatory training, led by coaches. They are then offered different measures like work introduction, work courses, apprenticeship training or training aimed at land and building maintenance or caretaker work. The coaches are ready to provide support during the entire project period. This has all happened in partnership with companies like the ICA school, the Swedish Employment Service and housing association Svenska Bostäder.

### **Individually tailored activities**

"What makes Merit and Filur unique is the way in which we work with the individuals' personal development, the opportunities to work in groups and the job evaluation. We also tailor our work to the individual's possibilities as we go along, and offer the participants increased support through coaching as long as they are part of the project and as long as they need it," says Jennie Bergsten.

For Maya (23), from Spånga north-west of Stockholm, Merit became a way forward. She had been unemployed for seven or eight months and had tried to find jobs herself. But she felt she never managed to highlight her own skills. With help from the coach she concluded that she needed to take a commerce course, and even though she had attended a commerce school she did get many new and more practical skills. She now works part time for a supermarket chain and part time in a kiosk, while planning to study economics.

"Being unemployed is not a good life. Through work I have got my life back and I feel that I am part of a chain which also means something to other people," says Maya.

Most of the young people who have attended the projects do well. Since the beginning in 2010 more than 400 youths have been full-time participants at Filur. A January 2013 survey showed 78.5 percent of those who attended the project's first two and a half years are now self sufficient. Among the more than 390 Merit participants who joined in 2012, 58 percent were self sufficient 90 days after the end of the programme. The results have improved while the projects have been running as the methods have improved. The idea now is to incorporate the projects' methods into Jobbtorg Stockholm's ordinary operations.

# How hard can it be?

Businesses in the Swedish region of Södra Småland coined the phrase 'How hard can it be?' one year ago, when they initiated a meeting to address youth unemployment in the region. It was part corporate social responsibility and part a drive to attract more skills.

THEME

22.05.2013

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN

"Being good neighbours we depend on each other. It is good for neighbours to have jobs and for businesses to attract skills," says Stefan Hörberg, Managing Director at one of the companies taking part in the 'How hard can it be?' project - HP Tronic.

One year has passed since Södra Småland's businesses decided to get together and discuss what they could do to help the region's unemployed youths while looking after their own needs to attract skills. 50 businesses gathered and talked about the situation for young people and about who was responsible for getting more young people into work. The Public Employment Service were also present at the meeting to talk about what resources it could offer.

The meeting identified concrete goals. They would create a model to help young unemployed people find work. The participants also calculated how much businesses would have to contribute, and found this would not necessarily be very much. The aim was to give 800 unemployed youths across eight municipalities the chance to get into working life as trainees or apprentices, which would mean only two percent of the region's businesses needed to get involved.

Creating arenas for cooperation has been another important part of the work. 'How hard can it be?' has for instance become part of TvärdräG, a cross-regional project where businesses and the public sector cooperate to showcase the region and attract skills. Future Kronoberg, a project aimed at helping unemployed 16-29 year olds find work and increase their skills, is also on board.

"One important goal was to gather the existing resources and this has now resulted in what we call the apprentice package. This helps the communication between businesses and the young job seekers, but also between businesses and the Public Employment Service," says Karin Palmér, project leader at TvärdräG which encompasses the project 'How hard can it be?'.

## Continuing support

The apprentice package means the unemployed youth gets a four week introduction during which his or her situation will be mapped. The job seeker will then be matched with an employer with a resulting one to three month long internship which includes training. After that, the employment service will help pay for six months of employment. A coach will support the youth for the duration. HP Tronic in Ljungby jumped at this chance and accepted ten apprentices. The company, which manufactures industrial electrical systems, employs 125 people. They are also operating in China.

"We became interested because of the focus on helping young unemployed people and because of the whole package with coaches from the employment service and good contacts with the service," says Stefan Hörberg, HP Tronic's Managing Director.

He praises the support the young people have received from the employment service and the fact that the service has covered much of the costs associated with training the youths. HP Tronic has been responsible for the coaching and has also brought in a 70 year old worker who has acted as a role model for the young, showing them how life in the workplace works both on the production side and socially - for instance the importance of coming into work on time.

"An employer must be aware that taking on apprentices takes a lot of time. At the same time you see, hear and feel what the job means to them," says Stefan Hörberg.

HP Tronic also work with young people in the longer term. It is a mentor company for a group of year 7s (13-14 year olds) who are following the company, and the company is following them. This is all part of a larger project and the idea is to make young people aware at an early stage of what jobs exist locally, and to give them the chance to get the kind of education which allows them to stay locally.

### **More social responsibility**

Karin Palmér at TväråG is very happy that businesses have taken the initiative to tackle youth unemployment. After one year many more young unemployed have entered into internships or jobs.

“We see how businesses now take more responsibility to make the region attractive, and the work with the young unemployed is both a result of wanting to increase their skills base and a desire to show more social responsibility,” she says.

She adds that it has been important for businesses to engage and talk about how they want things to work, and that they for instance have underlined the importance of uniform and clear systems with permanent contacts at the employment service.

“If businesses don’t engage, it is very hard to drum up a feeling of joint responsibility for the young unemployed,” says Karin Palmér.

And the businesses’ engagement has inspired others. Recently a press release arrived from Ljungby municipality, which challenged local businesses by promising to hire as many unemployed youths on a municipal level as the businesses together could manage.



Bjarne Brøndbo is proud to be allowed to help getting a young person back on track

## Bjarne Brøndbo, the employer who didn't say no after the first attempt

He stood there with his cigaret behind his ear, asking: Bjarne, where can I smoke? “That was the first thing he said to me,” says employer Bjarne Brøndbo. After a few hours he was ready to give up on the school dropout. He called the Labour and Welfare Service (NAV) and said he didn't think it would work. Give him one more chance, said Randi Nyheim Aglen from the youth team. That was the beginning of a good story. What happened?

PORTRAIT

22.05.2013

TEXT: BERIT KVAM, PHOTO: MARTIN HÅGENSEN

Bjarne Brøndbo, entrepreneur and head of car breakers and online car spares company Bil1Din.no gave the 17 year old one more week. He took him into his office and told him:

“I understand that you have no work experience. If you are to stay here I expect things from you. Let's start with two things: you will be in work every day. The working day starts at eight in the morning. You must be here a little bit before so you are

ready to start work at eight o'clock sharp, and you will work until four o'clock. And second: you will not have your hands in your pockets. These are your tasks for the first week. If you manage that we have come very far.”

That was the clear message from the employer, but the ten workers at the small car spares company had to back the move.



“Thanks to my not particularly sceptical workers who were willing to try this, he stayed with us for a while,” says Bjarne Brøndbo.

### **Responsibility gave results**

He tells us about a working environment which created a good framework for an insecure youth. They took time to talk to him, showed him trust and gave him responsibilities he could handle. Brøndbo's wife, Lise Greftegreff, provided important support and safety for the boy. This gave results.

“Simply put, the boy was taken seriously. He was given the exact same opportunities as the others. He was given responsibilities he could handle. I didn't expect different things from him than from any of my other employees.

“So he very quickly understood that ‘wow, here's someone who believes that I can do something. Here we have someone who is willing to give me responsibility without breathing down my neck’. And we did random tests.”

After a few months both the employer and the boy met the follow-up team. In Norway all under 25s who are not in work or education must be offered a tailored activity or training, and all under 21s should be offered the chance to finish their upper secondary education. A follow-up team is responsible for making this happen.

So at one stage during the internship at Bil1Din all the parties were invited to a meeting: an advisor from the county council, a contact from the upper secondary school, and a person from NAV together with employer Bjarne Brøndbo and the boy himself. Since the boy had twice dropped out of school, the follow-up team suggested a possible apprenticeship. But Bjarne Brøndbo, who by now knew the boy, had a different idea:

“I had discovered that the boy had changed completely after being with us, and I felt he had what it takes to manage what he wanted if he could be bothered. If the boy wanted to be a car mechanic, as he had suggested, a training practice certificate would not have been a good idea. My advice was therefore that if you want to become a car mechanic, you must finish your education and get a trade certificate. In the end the boy listened to someone he trusted, and that was me, so he said: OK, I go back to the car mechanic course at college again,” says Bjarne Brøndbo.

### **Well-known musician**

He is not your average employer. As the lead singer in the rock band D.D.E. he is used to dealing with people. This has helped him now, he tells the Nordic Labour Journal:

“I am no jobs-worthy. I am better with people when I can use the skills I have gained over many years and through meeting a lot of people. So there is no teaching manual which I have learned from. This must be a win-win situation. We didn't

pay the boy, for starters. He got his salary through NAV, and that's the way it has to be.

“We are also part of a project called ‘Ringer i vannet’ [Ripples in water], together with the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise and NAV, which aims to bring people back into working life. It could be a 50 year old who has worked for 30 years in the same company which suddenly goes bust, and who therefore has great difficulties getting back into working life.

“Next week we meet someone who might be starting work with us. It's a win-win situation: we get good people, are allowed cheap labour for a while and we can recruit clever people after a trial period.

“We have had people on wage subsidy schemes for a while before giving them a permanent job, for instance one guy who is a trained car mechanic and who needed an internship. He had been off sick for eight months around the same time as he got his car mechanic certificate. He got a space with us and got a permanent job after two and a half months. He is a fantastic worker.

*What would you say to other employers who wonder whether this is something for them?*

“I believe our kind of business is ideal; a car breakers. We need people to do everything from tasks where no previous skills are needed to more demanding operations. We have routine jobs which are repeated every day, every week, we have a sales department where you just sit at a PC. We can have a worker in a wheelchair. There are no limits.”

### **Flexible on absence**

“What we have done, and I need to include my wife in this, is to simply be very clear that all our employees are very important to us. They're important for the shop to make a profit and important for us to manage to deliver what the customer expects. We eat a hot meal together every Friday. Today I'm cooking for everyone at 12.30 and everyone will be there. We are very flexible when it comes to absence from work. We don't keep a tally even if people are gone for a couple of hours, but we expect them to catch up somehow - although we don't monitor whether they do. With only ten workers it is a bit more manageable than if we were a hundred. We are off to Gdansk on a company trip for two days. We have put together a simple professional programme where we'll discuss how to better organise our work.”

*What's your advice to others running similar businesses?*

“Take everyone seriously, listen and give advice. I also think it is crucial that the employer is open and doesn't exploit the situation by thinking ‘let's get an apprentice in to do all the dirty work for us’. Me and my wife Lise are proud that we've been able to help a boy who was struggling. You can call it idealism, even though we are also running a business. If you

stop thinking about making as much money as possible, it is incredibly nice to be able to help one or more people get a good life, regain their self respect and a good social position that they are happy with.”

So what happened? The school drop-out is back in school and Bjarne Brøndbo still keeps in touch:

“Yes, I am a helping him out with his russe car [school leavers’ party vehicle]. Today he is a total star when he gets together with his gang, he’s a pal of THE Bjarne Brøndbo and gets his car parts for free.”

# Avoiding change-induced stress in the workplace

Changes are common in Nordic workplaces, and the social partners in Denmark are now joining forces to prevent this from causing stress.

NEWS

22.05.2013

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

Restructuring, mergers and other changes are necessary for the survival of companies and their workers - especially in the Nordic region where major changes happen very often. Now a new Danish campaign aims to prevent such changes from damaging the psychological working environment, causing stress.

The campaign 'A good psychological working environment in the face of workplace changes' has been launched by the social partners, including employers and trade unions plus the Danish Working Environment Authority and the National Research Centre for the Working Environment.

## **22 recommendations**

The campaign is based on 22 recommendations for how workplaces can maintain good psychological working environments during times of change. Studies show that changes impact on workers' psycho-social working environment and wellbeing both before, during and after the actual change. Changes can be positive for workers and leadership alike, but they can also put pressure on the workplace and the psychological working environment.

The campaign says good processes of change mean a company must

- Be ahead of the changes
- Involve workers
- Have good communication for the duration of the changing process
- Support the process of change and develop necessary skills

## **Much change in the Nordic region**

Nordic workers are often required to face major changes at work. According to a 2012 Eurofound report, more than half of all Danish, Swedish and Finnish workers have experienced major changes at work in the past four years.

Changes at work and the insecurity which follows is among the most common causes of work-related stress in Denmark. Three in four Danish workers say reorganisation and job insecurity represent the most common causes of stress. This is a slightly higher figure than the European average. The figures are from a new survey from the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work.

The data has been collated from 31 countries and shows that Danish workers are also among those who experience the least stress. 38 percent of Danish workers say work-related stress is very or pretty much common. In Norway and Sweden more than 50 percent of workers say stress is very or pretty much common.

## **Measures against psychological stress**

The campaign for a good psychological working environment in the face of changes is the result of a political agreement to reduce by 20 percent the amount of workers suffering from psychological stress by 2020. The Danish parliament agreed to this in 2011 as part of a new strategy on working environment measures leading up to 2020.

In order to reach that goal the Danish Working Environment Authority and the social partners were asked to identify methods for identifying and rectifying problems in the psychological working environment. This has resulted in a set of recommendations for inclusion in the workplace and a set of recommendations for how to handle the psychological working environment before, during and after the changes. These recommendations are gathered in the document 'A good psychological working environment - when changes happen in the workplace', and will be debated during a conference on 23 May this year.



Newly appointed Prime minister Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson gets the key to his office from predecessor Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir

## New government in Iceland

Iceland has a new government. It has announced a stop to EU membership negotiations to allow time to decide whether negotiations will continue at all. It is still unclear when a referendum on EU membership will take place.

### NEWS

22.05.2013

TEXT: GUÐRÚN HELGA SIGURÐARDÓTTIR, PHOTO: FOTO: FORSÆTISRÁÐUNEYTIÐ

The Progressive Party (Framsóknarflokkurinn) and the centre-right Independence Party (Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn) have formed a coalition government in Iceland. The Progressive Party leader Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson is Iceland's new Prime Minister.

The country has broken off EU membership negotiations. The government will evaluate the negotiations which have

taken place so far as well as recent developments within the EU. The evaluation will be presented to parliament and the Icelandic people. Negotiations will continue only if the Icelandic people back a membership application in a referendum.

Prime Minister Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson says the opposition to the EU is not surprising to anyone who is familiar

with Icelandic politics. He says opposition has increased lately within both the coalition parties.

“The parties have agreed to hold a referendum on the EU membership negotiations within the next four years,” says Prime Minister Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson.

“We have yet to decided the exact date,” he says.

The new government promises to improve the economic situation for Iceland’s families. Mortgages are index-linked and interests rose sharply with inflation between 2007 and 2010. As a result living standards fell for many families. The government now wants to address that problem, mainly by reducing the amount people are allowed to borrow and by lowering income and business taxes.

The government is also promising to use the opportunities created by the closure of the proof of claim proceedings after the bankruptcy of Iceland’s private banks, to improve the economy of families. The Króna remains Iceland’s currency.

Iceland’s government uses Norway as a model. Iceland is establishing a state owned oil company to extract any oil or gas found within Iceland’s borders. Prime Minister Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson says they are following the Norwegian model.

“We would like to learn from Norway,” says Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson.

Iceland will also establish an information centre for fisheries according to a Norwegian model, to promote fisheries and fish as a food source. Iceland’s new fishing tax will be revised.

The government wants Iceland to play a leading role in the North Atlantic region, and lead the western Nordic cooperation.