



Off the Streets and into Work

# London Day Centres Study Visit to the Kofoed's Skole, Copenhagen

## Visit Report

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Sponsored by the London Housing Foundation



## **Introduction**

In June 2005, OSW and three leading day centres in London made an exploratory visit to the Kofoed's Skole (KS) in Copenhagen, Denmark. The visit, attended by senior staff from OSW, The Passage, New Horizon Youth Centre and St Giles Trust was funded through a bursary from the London Housing Foundation. A list of delegates can be found in Annex 1 and further information about each of the participating agencies appears in Annex 2 of this report.

This report draws together the key findings of the visit, the lessons learnt and identifies the potential for replicating aspects of the KS methodology within the London day centre environment.

## **Background and Context**

Day centres in London provide a varying level, range and quality of training and employment services to the homeless target group. Where they are provided, they are often seen as an 'add-on' rather than a core aspect of how they support service users. Coupled with a harsh outcome-focused funding climate, there is a compelling case for modernising day centres to provide relevant, client-focused services that provide vital stepping stones towards independent and sustainable living.

In 2004, the ALG and ODPM commissioned a review into day centre services for single homeless people in London. The study found that although many day centres had now moved to a more interventionist approach, more change is needed if services are to help homeless people move on rather than building a culture of service dependence. This transition is challenged by the fact that most day centres predicted a decrease in income in the next financial year. As the report states, in total, day centres reported that they expected lower levels of statutory income in 2004/05 (9% less than 2003/04). Despite the growth in services provided by day centres, income from other parts of the statutory sector (Supporting People, Health, Employment) is still only a small proportion of the total income for day centres (*ALG Day Centres Research Project, Resource Information Service, March 2004*).

There is a difficult climate for funding and planning services generally within the voluntary and community sector, with the view by some that the service delivery agenda is increasingly being set by statutory funders rather than service providers and service users.

## **Aim of the Visit**

The primary aim of the visit was to provide an opportunity for each participating agency to strengthen its strategic perspective by examining an alternative model of delivery and examples of good practice in day centre provision. An associated aim was to provide a mechanism through which the

main findings and lessons for future service design could be shared more widely amongst practitioners. This report is a key element of delivering that aim.

## Overview

In June 2005, OSW received a sum of £4,000 through the London Housing Foundation Bursary Scheme to fund the cost of a visit for seven delegates to the Kofoed's Skole in Copenhagen. The main outputs, as identified in the partnership proposal, can be summarised as follows:

1. Visit by seven senior staff in June 2005;
2. A report on the main findings and lessons learned from the visit;
3. A report from each participating agency following a review of services in light of the lessons learnt;
4. A dissemination seminar/conference to senior day centre staff;
5. A possible bid to the EU Leonardo da Vinci programme to fund a wider exchange of best practice across Europe.

The visit was conducted over two and a half days on the 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of June 2005. The following programme summarises the main elements of the visit:

### Tuesday 14 June

- 9.25 Depart London
- 13.15 Arrive Copenhagen
- 15.00 General introduction to the Kofoed's Skole by Ole Meldgaard, Director
- 16.00 Depart school for overnight stay

### Wednesday 15 June

- 08.00 Visit to Kofoed's Cellar in central Copenhagen. The Cellar is a drop-in day centre facility offering food, clothing, showers, a laundry and access to computers for email and internet use.
- 09.00 Visit to the Kofoed's Skole's youth hostel at the school's main site in Nyrnberggade.
- 10.00 Visit to the school's Forward project for recovering drug addicts.
- 12.00 Lunch
- 13.00 Visit to the school's Greenlandic section, a division of the Kofoed's Skole offering traditional crafts and design workshops for people of Greenlandic origin.
- 14.00 Visit to the school's Educational Department, offering a wide range of vocational and academic courses.
- 15.00 Visit to the school's English Class, offering basic English language lessons for Danish and foreign students.
- 16.00 Depart school for overnight stay

## Thursday 16 June

- 08.00 Visit to the school's Production Workshop, a social enterprise assembling electrical components and semi-manufactured products through small local commercial contracts.
- 09.00 Visit to the school's Print Workshop, also operating through small local commercial contracts.
- 10.00 Meeting with the school's Social Counsellors to discuss student needs and social factors.
- 11.00 Walking tour of the school's other workshops and facilities.
- 12.00 Lunch
- 13.00 Meeting with Ole Meldgaard to discuss a general overview of the visit.
- 14.00 Depart Kofoed's Skole for airport and return to London

Further information about the Kofoed's Skole and its services is outlined below.

### The Kofoed's Skole (KS), Copenhagen

Founded in 1928, KS is a self-governing body that operates a pedagogic model to address problems associated with long-term unemployment, social isolation and loneliness. Service users are referred to as 'students' to emphasise the role of education in developing people's self-esteem and abilities, however, the terms 'education' and 'school' are interpreted in their widest sense. Education is not associated exclusively with narrow vocational qualifications or work competencies, rather a recognition that learning is often the first critical step out of inactivity through self-help.

The school's assets and facilities are considerable and clearly superior to anything that currently exists within the homelessness sector in London. The school owns a five-storey building of 12,000 square metres floorage, plus adjoining buildings of 4,000 square metres. In 2000, the Kofoed's Skole opened a new department in a Danish provincial town. It also has sister school's in Poland, Estonia and Lithuania.

The school's main site provides a counselling service, vocational guidance, legal support, shower and laundry facilities, a library, cafeteria and access to around 30 supported workshops. In addition, the school's education department offers about 150 courses in disciplines such as ICT, maths, Danish and foreign languages, music, art and sport. The school also runs a 50-bed hostel for young homeless students who must participate fully in school activities to maintain their place.

The school's workshops cover a range of skills and abilities. The less demanding of these workshops assemble electrical components, semi-manufactured products and provide postal administration services. Students work in hourly modules, with a maximum of three modules per day. In emergencies, people in financial crisis can access these workshops to earn money for food and other basic needs, thus avoiding the need for street begging.

Other workshops produce goods and services for the school and for external customers. Students undertake much of the school's building and equipment maintenance, while assembly work, printing, grounds maintenance and gardening is delivered through small commercial contracts with local businesses and residents. The average period of stay within the workshops is nine months, with 45% of students progressing to employment or further education.

The KS operates its own internal currency (Kofoed Dollars). Students working in the workshops can use the Kofoed dollars they earn to 'buy' items such as food, drinks and cigarettes either within the school or at participating shops locally. This is intended to engender an ethos of work to achieve financial sustainability.

To enrol at the school, students must be unemployed, at least 18 years old and have a legal right to residency in Denmark. More than 40% of students are from foreign backgrounds, with about 80 nationalities represented. Interestingly, the average student age is 36 and 85% have some form of stable accommodation. Almost half the school's students are women.

The school derives approximately 75% of its income from government sources through an agreement between the school's board and the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs. The remainder comes from public donation, contracts with Copenhagen's municipality and some small commercial contracts linked to the school's workshops.

The school has a permanent staff of around 150. Largely, they are tutors, teachers, counsellors and skilled craftspeople.

## **Agency Expectations**

The agencies that took part in the study visit cited a range of reasons for their participation and expectations for the visit. These can be broadly categorised within the following areas:

1. To examine an alternative model for day centre provision that prioritises the role of education, training and employment support in service provision;
2. To learn more about the school's relationship with local, regional and national government, with particular emphasis on sustainable funding structures. Each of the participating agencies reported difficulties with short-term, target-driven and competitive funding streams that make the delivery of proven services insecure and hinder planning for future service development;
3. To consider new and diverse methods for generating income to support the delivery of education, training and employment services, reducing the dependence on precarious statutory funding streams;

4. To identify areas of best practice in service delivery and planning that have potential for replication within London day centres.

## Key Findings

The following findings have been derived from direct observation, debrief discussions amongst delegates and from post-visit reports completed by each of the participating agencies. For clarity and ease of reference, they have been categorised under a range of sub-headings relevant to the school's structure, services and client group.

### Structural and Social Issues

1. A large proportion of the school's income (around 75%) is derived from a local agreement with the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs. This funding agreement is reviewed annually, but does not require a process of re-application.
2. None of the school's statutory sources of income is tied directly to the achievement of outputs or outcomes. The school has been able to develop a level of trust with funders based on a successful track record of achievement and positive outcomes for clients. The effect this has had on the school's ability to develop a truly client-centred and flexible approach cannot be overstated.
3. These funding arrangements have not had a negative effect on success. Approximately 40% of KS students progress to further learning or employment, a rate that compares favourably with achievement across the OSW programme. Within the school's Education Department, 70% of students move into other forms of education or into employment.
4. The Danish equivalent of Jobcentre Plus can make a demand on an individual to attend the school as part of their eligibility to claim benefits. Once there, however, the school has a great deal of autonomy regarding the support a student receives, including when, and if, a student is ready to take up employment.
5. State benefits in Denmark are not affected by moderate personal earnings. This enables the school to incentivise and pay for activity in the production workshops and through the school's internal currency, Kofoed dollars, without fear of punitive action through the Danish benefits system. This has built a strong work-focused ethos within the school.
6. In Denmark there are no limits on the duration of relevant work placements for people in receipt of state benefits. This has allowed the school to tailor the level of support offered to the needs of the student and the skills demanded in the workplace.
7. Most departments within the school have developed strong partnerships with local businesses, often cemented through commercial contracts. When outsourcing production through the school, firms must make a commitment to work placements. Although this is no doubt assisted by a strong sense of corporate social responsibility in Denmark, there are

clear bottom line benefits for local companies through the supply chain and access to skilled staff.

### The KS Ethos and Concept

1. The school operates a pedagogical approach to promoting economic and social inclusion. That is, education is seen as a central plank by which a person can be supported to regain control of their life and improve their life chances. Although the terms 'student' and 'school' are central to the school's philosophy, education is interpreted in its broader social context and not merely as a means to gain narrow vocational qualifications. Indeed, very few courses offered at the school are externally accredited. As the head of the school's Education Department put it, "education is a means to enlighten students, skills are less important".
2. The school avoids a 'deficit model' when assessing a student's needs. Support is provided on the basis of a person's strengths and desires rather than a limiting judgment about their problems and weaknesses. The school deliberately avoids a major focus on the student's history when conducting an initial assessment. The language and concepts the school uses are drawn from civil society rather than a therapeutic context.
3. The school's approach has many similarities with a coaching model where students are encouraged to identify and address their own goals and aspirations. This approach recognises that some traditional forms of support can make people passive and dependent where they are not responsible for their own actions and effort. The school believes the personal satisfaction a student gains through this process is much more powerful than simply addressing an immediate 'problem'.
4. As the school's funding is not target-driven, students are free to choose their programme of activities and to progress at their own pace.
5. The school recognises that most of us learn through trial and error. The school's funding structure allows for a progression path that may not be linear. That is, a student may encounter set backs and diversions on the route to achieving their goals.

### The KS Staffing Structure

1. The school has a permanent staff of about 150 people, including social workers, counsellors, guidance workers and tutors.
2. The school's Education Department employs approximately 50 teaching staff. With around 630 students attending the school in any single day, this represents a staff to student ratio of 1:12.
3. Each of the school's four departments manages its own operational plan, budget and staffing structure. The work of each department is led by a Head of Department who reports to the school's Director.
4. It is notable that the majority of staff, including tutorial staff, are older than their London counterparts. The school has an active policy to recruit on the basis of life experience as much as formal qualifications. Many staff are former service users.

5. Staff are encouraged to develop innovative approaches to student need, including the development of new services through the support of the school's Director. All staff are firmly committed to the school's ethos.
6. The school's liberal ethos and lack of target-driven culture has undoubtedly had a marked effect on the morale of staff and the general positive atmosphere. It was notable that staff retention was not an issue for the school, with many staff having delivered more than 10 years of continuous service.

### The KS Approach

1. The school has established a strong profile within Copenhagen and Denmark generally. It was immediately striking how many people we encountered on the visit were aware of the school and the types of services it provides. As a result, more than 50% of students access the school themselves through a direct approach. Some, however, are referred by social workers, job centres, prisons and hospitals.
2. Courses within the school's Education Department are normally based on one semester of six months duration. Where students drop out during the semester, new students are admitted through the school's waiting list. This requires the development of individualised teaching structures, similar to 'roll-on roll-off' structures sometimes used in the UK. Courses are delivered through short, self-contained units that do not disadvantage students who start throughout the semester.
3. An attendance rate of 80% is expected of all students. Where attendance is poor, or stops, tutors will undertake a review with the student to motivate more regular attendance. Where this is unsuccessful, the student is 'dismissed' and replaced by another student on the waiting list.
4. All students are encouraged to use the school's guidance worker who will advise students regarding their selection of subjects, but it is possible for a student to structure their own programme based on their individual interests and needs.
5. Each student is assigned a 'social worker' (similar to a key worker in a hostel) who conducts the initial assessment and works with the student to develop an action plan setting out the targets for the student's stay at the school. This action plan forms part of a 'contract' with the student incorporating joint rights and responsibilities. Social workers interview students each quarter to review progress against their action plan.
6. Social workers have the ability to provide emergency financial assistance to the student in the form of an interest free loan. Students may use the loan for any purpose linked to their action plan, such as a deposit on a flat, payment of rent or a utilities bill.
7. Like many London day centres, the school takes a holistic view of an individual's needs, providing support with health, housing, employment and dependency issues. It's defining feature, however, is through education as a catalyst for change.
8. It is within the power of the school to make a recommendation that a person should receive a 'social pension', equivalent to our Income Support or Incapacity Benefit.

## The Client Group

1. Typically, at the start of each term, 1,100 to 1,200 students are enrolled within the school's Education Department. There is a natural attrition throughout the year, but as students leave, they are replaced by others on a waiting list.
2. From our observations, the majority of students at the school are aged between 40 and 50 years, mostly with low support needs related to education, training and employment.
3. Where referrals are made to the school, there is a high degree of co-operation between local government, social services, health professionals and the school's social workers. Students unlikely to benefit from the school's approach are referred to other more appropriate services, particularly where they have very high support needs. This undoubtedly enables teaching staff to focus on the educational aspects of a student's progression.
4. Unlike the profile of London day centre users, approximately 85% of KS students live in independent, unsupported accommodation.
5. Classes at the school are not combined according to level of need. The school believes this diversity of background and level of need provides better opportunities for peer support, thus helping less able students.

## **Initial Outcomes**

Each of the participating day centres has made a commitment to review their activities in light of the report's findings and learning points. This process will be supported by a planned bid to the European Commission's Leonardo da Vinci programme. If successful, this project will establish a transnational network for the exchange of practice, knowledge and lessons in the field of training and employment within day centres or agencies providing day services for homeless people.

In the interim, participating agencies have undertaken an initial analysis of their activities and have reported the following outcomes from the study visit:

### Volunteering and User Involvement

1. Review of volunteer recruitment policies that currently restrict service users or ex-service users from volunteering within their own day centres for a fixed period of time. In the case of The Passage, this policy has been amended. Volunteers are now recruited solely on the basis of their skills and capability;
2. All agencies are reviewing how service users are involved in the development and organisation of day activities and assisting clients new to their services. This is in response to the observation that rebuilding a student's sense of belonging and identity is a primary focus of activity at the Kofoed's Skole.

## Staffing

1. The Passage is currently reviewing their HR processes to ensure the value of life experience and a positive attitude to service improvement is a prominent feature of frontline staff recruitment. This stems from the observation that many staff at KS came with a wealth of life experience, some having been ex-service users and most over the age of 40. Staff retention at KS is and always has been very high;
2. All agencies are investigating a possible role for service users within the staff recruitment process.

## Services

Although significant changes to service delivery will be evident only after more detailed analysis and review, the following early service innovations have been reported by participating agencies. In the case of The Passage, clients are currently being consulted about the findings of the visit and the types of service improvements they would like to see.

1. Further investigation of the use of an internal currency system to reward clients for productive activity and/or general upkeep and maintenance of day centres;
2. Implementation of new methodologies for promoting activities and encouraging client participation. The Kofoed's Skole employs many innovative methods to raise client awareness of available activities, including a set of laminated business cards with pictorial representations of activities. This is particularly effective for clients with literacy problems or for speakers of other languages. The Passage has now implemented a similar set of menu cards placed in high-volume areas to promote the centre's activities.

## **Lessons for Future Service Delivery**

The following lessons have been distilled from the main findings of the visit. They provide a foundation upon which the participating agencies, and indeed the wider day centres network, can review or reaffirm existing strategies and methods of delivery.

1. There is a clear primacy of education and training within the Kofoed's Skole methodology. Although for most people accessing day centre services in London, employment is not the highest immediate priority, the school does offer a model for better integration of employability services;
2. Effective client assessment should not have an unbalanced emphasis on identifying and analysing weaknesses and problems or revisiting a person's negative case history. The school provides evidence that structuring a support programme around a person's strengths and desires can be a powerful platform for change;

3. In delivering education and training programmes, it is important to have effective referral structures, particularly where clients come with high support needs. Funding structures that link payments to results can sometimes provide a disincentive for referrals to other services seen as competing for limited funds;
4. The school has demonstrated a coaching methodology where clients are encouraged to address their own goals and aspirations, with support, can have clear long-term benefits;
5. The school's funding structure has enabled an approach to education and training that accepts that learners may not always succeed in their first attempt to achieve their goals;
6. Adopting a 'key worker' approach to education and training provision can have a profound affect on recruitment, retention and positive outcomes;
7. A learning curriculum that offers a 'roll-on, roll-off' structure and short, self-contained units of learning provides greater opportunities for marginalized learners unaccustomed to formal learning;
8. Classes adopting a 'mixed ability' approach provide better opportunities for peer support and an 'emotional investment' in learning;
9. It is critically important that day centres are well integrated with the local community. The reputation the Kofoed's Skole has developed as a 'good neighbour' has not only improved community relationships, but has offered the possibility of commercial contracts with local firms;
10. Service providers should not undervalue the life experience older workers bring, particularly when working with clients with troubled backgrounds;
11. Service providers should consider the ways service users and ex-service users could contribute to the management and delivery of services, offering real opportunities for paid employment where appropriate.

## **Lessons for Funders/Policy-makers**

The proposed project outcomes included in our original bursary proposal to the LHF identified the importance of offering improved awareness of alternative models of good practice. In addition to the valuable lessons for service delivery, the visit highlighted some structural issues that will be of interest to funders and those responsible for day centre policy development.

1. The need to constantly 're-invent' services to meet the shifting priorities of funders is time consuming, disheartening and a waste of scarce resources. In contrast, the Kofoed's Skole derives approximately 75% of its income from a local agreement with the Danish government. This agreement is reviewed annually, but does not require a process of re-application;
2. Output related funding and a client-centred approach to service delivery are often incompatible. Much of the school's success is attributable to its ability to use funding creatively and trial new methods of service delivery with inherently higher risks;
3. Benefits rules that apply time limits to a client achieving a job discriminate unfairly against people facing severe and multiple labour

market disadvantage. In Denmark, the Kofoed's Skole has a degree of autonomy to decide when, and if, a client is ready to take up employment;

4. A benefits system that allows moderate levels of personal income has the ability to offer clients a better understanding of the value of work. The school has engendered a strong work-focused ethos amongst its students by offering 'paid' employment within its workshops as a transition to the open labour market;
5. The ability to offer extended work placements without affecting job-seekers benefits has enabled the school to tailor support to the needs of its students and the demands of employers.

Ian Perkins, OSW  
September 2005

## Annex 1

### Study Visit Delegate List

Delegate	Organisation	Position in Organisation	Email Address
Ian Perkins	OSW	Director of Development	ianperkins@osw.org.uk
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Helen Standen	The Passage Day Centre	Day Centre Manager	helen.standen@passage.org.uk
Dean Harris	New Horizon Youth Centre	Advice Team Manager	dean.harris@newhorizonyouthcentre.org.uk
Pauline Roberts	New Horizon Youth Centre	Youth Team Manager	pauline.roberts@newhorizonyouthcentre.org.uk
Sarah Totterdell	St Giles Trust	Head of Prison Services	sarah.totterdell@stgilestrust.org.uk
Andy Cross	St Giles Trust	Head of Training	andy.cross@stgilestrust.org.uk

## Annex 2

### Participating Organisations

#### London Housing Foundation

London Housing Foundation supports agencies working with single homeless people across London. They promote and support work with outcomes, the development of leadership through action learning sets and publish and sponsor reports on issues affecting agencies working with homeless people. Further information about the work of London Housing Foundation can be found at [www.lhf.org.uk](http://www.lhf.org.uk)

London Housing Foundation funded this visit through their Bursary Scheme.

#### Off the Streets and into Work

OSW is a registered charity with unrivalled expertise in providing training and employment services to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. OSW collaborates with a range of strategic and services delivery partners to offer co-ordinated solutions to some of the complex problems that face people at the margins of society. Further information at can be found at [www.osw.org.uk](http://www.osw.org.uk)

OSW acted as the lead body for this study visit.

#### The Passage

The Passage runs the largest voluntary sector day centre for homeless people in London. Focusing on the needs of people over the age of 25, the day centre offers a range of employment, training and leisure activities, including computing, life skills and a mentoring programme. Further information can be found at [www.passage.org.uk](http://www.passage.org.uk)

#### New Horizon Youth Centre

New Horizon Youth Centre is a day centre for young homeless people in and around the King's Cross area of London. The centre provides employment and training services and careers guidance, together with more traditional day centre services such as shower and laundry facilities and health support. It also operates an advice and referral service for homeless people as well as resettlement and outreach.

#### St Giles Trust

St Giles Trust provides services to people who are vulnerable, disadvantaged, socially excluded, homeless, or at risk of homelessness to maximise their potential. St Giles' training and employment related services include accredited literacy, numeracy, arts and computer skills training, career guidance, and work placements. They deliver training projects in a number of prisons across Kent, London, Oxford and Surrey where prisoners are trained to NVQ level 3 in Advice and Guidance in order that they can volunteer as Peer Advisors. St Giles also supports prisoners to find employment on leaving prison.