

## Title: Leisure time as part of the systematic public health promotion. Experiences from Modum municipality, Norway

This paper describes how Modum municipality has developed a new universal measure to strengthen the inhabitants' opportunity to health promoting leisure activities, and the preliminary results of the project.

### Context

Most children in Norway experience good childhood conditions. That is to a large extent due to the strong welfare state and the redistribution of income through taxation.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, health inequality is an increasing problem, and over the last two decades the economical inequalities has increased as well.<sup>2</sup> Participation and inclusion improves health and quality of life.<sup>3</sup> Organized leisure activities are one important arena, in addition to kindergarten, school and work, where the municipality can facilitate participation and inclusion.

In Norway, leisure activities are mainly organized by voluntary associations in addition to a few public and private organizations. 80 % of the children in Norway states that they have participated in an organized leisure activity during their childhood. Sport is the most popular activity.<sup>4</sup> Even though "Sports for all" is the vision of The Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports, there is a social gradient in health that runs from top to bottom of the socioeconomic spectrum in participation in sports for children and youth.<sup>5</sup> The same pattern exists regarding participation in bands, choirs, orchestras and arts-schools in Norway.<sup>6</sup> The reasons why there is strong correlation between socioeconomic status and participation in sports and other leisure activities are probably complex. There are cultural, social and economical reasons.<sup>7</sup> There is no reason to believe that the results are any different in Modum municipality than in the rest of the country. The health profile shows that Modum has more incidences of mental disorders, overweight and musculoskeletal disorders and than the national average, and the share of youth who experience they have a friend they can trust is lower than the rest of the country.<sup>8</sup>

The municipality of Modum has in response to The Norwegian Government strategy; "Children living in poverty" developed and tested new solutions to ensure that *"all children, irrespective of their parents' finances, have the opportunity to participate regularly in at least one organized leisure activity together with others."* The project is anchored with the councilor.

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<sup>1</sup> Wilkinsson and Pickett, 2017

<sup>2</sup> Dahl et al., 2014

<sup>3</sup> Trommald, 2017, Helsedirektoratet 2017

<sup>4</sup> Barne-, Ungdoms- og Familiedirektoratet, 2015

<sup>5</sup> Bakken, 2017

<sup>6</sup> Barne-, Ungdoms- og Familiedirektoratet, 2015

<sup>7</sup> Bakken 2017

<sup>8</sup> The health profile of Modum: <https://khp.fhi.no/PDFVindu.aspx?Nr=0623&sp=1&PDFaar=2018>

## Rationale

Modum municipality recently adopted a local strategy addressing childhood conditions. Leisure activities are part of the strategy. Participation in leisure activities leads to social network, social support and may counteract loneliness.<sup>9</sup> Universal measures and early intervention is to be prioritized and involvement of users is required when developing new measures.<sup>10</sup> The new strategy emphasizes cooperation between the different sectors within the municipality to fulfil the common goals. It is founded on existing knowledge, and addresses local challenges.

The solutions were designed in cooperation with the inhabitants of Modum community. Children and youth in schools and the youth council participated in all phases of the project. There was a workshop with a group of young persons in need of health services or social services. There was dialogue with employees in Modum municipality who meet the children in schools, leisure activities and health services. In different ways they all pointed at the lack of information about the existing leisure activities. Some of the young ones said “you know.. there’s nothing more to do than sports..” “if I could try different things. I don’t know what I can do or what I like” or “if there was martial arts, I would try” or “is there any organization where I could practice outdoor life?”. The employees typically stated: “if there just had been an activity they could participate in, where they didn’t have to pay” or “Why is there no sports for fun?” All these activities existed in the local community and most organizations want more members and want their leisure activities to be “for all”. The feedback showed that there was a lack of information about all the existing leisure activities and it would be beneficial to make that information available for all inhabitants (universal approach). It would also be important that the information and support to inhabitants exposed to social exclusions, health issues and poverty were ensured.

## Description:

The new webpage [www.fritid123.no](http://www.fritid123.no) contains all the local leisure activities organized by voluntary associations, public and private organizations in Modum and two municipalities that border with Modum; Sigdal and Kroedsherad. All the inhabitants, regardless of age, can search for leisure activities due to what type of leisure activity they are interested in (sports, cultural activities, exercise, social meetings, outdoor life and “others”). They can also sort activities based on where they live, their age and how much money they want to spend on leisure activities. It also shows where you can borrow equipment for free if needed.

It is of great significance that the citizens are introduced to the webpage. People employed in the different sectors within Modum municipality; teachers, community health workers, people working in the refugee services and Labour and Welfare Administration and so on contributed in the development of the webpage. They play an important role in introducing people to the webpage and encouraging more of the

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<sup>9</sup> Helsedirektoratet 2017

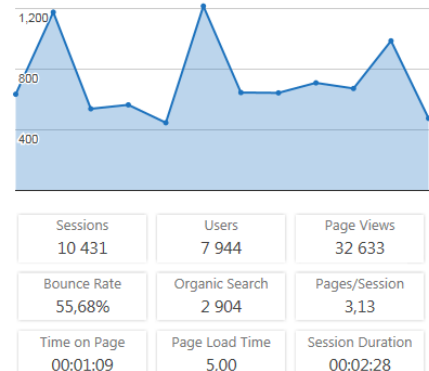
<sup>10</sup> Modum kommune, 2017

inhabitants to participate in social activities, in addition to information through local and social media.

### **Achievements:**

The project has been evaluated internally. It would be beneficial with an external evaluation.

The webpage has been visited by nearly 8000 users the last year. Modum, Sigdal and Kroedsherad municipalities has totally 20.000 residents. There is no quantitative data of how many of those 8000 users who has actually participated in a new activity, but there is some more or less random feedback which will be described later which shows that some residents has participated in new activities because of the webpage and the encouragement they got from employees in Modum.



The preliminary experiences show that the inhabitants' knowledge of local activities has increased. Many people are surprised to see how many different leisure activities they can participate in, and that there are several activities that do not cost anything or has low costs. Some people discover and that there are activities they didn't know exist at all: "You don't have to go to a big city to find out if you may like archery and curling or not (...) now I know I can do rabbit jumping, curling or play the accordion in Modum." (Member of Modum Youth Council, 2017) "Now I find Modum a more attractive place to live. I have lived in Modum for seven years and I have complained about this place just as long. I thought it was nothing to do here, but there are a lot of activities I didn't know about. I will contact the local fishing association." (Man 30 years).

Another achievement is that the employees in Modum municipality have changed the way they work in different ways. Leisure activities as an important factor in health promotion is strengthened, and may lead to citizens empowerment regarding leisure time. The teachers in one primary school in Modum tested out the webpage and to talk about leisure and participation this spring. The results will be shared with the other schools this autumn. Pupils, who did not participate in anything organized in their spare time, were given the task to examine the webpage before the parent – teacher conference. Many pupils found leisure activities they sought out. When significant others, in this case a teacher, facilitated participation through information and encouragement, children and their families got the support they needed to find leisure activities they wanted and could manage to participate in by themselves. The "significant other" could be the teacher, but it could also be the school nurse, the refugee consultant or the social worker. It is reason to believe that when all these people, who all matters to some families, addresses the importance of leisure activities, more people find leisure activities they would like to attend. There is an example from the refugee service that some young boys from one municipality did not find anything they wanted to attend within the local community, but found activities in another municipality that fulfilled their wishes regarding leisure activities.

In Modum the project has served as a concrete example of direction in the local strategy addressing childhood conditions. The strategy tells us to prioritize universal measures. The aim and main challenge is to design universal measures that are sufficiently effective so that targeted measures would not be necessary. For example; In Norway, the municipality is bound by law to provide inhabitants with health challenges assistance to leisure time through health services when needed. There are some examples that people who thought they wanted and needed a personal assistant to support them in leisure activities, decided that they did not need it anyway. Instead of applying for a personal assistant they were guided through the webpage and found organized leisure activities they could manage to participate in by themselves. Others still prefer personal assistants.

The local cultural department report about fewer inquiries regarding leisure activities after the webpage was launched. Other employees report that they find the webpage useful when they work. A challenge is to implement the webpage. There has to be regular information in local media and social media to remind the residents about the webpage, and the employees need reminders as well.

A side-effect of the project was that the interaction between the municipality and the voluntary associations enhanced. Challenges and solutions were discussed, and both parts gained increased knowledge about each other and different challenges. Some of the public activities were ended because the voluntary associations offered similar activities, and wanted more participants.

The web solution has also received interest from other Norwegian municipalities that want to implement something similar. The plug-in will become available for other municipalities, but first it will be developed further for a better user experience and it shall be easier to keep it updated.

### **Conclusion:**

Before the project neither the residents nor the employees in Modum knew the range of leisure activities organized by voluntary associations, public and private organizations. There was no place where the information was collected. The citizen participation has been of great significance to the design and result of the measure. A cross sectoral approach to collect information about all the leisure activities and make it available to the residents was an important step for Modum. That has led to increased knowledge about the scope of leisure activities, more people have found leisure activities based on their own wishes and dreams, changed working method for some employees and that some of the targeted measures is not necessary anymore.

There will be a further implementation and development of leisure as an important factor in health promotion. The webpage will be improved and made available for other communities, the experiences of those who has participated in the project will be shared with other employees within all sectors and there has to be regular information about the webpage in local and social media. The different targeted measures regarding leisure activities that has existed for years will be evaluated in the light of the information available.

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