

EU Leonardo Mobility project 'Social Pedagogy – Learning in Practice'

Participant report by Matthew McFadzean

PREPARATION:

As soon as I found out that Care Visions were looking for volunteers to take part in the Mobility project, I knew that I wanted to be involved. I first became aware of Social Pedagogy about 2 years ago, when I was asked to consider being transferred to a house which Care Visions were planning to open and run under the guidance of a Social Pedagogue. I subsequently spent 7 months working in the house which was eventually chosen and the things I learned there only piqued my interest. I was delighted when my application to take part in the Mobility was accepted.

Looking ahead to the Mobility, there were many different aims. I wanted to observe the interaction between Social Pedagogues and the young people in their care. I also hoped to see how they identify and utilise learning opportunities. Young people can be resistant to participating in anything which we have put in place for them, so I was keen to see how Social Pedagogues handle this challenge. I further wished to learn how Social Pedagogues identify, assess and manage risk. Having seen a broad range of relationships between care homes and local communities, from invisible to fully integrated, through hostile and under siege (a local authority unit in Central Scotland), I wanted to gauge the relationship between Danish care homes and the wider community.

At **Rymarksvaenge**, I hoped to observe how Social Pedagogues care for young people in a residential setting. I also wished to learn how such a home can be managed successfully without hindering the process



"New home- new beginnings"

"Youth Pension" : Rymarksvaenge

At **Stockholmsgave**, I hoped to gain new insight into how natural resources can be used to create a learning environment and learn how I can bring this into my practice with older children.



“Waiting for lunch to cook” : Stockholmsgave

In preparation for the Mobility, I attended a 2 day seminar with my 5 Care Visions colleagues, the 6 members of the Mobility who had been selected by Lancashire Council and the 2 facilitators of the project, Charlotte Firing and Gabriel Eichsteller. This was a significant step on the journey, as I learned more about Denmark and Copenhagen and got to spend time with the group of people who were all going to be sharing the experience with me, most of whom I had never met before.

We were given an introduction to the 6 organisations where we could be placed, asked to decide which 2 we would prefer to visit and tasked with choosing a buddy from our partner organisation. This went very smoothly and did not take long. I found myself paired up with Maelor. As we talked, we found common interests, especially in music. We had both been drawn to Rymarksvaenge and Stockholmsgave and I felt optimism for the partnership.

When we all parted again, the Mobility felt more realistic. Maelor and I agreed to keep in touch over the coming months. A Facebook group was set up and this became an excellent tool for maintaining the communication and facilitating discussions between all the members of the group. The next time we would all meet would be in Manchester Airport, on March 4th.



Maelor: my buddy for our Grand Adventure (with Anders the story teller in bottom right)



After this, the logistical preparations became my priority. I renewed my passport and applied for a European Health Insurance Card. I bought a Copenhagen guide book and a map. In theory, by the time I got there, the city layout should have made sense but it took some days before I began to get my bearings. In spite of all my research, I was probably little better prepared than if I had done none!

Attempting to learn the language was a hurdle which caused some consternation amongst the participants, even though we were assured that Danish people speak English very well and would not expect us to learn their language. I decided to work with the Byki Language Programme and found Danish to have many similarities with Scottish/English. I would hesitate to recommend the programme I used, however, as the pronunciations I learned were not accurate and this caused some hilarity for the Danes I tried to speak to. When I tried to say that my Danish was bad, a slight mispronunciation had me stating that it was lovely! When I asked for directions to the street we were staying on, Christina looked confused and hesitantly asked, "You want to find a goat?" My advice to future travellers would be to start learning early and to concentrate on learning simple, everyday phrases and replies.



A gathering of the group outside our accommodation in Classensgade (not a goat in sight!)

In the months between the seminar and the Mobility, Maelor and I kept in touch, although we didn't meet up. The Facebook group was a great source of information and support, a reassurance that we were all in this together. It was also used to signpost the important milestones along the way. Since we have returned, the Facebook group has taken on a new dimension.

One of the most valuable exercises I did in the months of waiting was to have an on-going discussion with the young people I care for, asking them what they would expect from Danish people coming to spend time in their home. During this, I was asked why only adults were going and young people wondered if it would be possible for them to be involved in future. I have raised this question and found that there is the aim that young people will get to take part in the project.

MOBILITY:

Cultural experiences

I found Copenhagen to have a very relaxed atmosphere. The fact that so many people cycle keeps motorised traffic to a minimum. It might be 25-30 years since British cities saw so few cars.



Who needs a car when the land is so flat? My transport for 2 weeks.

The Danish people I met were very welcoming and interested in who I was and why I was there. Almost everybody speaks English and it can be quite difficult to get to practice speaking Danish.

Often, I would find that Danes would not understand my Danish because they had already made the mental shift to thinking in English. I had better luck when I spoke with strangers and even got through a few, very simple conversations without having to resort to English. There is a common root to much of our language and I think that I could probably communicate without English in about 6 months, if I was immersed in the culture, especially if I worked in the kindergarten!

Copenhagen is very culturally and artistically rich. Every turn reveals a new statue or monument. The city landscape is very heavily influenced by water. The old city embraces the harbour and is intersected by canals. The four, artificial lakes which curve through the middle of the city, framed by beautiful, Northern European architecture, are breathtakingly beautiful.



A statue round every corner: Gefion Fountain and Hans Christian Andersen

The Danish, national identity is heavily influenced by the German Occupation during the Second World War. There is still discomfort with the way this was initially accepted and, in some cases, welcomed. The Resistance Movement, however, is a balancing source of pride and the Danes did help almost all the Danish Jews to escape to Sweden. Danes are quick to deflect any praise for this, though, by saying that many helpers did so for financial reward.

Danish humour has much in common with the British, with a love of the absurd and the surreal. There is also a strong, if benign, animosity for the Germans and the Swedes, their nearest neighbours, which reminds me of the Scottish cultural attitude to the English.

We took a boat tour of the harbour and canals, with our guide pointing out many of the famous landmarks of Copenhagen, not least of which being the most famous statue of them all, the Little Mermaid. As well as the original, bronze statue, there is a further, granite one and another bronze, the Mutant Mermaid.



"The many faces of the Little Mermaid"

I was able to explore several museums; the Danish Resistance Museum, which I came away from with a strong sense of the complex emotions lingering from the German Occupation; the National Museum, with its wonderful exhibition of artefacts from pre-history all the way up to the Viking era, and; the Carlsberg Glyptotek. The breath-taking collection of statues at the Glyptotek defies description and has to be experienced first-hand.



"Probably the best collection of statues in the world."

I had the honour and privilege of being invited into people's homes. Maelor and I were invited to have dinner with Christoffer and his family. We then watched a film made by young people about one of the young men he supports in prison. One of my most treasured experiences involved spending the evening with Jensine, one of the young people who has moved into her own flat, and Brigitte, sharing recipes, cooking dinner together and then eating our creations. Before we came home, we experienced the hospitality of a Danish house party, held in our honour. Charlotte and Christina Bornemann Surel (who worked with Charlotte to make our stay in Copenhagen such a success) organised tastings of traditional food for the group and the staff and children at Stockholm gave us what the Danes eat on a daily basis. From this, I have developed a taste for rye bread, rugbrød. The small children were upset if lunch did not include this staple.

The Placements

Maelor and I spent our first week at Rymarksvaenge, an institution which looks after young people between the ages of 14 and 23, first in the residential unit, which can accommodate up to 7 young people, supported by 2 Social pedagogues, then in the smaller, 3 bedded annex, where 1 Social Pedagogue helps the young people preparing to move on. The unit has a throughcare, "Hybler" team of 2, who support young people who have moved on from residential care and now live in flats or supported accommodation within the wider community. There is also a Sports department, which was proposed, set up and is run by Christoffer, one of the Social Pedagogues. This work is mainly conducted in the network of fitness centres throughout the city and aims to improve the mental and physical health of the young people, whilst also identifying and nurturing their inner talents and abilities.

We spent our second week at Stockholmsgave forest kindergarten. The infants, aged from 3-6 years, get a bus from a central meeting point at 8.15am and spend their days on the outskirts of the city, in a kindergarten where much of the day, whatever the weather or the season, is spent outdoors. The children are looked after in 3 classes of 18, Dolphins, Snails and Swallows, each staffed by 2 Social Pedagogues and 1 support worker. The focus is on socialising children with their peers and developing self-confidence, self-sufficiency and self-determination.

Week 1: Rymarksvaenge

Each day at Rymarksvaenge was very different for us, as we spent each one in a different department of the institution.

Day 1:

Maelor and I rode through Copenhagen on our bicycles, not sure what we were going to experience. When we arrived, we were met by Tina, the manager, and spoke with her about the philosophy of the institution, which is based on Non-violent Communication, as created by Marshall Rosenberg. We were then introduced to Sara, the Pedagogue working with the young people in the annex, and went with her to her office, which was at the opposite end of the building from the annex. We sat in this office for a long time, chatting and getting to know each other. I was beginning to feel a bit restless and wondering when we were going to meet any young people when we went across to the annex and met the 2 young people who were in that day, Lise and Stina.

After cooking and eating dinner with the young people, Sara and Lise agreed to take us on a tour of Christiania, near the harbour, and then go round some of the flats that Louisa could live in when she moves on from the annex. We walked through Christiania, where they openly sell drugs from market stalls, then drove to see the flats. We all toured Sankt Josef, a former hospital, one wing of which has been converted into supported accommodation. Lise was not impressed by what she saw. The accommodation was very functional and seemed almost like a cell.



Functional but Spartan: the Supported apartments at Sankt Josef

The second flat Louisa was shown lay just off the main, red light street. I later spoke to Sara about this, saying that I would feel concerned if one of our young people was housed in this place. Sara observed that such places exist and said that there was no point in denying this. She said that the young people have a choice whether to be involved in the red light district and housing them elsewhere would not stop this from happening.

Day 2:

We were met at the institution by Christoffer, who conceived and runs the Sports project. After a brief meeting with Tina, we cycled to Christoffer's first appointment, with a young person who lives at Sankt Josef. There was a brief delay. Christoffer explained that the young man, Magnus, was not ready and there was the possibility that he might not want to come to the gym. Christoffer said that he will not try to make the young person come but that he will give him every opportunity to do so. After a few minutes, Magnus came out of his apartment with his girlfriend and we all walked to the gym. Christoffer showed positive regard for Magnus at all times. Once at the gym, we took part in the workout and watched as Christoffer focussed all his attention on Magnus. When Magnus said that he felt his muscles tightening, Christoffer stopped the workout and used this as an opportunity to explain to Magnus how his body works and to show compassion and understanding for the young man. When we said goodbye to Magnus, Christoffer said that we had made him smile, which is a rare and special thing for this very serious young man.

We then cycled across town to the Social Pedagogy Seminarium, where we ate lunch and talked about Christoffer's project. wWe were surrounded by groups of students, all involved in intense conversation. Every so often, some would come over to our table and introduce themselves to us. It was clear that Christoffer was well known and there seemed to be a real sense of community among

the Pedagogues and trainees. Before Christoffer left us, he invited us to have dinner with his family that evening.

Soon after, we met Martin, a trainee Pedagogue who works as a volunteer on the Sports project. He introduced us to Christian, a young man who lives in the Rymarksvaenge Hybler. Christian is training in Martial Arts and he led us in a series of moves from different disciplines. Christian focussed on teaching us complicated moves, which I struggled to follow and replicate, with patience and clear instruction. Martin later explained to us that Christian had come in to care having been diagnosed with ADHD. We saw no sign of this during the time that Christian taught us, just a dedicated and focussed young man, brimming with confidence.

Saying goodbye to Christian, we cycled back across Copenhagen to our next appointment, a circuit training session led by Stina, one of the young people we met the day before. Stina is training to be a Fitness Instructor and her programme for us was brilliantly organised, tailored to our individual needs and taking into account my injured knee. It was also exhausting! Another trainee Pedagogue, Sara, was with Stina. As with the other relationships we saw, this was an equal partnership and an outsider might struggle to tell who was the young person and who was the Pedagogue, based on behaviour and relationship dynamics. Stina is also overseeing Sara's fitness programme.

Stina had told us that she is also at college, learning to work in the hotel trade and she explained that she has the opportunity to travel and complete a work placement abroad. She expressed a desire to visit the UK and I promised that I would investigate if there was any way in which we could support this.

We said goodbye to Stina and she went off to get the bus home. Sara cycled with us to Christoffer's apartment and left us there. We had dinner with Christoffer and his family, then watched a film that one of his clients has made about Christoffer's work with a young man who is in prison.

These are the closing comments from my diary at the end of the day: "Social Pedagogues are always showing affection for the young people, praising and encouraging them. All the Pedagogues are so inspiring and enthusiastic. The young people are confident, outgoing and comfortable teaching adults. I feel honoured to have Maelor as my buddy. He's great company, full of humour and humility."

Today was the most exhilarating, exhausting and inspiring experience. 25 miles on a bicycle and 4.5 hours in a gym will do that to you, I suppose!



The Social Pedagogy Seminarium

Day 3:

Today, we met with Birgitte, one of the Hybler, throughcare team. We had a long conversation with her in her office. After yesterday, I was feeling impatient to get out and meet with more young people but I was able to reflect later that this had been an important time, because it had helped to ground me again and allowed Birgitte to find out who we were and explain about her work, establishing our “common third”.

Birgitte first took us to meet with Britta, who lives in a flat. Birgitte explained that we would not be invited into the flat and said that it had taken a long time for her to earn Britta’s trust. When she used to turn up for meetings, Britta would make her wait for up to an hour, before coming downstairs and joining her. Birgitte emphasised that this was an important period, in which she was being tested by Britta. Birgitte’s approach to this behaviour was to never book another appointment after meeting with Britta and then to sit patiently until the young woman was ready to see her. This patience paid off and today Britta was ready and waiting when we arrived.

We were introduced and then went to a café to talk. The warmth between Birgitte and Britta was clear to see and Britta was very open about her life and the challenges she faces. She also acknowledged that it had taken her a long time to trust Birgitte and that Birgitte had been very patient with her. While we talked, the positive regard that Birgitte holds Britta in shone through and reminded me of a proud mother with her adored daughter. Britta told us about her musical aspirations and gave us the details of a website where we could view and listen to some of her songs. She also told us that she is studying to be a legal secretary, in case she cannot make a living from her singing. Although deeply hurt by the experiences of her childhood, Britta had a clear sense of future and realisation that it is her choices which will shape it.

The conversation came to a natural close and we said goodbye to Britta back at her flat. Birgitte then took us to meet Jensine, who had agreed to meet us in her bedsit. Jensine was welcoming, although a bit nervous to start with. From there, we all walked to a restaurant and had dinner. Jensine told us that she is training to be a chef and I was able to use my training in this field to establish a very animated discussion. Jensine said that she was sad that she had not known I was a chef, as she

would have liked to share recipes and techniques with me. With Birgitte's approval, I offered to come to her flat next week and cook a couple of main courses with her. Jensine was delighted by this and seemed surprised that I was sincere in my offer. She said that she would make the dessert which she had recently won a prize for.

When we finished dinner, we walked back through the city to Jensine's flat. I re-affirmed that I would come back and cook with her before we left her. Birgitte then drove us back to Rymarksvaenge. On the way, we discussed the backgrounds of the young people we had met and shared our observations. We thanked Birgitte for all that she had done for us and cycled home, marvelling that today had been as wonderful and unexpected as the previous two. Thinking about all the young people we had spent time with in the last few days, all of whom were in care, was that they all had a sense of future which stretched far beyond the present moment. This is a gift that I would gladly give to some of the young people who I have cared for, many of whom have been conditioned by their experiences to seek only instant gratification. I felt a sense of hope and optimism within me that it is possible for young people in care to regain a sense of future.

Day 4:

Gabriel cycled with us to Rymarksvaenge, where we were joined by Tina and Charlotte, for a meeting to review our experiences and observations, comparing the ways that we care for children and young people in Denmark, England and Scotland. This was a very positive meeting and we thanked Tina for the opportunity that we had been given to spend time in Rymarksvaenge.

After our meeting, we met with Mark, one of the Pedagogues who works in the main, 7 bedded, Youth Pension. Mark spent almost all of his time in the kitchen. He told us that this is the place where he is most likely to have contact with the young people, as they come for drinks or pass through on their way in or out of the house. They can come and go as they please, without informing staff that they are going out or where they are going. The young people who were in mostly stayed in their rooms and we did only see them in passing. Mark spoke about how important he feels that good food is for the young people and said that, by spending most of his time there, he is reinforcing the perspective of the kitchen as the hub of the house.

There was another staff member on but we did not see much of her, as she stayed in the office for most of the time. She looked nervous around the young people and Mark said that she was relatively new and inexperienced.

As we sat with Mark, we prepared the evening meal and asked him questions about practice. I was interested in finding out how he sets and maintains boundaries for the young people. Mark was perplexed by the idea that we would set boundaries and enforce them. For example, if a young person was required to be in by 10pm and did not return until 11pm, he would not consider this a major issue, as the young person was safe and had returned. He asked, "Why would I want to punish the young person? It's a battle over nothing." Mark also said that he would not get up to investigate if young people were up and about during the night, unless they were fighting. If he heard a young person leaving during the night, he would wait until morning to see if they had returned, before reporting them missing.

“Why create battles over nothing?”

Listening to Mark talk about picking your battles wisely, about not setting boundaries which give rise to areas of conflict, I found myself reflecting on incidents that I have witnessed and taken part in over the years and wondered if Mark’s approach would have led to a more peaceful and positive outcome. I found myself asking, “Is a hardline approach, which leads to a safe hold, in the best interests of the young person?” In Mark’s opinion, building and maintaining a respectful and gentle relationship is seen as essential for the goal of looking after and socialising the young people. It seems to me that a longer term view is taken than we are afforded in Scotland.

We set dinner out on the table and the young people all came out of their rooms to eat. I had cooked haggis and read out the Address to the Haggis for them. Most of the young people declined to try the haggis. They all ate the main food that had been cooked for them and then drifted off to their rooms. Staff had baked a birthday cake for Maelor. Some of the young people stayed for this, then they left too.



Mark in the hub of the Y P: Ready for dinner; Haggis or curry?: Maelor with his birthday cake

We witnessed a Staff Handover, in which the day’s events and the activities and plans of the young people were discussed. Soon after, after handover, we said goodbye and cycled away from Rymarksvaenge for the last time. It was a muted end to what had been a week of profound, moving and thought provoking experiences.

Week 2: Stockholmsgave

At Stockholmsgave, each day started at the Base, a central office where we met the bus. The children did not speak English but we quickly made a connection and built upon it. Waiting for the bus on the first day, a boy came over to the table we were sitting at and started to do some drawing. He was wearing a Star Wars t-shirt and I remembered that, under my fleece, I also was wearing a Star Wars t-shirt. I showed the boy and then did my best impersonation of the figure on his shirt. He started to laugh. Soon, Maelor was drawing pictures, and we joined in. From then on, the ice was well and truly broken and we soon settled into spending our time in the midst of 54 3-6 year olds.

On the bus that morning, the children were quite subdued in the main, although some were distressed and crying. As the week progressed, I noticed that the children were more animated and enthusiastic on the bus each day. A large group of parents gathered to wave the bus off and many of them ran alongside the bus for as long as they could, energetically waving and blowing kisses to their children. This, it turned out, was a daily ritual and some of the parents even managed to reach a junction which we passed about 5 minutes after we left! At the start of the journeys to and from the

kindergarten, the Pedagogues all counted their charges, checking, double and triple checking that all were accounted for. This was treated with the utmost seriousness and I saw, over the coming days, that, although it looked like there were few rules, the safety of the children was afforded the utmost respect. When children were whittling with sharp knives, they only did so in a set area, no other children were allowed to walk through this area, and a Pedagogue was always present. Fires were only built in the pit and, when lit, were also attended by a Pedagogue. A large container of water sat near the fire and, if the Pedagogue had to leave the fire, it was always extinguished first.



The children enjoy the responsibility of working with knives and take it seriously.

At the forest kindergarten, there were three classes, Dolphins, Snails and Swallows, each made up of a cross section of age groups, and Maelor and I were assigned to different classes. I spent 2 days with the Snails and 2 with the Swallows.

Day 1:

There was a basic routine to each day, which was defined by meal times. First thing, the children removed their own snow suits and then sat down in a circle on the floor with the Social Pedagogues to sing songs and play simple games, such as; trying to identify which of the children are not in class today, counting the children in the class, naming the days of the week. Bowls of fresh, chopped fruit and rye bread were then placed on the tables for the children to help themselves to. All the children were expected to serve all of their own food, pour their own drinks, clear and stack their dishes, at all meal times.

The Pedagogues in charge of Snails encouraged their children to spend most of the day outside, although they were allowed to play inside if they wished. Most chose to be outside. They all put their own snow suits, boots, hats and gloves on before they went out. Once outside, Martin and Mette, their Pedagogues, brought some tools out. Martin brought out knives and I joined him, eager to see how 3-5 year olds would respond to this. Each child brought their own stick, sat down and waited to be given a knife. They then, carefully and with a great deal of concentration, set to work whittling their sticks. I found a stick and joined in.

Occasionally, children would start crying in far corners of the wooded playground. If they came for comfort, the Pedagogues would cuddle them and then let them go back to playing. If a Pedagogue saw one or more children picking on another, they would go over and address it immediately,

kneeling or sitting down with the children and talking quietly with them. If this did not fail to solve a conflict and one child continued to pick on another, they sometimes withdrew the hostile child from the group for some one to one time.

Martin built and lit a fire. Mette sat down next to it and children drifted over to sit with her. I spent some time there too and other Pedagogues came and went. When Mette was on her own, she had to attend to a crying child some distance away and she extinguished the fire before she went.

Lunch of smorresbrod was served on the outside tables. The children were given a plate and a cup. They each made their own lunch and poured their own water from big jugs. The children were allowed to determine what they chose to eat and how much they ate. As with all other meals, they cleared and stacked their own plates and cups.



Lunch time: Smorresbrod in the sunshine:

Caring for each other; socialisation at play

In the afternoon, I spent time with a group of boys who were trying to speak to me. I got a stick and started drawing pictures in the sand. They quickly shouted out the Danish names for what I was drawing. We did this for some time and we were all entertained by it. Martin and Mette then called all the Snails to come in. One of the children had celebrated her birthday over the weekend and her father had brought in cakes. The father played a guitar and everybody sang a long birthday song, before the girl distributed the cakes. It was then time to get the bus back into the city. Lots of the children fell asleep on the bus, including a boy who had chosen to sit next to me.

In the evening, Maelor and I joined a martial arts class which we had been invited to by Martin and Charlie last Wednesday. This was extremely energetic and I was exhausted but refreshed at the end of it. These evening classes are attended by Pedagogues, trainees and young people and are aimed at socialising the young people, while teaching them skills and getting them fit. The Pedagogues attend, whether any of the young people come or not, inviting and encouraging each young person until they feel able to try it out. Again and again, I saw this patient, long term approach being taken and the results I saw within the young people were impressive. As I think about this, I am drawn to make a comparison with the growth of a Larch tree. In the UK, the Larch is a rapid growth, softwood. It grows very quickly but the wood is structurally weak. In the colder climes of Siberia and Scandinavia, the Larch grows much more slowly and the wood is strong, like a hardwood. If the bonds that form naturally within families are akin to the oak and the short term bonds within

residential care homes are like the UK Larch, then the Danish Pedagogical approach is like the Scandinavian Larch.

Day 2:

Maelor and I spoke about our experiences and observations on the cycle to the base. The Pedagogues stay back and let the children fend for and entertain themselves until they ask for help or attention. Martin had explained that one of the primary aims at the kindergarten is to socialise the children with their peers. Yesterday, I had gone out into the group of children and played with them. Today, I decided that I would try to follow the example of the Pedagogues and see how this worked out. The day was much more relaxed for me and I found that I had children around me for most of the time.

The 2 Pedagogues I saw most of today interacted with the children in different ways. One was very warm and comforting, offering lots of hugs, while the other was more business-like. Helle, the manager, took Maelor and me on a tour of the kindergarten and told us its history. Stockholmsgave means Gift from Stockholm and was given by the Swedes after the Second World War, in recognition of the hardships suffered by the Danes, and was originally a residential facility. It is now home to three different kindergartens from Copenhagen, which share the facilities equally.

After I finished for the day, I went shopping for the ingredients for tonight's cooking with Jensine. I met Jensine and Birgitte in the supermarket, doing the same. Birgitte collected me later and drove me to Jensine's. I had brought ingredients for 2 main courses and we made them together. As we cooked, there was a healthy blend of humour and serious discussion about techniques, tastes and textures. Birgitte sat back and did some knitting, watching us cook and joining in the conversation.

During dinner, the conversation quickly moved to self-belief, confidence, ability and anxieties. It was a very deep conversation and Jensine showed an ability to identify and express her feelings. As we talked, Jensine referred back to conversations she had shared with Birgitte in the past, finding commonality with what we were discussing now.

Jensine's pudding was delicious, so much so that I asked if I could take some home. Jensine gave me some to give to Maelor too. When it was time to leave, Jensine struggled a bit with goodbye. We had agreed to stay in touch and Jensine was not confident that I would do so. We spoke about trust, commitment and honesty for a while longer, before we finally said goodbye. Birgitte drove me home and we spoke about the conversation held over dinner. Birgitte spoke about the mothering role that she has with Jensine and how she balances this with her privacy. Birgitte emphasised that this is an important role that she plays for Jensine and said that she is comfortable with the boundary between her work and private life.



Joanne is training to be a chef. I spent a wonderful evening cooking, eating and laughing with her. Lemon Fromage a la Joanne (I should have taken the photo first but it tasted and looked so good that I forgot!)

Day 3:

I moved to the Swallows today. Some of this group were among the youngest and newest in the kindergarten and they were more needy than the group in Snails. The morning was spent painting. Each child got the opportunity to make 2 paintings and some had to be patient as they waited their turn. I saw no complaints or attempts to jump the queue. Maria explained that they do not praise individual paintings. They do ask the children what they are painting and then make a note at the bottom of the page. At a later date, they will go back to the paintings and discuss them with the child, seeing how much of the meaning has been remembered. Sometimes, they will give broad themes for the children to interpret. The week before, they were given 3 colours, green, white and yellow, and asked to paint a spring picture. All of these pictures were up on the walls. Today they had all the available colours.

Lunch was a messy affair, with the main dish being a fruity porridge called gruel. Some of the children did not eat this and asked for rye bread. The afternoon was then spent outside. There was a large crowd of children listening to one of the team playing guitar and singing story songs. I sat down to whittle and lots of the children joined in.

Before afternoon snack, I saw a staff interaction with a child which I was concerned about and, when I was not reassured by my enquiries, I spoke to a Pedagogue, who immediately approached the staff member and assessed the situation. She entered into conversation with the staff member and discussed what other approaches could be taken to achieve the goal. When a more appropriate approach had been identified and agreed on, the Pedagogue discussed situations when the initial method might have been suitable. The Pedagogue thanked me for alerting her to the issue and said that she had intervened immediately because of its serious nature. If it had been a more minor practice issue, she would have monitored the situation for a few days, to assess whether it was a one off, or a regular pattern of behaviour.

Day 4:

The children were divided into their age groups today, to allow them to further socialise with their peer group. Maelor and I went with 2 Pedagogues to a large, basement room, where the play was focussed on movement, colour and touch. The children were encouraged to take part but were allowed to stay back. One boy who recently joined the kindergarten did stay out but he watched and later joined in. One of the activities had children standing barefoot in a basin of kidney beans and having them poured over their feet and ankles. The children were captivated by this and were very calm while it was happening.

After the structured section, the children were allowed to play in whatever way they chose, within the room. The Pedagogues sat back and observed the dynamics at work, asking us if we had noticed that the girls had started a game about mothers and babies, while the boys were all play fighting. As I observed this whole session, I wondered how I could translate this into an exercise for working with teenagers.

After lunch, all the children went outside to play. Martin built a fire and I cooked the haggis, neeps and tatties I had brought in big pots over the fire. The afternoon was very relaxed, with children seeking us out and spending time with us. Lots of them worked with their knives as they sat around the fire.

All the children sang us a song about leaving. I then read the Address to the Haggis in broad Scots and Martin, who had brought in a kilt, cut up the haggis. All of the children and staff had a portion and the children ate it all. It was sad to be leaving and I felt that I was just settling into the rhythm of the place.



A day of celebration and sadness; Saying goodbye to the good people of Stockholmsgave

Back at the base, some of the children drew pictures for me and I got to speak to some of their parents. We said our final goodbyes and cycled away. It felt unreal that we would not be going back again .

That evening, Maelor and I had arranged to attend another of the Sports groups, Cross Training, and we were joined by James, from the Lancashire group. This helped me sleep soundly again!

Social Pedagogues:

We were privileged to spend time with some wonderful Pedagogues during our time in Copenhagen. They were all different, with different strengths and areas of expertise but they all shared common philosophy, a positive regard for children, young people and each other. They all had an inner confidence that their work and choices were respected and this showed in their practice. They are always looking for inner strengths, goals, ambitions and talents in those that they care for, in their colleagues and in themselves, and celebrate those that are revealed, giving them their full support.



Inspirational people I have met: Mark, Anders, Sara, Marie

The relationship the Pedagogues have with the young people is an equal partnership. Sometimes, the young person leads the Pedagogue. From my perspective, there were times when it was not possible to identify the adult and the young person from behaviour or the relationship dynamic.

The way the Pedagogues were treated mirrored their philosophy of care for the young people. Christoffer, a Pedagogue at Rymarksvaenge, had been using his passion for fitness and sports to work with the young people and felt that there would be benefits to expanding this, with him dedicating his time to the role and bringing in others to help. He was encouraged to prepare a proposal and present it to the company. Having done so, he was given backing and has been working full time on the Sports project for over a year. He has engaged volunteers from the Social Pedagogy Seminarium and sourced further funding to expand the project. Christoffer's enthusiasm is infectious and has a positive influence on the young people he works with. By supporting the vision of Christoffer, his employers have shown that they value the Pedagogues they employ and that their policy remains true to the Social Pedagogical philosophy. This, in turn, is inspiring other Pedagogues and trainees to be creative.



Inspirational people I have met, Pt 2: Martin, Rasmus, Mette, Lise

Pedagogues view every young person as a unique individual. On several occasions, in both placements, I asked Pedagogues about common issues and challenges which young people face. On each occasion, the Pedagogues explained to me that young people are all different and face their own, unique challenges, that it is not helpful or desirable to attempt comparisons, or quote statistics. At first, I found this frustrating, as there are common issues, such as endemic cannabis use,

but I started to relax as I saw that this was part of the culture in Denmark. My discomfort comes as much from the fact that I come from a culture where statistics and the patterns therein are measured in almost every area of society, from the stock market, to weather patterns, drug abuse and teenage pregnancies to unemployment. I found that releasing the need to look for patterns did not seem to hinder the Pedagogues in their task.

The Social Pedagogues I spent time with all place emphasis on encouraging the development of self-sufficiency and confidence in their own ability. I saw this approach being practiced from the earliest age in kindergarten. The Pedagogues leave 3 year olds to find their own way, only helping if approached and asked for help. A good example of this would be getting on and off the bus. Each step is at hip height for the smallest children, yet they all navigate it without help, carrying their rucksacks. This was a very important task for the children and offers of assistance were usually declined.



One small step for a man, one giant leap for a three year old.

The only time when a Pedagogue intervened without being asked, in my observation, was when there was conflict between children, or a child was injured. When one child hit another, the Pedagogue challenged this behaviour immediately, asking the child to consider whether the other liked or wanted what they were doing. When a child was hurt, the Pedagogue made themselves available and offered comfort in the form of hugs. In all such instances that I witnessed, these hugs were accepted and the child went back to playing almost immediately.

Management:

Pedagogues were all confident in their own autonomy, comfortable about making decisions without referring to line managers for support or permission. Although I did see the managers of both my placements, they were engaged in other matters throughout the working day and did not take an active role in the interactions with the young people while I was there.

Violence:

One area in which we would appear to take the longer term view concerns violence. We were told about a recent incident, in which a young person had assaulted the staff member. The young person was arrested, charged with assault and moved from the unit the same night. The Social Pedagogue expressed shock that I work in a setting where we sometimes look after young people who use violent behaviour to get their needs met. When we talked a bit more, I found some of the background to the assault. The girl had only moved to the unit three weeks before. She had split up with her boyfriend that day and was also going through a family trauma. The Social Pedagogue had said no to a request and the young person had assaulted him. When we talked more about the Care Visions approach to helping young people who express themselves violently to learn other methods of communication and expression, the Social Pedagogue became defensive of his position and was dismissive of the idea that he would ever work in such an environment. I felt that it was unfair to continue the conversation, as he was so obviously uncomfortable. Unfortunately, this was our last evening at Rymarksvaenge, so I was unable to seek any other perspectives from Social Pedagogues or management.

Practice Issues:

I saw one of the unqualified staff at the kindergarten in confrontation with a 3 year old girl. He was trying to make her go to the toilet before she had her snack. She was crying and refusing. He dragged the child down the corridor by the arm and stood over her in the bathroom. I asked what he was doing and he explained that they try to get kids into the habit of going to the toilet before eating. I felt uncomfortable about the way this looked so I asked a Pedagogue if this was an accepted and established policy. She looked concerned and said that it was not, saying that she would go and investigate. When she returned, she said that the man had told her he did not know what else to do. The Pedagogue spoke with him about alternative approaches which could be taken and the man was able to choose a different way. They also discussed a child for whom the initial approach would have been appropriate. This discussion was conducted in a way that allowed the man to focus on learning how to improve his practice, rather than dwelling on what he was doing wrong. The staff member thanked her for her intervention, which was seen as a valuable learning opportunity. The Pedagogue thanked me for speaking to her and said that she had dealt with it immediately, because it was a serious matter. If it had been a minor concern, she would have monitored his practice for a few days, to see if it was a one off or something more regular.

Financial Concerns:

Financial restraints are starting to make themselves felt in Danish Social Care. Staff and management at both the residential unit and the kindergarten expressed concerns for the future. Both services have had to make recent cutbacks; the kindergarten have made redundancies and the residential unit have the threat of closure if they do not have full occupancy.

Record Keeping:

The Pedagogues in the residential unit and throughcare are coming to terms with a new and unfamiliar level of record keeping, with an emphasis on providing evidence of progress in the work being undertaken with each young person. Pedagogues said that they understand that this is both

necessary and inevitable but also observed that it was taking time away from their working day, which would otherwise have been spent with the young people.

Danish Attitudes to Social Care:

At Rymarksvaenge, the Pedagogues said that most of the young people in their care were there on a voluntary basis, there not being a significant stigma to involving Social Services when a family is struggling to cope. There is also support for families to learn parenting skills and many parents accept this when their children move into residential care.

Danish Social Pedagogy:

Social Pedagogy treats all equally, yet sees each as a unique individual, seeks to bring out the unique talents and abilities within the individual, and does not try to make them conform to societal expectations and norms, yet still aims to socialise the individual.

All external influences, such as education, philosophies and activities, are seen as tools. The aim is not to impose a teaching upon the individual and make the individual conform to the teaching, but to use the teaching as a tool with which to bring out that which is already within the individual.

There were times during my first placement, at Rymarksvaenge, when I felt almost overwhelmed by the kaleidoscope of emotions I was experiencing. Much of what I saw mirrored what we consider good practice within Care Visions. Beyond this, there were aspects which inspired me to have confidence in my own intuition and to seek out teaching and learning opportunities which bring me joy, as this authentic enthusiasm has a profound effect on those around us.

There were a couple of occasions when I felt discomfort or concern about aspects of practice. Some of these related to communication and record keeping, areas which have been prioritised in Scotland, after being highlighted as failings in historical Public Enquiries. I think that we are very strong in these areas and could help the Danish by sharing this expertise. Some of my discomfort was undoubtedly down to my own conditioning and did not reflect upon Danish child care practice.

Scottish and Danish practice has a lot of common ground. Beyond this, there are areas which the Danes are seeking to develop, which we are already strong. Equally, we could benefit from further exploring aspects of Danish practice.

Reflective seminars:

All of the participants in the Mobility took part in 3 seminars; one on the day before we started our first placements; one at the end of our first placements and; one at the end of our second placements.

The first seminar started with a series of tasks, games and songs, designed to relax us and encourage teamwork. These were very enjoyable and set the mood for the day. Gabriel then gave us a model to work with when writing our reflective diaries and we spent the rest of the morning working with

this. After lunch, we were visited by 2 Social Pedagogues from one of the placements, the Star Club youth group, and had a talk with them which gave a flavour of the Danish approach to Social Pedagogy. The energy levels within the group were high by the end of this meeting were high and everybody was enthusiastic about what lay ahead. The rest of the day was spent walking through Copenhagen and taking a guided boat tour of the harbour and canals.

The second seminar was very different. The theme was “How am I feeling?” and there were some strong emotions expressed. This was the first time that we had all been together since the first seminar and emotions were running high. We had all had such diverse experiences and this was apparent in the group dynamic. Somebody said that they had not had a chance to say goodbye at their first placement and I realised that I had similar feelings.

Some of us were very emotional, some defensive, vulnerable and confused. I felt sad. I had to face the fact that I was not going back to Rymarksvaenge. At the end of the meeting, I felt totally deflated and slept for the rest of the afternoon. I had such a brilliant first week with Maelor and I had expected that this seminar would be a celebration. I had not anticipated that people would be so upset.

In the evening, we took the bus and underground to Christiania, to have dinner in a restaurant. I would describe the cuisine as high end, hippy fusion. The plan had been to watch a live band after the meal but, although dinner was relaxed and cordial, I think that everybody was exhausted and I was happy to head back for an early night.



“High end, hippy fusion”

The third and final seminar was all about reflection, first individually and then collectively in our 2 groups. The Care Visions team each contributed one aspect of Danish Social Pedagogy which we felt we could take home with us and the Lancashire team did the same. The 2 groups then came together and shared our findings.



Shared findings and reflections

In the evening, we all attended a party at Charlotte's house. This was a joyous occasion, although there was an awareness that a stage of our journey was coming to a close. There was a presentation of gifts and certificates, then a musical performance by Danny and Maelor. I had tears in my eyes as I sang along and I saw a few others whose eyes were also glistening. The Danish people have been very welcoming to us and this warmth was evident tonight.

EVALUATION/CONCLUSIONS:

I have returned to Scotland with renewed enthusiasm for the care of our young people and the development of our practice. I feel changed by the experience, calmer and more confident in my own abilities, my intuition and the potential for positive outcomes for the young people we care for with the Care Visions environment.

"Every individual is seen as equal, yet no two individuals are treated the same."

In Denmark, the philosophy which is applied within the care environment is equally applied to all. Each three year old in kindergarten, each teenager in the residential unit, each young adult in Hybler, each care worker and each Social Pedagogue is celebrated and encouraged to develop and express the gifts and talents which are inherent within them. External sources of learning are seen as tool which may bring out that which already lies within. They are not seen as something with which to fill an empty vessel.

I found this philosophy to have an infectious quality. Entering wholeheartedly into this environment, as Maelor and I did, I could feel myself growing. It was a pleasant and exciting sensation, a feeling of infinite potential, and this rubbed off on me over the course of a few days. I feel that creating that fertile environment for growth and change is a most important priority for me and I am happy to report that, in the month since I returned, there are signs that the 'infection' continues to spread.

I was deeply inspired by the support that was given to Christoffer's vision of using sport as a tool to help young people grow. All the Danish Social Pedagogues I spent time with were encouraged and supported to develop their own interests, talents, gifts and ideas, to then use them as authentic tools with which to encourage and support the young people in their care to develop their own interests, talents, gifts and ideas. There is a momentum within this approach which is tangible.

With this in mind, I am paying more attention to my own intuition and have been taking more opportunities to use my own skills and passions to create opportunities for growth with the young people I care for. I also find that ideas are bubbling up from within me, for projects big and small, for ways to inspire my colleagues to bring their own interests, talents, gifts and ideas into their practice and the lives of our young people.

I truly love the Danish principle that external sources of learning are not to be imposed upon the individual but, instead, used as tools to help the individual develop that which already lies within. I can see great value in using this approach to develop existing training programmes.

Spending time with Brigitte, the Hybler, throughcare Pedagogue, gave me an insight into the importance of the transition from being in care to self-sufficiency. In Scotland, this transition is among the greatest challenges that young people in care face. I saw the value that the relationship with Brigitte had for the young people and I hope that I will one day have the opportunity to help young people in this way.

When I try to express how I feel about what I have experienced on the “Social Pedagogy-Learning in Practice” Mobility, I keep coming back to a common theme; Inspiration. If we can inspire young people, that inspiration will give them the drive to achieve their goals. For us to inspire others, we must ourselves be inspired. I have been inspired by the work of Brigitte, Christoffer, Lise, Marie, Martin, Mette, Rasmus, and all the other Social Pedagogues I met, plus the young people who agreed to spend time with us; inspired to seek out the learning tools which lie all around us and to pursue those which seem to lie out of reach, then share the exploration of them with my colleagues and the young people in our care.

We each have the potential for growth within us. The more fertile the soil, the greater the growth. I saw a fertile environment within the Danish Social Pedagogical institutions which I visited and I have recognised aspects of myself which I can develop, to create a more fertile environment for the young people I care for.

Taking part in the **EU Leonardo Mobility Project- “Social Pedagogy- Learning in Practice”** has been a great honour and a life changing adventure. The Danish people I met invited me not only into their work places but, also, their lives and their homes. I thank each and every one of them for their kindness, their openness and generosity of spirit. Danes and Scots share a lot of common ground. Our differences are skin deep but our sames go all the way through.

Matthew McFadzean

20th April 2012