

Denmark: “Reading Friends”

Organization implementing the project

Name: Tønder Kommuneskole
Country: Denmark

Context

Two problems are tackled in this project: To motivate 4th grade children to read and to give lonely elderly people in a nursing home company and build friendship across generations.

The context is a public school and a nursing home in the town Tønder in Southern Denmark.

The target groups are some elderly people living in the local nursing home Richtesens Plejecenter, and 4th grade pupils aged 10 years in the local school Tønder Kommuneskole.

Action

The initiative to the project was taken by a staff member in the nursing home. She approached a teacher in the local school and suggested that pupils from the school should regularly visit some of the elderly and read aloud to them. The school was enthusiastic about the idea and the project is now organized so that all pupils from the 4th grade in the school visit the nursing home on the last Friday every month. Each elderly person has got 2-3 “Reading friends”. They take turns reading aloud from a book which they selected themselves, and after having read for 15-20 minutes, the pupils have an informal conversation with the elderly person, in which both parties tell each other about their life.

The initiative was awarded the “Success of the month” award by the local newspaper Jyske Vestkysten in June 2009.

Outcomes and impact

Outcomes: The project has motivated the children to read, and to become better readers. The children see a purpose to reading. The pupils are also forced to consider which kind of literature to select to make it interesting to the target group; the elderly people.

The elderly people are happy to get a visit from children, to whom they can talk and exchange experience.

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Quotes

“We got a new pupil in the class who also got a reading friend at the nursing home. She came to me after a while and said: ‘Now it is suddenly fun to read!’ It is very nice that she’s got that experience. The children can see a purpose, and that motivates them. Because of the contact with the elderly, reading becomes communication. They feel listened to, and several pupils told us it was like being on holiday”

(Gitte Bønning Kristensen, teacher)

“I was a little shy the first time. But not any more! Now, I just look forward to visiting him and reading aloud. He is very nice and a good listener. It is better and better each time, because we know him better, and he tells us about the time when he was working in a dairy” (Anders Thrige Nielsen, 10 years)

