

Norway: “The Gjelleraas project” or “School grandparents”

Organization implementing the project

Name: Gjelleraas skole, Skjetten
Country: Norway
Web site: <http://www.skedsmo.kommune.no/Hovedtema/Barnehage-og-Skole/Skole/Grunnskoler/Gjelleras/>

Context

The project started as an offer to children with very low test scores, but it has increased to include pupils with learning difficulties, behavioural problems or simply in need of more contact with adults or little knowledge of (Norwegian) society. The activities are put up, and then the teachers cooperate on identifying children for the activities.

At present (2011) the volunteers include three men and five women. One drives a mini bus they borrow from the municipality for outings.

Action

The volunteers and the “social teacher” take the pupils on various excursions and organise activities at school.

The excursions may go to a number of places, and are chosen both for the benefit of the children and of the “grandparents”. They may go to outdoor museums, visitors’ farms, the technical, zoological, botanical or historical museums, the Munch Museum, the famous new Opera House, or a nearby lake for a nice walk in the woods where they pick berries and mushrooms, and may have a barbecue.

Activities carried out within the school’s premises include crafts, cooking, baking, storytelling and board games, but also reading and homework aid.

Two of the «grandparents» are trained chefs, another is a painter and textile artist, and their courses are highly popular. All activities include communication.

The volunteers are also responsible for applying for funding, and are sometimes invited to school to assist in different school activities like reading aloud with the children.

This was added to what already exists: parents' meetings twice a year and "development talks" (one pupil and their parents) twice a year and the opportunity to talk to the "social teacher" when needed.

Outcomes and impact

Children and "grandparents" are all stimulated by their common activities. There is also a positive impact on the local community, as both the children and the elderly through this have more people to simply greet in the streets. It has also has a positive effects on mental health, as the children experience mastering, well-being and improved social skills. Research shows that poor social skills are an important factor in relation to substance abuse and crime.

The children gain vocabulary from the activities, which is especially important for children with an immigrant background. They also get important contact with adults, and feel "seen".

The "grandparents" likewise get important contact with children, and say that the project helps them remember their skills and keep them young. They also get the opportunity to go places they would not go on their own, so they too experience new things.

Quotes

"This is good mental health!" (Volunteer)

"We learned a lot about the history of Oslo. We also saw the 17 meter tall Monolith and found out that it is has 121 figures. We had a nice trip in the warm sun." (Pupils)



Pupils from 5th and 7th grade joined ten volunteers and the «social teacher» to the Vigeland Park.



The Monolith with its 121 figures.