

What does aftercare mean in a Nordic /Danish context?

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We have in Denmark since 1976 had an ongoing social political discussion on the question *Do we need to have an aftercare in our welfare state?* Politicians have not been able to find a sufficient answer. And therefore our parliament has not been able to agree on a concept for a law or legislation that could give guidelines for social pedagogues and social workers on how to offer the right social service to e.g. young people that are in desperate need of aftercare.

Several times experts and researchers have acted as whistleblowers but for deaf ears. Because it is obvious for all that we need a social pedagogical measure and institutionalized offer to young people who have been excluded from society.

How can a welfare state produce so many losers?

There are many answers to that question. But let's go a little back in history – and see, if we can find a reasonable explanation.

In 1905 the Danish parliament legislated a new law called “Børneloven” - Children's law - which was the first law in Europe given to protect children against all kind of abuse in an 1905 context. Child and youth care organization – mostly based on Christianity – had been fighting for this law ever since the Danish Constitution was legislated in 1849. Now the implementation could begin. And it was a success. A very well-known Danish politician, Peter Sabroe, now started a war against any private or institutional organization that did not live up to a certain standard and to a certain ethic code in the work with children and young people that for different reasons could not live with their biological parents. In that context aftercare came on the political agenda.

A certain legislation made it possible for organizations and public social service to offer young people social pedagogical and social work assistance and help. E.g. finding a way to education. Apprenticeship in workplaces. A place to live. Financial help – and - not at least: “mentors”.

In 1933 a new social law was legislated: “Socialreformen” it was called. Related to this law all municipalities had to implement a certain public service called “Børneværnet” . It was a public institution that had to supervise and control the private and public child and youth care. In this context aftercare was described as a necessity. Young people that need aftercare help could be “protected” by the “Børneværn” up to 23 years – and sometimes for a longer period.

After The Second World war the social democratic welfare model in Denmark was formed and slowly implemented in legislating e.g. social laws **in 1946**, and off cause – also in practice. It was a success! But in despite of this the amount of children living in residential homes and in foster family care increased dramatically. At the end of 50th the Danish population was 4.5 million inhabitants. More than 10.000 children was not living with their biological parents or families. In 2012 we are 5.4 million inhabitants and we have some 12.000 children not living with their biological families.

In 1974 the Danish parliament legislated a new social reform that was implemented April 1st 1976. “Bistandsloven” it was called. According to this law the “Børneværnet” was dismantled. The new law was an umbrella law in the sense that whatever social problem you might have; you would need to go

to the local social service center. The “motto” or keyword was that the family should stay together. If any family developed or came into social problems the social workers and the social pedagogues should try to make as little intervention as possibly. Try not to do any kind of forced removal – and if a child could not make an everyday life with their families – they should go and live with a foster family – primarily – and for a very short time – and as close to the biological family as possible. Conclusion: *We do not need aftercare anymore!*

But as mentioned above: Experts, researchers and politicians from the left wing in the Parliament blew their whistles by referring to the fact that the numbers of children and young people living in residential homes or foster family was still increasing. Not much – but increasing. From 1% of the population up to 1.5 %.

In 1998 a new social law was legislated. It was called “Serviceloven” . It replaced “Bistandsloven”. The “motto” was described in three priorities:

- The first level is free offers advice to people with social problems in a broad sense.
- Second level is a series of public service delivery, usually paid for, for example, kindergarten, nursery, recreation and education for adults.
- The third level has special deals and relief measures for individuals with physical or mental disability or with special social problems, such as care homes.

But the whistle blowers kept on whistling: *We need aftercare. The number of young drop outs is increasing!* Especially young boys with another ethnic background than Danish dropped out of school. The labor market was not able to include them – and in many of the big cities we saw locations changing into ghettos. We call it ghettofication of a minority in society.

Now – 14 years after the legislating the new “Serviceloven” whistleblowers are still blowing – and the politicians seems not to hear it. It is on the agenda in all media. Researchers are every day reporting about young people that in an early stage in life are trapped in a social deroute. Not only people with another ethnic background. We have young people that cannot live up to the standard requirements at school. They are called technically illiterate.

The goal for the next generation is that more than 90 % of a cohort should move through a secondary education. Is that possible? You can ask. The answer is, yes BUT it requires a lowering of the academic level. Is that possible? Yes, if we rephrases the content of secondary education. E.g. by more “creating” technically oriented colleges with practical content.

Is there absolutely no possibility to offer aftercare for young people? Yes, we do have a legislation that makes it possible. It is called “Ungdomssanktion”. As a part of the social law, we have a § that gives the social service aftercare to impose a penalty to young people that have been into heavy criminality - as an alternative to ordinary imprisonment in jail. They are “sentenced” into a special institution in a closed unit. And they can stay there up to one year. In average the stay will typically last from 3 to 6 months. During the stay the young people will have to participate in different workshops and school class. After the stay the young people have to receive aftercare for a year or two in a special institution, where they have to go to school or to work in different kind of handyman workshops.

The configuration problem.

My research shows that one of the major obstacles for the young dropouts is in the need of configuration of the social rules (also called social grammar) and the cultural context. Training in such a configuration could be the key to a better social inclusion and innovation. It could be the content of aftercare. It is a challenge for social pedagogy and social work. Can social pedagogues and social workers match this challenge?

The Nordic welfare model based on the Danish tradition is about to be phased out in Denmark. It means that aftercare is given back to where it came from: Back to the private (welfare) organizations. The question is: Can the private organizations match the challenge. I have no answers to that question.

Thank you for your attention.