

The Nordic Way, Denmark

**CHILDREN IN THE DANISH
SHELTERS**

Presentation of LOKK:

- The National Organization of Shelters for Battered Women and their Children has existed since 1987 and works as an umbrella organization and pressure group for women's shelters across Denmark. Today there are 39 members.
- The feministic foundation is the overall basis and thus works to create awareness, prevent, and fight physical and psychological violence against women and children.
- Every year publishes a detailed statistical overview of women and children in shelters.
- One of the ways the shelters contribute to create awareness is by establishing working groups within areas of interest.

Example: Bring the children in focus.

Methods:

- Produce visible proofs/ documentation about the children and the violence they have either witnessed or been exposed to

Aim:

- **To break the taboo about violence against women and their children.**
- **To get funding to secure the professional help for the children.**
- In the late nineteen eighties the shelters wanted to bring focus on the approximately 2000 children who every year stayed at shelters with mothers who had been exposed to violence.

The Children's Group.

- Volunteers from the shelters met and established “The Children’s Group”. Most of the shelters participated and planned to hold regular meetings and upgrading seminars in order to it make visible, that these children did not get the necessary support.
- At this time most of the shelters at were run by volunteers and it was seen as a problem, that a child could meet up to 50 different volunteers during a weeks stay at a shelter.

The Manifest of Childrens Rights

A shelters manifesto of Children's Rights was commonly agreed upon.

- Children have the right to:
- talk about the violence that has taken place in their family
- get to know that there are other families with violence
- experience that violence does not have to be a secret
- be protected against listening to other adults stories about the violence they have been exposed to
- have own "children's" physical areas in the shelters
- have the possibility to have visiting friends in the shelter
- have good experiences during their stay in the shelter
- have contact to somebody after leaving the shelter
- get personal support/ help to their crisis/problems

The Manifest of Childrens Rights

- be children and to know that children can trust adults
- be prepared to a future life after living in the shelter
- be permitted to talk about their negative and positive feelings towards their mother and father
- get help to see their father in a good way

In the shelters both volunteers and paid staff worked with the children as well as they could and at the same time it was agreed that a common statistic should be produced for each child staying at a shelter.

The Children's Statistic.

The questionnaires in the children's statistic would for example put focus on the violence that a child had been exposed to:

- Physical violence?
- Mental terror?
- Sexual abuse?
- Material violence?

Who in the family has exposed the child to violence?

- Biological father?
- Mother's husband/friend/lover?
- Mother?
- Others in the family?
- Give examples!
- Each answer would be elaborated into further question in order to give a clear picture of the child's situation.

The questionnaire has over the years been elaborated into 40 questions.

Reports:

1990.

The result of the first questionnaires became the background for the first report in 1988 – 90 written by Else Christensen, Copenhagen 1990.

1995.

In 1995 the first report about the children in shelters was published by the Ministry of Social Affairs. The report was followed by funding from the ministry that made it possible for the shelters to apply for the funding of salaries, seminars, education of staff, etc. The funding ran from 1995 till 1999. Evaluation of the home programmed was done by Hanne Lilholt Behrens who later on produced several reports on work done with the children in the shelters.

2002.

In the year of 2002 it is reported:

"All centers have professional children's staff. Normally the pre-school teacher will contact the mother as soon as possible after her arrival at the shelter, to talk about the child's practical situation as well as the child's experience with violence.". "Practically all the shelters have children's group meetings, where the children get together and share the experience they have had, often through different kinds of games. Some of the shelters offer talks with both the mother and the child, and sometimes with the child alone."
("Shelters in Denmark for Battered Women", Inger Koch- Nielsen and Lucia Caceres, Welfare systems and policies, working Paper 02:2005)

Governmental Action plans.

- The first Danish action plan to combat men's violence towards women and their children came in 2002 until 2004 and the result of LOKKs lobbying was that the children had specific focus.
- This was followed up in the next action plan from 2005 until 2008.
- 2008.
- This year 2008 a new law has been passed from the Ministry of Social Affairs instructing the local council to provide psychological help to children over 6 years of age staying at shelters with their mothers.

The method.

- The method with questionnaires/ statistics is used in relation to other problems that LOKK wants to put focus on: the battered women living in shelter, battered foreign women in shelters, non- Danish speaking women in shelters, etc.
- For further information see: [www. LOKK.dk](http://www.LOKK.dk)
- Lis Vahlun, Denmark