

The Mobile Café



Part 1: Parameters and Scope..... Page 2

Part 2: Content and Idea.....Page 4

Part 1.

Parameters and Scope

Purpose:

- The Mobile Café exists to help the most vulnerable and marginalized people on the streets based on *projekt UDENFOR*'s (project OUTSIDE) ideology that everyone needs contact and relations with others.
- Functions as *projekt UDENFOR*'s basic project in the outreach program in the streets.
- Participates in developing new projects and initiatives in *projekt UDENFOR*.

Anchoring:

- The Mobile Café is a firmly anchored project with a fixed core service and it serves as the basis for other projects, both of a practical and knowledge producing character, within the framework of *projekt UDENFOR*.

Method:

- The Mobile Café provides basic care in the streets through distribution of food and clothes, practical help as well as contact and company.

Staff members:

- There are 3 full time staff members.
- The group is composed of staff members with different disciplinary backgrounds.

Tasks:

- The employees do both outreach and outgoing work.
- The active number of users with a close relation amounts on average to about 10 individuals and in the course of a year to about 20 – 25 different people.
- Perform kitchen duties, among these grocery shopping.
- Meals are prepared 6 days a week, Monday through Saturday, in the Mobile Café.
- 50 servings are made each time and there is contact with 40-50 people every night.

- Participate in *project UDEFOR*'s education program and function as information gateway for outreach work.
- Documentation and gathering of knowledge of homelessness.
- The Mobile Café is responsible for the volunteers.
- Regularly provide documentation of activities.

Volunteers:

- There are about 40-50 volunteers connected with the Mobile Café, divided on the following tasks:
 - i. Food distribution
 - ii. Care
 - iii. Health project
 - iv. Veterinarian project
 - v. Food preparation.

Students:

- Besides thesis students, 1 social worker student is connected with the Mobile Café, which also shares 1 student of pedagogy with other pU activities.

Other fixed activities:

- Each December the Mobile Café hosts a Christmas party for the homeless in the park.
- It is party in which both volunteers and professionals participate.
- Participate each October 17 in the international homelessness day.
- In May it is *projekt UDEFOR*'s birthday and every year we celebrate with the homeless in the park where we have a barbecue and a good time.
- Each year in June we have The Users' Bazaar in Odense, Fyn.
- Besides the fixed red-letter days and activities the Mobile Café focuses on being visible in public with the van when there are relevant events, which can be both supportive or create debates.

Future:

- The Mobile Café must, now and in the future, be flexible and broad and make an inclusive effort on street level to help the most vulnerable of all, the homeless citizens with limited means.

Part 2.

Content and Idea

The Beginning of the Mobile Café:

In 1999 the permanently employed outreach workers in *projekt UDENFOR* realized that many homeless people did not give priority to a decent daily meal, despite the fact that many warm shelters offered a meal for a symbolic price or for free if they had no money. However, for a variety of reasons, few took advantage of the offer. For instance, some stayed away if they could not take their dog inside or because they did not wish to meet certain people they were afraid of. Some of the homeless with mental problems were too paranoid to use these soup kitchens.

In *projekt UDENFOR* we were convinced that in order to have the energy to deal with daily life on the streets, maybe even to change your life, a good, healthy and nutritional meal was essential. This was the main reason for starting the Mobile Café and it is also the reason why still exist today.

The Purpose of the Mobile Café

The purpose of the Mobile Café is to help the most vulnerable and marginalized people on the street based on the ideology of the Mobile Café that everyone is a social creature in need of contact and relations with other. The Mobile Café provides basic care in the streets through the distribution of food, clothes, practical help as well as contact and attention. It is a conscious decision to work on the streets in the public space because we access those users who cannot, or do not have the opportunity, to go inside. The Mobile Café is a firmly anchored project with a fixed core service and it serves as the basis for other projects, both practical and knowledge producing, within the framework of *projekt UDENFOR*.

The target group is the most vulnerable and isolated homeless people who live on the streets and who the Mobile Café try to establish contact with, and here no demands are made. We believe that even the most vulnerable and worst functioning people would like social contact. In this regard food

is fantastic tool to create and maintain contact, but it is just as important to have a chat as it is to distribute food, to establish a relation with those who live in isolation. Who are going to say no to hot meal when they are sitting freezing on a bench? And the food provides an immediate conversation starter. The help given is based on the wishes and needs of the individual homeless person.

Apart from the practical street effort, the Mobile Café is used extensively for teaching purposes and for the gathering of knowledge about homelessness. The Mobile Café is a good way to bring guests along in the streets without it seeming obtrusive to the homeless. We consider carefully which guests we bring along, and it has to have some relation to their jobs or studies. We bring politicians, students, mostly future pedagogues, social workers and nurses, but also anthropologists and others with us out on the streets. We often bring international guests who work with homelessness in their homelands. The Mobile Café has been the centre of several bachelor theses, final dissertations, one master and many smaller papers.

The Staff of the Mobile Café

The professional staff in the Mobile Café consists of employees with different professional backgrounds which provides a broad spectrum of competencies. The staff do both outreach and outgoing work. The outreach work focuses on both people and places and mostly takes place in Copenhagen. Focus in the outreach work is on establishing contact and form relations with vulnerable people with limited resources who live isolated on the street. The outgoing work begins when the relation with the homeless becomes safe and stable and regular arrangements can be made. The goal of the outreach and outgoing work is to establish contact and form relations, and this inclusive process can also result in other things, for instance, that the homeless person begins to express a wish for help with finances, housing, food or other things.

The overriding method of the Mobile Café is damage reduction, which means that we try to reduce the damage to the individual. We do this through conversation or provision of practical help such as food, sleeping bags, etc. The employees take their cue from the wishes of the individual and also respect if the individual expresses no wishes. In the Mobile Café attention and contact remain in focus.

In the first phase of the contact establishing work we use the method of observation technique, because observations provide the professional social assessment needed in order to engage in contact with a stranger. We observe the homeless person's behaviour, hygiene, circadian rhythm as

well as the place where the person stays or by the Mobile Café. The places we observe can be S-train stations, parks, backyards and usually the more isolated places in – and outside – the city, and we also observe the stops of the Mobile Café and its users there.

In the second phase, where contact is made, the employee tries to make the first encounter and initial contact phase brief and positive to ensure that the homeless would want to make contact again and to make the first meeting a pleasant experience for both parties.

In the third phase, where contact has been maintained over a period, the professional will work to clarify the situation of the homeless which happens through conversations. These conversations typically take place in the public space or where the homeless person lives on the street. The professional works in this regard from an overall impression of the homeless person in order to clarify his or her situation. Through the overall impression the professional uncovers different areas such as network, physical and mental health, housing, finances, education and job. This clarification provides, for one thing, a general impression of the individual in question, and, for another, it gives the professional an understanding of his or her situation in life as well as more opportunities for intervention at different levels. At this stage it is, furthermore, possible for the employee to determine whether to bring other professionals into the relation in order to support and help him or her in the best possible way as well as to ascertain both the short and the long term possible support measures. This phase can last from days to weeks to years and during the work in this phase it is not possible to set a fixed time frame. Moreover, there is the individual's personal development and process to consider, and it is important that the employee facilitates that process through time, patience, trust and space.

In so far as the individual person expresses a wish, which can be of such a nature that other collaborators, e.g. from the public sector, need to be involved, it is the job of the professional to assist in bridging the gap between him or her and the system or relevant volunteers in order to be able to cover the needs of the person in question in the best possible way. In this bridge building work it can also be necessary for the employee to act proactively and make contact with others before the need arises. Therefore, the employees in the Mobile Café are very aware of the importance of having a broad network of collaborators, both public and voluntary, as well as knowledge of what they can offer. Furthermore, the employee can offer to accompany him or her to, for instance, meetings with the local authorities, court cases, etc.

We are guests on the street, and therefore the task of establishing contact and a regular relation is always premised on the respect and recognition of the individual person. The outreach work takes place both weekdays and weekends at all hours since we work day, evening, and night shifts. Apart from outreach and outgoing work on street level the employees also have other tasks. These could be administrative work, cooking 5-6 days a week, as well as practical jobs in connection with this, coordination of volunteer jobs, giving talks and having info meetings for external visitors, house meetings, etc.

The employees receive supervision from an external supervisor every four weeks. Concerning documentation, we have an obligation to keep a record of the users we have regular contact with in order to be able to describe, and thereby document progress in the relation, and to use the document as a professional argument for further steps. In addition, the record is also used as a tool for the professional to make visible both the relation work and the professional considerations. In the documentation work we also make written observations. The employees prioritize the cooperation and the contact with the volunteers in order for the effort on the street to become as wide-ranging as possible and thereby provide the best possible help for the homeless.

The Mobile Café also participates in other networks, e.g., the annual "day of the homeless", which we help organize each year, "Night Need", of which Brian is the president, a coalition of 8 organizations all working within the area of homelessness who have opened an emergency shelter for foreigners in the three coldest months for the past three years. We are part of a task group with Københavns Kommune (the city council) where we try to find solutions to resolve the situation regarding the foreign homeless people in Copenhagen.

Documentation in the Mobile Café

Apart from keeping a record of the users, as mentioned in the above, the volunteers of the Mobile Café also do documentation. The volunteers keep a journal every evening and draw up a requisition form which they use in external and internal reports and for statistical purposes. Every year the Mobile Café produces four quarterly reports as well as an annual report. In addition, the intention is that every month we take stock of the users of the café and look at the composition and the nationalities in order to get an overview of the group. Documentation in the Mobile Café contributes to the accumulation of knowledge which then can be communicated in various contexts, and it can also be used to document the work done within the framework of the Mobile Café.

The Volunteers in the Mobile Café

There are 40-50 volunteers attached to the Mobile Café, divided among food distribution and care, the health project, the veterinarian project, and cooking. Nurses and veterinarians also participate as volunteers in the passing out of food. In that way they maintain a broad contact with the users and the other volunteers.

In the recruitment of volunteers we aim to primarily recruit students, usually students of pedagogy and nursing, and social worker students, to give them ballast and an attitude to the area they can use in their studies and future life. However, there are also volunteers with a bit more life experience, especially nurses, who the nursing students in the health project are fond of going with.

The volunteers meet the homeless with an open mind, joy and spontaneity and in a different way from the professionals.

It means a lot to the homeless that those who deliver the food do so on a voluntary basis without compensation.

It is very important to state that as a volunteer you are not supposed to replace the employees' contact with the homeless, but rather to supplement it so that you help create and maintain a stable contact between *projekt UDEFOR* and the homeless.

Every 6 weeks we hold a volunteer meeting where we agree on a duty roster and talk about what has happened on the streets and about the experiences of the volunteers. In these meetings there is often a talk, given by someone outside of *projekt UDEFOR*, about what offers there are in Copenhagen. It could also be a talk on mental illness and homelessness or on the many migrants who currently live on the streets of Copenhagen, who they are, where they come from, and why they have come, etc. In addition, the meeting is a good way for both the volunteers and the permanent outreach workers to meet each other.

We have 3-5 different courses a year for the volunteers and the content accommodates the wishes of the volunteers, e.g. conflict management on the streets, hygiene on the streets, first aid, abuse, mental illness, etc.

When you start out as a volunteer you are handed a copy of the volunteer handbook, which describes the basic values of *projekt UDENFOR*, as well as a lot of practical information and it also describes the demands made on the volunteers.

Every year there are different social events for the volunteers, e.g. an annual Christmas party and an annual summer excursion. This offers the volunteers and the employees in project UDENFOR, as well as the board, an opportunity to meet in a more informal setting than usual. This helps giving the volunteers a greater sense of belonging to the organization and it also strengthens the solidarity among the volunteers and the staff. Furthermore, we also arrange a barbecue event in Ørstedsparken in connection with *project UDENFOR*'s birthday. On this occasion all, users, volunteers and staff, meet for a nice barbecue.

Veterinarians on the Streets

The Mobile Café also offers a veterinarian check-up and our vets treat and inoculate the homeless' dogs when there is a need for it. The offer of a veterinarian check-up on the streets began in 2006. At any time the employees and the other volunteers can address the vets if they meet a homeless person with a dog in immediate need of treatment. In cases where the dog's condition cannot be treated on the street, we can refer the dog to a veterinary clinic. The vets in the Mobile Café primarily work preventively through health checks and preventive treatment (e.g. inoculation and chip marking) of the dogs. About every other month the vets arrange an "open house" in Ørstedsparken. We announce the date via posters in warm shelters and via handbills which are distributed from the Mobile Café. There is always a good turnout because many choose to come for a talk or a good piece of advice even if their dog is healthy. Often a great deal is discussed, even topics that have nothing to do with animals. In that way the veterinary project helps create trust and functions, in addition to the concrete veterinary care, as an additional link between the homeless and *projekt UDENFOR*. Often the dog is the homeless' best friend – the one who never fails you, and we want to take good care of the homeless' best friends. 50-60 dogs are attended to yearly, and the vast majority only requires preventive treatment. The state of health of the dogs, which join the project, is quite good. The homeless usually take good care of their dogs, and often the owners take care of the dog before they see to their own needs. In 2007 the veterinary project received the Homeless Award.

In the autumn of 2010 students from the veterinary and agricultural university will write two theses with the veterinary project as their point of departure. One is about the state of health of the homeless' dogs, and the other is about the symbiosis between dog and man with homelessness being the point of reference.

Health on the Streets

As a volunteer in the Mobile Café's health project you participate on an equal footing with the other volunteers in the distribution of food from the Mobile Café. Every Wednesday 1-2 nurses always accompany the Mobile Café. In that way the nurses maintain a good and regular contact with the homeless. They help with anything from small problems, such as sores, skin infections, and check-ups on current treatments, to more serious illnesses. Small problems, which can be taken care of on the streets, the nurses treat themselves, but usually, in cooperation with the outreach worker, they try to act as a link between the homeless and the official health care system. For example, we can accompany the homeless person to a visit with his or her general practitioner or in case of admission to a hospital. However, there is a group of very weak homeless people who are not capable of seeking out a doctor or keeping an appointment with the city council's Health Team on their own. In these cases, the volunteer doctors of the health project can step in as a substitute for his or her own doctor with basically the same possibilities of making a diagnosis, writing out prescriptions, treating or referring to further examination and treatment. There are also homeless people who, because of their situation, do not have access to their own general practitioner and that applies to both Danish and foreign homeless people.

The volunteer nurses have their own nursing car at their disposition which is adapted to the purpose. That means that they can choose to drive around on nursing business without food distribution.

The Students in the Mobile Café

Besides thesis students attached to the Mobile Café, we also have a social worker student and a student of pedagogy attached. The student of pedagogy rides out with the Mobile Café on a permanent basis in order to get acquainted with the people of the streets. The social worker student is permanently attached to the Mobile Café and is from abroad. At the time of writing there is a collaborative arrangement involving social worker students from Canada who join *projekt UDEFOR* for an internship. The arrangement came about because the Mobile Café agreed to join the exchange program on the social worker education at Metropol University Copenhagen. The

project is an Erasmus Mundus project and runs over 3 years. Even when this project finishes it is the intention to continue having social worker students from abroad, because we believe that it provides a good dynamic to the work as well as inspiration and sparring with foreign countries thereby acquiring new knowledge and new ideas. In everyday life it creates some small and large challenges because the students speak English which makes it necessary for us to communicate in English, but in that way we get to practice our professional terminology in English. At the same time we become part of the integration process that the student goes through when moving to another country with foreign and new traditions, mentality, weather, practical conditions, language, etc. This requires of us that we do not focus exclusively on what the student has to learn, but also on his or her integration and comfort.

Parallel Initiatives in the Mobile Café

Concurrent with the volunteers and the staff we have often have people in job training, work ability testing and wage subsidized jobs in the Mobile Café. This means that there are periods where there are extra resources available in the Mobile Café, which, in turn, can put an extra toll on the employees. In the Mobile Café there is also room for other projects, e.g. a food project in cooperation with a school class that uses their lessons in home economics to cook food for the Mobile Café in *projekt UDEFOR*'s kitchen. These parallel initiatives in the Mobile Café create a good dynamic and new insight.

The Food in the Mobile Café

We cook food 6 days a week, Monday through Saturday in the Mobile Café. The food is prepared by a permanent employee every day. We make 50 servings at a time and the menu varies from day to day with different meat, vegetable and pasta dishes. Great emphasis is put on the nutritional value as well as the appearance of the food. The Mobile Café has a different view on what constitutes healthy food because it is important that the food contains a lot of nutrients, i.e. proteins, fat, fibres and carbohydrates. Living on the streets is tough and stressful for both body and mind and therefore it is important that the food provides energy and is filling. We make an effort to maintain the frequency of the food distribution at a 100%, and realistically the percentage is between 90-100%. In the quarterly reports the statistics for each quarter are documented.

Everyday Life in the Mobile Café

One of the regular employees begins cooking the food at about 1 PM every afternoon, sometimes with a volunteer, and the volunteers who will be taking out the food arrive at 3.45 PM. The drive begins at about 4.15 PM. There are some fixed stops along the way and sometimes a fixed route, which can vary greatly depending on what happens on the street and where the homeless stay. The volunteers pass out food, clothes and hot drinks on the various stops and, equally important, have a chat with the homeless. If there is somebody in need of more help that the volunteers can offer, the permanent staff in the Mobile Café is contacted and they will follow up.

If the volunteers meet someone sick and in need health care, they can contact our volunteer nurses or doctor.

In the same way the volunteers can contact the volunteer veterinarians if they meet someone with a sick dog.

The drive ends when there is no more food and we attempt to distribute all the food. When the volunteers are back at *projekt UDENFOR* they are to wash off the food containers as well as write a diary about what has happened on the streets during the drive.

Challenges in the Distribution of Food

In places such as Valby station, Østerport station, and especially at Kultorvet, the number of users can grow to an extent that it sometimes resembles a soup kitchen. In the Mobile Café we are very attentive to that possibility. When we go the same places at the same time each day, these places can risk seeming like an institution with fixed opening and closing hours. Some of the dilemmas we then encounter relate to our target group. Are those that come here those, who do not know how to go to other places? With a few exceptions, no. Are they the mentally ill who live isolated in the streets? No, they have been scared off by all the people coming there. We distribute a lot of food, yes, but not to our target group. In that way, the success might actually turn into a failure. Those, who we want to feed, do not come, and most of the people that do come are perfectly capable of going elsewhere such as “Den Sorte Gryde” or Istedgade 100. Why then do they come to us? They do so because the Mobile Café, apart from having kind, friendly volunteers, also has good, freshly cooked food, fixed opening hours and is very stable.

Sometimes it happens that children come up to the van for food, which we give them so long as it is only one or two children, while we observe the children’s condition. Often, it is not possible for us to know whether these children, in fact, sleep or live on the streets, and it quickly becomes a matter

of guessing rather than a truthful knowledge of the children's situation. Should it become a daily issue, where we gain a proper knowledge of the children's situation, we are obliged to contact the authorities because of our heightened obligation to report in this area. We experience these situations perhaps once or twice a year and have ongoing discussions about it both internally as well as with an external lawyer co-operating with us.

We realize that the Mobile Café can never fill the need for food in the streets. No matter how much food we cook there will always be a need for more. If there is no more food to be had from us, there are many other possibilities of a free meal in Copenhagen, so that no one has to go to bed hungry.

Other activities in the Mobile Café

In addition to the daily work there are also other activities. Each December the Mobile Café hosts a Christmas party for the homeless in the park which takes place the last Saturday before Christmas. On this occasion we serve Christmas food and "glögg", pass out gifts and sing Christmas songs with the homeless. Both volunteers and professionals participate in this party. Every October 17 it is international Day of the Homeless where an event in the town centre takes place with music, food and speeches by different organizations working with homelessness, and the Mobile Café participates each year. In the month of May we celebrate the anniversary of *projekt UDEFOR* with the homeless in the park where we have a barbecue and a good time. Every year in the month of June the Users Bazaar in Odense, Fyn, takes place where users and user organizations meet with each other for debates and festivities. In addition to the fixed red-letter days and events the Mobile Café focuses on being visible in public with the van when there are relevant events taking place, which can be supportive or meant for creating debates.

Thoughts on the Mobile Café in the Future

Both now and in the future the Mobile Café should be flexible and open and make an inclusive effort on the streets to benefit the most vulnerable and socioeconomically disadvantaged homeless citizens. There should be continuity in our efforts in which the most basic needs are filled on the streets. Through our presence on the streets we observe new tendencies relating to the different groups and issues on the streets as well as the changes that occur during the year. In the future it could be exciting to develop the Mobile Café into being a breakfast café also. We intend to initiate distribution of breakfast in one of Copenhagen's many green parks a couple of times a week, but eventually on a more regular basis. This would give us the chance to make contact with the users of

the Mobile Café during the day, where we would be able to contact collaborators. The breakfast Café will be run by the permanent staff in *projekt UDEFOR*. We plan to begin testing the breakfast café in 2011.

It is the intention that in the future the Mobile Café continues being experimental and innovative both in terms of new projects and collaborators.