

Volunteers in the Mobile Café

Working as a Volunteer in the Mobile Café

The Mobile Café has some 30 volunteers, who help distribute food to homeless people in Copenhagen.

A typical shift begins at 5.30 pm. When the volunteers meet at the home address of projekt UDENFOR (projekt OUTSIDE) at Ravnsborggade 2-4, the food is ready, and they can begin to pack the vans – typically with food for 40-50 people. They will also pick up messages from the day before. These may often be important messages like:

- Ole and Conny will be at Kultorvet at around 8 pm and would like some food.
- Jakob asked for a sleeping bag. He will be at Østerport-train station at around 7 pm.

In addition to serving food, coffee and tea, bread, and sometimes fruit, the volunteers carry a schedule, in which they note down where they have been, and at what time, how many they have given food, and other comments. They also bring a journal in which they write important information for projekt UDENFOR's street workers. Finally, they always carry a mobile phone.

When the car has been packed at around 6 pm, the volunteers will begin their route through Copenhagen. Route planning can be flexible but there are fixed spots where we try to be at certain times. When the van has arrived at a stop, the volunteers will go for a walk in the neighbouring area to let people know that they have there. Then, as homeless people begin to show up, they will begin to hand out the food. The car will typically stay at the same stop for 15-30 minutes, so there will be time for both a meal, a cup of coffee and a quiet chat. Before they leave for their next stop, they note down some details – such as how many portions were handed out, names of the people who showed up, requests for clothes and sleeping bags, and perhaps requests for a visit from a projekt UDENFOR employee.

When the van returns to head quarters at around 9 – 10 pm, it is emptied and cleaned and made ready for the following day's shift. If there is any food left, it will be given to Reden, a drop-in centre for prostitutes in Copenhagen, where staff give the food to users who turn up there during the night. The shift ends after the messages for next days' volunteers and projekt UDENFOR staff have been duly noted in the journal.

Every 6th Monday, the volunteers, projekt UDENFOR's permanent street workers and Mr Brian Sorensen (e-mail:bs@udenfor.dk), our volunteer coordinator, get together for an informal meeting. Food, coffee and tea are served at the meeting, and often we will have invited someone from another organisation, working within the same area, to give a presentation on a given topic. The meetings also serve as a forum for exchanging experiences and developing a general team spirit. Shifts for the following six weeks are planned and the updated schedule is later posted on the projekt UDENFOR web-site. In addition to these meetings, street workers and volunteers also have the possibility to communicate with each other through a forum on the internet. They use this forum for discussing important issues as well as sharing funny stories from their daily activities in the streets.

What does it require to become a volunteer?

Most volunteers are in their mid-20ies or 30ies. There is a majority of women. Several have been volunteers for many years: some have even been with us from the very beginning. Our volunteers can be students and unemployed, but many are also employed in jobs, which may or may not be related to their work for projekt UDENFOR.

We have no specific requirements for volunteers, but you need to be able to enjoy touring the city a couple of times a month – in all kinds of weather. Equally, being in contact with the homeless – engaging yourself in a chat or- if time allows – a more serious talk, giving a smile, a handshake and showing the energy to care – is one of the fundamentals of being a volunteer. It is an advantage, but not a requirement, to have a drivers' license.

The job our volunteers do is not meant to replace the contact that our permanent street workers have with the homeless, only to supplement it, so that they help provide a stable contact between project UDENFOR and the homeless in Copenhagen.

Mr Brian Sorensen is responsible for both the Mobile Café and the coordination of volunteer activities in projekt UDENFOR. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer in the Mobile Café-project you can call Mr Brian Sorensen, and if there is a vacancy for new volunteers, you will be invited to join a trial-tour, where you will be following two experienced volunteers on their route.