
Unconditional Client Focus

Description of quality development at CFA (Centre for Holidays and Respite care), Vejle County, Denmark.

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An attentive public sector – from self-sufficiency to a committed dialogue.

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1. Title of the case: Unconditional client focus

2. General description of the organisation:

Denmark has a relatively large public sector that strives a great deal to help citizens in need of short breaks. This is reflected by a large selection of offers financed by public funding with the aim of supporting citizens and families who, in one way or another, have difficulty taking care of themselves in the society that they are a part of.

This is why families with mentally or physically disabled children are offered help according to the level of strain that the disability of the child puts on the family. A family will typically receive help in several ways, one of which consists of short breaks of varied time periods in a public institution.

CFA is Vejle County's way of offering support services and short term respite care for **all** disabled children and adults who live with their parents and have functional abilities that are permanently reduced either physically or mentally. The Centre is run according to the Danish Social Services Law § 51.

CFA offers:

- Respite care in the club, at the weekend, during holidays, with families and when emergencies occur.
- Courses for the parents.
- Home respite care.
- Theme holidays.
- Holiday trips and
- Dream Bus/respite care away from the Centre's grounds.

CFA co-operates with all 16 municipalities in Vejle County.

The team of staff at CFA consists mainly of caretakers, social workers, caretaker assistants, social and healthcare assistants and administrative personnel.

3. The main content of the case:

The case describes the fundamental ideas that CFA works with. These ideas can be concentrated into one core notion: Unconditional client focus.

This description includes four essential projects which are all based on the desire to put the institution's clients first:

- Dimensioning the offer
- Planning the client's short breaks
- The desires and expectations of the client concerning the short breaks
- The professional content and the nature of the activities offered to the clients.

The four main ideas at CFA are:

Preventing institutional placements is the overall aim at CFA. CFA offer families the respite care necessary for them to be together for as long as they desire.

An efficient use of resources is a precondition in a world financed by public money but in many ways also the best possibility to create room for development in institutions controlled by authoritative boundaries.

Offering respite care to all those who live at home regardless of age and functional level. Social legislation requires that social offers concern everyone in need of help which is why it is important not to incorporate declared or undeclared sorting criteria in to the offers.

Professionalism and activities in short breaks. Offering professionalism during the short breaks is a goal in itself. This professionalism is on the whole an approach based on activities and lifestyle.

When the Centre was founded these requirements were not all met at a sufficient level which is why it has been essential to improve on all of them.

CFA has attempted to reach a combination of all of these requirements by describing the purpose of all the work as "**unconditional client focus**".

Making unconditional client focus a part of the work has a number of consequences for the practical approach used in working with clients at the centre. First and foremost it is important to realise that the centre does not have the right to choose the methods for the individual child, the family does as it is the most essential resource in this connection. This way, the same methods and communication in the daily routine will follow the child and at the same time be challenging to the professional environment in a centre such as ours.

In this particular case we have chosen to describe a line of essential quality measures as we know that a goal such as "unconditional client focus" is not attainable in itself in the sense that one can just relax thinking that it has been achieved. However, it poses a constant challenge in the work and development at the Centre. Thus, the individual measures taken have both a purpose and a result but must be held up against the overall goal for the quality at CFA: Unconditional client focus. At the same time, the individual measures may continue and be built onto the results of other measures taken previously to improve the quality of the work at the Centre – and this development has proven to be sufficiently sustainable.

The projects:

Dimensioning: Booking as a precondition to creating a respite care offer that is based on "spaciousness", "professionalism", "efficient use of resources" and "activities".

At the time of the Centre's foundation the demand for support services was very unevenly dispersed during the week. Consequently, it was difficult to fill all the spaces on weekdays whereas many people requested more respite care during the weekends.

At the beginning the offer was organised in the way that the families were free to sign up on a list for when they needed support. This way the respite care was adjusted to fit whatever group of children might need care at a certain time. This way of organising care made it difficult to work with the resources that the children actually possessed and it also limited the professional content as it was only a question of respite care for a short and limited time period.

To replace this system the Centre chose to organise all aspects of the short break. This way the clients were provided with a respite care level which during the organising stage matched the level

at which their needs had been estimated. Furthermore, it made it possible for the children to be grouped together for respite care by age and interests and for their caretakers to be the same every time. This highly structured organisation of individual short breaks made it possible to build relations among the clients and between the clients and the staff. Furthermore, it made it possible to organise most of the short breaks at the Centre in a way that also made respite care attractive to parents of children with low functional levels, as they were now offered respite care with a high level of professionalism and knowledge concerning the child – every time.

Over the course of one year the occupancy reached more than 100 %, and the possibility to work steadily with spaciousness, professionalism and activities had been created – for everyone.

Organising: The method follows the child – 400 clients for 41 24-hour spaces

Apart from the more logical approach to organising and booking-in of the clients at this "VIP hotel", the new approach was also brought about to include the methods of the individual clients. At first attention was put on the communication tools and methods used by the families at home or used by the families at kindergarten, school or workplace. These tools have helped CFA in the process of adjusting the offers to fit the needs of each client.

Today this method has developed into a knowledge base concerning each client attending CFA as well as his or her family. The central part of the knowledge base consists of information given to the Centre by the parents. All contact caretakers prepare communication descriptions concerning the clients that they know the best and this way we can assure that all clients understand what is happening and are understood during respite care. The practical result of this work is shown by the fact that our organisation, which possesses 41 places of 24-hour respite care, has worked out individual knowledge bases on about 400 clients.

The joy of anticipation – from 12 to 41 24-hour spaces – from 0 to 15,000 wishes and expectations – and just as many photo-diarys.

This highly controlled organisation and booking procedure of respite care has given the Centre enough room and professional experience to be able to develop the individual short breaks in collaboration with the families so that all clients are received by competent and well-prepared caretakers who know the client, the families and their expectations as well as their values.

During the past two years CFA has in this way made inquiries as to what the individual clients expect and wish to experience when they visit the Centre. This does not imply just having a short discussion about what each client's interests are but letting the requests of the clients be in command of the organising of each short break. This means that about 15,000 short breaks are talked through and questions are asked each year.

This measure was put into motion after a discussion in the Centre's parents council in 2003 where the parents declared that "everyone should have the right to experience the joy of anticipation".

Planning of individual client's short break is now consistently based on the exact wishes of each client and of what he or she would like to experience. This is put into words in an activity schedule for the stay – a daily agenda – which controls the client's short breaks at the Centre.

Following up on these activity schedules takes place for each client in the form of a photo-diary where photographs complete a description about what has taken place.

Hereby the circle of anticipation is complete. It starts with the organising of the short break which implies putting into words what the family might expect from the Centre, while the photo-diarys represent the daily evaluation report for the people at home to evaluate whether or not their expectations have been met. This evaluation is not only based on the story on paper but also on the conversation with the child concerning the diary and his or her stay at the Centre.

In 2004, CFA made an estimation concerning the final elaboration and the application of these activity schedules. The goal was for them to be in place in 90 % of all overnight respite care. During the last three months of 2004 all short breaks were monitored which showed a 100 % application and completion.

Content development in 2005 – great experiences for everyone

The experience we have had with a significant increase in the quality of the organising has recently made room for a more advanced content in short breaks at the Centre. This represents an addition to the existing professional level in the respite care offers.

Concerning the content, two important new measures were added to the respite care offers in 2004 and 2005. In both cases, some new and very different interdisciplinary groups were included in the work. Essentially, they are very much unlike what one normally associates with holiday respite care as they go far beyond the normal reach of what specially trained staff can achieve.

The first of these offers is the circus offer that is provided during the autumn holidays. Whereas caretakers are often seen attending courses to learn how to juggle and perform acrobatic exercises in order to subsequently teach some of it to the children, we have chosen at CFA to hire an actual circus troop to be a part of the autumn holidays offers. The circus crew has had a fairly different way of approaching the group of clients at CFA, and at the same time the professional work of giving the clients a good circus input – both as the audience and as the performers – has been faced with new and exciting challenges. Shows have been held for the families, neighbours and other invited guests.

The other offer concerns the arranging of a seven-week festival during the summer holidays.

To all families the summer holidays represent a heavy planning task. Almost all schools are closed for long periods and the families have to find other ways of keeping their children entertained.

Danish summers are often characterised by music festivals where a large number of people gather for a short period and engage in a certain theme which is often music and maybe even a certain kind of music.

However, not everyone has the possibility of taking the best music festival memories home with them. Therefore, CFA has accepted the challenge to provide **all** clients with a music festival activity during the summer holidays. This implies an experience with a theme, booths, where special events take place in the morning, during lunch and at night, and from which you can return home saying: what a cool festival!

Arranging seven different festivals for seven different weeks has been an enormous job for CFA. The staff has had the benefit of a theatre director who has staged all the events, with actors and musicians who have all made the evenings in the party tent into concerts with "stars".

At the same time, putting together the groups participating in the festivals has only been possible thanks to the extensive knowledge found in the knowledge bases concerning each client.

4. The reasoning behind the case .

The reason for starting the quality development at CFA

CFA was founded in 1994 as an addition to a former institution for respite care which was highly influenced by the ambitions of the families with disabled children and the way the concept of support care was looked upon at the time.

The professional approach to respite care at the time was that parents with disabled children were offered respite care if there was a space available when they needed it.

At that time the only ambition was to ensure that the families connected to an establishment were satisfied with the respite care made available to them.

This also meant that relatively few families benefited from being connected to an institution as the primary aim was to satisfy client families already enrolled in a Centre and with very little focus on the families outside of regular users of respite care.

Consequently, in the beginning 45 families were filling the original 10 spaces and these were filled approximately 50 % of the time.

The families that took advantage of the offer did not have children attending preschool or even primary school.

Meanwhile, the politicians in Vejle County had the ambition that respite care would prevent permanent institutional placements and that this would take place in a modern environment.

Therefore the organisation was changed and moved, and the above-mentioned goals were set for the work being done at CFA.

One important reason behind this case has therefore been the will to perform the task as described in the goals and at the same time challenge the ordinary professional belief concerning the possibilities connected to temporary respite care.

5. The actors behind the case –The participants of the individual projects.

The most important actors behind the projects have been the management team which is divided according to its different functions:

- Staff and HR
- Booking procedures
- Knowledge about the clients
- Holidays and short breaks off the Centre's grounds.

In each project the department managers have acted as consistent and stable support in co-operation with the director of the centre and a small number of employees.

Behind it all the director of the Centre has kept an overall managerial focus and thus maintained focus on completing each project for the families and the clients.

6. The process leading to success

Three essential factors have helped the projects become a success.

One essential factor has been the desire to do it in a different and significantly better way than was the case at the original Centre. This was to be done by maintaining focus on the needs of the families and the guests instead of on practical limitations in organisation and in the staff's work schedule.

Furthermore, an essential factor has been a good contact with the parents and especially attention to their remarks and requests – not in order to make them a part of the already existing daily routine but to make them a source of inspiration for change.

For each project it has been essential to ensure that it is communicated to and understood by the entire organisation in order for all the employees to follow the process from the original idea to its application. This has implied a need for a basic staff training and therefore a systematic approach has been taken in that a common training has been provided in connection to each project. This concerns the tools to use as well as the foundation of the projects so that all employees understand the practical way of completing them as well as their essential background and the importance of maintaining focus on the needs of the families and the clients.

7. Results indicating the success:

The use of the Centre and its occupancy level has risen remarkably up to the present day. From approximately 50 % to 105 %.

The Centre fully lives up to the intentions of the legislation – to offer and provide supportive respite care to all persons with a permanently reduced mental or physical functional level and who live at home with their parents. The Centre has gone from being in contact with about 45 families to about 500 families. The Centre welcomes all children, adolescents and adults estimated to be in need of respite care to participate in a high quality respite care arrangement. The Centre is specialised in space organisation in order for this arrangement to be offered to absolutely everyone – even those with the weakest functional level. Recently, however, the number of applications has exceeded the limitations of our organisation and therefore only 400 families are in fact offered a participation in the program.

Another result is presented by the fact that the parent's demand for residential respite care at the other institutions for disabled children in the county has changed dramatically. Consequently, the institutions providing residential respite care have had to change the structure of their regular offers in the way that they have divided around 50% of their spaces in half instead of maintaining the former residential respite care

All users of respite care services in Vejle County have individual communication descriptions, methods and values within the families which follow the child during respite care. Furthermore, for all clients the staff at CFA has created individual knowledge bases.

The joy of anticipation and photographic diaries are incorporated into the respite care arrangement at CFA. Around 15,000 activity schedules per year are made in co-operation with the client and all the activities and impressions connected to the short break are put together in a diary along with photographs.

The development at CFA has helped create a better way of working and higher expectations concerning the quality of the short breaks for the citizens in need of support. In this contribution we have only described the ground-breaking quality measures that have created permanent and constant changes in relation to the expectations of citizens, counties and municipalities concerning a respite care centre. We look upon the success of each measure and the context that they are a part of as the reason why Vejle County and the Centre are contacted by a large number of families as well as other counties and municipalities who wish to gain knowledge on how to create well-functioning respite care offers. Offers that focus on efficient use of resources, the ability for citizens to choose for themselves, professionalism and activities.

Having to assess the quality of these new measures, besides the results based only on experience and facts, is more difficult. Therefore, to solve this problem, CFA has started co-operating with the Center of Higher Education in Jelling, Jutland and the University of Southern Jutland to assess the quality of the Centre's work seen from the families' point of view, as well as the development of the offers with regard to communication with the parents.

8. The main obstacles of the case.

The main obstacle in connection with completing these projects is the task of creating and developing something new and then subsequently maintaining these new aspects as a part of the work and a new way of solving the different tasks.

A public administration's job is, on the one hand, about creating a clear and thoroughly considered basis on which the politicians must establish their decisions concerning the services for their citizens. This is also the standard procedure for the administration of Vejle County. However, this basis of decisions will always be challenged by its surroundings and new ideas for how to solve the different tasks. To us, it seems that newly developed projects have gone through long processes of being accepted by the public administration as a way of solving the task in hand.

When the authorities in a bureaucratic system determine the budgets of a line of similar institutions they strive to do so based on relatively objective criteria. This means that an authoritative perception has been established as to how many caretakers need to be employed, how many assistants they need, how much money is needed for the clients' food and how many activities they can handle – or in this case, how many the authorities wish to offer them.

Then when an institution succeeds in creating something completely new and different within these set financial boundaries, the first reaction will typically be that the institution in question must have more means to work with than the others – or that they do not have to fight the same problems as the other institutions. In short, an explanation is wanted as to the special circumstances that has made it possible to achieve something extraordinary and thereby also an explanation as to why it cannot be done in other institutions.

The second reaction will be the question that if it is possible to create so many new measures then maybe the taxpayers' money has been spent too generously.

Not until much later in time will the new measures be accepted as a way of running the institution.

Equally, the parents – having had the same perception as many others, that offers containing a lot of events and activities are mostly for children with minor disabilities - have had to get used to the fact that the respite care offers provided by the Centre are in fact for everyone since this has been one of the Centre's ambitions.

In the daily management of the institution it can sometimes be difficult to find the time and the energy to create development. This is mostly seen in situations where development projects are put "on hold" in association with new staff being hired and the managerial focus being to teach the new staff the values, methods and the job that they are to perform at the Centre.

Finally, it is difficult to develop something new without having other institutions to compare notes with concerning the projects. At CFA we have solved this problem by seeking inspiration and sparring outside the county with a similar institution on Frederiksborg County.

9. Main sources of inspiration behind the case.

Danish social legislation is an inspiration to work by, as its requirements for the institutions are without any kind of reductions or deviations. In that sense all families with disabled children are to be offered respite care. So just in striving to live up to the laws has been a source of inspiration for quality development at the Centre.

At the same time this legislation is dynamic in the sense that it has to live up to the needs that families might have in relation to the society they live in. In other words, the legislation might still make sense in 10 years even though society and the families will have changed a great deal.

Once it has been decided to work by the legislation and the law § 51, the question arises of how this is best done. In this case an essential step has been to consider the needs, dreams and wishes from the point of view of an ordinary, modern family. The difference between the options of a regular family and those of a family with a disabled child is clear but their wishes, dreams and feelings are

absolutely the same. This is why we find great inspiration in the field between what we see as the universal family desires and what is practically possible for the families of our clients.

On the purely practical side we have found great inspiration in the desires of the highly significant, questioning families and these have to a large extent challenged the Centre and the quality of our work. We have chosen not to defend the way we normally work and instead to accept their criticism and take it into consideration. Hereby we work with concrete and universal solutions to their problems and are able to create a much more diverse quality development than what would be possible by looking at it only from a professional point of view.

10. The most important lesson learned

Quality development at CFA is best described as a general development of the entire way of working at CFA.

This development has taken place by, on the one hand, concentrating on keeping focus on the clients and the families and, on the other hand, a number of large development projects.

Each of the new measures has created new possibilities of initiating even more new measures, as the content of our development is based on a profound knowledge of our clients and their desires, which have themselves been created through dialogue and a systematic gathering of this knowledge. This knowledge has emerged from individual planning of each client's short breaks weeks ahead of time.

One of the professional results of this approach has been the fact that a large part of our staff has gone through systematic training which we have found to work well in connection with the attempt to reach unconditional client focus. At the same time, the employees maintain their professional integrity. However, this constitutes a whole project in itself and is only mentioned in this context because it represents a precondition to working towards "unconditional client focus" and to seeing the projects through.

During the development of the centre, it has been crucial to keep a certain direction and an ethical point of view, which in this case has been concentrated in the notion of unconditional client focus. This has helped keep the perspective on projects which technically might go in many directions. Meanwhile, the basic respect for the needs of the families has helped keep the direction and develop the Centre.

A necessary method has been to develop a immense consideration towards the needs of the parents. Not just in order to listen and to understand them but also in order for them to feel heard and understood. This way they will not just express themselves according to what they know from the services laws but they also bring to the Centre a new kind of understanding of the families' emotional needs be they together – sometimes at the same time and in the same place – sometimes separately.

Finally an essential part of the success of the projects has been the necessary managerial decision whether or not to take the consequences of the project. That is whether to measure the results of the project, repeat the work that has been done or maybe just let it become part of the daily routine at the institution. And finally, whether or not to engage in a conversation with employees that do not find the projects well-organized concerning their personal commitment and the importance hereof.