



Sorø Senior Service

Sorø senior service is a network of 60 volunteers who share responsibility for delivering grocery shopping to elderly citizens in the municipality who live far away from grocery stores and have difficulties managing it themselves.

The service is free but to use it you have to pass a 'check/visitation' by a caretaker to ensure the assistance it actually needed. Payment for the groceries is done via the internet and delivery is once a week.

Preconditions, Inspiration, Nurture

Many elderly people and people with disabilities find it difficult to manage grocery shopping. This is a particular challenge in areas with long distances to the closest merchant or supermarket. Elderly people receiving home care can get assistance with their grocery shopping from domestic helpers or private actors financed by the municipality.

People who are not yet eligible for home care may still have difficulties managing grocery shopping due to long distances to the nearest grocery store and problems with carrying heavy bags from the stores.

The idea to help elderly people in Sorø with grocery shopping came up during an informal discussion among a group of people meeting frequently for different activities at Kaarsbergcenteret, a centre where citizens aged 60 or over can meet for a range of activities such as playing bridge, listen to talks and lectures, potlucks and much more.. The group, who were all retired themselves, had an informal discussion about how they could support elderly community members who were having difficulties getting groceries. This is where the idea to establish a volunteer group to help out was born.

Kaarsbergcenteret provided a platform through which retired people in the municipality could develop social networks and this in turn was important in inspiring the collective action that led to the volunteer group.

Implementation

Resources

People who had participated in this original conversation then contacted the municipality to explain they had a group of volunteers who wished to help fellow older citizens in Sorø with their grocery shopping.

This led to cooperation between the volunteers and the municipality where the volunteers managed weekly grocery shopping and the municipality covered the cost of gas (on a per kilometre basis) and administration of the volunteer secretariat.

The association soon developed a network of 60 volunteers who were divided into four teams of approximately 15. Each team splits the weekly shopping workload so that each of the 60 volunteers goes grocery shopping once a month.

The association also have a small office at Kaarsbergcenteret where they handle the administrative. Every Wednesday two volunteers sit by the phone for two hours to receive the shopping list from the people calling in.

The next day – every Thursday – the volunteers buy and transport groceries for approximately five or six people. Usually the volunteers buy groceries for the same people each time, making it easier for them to know the preferences for those they shop for. Transport of the groceries takes place using the volunteers' cars and is subsidised by the municipality on a per kilometre basis.

Payment for the groceries occurs through a digital payment service. This system was introduced three or four years ago and prior to this it was cash payment. The cash payment system caused a lot of trouble for the grocery stores as well as the association trying to keep track on who owed what and having to figuring out change when the amount wasn't summing up.

The Network / Co-operation

The support from the municipality is crucial to the success of this initiative. Before you can become registered as receiver of the grocery shopping service you need to have a visitation by a medical officer from the municipality. This ensures that it is those in the most need of assistance are those who receive the grocery service.

Another essential part of the initiative was the already established group of retired seniors who were meeting frequently for activities at Kaarsbergcenteret. They established an association making it easy to gather a large volunteer group. Membership in the association

is free. There is a chairman of the association and two annual meetings are held along with more informal interactions relating to communicating about who is taking which shifts and other day-to-day matters.

Enablers and Barriers

The cooperation with Sorø municipality is the most crucial enabler for the initiative. As a result, Sorø Service is now promoted as a 'public' offer for old people living with a long distance from the nearest grocery store.

From the beginning there has been a clear division of labour. There are also some key volunteers such as those taking care of the administrative tasks such as refund of kilometre hours, the digital payment system and communication with new potential receivers of the grocery service. The administrative team consist of eight people in total and some of these also deliver groceries.

In 2015, Sorø Senior service was one of two organisations in Sorø receiving the majority of the municipal support for volunteer work. The other organisation is the local café InTro which is a volunteer driven organic café. Beside the municipal support Sorø Senior Service sometimes also receive a small grant from the local lodge 'Duen'.

All the volunteers have access to a car to deliver the groceries. Without a car it would be highly time consuming to deliver groceries to five different people in an area with limited public transportation. As mentioned previously an important enabler for Sorø Senior service is the community of people retired from the labour market now meeting frequently for social activities in their local centre.

Two barriers/critical points the association has experienced since it began in 2001 have been the threat of reduced financial support from the municipality and dealing with administration associated with the cash payment system. The second of these has been overcome by the implementation of the digital payment system.

For other municipalities a barrier to begin a similar initiative could be that either public or private actors would take care of such a service if there wasn't a volunteer group providing it.

Interaction with Municipalities and other levels of governance

The municipality has supported the idea from the beginning and cooperation continues to be successful. Despite this, there has been some debate about privileges for the volunteers, for example, the lunch that the municipality funds for the volunteers on the day that they

make their deliveries. But today a consensus has been reached in terms of supporting the association annually for the work they are doing and in 2015 Sorø Senior Service received most of the 'volunteer funding' from the municipality together with a volunteer café.

Social Innovation Effects

Outcomes, Impact and “Scaling”

Sorø senior service is an example of a successful cooperation between the third sector and the public sector to provide a service for elderly people. Sometimes people from outside the municipality contact the chairman of the association in order to learn more about Sorø Senior service but so far no other municipalities have established a similar initiative.

The volunteers usually give a bit of extra time to the old people receiving the groceries and help opening bottles and milk cartons etc. In general they tend to have more time than the home care staff who are often under a time pressure. Without the existing social cohesion established through the activities at Kaarsbergscentret this initiative probably wouldn't have happened. Today Sorø Senior Service has strengthened the cooperation even more among the retired people living in Sorø.

Lessons Learned

- The cooperation and support from the municipality is of high importance
- The digital payment service is crucial and makes the administration and delivery of groceries much easier
- The social network and the lunch following the grocery shopping makes it attractive for the volunteers to participate