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Trygg oppvekst – helhetlig organisering av tjenester for barn og unge

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Summary

The aim of this study was to investigate characteristics of municipalities that produce good and effective services for children and youth at risk. A combined qualitative and quantitative approach has been used to study how municipalities organize their services for children and youth at risk, and what municipalities emphasize in order to ensure a holistic approach to their services. Data was collected by a national survey regarding municipalities' services for children and youth at risk, regression analysis of the survey data and data from a municipality-government reporting system (KOSTRA), in addition to a case study with individual interviews in seven municipalities.

Children and youth at risk require coordination of services, as they are in need of assistance from several services. Rules and regulations, that most municipal services for children and youth are controlled by, demand interdisciplinary collaboration whenever it is necessary to fulfill their obligations towards the users' needs. However, the municipalities and services are free to choose methods and organization of the interdisciplinary collaboration. In 2008, regulatory authorities discovered great weaknesses regarding identification of children and youths at need of services and interdisciplinary collaboration between services to fulfill users' needs. Almost 80 percent of the municipalities that were supervised broke the law concerning collaboration on children and youth at risk.

Results from our project indicate that a resilient collaboration-culture within the municipality and common values among both management and employees are especially important for collaboration on children and youth at risk. However, this has to be continuously maintained. The foundation for leading municipalities in this field seems to be established within the municipality top management. Foundation within the top management seems to be crucial for the outcome. A common measure regarding collaboration in municipality strategic and action plans has been a success factor to create a mutual effort in services for children and youth at risk.

One of the challenges has been to decide on an organizational structure that opens for interdisciplinary collaboration. Several reorganizations and adjustments may be necessary to decide on a structure and system that appears most practical. However, collaboration-culture, requirements and expectations communicated by the management seems to be more important than the organizational structure.

Level of expertise, both among management and employees, facilitates collaboration. Willingness to prioritize promotion and building of expertise at all levels within the organization is considered a success factor.

Knowledge-based development of services is of great relevance. Collaboration models and initiatives were mainly knowledge-based. Collaboration with educational- and research institutions has been important for the services to gain new knowledge. At the same time, innovative thinking has been central when aiming to provide best possible services for the users. Municipalities take pride in being "up-front", trying out new models within their services. Projects are used systematically to provide resources for such testing. Priority areas are chosen in a way that ensures a red line and long-term engagement in new initiatives, and implementation is the key to enroll models tested in projects into ordinary services.

Prevention and early identification of difficulties is generally a prioritized area. Day care facilities are considered especially important in this regard, but not solely. Building of expertise levels, resources and capacity are focused on the youngest children whenever possible. There is a great potential for more long-term priority on prevention and early identification in creating a greater political engagement and enlightenment on children and youth at risk.

Quantitative variables are considered less informative for enlightenment on collaboration for children and youth at risk. There is a need for qualitative variables to evaluate the content of collaborations, and how well it actually works. The best indicator of good and effective services is the users' evaluation of the services. Therefore, the indicator "tool" developed in this project, based on data from the national survey, regression analysis and the case study, emphasize qualitative indicator areas where data are collected by qualitative evaluations of organizations, management or services, employee- and user survey.

Recommendations:

- Operationalization and testing of the indicator "tool" for collaboration over a period of time, and further development of relevant indicator areas
- Development of validated user surveys for all services for children and youth at risk
- Development of validated employee surveys on collaboration