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Publication date:
2015

Document Version
Early version, also known as pre-print

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Bilfeldt, A., & Andersen, J. (2015). *Empowerment of Care Workers and Residents at Nursing Homes in Denmark*. Poster presented at The International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics European Region Congress 2015, Dublin, Ireland.

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EMPOWERMENT OF CARE WORKERS AND RESIDENTS AT NURSING HOMES IN DENMARK

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Abstract:

How action research has contributed to the empowerment of residents and employees at nursing homes (2010-2015).

The project goal:

Empowerment (Freire 1974):

- More autonomy, participation and social life for the residents.
- A better working life for the employees.

The context:

- Employees felt trapped in a negative spiral of stress.
- Residents felt they were treated without respect and that they were socially isolated.
- Growing critique of the focus on cost efficiency and standardized measurement in care service (New Public Management) (Szebehely 2005).

Action Research:

- To frame democratic learning and acting (Lewin 1948); "A shared commitment to democratic social change" (Brydon-Miller 2008).
- To transform a habitual practice into a more social, reflexive, collective and morally obliging praxis (Kemmis 2008).

The people involved in the project:

Residents, relatives, employees, management, senior citizens organisations, researchers.

Important processes and methods:

- Group interviews, future workshops (Jungk & Müllert 1987), network conference with residents, employees, manager, experts and senior organisations.

A future workshop is

- a methodology where citizens and local stakeholders are the driving forces in the production of future visions, actions and scenario building
- facilitated by specific rules to eliminate the influence of power relations within the group

The concrete outcome:

Higher job satisfaction for employees and increased autonomy and a better social life for residents:

- Asking the residents (and their relatives) about their wishes, opinions and needs for care.
- Involving residents (and their relatives) in decision making at all levels at the nursing home.
- Behaving respectfully, for example by knocking at the door before entering a resident's flat.
- Supporting social activities for the residents in the afternoon by changing staff working hours.
- Establishing a grocery store inside the nursing home so residents can buy small items and at the same time establish an informal venue.
- Establishing mentorship relations between residents in order to combat isolation of new residents etc.

The roles of the action researchers:

- Facilitation of democratic knowledge building .
- Framing and documentation of the process of change, supporting task forces, adding knowledge and involving other external parties with additional knowledge.

Aspects of particular concern:

Ethical challenges and power structures between management, employees and residents (Gaventa & Cornwall 2008).



Residents at a future workshop



Employees at a future workshop