



Working with violence prevention with the school as a hub

Experiences gathered in the field



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The school should actively and consciously promote the equal rights and opportunities of pupils, regardless of gender. The school also has a responsibility to combat gender patterns that limit the pupils’ learning, choices, and development.

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FROM THE SWEDISH CURRICULUM FOR THE UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL.

ABOUT THE REPORT

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Introduction

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The work with En kommun fri från våld (A municipality free from violence) is part of the project Livscykeln (Life cycle), which is financed through the EU Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme 2014–2020. In Livscykeln, we focus on long term work with violence prevention throughout life. The work includes getting fathers committed to equal parenting, and violence prevention measures in compulsory school and upper secondary school. The work is based on experience from implementing violence prevention programmes and supporting systematic work with violence prevention in municipalities. Throughout the years we have worked with many municipalities and districts across the country, gathering experience and good examples of how to plan and improve the work.

In this inspirational publication, we share parts of what we have learned during the project, together with our partners. We focus on schools as an important hub in working with violence prevention, and how measures have developed in local conditions. We hope that this publication will contribute to an increased interest in violence prevention with a life cycle perspective.

Schools as a hub

Over the last ten years, MÄN has worked to improve the work done in Sweden when it comes to changing gender norms and violence prevention. Since 2018, EU financing (within the project Livscykeln) has made it possible for us to increase this work considerably, along with creating a more systematic approach. Involving an entire local community in the preventive work has been at the core of the work, and municipalities have therefore been a given partner to work with. In previous projects, we have examined how an entire municipality can come together to prevent violence among children and adolescents. Despite many options, schools have become the hub of the work done by the municipalities.

Most children and adolescents go to school, and many times it is the given starting point for universal and primary preventive measures. Given an intervention perspective, school is one of few places in our society, where there are group constellations, which stay more or less the same over time. Schools are also charged with counteracting stereotype gender patterns, promoting equality, and ensuring all children have the right to an education free from discrimination, harassment, and derogatory treatment. The practical and systematic work in schools with MVP, Agera tillsammans (Act together, AT) and Machofabriken (The Macho factory), has become the central hub if the municipalities' work. This has become extra clear through guidance, exchange of experiences in networks (for municipalities and those trained in MVP), and evaluations of the measures.

MVP and the AT-programme cover three of the World Health Organization's evidence-based strategies for violence prevention: developing life skills in children and adolescents, promoting gender equality, and changing cultural and social norms that

support violence. The programmes are also based on three distinct ideas of change, that are both easy to communicate and applicable to a variety of activities and organisations. The three ideas of change are 1) increasing awareness and knowledge of violence; 2) challenging stereotype gender norms, and 3) encouraging youths to become active bystanders.

Systematic work in the schools

The work was initiated in one or two schools per municipality and has gradually spread to other schools as well as other venues, for example after-school centres, libraries, and open meeting spaces. Pupils in grades four through nine as well as pupils in upper secondary school, have been the subject of systematic measures throughout the schoolyear. These measures have encompassed 7–20 lesson hours (14 on average). Agera tillsammans and MVP aim to increase awareness of violence and restrictive norms through reflection and dialogue. Starting with scenario exercises, pupils and personnel are taught how to counteract violence and harassment in their everyday setting. The Swedish National Agency for Education evaluated these measures in 2015–2017. After only one school year, there were measurable effects in many of the schools. Another evaluation of MVP will be made by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKR) in 2019–2021. There are also evaluation questionnaires within the programmes themselves, which schools can use. The supporting documents show that awareness of violence is increased, and that acceptance of harassment diminishes. The schools have been the “owners” of the violence prevention work, but the work has been coordinated and supported by external strategists as well as our staff at MÄN. Examples of external strategists have been coordinators against violence in close relationships, prevention coordinators, public health strategists, and public safety coordinators.



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**We have noticed
that there is a better
understanding of
boundaries.**

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**IFRAH HASSAN, PROGRAM DIRECTOR VIOLENCE
PREVENTION, DEPARTMENT FOR LEISURE-TIME
AND EARLY SOCIAL WORK, HÄSSELBY-VÄLLINGBY
MUNICIPALITY.**

**Could you give us some small insight into your
violence prevention work?**

– Our work has been focused on finding a structured way of working, which works over time but also for different departments and actors. There have been as many civilian organisations as municipal actors, to ensure a balance. If we want to reach our vision that all citizens will be met with the same message when it comes to violence, regardless of whom they meet, this is how the work needs to be done. That means we need to get together a group of people from the civilian sector as well as the municipality.

**Could you give examples of what you have
successfully achieved?**

– We try to focus on the things that are already working. For example, we have had a great cooperation with the Swedish Union of Tenants. Though at first you might not realize the Swedish Union of Tenants would focus on this kind of work, given they have their own methods for work with young people. But they have used our methods to enhance their own. We have also developed materials on violence prevention meeting techniques, which means that we can ensure violence free meetings. We need to think outside the box when it comes to what violence prevention looks like and our choice of partners.

**What is the most important change you have seen
since starting this work?**

– The biggest change that we have noticed is a better understanding of boundaries when it comes to violence. What is violence? Learning to intervene against minor violence. These things are intimately connected: what is violence and what kind of violence should we act on? To have the tools so that you actually know how to intervene makes it less scary to do so.

” When we start to talk about violence and harassment in a structured way in the schools, we give young people who have experienced violence an opportunity to open up about it.

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Engaging more stakeholders

The ideas of change and the message of the MVP-programme have become the conceptual framework for our work throughout Sweden, especially in municipal settings. The larger municipalities often choose districts in which to work, focusing on limited areas for pilot projects.

The aim has been to make organisations and stakeholders, that meet children and adolescents, to convey the same message. The work often starts with the staff at school, followed by for example after-school centres, field assistants, sports clubs, housing companies, and the police. Involvement of parents and residents has been initiated gradually in the pilot project areas. Because of our life cycle approach, we have been able to make sure that there are measures at all points in life, and we have inspired others to adapt the same way of thinking.

Local district teams

One way of improving cooperation between schools and other activities and organisations has been to create integrated district or area teams. These teams have worked with MVP and Agera tillsammans in the schools. This has enabled the schools to team up with other activities and organisations to collaborate

in the work done in the schools. Having multi-agency teams teaching the MVP-classes at schools has been a way of strengthening collaboration between the schools and other actors. It has also been a way for police, field assistants, leaders at the afterschool centres, youth strategists and personnel at young women's empowerment centres to build relations with the young. Because of the classes being run not only by teachers whom the students already know, a new dynamic has formed in the classroom. Working with district teams has increased the need for planning and coordination – but the benefits have been huge, because relations between young and adults in the area have been strengthened. This cooperation has also strengthened the bond between different professions and enabled a more far reaching work in violence prevention development outside of school.



In Enskede-Årsta-Vantör municipality in Stockholm, the work is run by the schools in cooperation with after-school activities, field assistants and local police. [Listen to them talk about their work here.](#)

Cooperating support functions

Once we start talking about violence and harassment in a structured manner in schools, we create an opportunity for young who have experienced violence to open up about it. Using far-reaching measures aimed at all children and adolescents thus increases the chances of early discovery. Nearly all the municipalities that we have worked with report that having these conversations in the classroom has led to an increase in youths seeking help. This means that we work in accordance with the World Health Organization's strategy on "identifying victims and providing care and support programs". Because of this, there needs to be information on local support available in the school and the municipality, as well as established routines on how to act when encountering someone who needs help. The work can lead to an increase in the number of reports to social services – which the municipalities need to prepare for. Other key players in offering support to young people with experience of violence are student health services at the schools, the municipalities' youth guidance centres, local young women's empowerment centres and women's shelters. For this reason, they have often been welcomed to the schools to talk about their work and hand out information materials. Some organisations have made sure to keep special opening hours on the days that

pupils are taking part in MVP lessons at the school. In some municipalities support personnel has been educated especially in meeting young people who have experienced different types of violence.

Are you interested to know more about working with violence victims or how you can cooperate with your local women's shelter or young women's empowerment centre? Feel free to contact one of the two national organisations for women's shelters and young women's empowerment centres in Sweden: [Unizon](#) and [Roks](#).

Strengthening ideas for change

Several municipalities have chosen a structured way of working with personnel at after-school centres. The work has focused on developing a more equal treatment, improving routines at the centres, or finding ways of initiating talks with visitors through, for example, movies and workshops. The centres have been able to share information on available support and have a unique platform for allowing young people to create movies, music or plays, and arranging events to prevent violence (MÄN has written a guideline: *Att arbeta våldsförebyggande inom öppen ungdomsverksamhet* – Working with violence prevention in open programs for young people. Please contact our office to get your copy). Increasing awareness and knowledge of violence, challenging stereotypical gender norms, and being an active bystander that acts upon violence, are tools that can be used in many organisations. One example is the policy Huskurage (domestic courage) which has been instituted by many housing companies – and which guides neighbours on how to act if they suspect occurrences of domestic violence. Another example is big sports clubs cooperating to educate both players and personnel in the office, clubs that have also participated in campaigns and fundraising events to encourage people to act on violence.

Do not forget the extensive resource which is local civil sector organisations. They are likely to have a lot of knowledge, dedication, and established networks in the municipality. Many of these organisations are also keen to cooperate, whether talking about the young women's empowerment centre, the football club, Save the Children or PRO. Maybe there are churches, mosques or ethnic organisations which operate in the area? [Please check for local MÄN associations as well.](#)

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The young are very competent – make use of that fact.

STINA GRAAD, DEVELOPMENT LEADER FOR EN KOMMUN FRI FRÅN VÅLD, BORÅS MUNICIPALITY.

How have you been working with violence prevention?

– We are working to develop a method for leisure time. It is based on Agera tillsammans, developed by MÄN, because the target group is the same for the method we are developing.

Is there something that you feel has worked exceptionally well?

– I would like to point out that there is always something already in place which you can use as a starting point. I would also like to point out that there is a lot of competence in the different target groups, it is quite easy to ignore this when it comes to adolescents and children. The same goes for personnel and teachers that are heading the work. There is a lot of knowledge there – remember to support that which is working well.

What is the biggest change that you have noticed having started the work?

– All of a sudden you notice things about yourself and your colleagues and organisation. Early on, personnel observed that many of the problematic issues or tendencies towards violence occurred in a specific location. Because of this, we need analyze how that place is furnished. In our organisation, personnel have started to take measures in rearranging the space to prevent violence. It is a question of doing an overhaul of the organisation and being available to counteract violence for preventive purposes. We can ensure that it does not happen to the same extent as before. Or better yet, never happen at all.



” Once we start talking about violence and harassment in a structured manner in schools, we create an opportunity for young people who have experienced violence, to open up about it. Most of the municipalities report that these talks in the classroom have led to an increase in youths seeking help for things they have experienced.

Getting young people involved

Another important part of our violence prevention work has been to get young people more involved in the work, which has also been a central part of the work done by the municipalities. For example, Borås chose to invest in developing the education programs for the youth leaders, adding discussions on norms and how to identify violence and harassment. Young people that have participated in these leadership courses have then in turn trained personnel or arranged violence prevention events. Daring to stand up for what you believe in and acting on violence have been essential skills for leaders within the project. Borås has also hired the young in summer to work as municipal developers, conducting surveys, planning campaigns and, among other things, making films focused on how to act on violence.

In Västerås there have been several initiatives coming from young people in schools which have been working with MVP. These initiatives include organizing theme days and starting groups at school focusing on honour-related violence and oppression. In Gävle young people have chosen to write their senior projects on violence, or to arrange workshops for younger students as part of their senior projects at upper secondary school.



Click here for some of the movies done by children and adolescents in Borås, on Violence, Gender and Active Bystander.





Getting parents involved

”Development of safe, stable and nurturing relationships between children and their parents and caregivers” is one of the World Health Organization’s evidence-based strategies for preventing

violence. Our experience of working with parents (for example teaching equal parenting and arranging support groups for fathers) is unfortunately that parents are hard to reach, an experience shared by other organisations. Several of the participating municipalities in Livscykeln have begun to develop and add violence protection components to existing parenting support programs. Some municipalities have arranged workshops for parents of children and adolescents that have taken part of violence prevention measures at school. At times, these workshops have been accompanied by exhibitions of materials that the youths themselves have created as a part of MVP. In 2018 MÄN put together a material for two parent workshops per request from the city of Stockholm (please contact us to take part of the material). Many municipalities have also chosen to offer training in equal treatment and equal parenting for personnel at antenatal clinics and children’s health care centres. Another tool in working with violence prevention has been to start up support groups for new fathers.

Integrated measures

The measures as well as the course of actions have differed between municipalities. Regardless of level or target group, measures have enhanced or completed each another. The work described in this text is not a fixed and ready model – but an example of how the municipalities have been working the outset of their violence prevention work. In the chart below you will find a division of measures into the different levels of the socio-ecological model. Together they exemplify pieces of the municipality-wide approach and the efforts to create a municipality free from violence from a life cycle perspective.

 INDIVIDUAL	 RELATIONSHIP	 COMMUNITY	 SOCIETAL
Killfrågor.se, online support for boys Young women’s empowerment centres and women’s shelters. The program Barnpiloter in Västerås Information materials in schools and at youth guidance centres. Helpline for perpetrators Kvinnofridslinjen, helpline for women who have been subjected to threats and physical, psychological, and sexual violence. Young men’s support centre and therapeutic conversations in Västerås Alternatives to Violence in Stockholm Unga relationer – helpline for youths who need to talk about relationships.	MVP Machofabriken Support groups for fathers and the Equal parenting-programme Agera tillsammans After-school centres Dialogue and workshops with parents in Stockholm Parenting support programs Here4u in Västerås Parenting tests Fostering relationships with police, field assistants and others Normstorm in Jönköping Deck of cards to prevent violence	Huskurage Campaigning in Gävle and Västerås Local A Violence Free Week-events Education programs for youth leaders An action plan in Gävle Youth events Movies on being an active bystander Movies about the work	Consent-based sexual offence legislation National strategies Increased debate on masculinity norms, violence, and mental health. #metoo and #krokaarm Information campaigns for Kvinnofridslinjen BRÅ’s work against online hate Swedish Gender Equality Agency Violence prevention work done by The Swedish Prison and Probation Service.

Conclusion

Our experiences show that there is not only one, but many ways of creating long term and sustainable violence prevention work! Local circumstances differ around Sweden, and these differences are often the basis for the road chosen. Our advice is to choose the most advantageous setting and start there, where there is commitment, interest, and resources. Structuring and making quality controls of the work is important, but it is likewise important to have an agile and flexible mindset.

There are some success factors in common for the municipalities that we have worked with in this project, success factors that we have also seen in our previous work with violence prevention. Perseverance and an openness to taking in new knowledge along the way are prerequisites for the work. Having support structures and the possibility of getting an outsiders perspective from time to time are also important factors. Having the possibility of meeting others that are doing the same type of work to exchange experiences and seeing that things can be done in different ways is also helpful. The work needs to be integrated into the daily activities, so that progress is not halted because of project funds running out. But most importantly, our experience tells us that it can be done! With tenacity, curiosity, and support, violence can be prevented.

Want to find out more?

- More on violence prevention – read [IAVP](#)
- Read more on [MVP](#) and [Agera Tillsammans](#)
- More on our work in [Livscykeln](#)

Further reading on violence prevention is available on [MÄN:s website](#).

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Our advice is to choose the most advantageous setting and start there, where there is commitment, interest, and resources. Structuring and making quality controls of the work is important, but it is likewise important to have an agile and flexible mindset.

READ MORE ABOUT OUR WORK ON VIOLENCE PREVENTION AT [MÄN.SE](#)