

# **Systematic Language Interventions in a disadvantaged areas in Esbjerg, Denmark**

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# Introduction

MedVind is a local alliance of around **50 local stakeholders** from public organizations, daycare and school institutions, NGOs, private sector and civil society

These actors are mobilized around a **shared vision**: that all children and young people in Østerbyen complete education and enter employment by 2030.

The alliance involves key stakeholders from all arenas affecting children's lives: family, school, daycare, community etc.

The alliance is supported by a shared **backbone**, which facilitates the joint efforts of local stakeholders to improve conditions for children and youth in the area – **including strengthening their language skills.**

89.2 % of youth is enrolled in education 15 months after finished school

64.5 % of youth is enrolled in education 15 months after finished school

6.7 % has the lowest possible score in Danish and Math

13.3 % has the lowest possible score in Danish and Math

40 % has an after school job

13 % has an after school job

16% has parents living on public income

28% has parents living on public income

# Strategy Against Parallel Societies

In 2018, Denmark launched a comprehensive legislative strategy against “parallel societies” targeted disadvantaged areas in Denmark

## Key regulations

- Max. 30% enrolment per calendar year of children from disadvantaged areas in each daycare (“better distribution”)
- Mandatory learning offer from age 1 for children in disadvantaged areas  
→ in force from 1 July 2019



# Why Language? The Local Problem

In Østerbyen, **nearly 50% of children starting school needed special language support.**

A local analysis revealed **a lack of structured and stimulating language environments** in daycare.

Observations showed:

- Few adult-initiated conversations and questions
- Low presence of narrative and explanatory language
- Uneven quality and systematics across daycare institutions

The analysis concluded that **staff lacked shared language strategies and professional tools, despite strong relationships with children.**

There was a need to **build a coherent pedagogical approach** that supports **children's language through everyday dialogue and interaction.**



# Our Approach: We learn together (VLS)

VLS is an evidence-based language and learning framework used across daycare and now in school in our local area. It is developed by TrygFonden's Child Research Centre, Aarhus University

## Key focus

- Language skills
- Socio-emotional skills
- Executive functions
- Pre-literacy
- Parental involvement
- Data-driven practice



## Key characteristics of daycare applying VLS as framework for language development

- Three integrated daycare centers (children aged 1 to 6 years)
- An enrollment of around 263 children
- Approximately 59 % of the children are immigrants or children of immigrant background
- Language assessments of all children at least once a year



# Key changes from working with VLS (language intervention)

- **Shared pedagogical framework** is reflected in a more creative approach to learning environments.
- **Practice reflections** – pedagogical staff and management meet to refine practice based on children's progression (data).
- **Improved quality of pedagogical practice** – The staff experience an increased sense of professional identity, which has a positive effect on the children.



# Child-level outcome

**Well-being outcome** for children in daycare increase from **41% to 58%** over a 4-year period.

**Language skill outcome** for children in daycare:

**+31%** oral language skills

**+43%** pre-literacy skills

**School readiness**

**93%** of the children were assessed to have the language skills required to begin grade 0 (vs. 76% nationally)



# Parents' perspectives

At one of our daycare centers, we asked parents about the increased focus on language. The survey showed that:

- **85%** say their children's language has improved with VLS
- **73%** say their children are more eager to engage in conversations at home

Despite comprehensive legislation mandating daycare attendance for all children above the age of one, the study indicates that parents view both daycare and the increased focus on language in the learning environment positively.

# Key learnings from Østerbyen

VLS has proven to be a **low-cost, effective language intervention** that has generated significant impact

Increased use of **data strengthens pedagogical practice** and ensures that all **children benefit from** the intervention

Mandatory daycare combined with systematic language intervention has **strengthened the language skills of children from disadvantaged areas**, thereby creating better conditions for their further educational journey.  
Parents respond positively to their children's development

If you are interested in learning more, please read our external evaluation of the 0–8-year area in MedVind i Østerbyen

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Or visit our website:  
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