	<p style="text-align: right;">Date : 08/06/2007</p> <p><b>What is Community Center Gellerup?</b></p> <p><b>Lone Hedelund</b>  Branch librarian  Gellerup/Hasle Libraries  Gudrunsvej 78  DK – 8220 Brabrand  Denmark  Phone. + 45 89 40 96 40  Fax: + 45 89 40 96 54  Mail: lhh@bib.aarhus.dk</p>
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**Abstract:**

**Community Center Gellerup**

*Gellerup Library is in the process of transforming into a Community Centre based on knowledge management. Danish public libraries are increasingly adopting a more proactive and outreaching role in developing local communities in co-operation with other local institutions and private organisations and networks. Especially in so-called exposed communities and housing sectors the libraries are striving to become a knowledge resource intended at supporting for instance ethnic minorities in dealing with their specific situation, competence development and integration in the Danish society.*

*One of the most fundamental democratic principles is the individuals’ right to equal and free access to information and knowledge. The idea of enquiring and enlightened citizens being a prerequisite for a well-functioning democracy goes back a long way. The main focus is on women and children.*

**Unity in Community Center Gellerup**

Community Center Gellerup (CCG) is a comprehensive effort offering information on the Danish society in many different ways. By focussing on citizens and their needs, the institution is working to disintegrate institutional barriers and to support active citizenship. Community Center Gellerup is furthermore working to give citizens ownership in the development of offers in the CCG and to ensure citizens equal status both in the local community and in the Danish society in general.

CCG uses the competences and resources of various organisations and administrations in established and structured cooperation and involves in varying degrees volunteer organisations, associations and citizens as equal partners in the cooperation. In order to

realize the visions for CCG it is important to support and develop the right staff competences and a range of partnerships and networks.

The cooperation partners in CCG are in other words working based on a holistic way of thinking in regard to translating the basic services and information of each cooperation partner into action. However, the holistic view does not focus solely on internal organisation, internal actions and activities, but also on out-turned work aimed at the civil society – at both local and town level. CCG is working to counteract the fragmentation of society and to decrease social and cultural inequality.

### **Historic outline**

From a historic viewpoint, many similarities exist between the role of public libraries today and when libraries were first established. Public libraries in Denmark experienced a boom of interest when the country changed from peasant society to industrial society. Libraries were necessary, as citizens from the country needed (new) knowledge to enable them to seek employment in the industrial sector. Presently, libraries are again facing huge challenges with the development from an industrial society to a technological knowledge society that demands more learning and education. Like during the first change, the immigration from country to city, from one nation to another, is rising. And like before, the world is becoming global; these days to an even larger extent. We are headed towards a completely multicultural society that demands far greater insight and knowledge but also greater tolerance.

When I was a child, the population was more homogeneous; not only in the town I grew up in but in Denmark in general. Very few radio channels were in existence and we had only one national TV channel. This meant that the majority of Danes received the same information through radio and TV. Discussions in schools and at workplaces were based on common conditions. Today there are multiple TV channels, not to mention news channels. People are free to design their lives and their knowledge from the radio and TV channels they prefer, the movies they like to see, the websites they visit, just as they are free to choose whether the food they eat should be prefabricated or organic. In short, each individual person can design his or her life according to his or her values without a need to socialise with people he or she does not like either because they do not agree politically or because he or she does not like their religion or the way they dress. In a 'worst-case-scenario', a multitude of parallel societies can arise, each oblivious to the other parallel societies. If this sociological tendency is not challenged, increasing intolerance must necessarily be the result both nationally and internationally.

At the same time it is my firm belief that social inequality nationally as well as internationally never has been greater.

Thus the role of public libraries has never been more important than now. Public libraries must ensure that citizens also become acquainted with values, information and knowledge about society, arts and culture not corresponding with their own views, which can serve as an eye-opener, a motivation and incitement to development or further development of the individual.

It is in this context that the establishment of Community Center Gellerup should be seen.

### **What is Community Center Gellerup?**

Community Center Gellerup is an organisation consisting of various public institutions working within the same framework and structure despite their diverse administrative organisations.

CCG is a cross-disciplinary cooperation building on an organisational form based on knowledge and experiences from different institutions and where cooperation is formed across professions on specific tasks such as cultural activities, information seeking and informal learning. Tasks can for instance include linguistic assistance, IT-courses, extra tuition, club activities and individual and anonymous counselling on e.g. health, housing, job market and issues to do with the family. It can also be teaching parenting to parents.

The methods used in CCG for developing both the library and other institutions and in connection with involvement of citizens and volunteers have been AI (Appreciative Inquiry) and empowerment.

The cross-disciplinary cooperation is built on a shared set of values, common events, courses, staff development, joint strategies and resource utilization and opportunities for sparring and room for activities managed by citizens.

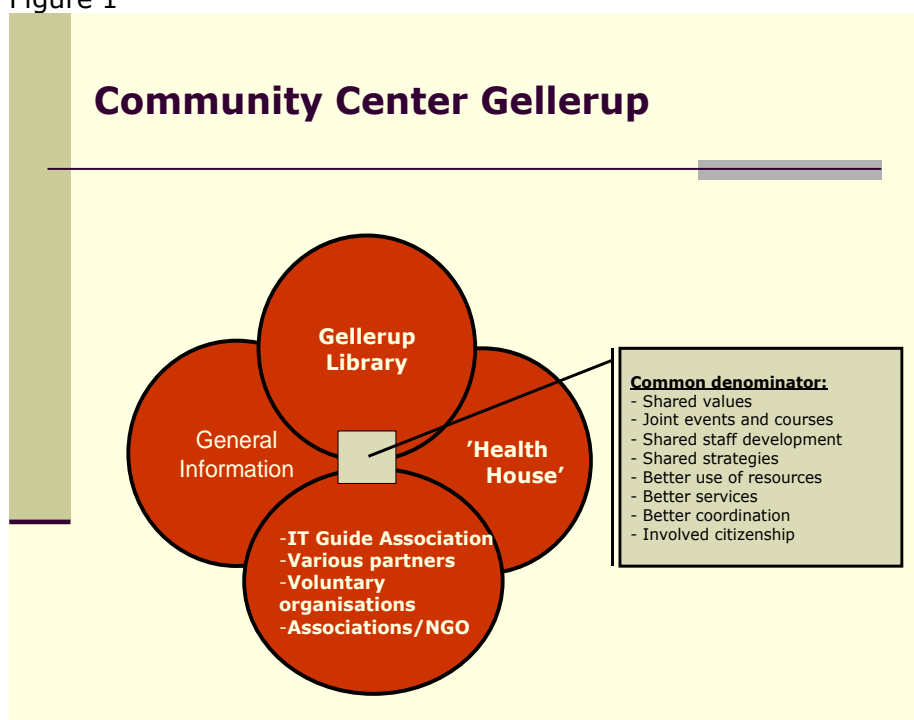
In short, the establishment of CCG has meant improved service, better coordination and genuine opportunities for the development of active citizenship.

Through this reorganisation, the actual public library, Gellerup Library, has taken advantage of the development of the everyday practise to form a range of social initiatives and has thus gone from a traditional Danish public library to a place that is 'much more than just books'.

CCG is in its form and content strongly influenced by the community in which it has been established.

### Who is participating?

Figure 1



Partners in Community Center Gellerup:

- **Sundhedshus/'Health-house'** (a healthcare centre): The Department for Children and Youths, Aarhus County. The objective of the Health House is to contribute to the promotion of equality in health and strengthen a healthy lifestyle especially among families with a different background than Danish and thus improve the children's health and well-being. The target group is future parents and families in the western part of Aarhus, but the Health House is in principle open to everyone. However, the Health House has a special focus on families with a different ethnic background than Danish and families that are especially exposed due to health or social issues. The activities are: groups for young mothers; subject groups, e.g. lifestyle groups, healthy food and

exercise, body and contraception, children's illnesses; 'Ready for Baby'; 'Food for Children'; baby meetings; preventive dental care and antenatal classes.

- **Folkeinformation/Public Information**, Family centre West, Social and Employment Department. Anonymous counselling and guidance aimed at strengthening the citizens' knowledge of society. Anyone experiencing a need for general guidance and information on everyday problems may approach the public information service and receive qualified information without any registration and be referred to the proper 'expert advisors'. Counselling is given in different languages including Danish, Arabic, Turkish, Somali, English and French. The Public Information Centre has 8 counsellors with very different educations: a farmer, an ethnographer, an interpreter, a nurse, a teacher, a minister of religion etc. The aim of the Public Information is to provide a service to all citizens of the municipality; however it is primarily directed at citizens of foreign descent residing in the urban areas of the western part of Aarhus. Public Information also offers legal counselling once a week for two hours.
- **Aarhus Public Libraries**, the branch libraries represented by Gellerup Library – which apart from traditional library services also offers: Circle Computer Club (structured IT-activities for children including graphical editing and Lego mind-storm), language and subject suitcases for children in day-care centres, reading activities (campaigns and reading aloud), and events for children. Special offers for adults include: IT-training in cooperation with the IT-guide Association, Job Corner (guidance on job seeking activities), introductions to Finfo (a national and local website for and with information about ethnic minorities), and various events. The Local Historical Archive for Brabrand-Aarslev is situated in a separate room at the library (see 'Fact about Gellerup Library below)

Fact about Gellerup Library

Gellerup Library (2006):

- Opening hours: 40 hours per week
- Circulation: 166,094
- Visits: 167,400
- Loans per visit: 1.00 (0.7 – 2005)
- Materials: 32,504
- Budget: 416,205 EURO (2007)

These 3 institutions work closely together with volunteer organisations, associations and private individuals in the community.

Established cooperation has been entered into with:

- **The IT Guide Association** is a 3 years old association – <http://www.it-guideforeningsn.dk/>. It is a multi-ethnic, apolitical, non-religious and democratic association based in the western part of Aarhus. The association has a double objective: to form a community of people with an interest in IT and to share the members' combined knowledge with citizens lacking IT-competences through free IT-courses. The IT Guide Association was founded in the spring of 2004. Today, the association has more than 30 members. The association offers IT-courses at Gellerup Library in many different languages, at different times of the day and during weekends. Tailored courses aimed at various associations (e.g. women's associations) according to their wishes and needs are also offered. Duration of courses can be 32 hours, 24 hours or short introductions in e.g. Netbanking.
- **the Daisy Association** - <http://tusindfryd.com/> (Tusindfryd) offers help with homework. The Daisy Association is a department under the Danish Refugee Council; it consists of a group of young students who offer help with homework free of charge to children, young people and adults. The homework help is open 10 hours per week spread over four days. People do not have to book a session, they just turn up. The homework-help is for all citizens, whether they attend a language school, are preparing

for the theoretical part of their driving test, attend primary or secondary school. It is also available to people who are starting upper secondary school or a commercial education. Approximately 20-25 citizens attend per opening day.

- **Fribørsen (Volunteer Exchange)** - <http://www.friboersen.dk/> - Fribørsen is an association independent of political, religious and financial interests. The objective of the exchange is to support and render visible the volunteer social work in the local area. The main service is to arrange contact between volunteer social associations and people wanting to do volunteer work. Furthermore, support is given to especially newly founded and small associations and projects in order to enable them to develop and realise activities.

### **Target group**

The entire population of the area is a potential target group for CCG, but in reality the concept appeals more to children, young people and women, while men mostly visit Community Center Gellerup to meet each other and hang out.

For many years, the Danish libraries (if not libraries throughout the world) have fought against an image of being dusty and boring; places of silence. But in CCG we have turned this dusty and not always true image to something positive.

We know from studies of people's cultural habits that women are greater consumers of cultural offers – including public libraries – than men. In several of the projects carried out in CCG over the last couple of years we have therefore consciously focussed on women – and particularly on women with a bicultural background.

We have thus kept in mind the African proverb: "When you educate a man, you educate a man. When you educate a woman, you educate an entire family/village".

A municipal reform was carried out in Denmark at the beginning of 2007. The reform has meant that the municipalities have far greater responsibility for the individual citizen as a wide range of services have been transferred to the municipality, e.g. in the health sector. Current research from among other places Sweden shows that people, who often go to the cinema, the theatre and to museums, live longer. Arts and culture are important elements in issues regarding health, quality of life and welfare (Lars Olav Bygren former professor at Umeå University).

When the Health House and Gellerup Library formed their present cooperation in 2003, this was one of the issues addressed.

### **Siting**

Community Center Gellerup is located in the centre of the poorest housing estate in Denmark: Gellerupparken.

### **Facts on the immediate neighbourhood of the library**

- 12,000 inhabitants (19,000 in the area of the library)
- 85% of which have a bicultural background
- Approximately 52 different languages are spoken in the area
- 40% of the children in the immediate neighbourhood are children under 14
- 1,400 children receive social benefits
- All pupils at the local school (Nordgårdsskolen) are bicultural
- Income of the average family is low – about 14,517 Euro against 19,541 for Århus in general
- About 60% of the citizens of the area are receiving cash payments or transfer income
- Many of the citizens have only short or no education at all and lack the basic knowledge to enable them to be part of the Danish society on an equal footing
- Many families have problems due to traumas or illnesses caused by torture and war.

## **Connection to the Danish society and in particular to the municipality of Aarhus**

In the preparation of vision, values and strategies for CCG, the group behind CCG incorporated visions, strategies and policies from:

- Vision for Aarhus Municipality
- Value basis for Aarhus Municipality
- Integration policy for Aarhus Municipality
- Library policy 2006-2009 for Aarhus Public Libraries
- *"From information to knowledge. On the way to the library of the knowledge society"* – strategy note from the Danish Library Agency

The main vision for Aarhus Municipality is as follows:

*Aarhus – a nice city for everyone. Room for diversity and multiplicity. Integration must be one of our strengths.*

The staff of Community Centre Gellerup has developed a model for these five values:

1. Credibility
2. Respect
3. Commitment
4. Focus on resources
5. Joint ownership

Aarhus Municipality has had an actual integration policy since 1996. The integration policy has just been revised. The intention of the integration policy is to strengthen the cohesion of the Aarhus society and to ensure that all irrespective of ethnic or cultural background are active citizens with respect for fundamental democratic values. Ethnic minorities must in reality have the same opportunities, rights and duties as other citizens of the city.

As a result, CCG focuses on the following areas:

- Citizenship and antidiscrimination
- Education and Employment
- Differentiated service

The library policy 2006-2009 for Aarhus Public Libraries and the strategy note from the Danish Library Agency (*"From information to knowledge. On the way to the library of the knowledge society"*) have been incorporated into the CCG's service, offers for citizens, activities, events and structure. In practise, this means that CCG treats people differently in order to treat them equally and that CCG is working to strengthen cross-ethnicity in the offers, initiatives and activities offered to the citizens.

CCG offers citizens

- equal opportunities in gaining both printed and digital knowledge and knowledge about society including especially knowledge about education and the job market.
  - linguistic and legal counselling.
  - discussion meetings inciting active citizenship and active participation in the political life
- focus on cross-cultural activities.

## **Methods**

CCG uses two primary methods for all work – be it serving patrons, involving citizens or developing staff competences. The methods are appreciative method (Appreciative Inquiry) and to give action competences (empowerment).

These methods are used not only by Community Center Gellerup, but are shared by police, social services, primary and secondary schools and day-care institutions. Community Center Gellerup therefore builds on these methods, as do other projects in the local community as well as the cooperation partners.

### ***Appreciative Inquiry (AI)***

- Acknowledge and enhance what is already working well.
- Focusing on solutions that already exist.

- Focusing on alternative realities, dreams and wishes.

In regard to **empowerment** we are therefore working on three levels:

1. **Individual citizens and staff members:** having the right to make one's own decisions – to live life according to own wishes
2. **Group:** being able to interact in a group – to create and support social networks
3. **(Local) society level:** stating one's opinion and pleading other peoples' causes – to demand and expect influence and respect.

### **What is meant by working holistically?**

Through the years many different terms and concepts have been linked to cross-sectorial cooperation. It has been dubbed cross-cooperation, community work, the hybrid library. Common to all the terms have been the public library's expansion beyond customary frames and their cooperation with other partners, which has added to the expansion of the very concept of public libraries.

When the work at Community Center Gellerup today is termed holistic it has to do with the fact that the work carried out at CCG is considered according to a comprehensive frame and the cohesion it offers not only in regard to our own organisation but also in regard to our immediate surroundings.

The majority of people contacting CCG can obtain anonymous counselling and advice. This is of huge importance to many of the citizens of the area, as they are very sceptical towards authorities.

Let me give you some examples:

Example one: A woman approaches Public Information to talk about the new legislation that means that she has to work at least 300 hours within a calendar year to sustain the right to social benefits. She is advised to go to the Job Corner, where she can be assisted in looking for vacant positions that match her qualifications.

The staff at the Job Corner helps her in clarifying her resources and in finding a suitable job. The woman then prepares an application and the staff is ready with sparring during the process. The application is sent or the woman – with the aid of the counsellor – contacts the employer. Another option is to refer the woman to one of the many employment-creating schemes in the community, which can help her on her way to ordinary work.

If the woman is offered the job she might come back to Public Information for counselling on how the job will affect her social benefits. After talking to a counsellor, she can obtain information from the legal books in the library.

Example two: Another woman may be in the same situation and follows the same course until she arrives at the Job Corner. But in this case it is ascertained that that the woman has some problems in regard to the job she is applying for. She may have minor ailments or be overweight, which would cause a strain on her knees when working in one of the vacant jobs. The woman can then go to the Health House and obtain counselling from a dietician. The dietician will give her individual counselling on changing her diet to loose weight in order to be able to handle the jobs she is qualified to apply for. She will then return to the Job Corner and from here she will follow the course of the woman in example one. The library staff will assist her in finding books about healthy diet and exercising.

A third example: A woman on maternity leave participates in an open house event on the job market in the Health House. She discovers that because she has been on maternity leave several times in a row she has lost part of her competences in the Danish language. Thus there are several words and terms she no longer understands. Before applying for a job she is therefore interested in brushing up her language skills. She enrolls in a free Danish course that teaches the subjects, words and terms, which she did not understand during the open house event at the Health House. This woman borrows Danish courses on tape and in print from the library's collection. At the same time she realises that she has to be able to prepare a written job application, so she enrolls in a basic IT-course, where she learns to write and design an application.

It is the experience of the staff at CCG that the holistic and informal approach described above is very beneficial, and they feel they are levers for hopes and dreams. The employees see that they are helping to generate knowledge and to create the framework for developing role models and pattern breakers.

### **The volunteers**

The cooperation with volunteers in CCG is divided into three categories:

1. organisations/NGOs – e.g. Fribørsen (Volunteer Exchange)
2. associations – e.g. IT Guide Association, Daisy
3. individual citizens – e.g. a citizen, who wants to arrange an event, exhibit photos or paintings or organise a discussion meeting – or a citizen volunteering to read aloud to children once a week.

Presently, approximately 80 volunteers are attached to CCG. 45 are working with homework help; there are 30 members of the IT Guide Association and about 7 volunteers reading aloud to children.

When involving volunteers it is essential to discuss and clarify with the staff group the extent of the involvement, and which tasks the volunteers will be working on. In CCG, volunteers are working on tasks that would otherwise not be carried out at CCG. The tasks in question are counselling regarding the creation of associations; holding basic IT-courses and Internet introductions and reading aloud for children between 8 and 11.

Involving volunteers is not cost neutral. Time must be spent on regular contact between the workplace and the volunteers whether it is an organisation, an association or private citizens. Staff time is spent on meetings, preparation and planning of activities and on follow-up on the activity.

In CCG we have furthermore introduced the concept of 'Quid pro quo'. This has resulted in 3 evening courses in the spring of 2007 in multicultural competences, and in the autumn we will carry out similar evening courses in conflict management for the volunteers.

In connection with the establishment of CCG we have focused on developing citizen driven activities. I.e. citizens in the community come to CCG to test whether their ideas are any good and 'marketable', and whether CCG wants to enter into a cooperation with the citizen or association to launch the activity.

During the last two years this has resulted in a wide range of activities and events. Three courses on social education and three Danish courses have been held. Three seminars have been carried out: a health day, IT-open learning, a seminar on folk high schools and continuation schools. Separate events such as 'Break the fast' (an evening event on Ramadan); a day about 'Khat and clans' held by young Somalis; a garbage collection day 'Clean Ghetto'; a concert, 'Gellerup wake up', against arsonists' attacks in the area; discussion meetings about Palestine; presentation of candidates for the Integration Council in Aarhus; sponsoring of shirts for a football tournament; a get-together for young men and women in the role model group 'Youth for youth'; exhibition of library material at the seminars 'Faith meets faith' – just to mention a few and to demonstrate the variety of subjects. CCG is involved in the events in various ways: financing or subsidising the event, staff assisting in preparing PR (posters and folders) or making available staff members and rooms to carry out the event. The activities have so far been carried out beyond CCG's normal frames for events.

These events and activities to a large extent reflect the needs of the citizens and the community. As the citizens themselves are contributing actively to the organisation of these events, we have decided to continue to budget citizen driven events and activities. The budget amount will be the similar to the budget amount for the library's own events. Besides, staff time for supporting these activities will be made available. Thus the positive experiences gained in the organisation of the work with volunteers will be implemented directly upon completion of the project period.



## **The future – developmental tendencies**

Community Center Gellerup started as a project in spring 2005. During the two years since then, the staff at CCG has focused on joint organisational and staff development, which has resulted in a decision on shared vision, set of values and cooperation models. The latter has been converted into an approved structure based on the actual cooperation. By approving the structure, CCG is transformed from project to daily operation. During the project period, CCG has carried out competence, role and method development, where all members of staff have participated in joint courses (on AI, empowerment, conflict management and learning) and social events (study tours to see other communities and to get to know each other better). We have worked with citizens' services; involvement of volunteers attached to CCG and held courses for volunteers. We have worked on both external dissemination (targeted at citizens in the local community) and internal dissemination (web and intranet). Finally, we have worked with the physical frames, which has resulted in a complete refurbishment of the physical space that has created better room for the many activities.

In a development process, some things will be put into daily operation, others will be further developed and new plans are projected. Community Center Gellerup has been no different.

Within the present framework, these areas need further development:

Job Corner, which was established in 2002

As is the case with many of the other offers at the library, the Job Corner has been developed by the library. The idea has since the very beginning been to create a place where people can drop by, informally and anonymously, to seek guidance and counselling in connection with all aspects of the job seeking process. That is to utilize the combination of the user's own initiative and the user's expectation of being serviced. Presently the Job Corner has around 80-100 contacts per month of which 60 % are women between 20 and 35 years of age. The number of users is constantly increased as more and more users tell others about their positive experiences, least of all the ones telling about their new jobs – that is ordinary jobs unsubsidised by the municipality. And such a positive story reaches us at least every fortnight.

We want to attach a permanent counsellor to the Job Corner. And we want to extend the Job Corner to include a dietician with a few hours' of individual and group counselling per week. The dietician can also be attached to the Health House and guide on change of diet for the entire family.

Volunteers

In spring 2007, a survey was carried out among all members of staff in Citizens' Services and Libraries in Aarhus on the use of volunteers in the entire organisation. Approximately 32 % of all employees participated in the survey.

On the general question of whether the employees liked the idea about involving volunteers in the organisation, 45 % were positive (or very positive), while 30 % were negative (or very negative). 25 % were neutral.

CCG will continue to involve volunteers for homework help; reading aloud for children and basic IT-courses in cooperation with the IT Guide Association. In connection with this, the staff has started a discussion about how to define the concept of learning, whether learning should take place in an open or a closed learning environment and how this is combined with Community Center Gellerup and its physical frames.

CCG will also be able to build on the experiences with events and discussion activities by contributing to the development of methods to strengthen the communication across ethnic networks. This goes for both groups of ethnic minorities internally and between ethnic Danish networks and institutions (public) on the one side and networks of ethnic minorities and associations on the other.

Community Center Gellerup can be further developed from a place of communication, information and counselling to include collection on knowledge about associations and resource persons in the community.

CCG can contribute to a further development of methods for proactive citizen involvement in regard to ethnic minorities; can become a place where everyone working actively with citizen involvement can exchange experiences and ideas and contribute in carrying out tasks in connection with these activities in cooperation with the citizens. CCG can also over time develop into a facilitator for citizens and associations in the area that wishes to be heard and to involve more citizens in projects and concept development. The centre can offer tuition, workshops and counselling on for instance appreciative methods, empowerment, project management, dialogue tools, conflict management, fundraising, events etc. The offers can be targeted at associations and organisations as well as citizens.

*Lone Hedelund: Librarian since 1977. Worked at several public libraries in Denmark: Thisted, Guderup, and also as chief librarian in The Nordic House; Reykjavík in 1995. Over the past 15 years at Aarhus Public Libraries as manager of the branch libraries Gellerup and Hasle. In the period 1982-1984 I was a board member of The Danish Union of Librarians. Since 1995 I have been board member of the Danish Library Association.*

*During the past 4-5 years I have been project manager for several projects:*

- *IT-projects: IT Competence Upgrading and 'IT for the People'. The IT Guide Association (<http://www.it-guideforeningsn.dk/>) was founded during the IT Competence Upgrading project. Experiences from the project are carried over into a recently launched project 'IT for the People', a collaboration between the IT Guide Association and Gellerup/Hasle Libraries. IT Competence Upgrading was instrumental in Aarhus Public Libraries being awarded the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's highly estimated library prize "Access to Learning Award" of 500,000 USD in 2004.*
- *"Reading Hunger" - The overall objective of the project was to increase bilingual women's interest in stimulating their children's ability to pick up a language and via the mother strengthen the children's cognitive development and imagination. This was done through working with stories and reading aloud. The target group was children aged 4-10 and their mothers. The main target group was children and mothers with bicultural backgrounds.*
- *Community Centre Gellerup since 2005*