

English summary  
of Fafo-rapport 2021:06

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**From Zero to Hero**  
On flexible learning arenas,  
dropout and the journey  
back

# From Zero to Hero

## On flexible learning arenas, dropout and the journey back

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The topic of this report is school dropout and methods for getting vulnerable young people back into education or into paid work. Specifically, it is focused on Café Han-co, an initiative by Viken County Municipality, Glemmen Upper Secondary School and Oppfølgingstjenesten (Follow-Up Service, OT) for young people. Café Hanco's target group is the young people in OT's target group, age 16-21, as well as young people age 22-24 who are recruited from NAV. All these young people have either left school or have never started an educational programme after completing lower secondary school. Either situation leaves them vulnerable and makes them more likely than other young people not to complete upper secondary school or go into paid work.

The key question is whether being a part of Café Hanco can help protect young people with different types of risk factors that make it difficult for them to return to the educational programmes they have started or to get a job.

Questions addressed by this project are:

- Do the participants at Café Hanco have a sense that their personal skills, social skills and formal skills are strengthened?
- How is Café Hanco used as a learning arena for young people in OT's target group?
- In what way do Café Hanco's methodology and flexible learning arenas help build young people up to become more independent individuals in charge of their own lives?
- Does their experience of physical and mental health change?
- Does the participants' absence decrease?

The starting point for this report is two-fold. Firstly, the analyses are centered on the young people and their needs. Secondly, school leaving is understood as a process rather than an isolated event. In this project, I have followed 41 young people through three year groups, and observed how the adults at Café Hanco have worked with the young people and developed their methodology.

Café Hanco started as a café, but currently consists of three companies for young people: Hanco Event (café and catering), Riv og Røsk (construction, forest clearing, sea and fishery as well as various work in the local community) and Hanco Media who create advertisement videos and take on photography jobs within the

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organisation and for external clients. The project also includes courses in social studies, which is an obligatory subject, along with physical activities and outdoor recreation.

The aim of Café Hanco is to be like a jump start cable for vulnerable young people who have gotten stuck. This means giving them back their self-esteem and a feeling of mastery, and letting them try different types of activities. The basic pedagogical principle is giving the young people a belief in themselves and giving them the power and motivation to manage in the future. Café Hanco is described as a flexible learning arena, to denote its situation between the educational system on the one hand on working life on the other hand. An important part of its flexibility is that it can draw on both institutions and thereby give the young people more space to try different things and find something that suits them.

Our analyses are organised into four parts, based on the dimensions in which young people are particularly likely to be vulnerable:

1. Individual, self-esteem and life skills
2. Familial, support and values at home
3. Social, belonging and isolation
4. Future oriented, ambitions and motivation

It is important to keep in mind that a publicly initiated measure is not the answer to everything. Research shows for instance that family has a crucial role in determining choice of education and school results. However, it is not easy to have a significant impact on internal family relations through political decisions. On the other hand, compensatory measures, in which the young people are strengthened in other ways, may be quite realistic.

Most of the young users of Hanco find it to be useful, and find they are more motivated to continue after having been to Hanco than before. These experiences can also be read from the results. For all three years, the vast majority of the young people have either gone back to school, started apprenticeships or started paid work.

The key to Hanco's success seems to be creating a community and an experience of belonging. Consequently, the strength of this flexible learning arena is that Hanco draws on the inclusive logic of a workplace where everyone in a team has a part to play. This includes experiencing that one's own absence will negatively affect others, because they will then have to do your job for you. By being a flexible learning arena, Hanco can include elements from working life as well as elements from education. The young people attend classes in some common subjects and can take ex-ams, implying that their time at Hanco will bring them closer to a clarified situation, whether in the direction of university and college admissions certification, starting an apprenticeship or finding a job.

The four vulnerability dimensions, along with what Hanco does, are analysed in chapters:

### **Individual, self-esteem and life skills**

A key aim of participating at Hanco is giving the young people a feeling of mastery – through trips, meeting other people and through activities. Cooking high-quality food and taking extreme trips are examples of activities that give the young people a feeling of mastering something, with the ripple effects of strengthening their self-esteem and confidence in meeting new people. Furthermore, an important basis of the work is to nurture pride in one's own achievements and what one does at Hanco, which is also important for many of the young people who find it difficult to accept that they are in this situation of needing this initiative.

### **Familial, support and values at home**

Many of the young people at Café Hanco come from disadvantaged families and difficult family relationships. To some degree, the adults function as a surrogate family for a lot of the young people, but their primary role is as significant, supplementary adults who can provide academic/professional and personal support for the young people. However, this close relationship implies that there cannot be a clear distinction between work and free time for the staff. They follow each young person closely and put a lot of energy into being there as “whole people”. Therefore, they must be truly passionate about what they do.

### **Social, belonging and isolation**

Café Hanco nurtures a sense of belonging through a number of different types of activities, which are selected and adapted based on the participants. At the same time, it is crucial to require the participants to push themselves and make a real effort. Additionally, the distinction between the staff (the adults) and the young people is downplayed as part of the strategy. Among the most significant measures are an emphasis on shared meals, in which the adults and young people sit together and talk about their day-to-day activities. Furthermore, the collective logic from working life is used, based on the experience that “I am needed” and that one is missed when one does not turn up. This is an experience many of the young people at Hanco do not have from their upbringing and previous education.

## **Future oriented, ambitions and motivation**

Hanco aims to be like a jump-start cable for young people. In other words, Hanco's goal is to light a spark to give them the motivation to continue on their own. The next question is where they should go. Hanco helps them with this through advising, but especially by providing them with a chance to try different activities, through the youth companies and in working life. They also have the opportunity to take exams in several subjects to achieve university and college admissions certification. It is also important that Hanco is not to be a permanent hangout for the young people. They are meant to move on when they are ready, and no later than after one year.

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