

People Need People – a regenerative partnership between civil society, municipality and mental health hospital



Purpose

Mental illness, poor well-being, and loneliness have unfortunately become “public health diseases” that each year place a heavy burden on the quality of life of patients and relatives as well as on welfare budgets. *“People Need People”* is a simple, equal, and trust-based collaborative model across three sectors—region, municipality, and civil society—that supports recovery and creates hope, well-being, and access to local communities for people with mental illness.

The model is aimed at people above the age of 18 who, with or without support, can take part in a voluntary work community. It can be used both as a preventive initiative and during and after hospitalization. Cross-sector collaboration has also proven to strengthen job satisfaction among municipal and regional employees, who experience seeing people’s potential unfold in new environments, tasks, challenges, and relationships.

Description

People Need People has been developed and tested since 2022 in an equal partnership between users of psychiatric services, the municipalities of Roskilde and Slagelse, psychiatric regional services, and the social enterprises Sct. Hans Garden and VeteranHaven. The VELUX FOUNDATION has supported the development process. Inspired by the method of Relational Coordination, the partners have developed a value-creating “garden–nature platform” that none of them could have created alone, and the psychiatric services recognize that participating in a garden community can be part of the treatment of patients.

Since March 2023 people affiliated with municipal social psychiatry or regional psychiatric services have been meeting at Sct. Hans Garden every Tuesday morning—year-round—and participated in a voluntary work community together with other volunteers, interns, and staff. This is made possible because municipal social psychiatry and regional psychiatry commit to ensure that at

least one staff member is present in the garden every Tuesday morning. Some participants have attended regularly for more than two years and now identify more as “volunteers” than as participants. Initially, they arrived together by bus from a social municipality center. Now they arrive on their own—by foot, by bike, or by public transport—from their own homes or from supported housing, and some also attend volunteer celebrations or other extra activities in the garden independently. There are also participants who come together with staff from inpatient wards or community mental health teams. Even a single visit might foster hope during hospitalization. As a user representative put it back in 2022: *“Just knowing that the garden was there gave me hope during my hospitalization. You need to make access to those kinds of local communities much easier.”*

Resources

The collaborative model is simple and requires relatively few resources once in operation. The municipality and the region provide recovery-promoting competencies (“a supporting invisible hand” / a sense of safety) one morning per week, as well as ongoing outreach and recruitment efforts. In fact this is an existing recovery task that is moved into civil settings and spaces of opportunity. Staff work side by side with participants until they become self-sufficient, and conversations typically revolve around all sorts of issues other than illness.

Associations and social enterprises provide “the inclusive platform” and a gardener (or another staff member) who, week after week, is ready with a list of meaningful tasks. These partners must be committed to a clear social purpose that they see strengthened through participation in *People Need People*. In Sct. Hans Garden, every Tuesday begins with a morning song and coffee at 9 a.m. for everyone present. The gardener then explains the tasks of today. *People Need People* participants have the option to arrive at 10 a.m., for example together with staff from inpatient wards; the municipal employee ensures that there is also coffee and work tasks for them. At 12 p.m., Sct. Hans Garden provides lunch for everyone. Everyone who works together in the garden on Tuesdays can call themselves “garden hosts” and share responsibility for caring for both the garden and the community.

Anchoring and Potential for Scaling

The collaborative model in Roskilde has been continued as part of regular operations following the conclusion of the development period in December 2025. It is assessed that the model can be scaled across other municipalities and regions within existing operating budgets. This is because public employees responsible for recovery tasks spend one morning per week in “civil society” instead of at their usual workplace. The decisive elements for a sustainable collaboration are:

1. “The common third” — a clearly defined meaning or purpose for the local community and the common tasks
2. Management support in all three organizations
3. Human qualities that include belief in and expectations that everyone can contribute to a local community

The model can also be applied as a prevention initiative. Thus, helping to reduce pressure on psychiatric departments.

See films, articles, and testimonials in Danish [HERE](#) and Sct. Hans Garden
www.scthanshave.dk