



Punishment that makes a difference?

RESCALED principles practiced in existing Norwegian prisons

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2.2 Søndre Vestfold fengsel, Larvik avdeling

Introduction

Søndre Vestfold fengsel, Larvik avdeling ("Southern Vestfold prison, Larvik department", from now on "Larvik prison") is a high-security prison for men. It was opened in 1862, and is located in the city of Larvik. Larvik prison is specialised on imprisoned youth between 18 and 25, and is the only Norwegian prison housing this target group only.



Photo: Therese Eskelund / Østlands-Posten

Prison size

Larvik can house up to 16 people and is a small-scale prison in a Norwegian context.

Differentiation

Security level:

Larvik is a high-security prison, and the security measures are in line with legislative requirements. A stay at Larvik might, however, feel less restrictive due to the size of the prison population, the tight relations between the staff and the residents, as well as its focus on dynamic security rather than static measures.

Although Larvik formally is a high-security prison, the rules and security measures are still stretched to allow for an adapted approach to the young target group. The officers are not required to wear a uniform, and the youth are entrusted more independence within the prison walls. The staff at Larvik emphasize a logical set of prison rules to reduce the friction between the officers and the youth. The officers also make sure to communicate to the youths why these rules are in place as a way of reducing friction and frustration.

Furthermore, Larvik relies on a system of rewarding good behaviour, rather than sanctioning misbehaviour. The young people may for instance join an officer outside the prison for various activities, as a reward for behaving well. If they do not comply with the rules, they are not rewarded. This encourages positive behaviour while simultaneously reducing the use of negative sanctions common in other high-security prisons, such as cancelling visits or retraction of leave permits. Such practice is another example of a way of reducing friction.

Target group:

The target group of Larvik is young people between 18 and 25. They accept people who have received sentences up to a

RESCALED-principles in practice:

- Small scale
- Differentiated
- Community-integrated

A small-scale environment: In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of people imprisoned for sexual offences. While this has often led to dispute and violent incidents in regular prisons, the staff at Larvik argued that they were often able to prevent such incidents due to the prison size.

maximum of 10 years. Yet, the residents are only allowed to stay for two years, mainly due to the small size. Residents who turn 25 will also be transferred to other prisons.

Larvik offers a tailor-made programme for young people, and has many years of experience with the target group. The aim is to give the youths a chance to turn their life around at an early stage and to prevent recruitment to more severe crime, which can often happen in large-scale prisons.

In the last few years, however, Larvik has experienced a change in their population. The youths are more often traumatised, have mental health issues, personality disorders, diagnoses such as ADHD, autism and Asperger, and are imprisoned for more severe crime (e.g. violence). This change may be linked to the changes in the prison population in general²⁰. However, due to the prison size, the staff argue that they have been able to adapt and offer a tailor-made approach to each of the youths.

Larvik prison is the only Norwegian prison focusing on the target group of young people from 18 to 25 specifically. In addition to Larvik, a unit for young people opened in Eidsberg prison²¹ in 2019, housing 25 to 40 people aged between 18 and 25. However, this unit is incorporated in a larger prison with the challenges that pose (e.g. negative influence by older residents, recruitment to organised crime, and less consistency in staff, culture and working methods).

Activities:

The majority of the youths at Larvik go to school during the day. The prison has its own school department, in cooperation with Færder upper-secondary school.

Besides school, the youth participate in a wide range of other activities. For example, anger management classes, stress management classes, mindfulness, courses in economy, and various forms of therapy. They also have morning meetings, weekly gatherings, individual conversations and program-based groups. Physical activities include workouts, volleyball matches and boardgames.

Community-integration

Location and architecture:

Larvik prison is located in the municipality of Larvik, which has about 47,500 inhabitants. It is a coastal municipality, with large agricultural areas, forests and mountains. Larvik is also the name of the city the prison is located in, which is relatively small with about 26,700 inhabitants.

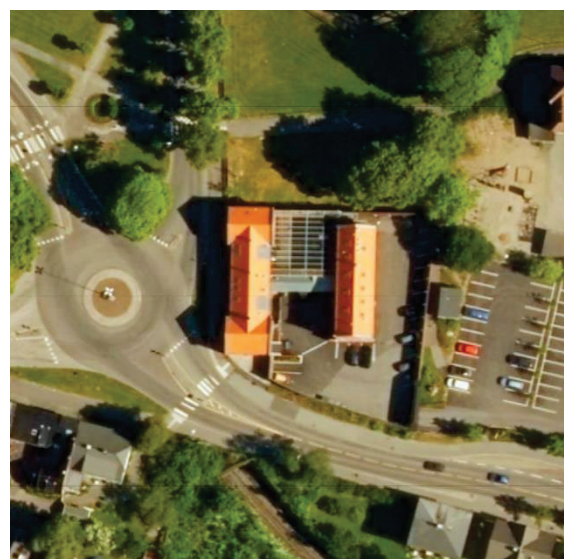
The prison is located in the city centre, and is easily accessible by train or car. In the surrounding area, one will find several shops and services, a campsite and a harbour.

“What facilitates change? To merely sit in a prison does not. The relationships we are able to form with the people detained here are worth its weight in gold. We have worked with youths for many years, and continuously aim to create a safe and secure environment.”

Hanne Guldborg, prison inspector at Larvik



Volleyball court in Larvik prison. Photo: Therese Eskelund / Østlands-Posten



Aerial photo of Larvik and surrounding area. Photo: Gule sider

²⁰ See “Notes and explanations” for further elaboration (appendix)

²¹ Eidsberg prison is a large-scale prison in a Norwegian context and has a capacity of 102 beds.

Larvik was one of the first prisons that opened in Norway, and is also one of the 1860s prisons. This is reflected in the design and architecture²².

Interaction with the community

The residents at Larvik have various forms of contact with the local community. As mentioned above, the residents are frequently allowed outside of the prison gates for different activities. Some are, for instance, working out at a nearby fitness centre.

Other examples of activities outside the prison include jogging in the nearby Bøkeskogen, the northernmost beech tree forest in the world, which has several kilometres of popular hiking trails. During the summer, the prison arranges trips to the beach.

Larvik also cooperates with the local community through going to sports events or participation in 'dugnader' (voluntary work in the community). For example, youth from Larvik helped out with building an outdoor stage for a local theatre group. In return, they were given tickets to the premiere.

Søndre Vestfold fengsel,

Larvik avdeling

Built: 1862

Capacity: 15 males (18-25 years)

Security level: High

Nearest city/town: Larvik

Nature of interaction: Meeting

Publicity/read more:

- About Larvik prison at the official website of the Norwegian Correctional Service <https://www.kriminalomsorgen.no/soendre-vestfold-fengsel-larvik-avdeling.5027969-237612.html>
- Newspaper article 'see the inside of Larvik prison': <https://www.op.no/bli-med-inn-i-larvik-fengsel-jeg-er-heldig-som-far-sone-her/f/5-36-747330>

²² See "Notes and explanations" for more information on the 1860s prisons (appendix)



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