

## Making the documentary 'Free To Play'

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This article contains different elements of the preparatory actions with regards to shooting the documentary *Free to Play* in Copenhagen and at the Sports School at Sønder Omme State Prison during the period June 14<sup>th</sup> to June 24<sup>th</sup> 2011. It also contains elements concerning different actions after the shooting.

Shooting a film within a prison is not a simple matter. Various issues need to be considered and taken care of before starting the shooting itself. To the best of our knowledge many prison services around the world hesitate to let film crews stay inside their prisons for longer periods of time. In the Danish Prison and Probation Service we likewise have serious considerations each time we decide to invite film makers inside one of our institutions. However we find it very important to be open about our work and therefore whenever possible we try to overcome whatever obstacles may be in the way of opening the gates – not only to the film crew but through their work also to the surrounding society. We prioritize to do so as we consider it important for society – as part of a resocialisation process – to get better acquainted with the life of prisoners and with the persons behind the crimes.

In the following we will describe some of our considerations along with listing some of the logistics and precautions that we needed to take care of before being able to welcome the film producers (S4S) at Sønder Omme State Prison.

There has been a large number and various kinds of tasks in connection with preparing the film shoot at Sønder Omme State Prison. These preparatory actions can roughly be categorized as:

- Legal matters
- Matters regarding the content of the film
- Practical matters
- Processing the first version of the film

## Legal matters

### The legal documents

The single most time consuming task for the Department of Prisons and Probation has with no doubt been the making of the various needed legal documents:

- The contract between S4S, DRA and Sønder Omme State Prison: Agreement on footage for documentary. June 2011.
- Annex 1. Certificate of Confidentiality
- Annex 1a. Certificate of Confidentiality
- Annex 2. Samtykkeerklæring (ansatte, besøgende ect.)
- Annex 3. Samtykkeerklæring (indsatte)
- Annex 4. Declaration of consent. (Roughly translated English version of Annex 2 and 3)

We have to the best of our abilities been trying to create good and flexible conditions for S4S to make the documentary they and Prisoners on the move wished for. To honor our tasks as a prison system it has however been necessary to take certain precautions and make certain restrictions. These limitations are noted in the legal documents and are generally seen serving the following aims:

- The protection of the participating inmates
- The protection of participating employees and visitors at the prison
- The protection of S4S while on prison premises
- Not violating the public's sense of justice or victims of an offence
- Not compromising any security matters
- To present an accurate and nuanced picture of the Sports School, of Sønder Omme State Prison and of the Danish Prison and Probation Service.

These documents have been created by Trine Lund Christiansen and Katja Gullitz-Wormslev, who is a lawyer at the Division for Enforcement of Sentences in the Department of Prisons and Probation. All documents have been discussed thoroughly by a number of people and finally approved within our system by: Prison Governor of Sønder Omme State Prison Anne Marie Heckscher and from the Department of Prisons and Probation: a lawyer from the Director Generals Office, a lawyer from the Security Unit and Head of Division for Enforcement of Sentences Ina Eliassen. In addition to this the documents have been discussed with and approved by Geoff Arbourne/S4S and Ine Melis and Rina Robben/DRA.

**The Treatment:** Geoff Arbourne's thorough investigations in prison systems around the world were originally meant to result in a synopsis and a manuscript for the film. Realizing that it would be impossible to decide on the exact angle before actually being on the premises and knowing the cast of inmates, Geoff Arbourne however decided to combine the two in one document: a less structured *treatment*. For the sake of the above mentioned aims also the Treatment had to be read, commented and finally approved by a number of persons within the prison system: The Governor of Sønder Omme State Prison, Head of the Sports School, Head of the Security Unit in the Department

of Prisons and Probation, Head of Communication in the Department of Prisons and Probation and Trine Lund Christiansen.

**Criminal records:** As a standard procedure everybody visiting a Danish prison is having their criminal history checked out in the Danish Criminal Register. As the register only contains information about crimes committed on Danish ground we in addition had to ask S4S to bring criminal records from their respective home countries.

### *Matters regarding the content of the film*

**Back ground information for S4S in order for them to understand the Danish Prison and Probation Service as well as context of a Danish open prison:** We have in different ways tried to provide Geoff Arbourne with relevant information about our system before starting the shoot. However it turned out to be surprisingly difficult to find any updated literature in English about the Danish Prison and Probation Service. Having asked several people within the organization we had to settle for what is to be found on our website ([www.kriminalforsorgen.dk](http://www.kriminalforsorgen.dk)) and for some slides from different presentations on the Danish Prison and Probation Service. Apart from the written material we have had a number of long conversations on the phone discussing the ideas and practices of the Danish Prison and Probation Service.

#### **Setting up and preparing interviews with:**

- **The NGO Exit:** The Director of the Aftercare Organization Exit (<http://www.exit-danmark.dk/index.php?id=362>) Ann Skov Sørensen agreed to be interviewed for the documentary as well as did ex-prisoner and Information Officer of Exit Hans Andersen.
- **The Department of Prisons and Probation:** The Director General William Rentzmann.
- **A politician:** We tried to get an interview with our Minister of Justice. We made a background description of Prisoners on the move and send it along with the questions that Geoff Arbourne had listed for the interview. Unfortunately the minister due to a full schedule had to decline.

**The question of language in the movie:** This very matter has been one of our greatest concerns and a subject of several discussions and considerations. The film being part of a European project aiming at a European audience the best solution would obviously be for everybody participating to speak English and not Danish throughout the film. Only one heavy condition spoke against this. Before starting the shoot we were quite unsure of the inmates' abilities of expressing themselves in English. We felt certain that they would be able to get by in English but less certain if the individual inmate's level of English would be sufficient enough for him to be able to express himself in a fairly nuanced manner.

Choosing to speak Danish would however lead to other kinds of complications as Geoff Arbourne then would not be able to communicate and connect directly with the inmates and moreover would

be very handicapped in the editing process. Apart from that the use of Danish would necessarily force us to use subtitles which is very expensive and therefore not really within the reach of the current budget.

In the end we all agreed that we could not really make the final decisions on the subject beforehand. Geoff Arbourne would need to discuss it with Pia Kjelgaard on the spot. If the level of English turned out not to be sufficient more staff members had offered to interpret. In every case it would then be left up to the inmate himself whether he wanted an interpreter and if so who he would prefer.

Luckily it turned out that we had underestimated the inmates abilities in this very field as all of them were perfectly able to communicate with Geoff Arbourne. However a few of them every now and then expressed some very understandable frustration not being able to explain in their mother tongue subjects that were important to them.

**Visiting the Sports School during the period of shooting:** During the shoot Nadja Sørensen and Trine Lund Christiansen spend a day at the Sports School to experience for themselves if everything was running as planned and to offer their assistance if it was not. Fortunately everything went just fine.

### *Practical matters*

#### **Two weeks of filming:**

As we noted in the beginning of this article not many prisons allow a film crew to stay for a longer period of time. There are several good reasons for choosing not to. For one it is bound to be an expense for the prison as you for the sake of general security matters as well as for the safety of the guests cannot let them move about on their own but need to have employees around them at all times. The most important reason though is that a visit like this, however pleasant the visitors, puts quite a bit of stress on many inmates as visits can be perceived as an invasion of their privacy.

Prison Governor of Sønder Omme State Prison Anne Marie Heckscher decided to meet the wish of film director Geoff Arbourne and invited him and his camera man Jeandré Gerding to stay and follow the life at the Sport School of the prison for a period of two weeks. Both Anne Marie Heckscher and the leader of the Sports School Pia Kjelgaard agreed that to serve the purpose of making a film that actually represented the Sports School it made good sense for S4S to stay more than just a few days to get to know the place, get a taste of prison life and not least to get to know the pupils at the school.

**Accommodation in Sønder Omme:** Anne Marie Heckscher invited S4S to stay for free in a special house normally used by the prison staff. The only special term for their stay was that they during the weekend only could spend the night, but not the daytime.

**Breakfast and lunch on the house:** During their stay Anne Marie Heckscher and Pia Kjelgaard invited S4S to join in on a healthy breakfast and a ditto hot meal in the middle of the day at the Sports School. Both meals prepared and served by the inmates themselves as they do it every day.

**Lightning equipment:** On Geoff Arbourne's request we found the addresses of two different film schools to call in the search for renting lighting equipment.

## *Processing the first version of the film*

**Translation matters:** We have been assisting with a few translation matters in the period after the film shoot.

### **Viewing and approving the first version of *Free to Play***

The people who have viewed and approved the film in the first and current version are:

From the Department of Prisons and Probation:

- Director General William Rentzmann
- Head of Media Relations Lars Erik Siegumfeldt
- Head of Security Unit Michael Gjørup
- And from the Division for Enforcement of Sentences: Head of Division Ina Eliassen, Niels Løppenthin, Nadja Sørensen and Trine Lund Christiansen.

From Sønder Omme State Prison:

- Prison Governor Anne Marie Heckscher
- Head of Sports School Pia Kjelgaard
- All the inmates participating in the film.

As it states in the contract our right of viewing was exercised particularly:

*“(I) to ensure that errors of fact are identified and pointed out; (II) to ensure that employees, inmates and others encountered in the State Prison area do not appear unintentionally in the documentary unless they have given their written consent to participation or have been blanked out; (III) to ensure that the documentary does not show anything that may entail a security risk relative to the State Prison, the inmates, the employees or others encountered in the State Prison area upon showing or broadcasting; and (IV) to prevent footage or statements that may violate the public's sense of justice or victims of an offence.”*

**In conclusion of the film process as a whole we will like to stress three matters:**

1. We have found our cooperation with S4S both enriching and enjoyable. On top of that we are very grateful for the ambitious and professional approach they have had towards the project as a whole.
2. We are very pleased with the outcome and expect that we in the Danish Prison and Probation Service will be able to use it as an enlightening educational and inspirational tool within the organization. Having less knowledge of other European prison systems we cannot really make any qualified guesses but we very much hope it can serve a similar purpose in the rest of Europe.
3. As regards the overall planning of a task like this we will strongly recommend that the relevant financial means will follow if a similar film project in the future is considered in an EU context – making a film is an extremely time-consuming and therefore very expensive business, we have now learned the hard way. We will also suggest that a more thorough planning takes place at the very first stages regarding concerns like: What kind of product do we want and very importantly *why*: What purpose does this product need to serve? And finally what is a realistic cost of such a project?