ON THE MOVE

Holistic Playful Movement Activities for Children in Vulnerable Situations



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Preface

This handbook is based on a cooperative effort of almost four years' duration: The project On the Move. This unique cross-sector partnership between Red Cross Asylum and Department of Nutrition, Exercise and Sports, University of Copenhagen, has focused on developing and researching the basis of a holistic playful movement measure with children in vulnerable situations.

Week by week, On the Move has created possibilities for movement, community, flow, and for feeling the joy of movement for children at Red Cross asylum centers. This handbook gives a brief presentation of the project, especially focusing on pedagogic inspiration for concrete holistic playful movement activities.

The project has been developed in close connection between practice, education and research. On the Move was developed through a unique cooperative process over time between all participants in the project. We would like to thank the children and families at the asylum centers for taking part in creating a rich and touching experience universe when participating in the On the Move activities. Similarly, many thanks go to the movement teachers and the pedagogic personnel at the asylum schools and clubs. To a great degree, you have contributed to developing On the Move through creative implementation of the movement activities and your strong involvement and pedagogic insight. You have also contributed to making On the Move a sustainable project which can live on in asylum schools and clubs, thus being a source of joy to more children in the future.

Thanks to DGI (the regional associations Southeast Jutland and Middle & West Zealand) who opened the doors to a broad selection of sport associations in the vicinity of the asylum centers in Avnstrup and Jelling. We hope that this handbook may be of inspiration in many contexts, and open up a world of play and movement for children in vulnerable situations.

We are extremely grateful to The Novo Nordisk Foundation which has made the project possible through a significant economic grant.

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COVER PHOTO: Emilie Thejll-Madsen ILLUSTRATIONS: Practitioner researchers and Anni Lamhauge LAYOUT: Berit Winsnes / BW Graphic Design PRINTING: KLS Pure Print

September 2024

Produced with support from The Novo Nordisk Foundation

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On the Move

Throughout the asylum system Danish Red Cross experiences children that can be physical, psychological, emotional, and social challenged due to their unpredictable life circumstances¹. Red Cross personnel experience that the children are often tense, do not sleep well, and are either hyper- or hypo-active, that is, their behavior is characterized by either a high or low energy state. This impacts them negatively, including their ability to form social and group relationships in school².

Movement can be a key component in the physical, mental, cognitive and social developmental processes of children^{3, 4}. Therefore, Red Cross Asylum and University of Copenhagen have developed, tested and theoretically based a holistic playful movement program which can support the physical, psychological and social development processes of children¹.

This handbook is aimed at professionals and volunteers working with groups of children aged 6-15. The handbook may be used with multicultural groups of children, and with groups of children in vulnerable and insecure life situations. The activities are relevant in asylum centers and in vulnerable housing areas, as well as in schools and institutions wishing to support children's development in community groups. The handbook briefly describes the background for this research-based program, the movement model which was developed, and concrete movement activities from On the Move which can be used as inspiration when working with movement with groups of children.



ABOUT THE ON THE MOVE PROJECT

BACKGROUND

Based on a common desire to test out, develop and anchor a holistic playful movement measure for school children in Red Cross asylum centers, the Red Cross Asylum and University of Copenhagen, conceived the idea for the On the Move project. Its purpose was to develop a movement program which could support physical, psychological and social developmental processes in children's everyday lives across school, club and leisure time settings. The project itself became a close collaboration between practice, upgrading courses and research.

PROJECT PERIOD

The On the Move project took place during 2020–2024. Red Cross Asylum has now included On the Move movement activities in their pedagogic practice, so that the children's groups still can participate in them.

TARGET GROUP

The movement program is a regular weekly activity in the children's everyday life at school and in club groups, and has been held in Jelling, Avnstrup, Sandholm and Lynge. The activities are led by cross-disciplined movement teams consisting of teachers, pedagogues and university-educated movement teachers.

PARTICIPANTS

About 400 children aged 6-15 participated in the movement activities during the project period. They live with their families and have various cultural and language backgrounds. Their parents, or the whole family, have experienced fleeing from unlivable conditions, or have migrated, and they live in uncertainty about their future⁵.

BASIS OF THE MOVEMENT METHOD

On the Move is based on a holistic view of the body and an understanding of movement which emphasizes supporting children's existential development processes. One fundamental basis is close-to-practice movementpsychological theory developed by Helle Winther, University of CPH.

PERSONNEL

The movement activities are based on the pedagogues' and teachers' thorough experience with the target group, the movement teachers' close-to-practice education in the fields of movement psychology and pedagogy, and the researcher's deep insight into both the concrete and theoretical aspects of these fields. In addition, all personnel have participated in further education courses together with the movement teachers and researchers to ensure continuity and quality in this collective effort.

RESEARCH AND SUPPORT

Research was carried out by a team of researchers consisting of a PhD student, a research leader and research associates. Through a grant, The Novo Nordisk Foundation ensured that the project was able to be realized.

On the Move supports developmental processes in children at asylum centers

The target group for the On the Move project is children in Red Cross asylum centers in Denmark. Children and youth in the asylum system often experience psychological, social, and existential challenges because of their insecure life situation^{6, 7}. When we meet the children at asylum centers, they often have scars on their souls. It is not only their refugee background that challenges them: insecurity about the future is also a hugely difficult circumstance. From earlier studies. we know that protracted stays at asylum centers and many moves between centers can affect their quality of life negatively in the long run, and have an effect on cognition and readiness for learning⁵. Many children in asylum centers must also learn to play and move around. Some must rediscover these abilities, while others have never before had these possibilities. When the children, as many others in their age group as well, have too low a level of physical activity, there is a need to direct measures toward their physical, psychological, and social health and development^{1, 2}.

The On the Move project was developed through a synergy-creating coupling between practice, research and upgrading courses. On the Move activities were developed for – and together with multicultural groups of children who did not necessarily share a common culture or language. The movement activities proved to function well with both newly arrived children who had just 'landed' in

a new asylum school or club context in Denmark, and with children who had been in the asylum system and in Denmark for many years and who had knowledge of the language and setting. There is a mulitude of possibilities for participation in holistic playful movement practice; play is a world language with which all children on Earth are familiar^{6, 7}. The project has shown that holistic and playful movement activities can create harmony and fellowship in multicultural groups of children, as these playful movement activities cross over language and cultural divides. The project has also shown that participation in this practice can create joyful moments while supporting the children's natural physical, emotional and social developmental processes¹.

I think, doing like this, that I'm flying. And then, I can't stop doing it, can I? ... I'm dancing, I'm jumping. '

A child's description of an On the Move activity¹.

Therefore, the holistic playful practice in On the Move has great potential also to be able to inspire movement in many other children's groups – regardless of which physical, psychological, social, and cultural premises the children have.

Movement psychological basis

All children on Earth are born in movement, and play is a universal language found in all cultures¹¹

Through bodily experiences, play, and movement, children can develop self-esteem, mastery and the confidence to join social communities^{8, 9, and 10}. Movement is therefore a very diverse phenomenon tied to children's existential learning and developmental processes, and to their being. When children are in insecure life situations, this can have consequences for their natural developmental processes on a host of parameters. Therefore, the On the Move project is based on a holistic view of the body and on holistic, closeto-practice movementpsychology theory^{8, 9, and 11}. Here the basis is the interplay between seven dimensions of movement which are always present in play and movement^{8, 9, and 11}. All On the Move activities are based on this understanding of movement. At the same time, this understanding of movement can be a source of pedagogic awareness for those who facilitate movement⁸. Therefore, movementpsychology is also the basis of the manner in which the pedagogic personnel support, contain, challenge, and embrace the children during the activities¹.



The mental dimension concerns language, focusing, and understading rules in a game^{8, 9}.

The psychological dimension is the situational or basic understanding an individual has about their self^{8, 11}.

The physical dimension concerns motor development, physical mastery, movement abilities and the body's possibilities^{8, 9, and 11}.

The emotional dimension is connected to the basic feelings: anxiety, anger, sadness, joy, and love^{8, 9, 11}.

The social dimension is connected to bodily communication, body contact, trust, togetherness and the feeling of community⁸.

The cultural dimension is connected to play, dance, and music from all over the world, and to the circle as a universal meeting ritual⁸.

The spiritual dimension is tied to flow, connectedness, forgetting oneself, and a feeling of freedom^{8, 9, 11}.

In a playful, creative and holistic movement practice, there is the possibility to create moments in which several dimensions are active simultaneously. More dimensions in positive interaction at the same time mean a greater possibility for creating peak moments in which the joy of movement and community bloom in a multicultural movement space; flow and self-forgetting can also occur¹⁰. Thus, the children's physical, psychological, and social developmental processes can also be supported. Those who facilitate the movements, and the children who participate, always have the possibility of creating and recreating positive movement spirals together.

Winther's Movementpsychological model



Movement sources in On the Move

Playful, creative and mutually productive sources

On the Move focuses on playful sources of movement processes that are creative and encourage participants to create together, not to perform and compete¹. On the Move works with themes and with various elements and tools from, for example, multicultural play, dance, martial arts, inclusive ball games, outdoor activities, and street activities¹. Playful movement sources are the essence of On the Move. The following describes five central elements which are important in all On the Move activities.



On the Move movement model — Holistic and playful movement practice

Music – energy, harmony and atmosphere

In On the Move, music is often used to accompany playful movement activities. Music can contribute to creating a multicultural movement atmosphere^{8, 9}. Music is pulse, rhythm, feelings, and melody. Music can thus create a common energv and invitation to playful movement and joy. The rhythm in the music can also contribute to create harmony and synchronicity between the children. In On the Move, there is a strong emphasis on how the music is used. Should the music support a game? Is it the framework for a togetherness-building dance with a fast tempo? Or does calm music contribute to rounding up a meditative movement session? As a movement facilitator, it's important to be aware of the energy of the music and its cultural background, and on that basis choose music that fits with the children's and group's processes.

Forms of organization and the circle as a universal coming together ritual

On the Move focuses to a large degree on community. Therefore it often focuses on playful movement activities which can be done in pairs, in a small group, or in a large group together, where the focus is on synchronicity, contact and resonance. The most important form of group organization in On the Move is the circle¹. The children come from many different cultures, and the circle is used as an assembly ritual in many dances and games all over the world. In a cirlce, everyone is included in the circular community, and everyone can see everyone else^{10, 12}. That's why the circle is used several times in every On the Move session.

Being a movement facilitator and readying the space

A movement facilitator is a guide with several different tasks. The movement facilitator is responsible for readying, leading and holding the room or space, and for creating a welcoming atmosphere with a safe and clear framework for the session and for the movement activities. At the same time, it's important to continually notice the children's physical, emotional, and social processes. Children and youth sense, notice, and read body language. That's why it's important for the movement facilitator to focus on the principle: 'Notice yourself when you lead others'^{8, 13}. Here it also matters that the facilitator senses the children, and also has a playful, inviting, and engaging bodily expression that show their own creativity and joy in movement. In this way, the facilitator can both guide the activities and support the children's processes at the same time^{14, 15}.

Several personnel can facilitate an On the Move group at once. For example, one facilitator can guide the activities and one or more others can support the individual child's participation during the session¹.

Each movement session is built up on the basis of the On the Move movement model described in the following.

The On the Move movement model

3

5

On the Move is built up according to a fixed structure which is based on movementpsychological and movement pedagogic principle^{1, 8, 9, 11, 12}.

The fixed structure can give the opportunity for recognition, which is important for all children, especially groups of children in vulnerable life situations¹⁵. The fixed structure is made up of four parts. In each part, there can be several play and movement activities.

The fixed structure is illustrated here to the right.

THE MOVEMENT MODEL

- A welcome ritual in which all are greeted in various languages, with creative movements to music. The purpose is to give all the children the possibility to feel welcome, and to participate with the language and movements that they carry with them from their own background.
- Movement and play, in which the children are together in the circle and at the same time, move in smaller groups fitting the theme.
- **3.** Community-oriented movement activities and games that fit the theme. These can take place in a circle or around in the room in different ways.
- **4.** Community-oriented relaxation games in pairs or in the circle. Closing the session in the circle, thanking and recognizing every-one in the group for participating.





Description from Johansen & Winther (2024)¹

On the Move activity descriptions

In the following a selection of On the Move activities will be described. The selected activities are built up according to the fixed structure in the On the Move movement model. Their structure can be followed as the basis for On the Move sessions. The activities can be adapted to various themes, age groups, time available and other existing factors.

For multiple sessions with the same group of children, there are examples of variations for all of the games. Facilitators can also include themes, stories and elements from various kinds of sports in the activities. Other play and activities can also be used and adapted according to the movement psychology theory model and the On the Move movement model. In addition, the children and movement facilitators themselves can develop movement activities together.

The following is an overview, and on the following pages are concrete descriptions and illustrations of the activities.

STRUCTURE	CONCRETE MOVEMENT ACTIVITIES
1 Welcome movement ritual	 Welcome movement ritual in various languages Greeting each other – movement round
2 Movement activities in the circle or in smaller groups	Kispus On the Move styleGames On the Move style
3 Movement activities in free space	 Movement across the floor together Catching and being caught on On the Move bases
4 Closing movement ritual	 Relaxation movements together Thanks for being here today – movement ritual

Overview of On the Move movement activities



Welcome movement ritual

Description

- **1.** Turn on multicultural, uplifting dance music.
- 2. Gather all the children in a circle.
- **3.** Give each child a 'base' to stand on. Or let the children stand in pairs on the bases, if they need more security than standing alone. Challenged children can stand on a base with an adult, as an alternative.
- **4.** The activity consists of everyone in the circle greeting each other 'welcome.' All bow down and the movement facilitator counts, '3-2-1' and stands up again, says 'Welcome,' and stretches their arms upward. Their arms make a circular movement in the air, like the sun.
- 5. Repeat the activity, so that all are included.
- 6. All now join hands.
- 7. Ask the children now, with an inviting voice and open body language, 'Do you have another language in which we can say 'welcome'?'
- 8. Perhaps the children speak Arabic, Kurdish, Farsi, Russian, Spanish, or other languages. So everyone repeats the activity in the languages of those present. For example, in Arabic: '3-2-1' and all say (in Arabic) 'Mrhbaan,' while everyone raises their arms from the floor, over their heads, forming a sun. Continue the activity until all the children have said 'Welcome.' It's important that all the children have the opportunity to say 'Welcome' in their own language, as this can create an experience of being seen and open up for their participation.

Variations

Time and language: The facilitator can also say 'Good morning,' 'Good day,' 'Good afternoon' or 'Good evening' instead of 'Welcome.' Some languages do not have a word for welcome. So instead, the children can say hi.

Ownership: After about four to six group sessions, the movement facilitator can let a child start the activity and perhaps also count '3-2-1' in another language than Danish, if the children can count in another languages.

Materials: Mats (used as bases) and music.





Greeting each other - movement round

Description

- 1. Everyone stands in a circle in pairs, on a base together, holding hands.
- 2. Turn on multicultural, uplifting dance music.
- 3. Show the children that when the music starts, they are to walk around in pairs inside the circle between each other. When one pair meets an-other, they are to greet each other by stopping and greeting them, saying: 'Hi, what's your name?'. When everyone has said their name, the children conclude by saying, 'Hi hi' and waving, and then walk on around the circle and find a new pair to greet.
- 4. When the music stops, each pair goes back to their own space.
- **5.** Repeat the activity; the movement facilitator shows a new way to greet each other.

Variations

Movement: The facilitator can show the pairs how they can dance around each other, give 'high fives', a hug or another movement when they meet each other.

Movement and fantasy: Instead of all the pairs greeting each other verbally, one can also use a movement to greet each other. Each pair then chooses a movement for themselves before they introduce themselves to a new pair.

Materials

Kispus On the Move style

Description

- **1.** Turn on multicultural, uplifting dance music.
- **2.** Everyone stands in a circle in pairs, on a base together, holding hands. If a child is challenged, an adult can stand together with him/her or with the pair of children, as a support.
- **3.** Show the children what the activity entails: They are to get into contact with each other and then exchange places. When a pair get eye contact with another pair, the pairs are to change places. It's important that both pairs confirm eye contact with their gaze before they change places. Now, both pairs stand on new bases and are to get into contact with a new pair in the circle.

Variations

Movement: The facilitator can show the children that they are to make a 'bridge' with their arms so that one pair goes 'under the bridge' (made by the other pair's arms) when they change places.

Movement and ownership: The facilitator shows the pairs that they can make a movement that another pair is to mirror before they change places. The movement could be to wave, jump on one leg, or something else. When one pair mirrors another's movement and gets eye contact, the two pairs can then exchange places.

Prisoner game: If the facilitator has the impression that the children can contain some degree of excitement, she/he can place a pair without a base in the middle of the circle. When the pairs change places during the game, the pair in the middle goes out and takes the place of the pair In the circle. Then a new pair goes into the middle.

Materials



Games On the Move style

Description

- 1. Everyone stands in a circle in pairs, on a base together, holding hands. If a child is challenged, an adult can stand with him/her, or with the pair of children, as a support.
- 2. The activity entails the children getting into contact with each other in physical contests. The facilitator can form new pairs of children from time to time. Be aware and show clearly with your own body how the children can look out for and take care of each other during the game. Four different games are described in the following:

Slap/feint contest: The facilitator shows how the participants should stand opposite each other, legs somewhat wide apart with knees bent and palms facing each other. The contest consists of slapping and feinting with the hands so that the opponent loses their balance and must move their feet.

Variation: Same situation, but instead of standing, they are to squat down.

"The poison arrow": The facilitator shows how the participants are to stand opposite each other in pairs and grip each other's right hand. Then they straighten out their right index finger, imitating an arrow. The object is to poke the other with the 'poison arrow' while avoiding being poked themselves.

Touch the knee: The facilitator shows how participants are to stand opposite each other and try to touch each other's knees.

Turn over the pancake: The facilitator shows how one participant lays down flat on her/his stomach, preferably on soft grass or a non-hard surface. The other participant tries to turn him/her over on his/her back. Then they reverse roles.

Materials



Moving across the floor together

Description

- **1.** Arrange bases so that they form a line at one end of the room (see illustration).
- 2. The children line up in pairs on a base on the line.
- **3.** The activity entails that the pairs of children are to move from one end of the room to the other, from their base and back again.
- 4. Start by showing different ways the children can move across the floor for example, hopping, jumping, running, dancing, crawling over to the other end and back. All the children are to mirror your movements when you move across the room and back.
- **5.** Now, stand on the opposite side of the room from the children (see illustration).
- 6. Ask the first pair in the row how they want to move across to the other side of the room and back. That pair begins to, for example, jump. Say: 'We're jumping,' and invite the other pairs of children to jump along.
- 7. At the same time, use the drum to drum the rhythm in which the children move. If they jump, then drum jumping. If they run, then drum fast. If they roll, then rotate one hand around on the drum, etc. If you don't have a drum, you can use music that turns on when the pairs begin to move across the floor.
- **8.** A tip about drumming in rhythm: Look at the children's feet, and strike the drum each time they hit the ground; in this way, try to follow their tempo. If you have knowledge of music, you can also play various rhythms which the children can follow. If you have several drums, then some of the children can join in drumming.

Variations

Fantasy: The facilitator can give the activity a theme or story. For example, it could be that the floor is the deck of a pirate ship, and the pirates are to move back and forth on the deck because of the high waves on the ocean. Or the floor can be a savanna, where the children are the animals, showing how they move in the tall grass.

Materials: Mats (used as bases) and music.



Catching and being caught on On the Move bases

Description

- 1. Turn on multicultural, uplifting music in a rhythm that fits with running.
- **2.** Gather the children in a circle in pairs, holding hands. If a child is challenged, an adult can stand together with the child or pair of children, as a support.
- 3. Spread the bases out in the room as 'safe' places.
- **4.** Choose one or two pairs to be 'catchers' who run after the other pairs. The pairs can be 'safe' on the bases, but when another pair comes to that base, the pair sitting there must get up and run out into the room again.

Remember to rotate "catchers" as the game continues, as well as change who the children are paired with.

Variations

Movement: The bases can be situated in different places and in different ways in the room. The children can also hold onto each other by their arms or over their shoulders as they run around together. Or they can run together in a hula hoop ring, or with something else holding them together.

Dragon catcher game: The children run in pairs, holding each other by the shoulders. When the 'dragon' catches another dragon, they connect with each other to form a larger dragon.

Fantasy: The catching game can be played with various themes: ice landscapes where the bases are icebergs; a space theme, where astronauts fly around between space stations (the bases); or the children are animals who hide in caves.

Themes: The catching game can also be adapted to themes which can include ball games, dance, martial arts, or street sport elements.

Materials



Group relaxation movements

Description

- **1.** Turn on calm, relaxing music.
- 2. Gather all the children so that they sit in pairs on bases in a circle.
- **3.** Guide breathing in and out, and stretching. The focus is on doing relaxing movements together. Here are three suggestions:

Breathing together: The children sit in a circle. They each place one hand on their chest and the other hand on their stomach. All of them try to inhale (breathe in) so that their chest fills up with air first, then their stomach. Everyone exhales (breathes out) with their stomach first, emptying it for air, then with their chest.

Directed breathing: The children sit in a circle in pairs, facing each other. First one child tries to 'lead' the other child's breathing by moving her/ his arm quietly and calmly up and down, like a music conductor. The child tries to follow the other's breathing. Afterward, they exchange roles.

Group stretch: The children sit together in pairs and stretch out different muscles in their arms and legs. To conclude, they all form a circle and all of them lift their arms up together.

Variations

Movement: Make various statues, animals, rhymes, and short sentences with movements, which the children follow.

Fantasy and ownership: Let the children themselves, in pairs, invent stretches, statues or animals, which they do together.

Materials



Thanks for being here today – movement ritual

- 1. Turn on the same music as was used for the Welcome movement ritual.
- 2. Gather the whole group in a large round circle.
- **3.** All the participants hold hands in the circle.
- 4. The purpose of the activity is for everyone in the circle to say, 'Thanks for being here today" to each other. The activity is closely related to the Welcome ritual, which opened the session, in that it closes the session. The activity contributes to giving a framework to the other On the Move activities, so that it's clear for the children when the movement activities end.
- **5.** Show with your body that all are to bend down with their hands pointing toward the Earth. Everyone joins in counting down, '3–2–1,' and when the facilitator says, 'Thanks for being here today," everyone stands up, brings their arms up in the air, and makes a big circular movement in the shape of the sun.
- **6.** Repeat the 'Thanks for being here today' ritual in other languages known to the participants.

Acknowledgement: The facilitator can say a couple of short sentences about what the children have done together today, for example: 'Today we've jumped, danced and laughed together.'

Materials



The joy of movement and contact WRA

Partners in the project

Red Cross Asylum has been operating asylum centers since 1984. These are run according to national governmental contracts. The Red Cross provides the humanitarian and practical tasks, while the immigration authorities make the decisions about the concrete asylum applications.

The purpose of the work by Red Cross Asylum is to give asylum seekers in Denmark a safe, meaningful and worthy everyday life while they wait for their asylum application to be decided. The focus is on asylum applicants holding onto and developing a perspective on the future, regardless of whether their asylum application results in a residence permit, or is rejected.

Red Cross asylum centers contain everything necessary for everyday life to function: childcare, schools, activities and instruction for adults, as well as health clinics and social-professional support, when needed. Engaged Red Cross volunteers offer these asylum seekers a broad range of leisure time activities, from games and sports to, for example, bicycle repair shops and cafes.

Today Red Cross operates five asylum centers across the country and is the supplier for two other departure centers.

Department of Nutrition, Exercise and Sports at the

University of Copenhagen carries out research on sports, education, and innovation, as well as imparting research results and knowledge at the highest international level. The close-to-practice research in On the Move is connected to humanistic social sciences research in the section for Sports, Individual and Society. Within this framework, the project is connected to the research group for *Embodiment, Learning and Social Change*.

The primary focus of this research group is on creating and documenting sustainable change processes in relation to the movement, learning, and social change in diverse target groups and contexts.

Here the focus is on illustrating the significance of movement, sport and the body for joy in life, learning, culture and refinement, community, life mastery, and embodied professional competence.

The Novo Nordisk Fundation is a Danish endowment fund. It is a non-profit organization supporting measures for the public good with the help of economic resources resulting from the fund's ownership of and investment in businesses and other financial activities. Via philanthropic activities and ownership of businesses, the fund works to promote human health and the sustainability of society.

Links to descriptions of games and play activities

DGI Trainer guide – exercises for children https://www.dgi.dk/boern/oevelser

DGI – Jump 4 fun https://www.dgi.dk/jump4fun/boern-og-foraeldre/ leg-og-traening-videoer Danish school sports – Play Patrol's Games https://skoleidraet.dk/aktive-frikvarterer/inspiration-og-materialer/legepatruljens-lege/

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