

## **Interview with Martine Teigen on how the Norwegian youth group operates and the advantage of having a youth group.**

In Norway the youth group of the Norwegian gastrointestinal association caters to people between 18 to 34 years old. For people younger than 18, there is a family group, and for people 35 and above we have a “grown up” group. These come in addition to the regional groups across the country.

**The Norwegian youth group has organised several events of various sizes. The main one is the national gathering held every year in September.** These gatherings change location every year and move around Norway and other places in Europe. In Norway they usually take place in mountain resorts or in huts. European places where we have gathered include Turkey, Greece and Cyprus. **These gatherings are often well attended and are the ideal place to recruit volunteers. For example, I was recruited in this way during a gathering in Turkey.** The youth group also organises smaller events, such as local group meetings, online courses and meetings (popular under Covid) and training courses for both volunteering and living with the disease.

Today **Martine Teigen** is the leader of the youth group and part of the board of the Norwegian gastrointestinal association. She has been doing voluntary work , on and off, in different patient organisations since she was a teenager. In 2013 she was invited to and became a member of the Norwegian association. Here she first was on the board of a local group in the city of Drammen, before she entered the national election committee. After this she was the leader of the youth group from 2017 to 2019. After a break she returned as the leader of the youth group during the autumn of 2022 and continues to have the position to this day. She is also the leader of the regional group in “Vest Viken”, a county in Norway. **In this interview she will share her experiences and knowledge of the youth group and the advantages of having a youth group.**

### **What would you say are the advantages of having a youth group?**

The advantages of a youth group include the camaraderie one experiences with one’s peers in the same life situation and age group. It provides tips and advice for a better everyday life, helps in mastering one's health, and allows meeting wonderful people, often leading to lasting friendships!

### **What types of activities do you organise?**

Typically, we arrange cabin trips and trips abroad every other year.

Link to more information on the website is here:

<https://magetarm.no/om-mage-tarm-forbundet/organisasjonsinfo/ung> The website provides more details, and it was updated by us. We have also undertaken various projects in the past. You can read about one of the projects where we applied for funding, and it turned out to be very successful!

Link to the successful project here:

<https://magetarm.no/undersider/nyhetsartikkel/med-fordoeylessykdommer-og-sommerfugler-i-magen?M=NewsV2&PID=19>

Several participants have held voluntary positions afterward, and many have continued to be involved in the association.

### **How do you work to encourage as many people as possible to participate in the activities?**

It's a challenging question since participation varies widely. We find that people often get the initial information through emails, and for those who have participated in earlier events, Snapchat chats play a crucial role in getting them to sign up again.

Additionally, it's essential to have compelling content, exciting locations, and activities. Attractive features are always a winner!

### **How do you decide on which activities to have?**

The activities have been in place from before my time, such as cabin trips and trips abroad to southern Europe, and they work quite well. Regarding the content of the activities, they are usually determined based on the feedback of previous participants. During most gatherings, we have tasks where we incorporate questions like 'What do you want?', 'Tips for speakers', 'What kind of activities'. We use this as a starting point to create a program, considering what is achievable and what is a recurring theme. There's always a lot happening behind the scenes before we finalize a program, including requests, financial negotiations, content planning, meals, and more. So, organizing activities requires a lot of time, involving many emails, requests, some googling, and time! But it's something I find super fun. I might be unusually passionate about that.

### **What is your favourite event organized by the Youth Group and why?**

In my time as a young member of the Gastrointestinal Association, I would have to say that my favourite gathering was probably my first trip abroad. I had recently joined the association, and this was my first trip. I was nervous, excited, and had lots of enthusiasm! The trip gave me so much and was a good result of previous youth leaders (Lena Karoline and Linn) and Hanne (the organizational secretary).

As for my favourite event while being a youth representative, I must say that the **Butterfly Project** was close to my heart.

The Butterfly project was a project in 2018 where youths between 18 and 30 could gather and learn about how to be active and engaged in the association with a disease. The project name is a derivation of the Norwegian saying "to have butterflies in one's stomach", which means to be nervous. It lasted over 2 weekends.

The project reflected a lot about me and things I consider important—engagement, motivation, and personal achievement/learning. Many new and some good members from before participated. The project had a good result and was very exciting!

But I also have to say that organizing member meetings outside of the 'hotel weekend' format, like cabin trips and trips abroad, has much more excitement happening behind the scenes, if it is well planned. The "pitfalls" feel more significant, and it requires much more than arriving at a "served table and preplanned setup"! But it's incredibly fun to get into the smallest detail levels!

**What experiences do you have in this work that other countries can benefit from? (organizing successful activities)**

The most important thing is to dare—to dare to organize something, whether it's one, two, or ten people that show up; it doesn't matter! For the one who comes, it might be the right person to get things flowing. Dare to invest in something a bit unconventional! Be creative and let people be challenged.

And to those who organize—having fun is allowed!

**How do you work to recruit/get new people into the group?**

The keywords are: Social gatherings, projects (like the Butterfly Project), daring to invest in good content!

**Do you feel that you reach out to young people?**

Both yes and no! Very grateful for those we receive responses from and reached, but of course, we would like to reach everyone. However, it's very nice to see several new faces at gatherings, and there has been a change in age demographics after the pandemic.

**Do you have a positive experience or story from your work in the Youth Group that you would like to share?**

The most positive aspect must be seeing all the great friendships that form among people who participate in the gatherings. Personally, I have made very good friends both at events I attended before becoming a volunteer and during my time as a volunteer. But what warms my heart the most is seeing those who light up during the gatherings and then, through social media, you see they have made very good friends for life! There's nothing as heartwarming as seeing Snapchat or Instagram posts with pictures of people who wouldn't have met in their daily lives and activities otherwise!

I love all the friendships that develop!

**Do you have any other experiences or advice you would give to other youth groups in other countries?**

Dare to organize, dare to invest time—it will be fun, and you will be an experience richer regardless! Don't dwell on things but ask for help if you feel it's needed! You can contact us on:

[ung@magetarm.no](mailto:ung@magetarm.no)



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