ALLAN THRAEN | 🕐 5 years ago | 📄 PDF | 💬

Life as a Coder

HACK-YOUR-FUTURE COPENHAGEN - AWESOME CONCEPT!

In the center of Copenhagen a team of volunteer IT professionals are teaching groups of passionate, dedicated and talented refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants coding skills, to help them land jobs in an IT industry starving for skilled workers. It's working - and it's an awesome concept!

I recently joined up as a mentor (and maybe eventually a teacher) with the organization called Hack-Your-Future - which currently exists in Amsterdam, Copenhagen and Malmö. I spent a few hours there for the first time this sunday and was thoroughly impressed by what I saw; 4 classes filled with enthusiastic students from a wide variety of nationalities and backgrounds coding together, asking questions and improving their skills.

Obviously this is not for everybody. To become a good coder you do need a basic technical understanding, a good mindset for problem solving, ability to quickly learn new knowledge, good team-working skills and so on. New students applying to get in are thoroughly interviewed and tested to ensure that the spots on each new class goes to motivated students with good potential to complete the courses. They are then taught by teachers and mentors who are volunteers using their free time because they too are passionate about coding and teaching and it just makes so much sense. Putting motivated and passionate people together like this creates a quite unique and amazing educational atmosphere.

Photo credits: Alex Penman

In Copenhagen new classes start around 5 times a year and the students are then put through 7 modules of 3-5 weeks followed by a 6 weeks final project where they can use what they have learned. They learn HTML/CSS & Javascript (3 modules) first, followed by Node.js, Databases and React. Personally, I would have liked to see some tracks for backend / microsoft - but it's certainly still a good start!
And languages and frameworks aside - the key thing that makes a good developer is not which languages he is fluent in - but rather having the right mindset and collaborative skills. Learning how to troubleshoot a tricky bug, how to plan and architect a new project, how to map your mental models into a great user experience, how to manage your source code in git and collaborate with remote team members in slack. Those are are important skills and life lessons.

If you at the same time are skilled in quickly acquiring new knowledge on your own, adding a language isn't that big of a deal - which this program certainly proofs.

The classes are taught once a week (on sundays) for ~4 hours, but reading and homework makes a typical student week of around 25 hours - and often students meetup during the week in smaller study groups to work together. Everything is coordinated in Slack - where both mentors, teachers, current and former students ask questions, share knowledge as well as job postings. All homework is assigned and handed in through github ensuring that working with these tools becomes a natural thing.

And it does seem to work! From the classes that have graduated so far, quite a few have gotten jobs or internships in the IT industry.

Immigrants and refugees is a hot political issue, and I could easily spend multiple blog posts with political opinions - but I'm trying to keep this site focused on technology, coding and business, so I won't go into too much preaching here, but simply point out that I think one of the best ways to integrate new-comers into a society is by making sure they get meaningful, decent paying work - where they can both support themselves, their family and contribute to society in the best possible way. And many (!) refugees and immigrants that make it to Denmark are very talented and often highly educated people - sadly it's not always that those skills are being put to good use. I think Hack-Your-Future is a great initiative to at least help some people get a good job - and to help some companies find new passionate and motivated

talent!

Photo credits: Alex Penman

From a personal standpoint I hope to get an opportunity to contribute more to this project.

If you feel this is as exciting as I do and want to help out with it - or perhaps help start a similar project in your city, reach out to them through their web site and let them know! You can also help in other ways:

- Being a mentor to one or more students
- Don't throw out a last-generation laptop just cause you got a new one. Instead donate it (if it's powerful enough to work as a developer laptop)
- Invite them on company visits. It's super beneficial for the students to see and talk to engineers at their actual work
- Help out with facilities and logistics
- Spread the word
- Hire an finished student - or have them as an intern (win-win)

In Denmark Hack Your Future is currently funded by Den A.P. Møllerske Støttefond, Roskilde Festival foreningen and Trygfonden.

Also - feel free to drop me a comment and share what you think are the most important skills to have as a developer.

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