

"PROTECT YOUR DREAMS - SAFEGUARD THE HOPE" CHILDREN'S CONTRIBUTION TO DEVELOPING HIGH QUALITY ALTERNATIVE CARE

Ombudsman for Children in
Finland Maria Kaisa Aula

Expert of experience
Helena Inkinen

*"Suojele unelmia,
vaali toivoa"*

Nuorten suositukset lastensuojelun ja
sijaishuollon laadun kehittämiseksi



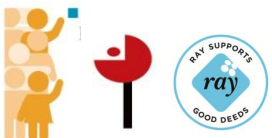
PROJECT BACKGROUND AND HISTORY



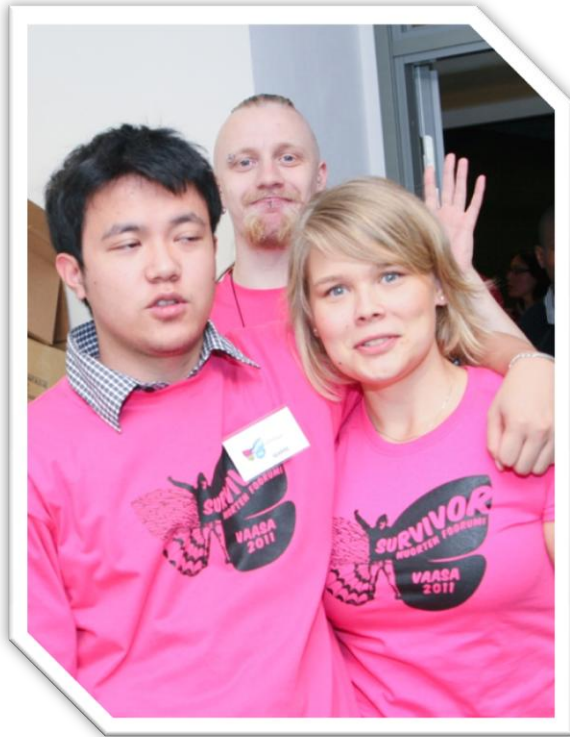
The Ombudsman for Children in Finland:

- Surveys children's opinions and conveys them to decision-makers
- Promotes the realisation of children's rights
- We do not inspect alternative care institutions or process complaints

In 2008, the Ombudsman for Children began regular cooperation with the children's welfare association Pesäpuu ry's expert of experience group 'Selviytyjät (Survivors).



PROJECT BACKGROUND AND HISTORY



Pesäpuu ry's expert of experience group 'Selviytyjät' (Survivors).

- The group consists of young people with personal experience of being placed outside the home.
- Pesäpuu ry is a centre of excellence for the development of child welfare.
- Young people as experts of experience: working with personal life experiences, exerting influence on the local, national and international level.
- The aim: to spread the operating model nationwide in Finland, with young people determining and assessing the quality of child welfare



PROJECT BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

The Ombudsman for Children wanted to examine:

- What is good child welfare and alternative care like in the opinion of children and young people?
- What kind of experiences (good and bad) do young people and children have of child welfare?

Partners: Pesäpuu ry, Selviytyjät group of young people, National Institute for Health and Welfare, the Central Union for Child Welfare



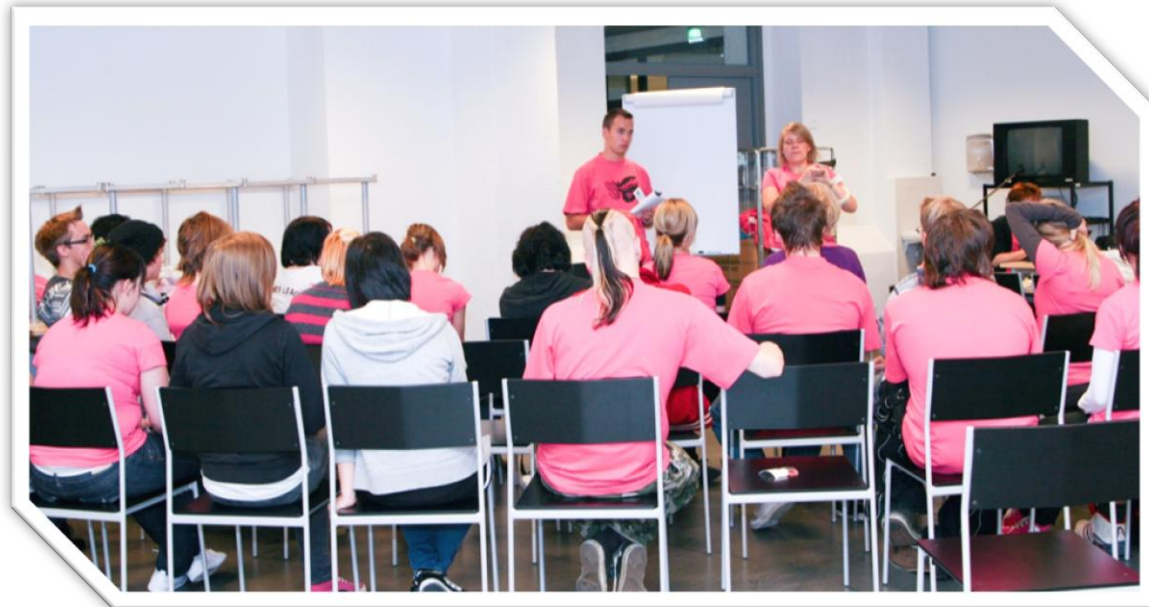
YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN PROJECT PLANNING.



PROJECT BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Tour of six localities in cooperation " WE BELIEVE IN YOU,
SO SHOULD YOU 2011"

- Six adults and seven young persons of the Selviytyjät group participated.
- Met with 120 children and young people placed outside the home
- Documented activity workshops



RESULTS



- Guidebook for young people on child welfare (around 15,000 copies distributed)
- Guidebook for adults working in child welfare (around 3,000 copies distributed)
- The report “Protect dreams - Nurture hope. Young people's recommendations for enhancing the quality of child welfare and alternative care” was published in the autumn 2012. (around 10,000 copies distributed?)

THE REPORT DISTRIBUTED TO DECISION-MAKERS, THE AUTHORITIES, INSTITUTIONS, SOCIAL WORKERS, PLANNING OFFICERS IN THE SECTOR, MUNICIPALITIES.



RESULTS



What are the makings of high quality child welfare in the opinion of young people?

More of the following is needed:

- Information and motivations
- Keeping up hope
- Interaction with adults to build trust
- Less prejudice
- Help to parents
- Continuity in relationships
- Treating the child as a whole person

RESULTS

Progress achieved



- Public debate with young experts of experience speaking alongside professionals and parents
- Decision-makers have met young people placed outside the home (for instance Sauli Niinistö, President of the Republic)
- Expert of experience activity pilots in Helsinki and Oulu
- Young people's representative included in a Ministry of Social Affairs and Health workgroup assessing the status of child welfare and development needs
- The recent national quality recommendations for child welfare take account of participation of children and young people

RESULTS

- Supervisors of institutions have started to interview young people during inspections
- Training for supervisory authorities and for OPCAT reporting
- Supervisory authorities have started investigating problems that have emerged in institutions



GROWING INTEREST TOWARDS GROUPS OF EXPERTS OR EXPERIENCE IN CHILD WELFARE

High quality child care is no longer possible without the voice and perspective of children and young people.



RESULTS

- Children's participation in child care has opened up to professionals in a new way; before, “hearing of children” was often regarded as something formal and bureaucratic
- Better awareness of children and young people's need to have information they understand



- Professionals have been forced to assess their individual expertise and the makings of professional skills: does training include sufficient skills of face-to-face contacts and interaction; should our work be about paperwork or people?

YOUNG PEOPLE ACTIVE AS EXPERTS OF
EXPERIENCE EMPOWERED AS CITIZENS AND
INFLUENTIAL PARTIES



RESULTS



- A nationwide training tour for social workers and decision-makers will be arranged
- Mapping of expertise of experience with small children (aged 5 to 8) placed outside the home is underway

RESULTS

Factors contributing to the project's success

- Partners and networking
- Longstanding co-operation of key partners with a focus group of young people in care
- Continuity - not “one project”
- Goal: Reforming the culture of child protection services and child welfare: respecting and utilising young people’s experience in improving the quality



Positive approach:
NURTURING HOPE!

CHALLENGES

What are the remaining/persisting challenges in this area?

- Haste among adults and defects in interactive skills
- Adults' preconceptions of children placed outside the home and their ability to participate and assess the services and support they receive
- Children do not get enough information that they understand in support of participation
- Suspicions of focus on children's rights resulting in the transfer power into the wrong hands



RECOMMENDATIONS OF ACTION

Recommendations of action for the Council of Europe (and other international organisations) to overcome lasting obstacles in order to accelerate positive developments



→ **THE ATTITUDES OF ADULTS ARE CRUCIAL:**
are we ready for mutual learning and interaction,
do we respect the human dignity of children?



RECOMMENDATIONS OF ACTION



Key points in the development of child welfare services:

- Regulation of customer numbers and group sizes: do adults have the time?
- Better skills for professionals to interact with children of different ages
- Delivering understandable information about services, rights and complaints mechanisms, for the children and young people
- Regular assessment of quality of services, including children and young peoples participation and feedback in the process
- Focus on child and family oriented, holistic cross the sectors management, planning and provision of services for children and families

"PROTECT YOUR DREAMS
- SAFEGUARD THE HOPE"

THANK YOU!

