



FOR A BRIGHTER TOMORROW

PROVIDING PARTICIPATION
AND RESOURCES FOR
FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

*“Child, you are a reflection of those
around you.*

*A vessel most valuable, may you
always runneth over.*

Never cease believing in yourself.”



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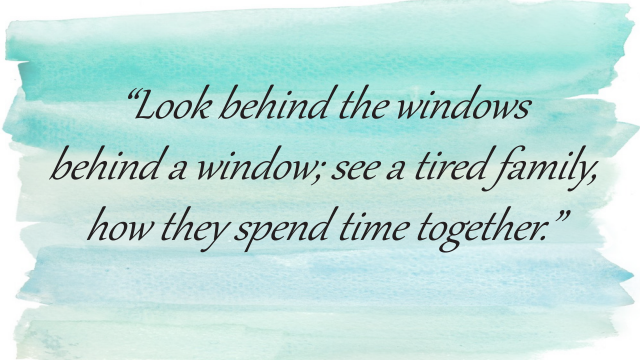
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*“Look behind the windows
behind a window; see a tired family,
how they spend time together.”*

*The poems in this publication have been translated
from the poems created as part of the international
art workshops hosted as part of the project.*

To the reader

The objective of our collaborative project has been to guide families to the right services at the right time, and to increase the participation of those who are most in need. Our efforts have provided professionals in the child and family services sector with the tools for identifying and breaking the cycle of deprivation and exclusion at the earliest possible stage. This publication describes the methods, models and approaches that were tried and tested during the project. We used our findings to answer the key questions that guided our international collaboration:

How can we help vulnerable families find the right services at the right time?

How can we develop and improve the services provided to families?

How can we improve the perceptions that families have of these services?

How can we increase the participation and empowerment of those who are most in need?

The Family Intervention Method and the related collaboration models utilised in early childhood education and child and family services help families proceed on their service paths, and they also serve to increase the familiarity and approachability of all the services that are available to these families. For professionals, they provide a clear path for the work they do with their client families, and the professionals' cross-sectoral and joint procedural expertise provide synergistic benefits and help increase the common quality of the services they provide. We utilised the service design method to develop customer-oriented open early childhood education contents and provide guidance towards open early childhood education, to make it as smooth as possible for families to discover the services they need. The experiences and needs of the people who use various services serve as a good starting point for developing these services. Arts activities were used to provide families with versatile artistic and cultural experiences. The opportunity to create and experience art is an empowering pursuit that can help foster togetherness in the everyday lives of many families. Art events and workshops were also used to provide information on the services and recreational opportunities available to families with children. The art workshop model was developed with the objective of possibly including it as part of the services provided to families with children. This

model combines artistic activities, which are guided by professional artists, with the expertise provided by child and family services professionals in arranging and running group activities.

The EDOR project developed a multidisciplinary and collaborative approach to child and family services by establishing a multidisciplinary team and family centre in the Bulgarian municipality of Sungurlare. The centre provides peer group services to young mothers, mediator services, as well as other low-threshold activities.

Paolo Freire's Problem-posing education method, introduced in the seminal *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, provides a model for developing a person's ability to critically assess their status in the world.¹ With the help of critical thinking, people can become active participants in society. In fact, increasing one's participation does not always demand a great deal of effort. Participation should never be provided in an external and illusory form - rather, it should be granted in the form of true decision-making power to those who are in a situation where the aspects that will affect their lives are under review. Art represents one method of increasing the well-being and methods for self-expression that people have at their disposal. As our international project team has observed, art can serve as a common language.

Even though Finland and Bulgaria are located at the opposite ends of Europe, they are affected by the same issues: child and family poverty, multigenerational deprivation, and the risk of exclusion that families face. When a family's problems are allowed to accumulate, the everyday lives of its members will become increasingly difficult to bear. Children in low-income families are provided with scarce opportunities to participate in recreational activities, and their parents' attention may be focused on surmounting the daily challenges they face. Projects can have an impact on pre-existing structures, for example by providing new services or creating new avenues for collaboration. Most often it is a question of observing and doing something mundane in a completely novel way.

During our collaboration, it has been our privilege to witness the changes and sparks of joy and light that have helped the families who participated in our activities.

1 Freire, P (2005) Sorrettujen pedagogiikka. Jyväskylä: Vastapaino.

Providing support to children and parents and new approaches to family services through collaboration

Marjukka Heikkilä

The central objectives of the VALO project were to increase the participation and well-being of families with children, help these families discover the services they need at the right time, and strengthen the networks and collaboration between professionals who work with children. These objectives were underlined by an understanding that, at that time, families were not being directed to the services they needed in time and that they did not possess enough information about the services that were available to them.

Collaboration between open early childhood education services and family counsellors from child welfare clinics

In 2019, the Valo project began to systematically enhance the collaboration between the open early childhood education services in Kotka and the family counsellors of the child welfare clinics operating under the Kymenlaakso Social and Health Care District, or Kymsote. The benefit of this approach was that it served to combine the expertise of two groups of professionals to enhance the early-stage support provided to families with children while decreasing the need to direct families to multiple services. The contents of the collaboration were planned jointly by the open early childhood education services and the child welfare clinic family counsellors and their superiors. The development of the collaboration took into account the interfaces available in both the service network provided by the family centre and the multidisciplinary evaluation process.

The implementation and focus areas of any open early childhood education services are decided by the providers themselves. Their activities must be guided and goal-oriented. Providers can place particular emphasis on, for example, spending time outdoors, play-oriented activities, artistic pursuits, or physical education. Open early childhood education services can provide parents and guardians with guided activities that they can perform with their children as well as peer support. Open early childhood education providers must plan their services in advance so that the objectives laid out in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care can be taken into account in their implementation. The activities provided by open early childhood education services are designed for children whose parents are at home. They are venues that provide mutual and interesting activities for families with small children and peer groups for parents and children alike. Open early childhood education providers regularly arrange so-called open day events that are available to all parents and children. These open days are free of charge, and parents are not required to sign up for them in advance. These events follow the practical policies of early childhood education and include guided pedagogical activities. Open early childhood education providers may also arrange club activities for children between the ages of 3 and 4. These club activities are typically subject to a charge.

The family work conducted by child welfare clinics falls within the scope of early-stage family work. Child welfare clinics are responsible for the implementation of family work and for hiring fam-

With the family

Open early childhood education



Child health clinics and family work



During our cooperation:

We assist and support families in their everyday lives.

We can arrange home visits or meet with the family in a day care facility.

We combine our skills: everyone's expertise is harnessed to seek what is best for the family.

We share information about local services for families and make referrals when necessary.

Together we organise parents' evenings, theme days and other events.

We consult each other and other professionals as needed.

We are bound by confidentiality. The family's affairs will not be talked about without the family's consent.

Family workers of child health clinics can be present in open day care or parent and baby groups.

Figure 1. A poster depicting the collaboration model between the open early childhood education services in Kotka and the family counsellors from Kymsoke's child welfare clinics Illustrations by Tiina Ikkonen.

ily workers to their operating units. The purpose of early-stage family work is to meet the support-oriented needs of children and parents on a temporary or long-term basis. Early-stage family work can also be initiated on an accelerated basis. An initial and service need assessment can also be conducted in connection with the family work process. Early-stage family work is used to provide low-threshold support to small families. Its services include providing support to parents, guiding the care and education of children, easing the management of one's everyday domestic life and routines, enhancing the ability of families to function in new situations, supporting the interpersonal skills of families, as well as expanding their social networks or preventing their social exclusion. During its first three visits, a family is not yet classified as a client family. Family counsellors are experienced in matters related to the age-appropriate growth and development of children as well as providing support to adults in their roles as parents. They also have practical experience in interacting with both children and parents. Family counsellors who work at child welfare clinics operate in the middle ground between social welfare and health care services, and they are intimately aware of the service networks available to families with children. The development work conducted by open early childhood education services and child welfare clinics resulted in regional baby groups for families with infants. The baby groups also included a family counsellor from a child welfare clinic. The participants from early childhood education services and the child welfare clinics felt that the collaboration functioned well and wished to enhance and model it into practical policy.

The pedagogical expertise in early childhood education services is strong. Special expertise plays a key role in the development, education and learning of children, and particular emphasis is placed on strengthening the role that sensitive interaction with children plays in the everyday activities of the early childhood education system. Fostering a mutual sense of educational responsibility with parents also plays a vital role in these efforts.

The parties involved in the project felt that there was clear demand for this type of collaborative effort. At the early childhood education services' open days and the baby meetings, parents relayed their concerns and the challenges they had faced

in their lives or in other situations, as well as their questions about the different types of support provided to families. Their challenges were related to everyday family life, the development of their children, their relationships, or other more major crises that they had faced in their families.

Collaboration necessitates mutual planning and joint operating methods

Whenever professionals carry out any joint activities or work with families, mutual planning and joint operating methods are necessary to ensure the functionality of these collaborative efforts. The collaboration included in the project was implemented as planned, and its activities were always conducted with a clear goal in mind. This allowed both parties to clarify their respective roles and quickly agree on how each task and duty should be divided. Their activities were based on a principle of openness and, in addition, they observed their obligation to confidentiality and always asked for the family's permission before initiating any collaborative efforts. The parties also agreed on the practical low-threshold measures that would allow early childhood education services to remain in contact with child welfare clinic family counsellors and, conversely, on the policies of when a family counsellor could direct families to the services provided by the early childhood education system. This helped families receive the help and support they needed at the earliest possible stage. In practical terms, the parties' collaborative efforts focused on mutual planning, to guarantee the best possible outcome for each family. Early childhood education services and the family work provided by child welfare clinics fall within the scope of different organisations. Obtaining the approval of the supervisors of those involved in shaping the practical approaches adopted by the collaboration was an important step in the overall process, and the creation of a practical model based on the collaboration was also justified on the basis of securing the continuity of these activities. The collaboration model will help clarify the activities to the other partners in the service network whenever family services are arranged within the network for municipalities and regional actors.

The participants in the collaboration were also given the opportunity to provide families with more extensive information, support and guidance at an

accelerated pace. While the parties had collaborated before, adopting a set of mutually agreed practices and engaging in systematic collaboration helped strengthen their mutual approach. Once the family counsellor had been introduced to the families in an open day event, the parents were more likely to ask for help when they needed it.

Collaborative efforts enhance expertise and family-oriented work

The family counsellors felt that they were able to deepen their expertise as they participated in the systematic collaboration. Family counsellors were provided with information on pedagogical solutions, growth environments, interaction, and the contents of all pedagogical activities. The interaction between children and parents was also displayed in a new light in the open day events arranged by early childhood education providers. The skills of early childhood educators were enhanced with social work-oriented expertise during the collaboration, and they also learned more about the services available to families with children. Families must be provided with the support they need for the challenges they face in a timely manner, be-

fore their issues begin to accumulate and grow, and the collaboration provided the parties with more opportunities to achieve this outcome. The development of the collaboration model has been a process of mutual effort. As the model has matured, so has the commitment that the parties involved have to this joint work and development process. Through it, the parties have been able to highlight the practices and expertise-oriented strengths that can be used to support families. The parties also hope that their efforts will help increase the impact that their work can have.

The VALO project has also expanded to the neighbouring city of Hamina, where the same principles are utilised to enhance the collaboration between open early childhood education services and family guidance services provided by child welfare clinics. In addition, the child and family work authorities in the South Karelia Social and Health Care District (Eksote) and the early childhood education services provided in Luumäki are also ready to enhance and model their own practical collaboration policy.



*“A photo,
like
a fading
leaf,
flickers in
the cold air.
Child,
have pride
in how you
truly are!”*

Let's talk about children - The Family Intervention Method

Mari Lehtonen

Let's talk about children - The Family Intervention Method has become increasingly popular in South Karelia. In the autumn of 2019, courses on the method have been arranged for various professionals in early childhood education services, social welfare and health care, and the third sector. Some of those who were trained in the method have chosen to deepen their expertise in instructor training seminars, providing them with the expertise to serve as method instructors. Nationally, the Programme to Address Reform in Child and Family Services (LAPE) between 2016 and 2019 helped spread the method throughout Finland. The method and instructor courses arranged in Southeast Finland were held after the LAPE programme, and they were part of a process implemented by three separate actors. The training processes were arranged simultaneously by the South Karelia Social and Health Care District Eksote and the *Osaava vanhemmuus* (Skillful parenting) and VALO - Strengthening Holistic Wellbeing for Families projects, which provided synergistic benefits by cementing the method with widespread and cross-sectoral activities as well as joint monitoring practices.

Providing families with the opportunity to discuss their issues and receive guidance

The Family Intervention Method is an evidence-based, two-tier method whose concrete goal is to help children cope with their everyday lives at home, in day care, and during their recreational pursuits. The Family Intervention Method is part of the Effectual Child and Family method, which is based on researched evidence on how parental issues and crises endanger the development of children and the effectiveness of preven-

tive measures.¹ The objective is to meet families during pivotal moments, discover their own sources of strength, and solve their challenges at the earliest possible phase. The work of professionals in the discussions and consultations they provide is supported by a log book that they can use to survey each family's current situation, strengths and weaknesses. At the end of the discussion, an action plan is drawn up together with the family. In addition to Family Intervention Method discussions, families can also solve their challenges in Family Intervention Method consultations that can involve other people who are close to the family or professionals who have worked with them. The collaborative model that was developed in the VALO project is an illustrative example of how a consultation arranged by early childhood education professionals can involve family workers from social services, with the family's consent. This opens up a clear pathway towards working with mutual client families. A vital starting point for both the discussions and consultations is that the family must be allowed to decide what they wish to talk about.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health took note of the method in the final report of the Functional Child Welfare assessment group², where the group proposed that the Family Intervention Method approach be implemented in adult services, to help prevent intergenerational exclusion. Currently, all Family Intervention Method-related efforts are managed by MIELI Mental Health Finland. Any professionals who wish to use or train others in the method must attain the necessary qualifications first.

The occurrence of a family crisis is not a prerequisite for a Family Intervention Method discussion.

1 MIELI Mental Health Finland www.mieli.fi

2 *Toimiva lastensuojelu. Selvitysryhmän loppuraportti*. Reports and memoranda of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2013: 19, 48.

In fact, the discussions can be used as a universal method for meeting with families. In the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting exceptional situation has tested the ability of families to cope on several levels. In its publication on the wellbeing of children in the aftercare of the corona crisis, the Finnish Government proposed that early childhood education providers and the Finnish school system should host discussions with children and their parents or guardians on how they are coping and how their ability to cope could be enhanced. The Family Intervention Method was mentioned by name in this report.³

The benefits of the Family Intervention Method approach include the opportunity to intervene at a very early stage, which can help families discover the solutions to their issues using the resources and close relations available to them at that time, without having to rely on the services provided by social welfare services on a more permanent client-provider basis. If necessary, professionals from other services that could be of benefit to the family can be present at the consultation, should the family wish to have them there. The principle of letting each family decide the matters that they wish to discuss and with whom helps foster a safe and confidential atmosphere and ensures that the families remain in control and as active participants in the matters that pertain to them. In plain terms, it all boils down to discussing your issues and finding common ground!

Family Intervention Method in South Karelia

South Karelia is a good example of how the Family Intervention Method can be rooted into practice, as many professionals in the social welfare and health care sector, early childhood education services, and family-oriented NGOs have been trained in the method there. The LAPE cooperation group of South Karelia serves as the region's executive team for the method. This multidisciplinary cooperation group is responsible for defining the policies used to implement the method and the joint indicators used to monitor its results. In addition, the region's child and youth welfare planning au-

thorities have specified the Functional Child and Family method as one of the joint methods that will be used to achieve a more client-oriented service system.⁴

The implementation of the method in early childhood education service plans and other strategies has varied between municipalities. The municipalities are also responsible for determining the groups that are offered the opportunity to participate in discussions. One way of arranging a discussion is to have it when a child's early childhood education is being discussed. The discussion can be offered to all families with children in a specific age group, which will help it appear as an opportunity rather than an obligation.


The Family Intervention Method helps increase the quality of early childhood education services in many ways. It helps improve collaboration and trust with parents, and the discovery of new solutions and successes also enhances each participant's ability to cope at work. When a common method is used, various experts, such as early childhood special needs educators and family workers, can gain new perspectives for the work they do. The Family Intervention consultations help create pathways towards working with mutual client families. The method makes it easier to detect when someone is in need of help, and a well-functioning approach to educational collaboration as well as fostering relationships with parents that are based on confidentiality and respect increase the chance that their children will be able to receive the support they need.⁵

The Family Intervention Method helps families feel that their role is that of a valued expert when it comes to their own lives. Being able to help even a single family is valuable unto itself. When we can avoid any long-lasting and deeply invasive services, we can reduce costs both in the short and long term - but the most vital impact of all can always be seen at the individual level, in the everyday lives of families. Each person will likely face a situation in their life where they will need support, and it is crucial that they be provided with someone close by who can help. After all, every family is the most important family in the world.

3 *Lasten ja nuorten hyvinvointi koronakriisin jälkihoidossa: lapsistrategian koronatyöryhmän raportti lapsen oikeuksien toteutumisesta.* Government publications 2020:21.

4 *Etelä-Karjalan alueellinen lasten ja nuorten hyvinvointisuunnitelma 2019-2022*

5 *Kiviranta Outi. Lapset Puheeksi-työn merkitys varhaiskasvatuksen laadun lisääjänä.* Seminar presentation, 2020.

A young child with light hair, wearing a tan jacket, is shown from the chest up, reaching out with both arms towards falling autumn leaves. The child has a joyful expression, looking upwards. The background is a soft, out-of-focus bokeh of warm yellow and orange light, suggesting a sunny day in a park or forest. The overall mood is bright, happy, and nostalgic.

*“Yellow leaves, blazing on the ground,
like the spark inside every child.*

*Let your inner light illuminate
even the darkest path.”*

Using service design to clarify what people need and want - Helping families find the open early childhood education services they need and developing their contents in a client-oriented manner

Tiina Ikkonen

Service design and design thinking were utilised in the development of the VALO project. These methods are utilised extensively in the field of design, as they place particular emphasis on creativity and participation. The project focused especially on design methods related to qualitative research and utilised them in many different phases and in various development tasks. This article describes the theory, process and tools behind service design with the help of various practical cases.

On service design and design thinking

Service design is a method of developing new services or enhancing pre-existing ones together with the people who use them and on the basis of their needs. The starting point is to understand the client's needs, wishes and end-goals.¹ This information is then used to develop services that users feel comfortable with, that are attractive to them, and that truly meet their needs. Compared to the act of designing a physical object, the end result of the service design process can be, for example, a new approach to customer service or more client-oriented service gestures.² The use of design industry methods constitutes a vital part of the process, as they help various actors

understand each other's point of view and serve as a link between different actors - for example, in the form of visualisations.² Using a visualisation or other creative method to describe a service can help illuminate new development paths and even influence the strategy of an organisation.³

Design thinking is an important tool for service designers, as it encompasses the ability to feel empathy and notice things that others may not, as well as the drive to improve what already exists, solve challenges and ask pertinent questions.³ Design thinking is not solely the domain of designers and can be used by anyone involved in development-oriented work.

The world is full of different service design processes. These processes typically utilise incremental approaches, i.e. the act dividing up larger entities into smaller development challenges, as well as iterative development methods that are based on repetition.⁴ One process model is the so-called double diamond, which provides an apt view into the various phases of the process, from the collection of client experiences to the creation of the end-product. The double diamond model also illustrates the variations in divergence (the pro-

1 Ahonen, T. 2017. *Palvelumuotoilu sotessa*. Palvelumuotoilun käsikirja sosiaali- ja terveysalan palvelujen kehittämiseen. 2nd edition. Espoo: Tarja Ahonen.

2 Miettinen, S. 2016. *Palvelumuotoilu – yhteissuunnittelua, empatiaa ja osallistumista*. In Miettinen, S. (ed.) *Palvelumuotoilu – uusia menetelmiä käyttäjätiedon hankintaan ja hyödyntämiseen*. 3rd edition. Helsinki: Teknologiainfo Teknova Oy, 21-41.

3 Mänttari, A. 2014. *Pääkaupunkiseudulla muotoilu ohjaa julkisten palvelujen kehittämistä asiakaslähtöisiksi*. In Miettinen, S. (ed.) *Muotoiluajattelu*. Helsinki: Teknologiainfo Teknova Oy, 108-115.

4 Tuulaniemi, J. 2011. *Palvelumuotoilu*. Helsinki: Talentum.

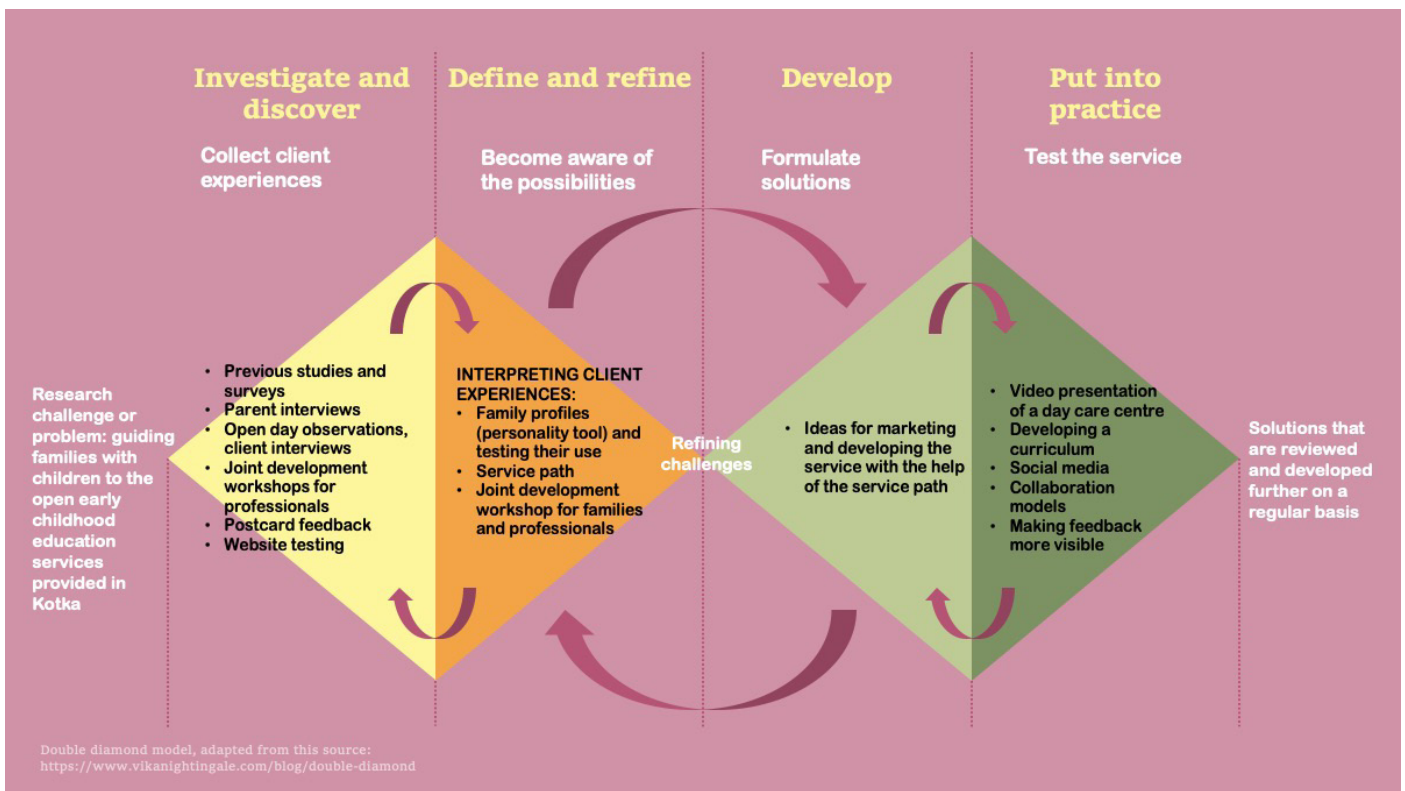


Figure 1. A double diamond model that contains the phases and measures included in the project's development task. Visual design: Ikkonen, T. 2020. Based on Chu, K. 2014.

duction of ideas) and convergence (analysis and elimination) inherent to creative problem solving. The process alternates between a creative idea production stage and a phase based on data and analytical deduction.⁴ Depending on the process that is used, the service development approach is used to involve end users, the provider of the service and other stakeholders at different phases and in various ways. Figure 1 presents the double diamond model and the phases included in the project development process. The different phases in the model utilised a user-oriented development process together with clients and/or professionals.

Child and family profiles and the paths families take on the road to open early childhood education services

One of the development tasks of the VALO project was guiding families to the open early childhood education services provided in Kotka. The starting point, or design challenge, was to discover methods for reaching potential client families and guiding them to the services provided by the open early childhood education system as well as dis-

covering the reasons for the decline in the people visiting the open day events arranged by open early childhood education providers. This challenge also supported the project's more overarching goal of directing families to the right services at the right time, especially when it came to early-stage support services. The Finnish public sector has identified the need to develop early-stage preventive child and family services, which is why there is real need for a user-centric design: one must understand the perspectives of both one's clients and the people who work with families.⁵ To solve this challenge, the participants began by collecting client experiences and thinking about the challenge from the client's perspective. A vital part of this initial phase is acquainting oneself with the topic at a general level and any previous studies and reports related to it. In addition, families were asked to provide open feedback on the services available to them at various events. To facilitate this process, a visually appealing form was created, where families were asked to write their feedback in a speech bubble. The feedback and development ideas were utilised at a later stage in the design of a thematic interview framework for families. These partially structured thematic

5 Hyvärinen, J. 2015. Muotoiluagentti ja lapsiperheiden kotipalvelu. In Jyrämä, A. & Mattelmäki, T. (eds.) Palvelumuotoilu saapuu verkostojen kaupunkiin. Verkosto- ja muotoilunäkökulmia kaupungin palvelujen kehittämiseen. Helsinki: Aalto University.



Figure 2. Both sides of a single family profile card. Illustrations and layout: Saara Kumpulainen.

interviews were conducted with a few people who were parents of small children. The goal of the interviews was to understand the attitudes that these families had towards various services, the everyday lives of families with children at a general level, and to discover new pathways that could be used to provide families with information on various services and events. The interview material was used, together with the experience speech bubbles and previous study results, as a basis in the formation of profiles of different types of families with small children.

These profiles are visualised descriptions that can be used to encapsulate all of the accumulated customer experience data.⁴ The end result was six profiles in all, and they tell the stories of different families in various situations. While the stories are fictional, they are based on actual client experiences. It was important to ensure that the profiles were realistic and relatable, so that the needs of the users of each service are truly understood and that they are provided with the empathy they need.⁶ The first profiles were created as part of a thesis by a service design student, and they

were then honed further together with industry professionals. The professionals tested the profile cards and then refined their contents and created instructions and additional questions to support their use. The profiles resulted in tools that professionals can use to, for example, survey the needs of families, in orientation activities, and in the planning of how services should be marketed.

The service design process utilises various data collection and processing phases both alternately and concurrently. The process can always be halted and traced back to a previous point to assess if enough information has been collected before proceeding further in the development process or if there is still something that should be defined in further detail. As the development task proceeded, parents were invited to another round of interviews in the open day events arranged by open early childhood education providers. The purpose of these interviews was to gather further data on how families had begun to use the service in question and how they would develop it further. At the same time, these discussions provided an oppor-

6 Klaar, M. 2014. How to have your cake and eat it too. An introduction to service design. Amsterdam: BIS Publishers.



Figure 3. Postcard feedback on the activities of the open early childhood education system. The creatures and speech bubbles in the cards were illustrated by Sina Puukko. Photo: Tiina Ikkonen.

tunity to observe how the activities were implemented and how the facilities were used.

User experiences were also collected using other experimental and visual methods, such as with website testing and mail-in postcard feedback (figure 3). The website test was a light usability test conducted with a few parents. Its purpose was to determine how well specific information could be found on the website of the open early childhood education system. Even though the test included only a few participants, it provided useful and concrete guidance and reachability suggestions for the development of the website and, in particular, the digital service path for clients. Studies on website usability tests have shown that just five testers are needed to reveal most of the challenges in the usability of a website (Nielsen 2000). In the postcard task, the current clients of the open early childhood education system were asked to provide their feedback on and requests for the activities provided to their children using a colourful postcard. The speech bubble in the front

of the card was reserved for any words of praise and the backside for development suggestions, both of which could be provided anonymously. The postcard task was implemented for several reasons: 1) it provided professionals with immediate development suggestions, 2) it could be used to quickly test how anonymously written feedback could be collected in a specific environment and with a specific target audience, 3) the feedback could be used in solving the development challenge, and 4) the praise on the front of the cards highlighted the good sides of the activity to potential new clients, and their visual design made them more interesting to read.

Mutual development approaches were also used to gather more client experiences. Together with the open early childhood education system of Kotka, an open day event at the park was arranged for families, and the outing included three assignments. These assignments focused on the curricula of open early childhood education providers, the terms used in the sector, how their services

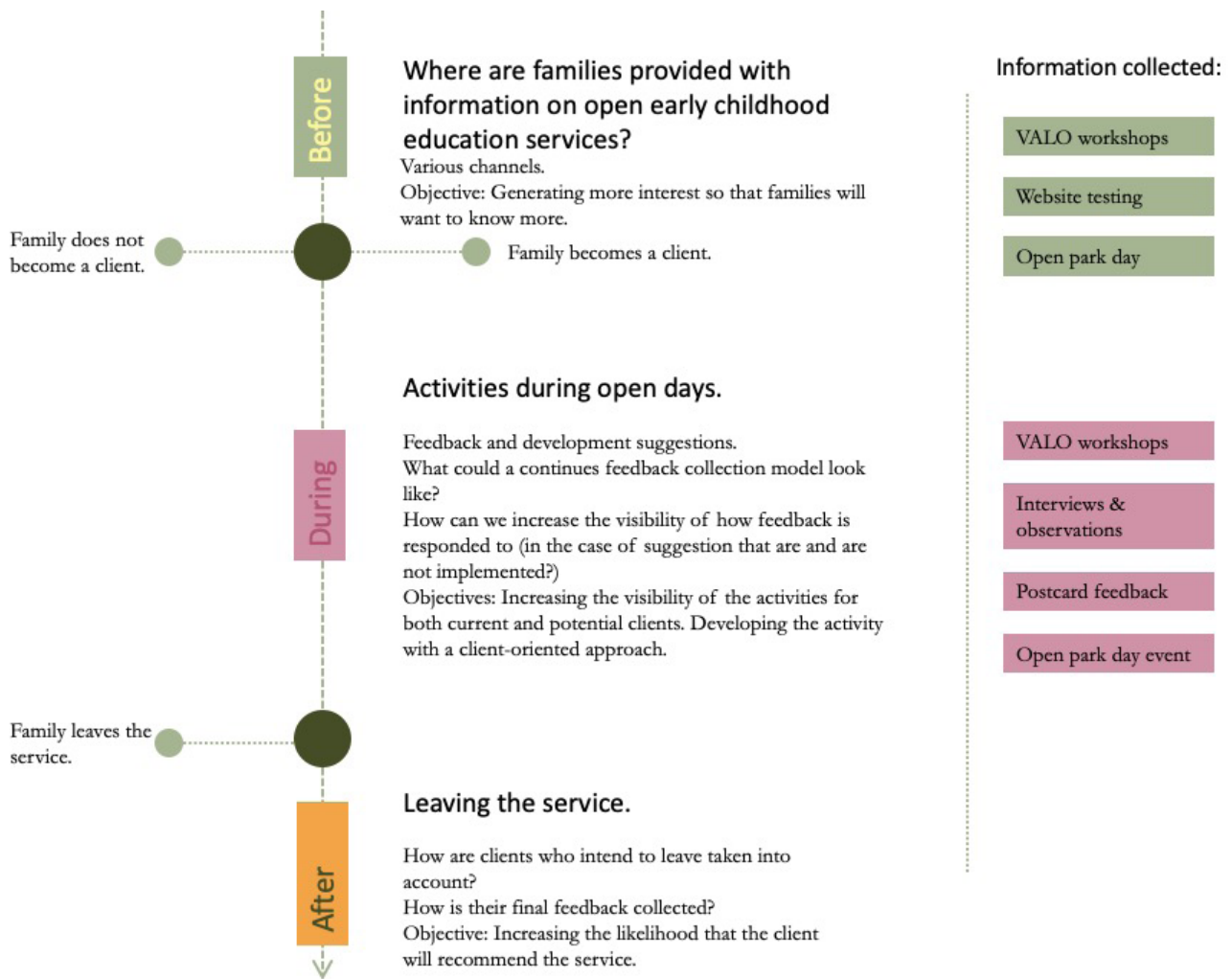


Figure 4: The table of contents and general descriptions of the phases included in the path. Visual design: Tiina Ikkonen

are marketed, how feedback is collected and how parents felt about outdoor activities. The assignments locations were planned in a way that they provided professionals with the opportunity to discuss and exchange thoughts with parents, and they also included assignments for children so that their opinions could also be heard. The use of assignments as a form of mutual development also provided both new ideas and a useful tool for professionals. According to Mattelmäki and Vaajakallio, two main reasons for mutual planning can be identified in user-centric service development processes: 1. Implementing information as part of the planning process, and 2. Meeting with users for additional information and inspiration.⁷

In the end, the path towards open early childhood education services was created using all of the research and workshop data that was accumulated during the project. The end result was a visualised service path template for professionals. The

path is divided into three parts: the activities conducted before, during and after the service. Each part and its related sub-questions and tasks can be used to further develop the service, and they also provide the opportunity to apply and adapt the path to one's own work. The path provides ideas and partial answers, especially to questions of where and how a service should be marketed. The path also includes a list of collected development suggestions for the activities of open early childhood education services, and it asks how these suggestions can be made visible to current and new clients as well as how one should respond to them. The path and six family profiles can be utilised in tandem or separately.

The information collection and development work for guiding families to the open early childhood education services available in Kotka were conducted between 2019 and 2020. In addition to the experts involved in the project, the work also utilised the expertise of service design students.

⁷ Mattelmäki, T. & Vaajakallio, K. 2016. Yhteissuunnittelu ja palveluiden ideointi. In Miettinen, S. (ed.) Palvelumuotoilu – uusia menetelmiä käyttäjätiedon hankintaan ja hyödyntämiseen. 3rd edition. Helsinki: Teknologiainfo Teknova Oy, 77-97.

Joy to the children and their parents! How the VALO project provided artistic activities and cultural well-being to families

Tanja Mäkelä

One part of the VALO project, implemented by Xamk (South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences), involved artistic events and workshops for families with children that were arranged in South Kymenlaakso and South Karelia between 2019 and 2020. The key idea behind these events and workshops was to provide children and their parents with the opportunity to try out different forms of art as well as to help families discover new recreational opportunities and sources of strength. The purpose of the art activities was to develop and design an art activity model for child and family services. The events were based on the themes highlighted in the cultural well-being sector and in high-quality children's culture.

Art as a source of well-being

Studies have shown that participating in artistic activities can have many positive effects on one's social well-being. Participation can enhance one's experiences of inclusion and help prevent loneliness. Communal art activities can help individuals feel like they are seen and heard. Participation can also help assess and discover one's own strengths and interests. For example, artistic activities can help develop one's social and interaction skills.¹ Participating in arts and culture can benefit the well-being of individuals and families in many

ways. For example, being seen and heard play a significant role in one's experiences of inclusion. Cultural well-being represents a diverse phenomenon whose core aspects include one's experiences of well-being, living a good life within or through art and culture, as well as the needs and rights people have in relation to cultural pursuits. At the societal level, cultural well-being is connected to education, services, research and decision-making. The key factor in the definition of cultural well-being is each person's personal experiences of how art and culture can increase or are connected to their well-being.² Various actors in Finland have attempted to provide a definition for cultural well-being. One example of this is the Taikusydän Nordic Arts & Health Research Network, according to which cultural well-being refers to individual or communally shared experiences of the effects that arts and culture have on well-being. Every individual is a cultural, creative and self-expressive being, regardless of their age or background.³

All in all, cultural well-being contains many different dimensions²:

- Everyday culture
- Artistic and cultural hobbies
- Experiencing art and culture alone or with other people
- The role that art plays in one's environment

1 Laitinen Liisa. 2017. Näkökulmia taiteen ja kulttuurin sosiaalisen hyvinvoinnin vaikutuksista. Sitra, online article. Available at: <https://www.sitra.fi/artikkelit/nakokulmia-taiteen-ja-kulttuurin-sosiaalisen-hyvinvoinnin-vaikutuksiin/> [Referenced 26 October 2020]

2 Lilja-Viherlampi, L.-M.; Rosenlöf, A.-M. 2019. Moninäkökulmainen kulttuurihyvinvointi. In I. Tanskanen. (ed.) Taide töissä – Näkökulmia taiteen opetukseen sekä taiteilijan rooliin yhteisöissä. Reports of the Turku University of Applied Sciences 256. Turku: Turku University of Applied Sciences, 20-39. Available at: <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe2019082124994> [Referenced 26 October 2020]

3 Taikusydän. 2017. Käsitteet. Kulttuurihyvinvointi. Website of the Taikusydän network. Available at: <https://taikusydan.turkuamk.fi/tietopankki/kasitteet/> [Referenced 26 October 2020]

- Cultural well-being services (including activities, acts and services that provide arts and culture-related opportunities as elements of well-being to individuals and communities).

The foundational idea behind the VALO project's art activity trials for families with children was that, in the future, cultural well-being services could be made part of the services provided to children and parents, for example in family cen-

tres. The art workshop model was developed in collaboration with child and family services professionals, the families that participated in the groups, and various artists. Based on the trials, a model was created that combines artistic activities guided by artists for children and parents with the participation of child and family services professionals in the workshop, where they can provide information on the services available to families with children.

VALO art workshops - an artistic activity model for child and family services

The part of the VALO project that was implemented by Xamk involved testing, developing and designing an art activity model for child and family services. The VALO project included the "Valon talo" (House of Light) art workshops for families with children in Kotka and Hamina in the autumn of 2019, as well as the "Valon tanssi" (Dance of Light) dance workshop, which were arranged in Kotka in autumn 2020. The purpose of the art and dance workshops was to provide children and parents with the opportunity to try out different forms of art, meet other families, as well as a pleasant and creative space for mutual activities between children and parents. The workshops combined artistic activities, mutual work, and presentations on child and family services, which could then lead to people utilising these services. The workshops included professional from the open early childhood education system and family counsellors from child welfare clinics. The artistic activities themselves were guided by professional artists. The child and family services professionals informed the participants of their own services and were there to test the art activities with the families themselves.

In the autumn of 2019, the *Valon talo* art workshops allowed children and parents in Kotka and Hamina to test their artistic skills. The objective of the workshops was to provide children and parents with versatile opportunities for engaging in and experiencing artistic activities. The workshops were targeted primarily at families that were likely to have no opportunity to participate in any hobbies or recreational activities that were subject to a fee. The development work was informed by ideas on cultural well-being, high-quality children's culture, and enabling participation. Another driv-

ing thought was that these artistic activities could help people discover personal and possibly hidden sources of strength and new recreational avenues. The other key factor was the support that could be provided to the mutual interaction between children and parents with the help of a high-quality art education.

The key partners in the trial were the open early childhood education organisations in Kotka and Hamina. The partners in the project helped plan and implement the methods used to recruit families to the groups. Both groups included artists as well as open early childhood education professionals, social services students, and Xamk's VALO project team, which was responsible for the workshops' coordination and practical arrangements. The *Valon talo* art workshops were hosted by five artists, each of whom guided one workshop in Kotka and Hamina. The art workshops were implemented in an identical fashion in both municipalities. The workshops in Kotka included five families and the workshops in Hamina included four.

The art workshops were guided by professional artists who helped the participants create Polaroid collages of their families and dreams, natural mandalas from autumnal materials, papier-mâché art, as well as experiment with circus methods and participate in a musical adventure. The meetings included an artistic activity and a communal evening meal that was provided at the end of the workshop. All of the art workshops included aspects that families could test and do at home. The feedback questionnaires indicated that the workshops inspired the families to arrange their own artistic moments at home as well. After a workshop group had finished its run, a final celebra-

What parents had to say about the *Valon talo* art workshops:

“Everyone was so friendly, and the new ideas and experiences they provided helped enrich our lives and the relationship that I have with my child.”

“My daughter was especially fond of the handicrafts, and after the musical workshop, we continued singing the same songs at home. Everyone was always excited to participate in them.”

“What comes best to mind are the small details, such as the circus tricks and musical moments, not to mention the delicious evening meals!”

tion was arranged where all the participants could gather together, enjoy a few snacks and marvel at the works of art they had created in their group.

The groups were part of the trial runs of arts and culture-oriented methods that were piloted during the VALO - Strengthening Holistic Wellbeing for Families project. The experiences of the families played an important role in the development of the model for artistic activities arranged for families with children. The parents who participated in the groups kept a diary during the art workshops and answered an online survey after the workshops had ended. After the workshops were over, the artists, open early childhood education professionals and students were invited to a development meeting to collect their feedback. Based on

their thoughts, a shorter art workshop model that would focus on a single art form and meet just three times was developed.

The *Valon tanssi* dance workshops were arranged in Kotka in the autumn of 2020. The implementation of the dance workshop was designed in collaboration with the open early childhood education actors in Kotka and the regional coordinator of the Kymenlaakso Social and Health Care District’s family centre, the family counsellor of the child welfare clinic, and Xamk’s VALO team. The planning process utilised the experiences that families, professionals and artists reported in connection with the *Valon talo* art workshops. The purpose of the dance workshop was to introduce families to the world of dance and provide

What children had to say about the *Valon tanssi* dance workshops:

“I liked dancing and eating. It was fun to come and dance.”

“I liked the pillows and music.”

“I liked dancing to a familiar song.”

“I liked dancing and striking different poses.”

a pleasant and creative space for mutual activities. The families were recruited to the group with the help of child and family services professionals, meaning that the professionals advertised the group in their own organisations. The recommended age for the participating children was 3-6 years. The dance workshops were arranged in the meeting space of the Family Centre of Western Kotka, and the group included three families in all.

The group was instructed by a dancing artist/physical therapist. The group also included a teacher from the open early childhood education system and a family counsellor from the child welfare

clinic. Xamk’s VALO project team was responsible for the implementation and coordination of the group. The experiment confirmed that the workshop could become part of the services provided to families with children.

What was learned during the workshops?

- Parents, children, and child and family service professionals felt inspired after they had been provided with the opportunity to test a number of artistic pursuits. The groups helped expand their participants’ understanding of art.
- The groups provided a relaxing and communal environment that allowed people to forget about their daily worries.

- Families were provided with tips on how they could spend time together and discover new recreational opportunities.
- Some of the families became so well-acquainted with one another that they began meeting outside of the group.
- The opportunity to enjoy a communal evening meal was considered a very important part of the group experience.
- The families were happy with the fact that child and family service professionals participated in the art workshops. This provided them with the opportunity to ask questions and talk about the services that are available to them.
- From the perspective of cultural well-being, the workshops for children and parents could, at some point, become part of the early-stage support services provided to families with children.

Art events for children and parents - cultural experiences and positive energy

During the VALO project, Xamk's implementation included seven artistic events that were arranged between 2019 and 2020. The events were planned in collaboration with child and family services professionals from various municipalities. The planning work took into account the wishes that the projects partners had for the events' chosen art forms and contents. For example, in Taipalsaari, the art event was used to advertise the facilities and activities of the municipality's new communal meeting space. The event in Ruokolahti was planned around the theme of video art, since the local day care centre had hoped to receive new ideas that would help families utilise the smart devices that they had at home. The art event in Rautjärvi focused on nature and drama and was arranged on the outdoor activity trail next to a local day care centre.

Art events for children and parents provide a good opportunity for marketing various services, new spaces or recreational opportunities that are aimed at these types of clients. Professionals from various fields can participate and talk about their services and answer the questions that families

may have. Artistic activities can also be used in, for example, parent-teacher meetings at day care centres or in peer-group activities. Art and culture create new experiences and dimensions, and applying artistic pursuits to child and family services can provide a great deal of new opportunities. It just takes a little courage, but the results are well worth the effort!

The following open art events were planned and implemented during the project: *Minun unelmia* (My Dreams) cartoon workshop, Hamina 04/2019, *Maaliroiskinta* (Paint splatter), Kotka 06/2019, *Tintamareskit* (Théâtre Tintamarresque), Sungurlare, Bulgaria 09/2019, *Tehdään yhdessä taideteos, kankaanpainanta* (Let's Create a Work of Art Together, textile printing), Taipalsaari 02/2020, *Perhekoppis - Kulttuurielämyksiä luonnossa* (Family Beetle - Cultural Experiences in Nature), Rautjärvi 08/2020 and *Videotaiderata - Iloa ja valoa arkeen* (Video Art Trail - Joy and Light for Everyday Life), Ruokolahti 09/2020, *Sinä olet taideteos! Tintamareskit* (You're a Work of Art! Théâtre Tintamarresque), Luumäki 09/2020.



The current situation of the most vulnerable families in Bulgaria

The situation in Sungurlare municipality - Bulgaria

Ilona Tomova

Bulgaria is the poorest member of the European Union. In 2019, the year with the highest ever GDP in the country, the at-risk-of-poverty threshold in the country was only EUR 212 per month (with prices of the basic goods equal to the average ones in the EU). At the same time, the monthly incomes of 1 586 thousands of Bulgarians (22.6% of the population) were below this threshold according to EU-SILC 2019 data. One tenth of working Bulgarians were at-risk-of poverty and among the part-time employees, every third was at-risk-of poverty.

In 2020, the share of people at-risk-of-poverty rose up to 32.5% or 2 500 thousands according to EUROSTAT. According to the strongest Bulgarian trade unions and some experts, 40% of the Bulgarians in 2020 are poor.

Bulgaria is one of the Member states with the highest social inequality. The inequality of income distribution between the top and the bottom quintiles (S80/20) was as high as 8.2 in 2017 and 8.1 in 2019. The Gini coefficient was 40.8 in 2019. The high level and long duration of social inequality erode social cohesion and democratic development, push out tens of thousands of relatively young people abroad to look for a better chance for jobs and decent living conditions for themselves and their families, destroy local communities, enhance the risk of social conflicts, high level of youth criminality and self-destructive behavior.

Roma are the third largest ethnic group in Bulgaria - according to experts' estimates, around 10-11% of Bulgarian population are Roma. Although their predecessors have lived in Bulgarian lands since centuries, they are still accepted as the most distant "Others", suffer a low social status and mass spread discrimination. The share of poor among Roma was 68.4%, among ethnic Bulgarians - 16.7% according to EU SILC 2019 data. If we compare the poverty rate of the Bulgarians from different ethnic groups with secondary education, we also observe significant social inequalities: in 2019, poor were 7.3% of the ethnic Bulgarians, 13.6% of the Bulgarian Turks and 28.9% of the Roma with secondary education.¹ The population living in severe material deprivation (limitation in 4 of 9 observed indicators) was 14.8% of ethnic Bulgarians, 22.1% of Turks and 63.0% of the Roma in 2019. Those at risk of poverty and social exclusion among Roma were 83.9%. Poverty in rural areas is much higher than in urban ones.

Sungurlare is a small rural municipality in South-East Bulgaria with roughly 12 000 people living there. Two fifths of them live in the only town in the municipality - Sungurlare, the rest - in 27 predominantly (very) small villages. The level of unemployed and discouraged in the municipality is almost 5 times higher than the average in Bulgaria. Most of the people from the villages are either unemployed/discouraged, or work in precarious seasonal jobs in agriculture with very low incomes and without social and health insurance as a norm.

¹ The shares of the Roma and Turks with tertiary education are quite small and the sample error is too high, that is why I do not cite the calculations.

There is no hospital in the municipality; neither there are medical specialists or medical laboratory. There are only 7 general practitioners and one dentist working there - three of the GPs and the dentist work in the town, the rest three have to take care of the dispersed rural population. In part of the small villages there is not even a GP. Mass poverty and lack of regular public transport make the contacts of local population with medical specialists extremely difficult.

There are 7 kindergartens and 6 schools in the municipality, only one of them - secondary. In the rural schools, most of the children study in merged classes with low quality of education. There is a municipal Center for child development in Sungurlare but only 75 out of almost 1000 children participate in its arts activities.² The number of early drop-outs from school is extremely high; especially among the children living in villages.

The majority of Sungurlare families with children suffer high level of unemployment, temporary precarious jobs, and low and insecure incomes for decades. That is why thousands of the relatively young people emigrate or leave their homes for months in search of seasonal jobs abroad. According to experts' estimates, in 2019 at least one person per every third family in Sungurlare municipality used to live or work abroad. In 2020, due to COVID-19 pandemic, most of those engaged in seasonal jobs at Black sea or abroad left without any work and incomes.

Official statistic data desegregated on ethnic basis are gathered only during the censuses - once in 10 years. The last such data are from 2011.

According to them, 8.6% of those who declared their ethnic self-identity in Sungurlare municipality were Roma. Local experts claim their share is much higher. Having in mind that 1 808 people in the municipality did not declare their ethnic self-identity and that usually Roma prefer not to do this because they are afraid of the social stigma of being Roma in Bulgarian society, we could raise the hypothesis that the actual share of Roma in 2011 was 21.8% of Sungurlare municipality population. Roma is the youngest ethnic group in Bulgaria and the one with the highest fertility rate, so we could accept the specialists' estimation that Roma children are at least two fifths of the municipality children.

Roma families are among the poorest of Bulgarian population. According to EU SILC 2019 data, two thirds of Roma children do not have place suitable for homework preparation, a second pair of seasonal or multi-seasonal shoes, and cannot afford a meal based on meat, chicken or fish neither fresh fruits and vegetables every second day. Three fourths of Roma children cannot invite friends at home because of the family poverty. In the Sungurlare municipality, the vast majority of Roma families face difficulties even to pay the taxes for the kindergarten education and care of their children. A NGO has covered the vulnerable families' kindergartens' tax expenses since the last several years and now the majority of the 3-6-years-old children have the possibility to go to kindergarten regularly.

² There are five groups for fine and applied arts in this center and mainly children from 1-5 grades of the elementary school are engaged in its activities.



Photos, from top to bottom:

Snapshot from a Valon tanssi dance workshop.

A work of art created during the Sinä olet taideteos art event.

Children creating art at a Valon talo art workshop.

Photos: Tiina Ikkonen and Tanja Mäkelä

The VALO - Strengthening Holistic Wellbeing for Families project was implemented between 1 October 2018 and 31 December 2020 in collaboration with the Center of Expertise on Social Welfare in South-East Finland SOCOM and Xamk, the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences. The project's partners included South Karelia Social and Health Care District Eksote and the early childhood education system of the municipalities of Hamina, Kotka, Lemi, Luumäki, Parikkala, Rautjärvi, Ruokolahti, Savitaipale and Taipalsaari. The Kymenlaakso Social and Health Care District Kymsote served as the project's collaborative partner.



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