

We-house at Kerava – Supporting the wellbeing of families.

Laurea University of Applied Sciences.

We-house Kerava

We-house Kerava is a low-threshold community house that is open to all citizens of Kerava. The facilitator of the we-house is The [Mannerheim League for Child Welfare](#) (MLL), Uudenmaa District, and for the first two years we-house is funded by the [we-foundation](#), which aims to reduce social inequality and the exclusion of children, youth and families in Finland. During this time, we-house hopes to convince the city of Kerava to grant them permanent funding.

The main aim of [we-house Kerava](#) (me-talo in Finnish) is to increase and promote the wellbeing of families and to provide them with support via participation, discussions with peers, and volunteering. We-house is open to all residents of Kerava and its neighboring areas regardless of age, gender or current social status. We-house offers a place for participation, inspiration and excitement; it brings joy to everyday life and enhances opportunities to find employment. All the activities and functions that arise from the wishes and needs of local residents are planned and carried out in conjunction with local service providers, organizations and companies.

We-house provides open activities, decreases loneliness and enables different forms of support all under one roof. We-house also strengthens cooperation between the city of Kerava, organizations and parishes, as well as increasing volunteer activities in the area.

Cooperation between we-house and Laurea UAS

The bachelor's degree in Social Services provides social services studies that incorporate the skills required to help and guide clients at different stages of life, as well as comprehensive skills the management of social services, service systems and legislation. During the social services studies students learn various innovative methods of working with clients and means of providing

concrete help and support. These methods are already put into action during the course in practical placements and project work. Social Services undergraduates are employed by the public, private and third sector in various counselling, service, rehabilitation and prevention related tasks, in early childhood education and in different management positions.

Cooperation between Laurea and we-house Kerava started in autumn 2017, when we-house was about to open its doors to the residents of Kerava. Collaboration with students was seen as a great opportunity to start promoting we-house and to plan the activities we-house could offer. We-house and its aim of promoting the wellbeing of the citizens of Kerava provide a great environment for social services students to plan and carry out challenge-solving micro-projects, and to practice their interaction and guidance skills with the clients and coordinators of the we-house. Social services students planned and carried out three challenge-solving micro-projects at the we-house Kerava in 2018.

Supporting the wellbeing of families

Together with the we-house coordinators, Laurea UAS undergraduates planned and implemented activities for the visitors to we-house. The main challenge for we-house Kerava was to make residents aware of the project's existence and to attract new visitors to the we-house. Students' micro projects had different aims, such as organizing art sessions for primary schoolers, arranging activities for parent-child groups and interviewing visitors about the services that we-house provides in Kerava. The common aim for all micro projects was to promote participation among visitors by allowing them to take part in the planning process. Over the course of 2018, there were altogether five student teams doing project work at we-house Kerava, three of which will be described here.

Shared experiences at the Multisensory Space

The first student team carried out their project in January 2018. The student team planned and created two multisensory spaces (read more at <https://aistienmenetelma.net/en/>) for children and youngsters who were also involved in the preparations for the spaces. The main aim of these multisensory spaces was to create positive experiences for the children involved in the project, but also for visitors to we-house. The first multisensory space was an underwater world and the second took visitors into the winter wonderland of Lapland.



Picture 1. Sea creatures for the underwater world.

Both multisensory spaces were created in workshops organised by the students, where children - and also more mature visitors to we-house - could create elements and decorations for the multisensory space. You can see a video of the underwater world at

https://www.instagram.com/p/BepwNa1IJRT/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet

And a video of the winter wonderland at

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BcbtC6SF-Yz/>

As we-house was still a comparatively new and unknown service among the inhabitants of Kerava, marketing became an important part of the student project. Students had to reach people

to advertise not just their own project activities, but also we-house Kerava. The students made a poster which they put up in shops, health centers and other public spaces nearby. They also promoted their project via we-house's social media channels. As a result, the we-house had many new visitors. Both multisensory spaces were successful, and many people that entered the spaces wanted to stay there for hours!

Trying to reach out to refugee families

The second group of students started their project at the end of January 2018 by meeting with the we-house coordinators. The initial aim of the project was to reach out to new refugee families from Syria that had just moved to Kerava. Students were supposed to plan activities especially for these families and to provide them with a chance to get to know people living in Kerava. Students did their best to market we-house as a low threshold meeting place by visiting the Topaasi multicultural center and immigrant service point. Students provided information about we-house and its activities to the refugees and workers and put up advertisements on noticeboards. However this did not result in these families finding their way to we-house during the time the students' project was happening at we-house.

Students and we-house coordinators came up with a "plan B", in which students would organize and implement activities for all the visitors to the we-house. The activities were aimed at creating opportunities for random visitors to get to know each other by doing something creative together. The students designed a project in which the visitors started to create a multisensory space together. During the sessions, students and visitors created papier-mâché planets and crafted spaceships from clay. The only exception was Valentine's Day, when activities were planned around the theme of friendship theme.



Picture 2. Creating planets and spaceships.

During the final session, the students constructed a multisensory space in which all the papier mâché planets were hung from the roof and space-themed crafts were dotted around the space. Visitors from babies to grownups loved the space.



Picture 3. Multisensory space at we-house Kerava. Picture by Bakar Bakar.

Impact assessment among visitors

The third student team carried out an impact assessment research among the visitors to we-house Kerava during the autumn of 2018. Throughout its existence, we-house Kerava has constantly asked visitors what they want and what they need, and organized different activities

based on the desires expressed. For example, at the beginning of summer 2018 it became apparent that there were many children looking for something to do during the daytime. In Finland, school children have ten weeks of summer holiday, while their parents have a maximum of four weeks off from work. Many families struggle to find ways to keep their children safe and occupied during the day when they are at work. Summer camps are very popular, but they can be really expensive and are fully booked months in advance. After realizing the situation, it only took only a couple of days for the we-house coordinators to start a day camp for school children. The summer camp was free of charge, so all children could take part in it. In order to provide the required activities, the we-house coordinators had to initiate close co-operation with different organizations and enterprises in Kerava.

A team of three students conducted guided interviews with 13 visitors of different genders, ages and cultures. All respondents visited we-house at least once a week, and some as often as five times a week. The main goal of we-house Kerava is to provide peer support and services for children and families and thus prevent social exclusion. At this stage it is impossible to say whether we-house has achieved this goal, but it is still important to hear how visitors have experienced we-house and the services and activities it provides.

Based on the interviews, we-house has already become an important meeting place for people. For parents, we-house facilitates peer support, which has a direct impact on their quality of life. For non-native Finnish speakers, we-house provides a safe environment to improve their language skills and practice Finnish with native speakers. Regardless of the age of the respondent, we-house has reduced feelings of loneliness. All respondents described we-house as a place to meet new people and make friends.

The students' conclusion was that we-house offers a community living room for the citizens of Kerava. We-house welcomes literally everyone, and by doing so it reduces prejudices and strengthens a sense of togetherness. We-house is a unique meeting place that has already earned its place in the hearts of residents.

Conclusion

According to the we-house coordinators, cooperation with students has been smooth and rewarding. All student teams have followed we-house's principles and acted according to them. Students have planned and carried out their activities based on client's wishes and requirements. In some cases, visitors to we-house have already become actively involved in the planning stage. Feedback from the clients has been excellent throughout.

Meetings and interaction with the students demand time and input from the coordinators, but they feel that the student teams have been very cooperative and efficient, and that ultimately we-house has been the beneficiary of this cooperation. The Students have brought fresh ideas into we-house activities.

One major challenge that student teams have faced is that it is impossible to predict whether there will be participants at the planned sessions. Some sessions have only had a few participants, where others have filled the house.

Students' feedback at the end of their projects was similar to the coordinators: the challenge-solving projects taught them stress tolerance, problem solving skills and in the end gave them loads of professional confidence. Despite small hiccups along the way, the students also felt that they achieved something. Even though these achievements might seem small, on an individual level they have a huge impact: a child found a friend, a new parent found a peer, or a teenager found a freetime activity.

The greatest lesson was the importance of shared experiences. There is no need for a common language, [as art brings people together!](#)

Puluboi's Christmas Street.

Aalto University.

The Art Education MA program at Aalto University collaborates with a wide range of partners. In autumn 2017, pedagogical studies for adult education included a project with different kinds of organization. A group of five art education students implemented their project in a collaboration network with University of the Arts, Helsinki University, Helsinki City Library (Kallio) and the Literary Art School of Helsinki. The project was called Puluboi's Christmas Street and it was based on a book by Veera Salmi. The aim was to create sustainable and site-specific art education concepts.

In this project, the role of challenge owner belonged to the Literary Art School of Helsinki. Teachers of the art school moderated the project, gave guidance to the student group in conjunction with their university teacher and formulated the challenge with the students. They had plenty of planning meetings with students, worked together with them onsite and gave them important and productive feedback .

While familiarizing themselves with the issue, the project group of five students had a walk and talk with the writer, and met the staff of a film company that was producing a film on Puluboi. Issues of the economics, artistic value and sustainability of the project challenged the group to think and act critically. The project group facilitated a workshop for trainee teachers and through the workshop created a platform for pedagogical encounters between students and pupils of Kallio comprehensive school. The Puluboi project also collaborated with upper secondary school of Kallio and created a "walk-in workshop" with sustainable studies pupils at the upper secondary school.

The project was open and organic, which was challenging for all partners. On the other hand, the openness of the project generated enthusiasm and great learning opportunities. During the learning process students articulated plenty of questions:

- What happens when the public meets art education in unexpected locations?
- What is multi-art education?
- What is art as education?
- Do you have to know when you are being educated?
- Who is educating who?
- What is public art education?
- How can art education be made sustainable and socially coherent?

Some of these questions were answered and some of them remained open at the end of the project, promoting further study and professional development. Sensory experiences in the streets and other public spaces of Kallio district, in conjunction with reflective discussions, had a profound effect on many of members of the project group. The project provided tangible benefits to 25 university students, three university teachers, and four teachers of literary art. Almost 100 young people were able to experience the arts in unexpected locations and situations.

The first stage of Puluboi's Christmas Street was implemented with very few resources. The main resource was the time that all partners invested in the project. The minor material needs were met by the Literary Art School of Helsinki and by the art education program of Aalto University. Later on, the Literary Art School of Helsinki received a grant to further develop the concept. With that grant they were able to employ students for part-time project workers in the second stage.

Reference for quotation

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