“The land of a thousand lakes”

Finland is known for its saunas, long dark winters, free education system, Sibelius, thousands of lakes dotted with idyllic summer cottages, and—above all—its high quality of life.

My home base in Finland is HAMK University of Applied Sciences in Hämeenlinna, situated about an hour’s train ride north of Helsinki. The town is nestled amid forests alongside Lake Vanajavesi, translated as “old waters” because they originate from ancient glacial melt.

I’ve been to Finland three times previously to teach at HAMK’s International Summer School of Wellbeing. On earlier trips I’ve been struck by the degree to which nature and art seem to suffuse everything in Finland, including their health and human services. I return because I want to learn more about the Finnish aesthetic, how it developed, and how it manifests in therapeutic recreational practices. I ask, “How have art and nature come to play such an important role in Finland?” In talking with faculty at HAMK University, I discover the reasons are two-fold.

A national cultural phenomenon known as the Golden Age of Art offers one explanation for why Finland has come to value art and nature so highly. From 1850 to 1907, a community of Finnish artists, musicians, and writers congregated around Lake Tuusula, 26 kilometers (16 miles) from the distractions of Helsinki. A great outpouring of creativity flourished in all the arts during this time, inspired by the tranquil rural scenery.

Lake Tuusula was home to many famous creative figures—composer Jean Sibelius, artists Pekka Halonen and Albert Eldelfelt, poet Eino Leino, and writer Alexis Kivi, among numerous others. Supported largely by the government, this artistic community helped shape the Finnish national character, identity, and culture through their creative pursuits, as reflected in the primordial Finnish landscape. The political uncertainty of the times fortified the new national identity to the extent that the effects remain readily visible today, as design, art, music, culture, and nature have become fundamental expressions of Finnish society.
The second reason art, and in particular nature, is woven so intrinsically into the Finnish psyche is the country’s delayed entry into the industrial revolution. Industrialization didn’t take hold in Finland until the 1970s. Consequently, many Finns stayed tied to an agrarian way of life—and in touch with nature—much longer than in other Western countries.

When industrialization did take root, growth was rapid and many people sought work in urban areas. While many moved, others preferred the country life. Among these, some turned to producing naivismi, or naïve art, a particular genre of art characterized by a childlike simplicity. These rural artists were self-made, with little or no training. Eventually naivismi came to embrace art made by individuals with disabilities, as you will learn when you read about Kettuki, the national center for artists with disabilities.

Wherever I go in Finland a care for the aesthetic, steeped in nature, is present—in home and workplace décor, in public places and buildings, in the abundance of green spaces. It is also evident in services to individuals with disabilities. Here the creative impulse is honored in people with disabilities, as well as the need of the human spirit for proximity to nature to thrive.

Beyond this, by law, people with disabilities have a right to a high quality of life. This right is not protected for regular citizens, only for those with disabilities. By law, their lives must reflect the principle of normalization (Nirje, 1992; Wolfensburger, 1972), which calls for the same opportunities, choices, and standards of living as ordinary citizens. It is the responsibility of municipalities to ensure this high life quality, and you will find that all the agencies featured in this section are supported generously from public city funds.

The Finnish therapeutic approaches and organizations introduced here, as noted in the introduction, serve children, youth, and adults with developmental disabilities; adults with mental illness; and girls in foster care. Most settings are situated in the community, while one, a psychiatric hospital, is institutional. Unique approaches for supporting well-being are featured, including a state-of-the-art resource centre, social circus, multisensory environments, Figurenotes music notation, empowering photography, and a centre that makes it possible for people with developmental disabilities to work as artists. In all cases you will find the threads of nature and artistry woven throughout.
Virvelinranta

“The right to a good life”

Virvelinranta, situated in Hämeenlinna along the bank of Lake Vanajavesi, is a prime example of the Finnish belief that people with disabilities have a right to a high quality of life.

This state-of-the-art facility is the result of many years of planning and collaboration among several parties: the City of Hämeenlinna, Eteva District, Hämeenlinna Regional Association for the Support, Development Centre Limited Häme, Hämeenlinna University of Applied Sciences, and the Education and Kiipula Tavastia Vocational College. After 10 years of planning, Virvelinranta opened its doors in 2010. Its primary aim is to promote quality of life through rehabilitative services for people with developmental disabilities.

On the day I visit Virvelinranta, my guide is Dr. Merja Salminen, principal lecturer and project manager of the Education and Research Centre for Wellbeing at HAMK University. As an indication of the close partnership between HAMK University and Virvelinranta, Dr. Salminen has offices in both places.

As Dr. Salminen shows me around the facility, everywhere I look the Finnish sense of aesthetic is evident—in the furnishings, the bright colors, the wall hangings, the architecture, and the careful touches of detail that add beauty and joy to the surroundings. Items made of natural materials—fibers, stones, plants, birch branches—bring the serene Finnish landscape indoors. The simplicity of design somehow enhances, and makes more accessible, the functionality of the therapeutic activities and environment.
Virvelinranta offers daily person-centered vocational, educational, and recreational rehabilitation services to about 50 people each week. Day activities, designed to promote individual growth and self-sufficiency, are organized by the City of Hämeenlinna. The three activity areas are identified by colors rather than signage—red, blue, and green—which are more easily recognizable by the participants. All facilities are barrier-free, with the latest adaptive equipment.

Facilities include a teaching kitchen, gym, physiotherapy room, sensory rooms, woodworking shop, sauna, education rooms, and music room. The music room is a gathering place for a community band comprised of Virvelinranta participants and locals from the town of Hämeenlinna. The Virvelinranta Rap is an example of one of their musical numbers.

Housing is also provided at Virvelinranta for a small number of people who formerly lived in institutions. (Finland has a similar history of institutionalization as the United States.) In fact, one of the facility’s sponsors, Eteva, formerly ran institutions. Virvelinranta was intentionally built near the centre of Hämeenlinna to align with the principles of normalization and community inclusion.
Additionally, Virvelinranta is an active centre for treatment, research, training, conferences, and a variety of social service businesses. The multidisciplinary staff includes psychologists, social workers, rehabilitation counselors, physicians, nurses, and educators. The operating budget is roughly 10 million Euros (13 million dollars) a year.

The remaining images speak to the quality of life and aesthetic surroundings enjoyed by the participants at Virvelinranta.
Heyne: International Perspective

Sauna is an important aspect of Finnish culture and a strong indicator of quality of life. Thus it is likewise a necessity for people with developmental disabilities.

PiiPoo

“It doesn’t matter if someone isn’t able to hear or remember or speak or walk. I’ve never met anyone who couldn’t smile.”
– Pilvi Kuitu

PiiPoo, a children and young people’s cultural arts centre, is the brainchild of a dynamic young woman, Pilvi Kuitu. Trained in theater production and social sciences, Pilvi founded PiiPoo in December 2005. The main aim of the cultural arts centre is to encourage children’s creativity and confidence in their own skills through a variety of art forms, while participating in diverse and inclusive groups.
Pilvi Kuitu, PiiPoo executive manager

Pilvi Kuitu, PiiPoo executive manager

Pilvi is aware the word PiiPoo sounds “funny” in English. The name of her agency comes from her favorite childhood story about a magician, Mr. Pii Poo, by Finnish poet Kirsi Kunnas:

Oh well,
Mr. Pii Poo made a spell.
He was a magician, Mr. Pii Poo.
Then he shouted: “Hii hoo!”
And stomped on the ground.
He used his magic for raisins, Strawberries, apples, and more.

Pilvi imagines that, beneath the magician’s cape, children and youth with and without disabilities can enter the world of cultural arts at the same magical starting point. From there, they can learn new expressive art forms, test the boundaries of their own creativity, grow in their art skills, experience success, and even have the opportunity to perform in front of an audience.

PiiPoo’s beginnings. The inspiration for PiiPoo came from Pilvi’s own two children. One day, while taking a sauna with her preschool-age daughter, Pilvi observed her playing with a doll, imitating exactly the language and mannerisms of her mother. Pilvi interpreted this behavior as her daughter’s innate need and desire for dramatic pretend play. Pilvi also watched her elementary-age son, who was typically agitated and sometimes violent (he was later diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome, Attention Deficit Disorder, and Tourette Syndrome), hold a violin during a music therapy session, bowing it with uncharacteristic calm and steady concentration. Pilvi decided then she wanted her children to “have opportunities to grow and learn through art,” and the seed for PiiPoo was planted.

Soon afterward Pilvi heard of a Finnish millionaire who was financing the construction of a new mall called Ideapark in Lempälä, just outside of Tampere. She thought Ideapark would be the perfect, though unconventional, place for PiiPoo. The mall would be centrally located, open to the entire community, and families would...
undoubtedly go there often. Parents could drop off their children for cultural arts programs then take time for shopping or lunch with a friend, or choose to participate in activities with their children. Pilvi called the entrepreneur to schedule an appointment. The millionaire, who said his mother had advised him to “never refuse a woman who requests a meeting,” was so taken with Pilvi’s idea that he agreed to house PiiPoo in Ideapark. He also helped establish the centre as a non-profit organization.

**Funding.** In addition to generating income from program fees, PiiPoo receives funding through the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. The municipality of Lempäälä also provides ongoing funding, as part of their mission to provide community support for individuals with disabilities and because numerous local school groups participate in PiiPoo’s program. Another important source of funding is *Taikalamppu - Aladdin’s Lamp*, a national network of regional art centres for children and young people. PiiPoo is one of eleven art centres across Finland that receives funding through Taikalamppu. Each centre encourages young people to express themselves and “discover their own way of being” through creative arts. Taikalamppu also supports each center’s autonomy to set its own developmental goals and operating systems.

It is inspiring to hear from Pilvi how arts are supported through so many local and national entities in Finland, and that one person can harness all these resources to actualize her dream for a centre like PiiPoo.
Programs. PiiPoo offers a variety of cultural arts programs every week, Friday through Sunday, as well as during school holidays. Programs include well-established art forms such as painting, drawing, making handicrafts, music programs, and dramatic arts. Novel art forms are also used, such as disco dancing, film, photography, animation, art and band birthday parties, and ultraviolet light face painting, along with a unique cultural arts method called social circus.

Participants include children and youth, and sometimes their parents, from the local community as well as students from nearby schools in Lempäälä. All programs and facilities are designed for inclusivity and accessibility. For example, the theater was designed without a stage to allow barrier-free access to the performance space. Personal adaptive equipment, such as a wheelchair, is often integrated into costume design or the staging of a play or performance. Further, groups always include individuals with mixed abilities who support each other in artistic pursuits.

Social circus. On the day I visit PiiPoo, young people with varying abilities are giving a social circus performance. The show is the culmination of weeks of learning circus skills, planning, staging, and rehearsing.

The concept of social circus originated in Amsterdam after World War II as a method to assist in the socialization of low-income immigrants and families. Since then, social circus has been used in many countries, primarily in Europe, to assist people in many different kinds of situations and for various purposes.

The circus phenomenon, Cirque du Soleil, has been instrumental in spreading the concept of social circus. Since 1995 Cirque du Soleil has sponsored an international social circus training program, Cirque du Monde, translated as “Circus of the World.” Cirque du Monde works with circus schools and other interested
partners from around the world to develop the teaching skills of instructors in youth-oriented social circus initiatives. Cirque du Soleil (2012) describes the purposes of social circus:

Social circus is an innovative social intervention approach based on the circus arts. It targets various at-risk groups living in precarious personal and social situations, including street or detained youth and women survivors of violence… The primary goal is not to learn the circus arts, but rather to assist with participants’ personal and social development by nurturing self-esteem and trust in others, as well as by helping them to acquire social skills, become active citizens, express their creativity and realize their potential.” (p. 1)

PiiPoo has been a pioneer in bringing social circus to Finland, and the method is rapidly spreading. Social circus at PiiPoo focuses on the following therapeutic goals:

- Provide practice in socialization
- Lift self-confidence and feelings of empowerment
- Motivate people to act together
- Tighten group cohesiveness
- Strengthen social networks
- Allow opportunities for others to see participants in their special roles
- Learn circus skills and movements
- Promote relaxation and enjoyment

PiiPoo is involved in many applications of social circus, to support people in all kinds of situations across the lifespan—even babies!

- **Circus with Friends** (*Kaverisirkus*): after school circus group for children with disabilities and students who have no friends
- **Family Circus** (*Perhesirkus*): circus group for children with disabilities and families
- **Tiny Circus** (*Pikkusirkus*): family circus group for social services customers, sponsored in cooperation with Lempäälä social work office
- **Circus Summer Camps**: week-long inclusive day camps
- **Circus Sparkle** (*Sirkus Kipinä*): hospital-based circus sponsored in cooperation with Tampere University Hospital
• **Circus in Action**: circus for 8th and 9th grade students that lack motivation to study
• **Dude Circus** (*Äijäsirkus*): circus project for men with disabilities and their friends
• **My Circus** (*Oma sirkus*): circus projects for schools with students with disabilities
• **Baby Circus**: circus for babies and parents
• **Home Circus and Circus Hapsa** (*Ikäsirkus*): circus for grandmothers and grandfathers in institutions

Pilvi explains that the last social circus on the list, Home Circus, is one of the genre’s newest developments. These programs take place in elder homes with nurses and staff participating together with residents. Early evaluation methods show promising results. Pre and post-program assessments have been given using **REI Systems**, a rating scale that measures the capabilities of residents in nursing homes across a number of variables. Initial results from participating in social circus have shown strengthened capabilities among elders, particularly in the areas of self-efficacy, socialization, and enjoyment.

**Art for quality of life.** Pilvi speaks passionately about the value of cultural arts programming as well as the need to provide inclusive experiences. “The arts can be a great influence for health, well-being, and quality of life,” she says. “When people act through art and act in a group, they are happier. They smile more often.”

Pilvi emphasizes the special skills and training that are required to teach art to people with diverse needs, “Some people think cultural arts isn’t a ‘real’ thing. ‘Hey, anyone can draw with children.’ But that’s not true. It needs to be seen as professional work.” To illustrate her point, Pilvi explains how students from HAMK University of Applied Sciences complete practicum experiences at PiiPoo to complement their theoretical studies in the social services degree programme. Pilvi believes it is essential for students in the social sciences to have face-to-face interaction with people with disabilities so they can “get over their fears,” as well as gain expertise in how to meet individual needs and goals through cultural arts.

Pilvi concludes the interview by looking into the future of culture arts for young people with varying abilities: “If we do things right, in the next 5 years we will have arts in all facilities and institutions, and children [with disabilities] will be seen as active and impressive people!”

*(Photos courtesy of PiiPoo)*
Multisensory Environments

“‘It’s not so much the room itself, but what you do in the room and the environment you create for the participants.’”
–Marja Sirkkola

Dr. Marja Sirkkola is a senior lecturer at HAMK University of Applied Sciences and an expert in Multisensory Environments (MSEs). She coordinates and teaches in the curriculum that prepares students to use MSEs in social services.

Pagliano (1998) defines a MSE as a dedicated space or room

…where stimulation can be controlled, manipulated, intensified, reduced, presented in isolation or combination, packaged for active or passive interaction, and temporarily matched to fit the perceived motivation, interests, leisure, relaxation, therapeutic and/or educational needs of the user. It can take a variety of physical, psychological and sociological forms. (p. 107)

Multisensory work derives from a practice called Snoezelen® developed in The Netherlands by Jan Hulsegge and Ad Verheul (1986). Dr. Sirkkola refers to their classic book, Snoezelen: Another World, as her “Old Testament.” Because Snoezelen® is now a registered trademark, the use of the word is restricted and, in fact, legal battles have been fought over who can use the name. Consequently, Dr. Sirkkola and others have adopted the term MSE and, more broadly, sociocultural multisensory work.

Dr. Sirkkola believes that “sociocultural multisensory work is culturally sensitive and socially transformative; it aims to create positive changes in society” (Sirkkola, 2010, p. 393). She explains further:

Sociocultural multisensory work is based on a social pedagogy. That means that we have to take care to consider the people who participate, where they come from, what their interests are, what they like, how they want to participate in building their environments and activities. Sociocultural work is based on the groups of people and the individual.

The primary goal of multisensory work is “to empower people with disabilities to achieve happiness through multisensory experiences” (Sirkkola, 2010, p. 392). A participant’s happiness is enhanced through pleasant sensory experience and the use of creative multisensory activities such as art, music, or dance.
Dr. Sirkkola explains that MSEs have the potential to enhance happiness, not only for the individual participant, but on several societal levels as well. Sociocultural multisensory work taps into and augments each level of what she calls Happiness Capital (Sirkkola, 2010):

1. **Macro Level**: Society—active citizenship, cultures, subcultures, laws  
   Goal of the Action: cultural democracy

2. **Exo Level**: Extended Community—local services, media, associations  
   Goal of the Action: local active citizenship

3. **Meso Level**: Community—feelings of success, togetherness, uniqueness, reciprocity  
   Goal of the Action: interaction, reflection

4. **Micro Level**: Individual—identity, emotions, experiences, interaction, and sensations  
   Goal of the Action: animation (p. 392)

The concept of Happiness Capital is discussed further by Dr. Sirkkola:

I think happiness includes so many valuable things. When you are happy, you have more potential to recover from whatever you have, you have more potential to learn, and you are more happy to live your life. That’s why I call it Happiness Capital. My idea is to increase the amount of happiness for people. At the individual level, the goal of action in multisensory work is animation—what we call sociocultural animation. Participants want to do things, they want to be involved and participate... I like the idea that the work is done in individual community and in extended community, in society.

In a multisensory experience, two or more of the senses are engaged at the same time. Dr. Sirkkola tells me six senses are utilized in MSEs: taste, touch, sight, smell, hearing, as well as balance. She adds that neurologists have actually identified as many as 160-plus senses! She explains,

For example, the skin has so many sensory systems, like pressure, heat and coldness, touching, even goose bumps. And the eyes see that somebody’s moving here or there, and so on. There are so many systems, but in MSE we talk about six sensory systems—balance is one of them, movement and balance, we count that.

Multisensory rooms are sometimes “purpose-built,” that is, designed for a specific therapeutic outcome. For instance, there may be a white room, a black room, a music room, a physiotherapy room, or a room with computerized equipment where participants can interact with the environment. Dr. Sirkkola focuses on multisensory environments that make use of everyday objects and activities:

I like “everyday Snoezelen®.” It includes clothing, eating, cleansing, like sauna rituals, things like that—what everybody is doing that has to do with multisensory work, on an everyday basis.

Dr. Sirkkola tells me multisensory spaces are experiential environments where you may either relax or take part in creative activities, such as theater, soundscapes, or communal dance. She says
MSEs provide for ever-present sensation, imagination, creativity, and community interaction: “All kinds of creative things can be done in the rooms.”

Multisensory work may be used with many different kinds of participants, as Dr. Sirkkola explains:

If I am working with gypsy families – maybe the mother is in prison. Maybe they helped their husbands [commit a crime] and they are with their children in the prison. In those cultures, the mothers are almost always the ones that suffer from crimes their families have made. I have to think, culturally, what is multisensory cultural work for them? What is the gypsy background, music, or religious and cultural habits? Also, for immigrants who come here, they have to participate in the planning.

MSEs are also used with participants with challenging behavior, with people who bite or hit themselves. You might play Mozart music, let them swing in a hammock, create a good smell, surround them with a nice color. Often they will stop injuring themselves because the brain is getting enough stimulation. They begin to smile and look at you, and they are happy. When the treatment stops, maybe the person continues to smile for a couple of hours, maybe only a couple of minutes.

People with stiff and spastic muscles can become relaxed after a MSE treatment. They can often open their hands, and smile and laugh. It is very positive for workers and, of course, the clients and their parents to immediately see the effects. Some families build their own multisensory rooms in their homes for their children for these purposes. Rooms may be big or small, or just a corner some place, with a curtain in front of the corner.

The ideology is that people can enjoy their lives through their senses. Maybe they can’t remember or speak or think, but they have their senses through which they can find their lives enjoyable. This is very important—not only for people with disabilities, but elderly people with dementia. We should find ways for them to enjoy life, perhaps by giving them a special hand cream they have used or playing special music they have enjoyed. Even hospice care is interested in multisensory ways of working, to make the last days of life more beautiful.

Dr. Sirkkola has been involved in the design of many therapeutic multisensory spaces. She comments on her approach to her design work:

Environment affects you immediately. Some say environment affects your feelings within 20 seconds. Once you step inside a room, if there’s a bad smell or if it’s crowded or if there’s too much dust or junk, you start to get a negative feeling. But if you have lights and nice furniture and nice colors, or if you go into the forest where there’s fresh air and the sun is shining, you feel, “Wooowww!!”

I like the concept of Scandinavian design and how “less is more.” I think in many MSE rooms that they’ve built here in Europe, they’re full of things. I think it’s better to have an empty space with a couple of things, and then to add things. I like white walls that let you
project images unto them. I like to have curtains that hide the equipment. I want to have lots of space to put things away and to keep them clean. I also like organic materials—wood and not plastic. I like Design for All kinds of things that are good for everybody. And multipurpose rooms where you can change the lighting easily, and rearrange the equipment and furniture by putting them on rollers.

You can’t build a room and “that’s it” forever. It has to be organized in a way that’s the best for everyone. And that’s a lot of work. That’s why I call it “multisensory work” because it’s not easy, like, “Let’s go there and enjoy!” We have to think, “What is the purpose of the session, or evening? What are the correct ways to arrange the room? What will be easy to clean and safe to use?” We need to consider ecology and recycling as well—not everything has to be brand new and top technology.

The method of MSEs has grown into an internationally used practice. Dr. Sirkkola comments,

In the 1970s the first multisensory places were built in Europe. During the 1980s and 1990s they were built in the United States. Now they are even in Mongolia, where they have Snoezelen® places inside tents. It’s all over the world now!
Mielenterveyspalvelut, or Mental Health Services

The use of creative arts for therapeutic purposes is a prominent theme in mental health services in Finland. Empowerment is an important value as well. In this section you will learn how the creative arts of woodworking and weaving are used for psychiatric rehabilitation at Kaivanto Psychiatric Hospital. You also will visit Clubhouse Näsinkulma, a community-based psychiatric rehabilitation program founded on an empowerment model.

Kaivanto Psychiatric Hospital. Located in Kangasala in southern Finland, Kaivanto Psychiatric Hospital provides inpatient care, addiction psychiatry and services, and psychiatric rehabilitation. As part of its psychiatric rehabilitation services, residents have the option to join a workshop, which includes woodworking and textile workshops.

Woodworking workshop.

“The main purpose is doing, not the end product.”
–Harri Perkiö

Harri Perkiö directs the woodworking workshop at Kaivanto. The workshop opened in 1963, the same year the facility was built. Harri has worked at Kaivanto for 22 years. Dually trained as a psychiatric nurse and a carpenter, Harri tells me his outlook on the purpose of his work:

“The main goals for the rehabilitants are to build skills, increase self-esteem and self-confidence, and to help people experience success. Even if people don’t think they can make something of wood, they all make something. The main purpose is doing, not the end product.”

Rehabilitants are referred to the woodworking workshop by psychiatric nurses. If rehabilitants are interested, they come, try it out, and decide if they want to participate. Rehabilitants are “in treatment,” says Harri, but he sees his work as feeding the “healthy side” of the individual. People who live on their own in the community, or with their parents, are also able to participate in the workshop as a leisure activity during their free time, with transportation paid for by the municipality.

Harri says, “We see many hard cases,” where people have schizophrenia or multiple problems as a result of alcohol and drug abuse. “If people are depressed, it’s huge for people to get up and come here. If they make something with their hands, it can be a big step forward in their rehabilitation.”
Harri explains his approach to teaching. “All instruction here is based on practical learning. We don’t have theoretical learning in mind here. We impart silent knowledge, which can only be gained when someone has experience working in a medium for a long time.”

“In Finland it is well-known among doctors that speaking, by itself, doesn’t help people get better; talking while working with one’s hands is much more effective.” Harri adds that, while talking is important, it’s not absolutely necessary. “For some people it is therapeutic enough just to work with their hands in an environment that is friendly and supportive—without talking. We respect people if they don’t want to talk.”

Harri says that he and the other psychiatric nurses in the workshop are an integral part of the psychiatric team at the hospital. “We are trusted staff and treated with professionalism. We are totally in charge of what goes on in the workshop.”

Harri reflects on his role in the therapeutic process, where sometimes professional distance gives way to relating more personally, as a fellow member of the human race:

I find it hard to be a nurse here. I’m myself as a nurse—there’s a huge difference. When you work long enough in mental health, you get to know yourself—and how much of a wall to put up and how much to let it down. If you go over the line, you know it.

I want people to be equal here, including the nurses. It’s important to face people at their same level, with no distance. For some cases, it’s important for the instructor to share from his own experience, to let participants know that our lives aren’t that simple, that we’ve had similar experiences. The treatment here is relationship-based. It feels like a home here. We laugh here. One of the most important medicines is laughing.
Harri explains that all their woodworking materials are second grade scraps from local saw mills: “We take the cheapest materials.”

The participants’ handwork is sold in a small store attached to the workshop. Though made of humble materials, the designs and workmanship are beautiful by any standard—items deserving of the pride participants undoubtedly feel in creating them.

Harri says the hospital has documented the positive outcomes of participation in the woodworking workshop:

Municipalities don’t need to pay for long periods in psychiatric hospitals. Participants are less isolated, they need to see their doctors less often, and they save more money. And the socialization affect is huge! People socialize much more. They usually come here two times a week. When they come in, they greet me and ask me how I’m doing. They look forward to seeing everyone, and often exchange phone numbers.

For Harri, however, “The best feedback I can get is if someone shakes my hand and says, ‘This was my best experience here’… and, later, when they stop by, just to say hi.”

**Textile arts workshop.**

“Lankojen johdattaa” - “Let the threads guide you.”

Marjanna Mattila, the director of the therapeutic textile workshop at Kaivanto Psychiatric Hospital, says textile art is “like a meditation” for the patients. “It requires a lot of focus. It’s intensive. You forget about yourself—your focus is on something else.”

In the textile workshop participants pursue a number of different art forms: weaving, felting, string art, stenciling, and embroidery. They create wall hangings, paintings, pillows, table runners, rugs, and weavings of many different kinds.
“Patients need methods as simple as possible to make something as beautiful as possible,” explains Marjanna. She shows me a 1½-inch wooden cube with a leaf shape made of ¼” foam attached to it, which is used to stamp a painted image onto fabric. Another implement that is easy to manipulate is a piece of crumpled cellophane tied to the end of a short dowel, which may be used to add texturing to wet paint. Stencils are also used. Other materials include the more traditional paint brushes, looms, and all kinds of threads, yarns, and ribbons. It is a textile artist’s paradise!

A large supply of different coloured threads, paints, and fabrics are always kept on hand at the textile workshop. Marjanna explains why it is so important for patients to work with colour:

People dealing with hard depression often say they don’t see colours. Everything appears grey. They can tell one colour from another, but they don’t really see different colours. When people work with colours, and combine them, it stimulates defining colour and the experience of them. Colour can work with the unconscious, awakening images and memories. People can experience unknown feelings.

If you have a huge selection of colours, patients can combine them in a way that pleases them—in a way that gives them “good vibrations.” Tests have shown that colours affect us physically. They can raise blood pressure or calm us down.

People here use colours differently. Some choose colours carefully and methodically. Others choose colours randomly—as an empowerment process. Later they say to themselves, “Now I know why I chose that colour, it’s because…”
Marjanna has a saying, “Let the threads guide you.” This is the advice she gives to those who come to her workshop. Marjanna can tell a lot about a participant by how a participant approaches a blank piece of paper or fabric:

For many people, it’s a huge effort to approach a blank sheet. Sometimes a person starts by tentatively adding things to a corner and builds from there. Usually, if there’s a huge uncertainty about what to put in the painting, the person has a huge uncertainty about life. Varying lengths of strokes in painting, or stitches in needlework, also reflect more emotional instability within a patient than when the brush strokes or stitches are even.

The approach to art therapy used at the textile workshop is derived from the philosophy of Fenomenologia, or Phenomenology, by Edmund Husslerl. This approach emphasizes the experience of the patient, and acceptance by others of that experience as what is true for the patient. Marjanna explains this orientation by giving an example of a participant who painted what he called “a ballerina,” which, in reality, was only random lines:
When the patient showed me his “ballerina,” I complimented it. I also encouraged him to show the ballerina to the doctor. It wouldn’t have been right to deny it. It’s the therapist’s problem if she doesn’t see the ballerina. I wouldn’t want to intrude on the patient’s world. If we try to deny what the patient experiences, it’s the same as denying the privilege of experience—even existence itself—because, in his world, there is a ballerina.

Art is one way of exposing delusional thinking. Sometimes doctors can’t even tell when people have delusions. Through the painting process, it comes out, especially if the person’s thinking processes are badly fragmented.
When I ask Marjaana how the outcomes of therapeutic textile art are evaluated at the hospital, she says,

We have more of a free purpose. We stay in close contact with the psychologists and psychiatrists. Sometimes a psychologist wants to see a patient’s work, so he or she comes here to look at it. If a patient makes some artwork with a graphic image that is alarming, I contact the doctor. Sometimes patients appear calm with a doctor, but their paintings are aggressive. Patients may have a hard time putting their thoughts and feelings into words, and a patient may tell the doctor the opposite of what is really going on. But, through the art, the doctor can see this contradiction and explore the patient’s experience in therapy.

Marjanna shows me a recent newspaper article about a former patient, Tuija Kautosen, who was introduced to textile art at Kaivanto Psychiatric Hospital. Tuija is now known as a textile artist with her own exhibitions. Marjanna tells me that Tuija combines her lived experience with an imaginary world: “Tuija believes the colours she chooses come through the subconscious world and speak to her through her heart. Since each creative act is such a singular experience, she never duplicates an image.”

Like Harri Perkiö in the carpentry workshop, Marjanna emphasizes the therapeutic value of “thought and mind working with the hands.” She also affirms the value of creative activity that focuses one’s attention and helps participants to live in the present moment.

Marjanna points out that, in her work as a textile therapist, it’s important to “expand your thinking. There’s always more going on than what you think and what’s in your environment. As an instructor, you’re never ‘ready.’ You’re always developing yourself and growing.”
Clubhouses have sprung up all over Finland to support the well-being and involvement of people recovering from mental illness in the community. Clubhouse Näsinkulma in Tampere was the first clubhouse in Finland, fashioned after the Fountain House model founded in New York City in 1948. Today, there are 23 clubhouses spread throughout metropolitan areas of Finland. Nearly 350 Fountain House clubhouses exist worldwide, and Finland has more than any other country per capita, outside of the United States.

The day I visit Clubhouse Näsinkulma, Employment and Education Director Miaa Anttila and several clubhouse members, who ask to remain anonymous, greet me. While they are too shy for photographs, they clearly play key leadership roles in the organization.
Suomen Fountain House, the coalition of Fountain Houses in Finland (Suomi in Finnish) provides the formal answer to the question, “What is a clubhouse?”

A clubhouse is a membership-based community formed by people recovering from mental illnesses and by hired staff. Clubhouses are founded on the realization that recovery from serious mental illness must involve the whole person in a vital and culturally sensitive community. A clubhouse community offers respect, hope, mutuality and unlimited opportunity to access the same worlds of friendship, housing, education and employment as the rest of society.

The guiding philosophy of Clubhouse Näsinkulma is “Voluntarity, equality, and the work-ordered day.” Every member has five basic rights:

- The right to rehabilitation
- The right to work
- The right to have a place to come to
- The right to meaningful relationships
- The right to build up self-esteem

Membership in Clubhouse Näsinkulma is entirely voluntary, free of charge, and lifelong. To become a member, a person needs to meet the following criteria:

- Sees a doctor for mental health reasons
- Does not engage in substance abuse
- Is willing to collaborate
- Is not violent

Clubhouse Näsinkulma has six staff members and 430 members, 150 of them active. The overarching goal is that members and staff share joint responsibility for maintaining and developing the clubhouse. Members and staff participate equally in planning, decision-making, and program development.

Mia and the members explain that all Fountain House Clubhouses share four functions: a work-ordered day, leisure activities, transitional employment, and supported housing. The work-ordered day is a structured system around which all activities at Clubhouse Näsinkulma revolve. Daily activities provide members with opportunities to learn new skills, participate in building
the community, and develop relationships and social interaction skills. Activities include office work, producing a clubhouse newsletter, kitchen and cafeteria tasks, cleaning, participating in meetings and decisions about the clubhouse, as well as leisure activities. Club members choose their own assignments in cooperation with other club members. A train-the-trainer model is followed in which members who are proficient at a task provide training to new members. In this way, self-empowerment and self-esteem are fostered for both experienced and new members.

Leisure and recreation activities take place both inside the clubhouse and out in the community. Groups meet weekly at the clubhouse for gardening, magazine reading, board games, and Russian and Swedish cultural activities. Community leisure activities include going to concerts, movies, and various community events—anything members want to do.

Transitional employment provides members with opportunities to work part-time in business, industry, or the public sector. Positions are fixed-term (usually 5 months) and employees are paid a normal salary. When the employee completes the term, another club member is offered the opportunity to work at the same placement.

Social psychiatric housing and day activity mental health rehabilitation services are also available to club members. Sixty supported housing options are available in the local area.

Education is also a big aspect of Clubhouse Näsinkulma. Members provide computer and Russian language classes to other members, and community education courses include home economics, English lessons, and food hygiene.

Through all these activities, clubhouse members are able to move into a more active life in Finnish society. Ilana, a Suvimaki Clubhouse member, comments on her clubhouse experience:

For me, the clubhouse meant a new start in life and rehabilitation. It offered me the possibility to test my strengths and abilities and discover new aspects of myself. Establishing relationships was important to me after many years of illness… The clubhouse has increased my self-esteem and confidence. I believe in myself, trusting my thoughts and feelings… Gradually, the club has shown me that I am a valuable person just as the other club members.
Figurenotes at Resonaari: Accessible Music Notation

“Resonaari is a place where the students’ talents, not their needs, take center stage.”
—Markku Kaikkonen

Playing music adds joy and accomplishment to a person’s life, yet learning to play a musical instrument can be a daunting task. Reading abstract notes on a staff and figuring out where to place your fingers on a keyboard or the neck of a guitar requires complex cognitive and motor processes that are difficult to coordinate. Thanks to an ingenious method of musical notation called Figurenotes, however, making music is within closer reach for beginning instrumentalists (Kaikkonen & Uusitalo, 2002).

Finnish music therapist Kaarlo Uusitalo originated the Figurenotes method to teach individuals with developmental disabilities to play an instrument and to use in music therapy. His novel approach offers a concrete system of notating and reading music through colors and shapes. Four colors are used—red, green, blue, and yellow—along with four shapes—circles, squares, stars, and x’s. One simply matches the two identical symbols. For instance, to sound the note “middle C” on a piano keyboard, one matches the “red circle” from the Figurenotes notation sheet with the “red circle” sticker attached to the “middle C” key. In essence, you play what you see. Figurenote stickers may also be used on guitars, drums, as well as other instruments.

Markku Kaikkonen (2008, 2009) directs the Resonaari Music School in Helsinki, where more than 180 pupils with developmental disabilities receive weekly music lessons using Figurenotes. All instruction is individualized at Resonaari. Teachers find the best approach for each student and teach at the same high standards as mainstream music education. Markku says, “Resonaari is a place where the students’ talents, not their needs, take center stage” (Kaikkonen, 2008, p. 43).
Markku Kaikkonen teaches Figurenotes at Resonaari Music School

Markku has helped further the Figurenotes method, which he believes makes playing an instrument accessible to nearly everyone (Kaikkonen, 2008). Markku writes that many people find the conventional abstract notation system difficult to comprehend, but the concrete color-and-shape matching system allows students to play music successfully right away and gain confidence in their musical ability.

Once a person experiences success early on, Markku observes, playing music can really take off. Later, if students are able to understand abstract symbols, they can switch to conventional music notation, if they like, where options for sheet music are more plentiful.

Markku sees music making as a basic human right. The Resonaari Music School has won a Musical Rights Award for meeting all five of the musical rights established by the International Music Council (2012):

- The right for all children and adults
  - to express themselves musically in full freedom
  - to learn musical languages and skills
  - to have access to musical involvement through participation, listening, creation and information

- The right for all musical artists
  - to develop their artistry and communicate through all media, with appropriate facilities at their disposal
  - to obtain fair recognition and remuneration for their work (p. 33)

Kaikkonen and Uusitalo (1999, 2002) have authored two books for teaching music through Figurenotes, *Kuvionuotit* and *Kuvionuotit 2*. (The word *Kuvionuotit* means ‘shapes and colors’.)

Figurenotes shapes and colors
translates directly as “Figurenotes.”) The Resonaari Music School collaborates extensively with international partners and, thus far, the book has been published in three languages besides Finnish—Japanese, Italian, and Estonian. Several excerpts from the text are exhibited in this article, which show Figurenotes symbols and corresponding conventional notation, as well as the song, *Morning has Broken*, transcribed in Figurenotes (see page 152).

This diagram shows how Figurenotes on a keyboard correspond to conventional music notation.
Example of Figurenotes “sheet music”

Heyne: International Perspective
Mikko Romppanen, social services teacher at HAMK University of Applied Sciences, has taught many students with varying abilities to play music through Figurenotes. At the International Summer School of Wellbeing at HAMK University in May 2012, Mikko demonstrates the ease with which a beginner can learn to play an instrument using this method. He sits beside a student who has never played piano in her life but has always wanted to learn. After a short explanation of how Figurenotes works, and with coaching from Mikko, she soon plays the entire melody of a song flawlessly. Buoyed by her rapid learning, the student pledges to take piano lessons the following autumn.

Applications. Figurenotes has several applications. First, it is recognized by the Finnish educational system as an effective method for teaching and studying music. The Resonaari Music School meets the standards of Finland’s national curriculum for education in the arts and thus satisfies the qualifications of an official music school. Markku writes that this endorsement offers educational equality for students with disabilities, which had not existed in Finland previously. It also recognizes the importance of music education for people with differing capabilities. Because the method engages students so quickly, Figurenotes is also used in mainstream music education, particularly in early childhood and elementary education (Kaikkonen, 2008).

In addition to music lessons, students at the Resonaari Music School can participate in bands and perform in concerts. Often celebrity guest musicians join Resonaari pupils in public performances. Some students even acquire a level of musicianship that allows them to become professional musicians themselves.

Figurenotes is also an effective method in rehabilitation and therapy. Because its approach to instruction is goal-oriented and systematic, Figurenotes makes it possible to integrate therapeutic objectives into music education. Markku says, “Because people can pick out a tune from Figurenotes almost straight away, a strong sense of motivation is immediately generated, and this naturally contributes to the therapy” (Kaikkonen, 2012, p. 2). The Research and Development Unit at Resonaari has documented positive therapeutic effects from the use of Figurenotes in the following areas:
• **Factors that affect quality of life**: learning something new, experiencing success, experiencing the joy of playing an instrument, greater self-esteem

• **Ability to perceive and process information**: the perception of entities; understanding the correspondence between symbols, cause and effect, and sequence and repetition

• **Motor and coordination skills**: acquiring the control needed to play an instrument, neurological rehabilitation

• **Study skills**: improved concentration, increased commitment to working and practicing, learning social and teamwork skills

Figurenotes may be incorporated into an overall therapeutic program as an additional methodological tool, or used as a therapy in its own right.

Another therapeutic advantage of Figurenotes is how it supports inclusive instruction with community members and students without disabilities. Because Figurenotes offers a printed form of music, a music teacher or band director can adapt conventional curricula and sheet music into Figurenotes to enable musicians with intellectual disabilities to participate. This kind of inclusive participation in the community not only exposes people with learning differences to new cultural experiences of music, it helps promote personal growth and musicianship in a sustained way.

Markku envisions Figurenotes as a tool for social change (Kaikkonen, 2009). He notes how musicianship strengthens a person’s immediate social circle, within their home, school, and community. He observes how Resonaari students often become active members of their community through playing music. Markku ultimately sees the music program at Resonaari as a force for a “musical cultural revolution”:

The programme… seeks, through action, to have an influence on the whole community’s attitudes toward “difference” so that it begins to be seen as a strength and an asset – and, above all, to make people aware that the learning and studying of music should be a basic human right. …It is important to focus on the quality of the teaching. As teachers we need to respect disabled people [sic.] as learners in an equal way with all other pupils and students we have. In this way learning starts to be more equal, in this way culture starts to be more equal—in this way there starts to be democracy, understanding, respect and equality in culture and in our society. (p. 42)

**Watch Figurenotes in action.**

View a BBC Scotland news story by Joanne MacAuley about Figurenotes instruction: *Colours and Shapes are Helping People to Read Music.*

*(Photo and video from the BBC website)*
Empowering Photography: *Maailman Ihnin Tytö*

“I think that our pictures show for the very first time in my life who I really am. My soul is in these pictures.”

Art and social educator Miina Savolainen has authored a beautifully evocative book, *Maailman Ihnin Tytö* or *The Loveliest Girl in the World*, which documents the use of a therapeutic method she created called empowering photography.

As a community arts project, Miina worked with 10 girls from the Hyvönen Children’s Home in Helsinki who struggled with feelings of abandonment and invisibility. Miina photographed each girl over nearly a decade while cultivating an intimate, supportive relationship with her. The aim of this long process was to help the girls see their own value and to give them a sense of inner power and wholeness. The sense of empowerment they experienced through photographic sessions would encourage them to see the goodness in themselves, as well as in their life situations.

Minna explains the title of her book, “The name *The Loveliest Girl in the World* means that every one of us is entitled to feel ourselves as precious and beloved, at least in someone’s eyes and, most of all, in our own eyes.”

As you can see from the photographs in this section, a fairytale quality envelops them. The real life stories of the girls are far from fairytales, and juxtaposing the two “realities” conveys a certain sadness but also a hope of seeing oneself in a more gentle way. Miina speaks of the “capability of photography to mix fact and fiction, and make visible what in reality are so fragile and hidden that they almost don’t exist at all.” The inner identity of a girl is revealed by mixing the truth of who she is with the fiction of a natural fairytale-like landscape.

In an address at the Women’s Worlds Conference in Ottawa, Canada, in July 2011, Miina explains the need for empowering photography and how she happened upon this method to help the girls at Children’s Home:
“Posing for the camera felt really bad and even oppressive, since I was never given the chance to be the centre of attention before. But seeing the photos made me feel so happy—I was beautiful and special! When I look at my pictures I feel whole and strong.” —Jenna Pystö

When I started working in childcare as a young enthusiastic social educator I thought it was the most important work you can ever do. What has happened in the lives of children in childcare is usually that the roles of the parent and child have turned upside down. The child is the one who is emotionally responsible for their parents, a comforter and caregiver for the parents… At the same time, the child loses her childhood. The child herself, as a whole multi-dimensional human being with her own needs, stays invisible and this leaves a huge wound to the child. Usually a child turns all the maltreatment and neglect inside and feels somehow it is her own fault. And it is possible that a child feels her capability to love other people is somehow defective… It leaves a deep effect in later life in relationships.

“I think nowadays people pay too much attention to outer beauty and compare it with the chick in the ad in the bus stop. I think everybody is beautiful as she is and everyone should feel special. The photo sessions changed what I think about outer and inner beauty. The inner has become much deeper and more genuine. That’s why it’s the most important, because everybody gets wrinkles one day! Our pictures glow with inner beauty too!” —Mira Alanne
“For me everything was the most important part—the pictures and being together and everything we did there. I couldn’t have done the photos with someone I didn’t know.” —Petra Parvikoski

I thought at the time that the most important thing in my job would be that the child should see her own value and preciousness, and the other people around her should see it too. In Children’s Home it is also hard to repair with words because the children’s trust is betrayed with words so many times…

I felt that there must be some other way that really I could do this work… to make the good visible. At this point my own background as a photographer came in. I had the knowledge that photographs have the power as an emotional witness. I thought that since it was easy for me to see the value at work in every adolescent… I thought, what if I would photograph the value that I see so clearly? Could it be possible that they could see all of it in the photo?

Miina discusses the photographic method she used with the girls at the Children’s Home, founded upon mutuality, reciprocity, and dialogue within the context of the photography sessions:

In the photo situation, we focus at looking at each other and I realized this is exactly what these children have been missing, starting from very early parent-child interaction. These children hadn’t been looked [at] in a way that is listening and present, and that’s why they benefited greatly, simply from the photographing itself.

And then when the trust was built little by little, and they got the courage to look straight … they actually made eye contact in the self-portrait into their own face, eyes, their inner world: “How do I feel? What has happened to me? What things are important to me?” They actually face the things that are inside them. I have photographed these girls in a manner how they wanted to be seen.

The photos that appear in The Loveliest Girl in the World were chosen by each girl herself, from among a thousand photos that were taken of her. The eldest of the girls, who ranged in age from 9
to 20 at the beginning of the project, discusses the process of accepting herself through Miina Savolainen’s empowering photography.

When I first saw the photos they looked just awful, totally horrible. But then you get used to the expressions. The more I’ve seen them, the more I’ve started to look at them more kindly. I don’t know, now you ask in what way I have seen myself with new eyes? I can’t explain, they just made me feel so good. Without the photos I don’t think I would ever have seen myself with gentle eyes.

Miina provides some concluding remarks about her work at the Children’s Home:

*The Loveliest Girl in the World* is a story about becoming visible, about accepting oneself and seeing the good in situations where the good isn’t shown easily. Only what matters is that the human being must be able to believe in her own wholeness. And when that becomes visible in a photo, it also becomes real and existing, and it can be shared with people. And that’s when you can start believing it, and it can really start growing.

You may [listen online to Miina Savolainen’s entire address](#) at the Women’s Worlds Conference.

For the past decade, empowering photography has been widely used in social services and educational fields in Finland. Read more about the international therapeutic use of photography in the article, *PhotoTherapy Techniques in Counseling and Therapy.*
“It meant a whole lot to me to see myself beautiful. In the Children’s Home I didn’t get the parental attention I needed. It has left a hole... After losing so much you try to live so that you don’t lose again. You live frugally.

In the photos every one of the girls has been accepted just the way she is, as the princess of her own life. Everyone is entitled to think about herself that way.” –Milla Makkonen

Note. All photos and quotes from the children and young women are taken from the website, *Maailman Ihain Tyttö, The Loveliest Girl in the World* (Savolainen, 2011).

**Kettuki Art Centre**

*Kettuki Art Centre* is a national cultural centre for people with intellectual disabilities in Finland. The word *Kettuki* comes from the name of its managing association, *Kehitysvammaisten taiteilijoiden tuki ry*, which translates as the “association for support of artists with intellectual disabilities.” In Finnish, *kettu* also means “fox” and, while not intended as a mascot, Kettuki’s artists have used the fox as a source of inspiration so often it has been adopted as part of the centre’s identity.

*Sulullinen Kettu, or Sad Fox*

–Susanna Hirvonen
Kettuki began its operations in the city of Hämeenlinna in May 2006. Executive director Esa Vienamo explains that Kettuki’s overall mission is “to raise the esteem of art by people with intellectual disabilities by promoting it at a nationwide level.” This mission includes “improving opportunities for people with disabilities to study and practice art in both professional and recreational contexts.”

Today the centre is housed in a stately residence originally built in 1910 by Finnish architect Lars Sonck for the director of the internationally-known Iittala Glass Centre. Located only 500 meters (.3 miles) from Kettuki, the glass centre is visited by 210,000 people a year, which Esa believes will open up tremendous opportunity for exposure of Kettuki artists, as well as for the sale of their artwork.

Esa Vienamo says the centre has three aims. First and foremost, Kettuki aspires to support individuals with intellectual disabilities to work as artists. Local artists with intellectual disabilities, ages 12 through 65, come to Kettuki once a week to create art in its studio. Esa envisions that eventually artists will engage in artistic pursuits at Kettuki every day. The artwork produced by Kettuki artists, as well as artists with intellectual disabilities from similar cultural arts centres around Finland, is exhibited in three gallery rooms. In addition to acquiring and maintaining its own permanent art collection, Kettuki facilitates the sale of art through special exhibitions.
Another means of generating income for artists is the manufacture of commercial products based on the artists’ designs. Prototypes have already been developed for notebooks, purses, umbrellas, trays, and tablecloths, among other items. The purses shown in the photograph below are the result of a collaboration between Kettuki artists and students from the Degree Programme in Design at HAMK University of Applied Sciences in Hämeenlinna.

A second aim of Kettuki is to maintain a national network of Finnish artists with intellectual disabilities. Kettuki is the hub for 17 similar cultural arts centres across Finland. Esa believes Kettuki is the only European country that has organized a national network of this nature. Networking methods include producing publications and education materials, compiling a databank of Finnish artists and their works, sponsoring an annual national networking conference, and publishing a newsletter four to six times a year. Additionally, Kettuki selects an Artist of the Year from across Finland who receives spotlight promotion.

One of Kettuki’s important publications is a sourcebook entitled Loytoja, Outsider Art from Finland. In the European and Finnish art worlds, the art produced at Kettuki falls under the genre of “Outsider Art.” Esa explains that Outsider Art encompasses “all art made outside the ‘normal’ [culturally acceptable] art world.” This genre includes naivismi, or naïve art, mentioned in the introduction to this section on Finland. Naivismi also includes work by artists with mental illness or intellectual disabilities, which is the focus of the sourcebook.
Kettuki’s third and final aim is to become a gathering place for diverse groups of individuals. The emphasis is on inclusion and mixing all segments of society, not on running segregated programs. Its doors are open to anyone who wishes to come together for creative pursuits—people with and without disabilities, students and professional artists, young and old. International collaboration is another prominent theme of Kettuki’s networking mission. In June 2011 Kettuki printed its first newsletter in English. Exhibits of works by Kettuki artists have been shown in places such as Venice and Tuscany. Further, the sourcebook Loytoja, mentioned above, is published in Finnish and English, and intended for international circulation.

As you can see from the artwork below, Kettuki artists have captured an honesty and vibrancy that has a universally humanistic appeal. Further information about events, exhibitions, literature, and networking, as well as other works by Kettuki artists, appear on Kettuki’s website.
Summary

This article has described several agencies and approaches in the United Kingdom, Costa Rica, and Finland that use recreation for therapeutic outcomes. Commonalities exist among the various methods as well as some unique differences.

A common theme among the approaches is the intent to improve the quality of life of individuals with disabilities through recreation involvement, as well as to encourage their active involvement in society. From Whizz-Kidz in London, to accessible ecolodges in Costa Rica, to Clubhouse Näsinkulma in Finland, a fundamental belief exists that people with disabilities have the inalienable right to the same opportunities for community participation as all citizens. Beyond this, the approaches utilize personal and societal resources to enhance quality of life and community involvement. Person-centered models of empowerment are followed, a range of recreational opportunities is available, and buildings are increasingly accessible. These approaches mirror the models of normalization, community inclusion, empowerment, and increased accessibility that also exist in the United States.

Another commonality, especially evident between Costa Rica and Finland, is the emphasis placed on the natural world as essential to the human spirit. The people of Costa Rica value their natural resources and biodiversity as their chief national treasure, to the extent that they have abolished their army to free resources to conserve ecosystems and improve quality of life. Their National Tourism Board has prioritized environmental stewardship and sustainability through their CST and Blue Flag programmes. Further, the country supports involvement by tourists with disabilities through their accessibility law, Ley N° 7600. Similarly, in Finland, nature is at the heart of national identity and character. And the connection of the Finnish people with the physical landscape extends organically to their ways of life, modes of creative expression, and therapeutic practices and environments.

It is perhaps from the distinctly unique approaches these countries offer that we in the United States have the most to learn. The United Kingdom’s comprehensive approach to inclusion, as exemplified by Scope, encompasses the entire lifespan and reaches systematically across education, employment, housing, and community participation, including leisure and recreation. If a similar coordinated process of inclusion existed in the United States, the empowerment, involvement, and quality of life of citizens with disabilities would be strengthened enormously.

Unique to Costa Rica is its international model of sustainable tourism practices. The government provides training, technical expertise, and funding for local communities to develop ecotourism ventures that both preserve natural environments and support local communities. If a similar national policy of sustainability were implemented in the United States, not only would the economies of tourist destinations be bolstered, the surrounding natural environments would be preserved. Further, people would grow more in touch with nature, which could assist in reversing the current trend of nature deficit disorder experienced by children and society at large (Louv, 2008).

Finland, too, is unique in how nature is such an essential element of whom people are and what they do. Also unique are their many innovative and artistic therapeutic practices, which produce
healing outcomes, stimulate creativity, and add to the quality of life of individuals with disabilities—practices such as the use of multisensory environments, Figurenotes, empowering photography, textile and carpentry workshops, and the pursuit of art as a career choice. This widespread appreciation and use of artistic pursuits reflects a society where art is seen as vital to human flourishing and, rather than reserving artistic endeavors for those imbued with “talent,” art is considered a common leisure activity. While therapeutic artistic pursuits are certainly available for people in the United States, they are not nearly so plentiful or obviously valued. In fact, art programs are often among the first to be cut when funding is scarce. Expanding recreational offerings in the arts would give many more options for participation and for therapeutic outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

At a recent exhibition of photographs from Miina Savolainen’s book, The Loveliest Girl in the World, an appreciative observer exclaimed, “I hope this project doesn’t remain unique in the world!” (Savolainen, 2010, p. 175). Likewise, this is my hope—that you are inspired to learn more about the approaches presented in this article and encouraged to adopt them in your own practice and communities!

References


