

Icehearts Finland

Background, Practices and Research

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Background, Practices and Research

In this presentation we talk:

- Icehearts Finland (NGO): Background and Icehearts Social Mentoring Model.
- Practices of Iceheart's work - What mentors do.
- About the importance of research to Icehearts model



Background

- Icehearts Finland is a preventive child protection organization that was founded in 1996. Its aim is to prevent children's social exclusion, provide social support, increase well-being and supplement public services.
- The organization was founded as a social sports club for children in a vulnerable position and social problems, but very quickly the work expanded to also include children's families, school and social welfare services etc.
- Long-term and comprehensive support of children in need of social support became the basis of the Icehearts model: One mentor, 12 years, group of 15-25 children from same area, holistic support in all areas of life (school, leisure time activities, family and services).
- Such support made it possible for children suffering from social problems to function in their own environment, attend school, participate in hobbies and live at home.
- The Icehearts model has received several national and international recognitions. In 2021, the European Commission named the model a "good practice" in child protection, and in 2022, the Commission granted 5 million euros for spreading the model in the EU.



Background

- At the turn of the millennium, there was one group of children involved in the Icehearts activity. Ten years later there were five groups, of which 3 in the Helsinki region and one in Ulvila. At the end of the 2010s, there were already more than 40 groups in several cities. In 2023, there are 70 groups in 14 cities. In the 2020s, the number of children involved has risen to over a thousand.
- The Icehearts model is implemented in cooperation with municipalities. The municipality recognizes the need for social support for children in a certain area and funds the establishment of the Icehearts group. Icehearts Finland recruits a mentor who commits to work for 12 years.
- The mentor goes around preschools in the area and chooses the children for the group together with the municipality's experts. The group starts its activities in the same fall, when the children go to school. The size of the group increases during the first few years, and in the fourth year of operation there are 15-25 children.
- The mentor supports the children in school lessons, organizes afternoon activities, helps with homework and organizes hobbies for the children. The educator is an educational partner for the parents and promotes the child's affairs in the services.
- “The aim of the Icehearts work is to comprehensively support the growth and development of Icehearts children so that the children of the target group grow into full-fledged members of society, capable and competent individuals. The kind of adults that the Icehearts children and young people themselves want to become and grow up to be” (Salasuo & Vartiamäki 2023).



WORKING ELEMENTS ON THE FIELD

- **School work:**
 - present in schoolwork
 - In the classroom with children
 - Deep coworking with teachers
- **Afternoon activities:**
 - Approx 3 first years
 - Same environment (school)
 - Safe place to spend time
- **Hobby**
 - All kinds of sport / art /outdoor activities
 - Create an an active lifestyle
 - individual support



Family work

- strong relationship with families
- educational partnership
- advisor

Network

- we cooperate with all parties that help the child
- networking makes work easier



Iceheart

HOME



- HOME
- SCHOOL
- PRESCHOOL
- SOCIAL SERVICES HEALTH CENTRE
- POLICE

Supporting the child

COMMUNITY HOBBY TEAM SPORT

TRUSTWORTHY Educator

understands the big picture PROFESSIONAL

DIPLOMA

No one is left behind

6-18y



Wherever the child needs us, we are there

ONE TEAM



50000 € EXPENSES PER YEAR

2.8 million € NET SAVINGS

PRESCHOOL

Importance of knowledge and research

- Since the 2010s, the Icehearts model has been developed in close cooperation with academic researchers. In 2015-2016, a sociologist Mirka Smolej worked in the organization and wrote an "educator's manual" based on his observations.
- In 2015, the first follow-up study on the operation also started, when the Institute of Health and Welfare started a 12-year research project.
- In 2019, another 13-year follow-up study was launched at the Institute of Health and Welfare to investigate the cost-effectiveness of the model.
- More than 50 bachelor and master theses have been written on the Icehearts model and two dissertations on the subject are in progress (School work and mental health).
- 2022 and 2023 Icehearts Finland recruited two youth researchers to strengthen research expertise.
- An important "secret" to the success of the Icehearts model is an open approach to research and the readiness to develop activities based on the researched information.
- According to research, comprehensiveness, long-term duration, the permanence of the same mentor, and sufficiently frequent meetings between the mentor and the child create a solid framework for social support (e.g. Lakind, Eddy & Zell 2014; Eddy & Schumer 2016).
- Within this framework, the Icehearts-model and its details are constantly developed and modified based on new research information.



**Thank you very much for your
interest
www.icehearts.fi**

