

Generalist Youth Information Services in Finland in 1997

The attached pages constitute the chapter concerning **Finland** which is part of a 17-country study completed in 1997. Each chapter provides a summary of the situation in the country at the end of 1997 concerning generalist youth information and counselling, and the methods and structures involved in its organisation and distribution.

This study was conducted by the **European Youth Information and Counselling Agency** (ERYICA), to which all the author organisations belong as “Member Organisations” or as “Co-operating Organisations”. Accordingly, the study is limited to those countries where in 1996-97 there existed functioning networks of generalist youth information centres and services which were co-operating with ERYICA.

The 17 chapters of this study, in separate English and French versions, can be consulted on the ERYICA Internet site (“www.eryica.org” - see the section “Documents”, then “1997 Study”). Each file, which is in Word 2.0 for Windows / PC (varying between 4 and 20 pages in length), can also be downloaded from the site.

More recent information about each ERYICA national partner, its activities and its network can also be found on the ERYICA Internet site:

- a) **current addresses of national partners**: under “Discover ERYICA”, then “Members”, then “Country”
- b) **links to Internet sites of national partners**: under “Discover SERVICES”, then “Web-sites of ERYICA Partners”
- c) (when the organisation co-ordinates a network) **links to a list of addresses of regional or local centres**: under “Discover ERYICA”, then “Members”, then “Country”.

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FINLAND

INTRODUCTION

Youth information of the "generalist" kind is a relatively recent concept in Finland. The first such youth information centre was established in Helsinki in 1984, and at present there are 16 centres in the country. In addition, there are some 100 information "points" where young people have access to the National Youth Data-bank. This is an Internet-based youth information service provided by the Finnish Alliance for Youth Co-operation (Allianssi), which is the body which co-ordinates generalist youth information at the national level.

From the very beginning it was quite clear that the number of traditional youth information centres would be more limited in Finland than in many European countries, for two reasons. First, as cities and towns are relatively small in Finland and the distances long (5 million inhabitants in an area which is two-thirds the size of France), a large number of young people living in remote areas are often a long way from the nearest youth information centre. Second, the high standards of the youth services in general (youth clubs, youth organisations, municipal youth work, etc.) and the range of effective specialised information services for young people (careers guidance, social welfare, travelling, etc.) means that there is less of a need for a specific system of generalist youth information structures than in other parts of Europe.

AIMS AND PHILOSOPHY

There is no national youth information charter in Finland but the centres have always respected very largely the same professional principles which have been adopted by youth information services in other countries. Most of the centres concentrate on providing information to meet the needs expressed by young people; only a few also provide counselling in specific spheres.

In 1994, by signing the European Youth Information Charter, adopted by the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA), the Finnish centres adopted the principles of this Charter, which to a large extent reflected the methods and principles which they had used until that time.

The information for this text has been provided by the Finnish Alliance for Youth Co-operation (Allianssi), which is a service organisation co-ordinating youth information at the national level:

ALLIANSSI
Olympiastadion, Eteläkaarre,
FIN-00250 Helsinki
☎ (358+9) 348.24.22
Fax: (358+9) 49.12.90

Text updated: December 1997

GOVERNMENT POLICY ON YOUTH INFORMATION

At the national level, youth work is one of the responsibilities of the Ministry of Education. In 1991, this Ministry issued a series of recommendations in the field of youth information, based on decisions of the European Conferences of Youth Ministers in the framework of the Council of Europe. In these recommendations, the Ministry encouraged the Municipalities in Finland to set up youth information centres and other information services for young people.

The Ministry of Education also gives financial support to Allianssi for its work as National Co-ordinator in the field of youth information. Particular emphasis is given to the development of electronic information services, such as the National Youth Data-Bank consulted directly by young people, and "Pro Youth", an information service for youth workers. The Ministry also supports general youth work under-taken in the Municipalities, one part of which is youth information.

LEGAL STATUS AND FINANCING OF CENTRES

In most cases, local generalist youth information centres are managed and financed by Municipalities and constitute part of their youth work structures. Most of the staff are employed by the Youth Office of the Municipality, and the use of volunteers is not very common. The number of full-time staff working in the youth information centres at present is around 50 persons.

All the local centres belong to the national network co-ordinated by Allianssi but are completely autonomous and are governed by their respective municipal youth work authorities.

In addition to the centres, there are about 100 youth information points in municipal libraries, youth clubs, schools, etc., throughout the country, where young people can obtain access free of charge to the electronic services organised by Allianssi in collaboration with the local centres. These "points" are financed and administered by the organisations in which they are located.

Profile of Finnish Network

National Co-ordinating Body:

Allianssi - Finnish Alliance for Youth Co-operation

Network:

- Allianssi (national resource and co-ordinating unit)
- 16 Information Centres
- 100 Information Points

Legal Status:

Allianssi is a non-governmental non-profit organisation recognised by the Ministry of Education.

Most local centres are administered by their Local Authority.

Information points may be structures linked to municipal services (such as libraries) or associations.

Number of Information Workers Employed in Network:

Around 50 salaried employees

Responsible Governmental Body:

Ministry of Education (national level)

NATIONAL CO-ORDINATION

The national service in the field of generalist youth information is organised and administered by the Finnish Alliance for Youth Co-operation (Allianssi). In addition to youth information, Allianssi is responsible for many other activities in the youth field, such as youth exchanges, youth work training, and youth research; it also administers the Finnish Youth Card, and functions as the National Youth Council. A service organisation which is governed by representatives of youth organisations and municipal youth workers, Allianssi is the Finnish member of ERYICA.

In the field of youth information, the primary role of Allianssi is to produce services for the local centres, such as guides, brochures and other materials, but above all the two electronic services already mentioned: **National Youth Data-bank**, and **Pro Youth**. Allianssi is also responsible for promoting the concept of youth information in Finland, for representing Finnish youth information in ERYICA and for organising the participation of local centres in international co-operation activities.

Allianssi has a **Committee on Youth Information** which brings together the representatives of local centres and other relevant bodies. These gatherings offer the local centres an opportunity to meet and to discuss important youth information matters. Allianssi also organises training courses for the staff of local centres. All the local centres and Allianssi use a common logo in their youth information activities.

NATIONAL YOUTH DATA-BANK

It was decided some ten years ago that, in order to reach as many young people in Finland as possible, an electronic Youth

Data-Bank should be developed. This data-bank was created in 1988, and it is now accessible either via Internet or through an on-line Bulletin Board System. In the data-bank there is information on a wide range of subjects which concern young people, such as housing, education, employment, personal relationships and sexuality, travelling in Finland abroad, and social security. It also contains a calendar of events aimed at young people, several interactive services, files of local information, etc.

In 1995, two Ministries launched a project in which they gave financial assistance to more than 60 municipal libraries which wished to develop youth information services. The Ministry of Education provided the libraries with grants so that they could purchase the necessary technical equipment and support services (computers, modems, user fees for the Youth Data-bank, training, etc.), and the Ministry of Labour placed unemployed youngsters with computer skills for between 6 and 24 months in libraries to give free guidance to citizens so that they could access services like the Youth Data-bank. Many of these libraries have since developed their own local on-line files for young people in the Data-bank.

National Youth Data-bank

Areas of information:

Housing, environment, education, love and sex, social security, travel, studying and working abroad, military or alternative service, employment, consumer and legal rights, local information, health, participation, and multi-cultural activities.

Language: Finnish

Address: <http://www.alli.fi/nutipa>

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND YOUTH INFORMATION STRUCTURES

The role of the national government in youth information is to support financially the national co-ordination and to encourage the Municipalities to create information centres and services. It has also given special grants for specific projects, campaigns and training activities. The Finnish government fully recognises the autonomy of youth information services. It subsidises the Municipalities for general youth work but it is up to each Municipality to decide the kind of services which it wants to develop.

The local councils of the Municipalities and their youth work sections therefore are the bodies which decide autonomously what kind of information services they wish to create for their young people. All the existing centres are administered and financed by local Municipalities. The centres provide local and national authorities with information about trends and new issues which young people raise.

Each local centre which is admitted into the national network by Allianssi's Committee on Youth Information is entitled to use the common logo; in return it undertakes to respect the principles of the European Youth Information Charter.

SERVICES WITH AN INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

Allianssi has on its Internet server a number of information services with an international dimension. These include "**Travellin' Light**", an annual calendar of cultural events in many European countries which are of interest to young people, "**Silvuplé**" (an information and answering service for young people about the European Union), and "**Pro Youth**

International" (mainly for youth workers) which is a service containing information about a wide range of youth structures and services in Europe. Both these services have been developed with financial support from the European Commission. In addition, Allianssi hosts the home-pages of ERYICA which provide information about the Agency as well as links to the home-pages of youth information structures in a number of European countries.

Silvuplé

Information and enquiry answering service for young people about the European Union.

Language: Finnish

Address: <http://www.alli.fi/silvuple>

Travellin' Light

Area of information:

Calendar of cultural events in European countries of interest to young people

Language: English

Address: <http://www.alli.fi/events>

TYPICAL SERVICES OFFERED BY CENTRES

Most centres concentrate on providing information in response to the questions raised by their users; only a few also provide counselling services. The areas of information available are very similar in all the centres, and they try to cover all the fields which concern the everyday life of

young people. Some centres also provide, in accordance with their resources, some additional services in such fields as housing, employment, etc. The focus of the information is always related to the needs of local young people.

The users of the centres are usually between 13 and 24 years of age, but parents, teachers, students, youth workers, etc. also make use of the services of the centres. In many places, school classes arrange a visit to the local centre as a means of making young people familiar with the centre and its services.

The information is provided free of charge. The hours that centres are open vary from one centre to another, according to their resources and the needs of local people.

PRO YOUTH

Areas of information:

Training, research, legal information, youth work in Finland, financing, methods of youth work, international youth work, electronic bulletin board, addresses, conversation channels.

Language: Finnish

Address: <http://www.alli.fi/proyouth>

PRO YOUTH INTERNATIONAL

Areas of information:

Youth work structures, mobility, European Union, Council of Europe, research, partner finding, country information, regional and inter-regional co-operation, links to youth-related Internet home pages in Europe.

Language: Mainly in English

Address: <http://www.alli.fi/euro>

ASSESSING THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

As the needs of information of young people differ very much depending on the place where they live, some centres have made surveys of the information needs of young people in their area. The surveys have been conducted either by interviewing young people personally or through questionnaires. The youth information centres also take into consideration other relevant factors like the physical distances to other youth-related services, the educational level of the young people, the needs of religious and other minority groups, and migration. Based on these surveys, some centres have identified specific areas of information in which they need to specialise, such as housing problems. For example, in Oulu, because of the large number of university students in the city, the youth information centre has specialised in the issues of studying, training and working abroad.

The youth information workers in the centres also get a great deal of useful information from their clients about seasonal information needs, such as the demand for summer jobs during the spring.

Allianssi has also undertaken, in co-operation with the Association of Finnish Local Authorities, a major survey of the living conditions of young people in Finland in which their information needs were also studied. The results of this study confirmed the importance of these needs.

CO-OPERATION WITH OTHER SERVICES

As most youth information centres in Finland operate with a small number of staff and low budgets, it is essential to create effective working relationships with a range of relevant organisations in the locality. Most centres work in close co-

operation with the youth, sport and cultural offices of the Municipalities, but also with many other partners such as schools, police, youth organisations, employment offices, social and health authorities and other youth information centres. The ways in which this networking functions can be affected by the different local situations and the needs/problems of young people but, in general, good co-operation with other services is an important requirement for a centre which seeks to offer a service of high quality.

Specialised Information Services for Young People

*In addition to the **generalist** youth information services described here, young people in Finland have access to **specialised** information services in a number of fields. These include:*

a) Careers Guidance and Training

In the national network of Employment offices.

b) Studying & Working Abroad, Youth Mobility and European Opportunities

CIMO (Centre for International Mobility)
P.O. Box 343 (Hakaniemenkatu 2)
FIN-00531 Helsinki
☎ (358+9) 77.47.70.33
Fax: (358+9) 77.47.70.64
Internet: <http://www.cimo.fi>

c) Psychological Assistance

Psychologists in schools.

d) Housing

NUORISOASUNTOLIITTO
Hämeentie 21, FIN-00530 Helsinki
☎ (358+9) 774.0280
Fax: (358+9) 77.40.28.11
Internet: <http://www.taikalyhty.fi/nal>

Specialised Information Services

(continued)

e) Sexuality & Family Planning

MANNERHEIMIN
LASTENSUOJELULIITTO
2 Linja 17, FIN-00530 Helsinki
☎ (358+9) 34.81.15.00
Fax: (358+9) 34.81.15.08
Helpline for Young People: 9800-20400

VAESTOLIITTO
Iso-Roobertinkatu 20-22 A
FIN-00120 Helsinki
☎ (358+9) 22.80.50
Fax: (358+9) 612.12.11

SETA (Gay and Lesbian Organisation)
Hietalahdenkatu 2 B 16
FIN-00180 Helsinki
☎ (358+9) 612.32.33
Fax: (358+9) 612.32.66
Internet: <http://www.seta.fi>

f) Prevention of Drug Abuse

IRTI HUUMEISTA ry
Mariankatu 13 A 1, FIN-00170 Helsinki
☎ (358+9) 66.10.01
Fax: (358+9) 66.10.19
Helpline: 0203-22388 (6am to 9pm)

g) AIDS

AIDS-TUKIKESKUS
Hietaniemenkatu 5, 4.krs
FIN-00100 Helsinki
☎ (359+9) 454.20.70
Fax: (358+9) 45.42.07.60.

HOW PLURALISM AND QUALITY ARE GUARANTEED

The information offered in the local centres and provided by the national co-ordination is always prepared with respect for the pluralism and the accuracy of the information. It is selected from all possible

sources and it is presented in a form which is easy for young people to understand. Some centres produce their own publications (brochures, magazines) to present local services. At the present time, however, there is no common system used by the local centres for the classification of information or documentation.

Professional training is an important means of guaranteeing and improving the quality of youth information services. Most of the workers in the Finnish youth information centres are qualified youth workers, trained as such and aware of the principles of youth information work. In most institutes where training for youth workers is conducted there are specialised courses in youth information. Allianssi also provides additional training for youth information workers. Finnish youth information workers have participated in European seminars and training courses organised by ERYICA, as well as in study visits for youth information workers, which are organised in the framework of European Union's Youth for Europe programme or under bilateral agreements in the youth field which Finland has signed with around ten countries.