

# Joy of friendship

## The Volunteer Visiting Service

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# Loneliness - a silent catastrophe

- 200 000 Finns are almost always or always lonely
- Some of the basic human needs are social contacts and respect
- Emotional loneliness dramatically reduces QOL
- Also a risk factor for cancer, anxiety, dementia, high BMI and many others



The strategic objective of the Finnish Red Cross; to strengthen health and safety

We will promote health, safety and well-being of people by reducing loneliness and improving everyday security

For this we have developed different volunteer friend visiting services and group activities

# The objectives of the Volunteer Visiting Service

- Provide opportunities for social interaction and support, especially for those who are at risk of being left alone and need to interact with others.
- The Volunteer visiting service is based on regional and local needs. It strengthens people's well-being and increases the sense of community.



People don't always know about the work we do

What people remember?



Also many other forms of help are provided,  
**Voluntary Visiting Service** among them reaching  
**30 000 persons / year**

# Friendship conqueres everything – also loneliness

- Activity begun in 1950's when volunteers visited people in hospitals
- Diverse services nowadays where everyone can be involved



Katja Lösönen

# Voluntary friend service at the moment

- In 350 Finnish Red Cross branches
- Around 8 800 voluntary friends, supporting around 30 000 persons
- 98 trainers in social services
- In groups or one to one
- Long-term or short-term

## Groups and activities for

- Elderly, youth, immigrants, family caretakers, people living in institutions, prisoners

# Local organization





# Volunteers role

- A volunteer friend visitors uses time based on their own availability
- The activities include for example going for a coffee, theater or walk
- A voluntary friend visitor can also accompany a person to the doctor etc.
- For some the volunteer can be the only contact to the outside world



Reijo Hietanen

# Important to remember

- Being a voluntary friend is based on a free will. Volunteers can stop any time they want.
- Voluntary friend is not a medical professional or a housekeeper. Volunteers don't generally clean, give treatments, take care of money etc.
- Volunteers are not "always available". Meeting times are scheduled.
- Volunteer is trustworthy -> meetings are confidential and promises are kept.



" It is important that there is someone to whom you can talk, someone who listens."

Terttu Sinipuro, volunteer friend visitor, Tampere.



Petteri Kivimäki

"I also have my own grandchildren but they live far away in Varkaus. As a voluntary granny, I can keep in contact with the children's world.

Marjo Nissinen, volunteer, Varkaus



Petteri Kivimäki

“We have visited the art museum, had a picnic, gone to the beach, flea market or for a walk, we send SMS messages and do the same things I do with my other friends”

Emma Koivuranta, 16, volunteer friend visitor, Oulu



# New activities

- **Koko Suomi – leikkii** project together with the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare to strengthen the culture of playing from one generation to another
- "Living life to the fullest as a pensioner" – project as part of the Finland's Slot Machine Association's Active Age funding program
- Training retiring people to participate in voluntary activities

# Future challenges – marketing?

- Rising the number of volunteers & people receiving help by 20 % in two years time
- Recruiting more volunteer visitors – especially male visitors
- Making the loneliness issue and FRC Volunteer Visiting Service better known to general public in order to:
  - reach the lonely people
  - inform the general public about the work that FRC does for the Finnish citizens



# Future challenges – marketing?

- All marketing should start from the product – does the product satisfy volunteers need?
- Is the whole path covered from the first contact to actually working as a volunteer?



- How to advertise service so diverse?





# Future challenges – marketing?

- There is a strong social stigma connected to being lonely
- When marketing the service for new volunteers it is important to understand that also the “lonely” reach the message
- Reducing the social stigma of loneliness should be part of the marketing plan no matter who is the target

Something extra to consider:

Voluntary friend service online –  
how to develop?

Contacting the ones who find it impossible to  
meet face to face



# Donate your time and become a friend

- All kinds of voluntary friend visitor are needed: different ages, men and women
- You can participate in the activities with your family members
- Trainings are organized around Finland
- More information: [redcross.fi](http://redcross.fi) or [punainenristi.fi](http://punainenristi.fi)



Petteri Kivimäki

Please join!



**Inka Porttila**

