ICEHEARTS
Sport-based early support program for children with greater psychosocial needs

Kaija Appelqvist-Schmidlechner
Senior researcher, PhD

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH AND WELFARE, FINLAND
Non-completed education or educational underachievement is associated with various problems in later life (mental health problems, alcohol abuse, ill-health, criminality).

Services are too fragmented and do not always meet the needs of children and families.

Poor socio-emotional adjustment in childhood increases the risk of mental health problems, risk-taking behavior, educational failure and involvement in crime in later life.

Already one positive child-adult relationship built on trust can protect the child from problems in later life.

Engagement in productive and health activities support positive development of children and youth.

Every child needs a sense of belonging.
Situation in Finland

• Most of Finnish children are doing well, however…
  – One of ten children lives in a poor family. The rate is three times higher than in 1995.
  – 5-10% of children and young people have behavioral disorders. The rate is five times higher among boys than among girls.
  – About 20% of the families are single-parent families.
  – The rate of custody among 0-20 years-old children was 1,4% in 2015 (17 664 children)
    → Costs 90 000 euro / year / child.
• The Programme to address child and family services (LAPE, 2016-2018) is one the key projects of Finnish government to promote preventive work in all child and family services.
• Public services need to co-operate more with actors in NGO-sector
Icehearts provides comprehensive and long-term support in the school and leisure time for the child and his/her family & co-operate with other sectors.
Positive attention and feedback

Adult-child relationship built on trust

Social inclusion through team sports

Co-operation with school and other services

Long-term support

Positive attention and feedback

Adult-child relationship built on trust
• Running in Finland since **1996** in **10** municipalities all across Finland

• Today over **500** children and **29** permanent teams / Icehearts-mentors are involved in the programme (28 boy teams, 1 girl team)

• Maintained by NGO-organisation Icehearts ry and funded by Finland’s Slot Machine Organisation (RAY), municipalities and donations
  – Costs of running one team (15-25 children) about 50 000 euro / year

• The program has gained several awards nationally and internationally, for example
  – the European Crime Prevention Award Most Innovative Project 2011,
  – Unicef Child Rights Award 2008, and
  – European Prize for Social Integration through Sport 2016.
Target group and aim

• The core aim of the programme is to provide long-term professional support for children (particularly for boys) who, at age six, have been recognised by social workers and daycare personnel as being at risk of marginalisation.

• Common background of participants: Boys with
  – Problem behaviour and socio-emotional difficulties
  – Learning difficulties
  – Parents in need for support in parenting
  – Single-parent family background
  – Financial difficulties in the family
  – Client of municipal child protection services
  – Immigrant background
Programme activities

• A single group of 10-25 children in need of support is assembled at pre-school age, age 6-7.

• The Icehearts team is led by mentors (professional trained in youth work/education/social work) providing sport activities as well as support at school and home for a period of 12 years.
  – The mentors are working in the school during the first years (grades 1-3), after that the programme consists of after-school / leisure time activities.

• The mentors co-operate with the parents, teachers and professionals of municipal services (for example mental health services, social services, child protection), and participate in meetings with other services when needed.

• The approach is underpinned by a set of values aimed at providing equal opportunities to all children.
What are the mentors doing in the programme?

- Giving attention
- Giving positive feedback
- Setting healthy boundaries, rules and routines
- Supporting the formation of peer relations
- Helping to deal with disappointments
- Motivating for physical activity
- Supporting the school work
- Supporting to having sports equipment
- Providing comfort and care
- Discussing with the parents about their child and supporting their parenting
- Motivating and encouraging to take part in different activities
- Solving conflicts between the children
- Participating in the meetings with other services
- Helping with school homework
- Acting as a sportsteam coach

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What we know about the benefits and the impacts of the programme?
Two ongoing studies on Icehearts by National Institute for Health and Welfare

1. Qualitative retrospective study on impacts of Icehearts programme (2015-2016)
2. Longitudinal study on Icehearts participants and perceived impacts of the programme (2015-2028)
Unpublished results: Päivi Känkänen, Jenni Wessman & Jonne Silonsaari

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Results from longitudinal study: Impacts of the Icehearts-programme after the first school year assessed by the Icehearts-mentors

Unpublished results: Kaija Appelqvist-Schmidlecher & Marjatta Kekkonen

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The strengths and possibilities of the programme

- Focus on early support
- Stable, long-lasting support
- Promote social inclusion, sense of belonging with the help of team sports
- Co-operation between home, school and different services
- Potential to individual, client-oriented, tailor-made support
- Support for schools and teachers in daily school work
- One alternative tool in child protection
- Support social integration of immigrants
- Potential to prevent school drop outs, custody, social exclusion, substance abuse, criminality....
  - Cost saving for municipalities
TAKE-HOME MESSAGE:

Children at risk for marginalization need comprehensive, long-term support and the sense of social inclusion.

Icehearts provides these through team sports and a positive child-adult relationship.

Thank you!

Kaija.appelqvist@thl.fi