



# The Captivating Culture Kids

Description of the Culture  
Kids service in Helsinki

Helsinki



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### Description of the Culture Kids service in Helsinki

Culture Kids offers every child born in 2020 or later and living in Helsinki the opportunity of being sponsored by one or more cultural organizations. The sponsors are determined by the child's year of birth. The sponsors invite the child and their close adult to at least two age-appropriate and free-of-charge events every year until the child's age group starts school.

Children are invited to join Culture Kids through the maternity and child health clinics.

The goal of the service is to strengthen the well-being of families and children through the proven effects of culture and by providing opportunities for families to meet people at the same stage of life. For the art, culture and sports organizations acting as sponsors, the program offers a platform that promotes cooperation. It is also hoped that the activity will promote the togetherness of city dwellers and combat the segregation of residential areas and resident groups.

The Culture Kids concept is based on two previous projects of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, which involved children born in 2000 and 2012. Participating families gave the activity very high marks and evaluated it, e.g. as having strengthened the family's well-being and increased interest in cultural activities.

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# Content

<b>At first .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Culture Kids – Action with impact <i>Tuula Haavisto</i> .....	4
<b>For children, families, cultural sponsors and the whole city .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Culture Kids promotes joy, community, cooperation and equity .....	6
Giving thanks, Marianne and Luna <i>Marianne Turtio</i> .....	10
Culture is the gym and playground of a toddler’s brain <i>Minna Huotilainen</i> .....	11
A new kind of partnership between arts institutions and the city <i>Mari Männistö</i> .....	12
Mash and circuses <i>Timo Riitamaa</i> .....	13
In the future, I hope to see a Finland where every child is proud of their own background and feels welcome <i>Hamdi Geddi</i> .....	14
Culture- and ideology-aware cultural activity strengthens the well-being of families <i>Marja Laine</i> .....	15
Culture Kids brings a cultural perspective to the activities of maternity and child health clinics <i>Leena Marila, Tiia Konttinen and Monica Lindberg</i> .....	16
The new museum grows together with the Culture Kids <i>Hanna Kapanen and     Arja-Liisa Kaasinen</i> .....	17
Many become one with the help of culture <i>Pasi Saukkonen</i> .....	18
It takes a whole village to raise a child... <i>Hanna-Mari Peltomäki</i> .....	19
<b>Projects of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra on the background of Culture Kids.....</b>	<b>20</b>
Godchildren of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra 2000 <i>Helena Ahonen</i> .....	21
The content and pedagogical idea of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra's godchild concerts <i>Eve Alho, Satu Sopanen and Annika Kukkonen</i> .....	22
The Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra's Godchild Project enchanted and moved <i>Etta Partanen</i> .....	23
<b>Towards the future .....</b>	<b>24</b>
For everyone <i>Tommi Laitio</i> .....	25
<b>Description of the operating model of Culture Kids .....</b>	<b>26</b>
Administrative organization.....	27
Sponsors of Culture Kids .....	28
Financing .....	30
Connecting with families.....	31
Free-of-charge events, multidisciplinary cooperation and cultural responsibility enable equality .....	32
Co-development.....	34
Values and Step Marks of Culture Kids .....	36
Promoting diversity.....	42
Whose culture?.....	44
Sustainable development and children’s involvement in the development of activities .....	46
Achieving values - Measuring Stick and Bettering Observation .....	47
<b>About the authors.....</b>	<b>50</b>



# At first

## Culture Kids – Action with impact

Tuula Haavisto, Cultural director emerita of the City of Helsinki, who took the initiative to expand Culture Kids

Pairs of bright eyes widen in amazement when a tuba comes out - and what kind of sounds it makes! In the orchestra's workshops, you can play yourself, if not the tuba, then instruments that fit in a child's hands.

And how about the continuum from Yalla!-workshops to Kalevala workshops?! In Yalla!, the children got to try different Arabic instruments. One of them, the qanon (string) was just like a concert kantele. The reason became clear in the following Kalevala workshops: the string instrument has traveled through the centuries and even to Finland in Europe and is known as a kantele in our country. In these workshops, parents and children learn and realize together in many ways: by listening to stories and music, dancing, role-playing. The children have also been stroked with feathers when told about Lönnrot writing down stories with a quill pen - creating cultural experiences with all the senses.

Moments in the lives of young children, first personal contact with culture. These have been offered to 0-6-year-olds in Helsinki since 2000, when Helsinki was the European capital of culture. At the beginning, children born in 2000 and 2012 were adopted by the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra.

Since 2020, all children born in Helsinki have been offered the opportunity of immersing themselves in culture twice a year until they go to school. Different year groups have different cultural sponsors. There are actors from theaters, music institutions, circuses, art galleries, museums and other cultural heritage actors to libraries and representatives of sports culture.

Immersive cultural experiences are a counterweight to the digital and to the isolation and loneliness that threaten in the age of social media. The workshops focus on joint activities, not selfies! When working with living culture, you are closely involved in the real world, in the same space as the performer, presenter, museum object or other cultural phenomenon.

The project was properly primed. The values were formulated together and tightly linked to action. They are constantly returned to when new situations arise. Representatives of different cultural groups were also involved in creating the multiculturalism part. From the point of view of families, it is important that elements of their own culture can be recognized in the offering. Useful lessons have been learned from this part of the project for the participating cultural institutions.

In the brainstorming phase, we thought in particular about how to get families who are not familiar with cultural activities involved. It is particularly gratifying to read in the texts of this publication that many of the operating methods created for Culture Kids are usable for reaching new audiences also more broadly.

Culture Kids would not exist in its current scope without the two previous rounds carried out by the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra. The experience gained from them was a necessary condition for expansion. The orchestra had already come across a wide variety of situations that otherwise would not have been taken into account in the planning. It also shared its experience freely, thanks to Annika Kukkonen and the other members of the orchestra!

The success of Culture Kids did not come out of nowhere. Motivating dozens of actors over several years and creating and keeping the concept simple enough for families and participating institutions is a masterpiece of networking and background work. Thanks to project manager Ulla Laurio, producer Anna Rosendahl and the entire Helsinki city culture and leisure team, who put together this considerable puzzle! Likewise, thanks to all the other actors who came along, starting with the child health clinics - I hope and believe that they are just as much on the winning side of this initiative as the children and families. Necessary financial support has been received from the Jane and Aatos Erkko Foundation, a warm thank you for that!

Summa summarum: after reading the articles, information boxes and speech bubbles in this book, I can see that the concept has proven its functionality also in the broad version. Many goals have already been reached in these first years of the 2020s. It's no wonder that the Culture Kids idea is spreading to other cities as well. Finally, I'll throw in a bet on the future: it won't be long before the Culture Kids concept receives an international cultural award – and deservedly so.


# For children, families, cultural sponsors and the whole city



Self-expression, creativity and experientiality are significant for children's development. The Culture Kids operating model promotes the child's right to participate in all cultural and artistic life and offers suitable and equal opportunities for the youngest city dwellers in cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activities.

In September 2024, the city of Helsinki received the Child Friendly City recognition from UNICEF Finland.

Culture Kids actors have been involved not only in offering wonderful experiences, but also in developing their activities to be more accessible from the perspectives of families with different language and cultural backgrounds. In addition, they have also developed the participation of young children and its observation.

The time spent together, interaction and emotional experiences of a close adult and a child are valuable, and numerous cultural sponsors have made them possible - thank you for that. 


Pirjo Mattila

Development expert / Child Friendly City Coordinator,  
City of Helsinki



## Heard from the nurses of the Child health clinics:

The whole idea is WONDERFUL; parents like it and it's really nice to tell the parents of the newborn as a "gift". THANKS!

Very well received, thank you very much for the cooperation! The families have been very happy and have actually been waiting for this. 

Parents are usually very happy about the invitation, great thing!

# Culture Kids promotes joy, community, cooperation and equity

In spring 2024, around 70% of children born in 2020, 2021 and 2022 were registered as Culture Kids. More than 22% of the participants in the programme were speakers of non-native languages, a higher proportion than the population average. Family satisfaction with the events averages 4.6 out of 5. The programme is a partnership between the city, cultural operators and a foundation.

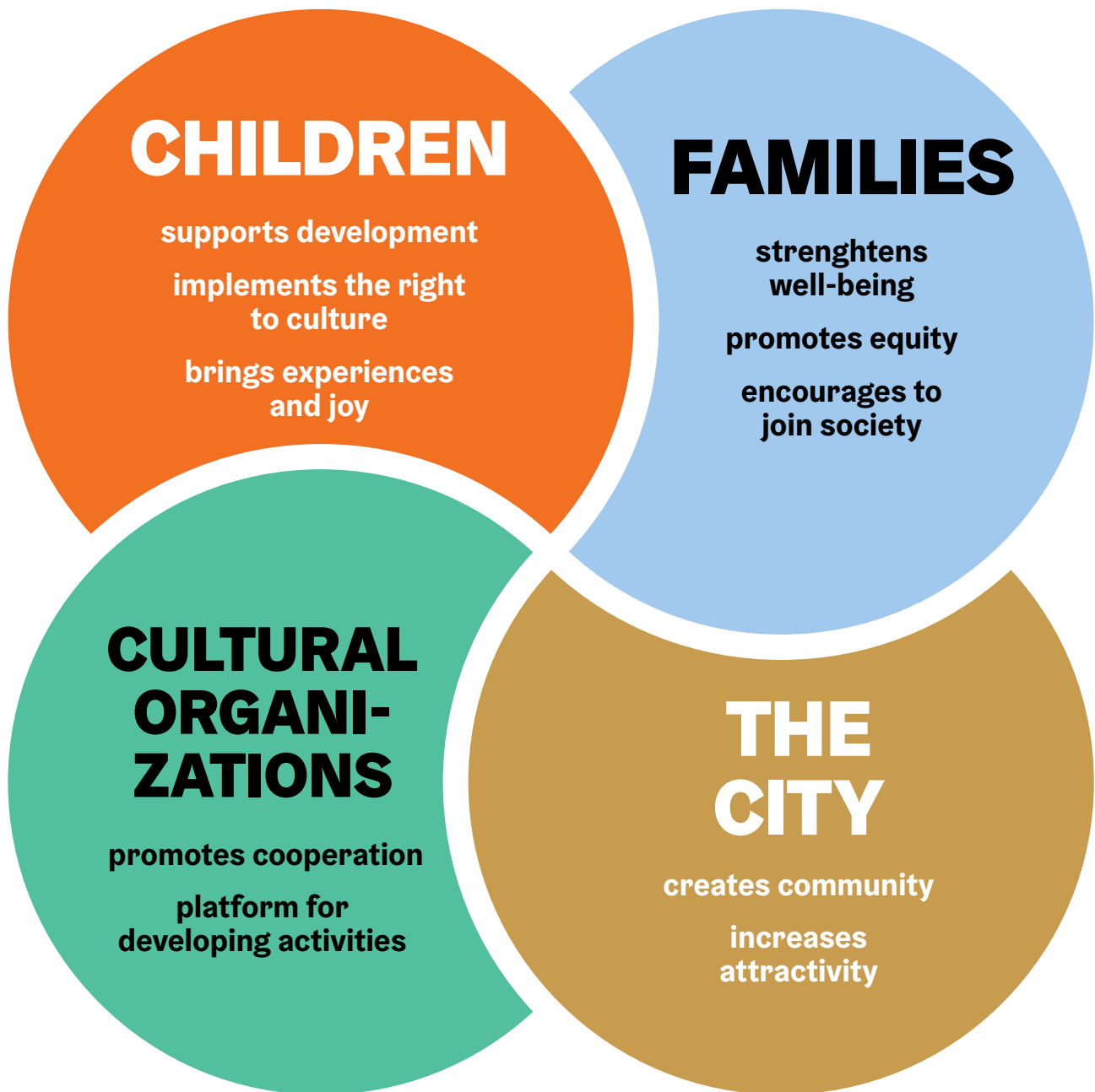
In 2024, when five out of the seven age groups are involved, a total of 880 Culture Kids events will have been organized, involving 21,146 Culture Kids with a close adult, i.e. a total of 42,292 people.

About operational costs and cost structure in chapter Financing on page 30.

## The impact of the activities is examined from the perspectives of children, families, sponsoring cultural organizations and the city

Culture Kids touches children, their families, the cultural organizations that sponsor them and the city as a whole. It implements the right of every child to arts and culture (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) and supports children's development through arts, culture and sport. It strengthens the well-being of families, promotes inclusion and equity and encourages families to seize the opportunities offered by the city. It promotes cooperation between the cultural operators involved and provides a platform for developing activities to better respond to the rapidly growing diversity of the city. At the city level, Culture Kids creates a sense of community that counteracts polarization and segregation and makes the city more attractive. And most importantly, Culture Kids offers children and adults shared experiences and joy.

In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) published a report (Fancourt & Finn 2019) that brought together more than 900 research publications on the impact of arts and culture on well-being. The report concludes that participation in artistic activities by either experiencing or creating art can prevent or even treat a wide range of physical and mental illnesses, and the WHO recommends ensuring access to and availability of diverse arts and culture services for all groups of people.



**Culture Kids is built on equity, impactful events and continuous development**

**Enabling equity**

The most important prerequisites for equality of families are that the Culture Kids activities are free of charge for families and that families are invited to participate at the child health clinics, which more than 99% of families with children visit regularly. Yet the quest for equity raises a myriad of other issues.

What kinds of cultural activities should be provided so that both old Helsinki residents who already know Helsinki as their home and new residents moving to the city from other parts of Finland or from abroad can embrace it? How do we break down socio-economic barriers? How can cultural events create a sense of community that counteracts segregation and polarization in a city that is becoming more diverse?

A shared online platform for all Culture Kids sponsors tracks the number of children registered as Culture Kids, their area of residence (postcode) and the languages spoken at home. The figures are

compared with the total number of children living in the area, the languages spoken and the socio-economic status of the area.

Although the proportion of Culture Kids whose families speak a language other than Finnish, Swedish or Sami is higher than in the rest of the population, it should be noted that the figure is very high in families where English or other languages of European origin are spoken and woefully low in families where Arabic or African languages are spoken. It can also be noted that the most affluent areas of the city have a high proportion of Culture Kids compared to lower income areas. In some average or above average income areas, more than 90% of children born in 2020 and beyond are registered as Culture Kids, compared to 40%, the lowest proportion, in the lowest income areas.

Discussions with families across Helsinki, when asked about barriers to participation, have highlighted the importance of perseverance and patience. Building trust and changing habits is slow and the process is a two-way street. Children and cultural organizations who meet each other with an open mind at Culture Kids events have an impact on each other. While cultural operators provide experiences for children, children change cultural organizations. The dialogue between different groups of people and different cultural operators continues. Although the activities do not yet seem to reach all families with children, it can be said that the conditions for real equality exist.

[More about enabling and promoting equality in chapter Free-of-charge events, multidisciplinary cooperation and cultural responsibility enable equality on page 32.](#)

## **A shared understanding of what quality is built on strengthens the impact of the Culture Kids events**

To support children's development, events must be of high quality and appropriate to the age and developmental stage of the children. They should strengthen the interaction between adult and child and provide ideas for creative activities after the events. The arts, culture and sport operators organizing the events have jointly developed and committed themselves to Values and Pedagogical Step Marks for the activities. These values serve as criteria against which the quality of the events can be assessed. [For the Values and Step Marks, see page 36.](#)

After each event, a feedback questionnaire is sent to the families involved. The average score has been 4.6/5 throughout the activity, indicating the success of the events. [More about the feedback survey in the chapter Connecting with families on page 31.](#)

In addition to the feedback, the quality of the events is also assessed through a method of Bettering Observation developed jointly by the Culture Kids actors. The cultural sponsors attend each other's events and observe the organization, content and reactions of the participants through a set of questions developed together. [Bettering Observation on page 47.](#)

## **Continuous development**

The Culture Kids service is a platform and a structure for arts, culture and sport operators to develop their activities together. By sharing their expertise, they all strengthen their knowledge of early childhood pedagogy. They will also find ever better ways to respond to the rapidly growing diversity of the city.

Each year, a series of co-development events are organized, the topics of which are chosen according to the interests of the actors and the broader phenomena of the city and society. The results of the co-development activities are summarized in written and visual form and shared among all sponsors.

As the children grow, the information and feedback they provide will also have an increasing impact on the development of the activities. The first Culture Kids, born in 2020, will be four years old in 2024!

[More information about co-development and jointly created documents in chapter Co-development on page 34. More about children's impact on the development of Culture Kids in chapter Sustainable Development and Children's involvement in the development of activities on page 46.](#)



**Cultural responsibility is taken into account in the events for Culture Kids.**

**All events are free of charge for families and are offered in different parts of Helsinki.**

**Culture Kids brings the well-being effects of culture to all families.**

# Giving thanks, Marianne and Luna

Marianne Turtio, mother of a Culture Kid born in 2021

I got the Culture Kids brochure from the Child health clinic when my current three-year-old was two weeks old. I immediately registered my child as a Culture Kid and we have been actively attending events since the beginning. Our sponsor is a group of theatres and we have been to performances all over Helsinki, e.g. at Vuotalo, Stoa, Q-Teatteri and Finnish National Theatre. Those moments have been memorable for us. I will forever remember my child's first performance at Puppet Theater Sampo. It was moving to watch how the baby followed the performance about the Pipu ball and marvelled at the musical world. At home, we played with the little ball we brought with us for many months, and the baby soon knew how to say "Pipu" herself.

I feel that through the visits, my child develops a special relationship with both theater groups and venues. I see that with Culture Kids, a lifelong relationship is created for the child not only with art, but also with the cultural sponsors.

When the Culture Kids activities end sometime, it is easy for us to continue going to familiar theaters. When my child is an adult herself, she can go to the same places without me.

I hope that everyone who organizes a sponsor activity understands how unique an opportunity this is not only for the family, but also for the cultural sponsors and the operators who provide the space.

For me and my child, Culture Kids events enable quality time spent together and the opportunity to really meet in the midst of hectic everyday life. My child and I usually go to eat before the show and talk about where we are going. It's wonderful to introduce your child to different places where you can experience culture. It's interesting to watch where her attention is focused, what excites her and what makes her eyes twinkle. It's wonderful to laugh together, hug when something makes her nervous and learn together how, with the help of art, you can learn to understand and deal with your own emotions.

As our latest performance, we have gone to see the Kuskit Company's performance about body awareness, Superbodies, at Q-Teatteri. It astounded me as a parent both artistically and educationally. Already in the lobby, we found literature about body esteem and children's books related to the topic, which we delved into while waiting for the show to start. The performance itself was insightful and made from the world of experience of a three-year-old. My child laughed and lived with the show. The show made it easy for us to discuss many educational issues at home. The program leaflet had information for the adult and a task for the child. The child could color the parts of the body in the picture where she liked to be touched green and the parts where she did not like to be touched with red. Through the task done together at our evening snack, I learned a lot about my child and her limits. This is a great example of how high-quality children's culture and art can strengthen both the relationship between a child and an adult and a broader understanding of the world.

When we go to see shows that my child enjoys, it encourages me to take her to other cultural events as well. She has become a really skilled theater-goer. It is through an activity like Culture Kids that we can invite new generations living in the city of Helsinki to create a lifelong relationship with art and culture.

It is wonderful that citizens of the city, regardless of their social and economic situation, are offered free and high-quality art experiences, so that no one has to miss out on experiencing art. I hope that as many families from different backgrounds as possible will join the activity. Theater and art unite and it would be wonderful to see the whole multicultural spectrum of families with children from Helsinki in the audience.

My three-year-old expressed our shared feeling after the last Culture Kids event: "I would like to give this one a star of praise!". In addition to the performance, I want this star of praise given by the child to reach the entire Culture Kids activity.

# Culture is the gym and playground of a toddler's brain

Minna Huotilainen, professor, University of Helsinki

When the first information about the impact of music on the brain was obtained in the 1990s, it started a whole new direction in brain research: everyone wanted to know how it was possible that playing music develops the brain so strongly. Three decades of careful research have shown that children's participation in a wide range of musical activities develops their ability to perceive and produce sounds and learn words, direct their attention, recognize and express their emotions, and cooperate with other children. Finnish music playschool is world famous, and in Finland children are taken to concerts and the door to musical experiences is opened for them. This is unique in the world - let's stick to it.

Other areas of culture have been studied less with brain research methods, but based on research we know that when working with culture, a child develops his visuomotor skills and his ability to cooperate. Expressing oneself, communicating one's uniqueness to others and bringing one's own idea to a joint project are important social skills for a child, and key skills for working life for us adults.

So it's no wonder that the Declaration of the Rights of the Child requires children to have the right to participate in culture. Culture is a platform for social discussion and ideas, and everyone should have the opportunity to participate in the development of society. However, culture is more than that - the long cultural tradition of human history extends from cave paintings and stories, songs and dances of stone age campfires to today's theatre, opera, art museum, library and concert.

As a nation, we exist when we have the sauna, works by Sibelius, Saariaho and Väinö Linna, but also the drawings, stories and dance videos of children born in the 2010s. When we include the child in the culture in a way that suits her, her thinking and world of experience becomes part of that chain of hundreds of generations, and she also gets to actively participate and produce her own contribution to that chain. Culture doesn't scream *Right!* or *Wrong!* but it asks *What if? Shall we try? Do you dare?* and therefore gives the child freedom of action and opportunities for creativity. And in addition, as a side effect, it also provides cognitive benefits for the development of the child's attentiveness, language functions and emotional skills. So let's let the children freely get excited about culture.



Puppet Theatre Sampo event  
The Bunny and the Miraculous  
Cloud for children born in 2021  
Pictured Anne Lihavainen, Satu  
Lankinen and Elina Vehkaoja.  
Picture Uupi Tirronen



Wonderful performance. The child thought the singing was the best. Really great this culture kids project, the opportunity to enjoy theatre with a child was terrific. We got to see a performance we would probably never have gone to otherwise.

# A new kind of partnership between arts institutions and the city

Mari Männistö, Director of Culture in the City of Helsinki

Helsinki's art and culture vision 2030 and the Service strategy of culture based on it, emphasize the role of the city as an enabler of art and culture which invites different operators to come and work together.

In Culture Kids, this goal is lived in a truly ideal way. The city, cultural operators and professionals of early childhood education have jointly defined the values and pedagogical guidelines within which the operators create exciting experiences, while the city coordinates and enables them. Responsibility of funding is shared by a tripartite: the city, the foundation and the cultural organizations. In such a safe structure, creativity and competence can blossom, cross-pollinate and bear fruit in the promotion of both professional competence and the well-being of families with children.

What once started with the "deep end" art institutions has also inspired other actors who have the potential to influence children's well-being. The latest to join are sports activities: creative movement and physical fitness suit Culture Kids well. There are now, in 2024, around 30 cultural sponsors involved with heartfelt and uncompromising professionalism, and the number is growing: new ones willing to engage in long-term activities – and challenge themselves professionally – are signing up. Through open and curious cooperation, expertise in children's culture in Helsinki has strengthened and the demand for children's culture has grown as its supply has increased.

Helsinki changes and becomes more diverse all the time. In Culture Kids, art, culture and sport operators meet all kinds of families and children from Helsinki and thus get the opportunity to understand and reach the audiences of the future. It helps operators to develop and plan their own activities in such a way that they are relevant to the people of Helsinki in the future as well.



Dance House Helsinki event Taimisto (Nursery) for children born in 2022

Picture Ilkka Saastamoinen



Absolutely awesome, more of this!  
The show was impressive even for an adult. Both enjoyed ourselves and the execution was skillful <3 THANK YOU!

# Mash and circuses

Timo Riitamaa, Head of Communications and Marketing, Cirko – Center for New Circus

Cirko – Center for New Circus has been promoting and developing Finnish contemporary circus since 2004. Cirko operates in Suvilahti, on the site of a historic gas power plant, where Cirko has two studios equipped for circus. Around 30 professional groups and more than 150 circus artists work at Cirko every year.

In addition to developing and performing domestic contemporary circus, Cirko brings to Finland the best of international contemporary circus to its own and partner venues such as Dance House Helsinki and The National Theatre. Cirko's own performances reach around 20,000 visitors each year, but before Culture Kids, only a small proportion of these visitors were children.

Cirko is one of the sponsors of the children born in 2022 together with Dance House Helsinki, Dance Theatre Hurjaruuth and Cable Museums (Theatre Museum, Finnish Museum of Photography and Hotel and Restaurant Museum). For Cirko Culture Kids has been a significant collaborative project: it has made it possible to multiply the number of performances of works aimed at family audiences.

The works for Culture Kids are selected through an open repertoire search and according to the stage of development of the Kids. Cirko does not have its own artistic ensemble, but the performers are independent artists. In addition to artistic quality and financial realities, parents are also considered in the search. We also want adults to enjoy themselves. The first work - Blind Gut Company's *Flight of the Starfish* - was performed in 2022–2023 for babies and toddlers at Cirko and in cultural centers and playgrounds around the city (about 1400 spectators). Handsome Feet's *Babysphere* (about 1,400 viewers) was a participative version of the *Colorsphere* performance presented in the seasonal program for slightly older children, developed for young children in the fall of 2023. The inclusion of young children also served as an inspiration for *Lightsphere*, an experiential installation involving all ages, which was seen by almost a thousand people during the Night of the Arts alone. The newest Culture Kids work is Recover Laboratory's *Secret Island* aimed at kindergarteners.

In the beginning, the audience lay on the stage, then they participated on the stage, and now the Kids are so big that they sit with their adults in the audience, on raised seats bought especially for them. Efforts are made to adapt the performances to Cirko's own facilities: once you've visited Cirko, it's easier to come back to see and experience other repertoire as well.

Since this is the first time we are doing this at Cirko, after each performance period, based on the observations of Cirko's staff and artists, as well as visitor feedback collected by the city, we go over how, for example, the performance times are fine-tuned according to the age of the children. There are several performances per day, and they are scheduled according to the respective age group and the daily rhythm of the families. The visitor path is also fine-tuned according to the age of the children: tables and chairs are now arranged to make space in the hall for prams and strollers, soon the strollers will be removed and the space will be taken over by play areas. Even mash in the title of this article should already be changed to drawing wall!

Inspired by Culture Kids and the national Art Testers activity aimed at eighth graders, Cirko will have an entire repertoire package aimed at families starting in 2025: CirkOtus. Within the framework of CirkOtus, three works for the whole family will be presented annually in our seasonal program, both in spring and autumn. The works of 2025 are *Kiinni* by Usva Company, *Kulinaarikaaos* by Company Kate & Pas and *Boxing* by Aura Company.

By guaranteeing a reliable base audience, Culture Kids makes creating and presenting works aimed at family audiences attractive in a whole new way. More circus shows for the whole family are now being created and performed in Finland than perhaps ever before. Inspired by the popularity of the shows, Cirko has also developed a work agency, through which the City of Helsinki's investment in children's culture brings joy to children all over Finland: families enjoying art, who will continue to find culture also in the future.



# In the future, I hope to see a Finland where every child is proud of their own background and feels welcome

Hamdi Geddi, Somalitoons

Somalitoons is a family business that produces Somali-language cartoons online. As second-generation immigrants born and raised in Finland, we see from the front row how important language and culture are in terms of the formation of a child's identity.

Cultural events aimed at the children of our own community have been our dream, and I was happy to receive an invitation to the Culture Kids development event. I gave a presentation about how important it is for minorities to know and maintain their own cultural heritage. On that day, a very important connection was established. We got down to business and organized a large cultural event aimed at children of Somali background in Finland for the first time. The event attracted so much interest that over the next two years we organized a total of three events, with a total of over 1,000 families participating. The children were able to get to know their own culture through play and dance, while the parents were able to interact with other families and share their experiences. Culture Kids participated at the events organized by Somalitoons and met many families of Somali background. We know that building trust between different communities takes time, but these types of events are a step in the right direction.

In the future, I hope to see a Finland where every child is proud of their own background and feels welcome. In this way, we promote dialogue between different cultures. It is important to provide children with safe spaces to come to and where they feel welcome. Culture Kids does important progressive work.

I am grateful for our cooperation and the fact that we can continue to enable events where children and families can see the richness of their own culture.



Theatre ILMI Ö. quite rOund

Pictured Maria Myllykangas.  
Picture Matti Snellman

# Culture- and ideology-aware cultural activity strengthens the well-being of families

Marja Laine, Ph.D, director, The Culture and Religion Forum FOKUS

The right to one's own culture is a fundamental right. However, the experience of being outside or the threat of discrimination is also present in cultural activities. At their best, the activities of Culture Kids help to support families' cultural dialogue skills and cultural and ethical competence. I am grateful that Culture Kids has wanted to tackle this goal, for example by hiring cultural interpreters, organizing trainings and publishing guidelines. It is important that we recognize and consider the diverse views and cultures of children and families. Taking into account the cultural and ideological diversity of children and families is, on the one hand, a respectful encounter, on the other hand, a brave and active questioning of whether it is possible for everyone to feel that they are an accepted and active part of our activities. Even if my intentions are good, do my actions only reinforce supposedly neutral points of view?

Culture- and viewpoint-aware activities go a long way when you look at activities as part of the social environment, where, for example, people who belong to the majority and minority viewpoints are subjected to different representations and prejudices. This does not require expertise in, for example, special issues related to ethics, but rather the readiness to face and listen and the patience not to define the child and the family from the outside.

Culture- and viewpoint-aware cultural activities are about dialogue skills. Dialogue on cultural and ideological issues is necessary to build inclusion and equality and to prevent confrontation. Dialogue is respectful communication, and by developing our dialogue skills, we reduce social polarization. The ability to engage in dialogue is the key to social peace, social well-being, constructive community and a sustainable future.

Dialogue skills strengthen a person and give courage. Our self-confidence grows when we know how to act correctly in challenging situations and we get the skills to face many kinds of people. With dialogue skills, we learn to prevent conflict situations and solve challenging situations together, promoting justice and equity. Dialogue skills therefore strengthen our interaction skills: we learn to listen, discuss and meet others and express our own thoughts and feelings. Dialogue skills also challenge us to develop: our self-understanding increases in contact with others and supports the development of our identity.



Cirko – Center for New Circus event The Secret Island for children born in 2022, in cooperation with Recover Laboratory

Pictured Susanna Liinamaa.  
Picture Iida-Liina Linnea



Thanks! A really beautiful and skillful show, perfect duration, time, location, child-friendly reception and the arrangements worked super well. A really positive surprise and we will definitely be coming again as paying customers.

# Culture Kids brings a cultural perspective to the activities of maternity and child health clinics

Leena Marila, Tiia Konttinen and Monica Lindberg

Maternity and child health clinics reach the majority of families expecting a child and children under school age in Helsinki. In Finland, this counseling service is regulated by law and it takes a broad view of the well-being and health of children and families.

One of the clinic's important tasks is to promote the well-being and health of children and families. The activities of Culture Kids support the same goal, and that is why maternity and child health clinics have been a partner of Culture Kids from the beginning.

The clinics work as an information broker, marketer and encourager in Culture Kids. It is a pleasure to hand out greeting cards to all children and families and inform them about the Culture Kids service! This is how Culture Kids reaches the vast majority of children and families. It is particularly important that every child has an equal opportunity to participate in the activity.

Culture Kids brings a cultural perspective to the activities of maternity and child health clinics: We encourage families to participate in activities where singing, nursery rhymes, fairy tales, theater and movement, as well as meeting other children, are the focus. Playing is central to a child's well-being.



Helsinki City Library  
event Who Says Hello?  
for children born in 2024

Picture Maarit Hohteri

”

A wonderful event! Such a good feeling about this. Calm atmosphere. It's wonderful that it felt natural that half of it was in Swedish. I speak Swedish to my child, so it is very important that there is program in Swedish. This reinforces natural and rich bilingualism. It was wonderful to get book tips outside the hall, and it was nice to take home a program leaflet with all the poems. I was moved by all of this. The best, everything professionally organized. This kind of thing encourages reading to the child and diving into the world of fairy tales together. Really 10/10.



# The new museum grows together with the Culture Kids

Hanna Kapanen and Arja-Liisa Kaasinen, New Museum of Architecture and Design

Architecture and design are part of the everyday life of children and families. Design is everywhere in our everyday life: someone has designed houses, dining tables, playgrounds, outdoor clothing, strollers, and even mugs. The architecture and design surrounding the child provide keys to the child's overall growth. Everything starts with small steps, observing your own environment, exploring and wondering with the help of different senses.

The Architecture Museum and the Design Museum merged at the beginning of 2024 and together now form a new museum, which will open in a new building in the Southern Harbor of Helsinki around 2030. The museum will be an active museum of making the future, where we look at the world and its phenomena through the eyes of a designer and where everyone can participate in the design of our common environment. Children's opportunities to influence the things we share also increase. Architecture and design education has a strong link to democracy education.

The Architecture and Design Museum's Culture Kids program is aimed at children born in 2023. The goal of the first workshops was to offer tips that will help you experience the museum in many ways with a small baby. Later, attention shifted to everyday objects and environments. The handprints printed in the workshop were a reminder of the child's growth into the world around them, into a person who affects their own environment and takes care of their environment. In the cleaning and repair workshops in 2024, familiar everyday tools were introduced physically and using word art.

Currently, the museum is preparing action moments for spring and autumn 2025. The characteristic features of architecture and design education, such as functionality and multisensory experiences, support the participation and learning of children and families.

Observations and feedback on the sessions are made careful use of. As a museum, we position ourselves alongside (and at the height of) the child to examine what the world looks like from the child's point of view. We will use this information in the planning of the new museum. The museum also wants to reach children, from the very youngest.



Museum of Architecture and Design event Repair and Cleanup Workshop for children born in 2023

Picture Anni Koponen

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A nice, relaxed, child-oriented event! It was nice to talk with other parents and the child could explore interesting objects and wonder about other children. The arrangements worked great and I felt welcome when there was a person right at the door to guide me further. Thanks!

# Many become one with the help of culture

Pasi Saukkonen, special researcher, City of Helsinki information services

Societies today are diverse, and especially their big cities. People are different in many ways, for example ethnically, linguistically, religiously or otherwise culturally. One of the challenges of our time is to create a sense of togetherness and a we-spirit in this diversity, and to strengthen a common identity.

Building a sense of belonging requires words and images. Words that tell us who we are and where we are, stories of a shared past and dreams of a shared future. Images in which we find ourselves and recognize each other

Togetherness is strengthened by doing things together on an equal basis. Cooperation helps to get to know, know and trust others. It also teaches how to mediate and resolve contradictions, even conflicts. "You learn by doing" can also be understood this way.

In the case of children and young people, the essential institutions for shared things are school and, for adults, especially workplaces. However, leisure places and forms of activity are also essential: the life circles of exercise, sports, other hobbies, and art and culture.

In this sense, culture is of paramount importance, both in the broader and narrower sense of art. Culture unites people across different borders, be they ethnic or cultural or, for example, economic or political. Culture is also the meeting point of tradition and creativity, past and future.

When the Finnish nation was built in the 19th century, art and culture were at the center of that task. Through culture, people who did not know each other began to feel that they were one, Finns.

They identified both with the stories told about Finnishness on stage, in showrooms and printed products, and with each other as audiences.

Now we have to rebuild the nation. We have to create a new Finnishness that meets today's needs and reality. It is a tough challenge and we have a lot of hard work ahead of us. There are also opponents. However, success in the task is possible if we can believe in it.

"Children are the future" is such a well-worn saying that it is almost empty of content. However, there is truth in this sense as well: today's children are tomorrow's adult Finns, whatever their background.

We can influence them, and we must also strive to do so.

By participating in culture by doing and experiencing, alone and with others, children grow into this society as both actors and adopters of different contents. Through art, a gate opens for them to a space where different kinds of Finns, as well as old and new Finnishness, can find each other.

However, art and culture are already close to some children, while for others they can be a distant thing. The distance can be increased by financial constraints, but in the background there can also be prejudices, thoughts that, for example, a classical music concert is not for people like us.

These thresholds can be lowered and the distances narrowed by many means. Culture Kids is one such channel through which a child comes into contact with art and culture at an early age. From that point it is good for the school, the vestibule of the *res publica*, to continue.



# It takes a whole village to raise a child...

Hanna-Mari Peltomäki, Jane and Aatos Erkko Foundation's Secretary General

The Culture Kids program and its implementers aim for a communal way of building a good life for children and the whole family. Diverse art experiences feed a child's development and, above all, the way in which they relate to art and culture as they grow up. Seeing and feeling art and culture in the everyday life of families strengthens the feeling of inclusion in the surrounding society. Cultural sponsors from different fields of art jointly bear responsibility for the children of our village.

In the Jane and Aatos Erkko Foundation, we see value in activities that bring together a wider range of actors, feeding their expertise and enabling new types of, even replicable, operating models. Culture Kids activity dares to think big and boldly, go on a journey and learn from successes and mistakes. We wish many happy encounters and new experiences for both creators and experiencers. Let's take care of our children's future together - *like a modern village!*



Finnish Museum of Photography event Time Travel to the 1990s for children born in 2022  
Picture Virve Laustela



My child and I got a wonderful workshop, which we were both impressed with. Me about how such big ideas could be so skillfully concretized in an age-appropriate way. The child got excited about photography, and has made it a habit to regularly take "pictures" with different things and look at the world through different things (e.g. a roll of toilet paper). Thank you, you left a mark, we will definitely come again!

# Projects of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra on the background of Culture Kids



Quotes from feedback from families of children born in 2012:

I felt that my child (and family) were invited. It was a nice starting point to get involved in an activity that otherwise I would hardly have gone to.

The low threshold to get involved, in a hectic everyday life it is wonderful when opportunities come as if on a tray.

This is an indescribably wonderful public education, child-centred and holistic activity that supports the well-being of children and families and values children.

Oh, the joy and delight of seeing your own and other people's children enjoy the music they hear! I would highly recommend it! The children's concerts have been great and I believe that the children's interest in music is partly due to this activity. In our family we don't do music, although we are otherwise interested in culture, and I am really glad that our whole family was able to attend the concerts and the musical education they provided. Such a great project that all the family members were crying when we were at the last concert.



# Godchildren of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra 2000

Helena Ahonen was Orchestra Director of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra in 2000

In Helsinki, the final years of the 20th century were a period of intense emergence of different forms of culture. The nomination as the European capital of culture in 2000 was a welcome recognition of that. The efforts of the cultural community to build a diverse cultural field received a visible reward.

The year 2000 was significant for Helsinki in other ways as well. The city's 450th anniversary was celebrated then, and during the second half of the year, Finland held the EU presidency.

The godchild concerts started from a small coincidence. The then deputy city manager Antti Viinikka organized a two-day seminar a couple of years in advance, which was supposed to bring together actors from different fields to have a discussion about the city's plans. Sitting next to me was the Secretary General of the EU Presidency, Petri Tuomi-Nikula, who in passing asked the question "couldn't the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra adopt all the children born in Helsinki in the year 2000 as their godchildren?" Great idea, but what about in practice? How many children? What does the orchestra play for them? What do babies like? How to reach the babies? What is the relationship between the orchestra and godchild?

First of all, the question WHY had to be answered. A piquant addition to the anniversary events? That wasn't enough of a motive. When the idea was bounced around, we realized something important. A child's first exposure to classical music was also many parents' first visit to a symphony orchestra concert.

At that time, approx. 6,000 babies were born in Helsinki every year. The first puzzle - how to get in touch with them? Should we be on duty at the front doors of the maternity hospitals to attract concert audiences? Fortunately, Finland has the best child health counseling system in the world. The Health Agency got excited. As a result, during their first visit to the child health clinic every newborn received an invitation to be a godchild, a contact form and a CD with a collection of popular short orchestral pieces conducted by Leif Segerstam. Most of the parents became inspired and by September, 2,500 families had already taken up the invitation to be godchildren. In total, 4,500 families signed up for the project.

But then the content. What can you play for a baby? A good expert was found at the Sibelius Academy, the developer of the Finnish baby music playschool activity, Eve Alho, who started as the artistic leader of the project. With her help, programs suitable for babies were built, which the chief conductor Leif Segerstam poured his heart into.

The project started well from the beginning. The first concerts were held in May 2000 at Finlandia Hall. Only one thing we could not foresee. Even though the lower lobby of Finlandia Hall is spacious, hundreds of prams - it was too much!

# The content and pedagogical idea of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra's godchild concerts

Eve Alho, Annika Kukkonen and Satu Sopenen

As a pioneer of music playschool for babies and baby concerts, Eve Alho was invited to plan the first concerts for the godchildren of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra in 2000. Performances were held in small halls; the little ones were able to be close to the musicians and instruments, enjoying the music, dance and gentle atmosphere for about 20 minutes. A year later, there was a big concert at Finlandia Hall led by Eve and Leif Segerstam. Teddy Pus, HPO's mascot, charmed the audience. Jubilant images of babies being tossed into the air to music made headlines. The Godchild project became a success and the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra and Eve Alho were awarded the Valopilkku (Bright Spot) of the Year award.

In 2002, Satu Sopenen, a pedagogue and professional in children's music, was invited to plan the concerts. The producer was Hanna Kosonen. Active and narrative events were created for godchildren, participation and interaction were tested and developed. Concerts were organized in all the halls of Finlandia Hall and even in the big foyer. At the farewell concert in 2007, the children sat next to the musicians in the orchestra, Leif conducted. The birthday concert 2010 was still held, which was the start of the future Junior concerts.

HPO invited godchildren for the second time in 2012. The project was further refined. The beloved concert friend, Teddy Buttons, became the mascot. The contents created in the first season were refined, and artistic and pedagogical depth was added to them. At the same time, professional production processes were developed by permanent producer Annika Kukkonen. All concerts are documented and can be viewed at [helsinginkaupunginorkesteri.fi/kummilapset](https://helsinginkaupunginorkesteri.fi/kummilapset).

In 2020, HPO invited, for the third time, an entire age cohort to be its godchildren, this time called Kids. New contents were innovated, e.g. Baby Symphony (Timo Hietala, 2020) and an interdisciplinary collaboration with the Helsinki City Theater was started (Carrot on the Run, 2023). In addition, the orchestra published content online, reaching an ever wider audience.

## The structure and pedagogical core of godchild concerts:

- Spring chamber music concerts featuring a professional of children's music, Teddy Buttons and musicians. Emphasis on participation and interaction.
- Autumn themed concerts with the symphony orchestra and guest artists.

The concerts take into account the children's age and developmental stages. The program presents orchestral instruments and key pieces of classical music. Satu Sopenen, Annika Kukkonen, and HPO's musicians are responsible for planning and implementation. The goal is to create a seven-year musical development arc and offer repeated, high-level, memorable experiences with familiar performers.



Helsinki Philharmonic  
Orchestra event Celebration  
in the Land of Music for  
children born in 2020

Picture Saara Autere

”

Absolutely wonderful concert, we had a great time with our child. It's great that such high-quality culture is made for children and that it is made available to all children in Helsinki through the Culture Kids activity. A big thank you to all the organizers for appreciating the children!



# The Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra's Godchild Project enchanted and moved

Etta Partanen, research director, Innolink

The Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra has already implemented two godchild projects, with children born in 2000 and 2012. In 2019, Innolink created a questionnaire commissioned by the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra for the families of the orchestra's godchildren born in 2012. In light of the results, the activity has received a rapturously positive reception among families, even aiming for perfect ratings.

719 families responded to the survey, and the eagerness to give feedback on the activities was already a positive message. Nine out of ten respondents gave the activity the highest rating on a scale of 1–5. The average value in the survey was an exceptional 4.9.

It is also noteworthy that only a few attended concerts only once or just a few times, as most visited numerous events, a fifth all of the organized events. The families assessed that the child's stage of development was taken into account very well in the contents and arrangements of the concerts.

Being the orchestra's godchild has offered families shared, joyful musical experiences. The activity is estimated to have increased the positive attitude towards classical music and concerts and lowered the threshold of concert halls. According to the respondents, general curiosity and interest in cultural pursuits also strengthened. The well-being of families is estimated to have improved at the same time, which is a significant issue in the busy everyday life of families with children.

Recommendation rating NPS is the most iconic satisfaction measure of our time. The godchild activity's NPS is an impressive 94. In the NPS meter, respondents rate their readiness to recommend on a scale of 0–10. As many as 96 percent of the respondents would recommend, based on their own experiences, that new families get involved in the project, i.e. they give a recommendation rating of 9 or 10. Only one percent gave a critical rating i.e. 0–6, and only three percent were neutral respondents. The range of NPS is -100 to +100, which means that the NPS of the godchild operation is already aiming for perfection.

In a national survey carried out by Innolink for the Finnish Symphony Orchestras, we asked what would make new visitors come to concerts. The research was aimed at consumers who do not go to classical music concerts. The respondents hoped for increased awareness of the concerts and delicious and accessible tastes of the world of classical music.

Godchild activities are exactly this at their best and can be a beautiful start to a lifelong cultural hobby. The positive effects of shared hobbies on the well-being of families carry far as the children grow. All in all, the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra's godchild activities have been a successful, distinctive and often emotionally moving project. It is excellent that this excellent practice has expanded to other cultural services in Helsinki.



# Towards the Future



Helsinki City Theatre event  
Molli's Wild Sleepover for  
children born in 2021

Pictured Kaisa Torkkel  
and Akseli Ferrand.  
Picture Cata Portin

” Thank you very much for organizing these,  
this is one of the reasons why Helsinki  
is attractive to families with children!



Hotel and Restaurant Museum  
event The Pizza of Dreams  
for children born in 2022

Picture Tuulia Leino

” Hilariously funny pizza dough moment. Encourages you to  
continue baking/moulding now that you have a good dough  
recipe. My grandson wanted to explore and get to know the whole  
museum properly with time. And had a great time there.

# For everyone

Tommi Laitio, Urban Developer and Strategist

Really good ideas are usually easy to explain in a single sentence, so that anyone can understand that there is something interesting here. Culture Kids is a really good idea:

*Helsinki strengthens every child's relationship with culture by inviting all children, through child health clinics, to become a Culture Kid of a cultural organization, i.e. to attend free-of charge cultural experiences, tailored to the child's developmental stage, twice a year for seven years.*

In recent years, I have looked at Helsinki from a distance. Much of my work involves explaining Finland and Helsinki to those who are trying to understand what the happiest nation in the world is all about. Year after year, there are two words that startle my listeners. Two words that seem so commonplace in Finland. Those words are 'for everyone'.

As the contributions to this publication show, making something work for everyone in an increasingly diverse society requires careful planning. It requires a delicate balance between self and commons. That is, the experience of having my expertise as a health professional or an arts professional respected while taking a moment or two to realise that we are doing something together that none of us could do alone. That is, the experience of being involved in something where my work in particular is critical to its success, which would not succeed without me, but whose end result is many times greater than my own work.

The simple promise that comes from the everyday lives of families and the successful me+us combination is what makes Culture Kids a significant public sector innovation and of interest to cities around the world. As the contributions and articles in this publication show, Culture Kids has made design solutions that nurture curiosity about the realities of others and trust in the expertise of others. These solutions include in-depth values work, simple metrics, coordination that understands cultural work, regular meetings, recognition of the risks of competitiveness, economic transparency, continuous improvement in equity, reasonable choice for families, and Bettering Observation. In practice, Me+Us means that the nurses of the child health clinics trust that the circus knows how to build experiences or that funders do not need to scrutinise every piece of content. Moving forward from trust and difference produces an experience that is engaging, specific and at the same time easy to understand.

In the introduction, Tuula Haavisto predicts that Culture Kids will soon win a major prize. I think she is right. I predict that within a couple of years, Culture Kids activities will have been launched in many cities around the world.

While international success certainly boosts the self-esteem of Helsinki residents, it is ultimately of secondary importance. The most decisive sign of success is what Marianne Turtio writes about in this publication: the experience of being welcomed into the world of art and culture as a result of the Culture Kids activities and the feeling of being an excellent parent to her child.

# Description of the operating model of Culture Kids



Being part of Culture Kids is a great gift, joy and honor for us! Preparing the performances, numerous shows, meeting the children and their loved ones and producing with you have been so valuable, warm-hearted, joyful, developing and satisfying for us! Culture Kids is an amazing concept! Just as super as it can be!



Theater ILM I Ö.



Culture Kids is an exceptional, wonderful and comprehensive opportunity to experience various cultural events from the perspective of both a child and a close adult. We have spent quality time together at the most diverse events and enjoyed it every time.



Tatu, father of a Culture Kid born in 2021

# Administrative organization

The administrative home of Culture Kids is in the city organization of Helsinki, in the Culture and leisure division. The service is owned by Helsinki's Director of culture, and its coordinator and producer work in the unit led by Helsinki's Head of children's culture. The special planning officer for children's culture who acts as a coordinator handles also tasks other than those related to Culture Kids, but the producer's working time is 100% reserved for supporting those art, culture and sports organizations who act as cultural sponsors. Roughly, the division of labor between the coordinator and the producer could be described as such that the coordinator is responsible for the entirety of the Culture Kids service, from finances to stakeholders, and the producer is responsible for the golden core of Culture Kids, i.e. the meeting of children and cultural actors at Culture Kids events. The producer manages the overall planning of the events. She is also responsible for the use and development of the website that serves as a registration platform for Culture Kids and she supports cultural sponsors in various exceptional situations. Although in 2024 so far only five out of (the final) seven age groups have been involved, the activity is already extensive. In 2024, a total of 880 events were organized, with places for 21,146 Culture Kids and the same number of close adults, i.e. a total of 42,292 people.

The seamless cooperation with the maternity and child health clinics in Helsinki enables Culture Kids activities to be spread within reach of all families in Helsinki, regardless of place of residence or social status. 99.5% of families with children use the services of child health clinics. Everyone born in Helsinki receives an invitation to join Culture Kids through the child health clinic at the age of two months, or later if the child moves to Helsinki at an older age.

In terms of the accessibility of the service, cooperation with the Helsinki early childhood education staff is also essential. The aim is to organize Culture Kids events, especially in the baby phase, as close as possible to where the families live. There are 60 playgrounds in Helsinki, many of which have spaces suitable for Culture Kids events. The staff at the playgrounds know the families in their area and encourage them to participate in the activities. Culture Kids events are also organized at the sponsors' own venues and in Helsinki's five regional cultural centers, in Cultural Centre Caisa and the Annantalo art centre for children and young people.

The Development and digitalization unit of the Culture and leisure division of the City of Helsinki is responsible for the technical development and maintenance of the website and the Communication and marketing unit is responsible for the communication and marketing of Culture Kids.

The Culture Kids service has a multidisciplinary steering group, which meets when convened by the Director of culture of Helsinki.



Q-teatteri event Superkehot (Super Bodies) for children born in 2021, in cooperation with the Kuskit company

Pictured Eero Ojala and Elisa Salo. Picture Mikael Ahlfors



Thanks! A really great show. An ingenious script, captivating puppets, great actors. Everyone should see this.



# Sponsors of Culture Kids

The children and their cultural sponsors, i.e. the art, culture and sports organizations committed to the program, are at the core of the activities of Culture Kids. Some of the operators were already involved in the brainstorming phase of the program in 2018, the majority joined in 2019, and the group has grown since then. The group of sponsors is not limited, a discussion of the possibility of cooperation can be started at any time when a party interested in sponsoring gets in touch. If a professional operator is ready to commit to long-term work with children, the continuous development of operations and the values of Culture Kids, they are welcome to join.

When planning the activities, many different approaches were discussed. It was clear that there would be seven different groups of sponsors (one for each cohort of children under school age), but whether each group would be made up of representatives from many different cultural fields or just one was one question. Another was whether the group would offer activities for its 'own' year group from birth to school, or whether certain sponsors would specialise in particular age groups. Theatre always for 0 year olds, music always for 1 year olds, visual arts always for 2 year olds, etc.

The approach adopted was to form groups in the same cultural field and have the same sponsors follow the child throughout his or her early childhood, from the age of 0 to the start of school. The rationale was to maximise familiarity. It was known that there would be a large number of first-time cultural visitors and it was wanted to ensure that a cultural genre and a few actors from that genre would become familiar to the family. The idea was that once it became familiar and easy to attend one type of cultural event, the experience would encourage and inspire people to take up other services available in the city. Walking alongside the same children also gives the sponsors a better opportunity to follow the children's development and to move forward within the pedagogical arc that characterises that cultural field.

## **Cultural sponsors in 2024 by year of birth of children:**

- 2020 and 2027 *MUSIC* Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra
- 2021 *THEATRE* Helsinki City Theatre, Finnish National Theatre, Svenska Teatern, Theatre ILMI Ö., Q -teatteri and Puppet Theatre Sampo
- 2022 *PERFORMING ART, DANCE, CIRCUS, PHOTOGRAPHY, FOOD CULTURE* Dance House Helsinki, Cirko - Centre for New Circus, Theatre Museum, Finnish Museum of Photography, Dance Theatre Hurjaruuth, Hotel and Restaurant Museum (Cable Factory and Suvilahti operators)
- 2023 *CULTURAL HERITAGE AND BUILT URBAN ENVIRONMENT* Helsinki City Museum, National Museum, Design Museum, Museum of Architecture, Association of Cultural Heritage Education in Finland, Helsinki University Museum Flame
- 2024 *WORD ART AND SPORT* Helsinki City Library and Helsinki Sports Services
- 2025 *ART AND JAZZ* Helsinki Art Museum HAM, Amos Rex, Finnish National Gallery (Ateneum Art Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma and Sinebrychoff Art Museum), Sointi Jazz Orchestra, UMO Helsinki Jazz Orchestra
- 2026 *OPERA AND BALLET* Finnish National Opera and Ballet



Meetings between all the sponsors are organized between two and four times a year. Some of these meetings are "*What is going on?*" meetings, which focus on information exchange, and others are workshop-style meetings to develop content and activities, where the sponsors share their knowledge and experience with each other in a facilitated way around a specific theme.

In addition to the meetings for all, the sponsors of each cohort of children meet each other about 10 times a year with the Culture Kids producer. During these meetings, the number of events, the number of children to be involved, the times and locations of the events and the valuable experiences to be shared are jointly agreed. Each sponsor is responsible for the content and production of their own events, but the Culture Kids producer ensures that the sponsors also have time and space to discuss content and learn from each other without being rushed.

When planning venues and numbers of participants, the number of Culture Kids, their age, postcode and languages spoken at home are taken into account. Previous Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra projects have found that around 60% of those registered as HPO Godchildren attend events twice a year. The same participation rate seems to be the case for Culture Kids. There are small differences in the activity levels of the different year groups, but as a general rule the total expected attendance at events is calculated according to this formula. Each year, the sponsors of each year group, together with the Culture Kids producer, decide how the total number of participants will be distributed between the different actors.



Swedish Theatre event  
The Magic Everyday for  
children born in 2021

Pictured Mikael Andersson.  
Picture Cata Portin

” An excellent, well-thought-out show that entertained not only the target audience but also adults. The classical music was cleverly arranged. I was particularly impressed by the energetic and enthusiastic energy. It was gratifying that the audience of children was not approached with the "left hand" but that the performance and the audience were important to the actors.

# Financing

The main funders of the Culture Kids activity are the City of Helsinki, the Jane and Aatos Erkko Foundation and the sponsoring art, culture and sports organizations.

The expansion of Culture Kids from a project of one art practitioner and one year cohort of children to a city service that covers all art forms and, when fully grown in 2026, will target all children under school age and their families in Helsinki, would not be possible without the support of the Jane and Aatos Erkko Foundation. The expansion of the activity has required exceptional commitment and a goal-oriented approach to development from all involved. The foundation's grant is channelled through the City of Helsinki, from where it is distributed to the sponsoring cultural, arts and sports organizations that organize events for Culture Kids.

The City of Helsinki will cover the costs of project coordination, the IT platform and communication. In practice, this means the technical development and maintenance of the website [Kummilapset.hel.fi](http://Kummilapset.hel.fi), the visual appearance, the invitation cards distributed in clinics and, when necessary, marketing campaigns and other communication. In addition, the city will cover the coordinator's salary costs and various running costs of the project.

Each sponsor is responsible for the planning and implementation of its own Culture Kids events, while the Culture Kids producer is responsible for the organization of the whole of the events. The annual number of events and the number of children to be met at the events are agreed in the autumn of the previous year and the producer draws up contracts under which the city will pass on to the operators a grant of EUR 16.5 per child from the Jane and Aatos Erkko Foundation grant (2024 level). The sponsors report all their expenses to the coordinator on an annual basis. The reports show that the sponsors invest on average the same amount in their activities as they receive from the foundation. Roughly speaking, it could be said that the foundation grant pays for the children's participation in the events and the sponsor pays for the participation of the adult accompanying the child. The costs of the productions and the actors' own funding vary from case to case, but in the experience of the first years of operation, the average has remained as described.

In the first years, the development of the project's content has required a special effort and the initial development partner was Föreningen for Drama och Teater DOT r.f. with the financial support of The foundation Brita Maria Renlunds minne sr. The development of cultural diversity for Culture Kids has been made possible by special integration funding from the City of Helsinki.

## **Structure and basis of calculation of operating costs:**

- xxxx children will be born in year xxxx.
- 70% of them register as Culture Kids during the first 4 years of age. In the first year, around 35% of the age group enrolls, after which the number rises steadily.
- 60% of those enrolled attend the events twice a year = number of children attending the events.
- Sponsors are subsidised €16.5 per child attending the events.

## **In addition to the costs of the events, please note:**

- Communication and marketing
- Registration and enrolment platform (= website)
- Salary costs of the staff responsible for the whole project
- Development and evaluation costs

On average, the sponsoring organizations themselves finance their events with the same amount as the grant. The costs incurred by the partner organizations include production costs, premises costs, costs of training and events, and any transport costs.

# Connecting with families

The child's guardian registers the child as a Culture Kid on [kummilapset.hel.fi](http://kummilapset.hel.fi). When registering, the child's name, year of birth, postcode and, as an optional extra, the languages spoken at home are asked. In addition, the guardian provides the e-mail address and telephone number of the child's close adult.

The close adult will be informed by e-mail when events for the age group of the child are published for booking. Generally, invitations to spring and early summer events are published in January and February, and to autumn events in August and September. Events for children born in different years are published at different times, depending on when the events are held, and sometimes in several parts. As a general rule, each Culture Kid can register for one event in the spring and one in the autumn.

On [kummilapset.hel.fi](http://kummilapset.hel.fi), if a child is ill or in other urgent circumstances, the close adult can cancel the registration (if this is possible for the organizer of the event) and the child will be able to attend another event at another time. If the sponsor has to cancel or change the time of the event, an SMS with instructions will be sent to all registrants, in addition to an e-mail.

After each event, a feedback questionnaire will be sent to the participating families, asking whether they received enough information about the event in advance, how well it was organized, how well the child's developmental stage was taken into account, whether the child enjoyed the event and what the overall experience was. The questionnaire also allows you to leave verbal feedback. The average rating of the feedback survey throughout the whole activity is around 4.6/5, which indicates that the events have been successful.

In all communications, Culture Kids aims to use clear language and unambiguous guidelines. The service languages are Finnish, Swedish and English, and the website also provides basic information about the service in 18 languages.

Families can also ask for advice and send feedback by e-mail to [kulttuurin.kummilapset@hel.fi](mailto:kulttuurin.kummilapset@hel.fi).

The service is continuously developed on the basis of feedback.



Finnish National Theatre event  
Fur Face Karlos and his Crazy  
Circus of Peculiar Animals  
for children born in 2021

Pictured Kalle Lehto.  
Picture Sanna Breilin



A great and inspiring show. I think it was a good idea that there was no speech in the performance but the performance opened up through actions, gestures and facial expressions.



# Free-of-charge events, multidisciplinary cooperation and cultural responsibility enable equality

The key to achieving equality for families is the fact that all Culture Kids events are free of charge for families. Another prerequisite is the cooperation between Culture Kids, Helsinki's maternity and child health clinics and early childhood education.

Almost all families with children in Helsinki use the city's high-quality child health clinics, and the clinic nurses can rightly be called true experts on the well-being of families with children. The nurses tell parents about Culture Kids at the clinic when the children are two months old and give the family a congratulatory card, which also includes an invitation to become a Culture Kid and instructions on how to join. The card is in three languages and basic information about the project can be found on the website in the 18 most widely spoken languages in Helsinki. Health nurses will also inform families with children who have just moved to Helsinki about the activities.

To make participation as easy as possible for all, in particular events for babies are organized in the children's neighbourhoods, close to home, at locations familiar to families. Play parks in Helsinki have opened their facilities for Culture Kids events and the play park staff, who are well acquainted with the situations of families in the area, play an important role in building a sense of security. Once the families have become familiar with their cultural sponsors in their local area, it is easier to go to events elsewhere and also be encouraged to try out the opportunities offered by the city more widely.

Events for the youngest children are often non-verbal, but if Finnish language skills are required to participate in an event, this will be mentioned in the event details on the website. Event performers/directors are also prepared to use English and Swedish if necessary.

The joint pedagogical step marks of the sponsoring cultural organizations emphasize the importance of creating a safe atmosphere around the Culture Kids events, so that even parents who may be unsure can feel warmly welcomed. There are always a lot of first-timers at the events and therefore the organization should be easy. Clear instructions, acceptance of uncertainty and friendliness are emphasised at all stages of the activity.



National Museum of Finland  
event Wow! Babies Take  
Over the Museum! for  
children born in 2023  
Picture Hanna Korhonen



Wonderful event for a 3-month-old baby. The 15-minute dance session was the right length of time, and it was wonderful to get a foot print. The exhibition was also colorful enough for a family with a baby.



It is also important to take cultural responsibility into account when planning the events. Families from different backgrounds should feel at home at the events. [For more information on cultural responsibility and its implementation in Culture Kids, see Promoting diversity on page 42.](#)

Around 6,000 children are born every year in Helsinki. Although it is hoped that every one of them will be registered as a Culture Kid, 100% participation is not a realistic goal. When the action started, the target was set at 70% of children born in each year to register as Culture Kids within the first 3-4 years of life. It was also decided that it would be important to monitor the postcodes and the languages spoken in the children's homes. The postcode indicates the area of the city where the children live and the languages spoken at home give an indication of how well the activities are reaching Helsinki residents from different cultural backgrounds. Although the declaration of language is voluntary at the time of registration, the languages declared allow an assessment of whether the proportion of children who speak a language other than Finnish, Swedish or Sami corresponds to the proportion of so-called non-native speakers in the total population of Helsinki. The profiles of the different neighbourhoods vary and the reported postcodes provide a rough estimate of how evenly the Culture Kids service reaches children across socio-economic boundaries. The aim is to ensure that the Culture Kids service also reaches families without a tradition of cultural practice and consumption.

The achievement of these objectives is monitored through an online platform shared by all Culture Kids sponsors. It shows the number of children registered as Culture Kids, their area of residence (postcode) and the languages spoken at their homes. The figures are compared with the total number of children living in the area, the languages spoken and the socio-economic status of the area.

After the first four years of Culture Kids, it can be said that the target of 70% of the age group is likely to be met. The total number of registered Culture Kids in spring 2024 was around 18,000.

The proportion of children who speak a language other than Finnish, Swedish or Sami at home was over 22%. It is higher than the proportion of foreign-language speakers among all Helsinki residents, which was 18.3% in 2023. However, it should be noted that the proportion of foreign-language speaking families is very high for families where English or other languages of European origin are spoken and regrettably low for families where Arabic or African languages are spoken.

A regional analysis shows that the most affluent areas of the city have a high proportion of Culture Kids compared to lower income areas. Comparing the postcode data of Culture Kids with the regional data of the City of Helsinki is challenging because the city's division into regions does not fully coincide with the postcode regions, and the data for the regions are not updated at the same pace as the data for Culture Kids. The analysis is therefore indicative and cannot be treated as exact data.

In the average or above average income areas of Lauttasaari, Etelä-Haaga and Vallila, more than 90% of children born in 2020 and beyond are registered as Culture Kids. In Meri-Rastila, where the average annual income is less than half of that in Lauttasaari, 48% are registered, and in Jakomäki, where the income level is lower still, only 40% are registered. This is far from the 70% target, but still high for an area where cultural participation has traditionally been low. According to a 2016 survey by the City of Helsinki, only 1.7% of children aged 0-6 in the Jakomäki area participated in paid arts education, compared to a city-wide average of 14.4%. In 2020, only 4% of all 3-19-year-olds in the area participated in arts education, compared to more than ten times the figure in the city centre. (Source: Taiteen perusopetuksen tila ja kehittämistarpeet, Sariola 2016. Taiteen perusopetuksen toteutuminen Helsingissä 2019-2020, Tyrväinen ja Gran 2022, available at [julkaisut.hel.fi](http://julkaisut.hel.fi))



The ground has therefore been open and the field wide for the joint development of Culture Kids activities. The open atmosphere created by the first meetings of the sponsors has been a key factor in the sharing of knowledge. A big thank you goes to Annika Kukkonen the producer responsible for the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra godchild activities (2011-), and Satu Sopanen, the pedagogical and artistic planner of the godchild concerts (2002-), who shared all their experience gained with the orchestra's projects. The wide range of sponsors was given a strong foundation on which to build and a wealth of information on what to do and what not to do. The co-development sessions build a common understanding and seek to find the best ways of working for children, families and sponsors.

It seems that transparency also pays off in financial terms. The free events organized by Culture Kids have attracted the interest of many parents to participate with their children in other cultural activities as well, including those for which they pay. And the high quality of what is on offer has created a new kind of demand.

Co-development meetings have consulted external experts and worked together with them on key issues for the Culture Kids activities.

**27.5.-5.6.2020 Values and Pedagogical Step Marks**, preliminary materials by Professor Minna Huotilainen, University of Helsinki and musician Satu Sopanen. Experts Suzanne Osten, film and theatre director, Unga Klara, Stockholm and Päivi Setälä, PhD, photographer, Pori Children's Cultural Centre. Facilitators Anne Sandström, Executive Director DOT ry and Raquel Benmergui, Graphic Facilitator. [Values and Step Marks can be found on page 36.](#)

**20.11.2020 Measuring Stick**, preliminary material Kaisa Kivelä, Director of Vuosaari youth centre. Experts Pasi Saukkonen, Specialist Researcher, City of Helsinki Information Centre, Jouni Juntumaa, Senior Planning Officer, and Miikka Haimila, Specialist, City of Helsinki Culture and leisure division. [Measuring Stick can be found on page 47.](#)

**5.5. and 19.5.2021 Bettering Observation**, expert, Senior planning officer Merja Hovi, Helsinki Youth Services. [The principles of Bettering observation can be found on page 48.](#)

**10.12. 2021 The Trail is Open! Looking at Culture Kids events from a neuropsychological perspective**, expert neuropsychologist Titta Iivonen

**23.5.2022 Culture Kids of Many Voices 1 - Polarization-strategic thinking**, expert Pia Rinne, Bouchra Amchou-Burton and Liibaan Sheekdoon, Helsinki of many voices project

**28.11.2022 Culture Kids of Many Voices 2 - From theory to practice**, experts Marja Laine, PhD, FOKUS ry and Hamdi Geddi, Somalitoons

**1.6.2023 Culture Kids of Many Voices 3 - Culturally responsible art education**, experts Marja Laine, PhD, FOKUS ry, Liibaan Sheekdoon and Ahmed Al-Nawas, Helsinki of many voices project. [For further details on "Whose culture?" see page 44.](#)

**18.4.2024 Children's Participation in Feedback and Development**, experts Outi Kekkonen, researcher and Pirjo Mattila, development expert, City of Helsinki. [Children's involvement in the development of activities can be found on page 46.](#)

# Values and Step Marks of Culture Kids

Developed jointly in a webinar 27 May–5 June 2020

## Values

The project operators of the Culture Kids project and their choices are guided by shared values, which are: focus on the children, professionalism, cooperation, accessibility and equity as well as experiences. Additionally, the question ‘whose culture?’ has a special focus in the Culture Kids operations.

These shared values are put into practice every step of the way: in the experiences of the Culture Kids and their families, in the Culture Kids events, in the physical and emotional environment of the Culture Kids events as well as in the common organization of Culture Kids and the partner organizations.

### **Focus on children**

A child is an active, competent cultural agent with the freedom of experiencing the events in their own way. We support the child’s agency, listen to them and respect their opinions. As a Culture Kid, a child can feel like they are being heard and included. They can feel that art and culture are intended for them.

### **Professionalism**

The Culture Kids operations combine the competence and skills of many different professionals. The staff planning, producing and executing the operations have an educational background in production, art or education as well as professional skills learned through their work that are developed constantly. The structures and content of operations are implemented in a professional and careful manner.

### **Accessibility and equity**

All children taking part in the Culture Kids services are treated as equals, regardless of their family background, socioeconomical status or place of residence. The activities are free of charge for the families, and taking part in them is simple. Special attention is paid to clarity in all communications, which are carried out in Finnish, Swedish and English as well as in other languages.

### **Experiences**

The Culture Kids events have a safe atmosphere that gives space for different thoughts, emotions and experiences. The events consider all the senses, and use of space is planned based on the target group. A child’s experience is an arc that starts with the journey to the venue and continues even after the event itself.

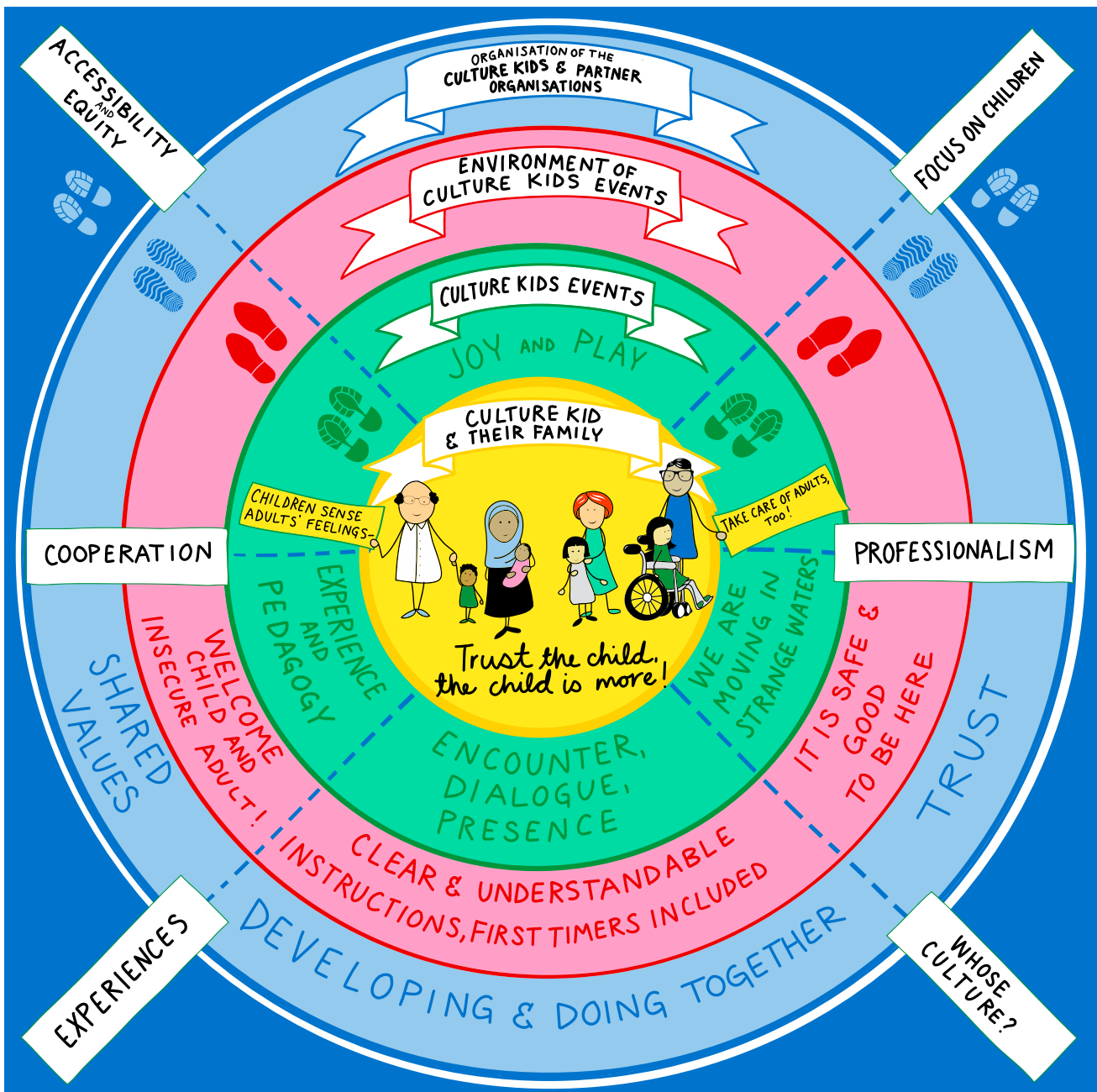


## Cooperation

The Culture Kids project is all about cooperation between the professionals and organizations of different fields. This cooperation values the different operational cultures and methods and facilitates sharing of ideas, skills and resources. Developing this cooperation requires both trust and determination.

## Whose culture?

Each Culture Kid can be proud of their own cultural background. The project operators take into account the increasing diversity in Helsinki and experience it as a richness and a resource. The events consist of stories in which the Culture Kids and their families can see themselves.



## Step Marks

### **The Culture Kid and their family**

The Culture Kids and their families are at the centre of the Culture Kids operations. The project promotes every child's right to culture and art and considers children active, competent cultural agents.

A child is sensitive to the emotions and attitudes of the adult who brings them to the events. The cultural operators will ensure that adults can also feel good and safe at the events, allowing the children to experience the events freely and in their own way.

The Culture Kids partner operators learn about childhood and a child's developmental stages so that these can be taken into account when planning and implementing the events.

### **Culture Kids events**

The Culture Kids events and venues are safe and the atmosphere is unhurried. The events comprehensively consider the special needs of children of different ages – children feel things fully, with all their senses. The sense of safety will also extend to the adults accompanying the child, and attention will also be paid to sustainability, ethicality and aesthetics.

The children's different temperaments and ways of being and existing are all allowed in the Culture Kids events. Physical activity and different emotions are also allowed. Together, we will attempt to overcome any obstacles to participation.

### **Pedagogical objectives**

- the child will encounter culture openly
- the child is curious and interested in culture
- the child knows that culture belongs to them and participates in culture
- the child's own agency grows stronger
- the child's individual personality is reinforced

### **Flow of play**

A Culture Kids event is an interactive event where the child and their parents have the room to participate and experience things, and where learning is a two-way process. The early social interactions between the child and an adult and between the child and their surrounding world will be reinforced in the events.

Play – children's own culture – has a central role in the operations. The interactive event is also built on an experimental approach and shared experiences. The child will see an example of an adult taking part in play.

As professionals of culture and art we bring hope, help people find opportunities and see options without glossing over the view of the world.

### **Art and culture experiences and presence**

The child will be given the space for personal experiences and observations at the events. Adults remain present in the situation and proceed on the child's terms while considering their age. Communication takes place in many ways: by watching, tasting, smelling, touching and moving. Physicality is present in the events; motion, possibility to explore and do, or just to be.

In these meetings, the child is in a dialogue with culture. Shared joy, doing things together and spending time together are the central aspects. The activities are prepared and created for the children and through listening to the children.

### **Event hosts, instructors and performers**

The event instructors, hosts and performers play a key role. They must have the abilities and skills necessary for true presence and communication that create a sense of safety for both the children and their parents. This sense of safety is a prerequisite for a child to be able to be both creative and capable of processing even potentially frightening things in these events. Respectful meetings between all parties must carry through the entire event.

The hosts create the event together with the children, not from above them. It is important that the hosts are highly competent professionals and have the will to work with children. The Culture Kids operations give the hosts the chance to experiment with different approaches to child-oriented work.

Culture Kids work is cooperation between the professionals in the cultural field, artists and culture and art educators. The varied cultural backgrounds of the producers and their extensive language skills increase the project's accessibility and cultural understanding.

### **Physical and emotional atmosphere of the Culture Kids events**

The environment of the Culture Kids operations is easily available, as accessible as possible, and safe both mentally and physically. The operators identify the obstacles that prevent families from taking part in the events and attempt to dismantle them. Accessibility is based on how the parents of the Culture Kids can feel that they are in control of all the stages of participation, from registration to being in the event.

The Kummilapset.hel.fi website must be easy to use and informative. The website is continuously developed based on user experiences. The adult registering the child at the events and accompanying them must be able to find information about the project on the website as well as information about the event environments and what to do there.

The Culture Kids operators will provide the information on their own venues on the website, which will then be translated into various languages. The operators also ensure that this information is up-to-date.

Special attention should be paid to the clarity and understandability of the project's communications.

Participating in the Culture Kids events should be as easy and comfortable as possible. It should be ensured that the venues have facilities for feeding children and changing nappies, for example. The event atmosphere should be permissive all around; the children are allowed to be children and the adults can be unsure.

### **Venue personnel**

Children's imaginations are often activated already on the way to an event. This is why the venue staff should be prepared and aware of their role as a part of the Culture Kids event. They understand the special aspects of activities targeted at children, and it is easy for a client to approach them when necessary.

Culture Kids operators and the venue's personnel are responsible for noticing and acting if anything unusual requiring intervention happens at the events. The Culture Kids organization helps the operators and venue personnel clarify their risk management and safety.

## Culture Kids organization and partner organizations

### The project's objectives

The City of Helsinki's objective for the project is to increase the well-being of families through culture and to promote the cultural equality of families with children. Other goals are to improve the accessibility of art and culture institutions in Helsinki by offering them the means for deepening their relationship with the public and developing the tools for it and reinforcing the early childhood education pedagogics of art institutes.

Each Culture Kids partner can define their own goals for the operations based on their own situation. It is beneficial for all the partners to be aware of each other's goals and respect them.

Indicators, either shared or each partner's own, will be used to monitor the progress of these goals. Correctly chosen indicators show the degree of success as well as future development areas. The indicators will evolve as the project proceeds, which is why it is important to continuously develop them together.



Theatre ILMi Ö. event  
The Forest Sings! for  
children born in 2021

Pictured Anne Korhonen and  
Outi Sädekallio-Snellman.  
Picture Matti Snellman

”

The show was a fresh, different children's theater show. I could say that the show was even a bit anarchic. And moving. Wonderful!



## Developing the project

A coordinator and a producer employed by the City of Helsinki's Culture Division are in charge of taking the Culture Kids project forward. The project will be developed in cooperation with culture operators, Culture Kids families and other partners. The focus points of this development will be agreed together and they will be specified based on the operators' needs. During the first years, the partners will build shared understanding of the project's pedagogics and of working with different families with children. The content and format of the events and the various production methods will also be planned and the project's website will be completed.

It is important to see what every Culture Kids partner brings to the project and build the operations accordingly. Each partner participating in the project has their own circumstances and different strengths, so learning is done together by sharing experiences and skills. It is also important to reinforce the trust between partners and allow time for cooperation to grow.

In addition to the Culture Kids partners, other cooperation parties, such as maternity and child health clinics and early childhood education institutes, should also be kept in mind. It is also important for all to be aware of the children's hobby path after the Culture Kids project and create channels for them to move forward.



City of Helsinki Sports Services event BabySauna for children born in 2024 in cooperation with Loiske Ensemble.

Picture: Kirsi-Marja Raunio



The baby liked the show very much, it was also pleasant and calm for the mother. The activating part was nice for the baby. Thanks!

# Promoting diversity

Helsinki's cultural vision *Art and culture in Helsinki 2030* puts art and culture at the heart of the city's development and good life. The vision highlights the potential of culture to address the city's challenges: art and culture can enhance creativity, understanding and critical and constructive dialogue. Preventing segregation is one of the key objectives of the Helsinki City Strategy 2021-2025 and Culture Kids is one of the ways in which culture can be part of the solution. The idea is that culture can create a sense of community that acts as a counterweight to segregation and polarization.

There is research evidence that a strong cultural identity is associated with high self-esteem and feelings of satisfaction. Knowledge of one's own cultural background and heritage does not contribute to segregation between cultural groups, on the contrary - it seems to go hand in hand with better education, employment and moderate political views. Building a strong and accepting cultural identity starts in early childhood and it is important that every child can be proud of his or her cultural background.

The diversity of the Culture Kids activities has been promoted in cooperation with different organizations and projects. In 2019, during the planning phase, as part of the Mukana-project funded by the City of Helsinki, Globe Art Point artists organized discussions and workshops between the sponsoring arts and cultural institutions and multicultural families. The workshops strongly highlighted the concern of multicultural parents that their children might experience their own background culture as somehow inferior to the mainstream culture. Parents wanted events to deal with themes that were familiar and relevant to them, and to be introduced by characters and personalities with whom children could identify.



Helsinki City Museum event  
Look! Look! for children born in  
2023, in cooperation with DOT

Picture DOT rf / Volker von  
Bonin / Helsinki City Museum

” Hakasalmi villa was a good place, there was enough to wonder about for an adult and a child. The baby loved the theater performance, has never been able to sit still for so long wondering about anything. The Polaroid photo was also a great idea!

Interaction with multicultural cultural actors was also strengthened by participation in a networking meeting organized by the Dörren project in Luckan. During 2021, a pro gradu paper was produced at the University of the Arts (Elizaveta Bomash), which explored the impact of the networking event on the attitudes of the sponsoring actors and the achievement of diversity.

Culture Kids was involved in the Helsinki of Many Voices project from 2021 to 2023. With the support of Somali and Arabic coordinators hired by the project, groups of Arabic and Somali-speaking parents were gathered, with whom discussions produced clear findings for the development of activities:

- There is nothing wrong with the activity and its structure as such, but the word 'godchild', which is perceived to be linked to Christianity, may alienate some families.
- Building trust is slow and there is no shortcut. Trust is built in people first and then in organizations. Trust-building activities will speak for themselves, but the results will be slow in coming.
- Communication through brochures or otherwise in writing is not effective. Instead, you need good videos, pictures and messengers from within the communities.

The interest of the sponsors in taking into account different cultural backgrounds and responsible cultural education practices was so great that the Whose culture? question in joint values was refined in 2022 and 2023, and opened up from different perspectives in three co-development events for all actors, led by experts.

Hundreds of Culture Kids events are organized annually in different parts of Helsinki (e.g. 880 in 2024), and the choice of venues also takes into account regional needs. In 2023-2024, the Culture Kids were involved in four cultural events of the Somali community in Malmitalo, Oodi, Vuotalo and Annantalo, as well as in Ramadan festivities in Vuotalo. Hundreds of Somali and Arabic-speaking families and children attended each of these events.



Helsinki University Museum  
Flame event Singing  
Builds Language Skills for  
children born in 2023  
Picture Saara Seppälä

” The music made my  
toddler dance and focus.



# Whose culture? Clarifications to values and step marks

Clarifications on the Culture Kids value Whose culture? were the focus of the co-development meeting of sponsors on June 1, 2023 at the Helsinki Observatory. Doctor of Education, executive director of Culture and Religion Forum FOKUS ry, Marja Laine, who participated in the meeting as an expert, prepared the wording for the detailed step marks together with sponsors whose expertise is cultural heritage. Illustration by Raquel Benmergui.

## Whose culture? Clarifications to Culture Kids values and step marks

Culture Kids promotes the participation of all children in art and culture. Sometimes the path to culture is not easy. Therefore, let's highlight perspectives and ideas that support the identity process and inclusion of all children! By taking these steps we will be able to create the experience that every child will be met as themselves and that each family's cultural heritage is meaningful and will be seen.

### Step of cultural heritage

→ I understand that Finnish cultural heritage can be unfamiliar and new to the child and their family. Am I creating an emotional experience that is positive or confusing, frightening, even differentiating?

→ I convey information that not all cultural heritage is material or canonized. I highlight the importance of intangible cultural heritage - stories, customs, skills - especially when a child's cultural heritage has been destroyed in a war or material cultural heritage is not as important for other reasons. I do this by empowering families, not comparing them to others.

### Step of recognizing the use of power

→ I recognize that in my role as selector and curator I exercise power, which brings with it responsibility. I can be responsible, for example, for reducing minority stress, i.e. I make sure that no one needs to represent anything other than themselves.

→ I am considering whether someone other than a cultural representative can "teach" cultural heritage? What are the opportunities and challenges associated with it? My goal is to give space, highlight, help and support.

### Step of acting in time

→ I realize that cultural activity is a dialogue in a certain time. Some of my methods may be up-to-date and based on recent research. This does not mean that everyone shares the same principles. Am I able to accept that not everyone can participate in my activities if, for example, only unisex toilets are available?

### Step of processing one's own feelings

→ I stop to think from time to time, what excites me, what feels challenging? Why do I feel this way? Is the fear justified or am I afraid, for example, that my actions will cause a stir? I keep in mind that insulting and intentionally provoking are not the same thing as essentially sensitive and empathetic cultural activities.

→ Art brings out different points of view. I create space for courage and openness. I see criticism as an opportunity to learn and move forward.



## Step in linguistic communication

→ I keep in mind that language is only one tool. I organize activities that are not only based on language and in which everyone can participate in their own way. I make sure that the content is visual and versatile, using clear language.

→ I recognize the linguistic and cultural diversity of my own work community. I genuinely give space and opportunities to utilize this expertise. I offer internships for students speaking different languages.

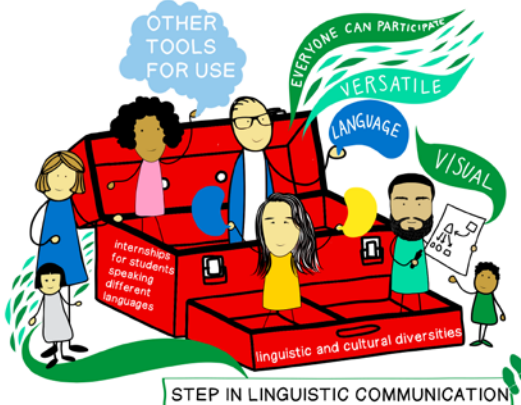
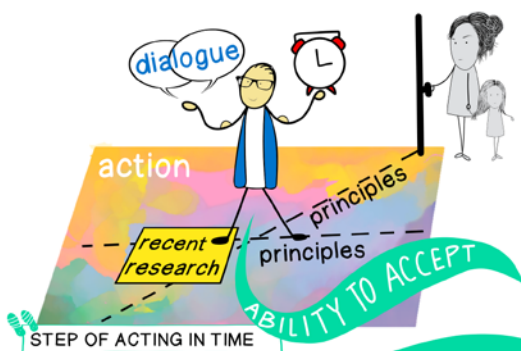
## Step of facing challenging situations

→ I accept that building trust is active work and I take this into account when planning my working time.

→ I am aware that cultural heritage can also be associated with difficult feelings. When we visit a difficult cultural heritage together, we also share experiences of, for example, racism, fears, war and the grief of cultural heritage being broken or lost. When someone invites me to come close to their cultural heritage, I recognize the role of difficult cultural heritage.

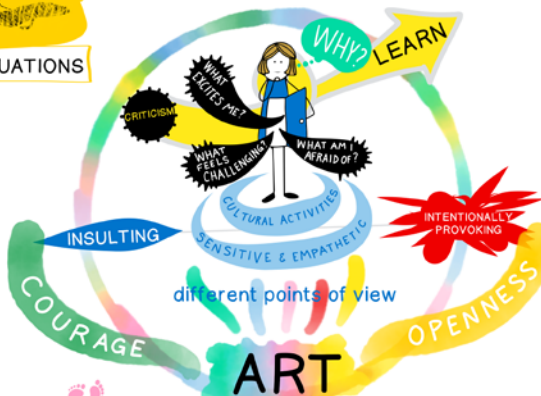
## The gatekeeping step

→ I challenge myself to think about what role I allow others to play. Are people, representing different cultural traditions, religions or languages allowed to participate in our activities throughout the process as equal actors, or are they marginalized or exoticized to give a perspective just because we want to appear to be considerate of diversity? When I need competence related to diversity, do I dare to share power or do I just want to adopt and buy a certain point of view?



## Whose culture?

Culture Kids promotes the participation of all children in art and culture. Sometimes the path to culture is not easy. Therefore, let's highlight perspectives and ideas that support the identity process and inclusion of all children! By taking these steps we will be able to create the experience that every child will be met as themselves and that each family's cultural heritage is meaningful and will be seen.



# Sustainable Development and Children's involvement in the development of activities

## Sustainable Development

In 2023, the Culture Kids programme was subjected to a so-called SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) analysis, which examined how the programme implements the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development goals to which the City of Helsinki is committed:

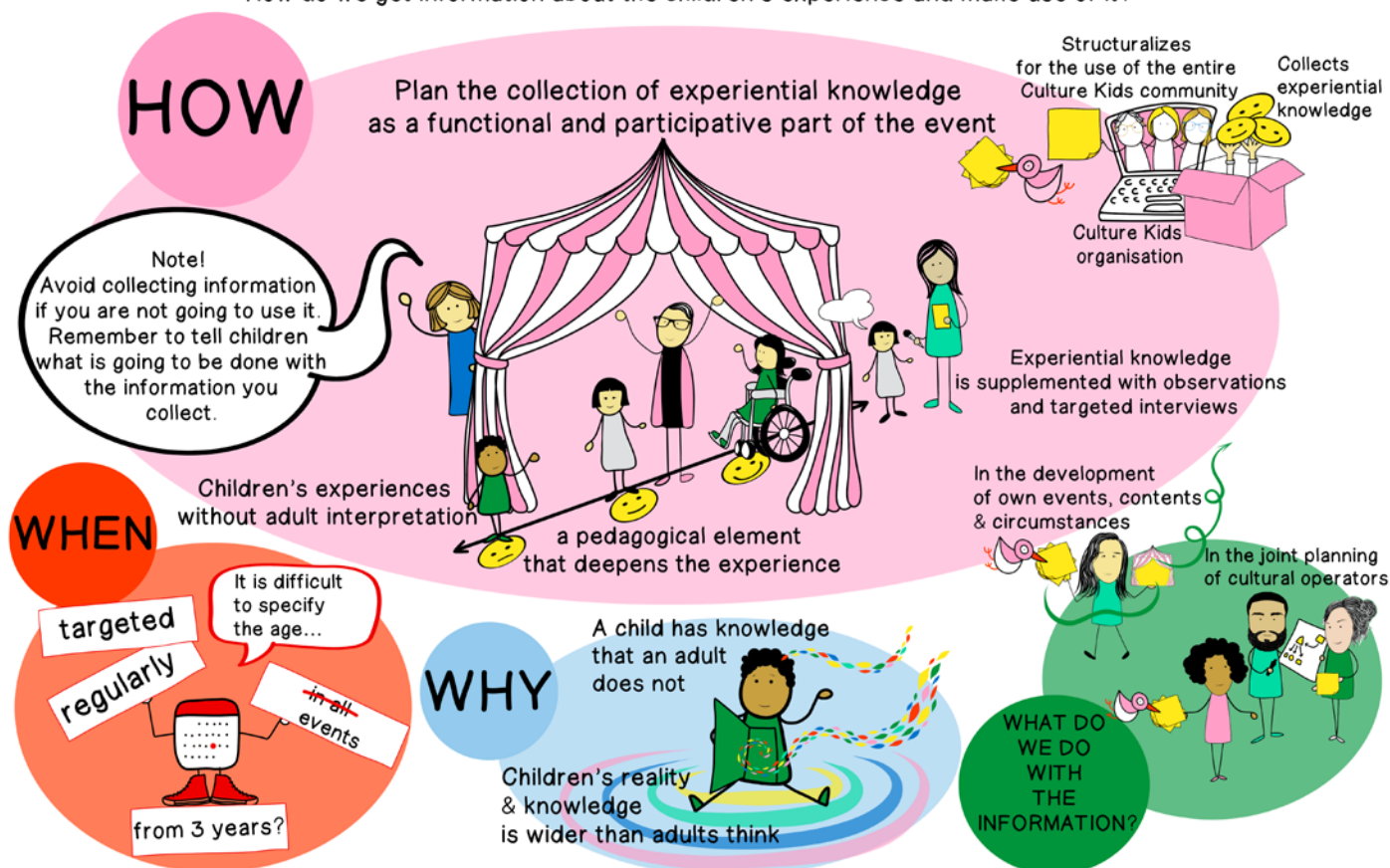
- "Culture Kids reinforces the strategy's goal of using culture to promote inclusion, increase cultural understanding, reduce segregation and foster citizens' engagement with Helsinki. The Culture Kids activities also support family well-being, mental well-being, social health and increase the experience of arts and physical activity.
- Culture Kids is a key action to support the participation of children and families with children in particular in cultural events and thus promote cultural sustainability. The programme also supports cultural operators of all sizes and fosters cooperation. In the future, the Culture Kids programme could pay even more attention to the sustainability aspects of productions and, as a theme, to supporting sustainable lifestyles."

## Children's involvement in the development of activities

The experience of children and families is at the heart of Culture Kids. The core question is how we learn from children's experience and how we use it. The starting point for thinking is that the child has knowledge that the adult does not have. Children's reality and experience is broader than adults think.

### Culture Kids as feedback givers and activity developers

The experience of children and families is at the core of Culture Kids' activities. How do we get information about the children's experience and make use of it?



# Achieving values - Measuring Stick and Bettering Observation

## Measuring Stick

Progress towards the objectives of Culture Kids is monitored from three different perspectives

### 1. The families of Culture Kids

Feedback online after each Culture Kids event

Systematic observation of children's and families' experiences at the events, Bettering Observation

### 2. Sponsoring arts, cultural and sports organizations

Quick reports after the events on exceptions and reporting after the series of events

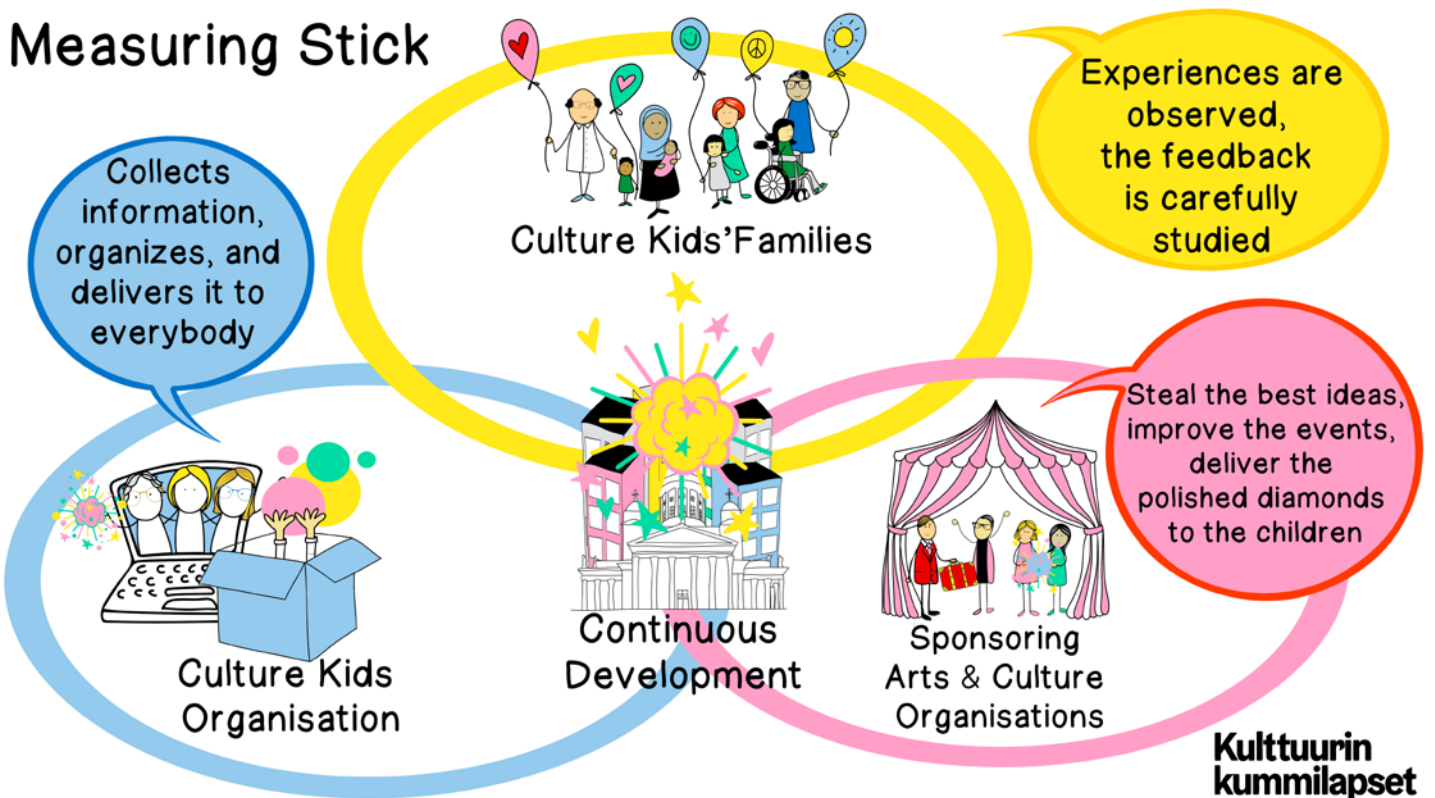
Systematic observation of children's experiences at events

### 3. Culture Kids organization

Continuous data collection from the website

Collection and sharing of information from sponsors

## Measuring Stick



## **Bettering Observation**

The aim of Bettering Observation is the continuous development of Culture Kids events so that they are meaningful experiences for children, families and the sponsors involved, and in line with the values of Culture Kids.

The primary purpose of Bettering Observation is to develop the observer's own Culture Kids events. At the same time, the observers have the opportunity to give a gift to the observed as feedback. Feedback is built on what we want to give thanks for and what we learn from.

### **Observation in a nutshell:**

#### **Before the event starts**

- Accessibility
- Guidelines
- Welcome
- Arrangements of the venue
- Getting down to a shared experience

#### **During the event**

- Respectful encounter
- A safe environment for child and adult
- Content of the event
- Whose culture?
- Continuous development
- Dealing with emotions

#### **After the event**

- Descent from the event
- Bye bye
- Connection with the Culture Kids

#### **What do I take from the whole for my own activities?**





Theatre Museum event How does the Gentle Dragon Find its True Self? for children born in 2022

Pictured Freia Stenbäck.  
Picture Heini Räsänen

” A wonderful play, and it was just right for the age level and inclusive!



Association of Cultural Heritage Education in Finland event Yalla! Workshop for children born in 2023

Picture Julia Uusoksa

” Absolutely wonderful moment! Beautiful music, lots to explore for little ones, and a warm, happy atmosphere. More of these!

## About the authors

Helena Ahonen is a cultural influencer who served as Orchestra Director of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra in 2000, when the orchestra's first godchild project began.

Eve Alho is a pioneer in Finnish music playschools and one of the first to start music education for babies. She developed the programme for the Helsinki Philharmonic's first godchild project in 2000-2002.

Hamdi Geddi, together with her husband, founded Somalitoons, a company that produces Somali-language cartoon films online. Hamdi has shared her expertise and built a bridge between Culture Kids and Somali-speaking families.

Tuula Haavisto was the Cultural Director of Helsinki from 2017 to 2019. On her initiative, the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra's Godchild project began to expand to serve multiple cultural disciplines and all children under school age.

Minna Huutilainen is a professor and brain researcher at the University of Helsinki whose research focuses on the neuropsychology and physiology of learning. She has produced an educational package for the Culture Kids community on the role of culture in the development of children under school age.

Arja-Liisa Kaasinen is Head of Learning, Communities, Audiences at the Museum of Architecture and Design, where she is planning new activities for the new museum.

Hanna Kapanen is Educational Curator at the Museum of Architecture and Design and a design education expert who has also brought her expertise to Culture Kids.

Tiia Konttinen is the head nurse in charge of maternity and child health clinics in Helsinki, where she is responsible for liaising between the Culture Kids organization and the staff of the clinics.

Annika Kukkonen is in charge of the education programs of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra. She produced the HPO godchild project for children born in 2012 and continues to produce the Culture Kids project for children born in 2020. Annika has been involved in the planning of the extensive Culture Kids service since its inception.

Marja Laine is the Executive Director of the Culture and Religion Forum FOKUS ry. She has worked as an expert on intercultural and interreligious dialogue and responsible cultural education in the development of Culture Kids.

Tommi Laitio was the Director of Culture and Leisure of the City of Helsinki from 2017 to 2022, when the extensive Culture Kids programme was planned and started. He now lives in Los Angeles and works around the world as a city and organizational development expert.



Dance Theatre Hurjaruuth  
event Hupsistupsis! –  
Cirkus workshop for  
children born in 2022  
Picture Riku Virtanen



A great, fun workshop that activates all the senses, which the toddler clearly enjoyed!

Monica Lindberg is the Head of Maternity and Child Health Services in Helsinki, with a long track record of managing and developing health clinics and promoting the well-being and health of families with children.

Leena Marila is a Senior Planning Officer in the City of Helsinki's Social Services, Health Care and Rescue Services Division, where she is responsible for the development of family and social services. She is involved in many activities of importance to children and young people that require cross-sectoral cooperation across the city.

Pirjo Mattila is a development expert in the City of Helsinki's Culture and Leisure Division, where she is responsible for promoting the well-being of children and young people and UNICEF's child-friendly city work.

Mari Männistö is the Director of Culture of the City of Helsinki and the official owner of the Culture Kids service.

Etta Partanen is Innolink's research director. In 2019, she did research on the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra's godchild project for children born in 2012.

Hanna-Mari Peltomäki is the Secretary General of the Jane and Aatos Erkko Foundation. The Foundation's support enables the scaling up of the Culture Kids service from a project of one art form and one cohort of children to a service that from 2026 will be open to all children under school age.

Timo Riitamaa is the Marketing and Communications Manager of Cirko – Centre for New Circus.

Pasi Saukkonen is a Special Researcher at Helsinki City Information Services, specialising in issues related to multiculturalism, immigration and integration. He has been involved in the development of Culture Kids, opening up issues related to the increase of cultural diversity.

Satu Sopanen is a musician and music educator, known above all as a versatile expert on children's music. She has planned and developed the content of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra's godchild events since 2002.

Marianne Turtio is the mother of a Culture Kid, born in 2021.

### **Advisory group**

Ulla Laurio is a Senior Planning Officer in Cultural Services in Helsinki, who served as the first coordinator and project manager of Culture Kids in 2019-2024.

Annika Kukkonen is the Education Manager of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra. In addition to producing, she has also been involved in a large number of Godchildren and Culture Kids events as a performer.

Mirka Nokka is team manager of the Promotion of Children's Culture team at the Annantalo Arts Centre for Children and Youth.

Anna Rosendahl is Producer of audience outreach at Annantalo Arts Centre for Children and Youth. She was the first producer of the Culture Kids service from 2020 to 2023. Together with Ulla Laurio and the sponsoring organizations, she developed the production structures, content framework and operating methods of the Culture Kids service.

Anu Ojanen is a communications expert at the City of Helsinki's Culture and Leisure Division. She has been responsible for the communication of Culture Kids for several years.

# Helsinki

Culture Kids offers every child, born in 2020 or later and living in Helsinki, the opportunity of being sponsored by one or more cultural organizations. The sponsors are determined by the child's year of birth. The sponsors invite the child and their close adult to at least two age-appropriate and free-of-charge events every year until the child's age group starts school.

Children are invited to join Culture Kids through the maternity and child health clinics.

The goal of the service is to strengthen the well-being of families and children through the proven effects of culture and by providing opportunities for families to meet people at the same stage of life. For the art, culture and sports organizations acting as sponsors, the program offers a platform that promotes cooperation. It is also hoped that the activity will promote the togetherness of city dwellers and combat the segregation of residential areas and resident groups.

The Culture Kids concept is based on two previous projects of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, which involved children born in 2000 and 2012. Participating families gave the activity very high marks and evaluated it, e.g. as strengthening the family's well-being and increasing interest in cultural activities.

This publication presents the Culture Kids service in Helsinki from the perspective of children, their families, the arts, culture and sports organizations that act as sponsors, and the city as a whole. It also includes a description of the practical implementation of the service.

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