

NORTH KARELIA

THE REGION OF AGEING KNOWLEDGE

SUMMARY



North Karelia the region of ageing knowledge

In the whole of Eastern Finland, population ageing, low birth-rate, and youth moving away are typical phenomena. This is true especially in North Karelia, where the population ages faster than in the rest of the country. We are living the reality that the rest of Finland and Europe are only approaching.

The purpose of this publication is to make the regional ageing work and research competence visible and to describe some of the gems of the development work. In North Karelia, we have started creating new, positive prospects in our ageing society. The elderly are sincerely seen as a societal and communal resource - even as an attraction factor.

The graying of the population can be seen in the service systems but also around town. Many everyday practices (housing, mobility, interaction) need to be reconsidered. Sparsely inhabited areas that are typical in North Karelia create their challenges. New competences, fresh solutions, and unprejudiced co-operation are called for in these areas.

North Karelia is located on the eastern border of Finland. The region comprises 14 municipalities (1 January 2009) and over 166 000 inhabitants. It is divided into three sub-regions: Joensuu (six municipalities), Central Karelia (four municipalities), and Pielinen Karelia (four municipalities). The sub-regions are structurally varied. There are densely populated urban areas and long stretches of sparsely inhabited areas.

Strength in co-operation

In North Karelia, we rely on the strength of co-operation. A network approach to multi-sectoral co-operation gives good results.

The ageing of the population is strongly present in the definition of policy of North Karelian Welfare Strategy 2015. There is a willingness to support the autonomous and meaningful everyday life of the elderly. In addition, an active expert and development network within working with the aged called by The East Finland Social and Welfare Centre of Expertise strengthens the regional co-operation. The objective of the network is to influence the development of the sector, support peer learning, and communicate competences and good practices.

A new direction for working with the aged

In North Karelia, the objective of working with the aged is to support the autonomy of the elderly in various ways of early support and preventive methods. This is both humanely and economically sensible.

Making preventive home calls supports living at home, mapping out life situations, and predicting the future needs of the elderly. In Joensuu, they are realised at homes of those over 75-year-old persons who are not included in the municipal home care services.

A model for senior counselling that provides information and services as effortlessly as possible has been created in Joensuu. The Senior Consultation Service Ankkuri (Seniorineuvonta Ankkuri) provides information for the elderly about the services offered by the municipality, as well as the private and the third sector. The City of Joensuu is planning to connect the Ageing Clinic Ruori (Ikäneuvola Ruori) to the service. The idea is to create a model in co-operation with the elderly for promoting health that is based on interaction and partnership.

Physical exercise and outdoors activities are central factors in welfare. Municipalities, organisations, and North Karelia Centre for Public Health inspire the elderly to exercise. The aim is to increase their health exercise level at home and in their surroundings. Those who work with the elderly are being trained to understand the significance of exercise, and to assess and support them.

Socio-cultural inspiration

Art, culture, and creative methods are broadly used within social work in North Karelia. Artists and other cultural actors have applied their competence and created novel co-operation within work with the aged.

One of the central developers of socio-cultural work is North Karelia University of Applied Sciences (NKUAS) as many music, fine arts, and dance therapists have graduated from there. In addition, creative methods are a part of the curriculum of the Bachelors of Social Services.

The socio-cultural development projects within work with the aged have been implemented to gain experience from artists working in the everyday life of the elderly. Community art, and ideas and methods of socio-cultural inspiration are used in the work. Nurses function as the artists' partners and so gain inspiration and courage for using creative methods as support in their own work.

Karpalo (Cranberry) Development Centre – a new operation model for developing work with the aged

Karpalo Development Centre is a development unit for work with the aged managed by Pielinen Karelia municipalities (Lieksa, Nurmes, and Valtimo). The unit develops and improves customer work and service structures, and combines the development work done in the area and communicates it further. It also has a significant role in strengthening practice research and

continuing education. In addition, the Centre develops socio-cultural work with the aged, as well as tests and supports technological applications within services for the aged.

New solutions to housing

Dissolving the Finnish institutional system of care for the elderly is the common goal of the municipalities in North Karelia. Early housing support and different housing alternatives are created “between” autonomous, independent living at home and at an institution.

The city of Lieksa has experience in communal living of those elderly who need much support. They have organised sheltered homes, group homes, and communal living homes. It has been noticed that performing daily activities and the quality of life have improved after moving in in a community.

Joensuu is planning to implement a welfare centre called Senioripiha (“Senior Home/Courtyard”) for the elderly. It would be an adaptation of the stereotypical Finnish dream, “A community of individuals by the river at the centre of the city”. The objective of the centre is a unit that would be a housing community and welfare centre, as well as a place for meetings, activities, and events. Senioripiha Ltd is owned by the city of Joensuu.

All municipalities in North Karelia (14) participate in the development work that supports them in dissolving the institutional system. The project is a part of the Kaste Programme 2008-2011 – a national development plan for social and health care services governed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The city of Joensuu governs this extensive project that covers Eastern and Central Finland, 62 participating municipalities altogether.

Organisations strengthening inclusion

In North Karelia, organisations have a significant role and long traditions in strengthening its citizens’ welfare and inclusion. They develop, together with municipalities, new forms of co-operation and voluntary work, and organise a major part of the club activities for the elderly.

Pensioner organisations are active doers in municipalities. Hearing pensioner and elderly councils strengthens inclusion and improves democracy in the municipalities. The pensioner board of the Regional Council of North Karelia is the pensioners’ official voice, functions as their trustee, and makes statements and proposals.

The work of the organisations and municipalities is directed by a regional organisation strategy, in which organisations are considered active doers in promoting welfare. It is put into practice by the regional Consultative Board for Organisations, which is the first of its kind in Finland. Regional organisa-

tions from various fields are represented. The common goal is to give voluntary work more visibility by campaigning and recruiting new volunteers.

Welfare businesses within elderly care

The welfare sector is growing the most within the service industry. At the moment, there are approximately 300 private social and health care businesses in North Karelia that employ over 2000 persons. The majority of these operate within care and home services.

The regional welfare sector's growth programme of entrepreneurship called HYRRÄ (2008 – 2010) supports the growth opportunities and business competence of welfare businesses. The project is managed by the development companies in the area: Joensuu Regional Development Company (Josek Ltd), the Centre for Development and Information in Central Karelia (Keti Ltd) and the Development Centre of Pielinen Karelia (Pikes Ltd).

The increasing use of the service voucher in services for the elderly creates new opportunities for the welfare businesses. According to the welfare mix approach, many municipalities are creating models for joint quality work and training with the businesses.

Innovative product development

In product development, a practical partner is needed to evaluate, test, and model the products. In North Karelia, companies, education, and practical work with the aged have come together. They develop tools and technology, housing and accessibility, for instance. Cranberry Development Centre functions as the development platform for door environments, tools, and the senior brand.

A registered working method developed at NKUAS called INNOstudio® uses different innovative methods either in short workshops or during longer innovation camps. The method is applied to the product development of companies and developing corporate image, as well as productising culture and experiences.

The Living Lab network promotes user-driven design. NKUAS is a part of a wide international network called European Network of Living Labs with Joensuu Science Park Ltd. The user data is used in the development work. Good results have been achieved from developing housing and senior products, for which the elderly, for example students of University of the Third Age at The Continuing Education Centre of the University of Joensuu, have worked as the user evaluators.

Developers and experts

There is a wide selection of education available in North Karelia. North Karelia Municipal Education and Training Consortium, NKUAS, HUMAK University of Applied Sciences, and University of Joensuu (University of Eastern Finland from 1 January 2010) operate in the region.

Especially the practical nurse education at the Municipal Education and Training Consortium offers training on work with the elderly. The Degree Programme of Social Services at NKUAS emphasises socio-cultural inspiring and creative activities. As a part of their professional advanced studies, the students can take a course on ageing.

Work with the aged is a part of the education of Nursing and Physiotherapy. In their practical training period, the students face more and more ageing clients.

It is possible to take the multi-disciplinary basic studies in Gerontology at the University of Joensuu. In 2010, along with the new University of Eastern Finland (UEF), subject studies in Gerontology will be available. UEF will also provide continuing education for those working with the aged.

The Universities of Applied Sciences in Eastern Finland (ISAT), Savonia University of Applied Sciences and NKUAS, are developing welfare services for sparsely inhabited areas.

The research on ageing is strengthened by a project conducted by the University of Kuopio called Constructing Wellbeing in Elderly Care - Organization, Design and Management as Key Elements. The aim is to produce information and understanding on how organisation structures, physical care environments, and management connect with and affect the welfare of the elderly. NKUAS also takes part in the project.

International co-operation

North Karelia is a laboratory of ageing. The regional ageing work and research competence, and innovations draw international attention. The experts and developers in elderly care in the region have participated in several projects and international exchange programmes.

The international arenas of co-operation provide the actors within work with the aged a significant opportunity for developing and learning. The Cranberry Development Centre participated in the Our Life as Elderly project (2004-2006) that produced new solutions for supporting living at home. The international co-operation continues at the moment with the Older People for Older People project. Its aim is to support the autonomous life of the elderly. They are seen as active participants in their communities. The idea

is to create new models especially for rural areas. The project is managed Development Centre of Pielinen Karelia Pikes Ltd and funded by the Northern Periphery Programme.

In St. Petersburg, there is a model environment called Functional Home (Toimiva koti) that is designed and assembled as a Finnish-Russian co-operation. The Finnish partners are ISAK (Development Centre for Devices for Independent Living) and Josek (Joensuu Regional Development Company). The Functional Home is a presentation, education, and training environment for welfare products and technology.

The Regional Council of North Karelia has applied with the Joint authority of Kainuu Region for a sub-project that belongs to the international DART (Declining, Ageing and Regional Transformation) project. It focuses on the regional effects of population changes (especially the decreasing and ageing population).

It is good to age in North Karelia

In the ageing North Karelia, it is a common wish that all elderly people have an opportunity for active, humane, and dignified ageing. It is possible by strengthening the regional multi-sectoral ageing work and research competence, and extensive co-operation.

FURTHER INFORMATION

North Karelia University of Applied Sciences
www.pkamk.fi

The Regional Council of North Karelia
www.pohjois-karjala.fi

The East Finland Social and Welfare Centre of Expertise
www.isonetti.net

The Finnish Federation for Social Welfare and Health (STKL)
www.stkl.fi

North Karelia Centre for Public Health
www.kansanterveys.info